

VIRGIN OF THE SEA SERIES

1. The Virgin of the Sea



MEIRING FOUCHÉ

THE VIRGIN OF THE SEA

by

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and

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SUMMARY

Simon Verbeeck, the great sailor with his long black hair and elegant black beard, declared war against all pirates. Pirates had not only robbed him of the Company ship of which he was the captain, but they had also taken away his beautiful young wife. Simon couldn't find a ship with which to bring his revenge to the pirates' doorstep. He and seven of his crew members ended up one day in a boat in the Cape of Storms, along the southwest coast of South Africa. In the fierce storm, their boat capsized, leaving them at the mercy of the turbulent sea. But then they saw a ghost ship sailing past them, with no crew on board. Simon and three of his men miraculously managed to board the strange ship.

They found no living soul on board, and everything seemed to be in perfect condition, except for the sails and ropes that had been badly damaged by the wind. Then they heard an unearthly scream coming from somewhere in the ship, which sounded as if it came from the dead, giving them the fright of their lives. They then made a shocking discovery that placed wonderful treasures in their hands, but to obtain them, they first had to solve certain secrets. And then Simon and his faithful follower Wilhelm Rieckert set off on the long, long journey they had dreamed of for so long in searching for Simon's wife.

EXTRACT

When Simon Verbeeck hit the water, he took a deep breath and filled his lungs thoroughly. The weight on his leg quickly pulled him down, for he was powerless to do anything about it. He sank rapidly to the muddy bottom of the river, where the water mixed with the saltwater of the sea. It felt like an eternity in which he was submerged. Deeper and deeper he sank until he finally hit the bottom, where he lay helpless. He felt his lungs swell and a great drumming in his head. He struggled desperately against the ropes binding his hands, but in vain. And even in these moments of death, where he was so desperately fighting to stay alive, it flashed through him how he had seen two figures swim away from the side of the pirate ship, at that moment just before he had dived off the plank. And that dark hair, that floating black hair, was unmistakable. One of those figures was his Maria. In a split second, he even felt grateful that, although he might die, his Maria might be saved. He could not understand it at all, but he knew that it was not a dream tormenting him.

1. THE VIRGIN OF THE SEA

Chapter 1

A SAIL IN THE STORM

There is a thunderstorm at the Cape of Storms, and the waves of the southern Atlantic Ocean roll in from the west like green dunes, their manes pure white, with foam flying before the feared southwesterly wind.

The eight men in the longboat struggle with the oars to keep the small vessel's bow into the wind. It is their only protection against the danger of being engulfed by the raging sea, which one moment boils up into waves that look like mountains, and the next moment sinks into deep, swirling pits where the foam spins, and it seems as if the bottom of the great water will be exposed. Their faces and clothes are soaking wet, their hair dripping, and their muscular arms are already numb from wrestling with the stormy sea.

"Keep her steady," roars the tall, dark man rowing near the bow. "Keep her bow into the wind," shouts Simon Verbeek, a large, rugged, and powerful man with flowing black hair and a graceful black beard.

"I'll keep her bow into the wind," calls the man at the helm, Wilhelm Rieckert, a smaller but sturdy blonde fisherman who has his hands full keeping the "Nooi van Amsterdam" steady in the sea. Occasionally, the tiller swings so violently that Wilhelm Rieckert has his hands full just staying in the boat.

The other men do not speak. They are gripped by fear, here in the raging sea that threatens to engulf them at every turn. On Simon Verbeek's

orders, they row as best they can, not to make progress, but simply to keep the "Nooi van Amsterdam" steady and true, with her bow straight into the stormy waves, straight into the southwesterly wind, for they know that if their fragile vessel should turn sideways, it will be the end of them.

They ride over the water hills, they sink away into deep pits, climb out the other side, and all the while they are heading into the wind, further and further away from the misty, almost invisible mass of Table Mountain. They know these waters well, for they fish here every day, not far from Cape Point. But this is a storm of storms. In their eventful seafaring careers, none of these men had encountered anything like it. Today, they understand again why the Cape of Good Hope is often called the Cape of Storms. If ever the old Cape deserved that name, it is on this day.

"Where are you driving us, Simon Verbeeck?" shouts Wilhelm Rieckert from the helm, gripping the tiller with renewed strength. "Are you driving us to the Ice Sea?"

