

September 1583. Ten months before the English appear at Roanoke Island. 17-year-old Alsoomse desires freedom to doubt, discover, aspire without tribal hindrance. Self-willed 19-year-old Wanchese seeks to become one of his mananatowick's essential men. Each abhors injustice, dangerously opposes it.

Alsoomse and Wanchese

by Harold Titus

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Alsoomse and Wanchese

HAROLD TITUS

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Chapter 7

They had angled across Occam toward a jutting peninsula between two broad rivers. "That way!" Andacon ordered, pointing emphatically. Wanchese, Nootau, and Osacan, paddles raised, stared. "That way!" Andacon pointed again, moving his hand leftward.

When they were a hundred yards from the tip of the peninsula, Osacan spoke. "All I see is bald cypress. Where is an opening?"

"Perquiman had three or four longhouses when I was here last," Andacon answered.

"Ah, no village then." Osacan laughed. "Wanchese, Nootau, no village girls for you!"

Wanchese shook his head. He was not going to play the fool of Osacan's joke. "The land is deep swamp," he said, blandly. "Where could anybody grow corn?"

"Plenty of fish," Nootau said.

Had Nootau also declined to play?

"Wide river. Seagulls," Nootau added. "White perch. Probably striped bass."

Nootau was not a skilled hunter. Mostly, he fished. He spoke from knowledge. As for hunting, there would be game here. Deer, especially. A person could live here. But not many. He was curious.

He saw beyond the shoreline a slight elevation. Maybe there, he thought.

"I see a weir," Andacon declared.

They headed for it, saw beyond it two beached canoes, one quite small, the other the size of their own.

A minute later they were pulling their canoe out of the water.

Thirty feet away somebody was staring at them. Wanchese glanced past the man to view the slight incline of a small clearing. Its leaves gone but colored buds forming, two large red maples back-dropped the clearing. Wanchese looked again at the man. Like Wanchese and his companions, he wore a deerskin apron. He had no feathers inserted in his head.

Andacon raised his right hand. "May we stop here? We are traveling to Choanoac. We need to spend the night. I am Andacon, of Dasemunkepeuc." He took two steps forward.

The man said nothing, stayed motionless.

Wanchese watched Andacon's back and shoulder muscles tighten.

"I came here at *cohattayough*. I spent the night at your *weroance*'s long house. He will know me."

"He is not here." Arms dangling, the man showed no emotion.

Andacon looked at Osacan, looked back at the man. "Who lives here? Where do I find them?"

The man bent his left arm, examined it, allowed it to hang. "Four hunters. From Weapemeoc. This is not a village." He looked up the gradual slope past the two maples.

All right, then." Andacon strode past him. Osacan, smiling at nobody, followed. Nootau and Wanchese trailed. Beyond the maples, twenty feet to the left of what was a rude pathway lay a felled, limbless tree trunk held in place horizontally by forked tree branches embedded in the ground. A canoe in the making, Wanchese recognized.

Wanchese saw beyond the half tree trunk, half canoe a rude, bark-covered shelter. Where this silent man spends his nights, he concluded. He hoped he and his party would have a roomier, more accommodating shelter within which to sleep.

Passing the red maples, they saw near the top of the incline four longhouses, similar to but somewhat smaller than the longhouses at Roanoke. Raising his right hand, Andacon stopped. He pivoted, looked at Osacan, grimaced. "I don't trust that ... man we just passed." His right thumb and forefinger traced the sides of his nose. "Somebody needs to guard our trade goods." He craned his neck, as if to see over the tops of the maples and the tupelo and cypress close to the river. "Also, can we trust these 'hunters'?" He looked expectantly at Wanchese.

"You want me to stay by the canoe." Why me? Wanchese thought. Nootau was the fourth man!

"I do." Andacon nodded.

“One of us will wake you when you are asleep,” Osacan said, smiling.

“Be certain that you do,” Wanchese responded.

“Your task bears responsibility. You will have first choice of a Choanoac girl,” Andacon said. “We promise.”

