

# Innocent III

## THE LAST YEARS

1216 A.D. - 1233 A.D.

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A Publication Of:  
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SE-600 11 Norrköping

BSRF  
2018



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### INTRODUCTION

This manuscript was begun in Los Angeles in March 1942 and finished in Honolulu, Hawaii in March 1950. Much of it was written while I was in the service in World War II, with the U.S. Army in the Pacific.

The story is about the last years of one of the great popes of mediaeval times, Innocent III, great in his leadership of men, great in his butchery of men. This pontiff authorised the 4th Crusade, presumably to slaughter the Infidel in the Holy Land; but it became more expedient to turn the fury of the Crusaders on to protestant heretics in southern France!

This story is purely inspirational. I knew nothing about Innocent III when I started it and the history books say nothing about his life after 1216 A.D. That is the year in which he is supposed to have died.

I am not a Catholic and in fact am not what would be called an orthodox Christian. Perhaps this had to be written because no Catholic would touch such a theme; nor would he encourage its printing. It is sure to go on the Church's index of forbidden literature once it does become public and known to the Hierarchy.

Strange that the writing of this bizarre tale didn't strike me as incongruous at the time. In World War II I vowed to give my life, if necessary, to defend America against its enemies. Fortune might have taken me to the Atlantic theater of action where we were in fact fighting two Catholic dictatorships. Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler and Fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini were trying to force the rest of Europe including Russia into the Holy Roman Empire. Had they succeeded America would have been their next victim and the Church would then have vanquished its eternal enemy, Democracy.

That war ended in 1945 but the war for control of men's minds goes on and on. This tale, finally published 23 years after it was begun, is a piece of ammunition in that current war. May it do its part in creating justice and victory for the cause of free men.

September 15, 1965

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Vista, California

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## CHAPTER ONE

"I'll be damned if I know why I keep chiseling on this damned rock! Why carve wisdom in rock that wont be read for a thousand years, and who gives a damn about mankind a thousand years from now, I dont. What makes me so stupid as to believe that men in that day will be interested in what has happened to me, or what I've done?"

The speaker leaned back from the wall on which he was working and mopped a perspiring brow.

"Patience, my son, some men are damned that others might be saved," came a reply from somewhere inside him.

"I know! I know! But if only I hadn't talked so much!" He resumed his chiseling in fine, Latin characters. "My teeth all dropped out; why didn't my tongue drop out too? If it had, I'd still be in Rome, at the top of the world -- damn it, I've hit my thumb again!" For he had emphasized the word "world" with an extra heavy blow of his crude mallet and it glanced off the chisel.

As he paused to examine the damage to the already bruised thumb, a fellow carver, dark skinned in contrast to the whiteness of the speaker, approached him.

"Here comes one of these dumb natives again," he muttered. "I suppose he wants me to parse a verb."

The Latin verb form clarified, the dark skinned carver went back to the unfinished inscriptions on the stone wall. Line after line of scholarly Latin was already finished. In fact, as one looked about the enclosure, and glimpsed others which opened from it, it became clear that this work had been going on for years.

The carvers had somewhat the look of the eagle in the eyes; and their curved noses were quite in keeping. Hair was combed straight back from the forehead and fell almost to the shoulder. On some, the complexion was well nigh black, though a few were light enough to reveal a ruddy bronze tint which suggested Atlantean origins. Their build was squatty, at least in comparison with their mentor. His hair was white. He was bearded, tall, ascetic. There was fire in the eyes, of either saint or devil; and he had the air of the Church about him.

"I believe we have worked enough for this day."

He raised his voice, in their tongue, to be heard above the clatter of hammer and chisel. After all, it was enough to expect them to copy Latin characters from his script; to train their tongues as well was too much. Even now, years after he had started the carvings of the messages and the teaching, he wondered sometimes if it wouldn't have been better to do the writing in their picture-graph script.



Little was said among the crew as they filed out. There was something of a courtyard outside. The walls here, too, had inscriptions on them; but there was also statuary and artful figures and carvings.

The whitehaired leader was met at the doorway by one obviously of his own race. This man was shorter, talked volubly and with his hands.

"Sire, there is a large city three days march down the coast. I have discovered it. I saw temples and other public buildings which rise high above the trees."

"Yes," the older man replied, "I have expected as much."

"But, sire, if you knew this, why didn't we -- why didn't you -- why didn't we go there -- to the city -- instead of shutting ourselves up out here in this wilderness?" There was almost despair in the shorter man's voice as he finished his query.

"Here, my son, we have respect and enough freedom for our needs. There, we would be subject to large organizations of power, religious and military, and subject to the jealousy of the men who run those organizations. We know well what it means to thwart such types. No, my next banishment might be by death, and I have much to do in this sorrowful world yet."

"But, sire, we are buried alive in this place! These men think we are gods, but their worship is a veritable prison!"

"Of course, of course," he was annoyed now, at the younger man's complaints, "nevertheless, that worship is a protection behind which we have time and leisure to carry on and complete our studies." There was no happiness in his tone as he said these things.

He was too much a creature of the cities to have ever voluntarily exiled himself to a place like this. Churchman though he had been, the monastery with all its minutiae of daily existence had never appealed to him; but rather the pomp and power, the wining and dining, the by-play of culture and passion that was Rome of the late Twelfth Century. And! He had been master of it all! With the wave of his hand he had condemned men to torture. With the stroke of his pen he had signed away whole territories. Now! Slowly, painfully he was etching the story of his life in a self-chosen, rock-ribbed prison thousands of miles removed from the land of his love. He was beyond the end of the world as geography was known in that day.

And how had he gotten there? One little mischance, one tiny misstep in the pathway of glory and power which lay before him -- and upon which he had been walking already for many years. Who would have thought that the love of a woman, at his age, would have caused his vision to waver and falter for that brief moment in a full career, and permit his enemies to take advantage of the opportunity presented and steal him away.



Not that his love had been unrequited, nor that he had violated the vows taken so early along the road he had chosen. Those had been too much a part of the iron discipline which underlay the learned, cultured, soft-spoken Innocent III. Keen eyed, unscrupulous men had discerned this tender flowering of love in the life of a Pope; they had seen then an opportunity. No matter if there hadn't been one at that time, some other pretext would have eventually occurred to suit their bitter desires.

"I must see you alone. Margarita." Brought him, in the dusk of a late winter day in 1216 to a bench by the San Sebastian fountain. The papal gardens were soft and gray with wisps of rain. There was a keen dampness in the air. It could bring chills and fever to this one or that one; but to another, who impatiently awaited his lady love, the winter air brought a touch of color to the ascetic cheek. It put a youthful spring to the walk not even papal garments could cover.

Off to the left there stood a deeply muffled figure, scarcely discernible now amid the darkness and mist. He started eagerly toward it, heard a rustle from behind, half turned, crashed to the ground from a great blow -- and, blackout!

\* \* \* \* \*

Lap, lap, gurgle -- lap, lap, gurgle -- lap, lap, gurgle wove its way slowly into the consciousness above the ascetic cheek. Lap, lap, gurgle. He grasped the noises slowly, deliberately, as one would an unfamiliar tool. They stood like islands in a sea of night -- lap, lap, gurgle.

"Why in heaven's name should I be hearing sounds like that?" This was spoken aloud and it brought him upright. That is, as upright as the chain around his neck would allow.

He knew his eyes were open now. The night was real, or at least the darkness, and the sounds were islands of sense in a vast, dark blank. And then a great throbbing ache at the back of his head brought back too vividly those last moments in the garden. His garden! Who had dared treat him thus? In anger he grasped the iron collar to tear it from his throat. He paused in slow amaze, his rings, those magic symbols of authority, of power, were gone!

"Documents proving my death! My anything, could be signed with those! And, be believed by anyone to whom they were presented."

He sank back to the wet timbers of his prison and to the ceaseless throbbing of his injured head. His long, philosophical fingers rubbed each other in naked awareness of the absent rings. His mind slipped back over the days and weeks preceding the garden attack.

"Matteoto, Cardinal Matteoto could have engineered that!" Again he spoke aloud and the sound startled him. It emphasized the alien quality of his environment. These grouped together in his mind to form -- a ship! He must be aboard



That would be the reason for the wet planking on which he lay, and the slow roll to account for the slap of bilge water. He was not too cold. Rome had been full of winter chill that other day. They had traveled south then, for how long? Curious fingers gingerly searched out the condition of the back of his head. Rather a well directed blow, that, to have lain him unconscious for so long a time and yet not to have taken his life. It must have been for the latter -- and yet? Well, time would tell.

"Ho, down there! Have ye come to, yet?"

Dragged back to a world of pain the Pope struggled to focus himself on the coarse voice above, and the searing, blinding Mediterranean sun which poured down through the open hatchway just over his head.

"Must have gone unconscious again," he thought, and then aloud, "Yes, I've come to."

"What's that ye say?"

"Yes, I've come to!" He tried to shout and the effort almost pushed him back into the fog again. His head nearly split from pain.

"Well, ye're due for some food then, and wine. Here comes."

The voice was not unkindly nor was it cultured. Through the haze of pain and weakness bare feet dropped lithely beside him, reached back to the deck up above -- it was scarcely head height above the floor of his prison -- and brought down a chunk of bread and a jug of wine.

"Here, sir, have a drink o' this. It'll give ye strength. I've had a good clout or two meself an' there's nothin' like the red to make ye see straight again."

That was something at least, his quality was known -- to this member of the crew. The Pope had seen enough of commerce at sea, which was the very economic life-blood of Italy of that day, to recognize the man as an ordinary sailor, and with a heart, too. For the Pope's head was lifted now by a calloused hand which nevertheless carefully avoided the wound and supported him at the back of the neck.

The wine coursed smoothly down his throat; its gentle fire spread through his middle, warmed him, cleared somewhat his muddy thoughts, shaped them into questions, angry, bitter questions. He pushed the jug away.

"How long have I been here?"

"We pulled out o' Ostia three days ago, sir, on the evenin' tide. Been sailin' due south ever since. Cap'n, he aint wastin' no time."



The Pope was acidly formal. "And whom, may I ask, is holding me prisoner? Shipping me about like some common cargo, to be sold at some foreign port?"

"That I dont rightly know, sir. You was brought aboard in the dark, from a small wagon." The sailor's answer was ready enough.

"Could you see who they were?" Impatiently.

"No, sir," apologetically, "but they was well mounted and well armed. Seemed to know their way about the harbor, all right."

"Your captain was waiting for them then?" Had Matteoto planned this thigg for days or had it come up on the spur of the moment? If it was the latter, he might be able to offer more pay to have himself taken back to Ostia. Or, perhaps, to bear in to the coast and land him at Naples, if they weren't already too far south.

"I dont know, sir. We was ship-shape s'far as food and water goes t'leave wi' the evenin' tide anyhow. I think cap'n was waitin' around to try to pick up a little cargo fer ballast goin' south. Not that it's any o' yer business." This abrupt, thankless questioning was making the sailor restive and impatient.

Innocent III modified his tone somewhat, "I see. Sorry to have bothered you; but I thought that if the captain was interested in a paying cargo for the voyage south I could make it well worth his while to make east for Naples or Salerno."

"Oh, no, sir! Cap'n 'ould never stop at any o' them strange ports. He trades for better prices for wheat and oil at Ostia than anywhere else. Always could, he says."

"But doesn't he usually take cargo back with him? To make the voyage pay both ways?"

"That he does, sir," the sailor let Innocent's head and shoulders back to the deck with an air of finality, "and you're the best payin' cargo he ever hauled or ever will haul back to Tunis." He stood up to climb out on the deck above.

"To Tunis!" Innocent jerked up again in spite of himself and started his poor head to pounding.

"That's right, sir. I'll leave the wine with you." With which the visitor hoisted himself up into the light, and Innocent III was left alone with his thoughts.

Tunis is the end of the world! Why didn't they kill me or poison me? Instead of preserving me to be buried alive in some strange land or sold into slavery among the heathen. But then, Matteoto was always squeamish about blood-letting and torture. He was hard enough in other ways." The Pope smiled musingly. "I can be thankful for that softness in his character. Nowadays kidnapping is



only for ransom; otherwise, you get rid of a man by -- murder!" He shivered and began to nibble gingerly at the bread. The welt on the back of his head was too painfully obvious for anything else. It hurt even to swallow.

Back in Rome, at that particular moment, the Vatican was the scene of great excitement and preparations. The assumption of the office of the supreme pontiff of the Holy Roman Church was under way. Honorius III was about to assume the title, robes and dignities of the Holy Office. Never before in the history of the College of Cardinals was the election of a Pope carried off with such dispatch. Never before in the history of the Church had there been such widespread dissatisfaction with the conduct of the Holy Office as in the pontificate of Innocent III. It lasted from 1198 through 1216, an amazingly long period considering those times.

In a wise and stern hand Innocent III had balanced the forces of Empire and Holy See to the confounding of his enemies and to the acute dissatisfaction of his friends. "He rules best who rules alone." Fortunately that principle of leadership was solid in his character long before Innocent had a chance to rule anything but himself. There it stayed and carried him through as amazing a group of political events as it had ever been any man's fortune to face.

Besought by men taught to be persuasive from their earliest education, to yield the scepter of temporal power trustingly placed in his hands only four years after his coronation into the power of the Holy Roman empire, Innocent laughed at them, chided them, for asking him to violate a trust, to go back on his word. He told the Cardinals who had put him in his place, "I know the duties of my office; I know the precepts which have guided my footsteps these many years; now that I am the Law, I would not deviate from it even if I could."

Later he had years to regret that iron fidelity. Years spent in a rockbound hilltop above the coast of Yucatan. And yet those years had a charm of freedom he had never known in Rome, a freedom that could never be the lot of any Pope. Innocent III was snatched from a life rigorous with ceremony and responsibility; a life in which every word, every gesture had to be carefully weighed before utterance, lest some picayune underling should slyly misinterpret and carry the tale to those who, in malicious glee, would magnify the whole thing into some tremendous scandal which would sweep the empire. Conferences would be called, strife ensue, and a whole whirlwind of human passion result.

Here, ah, here in his exile he could belch lustily over a good meal if he chose, swear lengthily if the hammer struck his thumb, or if a stupid carver should disorder one of his choice Latin phrases. And he did, too. The body though with reluctance gave up the habits of years, the early rising, the penances, the office, and all the weighty rigamarole of a church whose worship was founded on ceremony. He had helped to establish that back in Italy, and had roundly disciplined those who deviated from the prescribed rules and forms. Such discipline maintained the necessary integration of the sprawling organization that was the Church!

Here, where the discipline of the body was no longer of great importance, the



discipline of the Spirit had attained preeminence. Time and facility had finally given Innocent III an awareness of that Inner Realm which the pressure of office and the strictures of formalism had not allowed in Italy. And so a philosophical calm had slowly but surely pervaded his being as his exile lengthened. The farther the Papacy fell behind him on the horizon of time the nearer did he approach to that Peace which passeth understanding.

How necessary was its control in the terribly limiting environment to which Fate had committed him for the balance of his days. Those days were long and healthful; for the kidnap ship had wandered to a warm, unchanging climate in which most of his bodily ailments had completely disappeared.

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"Ho, Pietro, bring up our fancy cargo!" bellowed some voice of authority over Innocent's head. The very force of it startled him into complete awareness. Again the Mediterranean sun blazed into his wooden prison and again it ushered the kindly sailor. Pietro was his name.

Key was fitted to lock; iron collar was removed; and firm hands hoisted him up into clean air and the warmth of the sun. Momentarily blinded, Innocent was but dimly aware of a huge bulk of a man, black bearded, with tremendous hands and arms slanted outward in repose on a huge girth of belly.

"There aint enough of ye to ballast a rowboat, let alone the 'Sahib Queen'," boomed out at him. "But I reckon we're cuttin' water fast enough to suit them as bought your passage. If this wind holds we'll raise Cap Bon by sundown."

The quality of the captain's Italian, for obviously this was the captain, was surprisingly good. There was a suggestion of the islands about him, perhaps Sardinia; though he was certainly not a Moor; that dark skin was of wind and sun, not race.

The Pope grasped weakly at a stay and slide slowly to the deck. The sudden change in surroundings, the greater roll of the ship and the overwhelming light after days of darkness were too much for him in his condition.

"I think I'm going to be sick."

"Pietro!" roared the captain.

"Yes, sir."

"Drag him over to the side, you lubber; do ye want him pewking all over the decks of the Sahib Queen?"

"No, sir, captain." Even as he spoke he flopped Innocent to the rail and shifted him around until his head hung over the side and held it there.



"Mind yer business!" the captain shouted at other members of the crew as they crowded forward, curious to see what strange cargo had taken them out of Ostia without the labor of loading it on.

Seeing that the crew followed his order, the captain wheeled and ducked into his cabin. While Innocent's stomach, having relieved itself of the bread and wine, made a few more abortive heaves and gave up. Sun, wind and air soon began to revive his failing spirits and the kidnapped prelate had time and inclination to observe this new, strange vehicle of his destiny.

The Sahib Queen was a far remove in size and appointments from the Roman-styled triremes in which he had made his few voyages as head of the Papal state. This little vessel was trim and built for speed, no place for oars or oarsmen here but sail and plenty of it, and seamanship. Whoever had bought his passage on this fleet ship had bought wisely. He was surprised to find himself admirigg the choice and the vessel! He was strangely thrilled to find himself born through the water so swiftly and easily. He straightened up, almost involuntarily, at the new-found strength, and was aware of Pietro's watchfulness.

"Ah, yes, this new freedom has its limits, too!" he thought. And then, "New freedom? Have I accepted this removal so completely? Have I worn the mantle of the Pope so lightly that it can be thrown off -- as if it were nothing? Am I glad to be cast so violently out of office as though it had become a hateful thing? What has happened to me, these three days I've been unconscious?"

"Your soul has had a chance to express itself, for once."

Almost like the voice of a stranger did those words intrude themselves on his consciousness. Innocent III looked around; only Pietro was near and he couldn't have spoken them. They had been in his own thoughts, then.

"Your work there was done. You have given as much as was deserved. Now you must receive for a time and prepare for the future."

He relaxed at the words. "My future? But my future has been the Church! For my whole life! How can there be any future away from that?"

There was no answer to that, apparently, at least not for the time being; so he withdrew from the rail which was little more than a foot above the deck here and settled back on a coil of rope to enjoy his surroundings. His stomach quieted somewhat but sea legs weren't to be his for several days yet.

Innocent's eyes took in the lines of the boat; they were landsman's eyes; but he sould see the evidence of discipline in the orderliness about him and the response of the crew to the captain's commands. He rather envied that response, in comparison to the recalcitrant behavior of his prelates. The boat was probably of the islands, too; he remembered having seen similar vessels in the harbor at Ostia



and on voyages down the coast to Naples. His infrequent sea trips had been welcome escapes, both from the toils of overland journeys and consequent danger of brigands and robbery, and from Rome itself, and one of the weightiest offices in the world.

The galleys were many-oared, massive castles, too, from which the sea was remote. Now, here, the sea was a living thing which rolled and tossed and clutched at the ship and slid away. The wind thrilled its strange, heady power through and over him as it heeled the ship along. The overwhelming change from the life he had known stupefied him for days, drew him resistlessly into this endless surge across the trackless spaces of the sea, made him so amenable, so docile -- not that he tended toward violence or had any thought of it -- that he was allowed to move about the ship at will and returned to his below-decks prison only as the weather forced him. His heavy, winter cloak had been left him, fortunately, and this served well enough as a blanket for sleeping on the deck. Such accommodations as the ship afforded were on the whole cleaner and cheerier by far than the Italy of that day could offer to the wealthiest traveler on land!

Cap Bon did show high before sundown; but this intrepid captain and his crew showed their contempt for shore and confidence in his navigation by heading due west across the Gulf of Tunis. Innocent didn't know it but their destination was Bizerta and Cap Blanc. Land had disappeared again before nightfall; for the westerly wind increased to a gale and there was little rest aboard that night.

Dawn was showing dully under low, gray clouds when the Pope looked out of his hatch. The mountains of fluid green had the captain fighting the tiller himself as they threatened to engulf the little ship from the rear. The mainsail was out to the full to keep them abreast. Innocent was still queasy, but he did down a little wine which Pietro forced on him. Conversation was impossible against the howling of the wind, and he was all too obviously nothing but helpless cargo as the captain and the crew fought to keep the straining ship upright. The endless tension showed on their faces as the hours wore on and Innocent wondered if they were as lost as he was. To him the African coast toward the Atlantic was as much fable as fact, and he could but speculate hazily about this part of the Moorish dominions as he became aware of their dim appearance off to the left.

Hour by mountainous hour sped by with no letup, no slackening of the staggering pace of the Sahib Queen. There wasn't much Innocent could do but brace himself between the mast and the rail, arm locked around the one and foot against the other and thrill to the ceaseless struggle between the men and the sea. This was living! This was life as he had never known it in Rome. Uncomplicated, ritual-less living it was. Why, the idea of doing his office here and now was ridiculous in the extreme. The enormity of this offence against the rules of his Church escaped him at the time. But, why try to establish contact with the Divine when every straining moment of that runaway voyage was already so close to Eternity that a flick of the captain's wrist on the tiller would have buried them



under one of those mighty swells.

Nightfall found them still scudding along at that frightening speed. The clouds lifted somewhat but the wind never slackened for a moment, and the light that did filter down from the stars only served to emphasize the ominous mountains of water that continually formed and reformed behind them. The Pope wanted to help at the tiller; every one of the crew from the massive captain down was dog-tired; but his half-hearted gesture was contemptuously brushed aside.

Innocent retired below more than once but there was no rest on the straining Queen, whose tensions made themselves felt to everyone aboard. If he must die, he thought, let it not be like a rat in a trap, caught in the hold of the ship. That night Innocent III spent under the wind and the stars, nor under the overwhelming immensity of Nature did he deem it necessary to pray for protection.

Bizerte was far behind when day came again, nor had Captain Donizetti -- Innocent had picked up his name from the crew -- considered any attempt in the dark and the storm to bear southward. To have done so would have swamped the Queen immediately.

The northward tilt of the coast to Cap Blanc meant that the shore and the entrance to Bizerte harbor were bearing the full brunt of the tremendous waves. All Donizetti could hope to do now was make a little southing with the expectation that the lee side of Cap Blanc, on westward toward Algiers, would be sheltered enough somewhere that a landfall could be made.

It was, finally, at a little port far, far along the Algerian coast. The setting sun broke through at the last minute to almost blind them as they inched in under shortened sail, behind a rocky headland. The doughty captain, himself, was at the tiller.

"Look alive now," he bellowed at the crew, who found some hidden reserve of energy to scurry about and make ready for the landing.

A long, rocky breakwater jutted out and curved around. Captain Donizetti brought the Queen smoothly behind this into the calm water. Jib and mainsail came down with a bang and the anchor chain rattled over the side with a clatter that deafened the Pope for a moment.

"So this is it," he said grimly to himself, "some nameless Moorish port, buried alive or better dead."

No one seemed to pay any attention to him in the fast fading light as the ship was made secure for the night. The captain did not order him below in chains. It wasn't until the ship's boat was put over the side that Donizetti spoke to him.

