

# RED RUBY SERIES

## 3. Emerald of the High Seas



MEIRING FOUCHE

# EMERALD OF THE HIGH SEAS

*by*

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and

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## EMERALD OF THE HIGH SEAS

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### EMERALD OF THE HIGH SEAS by Meiring Fouche

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## SUMMARY

Off the coast of Barbados, a lone ship, the Red Ruby, charts a course home, its captain, Simon Verbeeck, eager for respite from pirate encounters. But a mysterious white flag fluttering from a tiny, uncharted island disrupts their journey. Driven by curiosity and a seaman's instinct, Simon investigates, unearthing a grim secret. The bleached skeleton of a man clutching a magnificent, blood-red ruby, and a journal speaking of a hidden "Paradise of Malu" and its cursed treasure.

The diary hints at a lost love, a woman named Juanita, and a perilous journey that ended in tragedy. Simon, captivated by the mystery, alters course to Barbados, determined to uncover the truth. His quest brings him face-to-face with the ruthless pirate, Jeremiah Hicks, and the alluring but enigmatic Juanita. A clash of swords and desperate escapes ensue, leading Simon down a rabbit hole of secrets and ancient curses.

The pursuit of the "Paradise of Malu" becomes a high-stakes race, with the legendary treasure and the deadly curse drawing both Simon and his enemies closer. Betrayal, perilous seas, and a haunting, singing rock all stand in his way. Can Simon navigate the treachery, outwit his foes, and claim the treasure, or will he succumb to the curse that haunts the legend of Malu? This is a story of adventure, greed, and a fight for survival in a world where the line between truth and myth blurs.

## EXTRACT

A man with a sword gestures for Simon to climb onto the plank. Once more, he looks at the fantastic singing rock. The sound of it is loud and booming in his ears.

For the last time, he looks at the shimmering reflection of the sea, and then he looks away at the beautiful Malu that will remain hidden from him.

A great cheer goes up among the pirates when Simon gets onto the plank. He stands very still there, tall, impressive, and powerful. His face is lifted up, as if he is praying. Then someone pushes him in the back with the sword, and under a cheering laugh and mockery from Jeremiah Hicks's crew, he begins to slowly walk towards the end of the plank. At the end, he hesitates again, and again the collective mocking laughter rises to the sky.

"Strike him with the sword then if he is too cowardly to walk over the end of the plank," orders Jeremiah Hicks from behind.

Simon takes one step, then he steps away into the emptiness and plunges down to the dark, slumbering water. When his large body hits the sea, he hears for the last time the thunderous cheer of those who desire his death. He sees for the last time the eyes of his Maria and he hears her voice coming to him.

Then he sinks down into the cool, dark depths. Against his better judgment, he tries to struggle to get back to the surface, but it is in vain because his hands are tied so tightly. Deeper and deeper he sinks away, his lungs swell bigger and bigger, the pressure in his chest becomes stronger as his breath forces to burst out. Even in these moments, he refuses to accept death, but he also knows how inevitable it is. He is powerless in the seemingly bottomless depths of the sea of Malu.

### **3. EMERALD OF THE HIGH SEAS**

#### **Chapter 1**

#### **BECKONING FLAG**

Directly south of the island of Barbados, the large, snow-white sails of the Red Ruby billow in the wind. It is a swift, purposeful voyage without any delay, for skipper Simon Verbeeck is homeward bound. The prow of his elegant vessel points straight towards the Cape of Good Hope. The nose of the Red Ruby is fixed directly on the vast Atlantic Ocean, because after months of adventures with pirates, Simon Verbeeck is heading to Table Bay to have his vessel refitted and to take on fresh supplies.

A little way ahead of them to starboard lies a small island, almost like a pinprick in the vast ocean. The two men in the crow's nests keep a meticulous watch on the sea and also observe the small island, for they have very strict orders from Simon Verbeeck that he does not want to run into a pirate ship. He is done with fighting for the time being and he wants an uneventful voyage back to Table Bay.

The man in the forward crow's nest raises the small brass telescope to his eyes once more. At first, he thought it was just a case of sensory deception when he saw the movement on the islet. But now that he is looking at it more carefully, he realises that it is not sensory deception. From up here, high on the mast of the Red Ruby, that object looks like a fluttering flag. A flag on a small island here in the expanse of the sea? Indeed, it is something that gleams and flutters at the top of an enormous coconut palm.

The lookout deems it prudent to share what he has seen. He knows the temperament of Simon Verbeeck when the skipper has given an order and it is not carried out meticulously. And Verbeeck's order is that anything, however insignificant, must be reported to him personally.

Therefore, the lookout shouts to those working on the deck. "There is something on the island to starboard. It looks like a flag fluttering there at the top of a palm tree. Go tell the captain."

