

RED RUBY SERIES

5. Quest for the Pearl of Malsia



MEIRING FOUCHE

QUEST FOR THE PEARL OF MALISIA

by

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SUMMARY

Captain Simon Verbeeck, a man haunted by loss at the hands of ruthless pirates, finds his life irrevocably intertwined with the fate of a legendary jewel and the beautiful woman he loves. When his beloved wife, Maria, is kidnapped by the notorious pirate Antonio de Santos, Simon embarks on a perilous chase across the treacherous waters of the Malsia Peninsula. But their reunion is short-lived, for fate has more cruel tricks up its sleeve.

Their paths cross again when Simon is forced to rescue the kidnapped daughter of a Malsia king, an act that earns him a treasure beyond his wildest dreams - a golden pearl of immense value. However, this newfound wealth comes with a price, as betrayal and treachery lurk within his own crew, threatening to destroy his plans and steal his hope. A bitter struggle ensues between Simon and his ruthless pirate foe. It is a contest of skill and bravery on the high seas, but just as victory seems within Simon's reach, a devastating loss changes everything and sends him on a new desperate journey.

With his ship destroyed and his wife once again in the clutches of De Santos, Simon embarks on a desperate trek into the heart of the Malsia jungle. Here, fate is a fickle mistress, and the odds are stacked against him. From encounters with treacherous crew members to perilous confrontations with rival factions, Simon is relentless in his pursuit. Driven by a fierce determination and the burning desire to reunite with his wife, Simon must risk everything to confront his enemies and reclaim his life, while battling against overwhelming odds and treachery. Will Simon's courage be enough to win, or will he fall victim to the ruthless world of piracy and deceit?

This is a story of love, loss, and the relentless pursuit of justice, set against the backdrop of a lush and dangerous world where the stakes are as high as the sails that propel them through the wild sea.

EXTRACT

The first De Santos man they encountered in their passage towards the forepeak died silently when one of Simon's men flew a throwing knife between his shoulders. A second one died before he could let out a cry, under the blow of a piece of wood that one of Simon's men had grabbed on the deck.

As far out of sight as possible, they slipped to the entrance to the cabins. They stormed inside, and then they came up against two giant negroes who were apparently guarding the door of a certain cabin.

Both were armed with swords and jumped forward when Simon and his men made their appearance.

Simon attacked the nearest man, and before the negro had even had the chance to raise his sword, Simon stabbed him through the chest so that he collapsed with a soft cry. The other one died under the combined assault of Simon's henchmen.

The door was of solid teak. But after Simon and his men had rammed it a few times with their shoulders, they broke the bolt and fell inside.

They found themselves in a smallish cabin on the side of the ship near the forepeak. In one corner on the wooden bench sat one of the most beautiful women Simon Verbeeck had ever seen in his life.

Her hair was jet black and lay in a lush bundle over her shoulders. Her complexion was that of a ripe olive. Her eyes were black and sparkling. A true pearl of the East. She was so slender and delicate that she looked like a child.

5. QUEST FOR THE PEARL OF MALISIA

Chapter 1 ENIGMATIC

The wind is southeasterly, and the graceful sailing ship, The Red Ruby, glides like a great swan over the undulating waters opposite the Malsia Peninsula. The helmsman of the large vessel holds the spokes of the helm firmly in his hands, for he knows that he must first sail half northward for a while before veering sharply to the left, into the boundless expanses of the Indian Ocean.

This morning, it is tranquil on The Red Ruby. The crew is busy without haste or excitement, scrubbing the decks, polishing the cannons, repairing a tear here and there in a sail, and performing all the hundreds of tasks necessary to keep a beautiful vessel like this running.

In the crow's nest, high against the mainmast that sways slowly back and forth with the swell, the lookout gazes far and wide over the smooth sea, for one never knows what might befall one in this part of the world. The Red Ruby is sailing across the traditional routes of the pirates towards the rich land of Siam, the equally rich land of Malsia, and other Eastern territories.

In the captain's cabin, it is equally peaceful. There, it is an idyllic scene. The heavy woodwork of the vessel creaks rhythmically as it moves through the water. At the table of red, polished kiaat wood, only two people are seated. A tall, imposing, dark man with a beard so black that it appears almost blue, a shaggy bush of black hair, and a sensitive, yet strong mouth. Opposite him sits a beautiful woman in her thirties. She is full-bosomed, she has jet-black hair like her husband, but her eyes are sensitive and her mouth sensual, making her almost irresistible to most men.

They are eating a breakfast of fruit, but their attention is not on the meal. Simon Verbeeck, captain of The Red Ruby, looks up at his wife. "My dear Maria," he says, "I still can't believe that you are here with me in this cabin. We... we have been separated for so long, my wife."