"You are free to go ashore -- if you should be wanting to," he said with a



knowing grin, "but Rouiba ain't no place for a Churchman. I can tell you that." He stared insolently at His Holiness, Innocent III, peering down over his immense belly, feet wide apart, arms akimbo.

Lothario di Conti, Innocent III, seated on a coil of rope by the mast, returned the look with as calm a gaze as he could manage.

"The only place I care to go ashore, Captain, is Ostia or some other Italian port. I can make it well worth your while."

"I swore to dump ye off in Tunis and that's where your goin!" With an air of finality he turned to the rail. "Pietro, Alaric, you stay aboard."

With that he lowered himself with surprising ease into the small boat and was rowed the scant hundred yards to shore by the other two members of his crew, a nondescript Italian and a thin, very dark man they called Jesus, apparently Egyptian.

The Sahib Queen was the lone craft in the harbor at that time and yet her arrival had seemed to evoke no excitement ashore. Beyond the pier lay as miserable a collection of hovels as Innocent had ever hoped to see. A few buildings showed the arched facades with which he had become familiar on his one trip to Spain. There was only the dimmest gleam of light ashore, here and there, to dispel the deepening gloom.

The desert chill descended with the night and drove Innocent into the shelter of the hold and the comfort of his heavy cloak. There he knew his first real sleep in almost six days.



## CHAPTER TWO

The shaft of sunlight which had beamed the voyager's way into Rouiba the day before raised only false hopes toward a break in the weather. The next morning dawned cloudy as before with more wind and bigger waves outside the breakwater.

It was the shuffle of feet and the moving of gear overhead that brought Innocent to wakefulness with a start. Confused for a moment he leaned back and bumped his head. The pain from his wound caused him to wince. He fingered the sore spot gingerly. It was going down. He pulled himself to his feet and found his legs steady under him as he pushed back the hatch and looked out into the grey morning.

"Ho, our fancy cargo is up for his breakfast," said Pietro. "It'll be nothin' o' the likes o' what ye were used to in Rome."

"I am hungry," replied Innocent as he hoisted himself clumsily on deck, "and I should like to bathe."

"Plenty o' salt water over the side," was the answer, "and there's a piece o' comb around somewhere." Pietro went back into the smoke blackened galley and returned with a piece of comb, indeed, and a long-handled pot. He gave them to Innocent with a friendly smile.

By leaning far over the rail the Pope managed to scoop up a pot of sea water and get most of it back up to the deck. He stripped there where he stood and performed his first ablutions in many a day.

Oh, it was wonderful to be clean again! Even without soap the change was so much for the better that Innocent felt himself a new man, younger and freer than he had been in years. Carefully he worked the blood and dirt out of his hair with the help of Pietro's comb. He obtained a little olive oil from the galley and soothed it gently onto the wound.

"Ho, there, ye lazy lubbers!"

It was the large bellied Donizetti on the quay.

"Aye, Captain," shouted Pietro in return. He and Alaric, a shaggy, blond giant sprang to the shore side of the ship.

"Look alive now, we're bringin' the Queen into load cargo."

The captain was already lowering his huge bulk into the little boat, but only



one of the crew was in it to row him out to the ship. Innocent looked in vain for sign of life along the waterfront but there was none.

He dried himself as best he could with his linen shirt and dressed even to the great cloak against the morning chill. How he would have loved a cup of steaming spiced wine right then, but he had to content himself with the bitter red that Pietro offered him, and there were olives and wheaten cakes.

"Ye'll find what ye need in the galley," Pietro had told him as he hurried to obey the captain's commands.

The three men sweated and strained over the anchor and then towed the Queen dockside with the small boat. During all this Innocent was ignored as though he weren't there; but he heard enough to know the dread truth. Rouiba was cursed with the dread plague, and the fearless Donizetti was able to bargain for all the wheat and olives the Queen could carry, and at his own prices.

It was slow work getting cargo down to the ship. Donizetti had the crew bending their backs to endless sacks of wheat which had to be carried from some distance up in the village, aboard the ship which was slightly below the pier itself, and then lowered one by one into the hold where Innocent had first regained consciousness. He watched his shrinking sanctuary with some misgivings.

The quay at Rouiba was of earth and stone, little more than an extension of the rugged shore. Crude stone paving sloped up to form the village street. The nearest of the Moorish buildings served as storehouses and it was from one of these, after the wheat was loaded, that the great casks of olives came rumbling and bumping over the cobbles. To keep these hogsheads from gaining too much speed, Pietro and Alaric, one on each side, braked the forward momentum by dropping wooden battens in front of them.

All hands including the captain gathered at the ship's rail to ease the clumsy things down onto the deck and to upend them in place. The expert work of these unlettered men fascinated Lothario de Conti di Segni, Innocent III. Craftsmanship of this type was new to him and it all added to his unexpected enjoyment of the kidnapping escapade.

It was sunset time again when the last of the hogsheads started its bumbling journey down to the ship. Innocent was lost in reverie as a vagrant beam of sunlight slanted across the harbor briefly free from the low storm clouds.

"Look alive!"

"Ho there, landlubber!"

Dimly sensing Pietro's shout, Innocent turned. The huge barrel had gotten away from the men and was headed directly toward him, the Pope. He froze in



horror as it rumbled and bounced across the quay. The stone edge arched it gracefully into the air and toward his head. Only then did Lothario dive for the deck. The hogshead, weighing all of six hundred pounds, sailed silently over him, smashed the starboard rail to kindling and splashed mightily into the harbor.

He was still white and shaken when the sailors jumped to the deck beside him.

"Faith of the virgin and I thought ye were a goner that time." Pietro sounded visibly relieved when Innocent sat up and showed himself uninjured. "Them as cracked yer skull in Rome gave ye but a flea-bite along side o' what them olives would adone."

Alaric was already thrusting out in the small boat to retrieve the vagrant barrel, still spinning lazily in the water beyond the ship. He hoped to return it to the ship's side before Donizetti should appear from the warehouse. But there was no hiding that smashed rail and when the captain did return to the ship he flew into a towering rage and let forth a stream of profanity that took five minutes in the telling. Innocent tried to make himself as inconspicuous as possible behind the other barrels but he came in for his share and took it silently like the rest.

"Well," Donizetti turned his blazing eyes to a stranger who had come down with him, "you said you'd earn your passage back to Ostia, fall to!" And back to Pietro, "Run a line through that block there! By the hair of St. Peter's head we'll have that mother-loving barrel aboard here before dark if I have to take the lash to the whole worthless lot of you."

Actually, it took the captain's mighty bulk on the line to hoist the hogshead aboard. He took a grim satisfaction out of this and dismissed them all with a brief, "We sail at dawn -- aint no gold to be made in this rat-hole."

Day broke with skies as lowering and windblown as before. Nothing daunted by this or the fact that one of his crew never did show up after that first night ashore, Donizetti ordered the Sahib Queen cast off. His ready acceptance of a comparatively inexperienced and untried stranger for a deck hand was now clear with the other crewman gone. The rest of the men were none too happy to be heading back into the open sea in such weather, short handed. But then, who wanted to stay in plague-infested Rouiba?

It was a miserable day for Innocent. The mid-deck section of the Sahib Queen was often awash with the new cargo aboard. He was forced to take what comfort he could atop the barrels of olives. Even then the salt spray drenched him often enough to make him homesick for the cloistered comfort of his Lateran Palace.

His palace? Even now the machinery of state was in motion, no doubt, and the cardinals were quarreling among themselves over his successor -- if indeed the man wasn't enthroned already! Matteoto and that young hothead, Orsini, had probably moved with undignified haste to put one of their yes-men in the Chair.



And God help Europe now!

These and other bitter reflections shadowed his brain that endless day.

"Sire," the stranger, whom Donizetti had called Masetto, was beside him with a cup of wine, "this is little enough of comfort but it does warm the blood."

Steady, dark brown eyes returned Innocent's gaze. Brown hair curled in careless ringlets around a wide forehead. Masetto had the squatty build of the Piedmontese, a people noted more for their staying power than for their brilliance in economics or politics. This man's voice had something of an educated sound to it, however.

Innocent nodded and accepted the proffered cup with a slight smile. The wine was welcome and he downed it in one gulp.

"I scarce expected to find a fellow Italian out here at the ends of the earth." Innocent made a question of the statement as he returned the cup.

"Sire, I go where adventure takes me -- to the ends of the earth and beyond."

The Pope would have asked more of this adventurer but he moved quickly away toward the stern where Captain Donizetti was at the helm.

It was sometime late in the afternoon that it happened. Of the thousands of mighty green swells which had pursued the Sahib Queen down the coast of Africa, one finally caught up with her. Perhaps there was a brief lull in the wind. Anyhow, with a great lurch of the tiller the Queen swung suddenly broadside and threw the captain into the sea as though he were an empty coat instead of three hundred and fifty pounds of man.

The seas which poured over the sturdy little ship then so threatened them all with destruction that there was no thought of help for Donizetti. Each hung on grimly where he was, expecting the next billow to be the last.

It was Masetto, close to the tiller, who caught it as the Queen came around before the wind for the second time and held her steady. She had gone around, come up in the wind, broached again, and come around once more with mast and sails still intact, groaning and struggling like a living thing.

Innocent clung to the mast on his barrel top perch and was soaked to the skin. His white hair and full beard streamed with salt water. He shivered as the white froth of the waves slipped by again at a frightening pace. Such speed he had never known before. He didn't want to die then, as the captain had, all alone in that vast desert-waste of water.

Pietro, a Norman named Alaric, an Egyptian named Jesus, Masetto and him-



self, what a crew to bring the Queen safely into port. And what port? That question drummed unceasingly through Innocent's mind as darkness closed down around them. What port indeed for these orphans of the storm driven helplessly westward to the edge of doom? If his holiness, Pope Innocent III, ever spent hell on earth that sodden, spray-soaked night was it. The others had their spells at the tiller to occupy their time though they stood no regular watches. Each leaned on it, fought with it, and fell away when he could stand no more. Innocent stayed where he was and alternately shivered and prayed. He might have dozed from sheer exhaustion though that seemed impossible.

A curse roused him to the leaden skies of dawn. It was the Norman, Alaric. His brawny arms were wrapped around the tiller; his legs were braced. He cursed the captain and each and every one of his ancestors, one by one, for having brought him out into the storm again. Better Rouiba with a thousand plagues than this hell on water.

Innocent III wanted no food that day; none was offered to him. It passed in a sort of stupor where his mind speculated vaguely on the Moorish kingdom somewhere over the horizon to the left and on old memories of the Spanish provinces somewhere on the right. He had visited Spain once. The Bishop of Barcelona was still his good friend. On that trip of years ago he had arrived at Spanish ports by sailings in easy stages along the coast of Gaul and down, never out of sight of land. For all he knew there might be a thousand miles of open water across the Mediterranean at this point. Eventually, he remembered, there was a narrowing of "mare nostrum" before it entered the trackless Atlantic. Beyond that was the end of the world, so legend had it.

The Pillars of Hercules, that was it! That was the name of the exit of the Mediterranean given to him by the Bishop. Perhaps the sailors could get the brave little ship around the rocky headland of the Pillars of Hercules and escape the storm -- that is, if they ever got that far alive. Even at this thought Innocent felt a slackening of the wind, or was he only indulging in vain hopes? Between hope and despair, stunned wakefulness and oblivion, the dreary hours marched by until another night had come, and gone.



## CHAPTER THREE

The Pillars of Hercules were passed by the Sahib Queen and her helpless crew in the wildest storm the Mediterranean had seen in a generation, and the captainless ship moved on out into the wide Atlantic. Oh, Pietro and the men tried to make northing toward the Spanish coast on the other side, but in vain. Two near-swampings forced them to continue to run before the wind.

Hope had sprung so high at sight of land again -- now on both sides of them! This changed to blackest despair as the Rock of Gibraltar disappeared behind them in the fading light.

"Gibraltar! That's what they name it hereabouts," shouted Masetto.

"Much good that does us now," shouted Pietro in reply, "aint got no chart to mark its passing."

Innocent could not speak for the rest of them, but for himself in his despondency the utter hopelessness of their situation gave way to a kind of numb calm. He resigned himself to the hands of fate that had preserved him from degradation or death in Tunis. If the end of the world was the end of life, so be it. If fate decreed otherwise, well, tomorrow lay ahead.

Sometime during that miserable night Masetto crept up to the Pope's wet and wooden bed and startled him to wakefulness.

"Sire?"

"Yes."

"If I not be mistaken, the Church has been thy life?"

"For many and many a year, my good man," replied Innocent, "but think you that Church will avail you aught beyond the ends of the earth?"

"Yes, Sire, that I do believe."

Innocent felt rather than saw the head nodding vigorously beside his ear. "And what would you have of me?"

"When I was last in Barcelona they did say that beyond the Pillars of Hercules lay naught but hell itself. I would fain be shriven ere my soul departs for purgatory."



"Churchman or no," replied the Pope, "I am in no mood to shrive souls this night, pray wait until the morrow. If God's blessing hath kept the Sahib Queen afloat these last three days, we may reasonably assume the protection of the Most High will remain with us for some time to come. Good night!"

With this dismissal Innocent hitched himself away from the man and tried to make himself as comfortable as he could on his miserable perch.

Masetto crawled back toward the stern to be near the helm. It was watch and watch around for the haggard, gaunt-faced crew for another night. Twice did lines part in the dark and twice did the three unoccupied hands make a wild scramble for repairs before all was lost. It was then Innocent cursed his age and lack of experience in working with his hands. Man-like, there was the urge to be in the thick of the activity, to carry his fair share of the responsibility of keeping the sturdy Queen afloat.

Dawn was scarce a promise in the east when Innocent was aroused by two figures creeping past him to the hatch. It was Pietro and Jesus. Wild thoughts of desperate men deliberately flooding the ship to commit suicide raced through the Pope's mind. He leaned toward them to catch their words.

"I tell ye the Queen's shipped so much water she's low in the bow!"

"Open hatch and we low all over!" objected the Egyptian. His broken Italian had a musical lilt to the Pope's ear.

"Ah, the wind's easin' a bit now," returned Pietro, "we aint taken a drop in an hour. I say, let's get some o' this wheat out o' here and she'll ride better."

"Wheat go -- what for hungry man eat?"

"You block-headed Egyptian! It'll damp rot and mold away to dirt before we can eat half of it. It's all got to be brought out an' dried in calm weather or none of it'll be fit to eat. Stand aside!"

Only half convinced the Egyptian grumbled to himself, but he did help clear the hatch. By the time half a dozen bags were heaved on the deck and tumbled over the side there was a bright patch of light to be seen dead astern, a break in the clouds on the eastern horizon.

Innocent slipped gingerly off his barrel, legs atremble, body shivering with wet in the cold dawn. Surprisingly, he felt stronger than he expected. He even tried to help roll the next sack to the smashed rail and over. Without a word and with scarcely a glance at their white-bearded helper the two continued until ten sacks in all had gone into the hungry sea.

Pietro was down to the flooring of the hold by then and that was enough to



reveal water oozing slowly but steadily out of the soggy wheat. There was an inch or so sloshing around Pietro's feet.

"No so bad," said the Egyptian as he spat into it.

"No," agreed Pietro cautiously, "I've seen worse. Now we know what shape she's in and can keep an eye on 'er."

"How much more wheat is in there?" asked Innocent as the two replaced the hatch cover and battened it down.

"Twenty sacks," replied Pietro shortly. "More'n we'll need if the Queen takes us all the way to hell." He glanced shrewdly at the Pope, scratching his bearded chin thoughtfully. "Ye must 'a been doin' lots of prayin' since we crossed the Gulf of Tunis."

"When I felt the need of it, yes," replied Innocent in measured tones, "and you?"

The sailor gave a wry laugh and turned away.

"Alaric," he called toward the stern, "Ye're a handy one with a fire, come forward to the galley here and light up. Time we all had some hot wine in our bellies."

The sun was clear of the horizon before Alaric's galley prowess was evident with a pot of steaming wine. This had made the rounds several times and was rapidly on the way to giving the ship a light-headed crew when the rest of his breakfast appeared. This turned out to be a heavy biscuit made from unleavened flour and salt fish fried in olive oil. After the strain of the preceding days and nights, and in the bright morning light, that breakfast was fit for the gods.

The wind abated somewhat as the sky cleared over the ship but the mighty swells followed them and gave the wanderers no alternative but to run due west before them. With the welcome sun to dry their clothing and soothe their tired spirits, all slept but the untiring Pietro. It wasn't long before he brought them up with a shout.

"Jesus, Alaric, Masetto! Rouse out there!" And he roared with laughter as they stirred their creaking bones.

His orders were still Greek to Innocent but the sky was black behind the ship and the men needed little urging to bring the mainsail down on the run.

"There's a blow comin' that'll tear stick, sail and all right out o' the Queen, if we let 'er!" Pietro shouted at them. "I, for one, aint tyin' myself to this helm for another week, day and night."



With the mainsail down and the Queen wallowing in the troths of the waves he left the tiller and gathered with the others in the waist of the ship where, in almost no time at all, he directed the fashioning of a triangular shaped device of spars and canvas. This "sea anchor" as Innocent later learned to call it, was thrown out beyond the bow of the ship but tied firmly to the bowsprit with a length of line. This done the men raced to get the Queen ready for the blow.

Soon Innocent could observe how the improvised anchor swung the Queen bow on to the wind and the waves and, as he cocked a discerning eye at the fading sun, he thought, "Still we drift westward away from the land."

Westward it was for two helpless days and nights. To the Pope it seemed he had spent a lifetime, an eternity, on the tossing ship, amid a waste of water without beginning or end. His head ached and his stomach retched from the ceaseless movement. What little nourishment he could get down almost refused to stay there.

Pietro kept grim watch of the water in the hold and when it crept past a certain point he had them all take turns in helping bail out. Even Innocent came in for his share of this. He turned to with a will though his legs and arms were weak and salt water had chafed many a raw spot between skin and clothes.

There was a third day of westward drifting before this second storm blew itself out. And the fourth day out of the Mediterranean found them still moving away from the Pillars of Hercules before a spanking breeze. It was clear, however, and between wind and sun the Sahib Queen and her weary crew slowly dried themselves and the ship out.

Clothing hung from every available line on the ship. The precious sacks of wheat were lifted out of the hold and distributed about the deck. Then all but the man at the helm turned to and bailed and sopped up every last drop of water in the hold. Pietro checked each seam and calk with his fingers.

"Sound as the day she first wet her bottom at Cagliari," he exclaimed triumphantly to Alaric there in the gloom.

"And we're lucky them infidel Moors gave us short weight in them sacks," added the Norman, "or we'd have wheat swelled up and busted all over the ship."

"That we would," was the reply as they climbed out on deck. "Leave."er open to air out till tomorrow if we can, while the wheat dries out a bit. No tellin' how long we'll be needin' it," he concluded significantly.

"Could there possibly be a pair of shears aboard somewhere?" Innocent, stripped to his drawers, approached them. "I'd greatly like to trim my hair and beard back a little -- if only for cleanliness."



"The captain had such things in his cabin --, " the sailor hesitated over the "Sire" he had used before.

"May I suggest you all use my given name of Lothario, for as long as we are together on the Sahib Queen," suggested the Pope, looking directly at Pietro. Within himself he thought, "They could throw me into the sea as useless baggage."

The dark brown eyes of the Italian sailor looked fearlessly back into the grey eyes of the Pope.

"I aint had much use for men 'o the robe or for their churches, but Sire was yer handle when ye came aboard at Ostia, and Sire it'll be." He looked meaningly at Alaric and the rest and turned, beckoning Lothario to follow him. "Let's have a look at Donizetti's cabin."

This was aft, behind the little galley. As they surveyed the messy interior Pietro grinned.

"A gentleman's kit is here somewhere -- Captain fancied himself a great one with the ladies."

A wave had smashed one of the dingy portholes open and the place stank of wet clothes, both of body and of bed.

"Better get this stuff out and dryin', first of all." Pietro grabbed a huge armfull of the over-sized garments and staggered out with them. Innocent gingerly picked the bedding off the wide bunk and dragged it out behind him.

"You want his room, Sire?" asked Pietro as they spread the soggy garments over the olive barrels.

Innocent detected a shade of reluctance in the man's voice and made quick to reply.

"Thank you, no, I'm used to the deck and the stars, now; I'd much prefer to sleep out here."

"Well, ye're welcome to make use o' what ye need in there," he replied generously as they returned.

In water tight chests they found scrolls and charts. These were well worn from much use, indicating that Donizetti was an educated man. There was also a complete toilet kit; for which Lothario Conti, Innocent III, was very thankful. It contained a razor, a small scissors for paring the nails and trimming the beard, a comb and a glass mirror of excellent reflecting quality. An unfamiliar crest on the lid of the finely carved box containing the whole of these things suggested the former owner was a nobleman.



Lothario noticed Pietro looking intently at something he pulled from the chest of charts. It seemed to be a small, wooden box with a glass cover. Curious, he moved to Pietro's side.

"What is that?"

"The Cap'n set great store by this little box -- magnetic needle, he called it." Pietro moved the box around in his hands as he spoke. "Damned if it don't point due north, no matter how ye turn it."

Under the glass on the bottom of the box were the cardinal points of the compass, beautifully and artfully engraved on a brass plate. Innocent noted with some surprise that the figures or characters denoting north, south, east and west were in some language strange to him. There was little doubt of north, however, because of the prominence of the figure. Suspended on a pin or swivel point above the brass plate was a double pointed needle which moved and wobbled freely and seemed to point continually in one direction regardless of the way Pietro turned the box.

"Is this the means the captain used to sail due south from Ostia without following the coast?" asked Innocent.

"This it is," replied Pietro, "and he often said 'There aint enough gold in St. Peter's to buy my magnetic needle'."

"Where was it obtained?"

"Ay, and could ye answer that one half the ship captains in the Mediterranean 'ud be knockin' at yer door! I'm thinkin' this'll be the means of gettin' us back to Ostia -- if we ever do!" Pietro tapped the case significantly and placed it carefully back in the chart chest.



## CHAPTER FOUR

Ship, cargo and crew dried out thoroughly in the many clear days that followed the storm. Innocent heartened to the fair discipline Pietro maintained. He managed to impress on all of them that their only hope -- if indeed there was any -- of getting back to the Mediterranean, to Italy, was in keeping the Sahib Queen trim and in good running condition.

With such extra gear as was aboard he kept all hands busy replacing line and rope and patching sail where needed. During a dead calm one afternoon the fearless Masetto dove overboard with some pitch in hand. He searched out an open seam well below the water line and patched it there in mid-Atlantic.

Atlantis! There was a name to conjure with! Many a night there on the deck Innocent wove fancies about that fabled land. He knew Solon's story of the tales of the Egyptian priests, about the lost continent beyond the Pillars of Hercules, sunk beneath the ocean eleven thousand years ago. Could it be that some remnant remained to be discovered out here amid the watery waste? A new land, with strange people? Perchance if the voyagers wandered around out here long enough a discovery might be made before they returned to Europe. What a tale they would have to tell.

