

And then they made me their chief

Bein' my report of the obtainin' of the coveted Harley Barbie, as promised to Kidd in return for her forgivin' me trespasses upon her home, hearth an' plumbin' in the heat of a highly agitated shower-attachment moment ...

Havin' explained to Mr. Blake the necessity o' me bein' away for a time, I set sail on The Libertine Trailer, in search of an answer to this most puzzlin' dilemma. Truth be told, I were stymied; \$500, how were I to raise that kinda coin? However, if it be that or the tuna torture, I knew I had to give it me best attempt, as it were. After aimless sailin' fer some time, I came upon a small, unfamiliar island. I checked me compass, found it to be pointin' south, which did not strike me as a particularly cheery omen. Still, nothin' ventured, an' all that ... so I decided to investigate, expand me horizons, in a manner o' speakin'.

I noticed nothin' unusual at first – a nondescript island town, main street, shops, businesses. However, there were one standout ... no citizens. Not a soul walked th' streets. I eventually found meself meanderin' through a stretch away from town that were relatively undeveloped, with sand, scrubby brush, some palms (South Seas, mate) ... an' soon I saw a large red brick building in the distance. It looked to be a gatherin' place of sorts, not quite church, not quite auditorium. As I approached, I could hear voices, indicatin' a considerable crowd. I also saw a few small cars parked, though they didn't look to be near enough transport fer th' number o' voices I reckoned I were hearin'. I crept up to the building an' hid around one wall, an' then saw a dark sedan comin' toward th' place. I can't say why I felt compelled to hide. I were armed, an' the place weren't marked against trespassers. Yet somethin' made me duck behind th' wall as the car came closer, parked, an' several men climbed out. I got a look at 'em before they entered th' building; they looked to be of no nonsense, an' of the roughest company I'd seen since me extreme engagements in piracy during me Fiji days. They also was armed fer bear, an' I couldn't help but consider me decidedly inadequate pistol an' sword, in comparison. As they opened th' door to the place, I could hear the voices inside louder, engaged in chantin' or prayer. Then th' last bloke stopped at th' door, paused, looked up, said "I heard something." I saw him start to turn me way, an' froze fer a second. I then noticed a large barrel against th' wall, so I quickly pulled th' lid up an' climbed in, findin' meself up to me neck in liquid, I couldn't clock what it was. It was cold, a bit thicker than water, an' had a smell to it I couldn't place. Didn't give it too much thought at first, because I were too busy bein' thankful fer a place to hide from the big bloke, who just then came 'round the corner. I held me breath, finally heard him an' his mates agree it were nothin', and enter the building. I stood up, removed th' lid, an' was able t' see that I'd been hidin' in a barrel-full o' bleedin' whitewash. I started to climb out, slipped an' fell back in, this time submergin' meself from head to toe. A second attempt were successful, however, an' I hauled meself out.

As I stood in th' sun, covered in th' white stuff, I contemplated what I should do ... largely favorin' the option o' headin' back to me ship an' callin' the whole experience a lost cause. Then the door opened, an' two o' them men I'd seen earlier came out. I didn't wait t' find out their intentions, savvy? Decided instead to trust me instincts ... which means I turned an' ran. I ran to the other side o' the building, where I saw what looked like an old-fashioned fire escape-type fold-up ladder, which led to windows higher up on the side o' the building. I took off me sash (advantages in dressin' in layers, mate, take note), made a lasso, an' managed to rope part of the railing, pullin' meself up to the first step. I then made me way up the steps an' climbed into one o' the windows. I found meself on a narrow balcony of sorts that ran all 'round the huge room. I saw that there were several levels exactly like the one I now found meself on; I were on the lowest one, about thirty feet above th' main floor, with four more levels above me. All these walkways ran all 'round the building; from these narrow precipices, one could see all activities on th' floor below. Which is now where I focused me attention.

The whitewash were dryin' fast on me, an' I rubbed at th' stuff that had gotten into me eyes, tryin' to see what were happenin'. It were quite a crowd, to be sure, men, women an' children alike, all in colorful dress, all talkin' at once, seemin' most agitated. I also could see several men facin' the crowd, standin' almost directly below where I balanced meself. A couple of 'em looked much like the blokes who had chased me earlier, but from the angle I were at, it was hard to tell. I was at a loss, I weren't sure what to do, whether I should slip out th' way I'd come in, or wait a bit longer an' observe. Then the decision were made fer me; I leaned a bit too far over the edge an' slipped from me perch. I yelled out as I plummeted downward, landin' smack on top o' one of the men facin' the crowd, knockin' us both to the floor. Everyone went unnaturally quiet, right down to the last child. I heard the bloke underneath me groan, he pushed me off ... I looked at him, an' I shook me head, thinkin' I must be seein' things. MALACHI! He mumbled, sat up slowly, rubbin' his head, looked at me, an' went all red-faced. "Manouche!" he exclaimed. This was quickly followed by some select oaths that I believe are best deleted here, for our younger an' more sensitive readers.

"Blimey, mate, apologies," I responded, stammerin', wishin' me own head would cease its throbbin'. "Jus' a little accident ... " I tried brushin' him off, leavin' instead a few streaks o' the bleedin' whitewash. He stood up, grabbed me roughly an' pulled me to me feet. He were beyond furious, an' I realized with horror that I'd somehow managed to interrupt another of his schemes. This were just the type o' thing I used to do to him years ago in Fiji, always inadvertently, mind ... an' I could tell by th' cold look in his eye that we were sharin' the same basic memory at that moment, with vastly differin' sentiments.

