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by

JÉAN S. MacLEOD



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## CHAPTER ONE

THE man stood at the edge of the Bluff gazing down over Frenchman's Cove at the little group sitting on the coral sand. Taller than average, his taut jaw hard to the point of ruthlessness, his eagle gaze surveying the scene before him with calculating intensity, he looked a man used to command, autocratic in his dealings when the occasion demanded a firm hand, but fair in all things. The steel-grey eyes searching the beach with its slanting coconut palms trembling in the morning breeze took in all the land between South Point and Pelican Head, the rich land surrounding Succoth which had remained neglected for fifteen years. The signs of poor husbandry were clear to be seen, yet there was a certain charm about the dilapidated old house nestling behind its sheltering screen of palms with the low, rugged spur of hills rising behind it to shield it from the east wind and the incredible blue of the Caribbean Sea stretching before it to the western horizon with only one small island between.

For several minutes the intruder stood there immovable, his eyes narrowing as he scanned the rough land sloping away from the craggy Bluff to the scrub-covered area which ended abruptly at Morgan's Reach. It was all good land which had been allowed to run to seed and he turned away from it impatiently, looking back across the Cove to the huddled figures basking idly in the sun. Only one of them faced towards him, and she seemed to be so intent on what was being said by the others that she apparently did not notice him. The other three had their backs to his rugged vantage-point, oblivious to the fact that they were being watched. In their scant bathing gear they looked like a conclave of Indians, he thought dismissively as he turned abruptly to

walk back across the Bluff, but no doubt they were part of Succoth and, therefore, interesting.

Before he passed completely out of sight he paused once more, gazing out towards the Atlantic with a ruthlessness about his jaw that suggested a firmness of purpose which would not be denied.

The four young people sitting down in Frenchman's Cove had formed a tight circle, hugging their bare knees as they dug their toes into the warm, silver sand, but suddenly one of them—the boy—lay back, shading his eyes with his hands.

'It's an odd situation,' he observed, 'but one we can't do very much about. After all, we more or less expected to be turned out once the island changed hands.' His blue eyes sought the bluer horizon's rim where a three-masted schooner sailed lazily, blown by the warm trade wind on its journey to one of the islands. 'Of course all this is idyllic, but we didn't expect to go on living on Millo for ever.'

'You didn't,' his elder sister agreed, turning on her side to look at him, 'and I'm resigned to the idea now, but what about Jacinthe and Makeda?'

She looked across at her younger sister who sat next to Jacinthe, who was their cousin, aware of the tension in their faces as they listened.

'Makeda,' she persisted, 'what are you going to do?'

The girl on the other side of the circle seemed to shake herself free from some impossible dream as she unclasped her knees and leaned back on her hands. She could feel the warmth of the sun on the sand and the caress of the gentle wind on her golden skin, and she lifted her face to it for a moment before she answered her sister's question.

'I don't know, Abi. Perhaps I haven't any real choice.' Her mouth grew rebellious and her eyes were suddenly dark with resentment. 'I never thought we would have to leave the island; I imagined we were on Millo for the rest of our lives. Oh,' she added when her sister would have rejected the idea out of hand, 'I don't mean you. I know you're dedicated to your nursing, and I envy you because you've got what you wanted. Going back to New York is your idea of complete



fulfilment, though you must feel sad about Millo, too. You won't be able to come here much longer to lie in the sun and go back "renewed". You've said that often enough.'

'There are other islands,' Abi answered philosophically, shaking back her long auburn hair. 'Other places in the sun.'

'Such as Virginia Beach or Miami!' her brother suggested with a mocking smile. 'Or even the Bahamas.'

'The Bahamas are nearer to New York,' Abi pointed out. 'It will all depend on where Mother decides to settle.'

'She won't make a final choice just yet.' There was a degree of hope in Makeda's voice as she uttered the swift prediction. 'She said so the other day. She'll wait till you graduate, Heber.'

Her brother turned over on to his chest, scrutinising the tiny grains of coral sand as he ran them through his strong brown fingers.