If they returned to Europe indeed! Each day saw their westward drift lengthened, though none would admit it. Pietro tacked to the north; then he tacked to the south; but never eastward could they go.

The early enthusiasm to help, to keep the Sahib Queen shipshape slowly wore away. Alaric, Jesus and Masetto were not openly hostile, but as one monotonous landless day followed another they became indifferent. At times Lothario Conti wondered if they had sailed off the earth without knowing it and on into a watery hell, in which they were doomed to wander throughout eternity. One thing gave him grim satisfaction. The passing days had lifted years from his shoulders. He knew hand and eye were steadier and clearer; there was even a youthful spring to his step as he moved about the ship. He willingly took turns at the tiller now, and the crewmen were glad to relinquish what was to them a rather pointless duty. Innocent knew full well the value of daily duties and responsibilities; hadn't he set up the rigid routines which regularly guided the thousands of Churchmen throughout Europe?

"We'll make a first class sailor out of you one of these fine days."

It was Masetto who made this observation to the Pope. And it was a fine day indeed, with a clean, sharp breeze from east careening the little ship along. Using Donizetti's magnetic needle Pietro had set a southerly course hoping vaguely to raise some segment of the African coast. He had heard that the vast



southern continent jutted far, far to the westward in the Atlantic; but in truth he had no idea how far westward the Sahib Queen had gone in her trackless voyage.

It was enough for Innocent that he had been told to keep the Queen as nearly at right angles to the sun's path as the easterly breeze would allow. It was during one of these duty periods that Masetto approached him with the above remark. He followed that with a word of praise.

"That's a straight wake behind the Queen, Sire."

Innocent glanced back and accepted the compliment with a brief smile. "There is something to be said for a life on the sea. Would that I had had more time for such travels in years gone by."

Masetto pointed at Innocent's hands, "You spent many years in the work of a scholar?"

"There was a time when I thought it more important to work with my mind than with my hands." The Pope looked at the reddened, chapped skin, turned up a calloused palm, "Now, the shoe seems to be on the other foot."

Masetto spat reflectively over the side. "There was a time when the priesthood seemed the only way for me. Mother spent many an hour on her knees praying I should take orders, but I was all for a life of adventure. Now I've had it -- I don't know."

"Don't waste time on vain regrets," Innocent chided him.

Masetto nodded in vague agreement and changed the subject. "Sire, won't we ever return to Rome? Are we to wander out here forever?"

The Pope shrugged his shoulders and smiled confidently at his questioner. "We both have a good many years to live, as yet. We certainly are in less danger of sinking now than we were during the storms. We have food and water aplenty to last for a month, more if need be, Pietro says. What is there to do but continue sailing in the hope of finding land?"

"But when, where?" asked Masetto helplessly.

Lothario yawned and shook his head. He was in a facetious mood. "Perhaps we shall find fame and fortune in discovering a new land, and tell many a tall tale when we return to Rome. The Church needs new fields of holy endeavor. It is getting old and settled in its ways. Men are turning to more worldly pursuits."

"The Church?" said Masetto slowly, "Then Alaric was right, Sire, you were



high in the councils at St. Peter's."

"I was the highest," Lothario said simply.

"Mother of God!" the adventurer whispered, his eyes taking on a blank stare. He slid slowly to his knees, pulled his cap from his head and crossed himself. Wordless prayers trembled on his lips.

"Come, man, on your feet!" exclaimed Lothario harshly. "We'll have no such goings on here. On the Sahib Queen I am a man among men. I was to have been sold into slavery -- or worse, but praise be to God I was spared that fate. Still, I am nothing but a homeless, nameless wanderer, little different than yourself."

"But, Sire, if we return to Rome?"

"Who would believe my story? I've been properly buried now." A fleeting smile lifted the corner of Lothario's lips. "I am sure, and a successor has been chosen and put in my place. I would be destroyed if I returned."

"This monstrous crime will not go unpunished," said Masetto. He clutched his cap in taut fist as he rose to his feet.

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," was Innocent's answer. "I shall not worry about them. Rather shall I be thankful for the first real vacation in eighteen long years. And as for you, Masetto, perhaps you will find this voyage to be the greatest adventure of all. Few there are who can boast of having sailed out into the trackless Atlantic ocean; none, until the present time at least, can say they've crossed it!"

The self-styled adventurer looked despondently across the waters and heaved a sigh. "I would willingly leave such boasting to others."

"We've sailed so far west now," observed Lothario, "That we would have fallen off the end of the earth ere this; but here we are rolling along on salt water no whit different than that which threatened to drown us in the Mediterranean."

"In this we shall drown just as easily," groaned Masetto.

In the face of the man's obstinate refusal to be buoyed up Lothario turned impatiently away from him and, keeping one eye on their frothy path and the other on the sun, tried to keep the Queen's wake as straight as possible.



## CHAPTER FIVE

Quiet nights at sea were the witching hours for His Holiness, Pope Innocent III. Stretched out on the warm deck of the Sahib Queen he could dream endlessly of the many problems of Being which had perplexed him through the years.

There in the vast, breathless hush of that great ocean all the minutiae of his former daily life at the Vatican seemed ridiculous. A sad, condescending smile crossed his face there in the dark as he thought of the prison of ritual he had erected around himself.

"Sleep not, oh idle dreamer, the ritual of the soul must now replace the ritual of the body. Too long hast thou followed the shadows of existence, turn thine eye inward now and learn of the substance."

Innocent started up, wide awake! Had he been dreaming? He looked around him in the gloom and then up; it might have come from above him. Overhead he could see only the tip of the mast wheeling slowly, majestically against the stars. He and he alone was stirring on the Sahib Queen. He settled back again into his comfortable position. Waking or sleeping the words must have come from within him -- his Inner Voice.

Shadow and substance, the flesh and the spirit, and now he was to learn of the latter. Well enough, the Pope shrugged his shoulders, there would be something to occupy his active mind. But how was he to begin? He searched vaguely around within himself.

"What is the substance of thy faith?" asked the Inner Voice.

"Why, belief in God, in a Divine Power within me, to see things through," was Innocent's answer.

"Search thy heart, thy mind, and thy soul for that Inner Power. It will lead thee to the goal thou desirest."

"Humph," thought he, "and what of all my years of study, the dogma, the ritual, what of rosary and scapulary, the altar with its chalice, candles, incense, are they to be discarded in this search for final Truth?"

He waited for an answer but in vain. He puzzled over the problem for a goodly while. Were the habits, the honest endeavors of a lifetime to be cast aside? The very iron out of which his faith had been built? He thought of the



Holy Scriptures, and as the scrolls of the sacred manuscripts passed before his mind's eye they stopped at these words of the Master Jesus:

"He who worships me in the secret place of the heart, him will I reward openly."

Humph again, that merely reinforced the original instruction of his Inner Voice! Speculating vainly over this new direction to his meditations, His Holiness, Innocent III, fell asleep.

\* \* \*

Before us lies a pleasant countryside. It is a valley, with ripe wheat waving gently before the breeze. Down the center of this valley is a winding road, a rutted road. Along this dusty way lurches a typical Italian cart, high wheeled and pulled by a single, ridiculously diminutive donkey.

In the distance are hills, seven of them, covered by the Eternal City, Rome. Towers and spires up-thrust toward the sky to which thousands daily raise their hands and their voices in prayer; but their hearts? Lifting the heart in prayer was a simple matter for Giuseppe Morgantini as his good ass lessened the distance between him and home; but in truth there wasn't enough power in all Christendom to lift the heart of the man who was spiritual head of the Holy Roman Empire.

Franciscan friar he once had been. One of the lowliest of the low he was, a pot washer, a scullion in one of the lesser kitchens of one of the smaller settlements of that order not far from Florence, queen of the Italian city-states in the 13th Century.

The power which displaced Innocent III in 1216 A.D. placed this peasant in the Holy See. A great Italian family, whose interests coincided with the Guelphs at that time, grew impatient of Innocent's delicate balance of power between Church and State. One in particular, a youth at the time of Lothario Conti's assumption of the high office in 1198, saw or thought he saw the burning ambitions of his early maturity wasting away under this compromiser, this doting old Pope who placed God and the Church, not to mention earthly realms, above personal gain. In fact, this fine impartiality had slighted our hero on more than one occasion of state, and so, when he engineered the kidnapping of the Pope in a garden of the Vatican, there was a considerable amount of personal satisfaction gained in the successful execution of the scheme.

Personal bias of the negative sort was the mainspring of Pietro Orsini's flaming existence. In his relations with women, and God knows there were many, the woman who flaunted his was the one who aroused his heart to murderous frenzy. No schizoid, this long haired boy from the house of Orsini, but a para-



noiac; nay, we might add to the dictionary of psychology and call him a manic-expressive. For frustration never blocked for long the outpourings of this restless spirit.

On the day Morgantini winds his way cityward in his most ungainly cart, we find Pietro Orsini closeted with His Most August Holiness, Honorius III. Up and down the dark panelled room strides the power behind the throne, his long velvet cloak streaming out unmindfully behind him. If he pauses to bend scornful glances at the man who he has placed in Innocent's shoes, the other heeds them not. The burden of the position beyond his every capacity had buried Honorius III in such a pall that even the jibes and threats of his lord and master could affect him no longer.

"You fool! You utter, damnable fool!" Orsini swore at him, "Why in the Virgin's name did you tell Vitelli you wished you were back at your pots! Why pots of all things?" Orsini spat the word at him. "Why that sanctimonious old wind bag will make you the butt of every tongue in Rome. And Florence besides, when he gets back there. God knows you've been laughed at enough already."

Orsini turned full on his disconsolate tool. Feet apart, hands twisting and clasping in impotent fury behind his back, he looked down with curling lip on the lowered head, which did not raise.

"Oh, God, if I just had some men to work with!" and he stormed from the room.

His sudden exit knocked an eavesdropping priest sprawling. Orsini swung the door shut behind him and as the creature started away on hands and knees, he vented his anger in one mighty kick at the crawling one's rear and got a welcome roar of pain.

His fury assuaged somewhat on the unexpected culprit, Orsini strode on down the corridor. Back in the privacy of the little study the Pope sat unmoved, dejection showed in every line of his wrinkled face. Iron grey hair hung uncombed over his forehead. His figure, when standing, was neither tall nor impressive. Nor was there any indication of the priest or scholar but rather the peasant in the slope of the shoulders, the homely face; and the stubby fingers and square palm indicated an elementary type, a forthright, unimaginative, faithful servant.

In his blind conceit Orsini had not reckoned the tremendous load which even the external trappings of the highest post in all Christendom would impose on the personality. Having disposed of Innocent III with marvelous ease he thought that he could create kings with the wave of the hand. And so a pot washer was the deliberate choice of Orsini's over-weening self-confidence.

Imposing this limited creature on the Church had in turn imposed limitations on Orsini. The Pope had to be watched all the time to see that he did not discre-



dit the Papacy entirely with simple, stupid blunders. Not that the lesser lights, who had been dimmed by Innocent III's brilliance, didn't hasten to fill the gaps in their overlord's personality. This they did with greatest alacrity. But there are many things which only the Pope can do and they must be done publicly. Oh, in ritual he got by passably, but there had to be audiences, with the leading men in Europe. Innocent III had welcomed them, and sent them away with the knowledge that they had faced a ruler. His successor, Honorius III, made such pitiable responses in place of the learned judgments which should have come from his lips that in a few short weeks his Papacy was already being discredited. Public audiences would have to be given up for a time. Especially when Cardinal Vitelli had goaded His Excellency into an admission that he preferred pots to St. Peter's!

With this astounding confession gnawing at his pride, Pietro Orsini the king-maker, stopped at the ante-room. This was really little more than a widening of the corridor which led from the Pope's chambers. On each side of the casemented windows and on around the room, from floor to ceiling, hung a rich figured material, piling up in stiff, crinkly folds against the floor. This part of the Lateran palace, rather than stone or tile, was floored with hardwood. Old at the time of our telling, the planks, four or five inches wide and pegged down, were rich with wax and wear and polish. At a desk, set back so that it was not visible as one came down the corridor, sat the Right Honorable Cardinal Matteoto, secretary-extraordinary to His Holiness.

"God's Name, Matteoto, couldn't you keep that old fool from dribbling his woes to that scatterbrain, Vitelli?"

"He's been going on like that for several days," replied the Cardinal, "even when he's alone! We can't do anything unless. . . ." The Cardinal apologetically allowed his unfinished phrase to trail off into nothingness.

"Unless what, man? Go on, go on!"

"Well," Matteoto coughed politely behind a limp hand, "Unless we stop audiences entirely." He ducked as though expecting a blow in return for this.

Orsini's voice dripped sarcasm in reply. "How absurdly simple that would be. Stop the audiences." And then changed to conjecture, "Might as well stop the Church." But Matteoto's idea had started a train of thought and the noble Italian strode away without so much as a fare-thee-well.

Outside, the afternoon sun glanced briefly on our hero as he stepped into a black, capacious four-wheeler. Who would have suspected the warm, lovely passenger awaiting him behind those curtained windows? Until the melody of her laugh floated out onto the street behind them as the coachman whipped up the horses.



Oh, let it not be said that there was malicious intention on her part. Her brother chose the opportunity which lay closest to hand. However, her easy acceptance of the crime he had committed showed her love for the Pope to have been something less than the devotion he saw shining in her eyes the many times official business carried Innocent III to the Orsini palace.

If the Princessa shared her brother's distaste for the common people she did not show it then. When with him she kept her attention on the play of his every mood, like a spectator at a game. Thus he beguiled her into a quasi-acceptance of his deeds regardless of how black some of them were. She loved power, too; she took it for granted, having been born to the blood. Thus, from her position, none but the highest star in the firmament of mortal rulers would do. That was or had been Innocent III. Worshipping from afar in her maiden-hood, the devotion continued through the years of his growing prestige and influence. Until, finally, her noble combination of beauty and wit bedazzled him into lowering the guard which brought about his downfall.

A curious crowd gathered to enjoy the noisy spectacle of royalty; but at this collection of humanity, which he loathed, Orsini shouted, "Drive on!" and slammed the door in their faces.

"To the palace, sir," came the meek reply.

"Where the devil are you taking us?"

The carriage halted.

"Bah!" He turned away from her to stare through the parted curtains. Startled at the route they were taking he threw open the door and shouted at the driver.

"Well, you might let it be known that His Holiness is ill. . . in the head?" And she smiled sweetly at her brother in a fashion long calculated to twit the sensitive edge of his ever-ready temper.

"Matteo to said that. I thought you might suggest something more clever."

"Stop the audiences, stop the audiences," he repeated in exasperation.

"Then stop the audiences!" She arched her eyebrows in simple directness.

He returned her gaze, "That fool, Honorius, is publicly wailing for his kit-chen. He's making a fool of us at every audience."

Princess Margarita de Orsini! looked amusedly into the face of her younger brother as he settled himself opposite her and observed, "The affairs of Christianity weigh heavily upon thy brow?" Already the laughter was gone as she probed his face with her eyes.



The elder Orsini, Pietro's father, had been one of the Cardinals who elected Lothario Conti to the Chair at St. Peter's. His cardinalship had been rather by inheritance because of prestige and the position of the family in Rome. He had taken it when past middle age and the fires of youth had burned low enough that they could be put aside with comparative ease. If a worldly man, the elder Orsini was pious enough for those times when the Church found it expedient to have strong, practical men in its inner circles. There was need of strength!

At the time of Orsini's passing in 1212 the fortunes of the family came into the hands of his only legitimate son, Pietro. Margarita's share in the estate was naturally left in the care of the brother as he was of age at the time.

The carriage pulled up and Pietro looked out. "Hah, we are home!"

Heavy portals, built to withstand a siege if necessary, swung slowly open and the Orsinis rolled on into their ancestral home. They were now in a covered alleyway which led under or through the building into an open courtyard cheery with sunshine, flowers, green grass, trees and a fountain. All this was hid from the world by an unbroken wall. The palace formed three sides of the little park to the height of three stories, with arched balconies looking down. The fourth side was a high, massive wall. Built to keep out the stones and arrows of vengeful foemen was the Palazzo Orsini, and the heat of the Italian summer sun. These it succeeded in doing but against winter cold there was little help.

Once in the sunlight the carriage stopped. Pietro helped his sister to alight. Inside, she retired to her rooms and he repaired to his richly furnished study. Yes, it was worthy of the name. Orsini was well read and learned enough for his times. Scrolls lay on his desk and were stacked in shelves against the walls. Arms also were there and not so securely placed but what they could easily come to hand if need be. A servant followed him in, he tossed his cloak to the man.

"Fetch Alonzo here."

Wordlessly the minion hurried to summon Pietro's right hand man. He was short, swarthy and marked by a scar on the right cheek; these things impressed one most as Alonzo Cantinelli entered the room. The scar was a sinister reminder of a stormy life. The strong hands, thick fingered -- how many lives had they taken? These hands of an impulsive, intuitive nature, rather than a thoughtful one, had dealt the murderous blow which felled the Pope, Innocent III, in the garden at the Vatican just a few weeks earlier.

Orsini wasted few words with his henchman, but outlined briefly what had transpired with Pope Honorius.

"Now, what I want from you in this matter, Alonzo, is discretion. Remain inconspicuous as possible. Just let the word drop, casually, among other matters, that you have heard that the Pope is discontinuing personal audiences for



an indefinite period of time. Here you might say that the reason is ill-health. Elsewhere you might pass the word that the reason is a temporary infirmity -- to let people think what they may -- you understand?"

"Of a certainty, your lordship." Alonzo smiled.

"It must come from widely separated places, so that none can trace it down, not to you and through you to me. Have you any acquaintances at the Frangipani's?"

Alonzo winked at his master, "There's a seamstress there whose ears -- and other charms -- are ready enough for my attentions."

"Excellent, excellent!" exclaimed Orsini. "On your way, then, this thing must get about quickly!"

Unabashed at this abrupt dismissal, Alonzo withdrew.

The Prince turned to a piece of paper, a letter arrived only that day from Ostia. He frowned over its message. So intent was he that a light tap on the door went unheeded.

"Tch, tch, tch," Princess Margarita shook her pretty head in the doorway. "What concerns thee now, dear brother, no news of our dear Lothario?"

"Devil take you! How did you surmise that?" he asked in annoyance, and hurried on without waiting an answer, "that fat rascal Donizetti should have returned days ago, even from the Pillars of Hercules, if he went that far."

"Wasn't there a great storm not long after -- " she hesitated, "Not long after they sailed?"

"Yes," agreed the Prince, "Angelo reported that from Salerno. But Donizetti is a master of the seas if Italy ever produced one, and the Sahib Queen a worthy ship. No, I can't help but feel they got through, somehow."

"And as long as Pope Innocent III is free in Europe --?"

He voiced the thought in reply, "There's no peace for the Orsini in Rome! Pah," he scoffed, "Who would believe a weak old man. The Pope is dead and buried; the whole world knows it -- and yet -- ." He looked at the letter again. It merely reported the non-arrival of Donizetti's ship on the return voyage from Tunis. "Well, no matter," he gave an impatient shake of the head, "There's little sense in giving thought to something beyond my reach at present. We'll have to deal with him when, or if, he ever comes back."

Orsini waved his hand across in front of him as though brushing the matter



out of the way like some noisome fly, A fly which was to buzz within him for years to come, gnawing away at his avid, insatiable curiosity until eleven years later he was to send a ship in search of that man whom he had so heartlessly condemned to oblivion, Pope Innocent III.



## CHAPTER SIX

One day was much like another as the Queen see-sawed back and forth before a prevailing wind which, if Captain Donizetti's magnetic needle was to be believed, always blew from the east!

Pietro knew they were fighting a losing battle against the wind and at times hinted at turning and running before the wind just for relief.

"Ho, land away!" It was Jesus at the tiller, pointing to the vaguest of shadows on the western horizon. The ship was on a northern tack at the time and all rushed to the starboard side. Alaric scurried up the rigging like a monkey, hand over hand, until he reached the small cross-brace near the top of the mast. This served as a lookout post when necessary. Perched on this his eyes strained westward.

It was already late afternoon and the setting sun glared back into their eyes. Even so, a black shadow was visible, low down. It could be land; it could be a cloud, too.

"Come about, you fool!" roared Pietro from amidships.

The Egyptian eased the helm over and with a smart crack of the canvas the Sahib Queen was sailing straight into the setting sun.

Hopes ran high as darkness came on. Pietro broke out a bottle of wine from the captain's private stock and as it made the rounds many a toast was drunk to Innocent's "new world" which they were to discover on the morrow. Pietro himself took the first watch in the bow.

The long hours of the night crept by; the stars wheeled their measured way across the heavens; but no sound of surf broke the silence to warn of rocky shores ahead. When dawn at long last paled the eastern sky behind them, it revealed a sea as vast and empty as the one they had sailed through the day before. Pietro was bitterly disappointed.

"Blast you, you crazy Egyptian and your 'land away'," he growled, "Cant you tell the difference between land and a bank o' clouds?" He stalked off to the captain's cabin and slammed the door shut behind him.

Jesus spat after him and mouthed a curse in his own tongue, then switched to good Italian for the rest of them. "Which one took the first bow watch?" he jeered.

The course westward had not been changed as Innocent took his morning post



at the tiller. It kept the sun warm on his back. At such times as these he bared the upper part of his body to the breeze as did the rest of the crew. Until now even his skinny arms and boney shoulders had taken on a healthy brown.

The rugged fare of salt fish, salt mutton, olives and course wheat cakes was monotonous but healthy. The stomach ailment the Pope had complained of in Rome was gone now. He was a man among men and proud of it. He was doing his share of shipboard routine every day. He was proud to have earned Pietro's respect, not for what he might have been in Rome, but for what he was on the Sahib Queen, a dependable deck-hand.

His most Catholic majesty, Innocent III, had many an inward chuckle over that; how his College of Cardinals would have raised their manicured hands in horror to see him now. How that august body would have sniffed disdainfully at his tattered garments, his ragged beard, his sun-browned skin, and the open deck on which he slept.

And Innocent? He was glad! He was full of a thousand joys to be free of the weighty office which had become an empty burden, slowly killing him with responsibilities which could not be successfully born by any human being.

Here on the open sea each day came with a promise of adventure and excitement. This ship in which he rode shared each living, thrilling moment of its passage with him. He liked the ship because he could see immediately the results of whatever work he did. If his work was wrong Pietro told him so in no uncertain terms. When it was right his own inner satisfaction at the achievement was enough.

This day he kept his position in the stern until high noon, and kept the Queen on the straight westward course she had been travelling when he took over in the morning. Within his own heart there was an eager yearning toward the western horizon. It mystified him but he yielded to it. Why he should be so anxious to put Europe behind him, with all the life he had known there, he couldn't say. Instead of wasting time in vain regrets his imagination leaped ahead, westward, and to whatever undreamed of world lay before them.

"If we should discover land, then we'll return to Italy in triumph!" he exclaimed aloud.

"With a gaudy tale of maidens fair and cities paved with gold?" laughed a voice beside him. It was Masetto. "I caught you daydreaming, sire."

"Dreaming is one luxury I can indulge to my heart's content out here," countered Lothario.