"For me, it's like a dream," she says, and her smile illuminates her entire face. "For me, it's just as unbelievable, Simon."

Suddenly, her eyes cloud over. "You haven't told me yet how that

scoundrel, De Santos, treated you. You haven't told me anything about your experiences in the hands of this notorious pirate."

She makes a small gesture with her hands and shrugs her shoulders. "It may sound strange to you, my husband," says Maria Verbeeck, "but there isn't really much to tell. Strangely enough, Antonio de Santos treated me with the utmost chivalry and courtesy. He was never rude to me. He never tried to get too close to me. He never molested me. On the contrary, he treated me like a princess. He set aside a special cabin for me. Provided me with some of the best food, and rarely encroached on my time. Now I must say that he occasionally tried to be romantic, but then I knew how to shake him off. He never imposed himself on me."

There is disbelief in Simon Verbeeck's eyes as he listens to his wife. But then he realizes that what she is saying must be the truth.

"I can understand," says Simon, "that Antonio would have treated you well. You see, my wife, you were the prize he wanted to hand over to the king of Siam. In return, he would receive from the king the fabulous Ruby of Buddha. It is a fantastic jewel."

"As far as I understand, the current king of Siam is a man of loose morals who is practically only concerned with beautiful women from all parts of the world. De Santos went to visit him and heard about the ruby and made an offer to the king that he would bring him a beautiful woman in exchange for the jewel. If I hadn't rescued you at sea in time, you would now be in the palace of the king of Siam. And I wonder if he would have treated you as chivalrously as De Santos."

"Must we talk about it? It's all over, man. And I am so proud of you for succeeding in rescuing me from the clutches of De Santos. However pleasant and obliging he may have been, for me, he remains a repulsive fellow. I can't help it now, but every time De Santos looks at me, it fills me with disgust."

Simon gets up from the table, walks behind her, and places his hands on her shoulders. He buries his face in her fragrant, luxuriant hair. "I am so glad that we are together, my Maria," he says. "Now we can continue our life together again."

She tilts her beautiful head back, and he sees that she is asking him for a kiss. Simon kisses her long and deeply. And when he finally comes

up for air, she whispers, “And what is your plan, Simon? Where are we sailing on this glorious morning?”

Her question awakens in the big man an excitement, an eagerness that makes him pace back and forth through the cabin with his hands behind his back. His shoulders are forward, his eyes are withdrawn.

“My wife,” says Simon Verbeeck, “I have just completed a good task. I am just sorry that I could not obliterate De Santos. I had him cornered well enough in the inlet along the coast of Malsia. But unfortunately, the cannons of The Red Ruby are no match for the cannons of De Santos.”

“I outsmarted him simply by maneuvering. If it comes to a straight fight, then I have to concede defeat against De Santos. That is why we are now sailing to the Cape of Good Hope. There, I want to refit The Red Ruby with sails and cannons, with supplies. Then I want to go to sea again in search of pirates.”

“Simon,” says Maria in surprise. “Surely you don’t want to engage in battle against the pirates?”

He turns around in front of the porthole through which the cool air flows. His eyes are bright and full of zeal. “Yes, my wife, that is my goal. That is my life’s calling. Piracy is a barbaric practice. It has caused me great suffering. Through pirates, I lost command of a beautiful ship. Through pirates, I had to become a miserable fisherman at the Cape of Good Hope. Through a pirate, I lost my wife and searched for her for a long time before I found her again.”

“Can you understand that this has created a grudge in me? Can you understand that it has led me to declare war against every single pirate on the seven seas of the world? Especially against De Santos, that extreme villain who is so cruel that it cannot be described. The misdeeds of De Santos at sea are legion. He not only robs, he also murders. On this ship today is a man without a tongue, a good seafarer who lost his tongue at the hands of De Santos. He will never be able to speak again in his life.”

“These are the things that have made me rebel and that have made me decide that for the rest of my life, I am going to fight against pirates.”

“But, my husband, it is dangerous!”

For a moment, he is silent, and he smiles at her so that his beard stirs.

“Yes, that is true,” says Simon Verbeeck, “it is dangerous. It is more than dangerous. To fight against the pirates is to seek your death. Because although they fight each other, they are in cahoots as soon as they face a common opponent. They will soon enough know that Simon Verbeeck is their implacable enemy.”

He begins to wander through the cabin again. “But we won’t talk about it now, my wife. This journey across the Indian Ocean to the Cape of Good Hope is a second honeymoon for us. We are just going to rest and talk and dream dreams. At the Cape of Good Hope, I will turn The Red Ruby into a vessel that will be able to face the best pirate.”