The information has barely been shouted below when Simon Verbeeck comes bounding out onto the deck. His tall form moves quickly and purposefully to the ship's railing. He snatches his large telescope and

observes the peculiar phenomenon on the small, nameless islet in the eastern Caribbean Sea. Standing next to him is his right-hand man, Wilhelm Rieckert.

“What do you make of it, Captain?” asks Wilhelm.

He sees how Simon’s mouth tightens, how his eyebrows draw together in a frown.

“I can’t quite make it out,” says Simon. “It truly does look like a flag. But who would hoist a flag on this island? A white flag.”

“Not pirates, perhaps?” asks Rieckert with a laugh.

“Highly unlikely,” Simon assures him. “It looks to me like a small, uninhabited island.”

“Shipwrecked sailors, perhaps?” asks Rieckert.

“That could possibly be it,” says Simon, handing the telescope to Wilhelm. “You must see what you can see,” he says.

Wilhelm Rieckert observes the object for a long time and with concentration. “Well,” he says, “it can only be one thing, a flag.”

“Let us sail closer,” Simon commands. “Prepare a few cannons, in case of trouble. Get two longboats ready with an armed crew for each.”

“Are you not going ashore, Captain?”

“My dear Wilhelm,” says Simon. “You know me as a curious man. Surely I cannot see a flag fluttering on a deserted island without investigating! Who knows, perhaps they are shipwrecked sailors. That is all I can imagine it could be.”

They swing the large vessel in a wide turn in the direction of the small island. They begin measuring the depth, and they sail cautiously. They bring the large sailing ship to a halt before the outer coral reef surrounding the island. They lower the two longboats, and the armed men leap quickly into them. Then they row with all their might towards the small island.

They are still some distance away when Simon Verbeeck notices something else. On one side of the white beach lies a long black object, and when he examines it closely through his telescope, he sees that it is some kind of vessel. A peculiar vessel. Of the kind that the natives usually use in these parts. It is a rather long canoe-shaped boat with a framework on the side that is meant to prevent the boat from capsizing in the breakers.

“They are definitely shipwrecked,” he says to Wilhelm Rieckert. “There lies their vessel.”

When the two longboats run aground, their bows in the wind on the white sand, Simon Verbeeck and Wilhelm jump into the shallow water at the same time, followed by the small group of men. They walk towards the vessel first. It lies high and dry and upside down on the beach. It is almost completely covered by the sand. It is quite clear that this strange vessel, which was flung here by the water, has been lying here for some time.

Simon Verbeeck looks at it with some surprise. The vessel is still in good order, so why would it be lying here so abandoned?

He immediately starts walking in the direction of the palm tree on which the white flag is fluttering. He gets a strange feeling as he walks across the sand with Wilhelm next to him.

It is a tall, extraordinary coconut palm on which the flag flutters. The men do not speak. They get the feeling that they are involved with a secret here that might affect them deeply.

Beneath the coconut palm, Simon and his men come across a strange scene. There is a type of shelter built around the trunk, a crude shelter made of palm leaves. The shelter has already been almost completely ruined. Wind and weather have torn it apart and broken it.

And inside the shelter lies the white-bleached skeleton of a large, tall man.

Simon Verbeeck stares for some time, amazed and in wonder, at the bones of the stranger who came to find his death on this small island. A host of thoughts flash through his mind. Strange possibilities press themselves upon him.

But what amazes him most is the object around the man’s neck. Simon goes to crouch there and observes it attentively. Around the bones of the deceased stranger lies a beautiful, precious golden chain. And attached to the chain is a magnificent, deep-red ruby that is cut into an eight-sided shape. It is one of the largest rubies Simon has ever seen in his life.

“Where would it come from?” asks Wilhelm Rieckert. “Where would he have gotten such a ruby? He must have been a very special man?”

“I can tell you where this ruby comes from,” says Simon Verbeeck. “It

comes from some princely house or another. No ordinary person would be able to own such a ruby.”

Simon carefully removes the golden chain with the ruby on it from among the bones, holds it in his hand, and then hangs it around his own neck.

It is one of the men who discovers something else. At the back of the shelter stands an old rum tub. It has a lid on it. It has weathered the wind and rain quite well because it is in a reasonably good condition. Wilhelm Rieckert takes the lid off the tub, and Simon Verbeeck looks inside. There are a few pathetic personal possessions inside. A knife, a dagger, an old pistol, and then... a rather large piece of parchment. And also a goose feather and a silver pot with ink.

What a remarkable man this must have been, thinks Verbeeck as he looks at all the things. A man with a ruby around his neck, with a silver inkpot, and with a piece of parchment lying in a tub. Where would he have come from, and what would his journey have been?