Masetto nodded, "I have my dreams." He pushed the Pope aside in a rough but friendly way. "One of us should have had the kindness to relieve you." He



glanced up at the sun as he took over. It was behind his left shoulder as he faced forward. He squinted at Innocent. "You sail the Queen as though you were going somewhere."

The white haired old man calmly returned the gaze. "That is my intention."

"Hah!" The sailor spat carefully over the side, "And just where do you expect to be going out here a thousand leagues from Europe?"

"I feel in my old bones that some wonderful, unknown land is here somewhere. It will be discovered someday, why shouldn't we be the first to do it?" He waited not for Masetto's reply but moved forward toward the galley and a well earned lunch.

If the first they were to be to discover a new world the next few days gave no sign of it. For want of a better course, and for ease of riding, the Queen continued on before the wind. Except for such calm daylight hours as were occasionally theirs; then even Innocent would desert the tiller for a time, leaving it lashed in position. At night, with Masetto's help, they kept the Queen underway, guiding her by the stars. Pietro found both men eager learners of such celestial navigation as he could teach them.

It was during the noon time siesta of the thirty-ninth day out from the Pillars of Hercules, according to Pietro's reckoning, that it happened.

Innocent was at his usual resting place by the mast when a dismal flapping of wings brought him up sharp out of a peaceful doze. High above him on the little cross-piece perched a gull. Innocent stared open-mouthed; it stared back at him. Then, without a squawk or a peep it flapped away again in a southwesterly direction. He leaned back against the mast, wondering if his eyes had deceived him, but his hand didn't! He had just placed it in a slimy, gooey blob of white bird lime on the barrel beside him. The evidence of the bird's arrival was there for all to see -- and feel, if they so desired. The Pope scrambled hastily to the deck.

"Pietro, Pietro!" He hurried to the door of the captain's cabin.

"Eh?" came the sleepy voice from within, "has that crazy Egyptian sighted land again?"

"No, but we've had a visitor," Innocent replied hopefully.

"Visitor?" This brought Pietro to the doorway, his eyes blinkin' in the bright sunlight.

"A bird just landed on the mast cross-brace and flew away again."

"Ah, yer dreamin'," scoffed Pietro, "I dont hear nothin' and how about



Masetto and the Norman, why didn't they say somethin'?"

"They're asleep."

"Which way did it come from and which way did it go?"

"It flew toward the southwest," replied Innocent, "couldn't it be that land lies in that direction?"

Pietro moved out onto the deck, pushing Innocent aside, and gazing intently at the empty sky.

"You're dreamin'," he said and turned to go back in again.

"Stop," said Innocent, "There is proof for him who wants to see it. Come."

The sailor followed him reluctantly followed him around the olive casks and the gear. The white blob caught his eye almost immediately.

"Name of the Virgin and all the Saints and Thomas!" He swore softly. "Southwest did ye say?"

He ran up on the poop deck and unleashed the tiller.

"Hold on now!" He eased it over gently. The Sahib Queen came up straight for a moment, her mainsail quivering; and then it bellied full with a bang on the new tack, bringing the rest of the crew running and looking at the empty horizon with wondering faces.

"The old man here saw a bird," said Pietro by way of explanation. "If ye dont believe him look atop the barrel yonder. We're followin' it, fast as we can. Alaric, get the cap'n's glass from the cabin -- no, I'll get it myself. Here, take the tiller and hold off about so off the sun."

The "glass" was another of Captain Donizetti's prize possessions which had come with the ship. Through its system of lenses and brass tube distant objects could be brought close to hand in an amazing fashion for observation. Pietro got this from the cabin and climbed high in the rigging. He looked a long, long time, saying not a word to the anxious watchers below.

"See anything?" asked Masetto when the man descended to the deck again.

"Could be land, could be a cloud," was the laconic reply. "We'll hold our course." He stalked back into the cabin and shut the door.

"He's trying mighty hard to fill the captain's shoes," observed Lothario, to no one in particular.



"Too damn hard, for Jesus," said the Egyptian.

The breeze freshened to a near gale as the afternoon wore on. No orders were given to take in sail so the Queen boiled along burying her rail under froth from time to time. Southing they made but there was no land in sight at sunset.

It was a reluctant crew of men who took in sail before the last dim light was gone. Innocent was at the helm. The rest struggled with straining canvas and flying gear; for to have continued on into the black night with that wind would have been suicide. The mainsail was taken in entire leaving only the jib to carry them almost due westward again with the storm. Jesus was the most despondent of the crew but even he seemed to have been given new hope with the coming of the bird and willingly stood his watches during the night.

At dawn a hoarse shout from Pietro himself brought all hands on the run. There, low-lying to the south of them, stretching from horizon to horizon, was land! It was a dark green mass under the gray sky and marked by twin peaks. Even as they looked a veil of rain came between them and the land and the wind shrieked with the howl of a thousand furies. It ripped the jib from its stay-lines and sent it flapping into the water. For one breathless second the Queen lay broadside to the mighty seas. At the tiller Pietro swore endlessly as he tried to scull the little ship around with the rudder. Reluctantly, and with the help of the dragging jib as a sea anchor, she came head-on into the gale.

"Land in sight," muttered Innocent to himself, "and we have to face the worst storm since we left Europe."

He didn't expect to be overheard in that shrieking bedlam. Pietro didn't trust the dragging jib to keep them headed into the wind, besides he wanted to save that precious canvas. Other sail and spars were dug out and rigged into a sea anchor, secured at the bow and heaved overboard. Then came the weary task of dragging the torn sail aboard. Even Innocent had to pitch in with that and by the time it was in, rolled and stowed he felt as though his arms had been pulled out at the sockets.

Numbed by the strain and by the howling of the storm he fell into the sheltered spot between the barrels by the mast and lay there too weary to care whether the Queen floated, foundered, or wrecked herself and her helpless crew on this alien coast.

Three times during that storm-tossed day did he have to rouse himself out and help lash down gear that had broken loose. The wind was a living, screaming thing that beat and tossed the little ship around so fearfully that more than once Innocent thought it was all over with them. At times it seemed that wood and flesh could stand no more. If anything, this storm was the end of the world. He was sure the Mediterranean had never produced anything to compare with it.



Suddenly, some time during the night, the wind stopped blowing. Then they were in a deathly stillness more terrifying than the storm itself. Mountainous waves still tossed them about unmercifully. These made Innocent seasick for the second time in his long voyage. It was a relief when the wind started blowing again, as violently as before. Strangely, the Pope's seasickness disappeared.

The dread sound of a surf beaten shore had been in the background of his consciousness ever since he had sighted land the day before. It was only as the morning light revealed no land in sight that he relaxed his taught stomach muscles and felt the ache from the long tensions. Slowly but steadily the wind abated as the day wore on. The salt spray cleared out of the air and the rain dwindled to a fine drizzle.

Pietro pulled them all together to get to work on the torn jib and prepare it for use again. Land, land was the subject of their conversation. None had the remotest idea of where the twin peaks were now in relation to them, and whether they had seen an island or the shores of some great, unknown continent. There was no sun. All they could do was strain their eyes toward the blank horizon and speculate as they worked. One subject, of course, was inevitable.

"Native girls? You can have 'em!" exclaimed the blond Norman, Alaric. "I sailed down the coast of Africa on a Portagee trader once -- once was enough!" He shook his blond curls until they danced. "Gimme a white girl any day; one with some spark in 'er!"

He clapped Innocent on the shoulder. "How about you, greybeard? Hah, bet you aint had a girl in yer arms in fifty year!" He roared at his own joke.

"Shut up and leave him alone," ordered Pietro.

"That's all right," replied Innocent, rubbing his bruised shoulder, "I hope each of us finds what he most desires when land is ours for sure."

"That's fair enough for me," chimed in Masetto, busy with needle and palm. "In the new world let each man get what he wants."

"And women it is," shouted Alaric, "Eh, Jesus?"

The dark Egyptian only grinned his reply.

"Gold would best suit my needs," said Pietro. "The price of a good ship like the Sahib Queen and a hold and deck full of cargo for trade."

"If we could only have made land yesterday when we saw it," mused Innocent, "One thing we have proved with all assurance."

"And what would that be?" asked Masetto.



Innocent looked at him with a smile, "Men from our part of the world can find land by sailing westward."

"If we return to tell of it!" was Alaric's cynical reply.

"I'll wager we ain't the first ones to be blown out into the Atlantic," said Pietro. "My father talked of the great blow of '76 -- 1176 that was -- lasted three times as long as this one did."

"Nor will we be the last to leave Europe's shores," added Innocent.

"The Portagees talked of islands to the west," said Alaric.

"What was said of them?" asked Innocent.

"Ah -- that's all it was, talk!"

"The two hills we saw yesterday must have been on an island," said Masetto, "or we'd have been wrecked, sure. We must have been blown past it."

Pietro nodded his head in agreement. "Pass it we did -- or blew around it. I'll swear by all the Saints that wind blew in the opposite direction when it started up again."

Had they but known it the helpless voyagers had raised the northwest end of the island known to modern times as Cuba, only to be moved westward past it and then southward by one of the Caribbean's hurricanes. Their southward drift in the tail end of the storm was taking them toward the inhospitable coast of Yucatan, the land that three hundred years later was to confound the Spaniard, Montejo.

When the sail was patched to Pietro's satisfaction and properly hung in place again, the voyagers turned to the other ship-board chores which meant keeping the Queen afloat and in running condition. But, as this work was caught up late in the day a kind of lethargy set over them as an aftermath of the storm and as a kind of letdown because of the land-less seascape which surrounded them again. The mainsail pulled not a breath of air that day as it remained furled.

"Ah, we'll dry it tomorrow if there's sun," Pietro had said, and to help relieve the pall of gloom which settled over them he opened a new cask of red wine. Lothario Conti passed his cup as often as the rest. By the time Venus showed her pale light low in the western sky, the crew of the Sahib Queen had set themselves aglow as well. There was many a jest, many a wild tale of the sea, and a round of sea chanties sung off key to fill the long hours of that memorable night. They fell asleep where they were 'round the smoky lamp amidships and it was the wine and the gentle motion of the ship that did it.



Lothario was the thinnest and the oldest of the five. His were the aching bones that set up the loudest complaint in the pre-dawn darkness there on the cold, hard deck. He hitched himself around, trying in vain to find a soft resting place for his sharp pointed elbow. When that was finally quiet his knee on the deck set up a complaint. He breathed a curse against all boards in general and the deck of the Sahib Queen in particular and turned over. Now, much to his disgust he faced the full force of Pietro's open-throated snoring. The Pope heaved a deep sigh, groaned and sat up. Dawn was stretching the first of its delicate fingers up the eastern sky. Even a misspent Pope could snatch the bliss of another hour of sleep on a Sardinian fishing vessel which had neither fish nor port of call. He lurched to his feet and hobbled with creaking joints to his rope-coil bed on the olive casks by the mast. Stiff fingers fumbled for his heavy winter cloak, found it, dragged it up around shivering shoulders. Just before easing himself down into restful slumber, his eye caught a black shadow along the western horizon.

"What a heavy bank of clouds," breathed Lothario Conti, "heaven forbid we should face such a storm so soon again."

He leaned forward and rubbed the sleep from his aching eyes. Daylight was racing fast across the ocean now and it revealed two layers of clouds to the west. The lower one was black, all right, in fact it didn't seem to get any lighter. The upper one turned from black to grey before his eyes. It even had tinges of white which would turn to gold when the sun came up; he had seen that joyous sight dozens of times on this voyage.

"Our drift is westward," noted Lothario as he leaned there drowsing, "and if we drift at this rate we'll soon know whether those clouds are clouds or land."

"Land!" he exclaimed so loudly it startled him. In eager amazement he moved quickly to the rail, aching bones forgot, for a closer look; but strain as he would he couldn't be sure. Then he thought of the captain's glass in the cabin and turned to hurry toward the little door by the galley. A snore from the prostrate Pietro caught his attention as he stepped fully over the sleeping man. Impulse turned by a sense of duty, he stooped and shook the man's shoulder.

"Eh, what's up, grey-beard?" Pietro reached up along Lothario's arm and held onto him, squinting up at him from sleep-bleared eyes.

"It may be that the captain's glass will enable you to tell if that is land to the west of us or only clouds," said Lothario quietly.

If the Pope had been excited Pietro would probably have reacted equally strongly the other way and told him roughly to go back to sleep. The very quietness of his spoken words, however, carried an urgency which brought the sailor immediately to his feet. With scarcely a glance in the direction Lothario pointed he plunged into the cabin and came out with the captain's magic glass.



One quick look seemed to tell him nothing so he moved to the rail and steadied himself with one arm hooked around the rigging. He stared a long, long time at that low, black shadow and with never a word between them. Finally he turned to Lothario.

"Land it is, my Churchly friend." There was a smile of satisfaction on his face as he handed the glass to Lothario. He strode over to the prostrate crew and booted Masetto in the rear.

"Jesus, Alaric!" He roared, "and you Masetto, rouse out there ye lazy bilge rats! Ye dream of port and maidens fair and there they to the west of us! Turn to!" And he started loosening the lines which bound the furled mainsail. "Grey beard, stand by the tiller 'til we get the Queen's rags aloft, then it's due west."

Pietro sang out the chorus of a sailor's work song and roused the others quickly from sleepy reluctance to a happy-go-lucky teamwork to get the Sahib Queen underway.

Almost before the sails were set Pietro had scurried up to the makeshift crow's nest with the glass to watch that black shadow grow larger and grayer as they made westing at a good clip. Even the always hungry Alaric was slow in making breakfast that morning as he peered anxiously from the galley every other moment.

Before Pietro's confirming shout, "Land it is!" came down to them, all knew that flat mass looming ever larger before them was more than just water vapor floating above the sea. It was land, rising abruptly out of the ocean to an unrelieved levelness with no suggestion of even the low rounded peaks they had seen two days before. Somehow, it was disappointing.

Mid-morning brought them close enough that Pietro felt it wise to swing southward on a tack which moved them slowly on a line almost parallel to the rugged shore and several hundred yards off. At noon they had searched in vain for a haven of any sort along this inhospitable coast. The surf was so small as to be almost negligible, and it rose and fell on what appeared to be for the most part narrow, sandy beaches running into the base of limestone cliffs perhaps seventy or eighty feet high. There was the edge of a flat, jungle-covered table land. Here and there rock slides had come down, bringing part of the jungle with them and offering rough but ready access to the country above. Never a sign of a human being, ship, boat, dwelling, town or city had they seen; neither was there a stream or river of any kind to cut a harbor for them, lacking any natural cover or bay.

"I'm all for beaching her," the Norman said more than once during that two hour cruise and Pietro did finally agree that might have to be done if they were to land at all. Even as close as a hundred yards they were still in blue water



but the wind had died to the gentlest of zephyrs. The crew stood by and at Pietro's shout the mainsail came down with a bang. He had sighted a sand bar lying off shore with a considerable stretch of water behind it. He ordered Alaric to the tiller and, standing in the bow, guided the helmsman as jib and following breeze nudged the Queen into the calm, shallow harbor. Sparkling in the bright sun was a clean, clear sand bottom perhaps ten feet below. Pietro let the Queen drift a little closer to shore and then down went the anchor.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

No sense of triumph coursed his veins as Lothario looked at the precipitous shore. This sudden relaxing of the strain left him weak. He eyed the chalky limestone, the dense growth that topped it, incuriously, and turned to Pietro.

"Well, my sailor friend, my mouth is watering for a juicy orange, a roast chicken, perchance. Think you we can climb that bluff and find the wherewithal for a decent meal?"

"Aye, that we can," replied Pietro. "Come on, men."

The small boat was dropped over the side. It leaked badly but not enough to stop them. Jesus and Masetto were left aboard. The oars dug into the water and quickly the keel grated on the beach. Lothario was first out. When the solid ground met his feet a wave of dizziness swept over him and he fell rather than knelt to kiss the sand. Pietro was close behind and then the Norman giant and they followed suit. They crossed themselves there on their knees, and Lothario breathed a quiet prayer of thanksgiving for the safe journey, and for protection and guidance in the days to come.

The peace was short lived, a cloud of hungry mosquitoes descended. Slapping impatiently at them, the men pulled the boat up and surveyed the beach. Either way it presented a sameness. In some places the crumbling reached the water, with great chunks of stone deep buried in the sand. There was little choice but to go straight up where they were. This they did. Vines and creepers came part way over the crest and with their aid the men struggled on up into a heavy growth that made an unobstructed view of the coast from their vantage point impossible. Lothario wondered vaguely if they should have brought arms. Not that the Queen boasted an arsenal, but a sword might have been wise security, and it would have helped in cutting through some of the brush that blocked their way as they headed due west inland. Pietro and Alaric had their knives, Lothario nothing.

The enforced activity and the thrashing leaves did relieve them of the mosquitoes temporarily, but nettles and thorny branches stung and tore at them in a hundred places. After seventy-five yards of this heavy going Lothario was a poor third and just about ready to drop when an exclamation from Alaric urged him forward. Pushing blindly ahead the Pope lunged suddenly free. The ground was hard, stone hard underfoot -- pavement!

This sudden transition left them all wordless for a moment. Pietro looked wonderingly at him. Lothario scraped thoughtfully at the blocks of this road; for



highway it was, perhaps thirty feet wide, stretching endlessly north and south through the jungle. Developed civilizations produced highways like these, though how old it was would be hard to determine.

"This granite-like stuff would be as indestructible as the Appian Way," Lothario observed, half to Pietro, half to himself. "There's grass in the cracks.

"No horse manure," Pietro pointed out.

"No cart tracks either," Alaric added.

It was true. Not a sign of a wheel mark of any kind, and yet this highway gave a feeling of having been traveled, though not heavily enough that the traffic had to push back the jungle for room. That grew solidly to the edge of the stone. Pietro slashed several branches, broke them down and out into the road to show their entry point, and they set out to the right, northward, into the sun-dappled reaches of the highway.

Here mosquitoes could get at them again and so their walk was neither slow nor pleasant. Perhaps a mile of that quiet was uneventful except for raucous bird noises and the crash of some small animal through the brush; at least Lothario hoped it was small. Besides, his nerves were jumpy, what with the pests and the unsolved problem of this deserted road.

Then they saw it, a him, or at least a figure that looked like a man. They stopped. He stopped. He had come in sight as the highway curved gently toward the west, perhaps two hundred yards away. They approached each other cautiously. To the stranger the voyagers were unarmed by any standards except for the sheath knives Pietro and Alaric carried. There was nothing formidable about him, either, so curiosity drew them irresistibly together.

He was bare armed, bare legged. Apparently the ever-present mosquitoes bothered him little, if at all. He was dark, very dark. Lothario compared him to the Moors of North Africa. His nose was just as hooked, even more so. The man's eyes were dark, too, with a certain fierce quality about them. The sandals on his feet were made of some hard, woven material. His dress was a simple, sleeveless tunic; there were ornaments of precious stones attached to it. Black hair, uncovered and thick, hung straight to the shoulders. This was no race that any of them had ever seen, European or Oriental. Lothario felt a sense of disappointment. He had hoped, somehow, vaguely, that the Sahib Queen had brought them to the Indies. He knew now that the discovery of the highway had made that hope a certainty without his realizing it.

The stranger spoke. They were close and all stopped and stared.

Lothario answered in Latin, slowly and carefully. Hook-nose replied with one word that might have been, "What?"



Lothario spoke again, more slowly. Hook nose shook his head.

The Pope tried Italian. Hook nose shook his head again and laughed. They all laughed. He said something which might have been "come" or "follow", for he turned and trotted back up the pavement, expecting them to do likewise. They did. Soon they were to a break in the jungle wall which opened inland at right angles. This was neither paved nor as wide as the road.

"No wheel tracks here, either," grunted Pietro.

"No," panted Lothario, "they dont have wheels, nor horses either, I'll wager."

"My God, do they run everywhere?" Alaric was winded, too.

"Probably," gasped Lothario. "Stop, stop, I cant run any farther!" And he slowed to a walk. To add to their lack of condition the ground was rising now, and as the growth thinned a little he could see they were climbing a long slope which led to low hills a distance ahead of them. Then, without warning, cleared land was on either side of them with cultivated crops in various stages of maturity.

Hook nose shouted and curious people of this strange new world gathered to stare as the odd looking trio followed their guide. The women were dressed not unlike Hook nose. Some wore head bands and were lighter in color. Children of both sexes were quite naked -- to an embarrassingly mature age, Lothario thought, as he saw Alaric and Pietro eyeing the girls with long, thoroughly appreciative glances. The girls stared back with no apparent conscioasness of nakedness.

Then they were in the village, but Lothario was disappointed. There was little in this obviously agrarian, unmechanical culture to connect it with the highway through the jungle. Any more than the Italian villages of this thirteenth century along the Appian Way had anything to do with the creation of that magnificent road which agelessly passed them by.

Hook nose proudly presented them to other adults of the same general characteristics. Lothario with his long white beard drew their most obvious curiosity. There didn't seem to be any elderly counterparts in this community. Perhaps no one lived to old age in this new world -- or had these people discovered the source of eternal youth. Lothario listened to their soft, queerly accented speech. Well, he'd have to add another tongue to the six he already knew.

The village was an odd mixture of old and new, of unpretentious, reed-thatched structures, and of massive stone buildings whose setting and arrangement were part of a far larger plan than this village. It looked as though these mighty structures had long outlasted their builders.



These observations and conclusions flitted across his consciousness as Innocent III watched their dark-skinned hosts. From a group of perhaps a hundred adults an older, stockier man than Hook nose stepped forward and spoke to him; then, turning obviously to the Pope as the leader of the three, he spoke rapidly and at length. The listener smiled and shook his head. The leader continued, however, with remarks that were intended for their audience's benefit as well. Then, to Lothario's amazement the leader bowed low to him in deference. Others stepped forth from the crowd and this group, along with Lothario, Pietro, and Alaric, made its way to the most imposing of the stone structures. This had finely chiseled, ornate patterns on its exterior walls, and bas-reliefs of rulers and warriors, animals and reptiles in a profusion which gave no indication of whether they were entering a temple or a palace.

There was still plenty of light from the late afternoon sun but the interior was dimly lit by small apertures in the thick stone walls. From an oil lamp others were lit to reveal a long, narrow room. To Lothario it was low ceiled after the pillared and vaulted magnificence of Italy. The arch was apparently unknown to this race. In the flickering light there was a barbaric splendor about it, nevertheless. Rich woven materials hung against the walls. These were as ornately hieroglyphed as the outside walls. This building appeared to be a council chamber as there was a raised chair or throne at one end with others in a formal rectangle below it.

Lothario looked doubtfully at his threadbare garments, fingered self-consciously his long, white beard, and pulled at the hair hanging loosely to his shoulders.

"We aint very pretty for being received by a Duke, or whatever he is," Alaric nodded toward the leader as he watched Lothario.

As though catching the import of Alaric's words, and Lothario's thought, the leader went up behind the throne and lightly removed the hanging. The brilliance of its colors was superior to anything Lothario had ever seen in Europe. By this, all were standing inside the rectangle of chairs.