'That will take another year—maybe two, if I fail to pass first go,' he frowned. 'Then—who knows? I may decide to go to England, since it was where we were born.'

Eagerly Makeda turned towards him.

'Does that mean you hope to follow in Father's footsteps?' she asked. 'Heber, it's a wonderful idea, and he would have been so proud if he had known. But perhaps you told him before he went away on that last fatal dig?' she added. 'Before he left Millo for the last time.'

Heber shook his head.

'No, I didn't,' he confessed. 'Maybe it was—afterwards that I gave it my undivided attention.' He got to his feet, stretching his thin body in the sun. 'But aren't we jumping the gun a bit? I have another year to do before I'm a qualified geologist and a good many things can happen in a year.' He looked down at Makeda. 'You're the only one who'll be immediately involved,' he pointed out, 'if you mean to go on with the research you were doing for him.'

'I intend to finish his book.' A determined look came into Makeda's eyes, making her appear older. 'It meant more than anything else to him, in the end,' she added, 'and we were half-way through the first set of notes when he left for



Cairo. I've carried on since then as best I could, but I can't do any more till we've heard from the London solicitors. If there are no more notes among his personal effects,' she added unsteadily, 'then my usefulness will be at an end, but I feel that there must be another batch of them on their way here, enough to complete the MS and send it off to the publishers.'

Her father, an eminent archaeologist, and his colleague, Professor George Hunt, had disappeared six months previously on a journey from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, where they had hoped to find further evidence in support of their theory that King Solomon's Mines of Ophir had not been the only source of riches to be found beneath the desert sands. The copious notes which Makeda had been sorting and finally typing for him had made her heart pound with excitement, and she had been glad of her comparative isolation on their Caribbean island while she applied herself to her lengthy task. Of his three children, she had been the only one who had been content to stay on Millo, dedicated to his memory as she worked on his book, knowing that it had been his great ambition to set the facts of many years of diligent research and endeavour before an interested public. She had come to consider herself his chief assistant, as far as the book was concerned, and she had known herself greatly beloved. All the warm affection of which she was capable had been given to the quiet man who had brought her up to appreciate the beauty of the world and recognise the wonders of the past, and she had been greatly shattered by his untimely death.

Of course, they had all been shocked in their separate ways when the news had been relayed to them from London—Abi, and Heber, and Jacinthe, and her mother, least of all perhaps, because Dolly Garland had never really understood the man she had married in London twenty-five years ago. Their interests had been poles apart, and even on Millo they had known the restlessness of divided affections. After the birth of her son, Dolly had had little time for anything else, and latterly she had spent much of the year in England, intent upon his education, leaving her daughters in the care of her

husband, who had leased Millo fourteen years ago in the hope of providing his family with an established home.

Dolly had rejected Millo almost immediately, although she found it a convenient refuge from England during the winter months. Mammy and Ben had more or less taken her place in her daughters' affection and Jacinthe had joined them on Millo during the school holidays, a small, frail orphan when her parents had been drowned in a boating accident off Jamaica. With no one else to turn to in such a dire emergency Jacinthe had come to consider herself part of the Professor's family, helping out in the house when she had finally left school and seemingly without any other ambition than to stay on Millo for the rest of her life.

Both Makeda and Jacinthe were true children of the Islands, loving their home, however dilapidated it might have grown over the years, and Jacinthe seemed to be paying scant attention to the argument on hand. A quiet, introspective girl, she looked much younger than her seventeen years, her fair hair, which she had dried in the sun, held back from her thin, oval face by two elastic bands, her body scarcely developed and burned as brown as a Carib's. They had been swimming all morning, each with the distressing knowledge in her heart that their absolute freedom might be ruthlessly curtailed by the dire change of circumstance which neither of them had expected.

Makeda looked across the circle at her silent cousin whose gaze was fixed on the higher ground on the far side of the Cove.

'What's the matter?' she asked. 'You look surprised.'

'Someone has been standing on the Bluff watching us,' Jacinthe said, speaking for the first time.

They turned with one accord to look across the narrow stretch of water between the sands and the spur of rock which ran down into the sea on the northern side of the Cove.