They take out the piece of parchment, and Simon Verbeeck immediately sees that the writing on it is in the form of a diary.

He looks at the last entry on the parchment first. It is in a shaky, weary handwriting. The words that are written there are very simple. “Today is surely the last day,” the stranger had written there. “I feel so weak that I can barely lift my hand to write this. Farewell to the world that I have searched for so long but could not find. Farewell to the paradise of Malu that I have left and which I could never find again. I wanted so much...”

But apparently, he did not get any further. It seems he had just enough strength to put the parchment in the tub and put the lid on it. Then he had gone to lie down to die.

Simon Verbeeck quickly reads a few more snippets from the diary.

“I come from Barbados, and I am sailing south, but I have lost my way because I have become a victim of the curse of Malu... Cursed is he who searches for the treasure of Malu... Ten times cursed is he who speaks of the treasure of Malu... Die shall he who leaves the Paradise of Malu and goes to search in the great world beyond... I wonder if Juanita longs for me... The sea is so vast and so wide... I did not want to listen, therefore the curse of Malu is upon me... Ten times cursed am

I because I have spoken of the treasure of Malu... Juanita, my dearest Juanita, I shall never see you again..."

Simon Verbeeck hastily reads further snippets from the remarkable diary, which was initially written in a neat hand and in almost perfect Spanish, and yet it does not seem to him that the skeleton is that of a Spaniard. He has knowledge of such things, and he is convinced that this is the skeleton of some native or another. But what native would be able to write such Spanish, and what native would be able to wear such a ruby around his neck?

Juanita? Who is she? And the treasure of Malu. "What kind of treasure is it? The Paradise of Malu. Where is it located?" These are the questions that push through Simon Verbeeck's astonished mind as he stands looking at the parchment. He is in such a hurry to take everything in that he finally turns the parchment over slowly.

And then the shock pierces through Simon Verbeeck. On the back of the parchment, a map is drawn. It is partly a map of land and partly a nautical chart.

And when he looks at it carefully, his hands suddenly begin to tremble... On the map, the positions of certain stars are indicated. A certain region of land and a certain sea area are marked. The direction of the sun in the middle of summer is indicated on it. But for Simon, the region is a closed book. He cannot make out where it is located.

But what interests him the most is that the Paradise of Malu, as the deceased stranger calls it, is indicated on the map.

And then something else is indicated, something that interests the experienced sea captain intensely. Near the coast that is drawn there is a small dot in the sea.

Next to it, in neat letters, is written. "The singing rock."

"The singing rock?" says Simon Verbeeck aloud, so that Wilhelm Rieckert looks at him in surprise. "The singing rock? What could that signify?"

Verbeeck looks at the skeleton lying there, and he wishes the man could just speak a few more words to tell him what the secret is of this strange map. What lies hidden in the Paradise of Malu, and what the singing rock means. But the skeleton remains silent, for the white bones are almost completely covered by the sand.

## Chapter 2

### JUANITA

Captain Simon Verbeeck and his men stand indecisively on the sand. They have found something that they cannot explain at all, that makes them think in all directions, and that holds the possibility of a great adventure for them.

“What are we going to do?” asks Wilhelm Rieckert when he and Simon go to stand aside.

The large, dark seaman looks at his friend. “If I don’t find out what all these things mean,” says Simon, “then I am not worthy of my name. Here, we find a skeleton with a ruby around its neck. We find a strange diary that speaks of a paradise and a lost treasure. We find a clue in connection with a so-called singing rock. We find a map that will stir the blood of any seafarer. What do you think we will do, Wilhelm Rieckert?”

“There is only one thing to do,” says Wilhelm, “and that is to go and find out. But how?”

“We will have to do it from one side,” answers Simon. “Our very first task is to find out who the fair Juanita is. The woman whom this wanderer longed for so much. Perhaps she can tell us things that can give us a new clue. I must confess that this map does not mean much to me. I don’t know the region that it seems to refer to. But we will find it out, Wilhelm.”

Simon Verbeeck is a decisive man who does not like to let grass grow under his feet. Therefore, he turns on his heel and walks back to where the skeleton is lying and where his group of men is still standing observing it. But Wilhelm takes him by the arm.

“There is one more thing,” says Wilhelm. “Will these men accompany us? You know the superstitions of seamen better than I do, Simon Verbeeck. And in that diary we just looked at, a double curse is uttered. Cursed is he who leaves the Paradise of Malu, cursed is he who searches for the treasure of Malu. If the men know this, do you think they will follow us?”

“Time will tell, my faithful friend,” says Simon Verbeeck. “We cannot reason about it now. The first thing we must do now is to sail to