I saw him clench a fist, an' I reckon he would've throttled me then an' there but for a wave o' noise from the crowd. A few men stepped forward, talkin' in a tongue I didn't recognize; but from Malachi's responses to them, an' all appearances an' gestures, I gathered that they were insistin' he let me go. He finally scowled, snapped off something to one of 'em, an' released me. The men from th' crowd moved forward an' ushered me past the rest o' the crowd, into a small room toward th' opposite end o' the great room. They brought me in, an' showed me somethin' that explained volumes ... an icon of sorts, very much like an Innuite totem pole, with an assortment o' carved images, animals, an' human countenances. At th' very top were one that looked more than a little familiar ... it were the spittin' image of yers truly, an' it were all in white. With th' whitewash, I apparently looked exactly like a diety they thought very highly of, indeed. They bowed before me, an' led me to a corner of this room, where they kept a huge chest full o' riches. It were a plunder t' be reckoned with, mates, is all I can say. I stared at it hungrily, an' one o' the native blokes picked up a gold jeweled crown from th' chest an' placed it on me head. It were oversize, slipped a bit, but he seemed as happy with th' result as if he'd sculpted me from clay himself. His mates apparently agreed with him, an' the lot of 'em said somethin' that sounded most respectful an' agreeable, an' proceeded to bow before me. I did me best to gather me wits an' play along, behavin' as royally as I could, tryin' to ignore Malachi glowerin' at me from behind the other onlookers who'd come to worship me. I subtly filled me pockets with some o' the treasures from the chest, just before they reverently ushered me back out of the room, through th' hall, out the door into th' sunshine, the entire crowd now followin', an' chantin' something I couldn't understand, but once again, sounded quite agreeable an' respectful-like.

They took me back the way I'd come earlier on me onesies, then turned off th' road into a wooded area, where we soon reached a small an' very beautiful lagoon. Huge, colorful flowers, a waterfall, tropical paradise. They led me past th' water, to a sandstone platform, an' had me step up onto it an' stand in th' middle. Several women came forth an' placed items in front o' me, like offerin's ... food, animal skins, odd statues sculpted in clay. I looked at the stone on which I stood an' saw a design carved into it, like a pentangle. So intent I was examinin' this, I didn't notice the hush that had come over th' crowd. When I finally did, I looked up, an' saw that th' same group of men who'd taken me to the altar room now stood starin' at me. One o' them

stepped up next to me, brought forth a scroll o' brown paper an' read from it, placin' his hand on me head, an' the crowd bowed their heads as he read. He then stepped back down on th' ground, joinin' the others. They reached to their belts, produced small bows an' arrows. They loaded up, bringin' th' points o' the arrows to face me ... an' it dawned upon me that I were to be a sacrificial pincushion, in a manner o' speakin'.

"Ahh, now, hold up there, mates! Y'don't want t' be doin' anything rash, savvy?" I tried to convince 'em, musterin' up a surprisingly steady an' charming smile, if I do say so meself, under th' circumstances. I'm not sure I'd be 'ere to relay the tale today if not fer what happened next. Whatever his motivations fer exposin' me fraud were, Malachi now quickly burst forth through the crowd, ran up to me, an' splashed me with water he'd scooped from th' waterfall into his hat ... thereby washin' away some o' me whitewash, as it were. I felt the stuff run down me face, an' I felt the shock wave ripple through th' observers, who was slowly realizin' they'd been had. Malachi grabbed my arm an' pulled me from th' platform, an' we made a mad dash back to me ship, the natives in hot pursuit. We felt arrows zingin' past us; fortunately, the element of immense surprise an' their fury seemed to affect their aim. We made it back to me ship in one piece an' set sail without further ado. Once safely out of range, we watched the natives rantin' an' ravin' on th' beach where we left 'em behind, shootin' arrows an' visitin' curses upon our heads that we'll no doubt 'ave to face up to someday. Truth be told, mates, I felt a twinge o' remorse ... though not so much that I turned around an' returned th' crown an' pockets-full o' treasures, savvy? As we sailed homeward, Malachi an' I engaged in a few gentlemanly /womanly games o' chance, his goal obviously to lay his hands on all he'd seen me pilfer. Alas, it weren't his day, an' I not only thwarted his efforts, I also won a small ship from him. I smothered a laugh ... then, noticin' the murderous look in his eye, an' decided he'd had enough. After all, he'd saved me life. So I canceled all debt, an' even went so far as to generously go halvsies on me plunder with him ... though I did insist on keepin' the crown.

And so, to conclude this report, I docked the Libertine Trailer at Ile-de-Mattele, a port-o'-call en route back to Deppville, where I exchanged some of the jewels fer cold hard cash. I then hastened meself to a large an' varied emporium, which I'd contacted previously, knowing they would 'ave the holy grail I sought ... the Harley Barbie! I laid me money down, received the coveted item, smiled me thanks, made one more stop at th' local tavern to replenish libations fer me journey home ... an' here I am.

As is often said, to the winner go the spoils. Kidd, mate, I give to ye that which ye seek ... an' I thank ye again fer the opportunity to redeem meself. It's me hope that we can now get past all this, an' once again become that well-oiled pirate machine what strikes fear in th' hearts o' lesser men, an' on occasion, Deppville's finest. Oh, an' final note, Kidd ... pay no mind to that small streak o' whitewash on th' packagin'. I 'ave it on good authority that it won't affect th' worth of the Barbie itself. Cheers, mate.

I remain your humble Boatswain,

Manouche Roussel
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