'There's nobody there,' Abi pointed out unnecessarily. 'You must have been dreaming.'

Jacinthe held her breath for a moment.

'I don't dream all that easily.' She found Abi's abrupt materialism disconcerting at times. 'The man was there while you were arguing. I saw him because I was the only one facing that way. He was very tall and he wore a red shirt and blue jeans and stood out quite clearly against the sky.'

'It could have been old Ben or one of the children,' Abi suggested indifferently as she rose to pull on her cotton shift.

'Mammy never allows the children on to the Bluff, it's too dangerous,' Jacinthe pointed out. 'Besides, it was a man. I saw him quite plainly, no matter what you say!'

'Well, he's gone now.' Abi moved her attention to the line of coconut palms slanting across the beach at the southernmost point of the island. 'Anyone ready for a swim?' she asked.

'We've been swimming all morning.' Makeda rose to her feet, digging her toes into the warm sand as she looked back towards the Bluff. 'Someone ought to go up to the house just in case we *have* a visitor.'

'Mammy will cope,' Abi declared. 'Besides, we're not likely to have visitors until the trader comes in tomorrow morning.'

'Unless it was a yacht,' Makeda mused, her brows drawn together in a swift frown.

'They would have come into the Cove. It's the best anchorage,' Heber reminded them as he made ready to follow Abi back into the sea. 'But maybe you'd better check.'

Jacinthe followed Makeda up the beach.

'I wasn't day-dreaming,' she protested. 'Really, I wasn't! The man was there. He walked away across the Bluff in the direction of Green Turtle Bay.'

'I'll go and see,' Makeda volunteered without further ado. 'You go back to the house in case he's gone round the head of the Cove towards Succoth. Mammy might not know what to say to him.'

'I think he was a complete stranger.' Jacinthe stopped in her tracks to look at her cousin, her blue eyes full of a deep concern. 'Supposing it has something to do with Millo changing hands?'



Makeda gave the idea a moment's consideration, her cheeks flushed, her eyes unusually hard.

'Why should the island be involved?' she demanded. 'If this—person had something to do with Millo changing hands we would have heard about it before now. Mr Pettigrew would have written to us from Barbados, or come over with the trader if it was really urgent. Besides, Mother's over there just now and she will probably bring back the latest news.'

'When she comes,' Jacinthe murmured beneath her breath. 'You do know she intends to go to England with Heber?'

'She said she might,' Makeda acknowledged abruptly, 'but Heber may not want her to go. After all, he's nearly twenty-two. She can't go trailing after him for the rest of his life.'

'It's going to be difficult for Heber,' Jacinthe sighed. 'Of course, she's very fond of him.'

'Which isn't exactly an absolute excuse.' Makeda was reminded of her father, baffled and angry by her mother's complete indifference to him. 'I think Heber will tell her so, in the end,' she concluded.

'She'll be terribly hurt,' Jacinthe suggested. 'Don't you want me to come with you to Green Turtle?'

'In case I'm abducted, or something equally terrifying?' Makeda laughed. 'Your "man on the Bluff" must have come by sea, since there's no other way of reaching Millo, but I hardly think he'll be a pirate, as you seem to fear! He's far more likely to be someone off a yacht exploring to stretch his legs before they set sail again, and we've probably seen the last of him—if he was ever there at all!' she teased.

'Makeda! I wouldn't say it if it wasn't so,' her cousin protested. 'I'm not like you, full of imagination and the determination to keep Millo for yourself.'

'It *is* private,' Makeda returned, 'but that's not my only reason for wanting to keep it so. You know I love Millo and—and what I'm going to do without it I can't tell!'

Standing in the deep shade of the coconut palms, she looked very young and completely vulnerable. She was eighteen, one year older than Jacinthe, but the sun on her face and the wind blowing her auburn hair back from her

high forehead made her look many years younger. Her slim, bronzed body was encased in an old bathing suit which she had worn since her schooldays, and she had thrust her feet into a pair of battered sandals to walk across the scrub, disdaining the fashionable blue shift which Abi had offered her when she had followed Heber into the sea.