The leader approached Lothario and before he could raise a hand in protest the robe, or cape, which it proved to be, was about his shoulders. He looked in startled amaze at his companions. Their stares were equally blank. Then they were treated in like manner. The leader drew Lothario upon the dais which contained the seat of honor and motioned him to sit there. The Pope thought better than to protest. In fact the whole procedure was so far removed from either experience or anticipation that there was really nothing to do but acquiesce. In folding the mantle about him before sitting, his hands were startled at the unfamiliar fineness of the texture. Looking closely Lothario was amazed to see that it was made of countless thousands of tiny feathers, artfully attached to some kind of woven backing.



Alaric plucked at his mantle rather doubtfully and laughed again, "Aint this somethin'? But ye cant eat it and I'm hungry!" He looked at Pietro.

"Aye, honors are fine ; but I'd like to fill my belly with some of that over-sized chicken we saw running around out there." Pietro looked meaningly from Lothario to the leader.

Lothario nodded and looked at the leader, too. He pointed down his throat and rubbed his stomach. He regretted the impulsive action as soon as he had done it, considering the honor which had just been bestowed. The leader seemed not offended, however, and smiled back in understanding, as did the rest of his council. All stood watching Lothario. Tardily it came over him that their etiquette demanded he move first. Arising, and stepping off the dais, he offered to remove the robe of honor and return it to the leader with thanks, but he and the others gave immediate protest. Thinking better than to refuse, the Pope led the way from the building out into the village street and the light of the setting sun. As they walked along Lothario became aware of his aching legs.

"Pietro, if you're feeling as tired as I am, this night we'll not be going back to the Sahib Queen."

Pietro looked doubtful. Alaric shrugged.

"Jesus and Masetto will be all right down there. I'm sure they'll neither sail away nor come ashore in this dark," Lothario added.

Pietro laughed in assent. "Aye, there's no moon. I'm not for finding my way back to the Queen if it aint necessary. Are you, Alaric?"

"Naw," his gaze swept the awed villagers and he winked at Pietro, "maybe we wont sleep alone, either."

They had stopped by this time, Lothario not knowing where to go. He looked disapprovingly at the Norman. "For some reason unknown to us we happen to have been honored by these people. Let's not do anything to change this respect to dislike. We'll need their welcome for a long time to come.!"

Pietro nodded in silent assent.

The leader spoke to women, and indicated an open air structure lightly roofed over against the rains. This evidently served any public function; now it was to be a dining room in which the villagers could watch the newcomers eat. Such affairs were common enough in Europe and Lothario was stranger neither to the idea nor the custom. The treatment in the hall puzzled him. The welcome was of a kind which admitted only of one explanation. But on the face of it, it was impossible; they had been expected! The behavior of the people was indisputable. The fact was impossible.



To their delight a huge roast chicken was brought, some fruit, delightful if only because it was fresh, and some flat cakes of a coarsely ground grain or cereal completely strange to all three of them. They agreed on that. Nevertheless, the voyagers ate heartily and with great gusto, much to the joy of the village which had turned out in full force, crying babies and all. Probably there were one hundred and fifty people altogether. A fire at either end of the shelter gave light and smoke; however, the smudge effect under the roof discouraged the mosquitoes; so the white men suffered their smarting eyes without complaint.

A thousand questions thronged Lothario's mind, and a thousand possibilities of exploration, colonization and evangelization thrilled in answer. If the vitality and drive of the Church of Europe were directed here, what might not result? Here, too, were evidences of a civilization which handled stone as cleverly as had Egypt and perhaps at an earlier date. What a tale to take back with him!

Lothario and Pietro endeavored by signs to show how they had sailed for many days from the east, but with no success. They did put across the idea that there were five of them altogether and that two more were waiting back along the highway from whence they had come. But any return trip to the boat would have to wait till the morrow. Already the villagers were quietly slipping away to their homes in the dark. The white men found that they were to sleep right there under the shelter on the simplest of accommodations. The best they could do for protection against the mosquitoes was to contrive to cover themselves with their feather capes.

Dawn came quickly and with it the village was up and about like any agrarian community. After breaking their fast the voyagers placed their ceremonial robes reverently in the council hall; then an expedition was organized and, carrying fresh food and water, all set out for the Sahib Queen. Along the way, Lothario began to acquaint himself with their language, asking the names of trees, flowers, birds, the highway, the sun. When he pointed to this last, now well up in the heavens, their escort of half a dozen men including the leader and Hook nose became vociferous. The leader pointed at the sun and named it, and then he tied that word up with the name of each of the voyagers, pronouncing the compound word as distinctly as possible considering that their names were foreign to him. There was no mistaking his meaning.

"Now, I see why we were honored so upon our arrival," said Lothario.

"Why?" asked Pietro.

"They apparently think we came from the sun."

"What made them think that?" he asked incredulously. He looked down at his tattered garments.

"Well, it can't be our clothes. They are different but obviously not the finery



of royalty," mused Lothario. He was thinking of the splendor of his former position in Rome.

"Nor of Gods," laughed Alaric. He was boisterously amused at Lothario's deduction.

"And we have no followers, no coach, no arms, no bodyguard -- nothing at least of what we consider important -- to indicate authority or wealth," continued the Pope.

"Aye, and we aint religious appearin', either," Pietro observed drily, glancing sideways at his white-bearded companion.

Innocent III rose to the challenge. "Are you so sure, my friend? Of all things which might raise a man to eminence among his fellows, holiness has the least need of exterior trappings to reveal its true worth. You know, the most obvious difference between us and our hosts is the lightness of our skin, hair and eyes, and the shape of our noses."

"What's so holy about them?" scoffed Alaric.

"It might be to them," returned Lothario. "There's no logic to religious beliefs."

Pietro's markers were still on the highway where he had felled them. The Mayas, for that was apparently their collective name, followed reluctantly through the heavy bush to the edge of the cliff. The Queen was not clearly visible from above but as they descended the Italians proudly pointed her out riding gently in the lagoon. Jesus and Masetto heard them crashing down and came to the rail with shouts of relief. The small boat was quickly launched and Pietro rowed out with Lothario and the leader, Ahmet, as passengers.

The sailors fell on the food like wolves and gulped down the gourds of fresh water. No, they hadn't left the ship at all. They had heard noises during the night but they weren't going ashore to find out what they were!

Ahmet had stepped onto the Queen in reverent awe. In fact it was only with the strongest insistence of Lothario and Pietro that he could be gotten aboard at all. The strange craft which had brought the holy visitors was sacred to him.

"It's well we're not showin' the Queen to Captain Donizetti," observed Pietro as his practised eye took in the weather beaten hull and decks, the frayed sails and torn rigging. The Queen smelled, too, of rancid oil and moldy wheat, not to mention the fish that had flopped their last on the decks.

"I'm thinkin' there's a powerful lot of work t'be done here if we're aimin' to get back to Ostia some fine day," he eyed the Pope as he spoke.



Lothario's foot turned some loose gear on the deck. "Do you think we can cross the Atlantic again?"

Pietro was defiant. "Well, aint we done it once?"

Lothario smiled at him, then said, "I expect we'll spend some time here. I'd like to learn much about this country and these -- ah -- Mayas, as they call themselves. Wouldn't you?"

Pietro spat deliberately over the rail. "If you was includin' them heathen women, I wouldn't mind at all, at all." He knew there would be little sympathy from this Churchman in his fifties, with the normal, healthy needs of a younger man. Then he laughed. "Anyhow, we'll have to beach the Queen, before some storm does, an' if we can get some men down here we'll swing her on her sides enough to clean that bottom 'n get some of the filth out of her, too."

"Well, you know what's to be done," replied Lothario. If the work progressed too rapidly he could find excuses for staying long enough to discover all he wanted to know about Mayab.

"Not knowin' how quick storms blow up here, we'd better run her up on the sand now, the tide appears to be full," said Pietro. "Let's fall to!"

Jesus and Masetto were sent ashore to fell and trim logs. With Ahmet's help the anchor was raised and the Queen towed into a natural depression in the sand. There she was swung broadside and, with the sturdy Mayas lending their strength, tipped on her side and propped there with logs.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

Days passed, and with them the voyagers came to accept their exalted status in the community. Europe might as well have been heaven for all Lothario could convey its reality to the Mayans. Language would long be a barrier even to Lothario's keen mind, and where the visitors had already been placed out of reach, so to speak, what common ground could there be for understanding? The highway was a great temptation but with neither animals nor vehicles of any kind Lothario's range of exploration at his age was extremely limited. Pietro and the sailors had little intellectual curiosity to lead them far from the Queen, which they knew was their one chance to get back to the dear, familiar Mediterranean.

From sign language Lothario determined that the next community was three days march northward along the coast. Inland was really up the hill back of the village. When he evinced curiosity about what might be found in that direction, Ahmet very willingly led him up what might have been a street of the ancient city; for the way lay between rather well defined but jungle covered stone structures. The steeper places were terraced and with well spaced steps at intervals. The whole was obviously part of a well planned city which must have been impressive in its day. There was a steep crest, almost cliff-like, which was not noticeable from the village. The builders had taken advantage of this formation to such an extent that with the overgrowth that covered it, it was hard to tell where the hill left off and the stone builder's work began.

That which showed to the eye was rectangular blocks, minutely carved with a predominating feathered serpent motif, all of what might have been an artificially constructed pyramid. However, Ahmet settled this unspoken question by brushing aside some vines to reveal a doorway cut into living rock. It was the beginning of a stairway leading up and up and up into the sunlight. There was a landing along the way with openings leading off into impenetrable gloom. Ahmet made no move to enter, and with no means of giving light, Lothario felt no inclination to explore there!

There was rubble on the steps and decayed vegetable matter from which their feet disturbed crawling things. More reason not to loiter. Finally they reached the light with Lothario far behind on trembling legs. His lungs ached from the strain of the climb. There wasn't the splendid view of the surrounding country he had expected. The stairway had come up through the floor of a walled court, with openings and a passageway leading to other un-roofed rooms on the top of this hill. What a citadel it was!



Vines and grasses had gained footholds in the accumulations on floors and walls. Monkeys chattered at this invasion of their sanctuary. But what held Lothario's attention was statuary and curious shaped vessels or vases which occupied appropriate niches in the walls. One such, more like a large jar, with pleasingly curved sides swelling out from a small base then close in at the top with a gently curved lip, attracted him. It stood perhaps three feet high. He scratched at discolorations on its side. It was metal, not pottery! The sharp jewel in his Mayan ring scratched deeper; the dull glint startled him, gold! And the vase was half as tall as he. He looked quickly at the Mayan but Ahmet showed no interest in the discovery. The Pope moved on to a bust, life-size, and with a profile similar to Ahmet's. This was stone, but stay! A sort of lavalier-like ornament set at the throat of the stone carved garment was gold set with precious stones. Lothario estimated, as his eye took in the court, that he looked on enough wealth to ransom all the crowned heads of Europe. There were other courts on that hilltop and time alone knew how much lay untouched in the rooms below.

He longed to ask Ahmet innumerable questions about the treasure house but the language barrier made it impossible. With sign language he tried to ask how long the temple had been there or at least now long Ahmet guessed it had been there, but he couldn't seem to get it across. Further investigation revealed a court on either side of the one they had come up into. These were similar in shape and contained more objects of art. There was a sort of eerie loneliness about the place which appealed to Lothario after the common life of the village. He was eager to continue the meditations started so hopefully on the Queen during the voyage across and this place offered a solitude and an elevation suitable as anything he could have hoped for. The untold wealth there meant little to him now. Useless it was, as such, in this remote land. Of course if he should get back to Rome -- but that was something he wished to be fully informed about long before landing at Ostia. He had no illusions about the men who had engineered his disappearance and knew that next time they would not stop at kidnapping, should he show himself in his true identity at the Vatican.

There was one inscription on the wall that held Lothario's attention. At least these figures had a look more of writing than much of the ornamental work which appeared to be nothing but just that. He showed it to Ahmet, but the Mayan shook his head. No help there. The civilization that built this place had passed its peak hundreds, perhaps thousands of years ago if Ahmet, obvious descendant that he was, could not read what they had written.

With nothing else of interest to see, Lothario motioned toward the stairway. Ahmet led the way down. From the general condition of things, none of the villagers ever came up here. Ahmet's knowing of it, however, indicated it was a spot the villagers superstitiously held sacred as having once upon a time been a temple. Perhaps these were also the apartments of the priesthood. Ahmet had taken obvious satisfaction in showing it to Lothario, as though he had expected the Pope to make use of the place. If so, Lothario resolved the leader would have to prevail upon the villagers to come and clean up the stairway and the



courts, and the rooms in the rock as well.

Lothario's legs were shaking again when they reached the sunlight below; he paused to rest on a convenient stone balustrade, brushing aside the vines that overlaid it. It was pleasant there with birds chattering about. The heat of the sun was softened by leafy shadows and a breeze cooled his brow. He knew at once a peace which had been wanting for years in the multifarious responsibilities and cares of the Holy See. Of what consequence was time in this timeless, ageless setting? A tiny lizard, almost the color of the leaf which bore him, cocked a fearless eye at him. The Pope laughed from sheer joy and peace.

"I like it here," he said aloud, and waiting not for Ahmet's curious glance, continued on down the terrace.

Actually, the men saw eye to eye on the cleaning and preparation of the sanctuary. Ahmet felt that the Gods had come again to earth to take up their abode in the ancient temple, long deserted. The Pope looked upon it as a sanctuary indeed, from the unutterably dull life of the village below, and as a place in which to practice the contemplative approach to the inner life begun so successfully aboard the Sahib Queen, and even before in the Vatican. But there the cares of state and his failing health had allowed little time for energy for a course which his heart told him was the only way to Truth.

Lothario, after his life long habit as a Churchman, would fain have men wait upon him, but this the Mayans would not or could not do. Ahmet, after many threats and much cajoling, did get a reluctant crew to clean the place from top to bottom, but then only with him there to supervise. It remained for the women to choose two of their number to bring food and water regularly, to cut fresh flowers for the urns, and to do such cleaning as might be necessary. The girls slept in the village and as no men escorted them to the stairway in the mornings, Lothario assumed they were unmarried or unmated. The loose fitting tunics they wore covered their swelling breasts, for which he was thankful; and the garments hung close to the knees, altogether not embarrassing considering the demands of the humid climate. Their long black hair hung loosely even beautifully down their backs. Eventually the quiet, unassuming behavior of these two Mayan girls won his respect.

The two rooms off the stairway presented a problem in mathematics, had he but known it. There was no way then of looking into the minds of the men who hundreds or thousands of years before had superintended the carving out of their mausoleum. Lothario couldn't know then that the entrances to the rooms and to the stairway had been sealed and could be sealed again. They were open when he was first taken there and that was enough for him at the time. Jars of oil, golden jars at that, were brought for his lamps. There had to be a plentiful supply of that so he might study the inscriptions at his leisure. There were symbols, too, a huge feathered serpent occupied the whole wall of one of the rooms; it was the north wall. There were accompanying symbols. In the other



room was a huge circular tablet with elaborate figures or pictographs. This was living rock, left to project above the floor of the room. Numerous golden urns were overturned and scattered about. They might once have been set in a regular pattern; now they contained only dust. Time would reveal to Lothario that the urns contained human ashes, pretty largely, for these stone masters were of that ancient time when cremation was a well-nigh universal practice.

The room to the left of the stairway, going up, was entered from a short passageway of perhaps ten feet which came in at right angles from the landing. The room itself was longitudinally carved out on a true north-south axis and roughly thirty by seventy feet at the floor. The entrance was close to the south end. The north end must have been close to the face of the cliff. The walls sloped in slightly to a height of six feet and then curved quickly over to form a low vaulted ceiling. The end walls were formed the same way and the feathered serpent, being on the north end and running through the curve well up onto the ceiling gave the god an air of brooding over the whole room.

The significance of this "feathered" deity and the royal or holy robe proffered to him on his first appearance before the Mayans did not escape Lothario; though the implied association with a heathen god was extremely distasteful to his Catholic heart and mind. However, he was far from blind to the energy and will of the men who had built this place, and the artistry of their work in gold and precious stones was a joy to his critical eye. The magnificence and profusion of these in this one room alone would put his High Altar at St. Peter's to shame.

Pietro and the crew, busy with the reconditioning of the Sahib Queen, had shown little interest in his explorations, nor did he encourage them. However, the wealth lay to hand would be discovered eventually and somehow he was glad the capacity of the Queen would greatly limit the avarice which would rise to murderous heights in the four men. In fact, too much wealth aboard the Sahib Queen might be a guarantee of his not returning alive once Europeans waters were reached. After all, he was just one weak old man already dead as far as the world was concerned and they knew it.

Such speculations raced through Lothario's mind, in company with others about the meaning of the Maya pictographs and the age of the economic-religious structure of the civilization into whose fascinating remains he had blundered. His approach was that of one of the most mature, best-balanced minds Europe of that day had to offer. His was one which had watched the lusty growth of a new civilization for almost a generation. Body, mind and spirit had grown weary in the constant struggle to keep the spiritual and temporal forces in balance and give them positive direction.

Master of the mighty empire that was the Church of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, he tried to temper authority with a wisdom and understanding that grew with the years. Many prayer pillows had he worn out in those



years nor were those earnest endeavors unrewarded. When Lothario Conti di Segni, Innocent III, sought the Inner Light for the vision and strength which his daily problems required, he got it! God, to him, was real; a Being, the grace of whose visitations had been a constant benediction to him.

And yet there was an end to all things temporal; certainly is this true of worldly rulers, and Popes no less. So, in the fall of 1216, Innocent III could see the end not too far away. The time was coming when he would have done with care for his children and their endless quarrels disturbing the peace of his realm. In a way he was glad. He had finally realized that which never comes to some rulers; there is a limit, a very confining limit, to what can be done for mankind; or perhaps more properly, to what mankind will allow to have done for it. There was no conception of such a limitation to becloud his brow when he took office in 1198. Then the world was at his feet, soft and pliable, to be molded to God's Holy purpose -- or so he thought in his exuberance.

Time changed that and there were occasions when Innocent III would gladly have relinquished his august post to younger, more capable hands, could they have been found. The one thing that kept him to his purpose, the glorification of the Most High through his Church, was the boundless ambition, the unscrupulousness, the vanity of the Cardinals and the Bishops, and of the Italian nobility which surrounded him. The vainglory and self-seeking of some of these men was not to be gainsaid; finally they got him removed so that the mighty power and prestige of the Holy See could be directed to their own ends. Lothario had seen the inevitability of this long before it happened. The vision that had come to him aboard the Sahib Queen confirmed his fears but left him curious as to the complete state of affairs in Rome and those most closely associated with him.

Thus we find, as the sanctuary on the hill becomes liveable, Lothario deliberately creating an atmosphere favorable to the attainment of that ecstasy known to some mystics, to many adepts, and to a few saints. With freshly cut flowers to perfume the air and the constant flame of four lamps to freshen it, Lothario found the stairway room on the left suitable for his needs for meditation and study. Once cleared out and cleaned out and free from insect noises -- even mosquitoes were not to be found there -- the room could assume a deathly stillness. Then there was little to interfere with concentration but body noises and they are easily overcome.



## CHAPTER NINE

Morgantini and his high wheeled cart pulled on into Rome, down the way Veggiatore to the market. It was at a cross street in the narrow, twisting lanes that he was brought up short by a covered brougham. His little mule, pushed on by the loaded cart, rammed full into the spirited horses drawing the other vehicle.

The resulting tangle had Morgantini down by his mule and the gorgeous Margarita, of all people, thrusting her head forth to see who had dared block the way of an Orsini.

"You common dog of a fruit peddler, you," she shrilled. "Giovanni!" she screamed at her coachman, "box his ears!"

The coachman climbed down and added to the chaos by bellowing at Morgantini while that poor unfortunate tried in vain to separate the struggling animals. Margarita continued to add curses to the pandemonium. Soon traffic had piled up in every direction. Curious bystanders crowded in, a few to help, but most merely to watch the show. It was a rare thing to have a beautiful noblewoman show herself at all in those times, and one who not only looked out on the common world but swore like a man was a rare show indeed!

Word flew like magic through the surrounding neighborhood, a none too savory district as Rome went in those days. What might have been only a slight mishap in the ordinary course of things built up into a brawl. Street beggars, taking sides with Morgantini, pretended to be trying to extricate the Princess's horses from the tangle. They actually made it worse and in struggling with the frightened and plunging beasts managed to knock the coachman to the pavement. Margarita's voice rose as the crowd roared its laughter.

"Swine, rabble, scum of the earth -- why dont you do something!" she shouted. "You there," to a frocked and hooded priest, "name of the Virgin, why dont you help! God knows, I need it!"

For answer the priest, never showing his face, slipped away into the crowd.

The two footmen on the back of the brougham had by this gotten down to help the coachman and they were swallowed up in the milling throng. A sharp knife in a strong hand slashed the traces, one side and then the other. The harness of the house of Orsini was heavy with silver and gold. Once melted into new shapes, who would know or care where it was obtained? One of the horses reared free, lifting a footman off the ground with him. The crowd scattered momentarily, only to close in again to snatch at a glittering buckle or a slip ring.

As Margarita watched from the limited safety of her vehicle, she bit her lips



in vain regret at the absence of the troop of mounted soldiers which usually accompanied an Orsini coach onto the streets of the West city. If her father were still alive, woe to the unfortunate captain of the guard who would have let such a thing happen; but Margarita, proud in her independence, had laughed the guard away. Now there was an angry shout, and then another. Had two of the beggars fought over a piece of harness? Or had they come to blows with her men? Looking out she saw two ruffians struggling with her coachman, trying to take his whip away from him. Another beggar struck the brave fellow from behind and down he went.

A scarred, broken face leered at her as she stared out the coach door. She jerked back and it followed her in, quivering. It scowled and spat on the fine fur floor covering.

"Get out of here!" she screamed.

He paid no attention to her. His eyes followed his spittle and lighted on the luxury of the rug. A bare, hairy and extremely dirty arm reached in; filthy fingers grasped the fur.

"No you don't!" she kicked at his hand.

But too fast for her its owner jerked the fur from under her feet and held it on high outside. There was a hoarse shout of triumph. Like a signal the waving of that booty roused the mob and they began to tear the coach apart. A bloody face at the other window made her scream again. It was one of the footmen.

"Your grace, you'd better cut for it now, if you want to live. This mob'll likely do anything. St. Bartholomeo's is close by; you'll be safe there."

With that he opened the door. Saying never a word Margarita pulled her hooded cloak around her to cover her gorgeous hair and stepped carefully into the filthy street. The crush wasn't so bad here because she was between her rocking coach and Morgantini's high wheeled cart. She could see her driver hanging on to the bridle of one horse, the other had already disappeared. The second footman forced his way to her side. She looked wildly at him, ready to scream again.

Between them they worked her carefully along the wall of the nearest building to the corner where the next lane came in. There she paused and looked back.

"You'll die for this!" shouted Margarita Orsini in helpless fury, "You gutter rats!"

Eyes turned toward this new noise heard briefly above the triumphant roar, and then the rabble of Rome continued the division of the spoils.