The tall man at the front wipes the salty foam from his eyes.

"I'm driving you nowhere; I just want us to stay safe. Keep her steady, brother, keep her steady. She must not sway."

Here in the dark danger, there is even a strange excitement in the powerful Simon Verbeeck, for he loves storms. He grew up on the sea. He started on one of the large vessels of the Dutch East India Company when he began sailing to the East as the captain's servant. In those days,

he learned everything there is to know about a ship on the long voyage from Amsterdam to the beautiful ports of the East. Between Amsterdam and Java and between Amsterdam and Bombay, Simon Verbeeck learned how the sky looks when storms threaten. How to let the large vessel ride when the wind catches you from behind. How to hold her when a hurricane hits, and how with great patience and courage to face the danger when the wind suddenly dies down and the sea becomes as calm as a mirror.

Yes, this Simon Verbeeck, who today is a well-known and prominent fisherman in the Cape waters, knows the dangers of the sea very well. However, Simon Verbeeck is a bitter man.

He did become a great sailor. A seafarer like few, with intimate knowledge of all the seas and all the corners of the earth. A man who can immediately tell you to which power a large sailing ship belongs the moment the mainsail billows above the horizon.

And here he is now, riding the thin ribs of a longboat through a devastating storm. This because he clashed with a pirate ship that crushed him in the waters near Java. He and Wilhelm Rieckert, his faithful friend, barely escaped with their lives. They swam for miles through the wreckage, and if they had not each grabbed a large barrel, on which they were mercifully washed ashore by a sea current on the coast of Sumatra, he would not now be sitting here with his wet beard in the longboat.

That day, when the pirate's cannons sent his elegant ship to the depths, Simon Verbeeck swore an oath that he would devote the rest of his life to the destruction of the world's pirates. Together with Wilhelm Rieckert, he sailed back to his beautiful Amsterdam. He wanted to start over somewhere. He applied to the authorities for a new vessel, but this time an armed vessel with many cannons. The hunt for pirates had become an obsession for him, but the Company refused to listen to him. They were not willing to support a man who wanted to pursue pirates. Shocked and disillusioned, Simon Verbeeck wandered around Amsterdam, trying to find a private lender who would enable him to build or buy his own vessel and equip it so he could hunt the ships with the skull and crossbones on their flags. But no lender in Holland was willing to raise a hand against the terror of piracy. Everyone assumed that Simon Verbeeck would be defeated by the pirates.

So disappointed and disillusioned was this strong seafarer that he set sail for the Cape of Good Hope because he imagined that in that new settlement, there would be more hope of achieving something. He had spoken with sailors who often visited the Cape of Good Hope, and they had told him about the great expansion happening there in the new colony started by Johan van Riebeeck. They had impressed upon him that fortunes were to be made at the Cape.

Simon Verbeeck then set sail for the Cape of Good Hope, followed by his good and faithful aide, Wilhelm Rieckert.

But at the Cape, Simon's disillusionment was even greater, for instead of a large and flourishing settlement, he found a small and struggling colony, where there were not many prospects and where opportunities were rather scarce.

There, he first did carpentry for the Company, but later Simon decided that the call of the sea was too strong for him. He built himself the longboat, found a crew, and began fishing. With that, he would slowly accumulate money. For some reason, he felt that something awaited him here at the southern tip of Africa, where the great ships come sailing in like swans from the Far East and from Europe. He was convinced that an unexpected opportunity would present itself to him here, to become his own master at sea, to own his own vessel, and to set out against the pirates who had become such a scourge for all seafaring.

That disaster at sea, near the coast of Sumatra, had cost Simon Verbeeck dearly, for not only was his reputation as a sefarer tarnished that day, but much more had happened to him.

Here, where he now sits in the bow of the longboat, with the southwesterly wind of the Cape waters raging in his face, he relives that scene in his thoughts. With a great load of spices, Oriental food, and precious stones, his vessel was on its way back to the ports of Holland that day. Then he saw the large billowing mainsail appear on the horizon, and he saw the swift vessel cleaving the water, proud and majestic, like a swan of the sea. He was immediately on guard and called his entire crew on deck. They ripped open the cannon hatches,