'Go back to Succoth,' she said in a choked whisper, 'and look after Mammy and the children.'

The day had started disastrously, she mused as she climbed towards the Bluff. She had quarrelled with Abi and argued with Heber, all to no account, simply because they had taken this careless attitude towards Millo. Her beloved island really meant nothing to them. It had been a place to come back to in the holidays while they were all at school, a remote shelter which their mother had never liked, and now they were preparing to abandon it with a lightheartedness which she could not understand. All the love and affection of which she was capable had been given to Millo in the past and she could not bear to think of the time when she might have to leave it.

Heber had stressed the point of their likely departure over breakfast, which Mammy had served to them on the verandah, and tears had run unashamedly down the old woman's ebony cheeks. In her big white cooking apron Mammy had looked completely stricken, and Makeda, at least, had understood how she felt. The fact that she was about to be abandoned had reduced Mammy to speechlessness, but the slow tears had told their own particular tale. A life of faithfulness and loyal service could be coming to an abrupt end, and Mammy had nowhere else to go. She and Ben had come to Succoth when John Garland had leased Millo all those years ago and they had expected to stay on the island for the remainder of their lives.

Makeda felt as forlorn as the old Carib servant, although she could not shed any tears. The life she loved was about to be changed, and the hard lump at the back of her throat as she reached the highest point of the Bluff threatened to choke her. She could not look towards the future with any

real hope, as Abi and Heber did, because all she had ever wanted was to remain here in Millo, where she belonged.

The unshed tears misted her eyes for a moment when she looked down towards the sloping land which led through a grove of mahogany trees to the sunlit water of Green Turtle Bay. It wasn't exactly a safe anchorage because of the coral reef which almost enclosed it, but if you knew what you were about and had enough experience it was possible to sail into the quiet water of the bay and seek shelter beneath the ruins of Crichton Place. And beneath the promontory where Crichton's stood like a deserted ghost, a beautiful little ketch had put down her anchor.

Makeda had handled boats for as long as she could remember, sailing with her father when he returned to Millo from his searches around the world and then with Heber when they were old enough to go out alone, and her eyes lit up for a moment as she took in the clean lines of the little craft sheltering in the lee of the headland. It had been anchored close inshore, well away from the Albatross Bank, which suggested that the navigator had come to stay for more than just an hour or two while he explored the interior of yet another Caribbean island. The Grenadines were popular with sailing craft and cruisers alike right through the season, and it wasn't the first time that one of them had ventured into Green Turtle Bay, but Makeda had climbed across the Bluff with a deep resentment in her heart, sparked off by her conversation with the others in Frenchman's Cove.

Waiting for several minutes on the sloping ground which led down to the bay so that whoever was on board the ketch would see her and come on deck, she looked up at the grey walls of Crichton Place standing on a slight elevation above her. The house had never been occupied in all the years they had lived on Millo, having fallen into disrepair in the early part of the century when it had become uncommercial to grow sugar-cane on the smaller islands, but once it had been an elegant plantation house with its colonnaded portico and rows of long windows on two floors and a view westward into the sunset.



It was a view she loved because Green Turtle had become her secret bay, the quiet hideaway where she had found refuge when things were going wrong at Succoth. It was a place for dreaming and finding eventual peace, and it had been her undisputed domain all through her childhood because of the absurd belief that Crichton's was haunted. Long ago Heber had explored the uninhabited house and left it at that, but Mammy and Ben and the children wouldn't go near the place. The scrub had grown high around it, but the rows of splendid mahogany trees which the original owner must have planted still marked the position of a driveway winding down from Crichton's to the shore.

Even after she had waited for another five minutes, there was no movement from the ketch. The owner could be asleep in the cabin, of course, lulled by the gentle movement of the water inside the reef, and not likely to appear for some considerable time, but the longer she looked the more convinced she became that the elegant little craft was indeed unoccupied.