The footmen dragged Margarita away from the corner. They were happy that the mob had turned its devouring fury on the ornate vehicle rather than on them and their lovely charge. Soon the shelter of St. Bartholomeo's was gained. No sound of the street penetrated that dim interior. Its candle-blackened rafters were old when Lothario was a boy. Its stone pavements were already hollowed with the shuffle of thousands of feet. A hurrying priest was stopped. At the footman's whispered explanation he peered at the noblewoman. Under her hood and the shadows of the archway her face was dimly visible. He turned with scarce a word and hurried back the way he came.

Margarita found it difficult to remain still but finally the measured tread of the Father Superior echoed faintly along the walls. As he looked questioningly at the two men she stepped forward into the pale light filtering down through from stained glass far above. She slipped her hood back a little to reveal her white and lovely face.

"I am the Principessa di Orsini, father."

"To what good fortune do we owe the honor of your presence here?" She received a cheery smile from a wrinkled, happy face.

"Ill fortune, father." Margarita did not mince words. "Not twenty paces from your door I have been robbed; my horses stolen from me; my coach given over to the rabble; and my own person has been endangered! If it hadn't been for my brave footmen here -- "

"St. Bartholomeo's is most happy to afford shelter to your grace at this unfortunate time. I, Father Maggiore, thank the most merciful Father for your deliverance from the ruffians. Indeed, it is as much as a man's life is worth to venture out in broad daylight. What a sad, sad state is Rome today!"

Margarita stamped her foot. "Words went save my brougham from complete destruction!" Her words echoed hollowly down the vault. "Aren't there any men around here?"

"St. Bartholomeo's has never felt the need of any," replied the Churchman.

One of the footmen snickered at this and Father Maggiore looked at him in wonderment.

"I'll send one of my men to the Orsini Palace for help, then," retorted the Principessa.

"Your grace is welcome to such comfort as my Church affords," Father Maggiore replied without raising his voice. "Come this way."

The footman who had laughed slipped into the shadow and was gone.



"Stay here," she said to the other and followed the father.

He led her along the side of the nave and out into the bright sunlight of a delightful patch of garden. She tossed back the hood in grateful relief. The glints of red in her dark hair caused the father to blink. Margarita was Christian in name only and the atmosphere of the church stifled her. It didn't occur to her to be grateful for the protection she had received. Other things were on her active mind as she strolled down the garden path.

"Father."

"Yes, your grace." He followed along beside and a little behind her.

"Have you lately had an audience with His Holiness?"

"Why, yes your grace. The Holy See was most generous when I was in his august presence -- not a fortnight ago. I was with him, I believe, upwards of an hour."

"An hour! Well, and what in the name of the Sacred Virgin did you talk about in all that time?"

"Your grace, that was most strange, now that you mention it. His Holiness was so -- so humble about the responsibilities that had been thrust upon him. I believe he compared himself to some lowly scullion in the abbey kitchen." Father Maggiore shook his head slowly from side to side in disbelief as they walked.

They reached the end of the little garden path and turned back before he spoke again.

"I had hoped for some word of wisdom to bring back to my faithful parishoners but how could I tell them that His Holiness discoursed so learnedly about," he made a wry face, "pots and pans."

Margarita snorted her disdain.

"The strangest thing of all was that he asked me -- His Holiness, I mean -- to bless him before I left."

"Unbelievable," murmured the princess, "a truly great and humble man."

"His Holiness, Innocent III," said the good father, "was indeed a most worthy representative of the most High." He stopped and pointed solemnly toward the heavens. "Most worthy," he repeated, "to sit at the right hand of the Father in Heaven."

Margarita's amusement at him went unnoticed. They resumed their walking.



Two more turns of the little path were made before the footman who had stayed was in the doorway. He bowed respectfully as they approached.

"The Prince di Orsini has arrived, your highness."

Her brother had come, and with foot soldiers, she hoped. They hurried back along the arched and echoing corridor to St. Bartholomew's open door. It was late afternoon now and the working men and trades people were coming to do their daily devotions. Margarita impatiently brushed past them. Wearing an all-embracing cloak as she did her quality wasn't too obvious. None stepped aside out of deference to her rank. For her part she would just as soon have spit on them as look them. In the street her brother's strident, domineering voice greeted her.

"God's life, Margarita, can't you find your way about Rome without losing my favorite coach?" There was a trace of an indulgent smile on his face as he helped her in the carriage.

"Had I two score men-at-arms, dear brother, as you have behind us now, I wouldn't have lost your old coach! Oh, if I were only a man, I'd have gotten out there and run the filthy beggars through, every one of them!"

"Sh-h-h-h-h," he shushed her. "Orsini ladies don't think of such things."

"This one does!" she retorted as they drove off. "What are you going to do about it?"

He flicked at his knee idly with his gloves. "Oh, not much, my dear. The Orsini escutcheon in this part of Rome is more likely to be a harbinger of trouble than anything else."

With a pout she sank back into the cushions opposite him. Then she sat bolt upright again.

"Pietro, that fool of a churchman you placed in the Vatican must go; he must be replaced."

Pietro Orsini waved his hand wearily at her as they clattered along.

"No torrent of words can change that which changes not. Honorius III will be a scullion to the end of this days."

"I, Margarita, am as well aware of that as you, dear brother."

"Pray then, little sister, what would you?" Pietro raised a sarcastic eyebrow, "Place yourself on the throne of the Holy See?"



Her eyes blazed at him. "If I were there, and let not your heart be deceived about that, dear brother, no crimes such as happened to me this afternoon would go unpunished. Have you nothing to say about the loss of your finest carriage?"

Pietro slouched on the seat opposite her and just looked at her out of sullen eyes; his lips were curled in the typically selfish pout he carried over from childhood. Pietro Orsini was used to having his way. Now, nothing turned out well.



## CHAPTER TEN

The sun rose, fiery red over the endlessly flat forests of Mayab. Its rays woke the bright plumed birds in the trees, stirred the monkeys from their sleep, and, in the village of Motalpan, Lothario's votaries stirred also.

This bid fair to be one of the most exciting days in their uneventful lives. The white gods who had come across the sea in their white winged vessel were about to go back to the distant heaven from whence they had come. All were returning that is, but one. The one with the long white hair and the beard equally long, he had graciously consented to stay and bless the people of Motalpan with his presence.

Nanee brought Lothario his morning cup, a bitter brew made with little beans native to the region. They named it cacao. A later day would call it chocolate. All Lothario knew was that it had a marvelous facility for waking a person, regardless of the hour. There was fruit and rough cakes cooked on hot stones by the fire. The only grain these Mayas had, apparently, was a large yellow seed the women pounded into a coarse meal in stone mortars. They called it eesh-meel.

"You'll be coming to the Sahib Queen, Father?" It was Masetto who had come up to Lothario's shelter in the early morning.

"And I would be no other place in this wide world today, good Masetto, than at the casting off of the Queen on her return voyage to Europe, to Rome!" Lothario smiled warmly at his young companion.

"Surely you'll not be bereft of every bit of sense, sire, and stay on in this heathen land?" His voice was heavy with the anxiety of his disbelief.

"Ah, this worthless life would be worth less still in Christian Europe, Masetto. Mark you, I have been dead these many months to the world I once ruled." His nails scratched thoughtfully for the rings of power they once carried. "Better to be a god in Motalpan than a madman in a Roman prison, or worse."

"Madman?"

"Who would believe the truth? That I, Innocent III, had been kidnapped and had sailed to a new and unborn world in a Sardinian fishing vessel?" Finished with breakfast, Lothario stood up and smiled again at Masetto's refusal to accept the idea that he would not accompany them all on the long voyage back.

The two set off down through the village, followed by the usual procession of



children and dogs. Lothario placed a fatherly arm across Masetto's shoulder.

"The joy of breaking the news of Mayab and the Mayans I leave to you, my friend, if you can convince Rome of the existence of all this. Let them come to me. It is my belief that here I can meet them on more equal terms."

They stopped at one of the last crude shelters where Pietro was supervising the packing of the remaining loads of food, and of gold, that were to be stored on the Sahib Queen. Alaric and the Egyptian had spent this last night aboard, ostensibly to guard the heavily laden Queen, but more probably for privacy to consummate some amorous intrigue.

Lothario had found it wiser to ignore such alliances as his companions had clapped up with Motalpan maids. It was to be expected that Maya girls would put up little resistance to men whom their own parents revered as gods. He was thankful the sailors were able to satisfy their lusts without causing any trouble. Perhaps this was because, as much as anything else, the white men were considered above the social inhibitions of the community.

The Maya women had a way of baking their meal into hard cakes which would keep for months even in this tropical climate. Of course they required soaking in water to make them edible. With bundles of these on their heads the females formed a stately procession winding down the path to the great stone highway. They were followed by twenty men, each bearing a crude sack bulging with gold idols and ornaments which Lothario had caused to be carried down out of the temple where he studied. The treasure that remained could still be counted in the millions.

The Mayans cared little for the stuff even as usable dishes. It had no value to them. They were puzzled as to why the white gods should want to carry it away with them, but they willingly helped at Lothario's command.

"Pietro, if there would be one thing to send men scurrying across the seas -- beyond the ends of the earth -- the contents of yonder sacks will do it." Lothario nodded toward the last carrier just ahead of them.

"Aye, that it will," Pietro agreed. "If we don't get our heads cracked open for our pains, you may be sure we'll be back for more of this stuff." He eyed Lothario shrewdly. "It's been many a day since ye discovered this precious stuff up there in that heathen temple. Ye didn't load us up with all this gold for nothing."

Lothario looked ahead and smiled, "If Innocent III could leave one last bequest to the land of his birth, to his Church, it would be the knowledge of this New World. Don't you see what it would mean?" He turned to Masetto. "Europe is crowded now; its soil is poor; its people are poor from too many wars. Discovery of this new land would turn the attention of the Princes away



from their petty quarrels. They would send out expeditions; people would follow. The word of Christ with its message of brotherhood would find new birth here." He looked again at the burden on the sturdy shoulder of the Mayan ahead of him. "That gold has already bought your return, Pietro. When men see that they'll follow you to hell itself!"

Ahmet had shown the white men an easier way down to the ship than the precipitous ascent the voyagers had made the day of their first landing. A natural break or defile in the stone cliffs a half mile closer to the village created a gradual descent to the beach. From then on the hard packed sand made walking easy. The white man couldn't help but admire the swinging stride and the stoic endurance of the men and women ahead of them. Horses, beasts of burden of any kind were unknown here. Even the temple-building civilization showed no burden-carrying animals of any kind in its endless friezes.

If Alaric and the Egyptian had had company with them the night before, there was no sign of it when Lothario, Masetto and Pietro arrived at the anchoring place. Without setting their loads down the carriers waded right on out to the Sahib Queen, motionless in the sandy lagoon.

"Ahoy, you lubbers!" Shouted Pietro as the Mayans splashed toward the ship.

"Ahoy," answered Alaric from the galley. There was a big grin on his face as he came out and reached low for the first bundle of food. He tried to catch the woman under the arm as though to pull her aboard, too; but she slipped away with a laugh and came back to the shore where the three white men watched.

The skinny Egyptian, dark and silent as Alaric was blond and talkative, was there to help, too. The gold required the hands of two men to lift from Mayan shoulders up over the rail. Masetto shook his head doubtfully as the Queen sank lower and lower into the water.

"Old Donizetti never saw cargo the like o' this, eh, Pietro?" shouted Alaric.

The Egyptian opened the hatch to the hold where Innocent III had first regained consciousness. The two men picked up the first sack of gold to pitch it in.

"Leave be!" shouted Pietro angrily. "I'll stow the gold myself when I come aboard."

The two men dropped the sack where it was and returned to the rail.

"The crew seem to be agreed that you're captain, Pietro."

"If I dont sail the Queen back to Ostia no one else will; those lubbers know that. They had orders to get their women off the Queen first thing this morn-



ing. You dont see 'em, do ye?"

"No," replied Lothario approvingly. "Are all the other supplies aboard now, water, sails and so on?"

"Aye, we finished stowing all the gear we could scrape up yesterday afternoon. Though I dont hold much with this flimsy stuff they weave here. Give me stout Majorca canvas any day, best in the Mediterranean, one end to the other."

It was true the Maya cloth had little to recommend it for anything but the purpose for which it was made -- a light covering against tropic heat. Lightly woven and lightly colored, the plant from which the fibers were taken was apparently chosen for ease of working rather than strength of material. Nevertheless, for want of any better the village supply of cloth for months to come had been rolled up and put aboard. The filling of the Queen's water casks had been an arduous and time consuming task that took all of four days. The remaining wheat at the end of the voyage had long since molded and been thrown away but the untouched barrels of olives were still sweet and sound.

It was man to man when Pietro and Lothario parted, a warm hand on a friendly shoulder.

"Ye're a real man now that the smæll of the church is gone from ye, and it's reluctant I am to leave ye among these heathen."

"God alone could tell who is more heathen, they or I," jested Lothario. "I haven't said my office since I left Rome."

"Aye? Well, ye're still a Christian," Pietro replied. If there was a tear in his eye he covered it well by saying roughly, "Ye speak their crazy tongue better than I. Will ye tell them to cast us off and push us out as far as they can? There's a spit of a breeze comin' down from them hills. Come on, Masetto -- if ye're goin' with us."

The curly headed adventurer had already put foot in the water but he drew back. "I'm not going!"

As Pietro stopped in the water and looked back at him Masetto moved to Lothario's side and dropped on his knees in the wet sand.

"Father, I cannot leave you here alone with these heathen people."

"My son, I could not ask you to live the last years of your life in exile with me. What matters it where I spend my declining years; but you, you are young yet and should return to your homeland. There must be some sweet maiden awaiting you, eager to hear your tales of adventure and travel to the new world."

In answer Masetto grasped Lothario's hand and pressed his forehead against



the old man's wrist. His shoulders hunched over convulsively with sobs. He shook his head.

"No, I shall not return to Rome until you do, Father."

The firmness with which the young Italian clung to him surprised Lothario and stifled the harsh order before it rose to his lips.

"Well?" Pietro spoke from where he had stopped, beside the little skiff in the water.

For answer Innocent III shrugged his shoulders and turned his free hand outward in resignation. Pietro shrugged also, climbed in, shoved off with an oar and paddled on out to the Queen. The two men aboard started hauling in the anchor. At Lothario's command the Mayans loosed the stern lines and waded out to the ship. One clambered aboard and helped Pietro pull the lines on to the rear deck.

"Confound them," thought Lothario, "why dont they show some emotion?"

Nothing ever annoyed him very much, but the rocklike calm of these alien people exasperated him at times. It made them seem old and tireless, wise with a wisdom that really was not there. He and his European companions seemed so emotional, so childlike in comparison. When he realized he was irked at the Mayans he laughed at himself; his pride was hurt.

With the anchor in and the mooring lines secure aboard, the Sahib Queen seemed eager to leave on the long voyage home. She was free of the land again, and at Pietro's urging the Mayans moved her easily out into the shallow lagoon. The vagrant shore breeze caught her broadside by the time the pushing ones were shoulder deep and took her away from them. Alaric and Jesus had already turned to with a will so that the mainsail bellied out with the first puff of air that hit it. Pietro threaded the Queen easily through the shallows to blue water and only then turned to wave his farewell to the two who stayed behind. They stood, while the Mayans squatted patiently around them, and watched until the Sahib Queen was hull down on the eastern horizon and their eyes ached with the morning sunlight.

It was a storm of mixed emotions that raced through Lothario's heart as he turned with Masetto to walk up the beach. The natives arose and followed, silently.

"When we sent Pietro off with that load of gold we closed the door on my past, my son."

The voluble Italian was subdued in his reply, "When to you think he will return, Father?"



"The quickest we can hope for will be a year, at the very least and -- if the Queen does return -- my way of life will be so ordered here I shall not care to leave."

Masetto just shook his head slowly for reply.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Oh, Thou whose hands have spread the vault above,  
Whose mighty arms hold out the world in love,  
To man, child of Thy creation, this boon grant:  
More love, more love, more love!"

Lothario was alone in his low, vaulted chamber, a smoky oil lamp at either elbow. The light was feeble, but the clean lines of the golden vessels would have brought a king's ransom in Europe.

He slowly turned the pages of his writing. The Mayans had managed to make a paper of sorts for him out a papyrus-like reed. The sheets were small, irregularly shaped and colored things after the parchments of the Vatican, but Lothario complained not of the circumstances now which surrounded him. The wherewithal for his self-chosen tasks always seemed to come to hand, somehow.

"Nanee?" He thought he heard a step behind him. Any noise in that tomb-like stillness was startling and he jerked around.

A dainty, sandaled foot was on the stone floor beside his bench. A robe of the softest silk-like material hid the trim ankle. Lothario's eyes followed up the slender figure to discover a delicate, feminine face, full of such serenity, such calm repose as to make his own magnificent self-composure seem like the wildest storm. He made as if to rise but was stayed by the slightest of gestures.

"Thou wouldst call in vain for Nanee."

The vision of loveliness walked or floated around his writing table to face him.

"She is the only one who is brave enough to come in here and wait on me," remarked Lothario.

"Foolish mortal, if indeed Nanee were the only one to wait on you, your voyage through the Mediterranean would have stopped before it had scarcely begun." Her tone had the gentlest of reproofs in it. "The best of Captain Donizetti's skill alone would not have availed against the storm."

"Can it be that you guided the Sahib Queen through the gates of Hercules?"

"Innocent III is here. That is answer enough," was the gracious reply.  
"There is much to be done now before the Sahib Queen returns."



Lothario's eyebrows lifted even higher, but before he could question this bold bit of prophecy she continued. "There is opportunity in this place of leaving a record of wisdom which a thousand years hence will stir men to action, to leading a better life. Would you be willing to lend yourself, your body, to such a cause?"

Lothario, still seated before his lovely visitor, held his hands palms up on the stone table. He said nothing to stem the flow of her conversation.

"The Mayans, as you have observed, are greatly skilled in working stone." As though answering his mental protest she added, "It is true that Ahmet and his people no longer express the great ideas which once led their ancestors to create all this, but the latent skill is there. Your word is law to them."

Lothario smiled and inclined his head toward her slightly. "I have had enough of empires."

The vision smiled in return.

"Worldly empires, yes, but we would have you build an empire of the spirit."

"We?"

"Your sailing to this new world was not of my doing alone. Nor are the words which you will leave on the walls above, my words."

"Words? On these walls? Will you not explain, give some clearer meaning to all this?" he asked.

But even as he spoke the beautiful being grew visibly smaller and then vanished before his eyes. With that radiance gone the light from his oil lamps was almost intolerably dark. As he reached to trim the wicks there was the sound of a familiar step behind him.

"Nanee?"

"It is I, even Nanee, Master." And his wide browed, wide cheeked Indian servant stood beside him. "Nanee heard voices. Was there a guest with the Master? Nanee saw no person on the stairs."

Lothario was startled but tried not to show it as Nanee watched him quietly for the answer.

"Yes," he said to her, "there was a person here, and she will come again from time to time in ways neither you nor I can tell, Nanee."

"Nanee has brought oil for the lamps of the Master." She set a gourd on the floor beside the table.



Lothario was gratified that she said nothing more about the strange visitor. He would have been hard put to have answered any more questions himself. He wanted to be alone to think about it, but Nanee was there beside him and this question came unbidden to his lips.

"Know you of any man in Motalpan who carries the knowledge of the carving of this stone?" He waved a hand at the figured walls about them.

Nanee looked about her, wide-eyed, as though seeing the multitudinous carving for the first time. Wide-eyed she turned back to Lothario and wordlessly shook her head. He was tempted to argue with her but recalling the words of his evanescent visitor he waved Nanee away.

"I'll take the matter up with Ahmet on the morrow."

Alone again he sat back and tried to recall something of what had happened to him. His visitor certainly wasn't an angel. She seemed more like a glorified human being. Her approach toward him, her whole bearing was so direct, so matter of fact that he couldn't help but treat her likewise while she was there. It was only afterward that he wondered what his behavior should have been in the presence of this celestial visitor who materialized out of nowhere in the midst of his meditation. To call her holy would force him to make room for her somewhere in the holy trinity, and he just couldn't do that.

Lothario may have stopped saying his office everyday. He had dropped the mantle of the Pope with scarcely a regret; but a lifetime of Christian orthodoxy was not to be swept aside unless something more substantial came along to replace it. He fell to musing over her words, "leave a record on these walls that may be read a thousand years hence."

What did he know, indeed, that mankind of 2217 A.D. would consider of interest to them?

Of course, the voyage across the trackless Atlantic was something. So fantastic was it that half the people of Europe would scorn the story as a complete fabrication. He could tell that but in what language? Spanish? French? Italian? Those modern tongues that changed from year to year? A thousand years from now who would know them for what they were?

Latin? Ah, Latin, perfect tongue of scholars and poets. There was the language of the gods! Dead a thousand years already, Latin still lived and would live in the hearts and minds of all the noble scholars of the world. And who indeed would bother to read stone inscriptions but scholars?

And where to write? One glance around his inner sanctum sufficed! Have those heavy-handed clods raise their dust and noise here? Never! He blew one lamp out and took the other to its stairway receptacle with him, then on up to the fading sunlight above. Here there were acres of nice, black stone walls in



the open courts and in the passages.

"The temple of the sun and the feathered serpent were never put to better use!"

Lothario spoke as though the Mayans were already hard at work.

In the dusk of that dying day he went down the long stone stairway through the side of the hill, picked up the lamp at the landing and, descending, carefully deposited it in the appropriate niche at the bottom entrance. Outside he made his slow way down the stone terraces which graded the lower slopes. In this time-less community, why hurry? It was pleasant to see the supper fires glowing in the dark and hear the family sounds come up to him. Of late years he thought his churchly life had put him beyond the need of all that.

"Human companionship releases a light of love in the heart which can be gained in no other way."

His inner voice again, and this time there was a ring of wisdom to the words which made him feel they would well be worth carving into imperishable stone.

In the village he sought out and found Ahmet.

"Knowest thou the way of imprinting the spoken word on stone?"

Ahmet shook his head; he seemed somewhat puzzled; as though the idea were completely new to him. He looked at the men around him.

"Might as well have asked him if they could fly to the moon," muttered Lothario in his own tongue. He spoke up again, "It would be well if three of the young men accompanied this 'exalted mist' (using their term for him) to the temple on the morrow. The way of carving the spoken word will be revealed at that time."

"I hope!" thought Lothario as he moved away toward his own shelter.

The morning sunlight revealed three of the younger men of Mootalpan outside Lothario's door and waiting when he arose. Lothario was surprised to see them, and not too well pleased. He wasn't sure himself as to just how they would go about "putting the spoken word on stone", or what to use in this metal-less land. He wished Masetto were around to help, if only with ideas, but that young adventurer was off on some expedition of his own and might be gone for days.

But wait, even as he sucked bitter limes which Nanee placed before him, he bethought him of the glittering pieces of stone, or jewels, or whatever they were which he had discovered in one of the open courts on the hill. This was when he first explored the place and was more concerned with uncovering gold vases and ornaments than anything else. Those pieces of black glass were



in a plain, earthenware pot. Full of the dust and dirt of centuries, he had unceremoniously dumped it. The stone chisels were still undoubtedly laying where he had contemptuously kicked them months before.