It was a remark Wanchese would have expected from Osacan. He was surprised, and pleased! Andacon was a serious man who meant what he said. Even though Menatonon, not Andacon, would decide who would be lying beside him. That he had been assigned to guard the canoe meant that he had not lost entirely Andacon’s respect. Or, maybe he was being tested. Either way, he would perform the task. He nodded, turned about, walked down the incline.

The strange canoe-maker was near his shelter. He was starting a fire, striking together two rocks over shaved wood. By his side was a reed basket containing fish. Hearing Wanchese’s footfalls, he looked up.

“I will be spending the night by my canoe,” Wanchese said, passing him.

He had a deerskin to cover him but nothing to cover the ground. He had suffered worse. He thought it wise to find a place where he might not be noticed by any thief. He saw no such place.

Footsteps. He turned. The canoe-maker approached, a deerskin draped over his right forearm. “Use this. Do you have pearls, shells, and pottery to trade?”

Wanchese said nothing.

“So you need to protect them.” He dropped the deerskin at Wanchese’s feet. He turned, started to walk back.

“Thank you.”

The canoe man stopped, turned, looked at Wanchese for ten seconds. “I have fish for us to eat. You will know where I am while you eat.”

#

They had not spoken after the canoe-maker’s candid invitation. Wanchese had followed him to his fire pit: a depression covered with sand enclosed by sections of charred logs. The man had dried

Spanish moss and brittle twigs burning. He had taken from beneath sewed-together deerskin broken-off tree branches stacked against the nearest corner of his shelter. Wanchese guessed the branches had come from the tree trunk that the man was hollowing into a canoe.

After placing several branches on the fire, the man brought out of his shelter a four-legged, tied-together framework of blackened branches similar to what the women at Roanoke and Dasemunkepeuc used to roast fish. Wanchese had seated himself on a log near the fire. The man sat on a log opposite him, the fire between them. Roasting perch, the canoe man made twice quick eye contact. Appreciative of the man's generosity, Wanchese felt compelled to speak.

"I am called Wanchese. You?"

The man's mouth stretched; its corners moved downward. He grunted. "I am called many names."

Wanchese shifted his position on his log, lifted his right hand. "What can I call you?"

The man rubbed the flesh between his right thumb and forefinger against the underside of his chin. He looked into the fire. "Enkoodabao. Etchemin."

Wanchese's mouth widened. "You have two names? Which should I call you?"

The man looked toward the skeletal limbs of the red maple and gum, dark against a darker backdrop that would soon be night. Orange tendrils curled around the firewood's top branch. Wood snapped where a twig had been torn off.

Wanchese studied the man. Etchemin continued to look away. He was young, not fully grown. Wanchese judged him to be close to Alsoomse's age, shunned by others because ... of what? Dislike? Distrust? Compared to youths his age Etchemin was slimmer, lean. Wanchese assessed the youth's biceps, the tautness of his shoulders and chest. He was, not surprisingly, well formed, the consequence of hard labor.

Wanchese had to ask. "Etchemin. Why are you living here? Where do you come from?"

He did not receive an answer.

Etchemin tore off a section of fish with his front teeth.

Wanchese resumed his visual examination. There was nothing about Etchemin that indicated either knowledge of acceptable social behavior or attainment of elevated status. Wanchese saw no earrings, no tattoos, no shaving of the hair at the sides of his head. Clearly, Etchemin did not hunt! The only aspect normal about him was that his long hair was tied tightly at the back of his head.

Wanchese took another bite out of the second fish provided him. Is this what Etchemin lived on? Why was he not eating with the hunters? Feeling the heat of the fire on his bare arms, legs, and chest, Wanchese glanced down the now indiscernible slope.

He had noticed scars on the youth's upper body. A scar extended across his jaw bone.