Curiosity overcame her, at last. Loving boats and being as much at home on the sea as on shore, she walked down on to the coral sand, kicked off her shabby footwear, and waded out into the warm green water until she could swim. Times without number she had come to Green Turtle Bay to put her world in order, but suddenly it seemed that she had no real right to be here. The conversation of the morning still perturbed her and she approached the anchored ketch with an odd sort of rage in her heart. Why couldn't it all be the same as it had always been on Millo? Why had there to be change and heartache and tears?

She bit her lip on the tears, swimming with hardly a sound round the stern of the anchored ketch, although she knew now with that strange, inexplicable instinct which comes with long contact with seafaring that the little yacht was indeed unoccupied. It had a deserted look, but had not been abandoned. Everything on deck was ship-shape, and when she raised herself up to peer briefly through one of the port-holes the cabin it served was also immaculate. The man who

had been standing on the Bluff, according to Jacinthe, was still ashore.

Which meant that he had gone to Succoth and was probably there now being entertained by Jacinthe and even by Mammy, who would be reassured by her cousin's presence.

Turning on to her back, she confessed inwardly that she had come to Green Turtle Bay for that very reason. She had not wanted to meet a stranger at that moment, however fleeting his visit to Millo might be. She had wanted time to be alone, time to adjust to the thought of change, and seeking sanctuary at Green Turtle had become second nature to her. Now that she could swim unmolested in warm water enclosed by its guardian reef she felt secure.

Slowly she paddled across the bay, still on her back with her face upturned to the sky, her hair, darkly wet, floating on the surface. It was long and straight, with a red sheen on it when she dried it in the sun, and she never swam with a cap. It was something she didn't think about, just as she often swam naked when she was alone.

Coming out of the water at the far side of the bay, she peeled off the top part of her bathing suit to let her arms and shoulders dry evenly in the sun, raising her arms above her head with a sudden feeling of wellbeing which was difficult to assess. At least, she was free here, she concluded; at least, she was unobserved.

Before her hair had dried she saw the man at the entrance to Crichton's. He stood beneath the portico which commanded a broad vista to the open sea beyond the reef, and he remained quite still, the bright red shirt he wore making a splash of unexpected colour, like some kind of challenge, against the weathered stone of the deserted house. His tall, sparse figure was framed in the aperture which had once been the door, and even from that distance there was a look of supreme arrogance about him.

Makeda slipped the straps of her bathing suit on to her shoulders, wondering how long he had been standing there, watching. Then, with an angry light in her eyes, she marched straight up the beach to confront the intruder.

They met half way along the overgrown drive and because her feet hurt and it was cooler under the mahogany trees, she scowled at him, hugging her bare arms across her chest.

‘Good morning,’ he said with a whimsical smile. ‘I thought you were a mermaid!’

He had been standing up there at Crichton’s longer than she thought, and the knowledge was suddenly confusing.

‘What are you doing here?’ she demanded. ‘You must know you’re trespassing.’

His look was suddenly calculating, the smile wiped from his lean face as he met the hard expression in her eyes.

‘It’s something I hadn’t thought about,’ he assured her calmly. ‘The sea is free to all comers and a safe anchorage is nobody’s prerogative.’

‘It’s like a millpond beyond the reef,’ she pointed out without quite knowing why. ‘There was absolutely no danger, no reason for you to seek shelter in the bay.’

‘I see that most of my danger is on land,’ he observed, taking in her scant attire and brown limbs in one amused glance. ‘You live here, of course.’

She drew herself up.

‘It’s my home,’ she said. ‘My name is Makeda Garland and I’ve lived here most of my life.’

‘Makeda?’ he repeated, shortening the distance between them on the overgrown drive.

‘It was the name of the Queen of Sheba,’ she told him without hesitation. ‘My father gave it to me because his work was bound up with that period of history. He was doing research in Saudi Arabia when he died.’

He had been watching her keenly.

‘You miss him greatly,’ he suggested. ‘I believe I can understand how you feel.’

‘How could you?’ To her horror her voice had caught on a note of anguish. ‘You didn’t know him, so how could you possibly have any idea of how I feel?’

‘It was easy to hazard a guess,’ he said in that maddeningly calm voice which succeeded in putting her at a disadvantage. ‘Why are you so upset?’