The would-be carvers squatted motionless and silent while he finished his breakfast of bananas, corn-meal cakes and chocolate.

What the devil was it he had decided the night before? Oh, yes, his deathless message to the future was to be inscribed in the most scholarly latin. As they climbed the terraces and trudged the long stairs he turned choice phrases over in his mind.

"I, Innocent III, being of sound mind and body do declare to all the world that on the 12th of October, in the year 1216 A.D., I was forcibly abducted from the Garden of San Sebastian, at the Vatican, Rome, and through force of circumstances did arrive in this land after a long sea voyage."

There was a beginning which would lead to what? If there was to be any wisdom given to the world where would it come from, the beautiful being who had materialized in his study?

Arrived at the top he went directly to the court where the stone chisels had been left on the floor and there indeed he found them. There were chisels but no hammers. As he muddled this problem in his mind he noticed little barrel shaped stones in the debris that had come out of the jar with the chisels. Of course, the narrowed, waist-like appearance of these was for the binding. These were hammer heads, originally fastened or bound to wooden handles long since passed into dust. The Mayans had crude mallets of softer stone down in the village.

Lothario handed a hammer head to each of the men, showed them the chisels, and demonstrated with words and actions what their work would be. Agreeably enough -- was he not a God? -- they went below with the hammer heads. He had found four which would be usable.

While they were gone he made a closer survey of the walls. Apparently he was going to carry on in his way a work which had been dropped a good many hundreds of thousands of years before. The open courts and galleries on this old hill top had been constructed, partially at least, for the very purpose he had in mind. It gave him a sense of kinship with the place which was very comforting right then.

"A thousand years are as but a day in my sight. Where one hand faileth, another riseth up to take its place."

The stairway came up into practically the middle of a central open court, perhaps a hundred feet square. To the right and left on either side were smaller courts, slightly rectangular in shape and connected to the central one by a



All three were open to the sky. The walls of all three were filled solid with the heiroglyphics, and gods and the dramatic friezes which depicted the sacred and secular life of this ancient mace.

Directly opposite the stairway an apparently newer or later passageway had been carved straight back for a hundred feet or more out of the living rock. At regular intervals of about six paces narrow galleries had been hewn at right angles to the central passage, on either side. The walls of these galleries had been dressed and paneled in preparation for carving apparently, but nothing had ever been put on them. The top of the old hill was very level and all the courts and gallery walls had a uniform height of about eight feet.

When the volunteer carvers returned with the hammers all ready for use Nanee was with them. Lothario set all four to clearing the first two galleries of debris. He took one of the black, glittering chisels and a hammer and tried it out on the nearest stretch of wall. This happened to be the passage leading to the galleries from the main court. One blow told him why the work up here had been so elaborate and extensive. The soft limestone of the hilltop was an ideal medium indeed for preserving records. Easily worked by these simple hand tools, it was nevertheless durable enough in this mild climate to last for thousands of years, if not forever.

He set himself to carviging the words "Ave Verum" in letters about six inches high. He was still at it when the Mayans had finished the galleries. Nanee and the men watched closely as he worked. It wasn't long before he could tell they were itching to get their fingers on the tools and do some carving too.

Lothario scratched the outlines of the "E" in verum and passed the tools to the nearest Indian. Without thinking about the way it should be done, the Pope cut the letters into the rock. Obviously that method would be simpler and far easier than outlining each letter and cutting the limestone away to get the raised effect.

The other Mayans had taken up hammers and chisels and were eager to go so Lothario scratched with great care this sentence, which began: "I, Innocent III, being of sound mind, etc."

He saw immediately, and with resignation, that their lack of experience would cause many a botched word if they weren't watched closely.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

In thirteen long years, Lothario Conti, Innocent III, became an accomplished stone cutter in his own right. It was a strangely satisfying pastime to chisel fine Latin phrases in the soft limestone of this Yucatan citadel which had become his prison. For almost five years now he had lived and worked on the hill top and never set foot in the village below. He went down as far as the room behind the face of the cliff and that was all. His increasing age and the comparative infirmity of his limbs made Lothario fear that he might not be able to climb back up again.

The ignorant and superstitious Mayans were content to worship him as a god and to furnish him with such service and supplies as he needed for his living and his work. While his body aged his mind grew more keen and clear with simple living and with those contemplative exercises which have rewarded the mystic and the occultist of all ages. In the thirteen years of his exile, Pope Innocent III had placed his feet firmly on the Path which leads to freedom from all earthly bonds. And, the record of that inner development had been eternally engraved in the stone galleries of the Maya temple.

His awakened inner perceptions enabled Lothario to unlock the secret of the pictograph writings on the walls and to use the circular calendar carved in the stone table top in the stairway room to the right. He knew that the Sahib Queen had, thanks to Pietro's skillful seamanship, made the coast of Africa and worked its way northward and into the Mediterranean in good time. He knew that at this very moment, Pietro was again finding his way across the Atlantic in a somewhat larger, slower sistership of the Queen. The crew was different, of course, and in place of Captain Donizetti, Orsini's redoubtable henchman, Alonzo Cantinelli, was in charge. However, Alonzo was no sailor and the good seaman, Pietro, had been a captain in his own right for years, sailing the Mediterranean in this very ship, the Atlantia, bought with Maya gold taken home on the first voyage.

Lothario knew that the world had refused to believe the tale the sailors told on their return. Sail due west from the Pillars of Hercules? Only a crazy man would take a trip off the edge of the world itself! The gold was real enough and that was readily accepted regardless of where they said they obtained it.

Nevertheless, the voyagers' tales of a land beyond the setting sun, beyond the end of the world as Europe knew it, traveled up and down the Mediterranean for years before they got to the ear of Orsini. Two hundred years later the rumors were to help set the wheels of imagination going in the mind of one, Christopher Columbus, of Livorno.

Pietro had been shrewd enough to avoid Ostia in his trading trips from the Moorish dominions to Spain and Italy. The young Orsini and his methods were



well known; and the clever sailor, comfortably set up in his own business, had no mind to report the unfavorable results of the kidnap voyage. Let Orsini dwell in uncertainty the rest of his life, it was none of the sailor's business.

But the legendary tale, glossed with the years of retelling, finally did reach the ears of the mercurial Italian, the fire of whose personality was no whit dimmed by the passage of time. Alonzo brought the story to him.

"Say you this tale again!" The flames in Orsini's eyes revealed scarce a tenth of the storm which raged within. All the gnawing curiosity of thirteen long years sprang forth in a moment.

Alonzo stepped back instinctively at the suddenness of his master's response.

"Sire," he protested, "it was only the wildest of tales -- from a bawd on the waterfront at Ostia."

The two were in Orsini's study in the family palace in Rome. The Italian nobleman sat back slightly, never taking his eyes from his servant's face as the man stood across the desk from him.

"I had stopped at the inn, the Mare Nostrum -- "

"So that's why you were late!" interrupted Orsini.

" -- for a spot of wine," continued Alonzo, "and I heard this old wench laughing over some story she'd gotten from a wild Norman -- "

"When?"

"It was a long, long time ago, she said, years -- "

"Continue, in the name of heaven!"

"This sailor wanted her to sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules with him."

"Why?"

"She said he claimed there was some strange land out beyond the end of the world." Alonzo shrugged his shoulders, "Said he'd been there and come back with millions in gold."

"Why did he want to go back?"

"He claimed he'd spent his share and it was time to go back for more."

"There was a Norman sailor on Donizetti's ship, the Sahib Queen!" exclaimed Orsini. His eyes looked past Alonzo down the long years to a winter's



night thirteen years ago when the two of them had carried a limp, heavy bundle aboard the Sahib Queen in Ostia harbor. He remembered the shaggy blond giant who loomed up behind Donizetti in the flickering torchlight.

"Alonzo remembers him, too, Sire," was the quiet response.

Then was set in motion the machinery which after months of search and the expenditure of thousands of scuddi put the eager Orsini in touch with Innocent III's erstwhile navigator, Pietro. The persuasive abilities of one of the most powerful men in Europe were not to be denied; and Pietro, only after being allowed to pick a ship and crew of his own choosing, was prevailed upon to undertake the long journey to Yucatan.

Ostensibly, Orsini's partner in crime was the captain of the expedition, but there was little doubt in anyone's mind as to who would make it succeed or fail. A title and lands awaited the sailor upon his successful return.

In Mayab, Lothario knew that his lonely vigils in the hilltop observation post would have their reward. In that empty expanse of sea a sail would show again, guided to that very spot by the self-same Will which had brought the Sahib Queen the first time.

He passed the word to Masetto that his "Voices" had intimated the long wait would soon be at an end. The misspent Pope eyed the man keenly for the effect of the news.

Masetto slumped down on a handy stone seat.

"Ship? Returning?" He repeated slowly after Lothario. Then he shouted, "I'm going home, Sire, home to Italy, to my mother in Florence!" He jumped up, gesturing with great excitement and turned to Lothario. "And what of you, Sire, you'll be returning too? You'll not stay in this rock-walled prison for another thirteen years?" He grasped Lothario's bony arms and shook them.

"No, my son, I'll not be going back to Italy, to Rome; this is my home now."

Doubt crossed Masetto's face, his loyalty to the old man gave him pause. He had always assumed that Lothario would return if Pietro came back for them. Now, by his own statement, the Pope was saying that the rescuers were within an hour's sailing of the anchorage below the village of Motalpan, but that he would not accept the chance to escape. Masetto's wide, generous mouth hung open; he dropped Lothario's arms and stepped back.

"Surely, Sire, you're joking with Masetto. You can't mean it. This is a living death here while years of happiness may remain to you in Rome among the people you know and love. If not there you can live with mother and me. I am young yet. I can make a living for all of us."



The keen eyes looked away from the pleas of the younger man. The white hair fell back as though Lothario were looking and listening for some inner scene. He spoke quietly.

"The men who banished me to this land, farther than even they knew, are still alive, still in power in Rome. They would snuff me out the instant I set foot in Rome, in Italy, or in Europe! I have a feeling the coming of this ship is to make sure I am dead -- by the time it leaves."

"Surely, Sire, you do not mean --" Masetto's mouth hung open in horror.

"A murderer is coming ashore from that ship, my son," added Lothario quietly, "but my work is not finished here. It must continue. If you wish to return with them I shall not keep you."

"What a sad thing this is," the younger man said, every line of him drooped discouragement as he turned his eyes away, "that I must go back."

His body followed his eyes and without a backward look the companion of Lothario's exile walked slowly across the middle court and disappeared down the stone stairway.

What Lothario's feelings were at that moment would be hard to say. The white haired, white bearded figure turned and made its way to the stairway leading to the observation platform above the walls and climbed upward with measured step. The morning sun beat fiercely upon him as he seated himself and folded his hands quietly upon his lap, just as he had done every morning for years. If longing had power, Innocent III had drawn that ship of Pietro's back to Yucatan. Many a night in dreams he had seen a vessel on the far horizon, its white sails leaning to the breeze. Now that dream became a reality and a thrill of triumph coursed through him; though an observer would have looked in vain for any outward sign or movement. He sat motionless as the Atlantia searched her way along and finally disappeared, hidden by the limestone cliffs of that inhospitable, harborless coast.

Finally he stirred, arose, and made his way down to the temple floor. At the head of the stairs he looked down. Against the rectangle of green far below no figure moved. He glanced at the sun; it was getting high in the heavens, soon time for Nanee.

He moved with more than his accustomed slowness. A numbness weighed on his every action now as he descended to the landing which led off into the ceremonial chambers, still no Nanee. The very weight of feeling which laid upon him seemed to move him on and downward, down the steps which he had not trod for five years. The misspent Pope was going down into the village of Motalpan. The god was leaving his heaven. As he descended his mind raced back over the years. He re-covered the telling of his fateful story on the walls



above. It wasn't full written yet and he wondered if he would be permitted to finish.

"Be permitted?" he said aloud, "Why of course I'll finish my work, and to the full!"

At the lower entrance he paused to raise the vines which hung over it. There was no one in sight on the terraced slopes. He stepped carefully out, as though he might be listening, and went down the terraces. The grass-covered, vine-covered ruins on either side were unchanged. His first trip up that slope with Ahmet might have been yesterday.

Then he saw Nanee; or rather she saw him and fled back to the village. Soon an excited crowd came streaming out toward him; the "Exalted Mist" they had worshipped for thirteen years. Masetto was lost among them, if he was there at all; for Ahmet lead the throng. Twenty paces apart they stopped and the villagers fell on their faces. Ahmet spoke without looking up.

"Oh, Sacred Mist, Great Visitor from the sky, land of the sun, why hast Thou left Thy temple?"

"I go to the sea to welcome the gods who come from afar," Innocent replied. "Even now they await in their winged vessel along the shore. I would welcome them."

The curious Mayans stole furtive glances at him as he talked; when he started forward again they jerked backward awkwardly to make way for him; and as he continued through the village many arose and followed him. He stopped again and turned, and again they fell like wheat before the scythe.

"Ahmet," he said, "see that a feast is prepared for them. Come, thou and thy council, with me."

In solemn procession the Pope and his worshippers filed down the long slope to the ancient stone highway, along that and then off to the left and down the path that led by many twists and turns to the sandy beaches below. At first there seemed to be no sight of sail. Ahmet and the village headmen murmured behind Lothario but unerringly he continued on to the old anchorage of the Sahib Queen. And there indeed, behind a crumbling outcropping of limestone was a ship.

Four figures had drawn a small boat upon the sand. One discerned Lothario as soon as he appeared from behind the rocks. This man shouted and the four started running toward him. The Pope hesitated not, but as his Mayan escort came into view behind him the voyagers slowed down to a walk.

One squat, long armed, blockhouse of a man held Lothario's attention. That right arm had swung the club which felled him by the fountain of San Sebastian.



How many times had he observed Orsini's henchman in the visions which had come to him in his long exile. Lothario knew Alonzo inside out. He knew the blood which was on the menacing sword that clanked and banged against the stocky legs as they moved their owner closer. There was no mistaking the still-young man who walked beside him.

"Pietro, my brother," said Lothario.

"Sire, you still alive!" came the happy reply.

The two met in a brotherly embrace warm with Latin sentiment and understanding.

"Sire," said Pietro, "these be men from my good ship, Atlantia," he pointed at the two sailors, "And this be the master of the voyage, Alonzo Cantinelli, of the house of Orsini, in Rome."

"Welcome." Lothario briefly at each one of them. "You are indeed welcome to the shores of Mayab. I trust your voyage to this new world was a swift and uneventful one."

"It was that," said Alonzo shortly, "though I have little stomach for heaving decks and rotten food."

Behind Lothario the Mayans had fallen prostrate on the beach. Alonzo's eyes wandered past the Pope to watch. His lips curled in a sneer.

"Your followers serve you well."

"You, too, shall be as well served during your stay in Mayab," replied Innocent evenly to his one-time abductor, "if you comport yourself in the manner to which they are accustomed from me."

"And if I dont?"

Lothario chose not to answer but turned to Pietro. "Have you not informed this gentleman that white men are gods to these people?"

"Aye, that I have," replied the intrepid sailor, "and where is Masetto, has he not survived these years as well as yourself?"

"He has survived, indeed," replied Lothario. "Even now he awaits in the village, no doubt. Your arrival was not unexpected."

Alonzo and Pietro exchanged puzzled glances.

"Would you like to come to the village and refresh yourselves?"

"That we would," said Alonzo.



"I'll call the others ashore," said Pietro and he turned back toward the Atlantia.

"Leave be!" snarled Alonzo. "We'll go as we are. They stay."

The Pope ordered the Mayans to rise and follow them back up the path to the village. He suggested to Ahmet that a runner be sent ahead with orders to hurry the preparation of the feast.

Alonzo had little to say during the long walk, but he was a keen observer of everything that took place and of every word that passed between the two friends of the voyage of thirteen years aback. Masetto met them on the highway.

"Well, my son, what have you been up to now?" queried Lothario.

"Preparing for the trip, Father," he almost shouted. He fell upon Pietro and hugged him, laughing for joy.

"Who might this ragamuffin be?" asked Alonzo in annoyance.

"Masetto chose to share my years of exile. He joined the Sahib Queen at Roubia, in the Moorish dominions."

The motley procession continued down the mosquito infested highway and up the sloping fields of corn. Alonzo did sweat and swear under his helmet and breastplate. He had insisted on coming ashore fully armed and armored in spite of Pietro's assurances, and still acted as though he expected some fierce warrior to spring out at him from behind every bush.

"To the murderer there is a hidden foe around every corner," thought Lothario.

Sight of the naked Maya maidens in the fields aroused the usual raw jests and knowing winks between the Italians. Pietro had probably spared no detail of his past experiences and the coming pleasures of the crew.

"Do you really think me capable of such swinish behavior at my age?" asked Lothario, of the unspoken insult in Alonzo's eyes.

The face of the Orsini henchman flushed even redder than the tropic heat had made it, but he chose not to reply.

The aged man led the way to the royal council chamber, and, this time the visitors performed the ceremony of the feathered robes with the Mayans looking on. This time the Italian renegade was seated, by the Pope himself. Innocent's also were the hands that placed the royal garment across the steel-cased shoulders. The little black eyes glittered their satisfaction. Inwardly, Lothario marked the patent weakness in the strong man's armor, flattery.



With the robe ceremony finished the white men retired to the public dining shelter in the center of the village for the feast of welcome. Women served them. During the passing of the different courses a naked maiden approached shyly with a tray of roast chicken. It was toward Alonzo, the guest of honor, that she came and brushed past one of the sailors, a lop-eared fellow. He pinched her brown thigh. She jumped away from him with a cry, spilling some of the food on the ground.

"We'll have none of that," exclaimed Lothario angrily, "Leave the women alone!"

"They're nothing but heathen," growled Alonzo over a mouthful of chicken.

"I'm with His Holiness here," Pietro spoke up firmly. "That lout could start such a fire as would consume us all. Me? I want to spend my last days at home, not in this God-forsaken corner of the earth!"

"That's a different tune from what you was singin' when we hired aboard at Ostia," whined Lop-ear.

"Mind your tongue," said Pietro. "When darkness comes there'll be plenty of time for wenchin', not before."

Alonzo spat out a piece of chicken bone and leered at Lothario, gesturing with a drum stick.

"If these heathen women are anxious to know what manner of men the Gods are, we'll show 'em!" He belched with great and obvious satisfaction and tore off another mouthful of meat.

"What would be the object of your journey to this unknown world?" Lothario addressed the question to Pietro.

"I was ordered to come," the ship captain replied shortly. "Ask him."

Alonzo pointed back at Pietro as Lothario turned to him.

"He says there's millions in gold here, aint that enough?"

At that moment Nanee came up with a gourd dish of bananas and cakes of eesh-meel and placed it in front of him. He grabbed a handful of her knee-length skirt and wiped his greasy fingers on it. Rather to Alonzo's surprise, she stood motionless until he was through, her eyes on Lothario. The squat Italian caught the look and swore under his breath as he continued eating.

Innocent sensed that the burly leader of the Orsini expedition had not quite the same self-assurance here and now which had once led him to lay violent hands on His Holiness, Pope Innocent III, that cold winter day in the gardens of the



Vatican. His boss was nowhere near to advise him, and there was just enough cowardice and superstition in his black soul to hold him half fearful of this old man who, cast out of his position of power and authority on one side of the world, had still been able to achieve the same role in this nameless community.

These feeling-thoughts flitting through the animal mind before him Innocent could read like the words on an open scroll. He even knew that Alonzo's peasant cunning sensed the reading and hated and feared it. The old man knew that Alonzo had been sent to Yucatan with two missions to fulfill. He was determined to allow the one and to thwart the other.

"Ahmet," Innocent called, "Send thou two messengers -- men, not women -- to the heaven-sent vessel which rests by the shore. Let them carry food and fresh water to the mist-born gods who remain there. There are two."

"What was all that about?" growled Alonzo.

"Refreshments for your sailors on the ship," replied Lothario. "Messengers will carry something to them."

"Like as not they'll refuse it," said Pietro with a shake of his head. "These heathen Mayans have them afraid to come ashore. Hey," he turned to the lop-eared one, "Go you with the runners to show those block-heads aboard ship that we remain unharmed and that the grup aint poisoned."



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The voyagers would have napped after the feast was over, as that was the custom of the Mayas; but the mosquitoes bid fair to be too much for them. Ahmet caused smudge fires to be lit under the dining shelter for their protection, but between the stench and stink of the smoke and the bite of the pests there seemed little choice. Alonzo noticed Lothario's indifference to the mosquitoes and that added to his annoyance. Napping was not for him anyhow and he was soon up and about, poking around the village.

His helmet and breastplate set him quite apart from the other white men, even if his truculent disposition didn't; and so there was a scattering of adults among the parade of dogs and children which followed them. Lothario went with him.

"Where's all the gold Pietro boasted of?" asked Alonzo bluntly. "This God-forsaken place is poorer than the slums of Naples! What's more, these people don't even fight!" His lip curled contemptuously, "There isn't a weapon among 'em."

"The Mayans apparently have no enemies," replied Innocent. "Neither do they have crime, nor jails, nor prostitution. Money is the root of those evils and money they neither have nor need."

"But the gold, man, the gold!" Alonzo urged with great impatience.

For answer Lothario stopped and picked up a battered water jar; they were standing by the door of a thatched Maya hut as humble and simple as the rest. The jar was heavy, perhaps a foot high and less than half as much in circumference, and of a graceful, vase-like shape. Lothario held it out to him with both hands.

Alonzo accepted it with a curl of the lip. He hefted it in one meaty hand. A poniard was withdrawn from its scabbard at the waist with the other and jabbed at the discolored surface. He scratched again with an oath. He looked up at Lothario, his teeth gleaming under his moustache.

"Mother of God, this is gold! And these swine know not that it is. Haw, haw, ho, ho." He looked around at the villagers as he laughed and jammed the dagger back into its place. The circle of onlookers stared back at him in their strangely incurious way.

"What are you staring at?" he roared. "Go on, be off with you!"

He scattered them with a great, swooshing gesture; but one youth moved too



slowly and Alonzo felled him with a blow on the head from the golden jar. The boy lay there without a sound and still as death. Innocent knelt beside him and laid a hand on the warm, brown chest. The heart still beat, fortunately.

"And what would happen if I killed him?" sneered Alonzo as Innocent looked up.

"Who knows?" was the thoughtful reply. "These people don't know violence -- as you do. In all the thirteen years I have lived here there has been no crime."

The Orsini minion merely shrugged his beefy shoulders in reply.

"If you start something, you may have to end it," warned Lothario. "You came in peace; why not go in peace? There is more gold here than your ship can possibly carry back to Ostia. Take it. It is useless here."

The beady eyes glittered at Innocent when he spoke of the inexhaustible treasure. He ignored the import of the Divine's remarks.

"Where is it? Scattered through this junk heap?" he gestured at the thatched houses. "Do I have to tear every one apart to get the gold out of it?" He said that with a calculating look as though he were about to start.