Again, he is silent for a moment and looks attentively at her. “What do you feel like doing, Maria? Should I build a house for us in the Cape of Good Hope? It is a beautiful Cape. The climate is wonderfully temperate. The rain is plentiful, the soil is fertile. They already have beautiful vineyards there. They have already planted many oak trees. The settlement there is developing nicely. Do you want to settle there, Maria?”

She looks down at her hands, and then looks up at him again. “You know well enough,” she chides him with a smile, “that the sea is in my blood just as it is in your blood. Why should I sit on land while you are traversing the sea?”

He springs quickly towards her, takes her slender brown hands in his, and presses them against his lips. “You are the most precious thing I possess. If you want to travel with me, then you can do it, because I will defend every hair on your head with my sword. I will have a large cabin arranged for you here on The Red Ruby where you can spend your days near me.”

“Thank you, Simon,” she whispers lovingly, turns her face in his hands, and looks up at him gratefully.

He refills their drinking cups with wine. He comes and sits here near her to admire her again, for she is beauty itself. Her skin has the color of olive, her eyes are bright, and her hair glistens with vitality.

When Simon Verbeeck and Maria Verbeeck raise their cups to drink to each other’s good health, the seaman up in the crow’s nest stiffens. He rubs his eyes and looks again. He looks with all the attention and concentration he is capable of. His body has stiffened. It is as if

everything has come to a standstill for him. As if even The Red Ruby is no longer moving.

Far in the background, he dimly sees the hazy blue line of the coast of Malsia. And here in the foreground, just off the coast, he sees an object that at first makes him think of a large fish. But it is not a fish. It is something that seems to be desperately heading in the direction of The Red Ruby. He cannot quite make it out. And because he cannot make it out clearly, he shouts as loudly as he can to the men on deck. "I see something eastward... I can't make out what it is."

The screaming announcement of the man in the crow's nest causes a stir on the decks. Men who are high on the cross-masts repairing sails and ropes, put their hands over their eyes and look out over the sea to see what it is that the observer sees.

Actually, it is just a small black speck on the mirror waters here along the coast, but it is coming deliberately in this direction. And those of them who have sharp eyes imagine that it is a vessel.

"Go tell the captain," shouts the man from the crow's nest.

Simon Verbeeck is just about to kiss his attractive wife again when there is a knock on the door.

"Come in," he calls out impatiently. And when the seaman enters, his headscarf respectfully folded in his hands, there is thunder on Simon Verbeeck's strong, dark face. "What is it, man?" he asks commandingly.

"The man in the crow's nest has spotted something, Captain."

Simon's eyes suddenly come alive with alertness and suspicion.

"Spotted something? What has he spotted, man? A hurricane, or a pirate, or what?"

"We can't make it out, Captain."

Without another word, Simon jumps to his chart table, grabs his telescope, and flies out of the cabin.

He springs up the stairs to the foredeck, pulls open the telescope, and looks in the direction where the observer in the crow's nest is pointing. Simon Verbeeck looks long and attentively through the telescope at the object that is gliding over the water. What it is, is quite clear to him, but the more he looks at it, the more excited he becomes, the more astonished.

He lets the telescope fall once. He brings it to his eyes again. He simply can't fathom this thing. He scans the horizon, but it is empty. He doesn't see a sail or anything. All that disturbs the stillness of the sea is the object that is coming from the direction of the coast of Malsia toward The Red Ruby.

When he turns around, Simon gives a few short and powerful commands. The helmsman turns the helm sharply. The Red Ruby leans low and swings its bow in the direction of the land. Soon the large ship is sailing straight at the black speck that interests everyone here on The Red Ruby so deeply.

Again, Simon Verbeeck looks at it through his telescope. His seamen stand curiously around him, but he is silent. He does not say what he sees, because what he sees is so strange to him that he cannot explain it...

Simon Verbeeck remains standing on the bow of his vessel as it sails quickly towards the object.

The seamen must wait patiently until they can recognize it, and when they finally recognize it, they look at each other surprised and astonished.

It is an ordinary vessel. One of the kind that people in these parts of the world use.

What strikes them most is that the long skiff is being rowed forward with all its might. There is haste in the movement of the oars. The six or so men in the skiff lean low forward, then vigorously pull the oars backward, and the narrow snout of the small vessel cuts manfully through the surf.

The men are speculating about what it might mean. Who are they who are coming here in such haste from the coast of Malsia to The Red Ruby?

Are they white men, or are they natives? That is the question that keeps everyone occupied.

They are close to the skiff before they can see that there are six men in it and that they are natives.

"What could it mean, Captain?" asks Wilhelm Rieckert, Simon Verbeeck's right-hand man.

"I wish I knew what it meant," says Simon. "It must mean something,