Innocent became contemptuous in his turn. "You would bother with household trinkets like these when a single vase from the temple would ransom the Holy Roman Emperor? Pah, Alonzo, surely you risked life and limb across a thousand leagues of ocean for more than water pots. Come!"

The Maya boy had by this returned to consciousness, apparently no worse for the blow. With a parting pat on the lad's head, Innocent rose. He led Alonzo through the village and picked up Pietro and the sailors on the way. They all climbed the broad terraces, passed the crumbling temples, and paused before the stairway in the cliff. Alonzo held back when Lothario pulled the vines aside.

"This leads to an open court above," the Pope assured him, "see the light up there?"

When Pietro plunged in Alonzo needed no further urging and up they all went. Lothario was winded before the landing was reached and was in no condition to keep up with the impatient feet of the others. As he lagged behind he watched fearfully when Pietro led the way past the ceremonial room landing and steadily on upward. He would hate to have had that holy place desecrated for its few objects of art when there was so much more above. When he thought of the many hundredweight of gold to be carried out in the next few days he almost stopped from the weariness of it; but he did want to be up there for the uncovering of the precious stuff and pressed on as best he could.

Alonzo was rushing about the open court, poniard in hand, pricking and



scraping every bit of gold "pottery" and statuary he could get his hands on. He was like one possessed. Pieces which would have staggered an ordinary man were picked up and carried to the stair head. It wasn't long before he had a fantastic pile. Pietro, Masetto and the others caught the fever too, and soon the pile of priceless Maya metalwork waiting to be carried down was near a ship load.

Lothario watched this de-nuding of his favorite abode with mixed emotions. Pity was uppermost, as, in his mind's eye he saw the trail of lust, murder and corruption which would follow the dumping of this unearned wealth in Italy -- if it ever got that far! Also, he saw the virtual slavery of these peaceful, defenseless people once the greedy, more virile Europeans came to these quiet shores.

"Nor is the Church mighty enough to stay the hand of the conqueror." Lothario spoke this last aloud to the unheeding men as he picked his steps carefully around the pile and moved away from the stair head.

Alonzo started down the central passageway which led to the galleries of Lothario's endless carvings and the Pope followed him. The murderer glanced impatiently into each gallery and hurried on to the next.

"Pah, empty!" he exclaimed at last and turned back, scarcely heeding the white haired figure at his elbow.

"Do you not see the words written on the walls?" asked Lothario.

"Words?" sneered Alonzo, "What have I to do with words? Cant haul them back to Italy, have too many there now! What I want is gold!"

Masetto had followed them down the passageway and as Alonzo spoke so vehemently of his soul's desire his baleful eyes fell on the hopeful Italian.

"What do you want?" he asked harshly.

Before Masetto could pull himself together to think of a reply to the pointless question, Lothario spoke up.

"There is a city full of gold not three days march down the coast."

"That's right," gulped Masetto. "I've seen it."

"But," added Lothario, "There are trained armies there also for the defense of it."

Alonzo's eyes gleamed with excitement at mention of this new source of wealth, but when he heard the word "armies" he shrugged his shoulders impatiently and started back toward the central court. "There is enough here for



our return trip and we can come back again."

At the pile he surveyed it from several sides. All were silent watching him and then he looked shrewdly at Lothario.

"Can we have the help of the heathen to carry this gold to the ship?"

Innocent was so surprised at this mollifying tone that he found himself agreeing before he knew it!

Pietro spoke up quickly, "Ye're not thinkin' o' puttin' that stuff on the Atlantia tonight, are ye?"

"Why not?" was the blunt reply.

"The Atlantia needs overhaulin' and repairs. We aim to beach her and clean the barnacles off her bottom!"

"We sail tomorrow!" exclaimed Alonzo. He banged his sword hilt with his open hand for emphasis.

"Sail tomorrow on the Atlantia and ye'll sail straight to hell!" replied Pietro with equal firmness.

Innocent stood aside, verbally, in this contest of wills. The sailor eyed the Orsini henchman for fully a minute. Alonzo fingered the handle of his poniard abstractedly, as though, through Pietro's eyes, he could see storms lashing their ill-prepared ship on the return voyage and the over-laden vessel foundering in the vast and silent sea. He settled back with a shrug of his shoulders.

"So be it," he said, "nevertheless, the gold will be moved to the beach for loading and that on the morrow." He turned to Lothario, "Thinkest thou a guard should be posted here this night?"

Innocent laughed at him. "These precious things have lain here for ten thousand years undisturbed, until you came along." The delicate allusion was beyond Alonzo's sensibilities. "Until you remove them, here they stay! As you observed in the village, gold means nothing to the Mayans."

"Aye," said Pietro with a chuckle, "if there be any robbers in Motalpan -- or whatever they name the place -- we're the ones what's doin' it and none to hinder."

Confident of Pietro's backing, Innocent refused to ask the natives to help carry the loot below that night and suggested that all descend to the village while there was yet light to follow the stairs down. He would greatly have preferred to spend the night in his sanctuary as was his wont for so many years past but he feared for the peace of the village should he not be present whilst the visitors



remained in Motalpan.

Nanee was amazed that her lord and master should desire to remain below that night. She moved with unusual speed to prepare the couch in the dining shelter where Innocent insisted on resting. One night in the village council chamber long years before had been enough, to the usual accompaniment of mosquitoes there had been added fleas, millions of them, for too many for a philosopher to cope with.

Nanee wakefully kept the smudge alight and drew a grudging word of appreciation even from Alonzo. Strangely enough, Orsini's henchman made no attempt to find a woman. Pietro and the two sailors slipped quietly away with Masetto some time during the night, and as quietly returned. In fact it was their stentorian snoring which brought Lothario sharply awake. He lay there for a long time wondering how the liaison had been accomplished so quickly and easily. He hadn't been aware or a wink or sly gesture of any sort during the day. Speculating thus on the way of all flesh, he slept again until dawn.

"Man's got to wash himself." It was Alonzo blundering about in the early light looking for a water jug, cursing everything and everybody in general. Innocent was interested to observe that he looked much less imposing without his armor. Nanee appeared from nowhere and, at Lothario's order, soon returned with fresh water. Alonzo dumped all of it in a large open bowl and proceeded to splash and blow until face, hair and beard were all adrip. It was a vastly amusing spectacle to the Pope, but his pleasure showed in the twinkle of the eye. By the time the armor-wearer had dried and clothed himself and twirled his black moustaches into their proper points Nanee was ready to break their fast with a jug of the steaming, bitter brew which Innocent had come to love. There was also a tray of delicious eesh-meel cakes and honey, and fittle, sweet melons freshly broken open.

"These heathen serve thee well, I see," observed Alonzo. He grabbed a piece of melon with one meaty paw.

"Why not?" spoke up Pietro from nearby, "Are we not gods?" He rubbed the sleep from his eyes with one hand and set out the gourd drinking bowls with the other. He poured a few mouthfuls of the steaming liquid into each one. He picked up the nearest one, sloshed the contents around a few times to cool it off and gulped it down with noisy satisfaction.

The lop-eared sailor followed suit but when the steaming bitter brew hit his unsuspecting palate he did spit and blow and curse. Pietro roared with laughter. Alonzo looked doubtfully at Innocent before reaching for his cup.

"This brown liquid has a great facility for clearing the brain of an early morning," Lothario reassured him, "and it is most delicious when boiling hot." With this he reached forward for his own cup. However, he sipped it slowly and



nibbled at a cake dipped in honey the while. "Rome at its best could never offer an early morning feast to top this."

Alonzo grumbled something about a "joint of mutton" for him, but put the melon rind aside and reached for his drink. It had cooled a little by this and he smacked his lips over the first sip. With this encouragement the sailors tried their servings a little more slowly and by the time the third round was poured they'd drained the pot.

Innocent called for more "cacao" and breakfast continued in a happy mood. Even the ever-present mosquitoes seemed less bothersome. There was a crowd of onlookers to watch the gods at table and Lothario took advantage of the moment to ask Ahmet to choose six of the strongest men to help move the gold figures and vessels from the temple down to the ship.

The pile at the head of the stairs was not enough for Alonzo and he would have caused more to be brought down. Pietro put a stop to it by saying there was more gold on the beach already than his Atlantia could carry back in one trip. This argument took place late in the second day on the sand where the ship's crew prepared to beach the ship. Alonzo made himself comfortable on the pile of gold and watched while Pietro and the sailors rigged block and tackle in preparation. At high tide the vessel was brought in and tipped shoreward by ballasting the shore-side deck. Before darkness fell that evening the sailors had made a good beginning at cleaning the barnacles off the upper side of the ship's bottom and had also recaulked one sprung seam to Pietro's satisfaction.

"It looks like the morrow will finish the outside of the hull," he reported to Alonzo.

"What else?" asked the Orsini hireling with exaggerated boredom.

"If we get the other side clean by evenin' we should be able to check and patch her runnin' gear the following day and if all goes well -- load fresh water and food --"

"The gold, man, the gold!" was Alonzo's furious interruption. "You'll be thinking of that first!"

"I'm as alive to a rich cargo as yourself!" retorted Pietro. "But it takes a good ship and better to get 'er home, you'll be rememberin'." He waited not for more words from the leader of the expedition but turned to his crew. "It's up to the village now with ye for a warm meal and a warmer bed!"

By the afternoon of the next day Alonzo was pacing the beach like a caged lion. Each look of his eyes spoke out. "This has been too easy. Someone will surely resist our taking of this treasure."

He railed at Pietro for the slow and careful cleaning of the barnacles from



the Atlantia's naked bottom, turned up to the burning sun; and his rage knew no bounds when one of the crew, hard at work, punched the sharp edge of his scraping tool nearly through a plank that was well below the water line. Caution demanded that it be replaced, yet Alonzo was all for caulking the hole with Pietro's crude pitch and making that do.

"Only a crazy man would sail a ship with a rotten hull!" retorted Pietro. "We replace that plank and any other that's so rotten a man's blade cuts through it like it was cheese."

The rest of the day was spent in searching for a tree of the proper hardness in the woods above the ship, and half the next in felling it and letting it down to the beach. Then the sailors fell to with axes and hoe-shaped adzes, trimming and shaping it to the proper width, thickness and length. Even Masetto was put to work at this.

It seemed to be tacitly understood that he would return with the Atlantia, though nothing had been said to Alonzo. And, as for Innocent's going or staying, nothing had been said about that, either. The misspent Pope knew in his own mind that he had no desire to return to Italy even had he been welcome. Europe had forgotten him and he in turn had shaken the dust of the misguided, unhappy Holy Roman Empire from his feet. All that remained to him to do in this life was to finish the record of it in the temple. Even now he was longing for the old, quiet routine which had been so rudely broken by the arrival of the voyagers. He had looked forward to their coming, had watched for it daily for years, and yet dreaded it. Now that it was an accomplished fact he would hasten the departure also. Of course there was the question of the secret instructions given Alonzo by Orsini before the Atlantia left Ostia. Undoubtedly the murderer had been ordered to finish what had originally been planned when Innocent III had been shipped off to Tunis, to complete oblivion.

The question had been in Lothario's mind and heart with the nagging persistency of a toothache for almost a week now. He yearned for its answering and ending, one way or the other.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Beginnings and endings, how many times had Lothario de Conti di Segni made them in his sixty-nine years, and now he was threatened with the end of his life unless, perchance, it was the end of the road for Alonzo Cantinelli there on the sandy beaches of Yucatan. It came about thusly.

Burning anger had been consuming him for two days. He raged through the replacing of the rotten plank and when Pietro expressed doubt about the soundness of the one next above it, Cantinelli was beside himself.

"I'll spit the man who prevents our sailing another day!" he roared and jerked his sword from the scabbard; That was the last voluntary move he ever made. The lop-eared sailor was standing behind him, a freshly sharpened adze in his hands. Quicker than thought -- the move could only have been instinctive -- he shifted, swung the heavy tool aloft and down. It cut through Alonzo's helmet like it had been so much tin.!

Wordless, the mighty figure slumped to the beach. The men of the Atlantia gathered in silence while blood spurted over the still stuck blade and soaked away in the sand. A sailor crossed himself, his lips moving silently.

"There'll be the devil to pay in Ostia," whispered another one of the crew.

Lop-ear looked blankly from one face to another. "It was so easy! And I never killed a man before, in all my life. I swear by the Virgin I didn't! When there was fightin' I always ran away."

He looked as though he were ready to cry because no one would believe him. Each was busy with his own thoughts, mostly of relief that the menacing figure had been stilled forever.

"I aint sorry," said Pietro, "rather it was him than the old one up in the village."

"What'll ye be tellin' the Orsini when we get back?" asked the first one that spoke.

"There's other places in the world besides Ostia and Rome," was Lop-ear's defiant answer. "With my share o' the gold -- and I'm expectin' my share now -- I can set myself up like a duke anywhere!" He looked meaningfully at Pietro.

The ship captain's eyes swung reassuringly from face to face, "You can lay odds nobody but his Lordship knew of this trip and he wasn't tellin' anyone. We'll



take our own sweet time about returnin' and it'll be an empty Atlantia that ties up to the quay at Ostia." He winked broadly at Lop-ear. "The whole pack of ye was washed overboard in mid-Atlantic and I never did get to the New World -- haw, haw, haw, haw!"

Roaring at his own humor Pietro set off up the beach. As an afterthought he shouted back, "Bury that sack o' guts where he lays. I'm to the village to tell his Holiness about this."

Lothario received the news with mixed feelings. He had been seated in the dining shelter with Masetto, discussing last details of the latter's departure on the Atlantia. It was only as he stood up that the Pope was aware of the tremendous load that had been lifted from him with the passing of Alonzo.

Masetto crossed himself hurriedly.

"Waste no words on the dead," said Pietro. "Better be sayin' thanks that ye're about to set sail for home -- which ye wouldn't be a doin' if jug-head hadn't split the man's skull."

"He is dead then," said Lothario quietly.

"And buried, by now!" replied Pietro emphatically. "Ye'll be leavin' this heathen land now for sure, wont ye, Sire?"

Innocent moved his head slowly from side to side and smiled at the sailor, "This is the last earthly home I'll ever know, Moctalpan and -- " he pointed back up the hill.

"Moctalpan be damned!" exploded Pietro. "Surely ye've had enough of this prison."

"Even a prison has its comforts, Pietro, and its safety. The wants of an old man are simple. They are easily supplied here. Europe is full of misery and suffering, the work of ambitious and selfish men. Someday they'll even bring their wars to these shores; but long, long after I'm gone -- for which I am grateful. I have no stomach for strife any more."

"Yer mind is made up, I see," replied Pietro regretfully, "but ye'll help with the last of the loadin' and see us safely off?"

"That I shall, my friend, and Moctalpan shall give of its precious best to speed your return to Italy." He sent Nanee with orders to Ahmet for the preparation of food for the trip.

Pietro said nothing to Lothario of his plan to deny having reached the New World upon his return, and Lothario thought not to ask how Alonzo's murder would be explained.



All was complete in another four days and a solemn, stately procession of burden bearers again marched down to the shore just as they had so long ago. Innocent was determined to accompany them as he knew in his feeble bones that this was the last trip he would ever make to these sands. He asked, but was refused, knowledge of where Alonzo's corpse was buried. Once the *Atlantia* was floated and the tides moved over the sands none of the crew could have located the spot with certainty; for the gold, with Masetto's eager help had been safely stowed aboard.

This time, Pietro knelt there in the sand, along with Masetto, Lop-ear, and the others to receive the Pope's blessing on their return journey. When the brief ceremony was over and the voyagers waded out to their ship, Pietro held back.

"There's still room aboard for ye, Sire; ye can still have my cabin."

Innocent shook his head for reply.

"I feel like a murderer!" exclaimed Pietro.

"I'll be safer here than any of you on the *Atlantia*," said Innocent with a smile, "Go along with you."

Pietro shrugged his shoulders and followed the others into the water. The anchor was up before he was aboard and the mainsail soon after.

Innocent stood and watched and waved until his tired eyes could stand the sun's glare no longer. Nanee was by his side. Leaning on the silent girl he moved slowly along up the beach toward the break in the cliffs. The Mayans followed wordlessly.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

To Innocent III in Yucatan, each day rolled up swiftly thereafter and tucked itself away in his memory. The record on the rocks grew and grew, but it was still unfinished and now he knew it was a grim race between himself and death.

Carvers, dark-haired and hook-nosed came up from the village to work with and for the god who lived in the temple. They carved in a language which they knew not; classic Latin written for them by a scholar out of mediaeval Europe. Names meant nothing to Lothario, neither did personalities. He trained them to carve and set them to work. There were smashed fingers and strained tempers -- the latter more usually on Lothario's part, but the work of transcribing a lifetime of wisdom went on.

One thing had been revealed to him. Europeans would return to this New World eventually and make it their own; new countries would arise. And part of his work would be to tell these new-comers, through these carven words, just how much effort, and failure, had gone into many attempts to open up the land to exploration and colonization. His own plan to break the news to Europe had failed for the time, but the future would bring other adventurers to these shores. They would return and spread the story wide.

\* \* \*

The voyagers were well out to sea by the time Innocent had climbed back to the village of Motalpan. As he passed through the cultivated fields at the lower level he paused to look about him. The younger children played in their naked innocence along the rows; some making a game of helping to pull weeds. The handles of the cultivating blades rose and fell in the bright sunlight. They glittered with the polish of years of use. Those closer by paused to give heed from their work as the greybeard passed by. The gods had come; the gods had gone; god remained; and the temple was on the hill. That was enough for them.

"Aye, the temple on the hill; that is my home," thought the enfeebled Pope and he moved slowly on up through the village. "If these trembling limbs get me to the top of those stairs of stone, they'll not bring me down again."

It was thoughts such as these which gave him pause along the way for one long, last look at the familiar things: the dining shelter, the council chamber where Ahmet had placed the feathered cloak about his shoulders thirteen long years before, and the terraced walk through the crumbling, vine covered grandeur that was Motalpan a thousand years ago.



"Return to the hilltop fastness and finish they work ere the sands of thy time on earth run out."

The Inner Voice spoke the words of strength. These carried his trembling limbs up the hundred ~~and~~ one steps to the temple chamber landing. He hesitated before the inky black interior, but inside awaited the meditation chair of his many restings. One foot before the other, that was the way; but lo, as he went in the darkness receded before him. It was as though he cast his own light about him, a steady glow which was shadowless because it radiated from him in every direction. From force of habit he reached for an oil lamp in the niche; then he laughed at ~~himself~~ and spoke aloud.

"What better light could man ask than this? His own."

At the table he sat down. Writing papyrus was there, undisturbed, and a quill and the berry-red ink of his own devising; but all these remained untouched. The Pope sat quietly with folded hands until the pulsing of his heart should return to the steady rhythm of complete repose. Then the thoughts came, the vision, clear and perfectly understood.

"The weight of thirteen years of worry has been lifted with the passing of Alonzo Cantinelli. Before the voyagers shall see the Pillars of Hercules, Pietro di Orsini will have gone to his reward. Centuries will pass before the all-conquering white man from the east treads these shores again. Turn thou to ~~thy~~ labors with a light heart, at one with body, mind and soul. Though the future readers of thy message are long yet unborn, time for thee is short."

The exiled Pope settled back in his chair. So, there would be more visitors from Europe but not in his life time. How he had weighted himself down with that fearful hope all these years; now he was free, free!

There were still a hundred steps to climb but the journey upward was lighter now and each step was a step of joy. In the court above he hurried to the little stairway which led him to his observation post. Up there, seated, his gaze swept out across the vast reaches of the sun-dappled sea. He was home again, really home.

Now the shimmering waters became a dazzling screen in which he viewed his passing world, looked down the endless corridors of time, back into his own primitive beginnings as a human being on this planet. Then he traced the rise and fall of each life's effort in search for Truth. He followed out each wilfull misstep which blinded him, temporarily, to the Path. He saw the guiding hand of his own Higher Self, his soul, correcting the errors and setting his steps aright. His observations brought him to the present life as Lothario de Conti di Segni, His Holiness, Pope Innocent III. From this vantage point in time he saw how the very frustrations and disappointments which had been slowly killing him at St. Peters would bring him back the next and last time with even greater force



and deeper understadding to lead, not men, but nations to that Path which he had discovered here in the crumbling ruins of Yucatan.

Pope Innocent III read well the message of the vision and fell into a deep sleep there on his meditative perch.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Line after tedious line of classic Latin was carved on the soft limestone walls of the temple as the years sped by, four of them. The wisdom of a lifetime of the struggling with men, with their ambitions, greeds and jealousies was distilled there under the steaming tropical sun. To this collection of experiences was added the all-wise revelations of the Inner Voice, now a daily companion to Innocent's self chosen labors. He was not given to speculation about the end of them -- which would be the end of his life as well; nevertheless, the vision of the end came clearly to him one day and it included a scene which made him summon Nanee from her cleaning labors.

"I would have words with Ahmet ere the setting sun of this day."

She bowed low and hurried down the stairway to the world below.

Innocent knew the Mayans were busy in the fields with their planting and that Ahmet was not above helping. That was why he left the time of coming to the leader's convenience. A call from the "Exalted Mist" was not to be lightly accepted, however; and the village chieftain soon returned with Nanee. After the headscraping bows were made, Innocent bade him stand.

"The Exalted Mist would have stones gathered on the terrace before the entrance to the stairway. Let there be clay brought there and other building materials."

"As the Exalted Mist desires," murmured Ahmet.

"The day is not far off when the Exalted Mist shall return to his home with the Sun god who dwells on high."

Ahmet's head struck the pavement again.

"The faithful attendant, Nanee, will convey the message of my departure. Under pain of death let no one come up into the temple. When the faithful one comes to the village to return here no more, let the entrance at the foot of the stairs be sealed over. With thine own hand plant vines and creepers between the stones, that the entrance comes to seem, in time, a part of the cliff."

Ahmet and Nanee kneeled with heads low until, realizing that Lothario had finished, they backed away on all fours.

"So be it, oh Exalted One," was Ahmet's mumbled compliance as he fled back to the worldly comforts of his village.



Each day of the passing years had seemingly placed Innocent closer to heaven and farther from the simple villagers. Until by this he was little more than a legend to the majority. They were content merely to come to the foot of the stairs to bring their offerings and to say their prayers. The work in which Innocent was engaged was not for their ken and finally any effort expended toward a closer rapport with the Mayans seemed wasted.

\* \* \*

It was toward the close of one fine day in the year 1233 that a premonition of the coming end sent the whitehaired figure toward the stairway as hurriedly as his trembling limbs could carry him. The carvers had already descended to the village and Nanee with them.

He leaned heavily against the wall as he descended toward the room where the great Mayan god watched with its air of timeless brooding.

The aged man found his meditation chair in the dark and composed himself as best he could to still the wild throbbing of his heart; but now, instead of assuming their wonted calm, his pulses roared on until the very cataract of sound threatened to sweep away sight, sound, feeling, life itself!

"I need air, Nanee!"

The folded hands unclasped and reached for the table before him, but even as he reached his body slumped forward, lifeless where it rested.

En victus, Te victum.