"My friends and I follow Wingina, *mamanatowick* of Dasemunkepeuc, Roanoke, Pomeiooc, Aquascogooc, and Secotan," Wanchese informed. "We will be trading with the great Choanoac *mamanatowick* Menatonon." Expecting no response, Wanchese watched gray flakes rise from the flames of the fire. "Thank you for sharing this food," he said.

Etchemin rose from his log, walked to his stack of branches, returned with an armful. He placed two on the fire. "I will sleep in my house. You may sleep here," he said. "Water to drink is in the river." He turned, walked to his shelter, disappeared within.

Wanchese rose. He would use the deerskin he had not taken out of the canoe, expecting to be provided a bed inside a longhouse, to cover himself. Etchemin's deerskin would cover the ground. He expected to be awake much of the night.

#

He was awakened by the staccato sounds of a Great Horned Owl. "Hoo-hoo hoo, hoo-hoo hoo, hoo-hoo hoo." A mating call. He anticipated a response. There was none. "Hoo-hoo hoo, hoo-hoo hoo, hoo-hoo hoo," the same male sounded, unexpectedly close. He had never seen the Great Horned Owl, which lived, bred, and hunted exclusively at night. He *had* seen the crushed remains of its prey -- too large to be ingested.

Wanchese glanced at the fire. It was still burning. It had, in fact, not diminished! The corner of his left eye caught movement. He started, sat instantly upright. A human figure sat close to the fire.

Etchemin.

His arms and upper back tingling, Wanchese stared.

"Wanchese." The youth's right heel made a groove in the sandy earth. He looked at the mark. "You asked who I am."

"I did."

"I am Chesapeake. From Skicoac. I came here because I could not live there."

Ten seconds passed. The light of the fire extended up past Etchemin's face.

"Why?"

"Because ... I am different. ... I do not kill, do not hunt. I will not fight."

Wanchese pointed. "Those scars?"

"Braves have hit me."

Wanchese inhaled, exhaled. His jaw and cheek bones hardened. He thought of Askook. "You let them hit you?"

Etchemin looked at the fire.

"Why?"

Etchemin stared past Wanchese's left shoulder.

"Were you afraid of them?"

Etchemin made eye contact. Wanchese recognized anger. He raised his palms to the level of his chin. "Why?"

"I do not hunt and kill. I do not fight!"

Wanchese leaned backward. Staring at the Chesapeake, he struggled to understand. "Why do you not hunt?"

His right hand gripping his right knee, Etchemin leaned forward. "What do you see in the eyes of a doe that you have struck with your arrow and she is dying?"

Fear, Wanchese thought. It was the worst part of hunting.

Wanchese spoke rapidly. "Ahone permits us to hunt. It is the way of life. Eat or die. We give thanks to the animals who sacrifice themselves. You know that."

“Killing is evil,” Etchemin said. “Fighting leads to killing. I will not become evil to fight evil.” He rose. He glared toward the river.

“If you never fight, ... you are the doe.” Wanchese stood.

Etchemin turned away, went to and entered his dwelling.

Wanchese knelt upon Etchemin’s deer skin, stretched himself upon it, pulled his own deer skin over his body. He questioned how much sleep he would get before the sun made sleep no longer possible. He could not respect a man who had the physical ability to defend himself. It was probably that unwillingness more than Etchemin’s refusal to hunt that had caused other young men to abuse him. Etchemin had chosen to live this way and had been punished for it. He had been rejected and driven away to restore harmony, balance. Ahone had created a world that abhorred imbalance. Herring, striped bass, plovers, hawks, squirrels, turtles, bears all lived according to Ahone’s rules. Ahone’s dictate to the Real People: maintain His balance. Those who refused to obey had to be expelled.

#

Voices woke him. Early sunlight had penetrated the little clearing. Wanchese rose to a sitting position. He heard Osacan and a voice he did not recognize. Six men appeared out of a cluster of red maple and yellow-poplar. Osacan saw him.

“Wanchese, I am sorry I did not wake you. How went your night?” He laughed.

They veered toward him. He stood, and started to fold his deer skin.

“Not talking? You should know I had a very comfortable night!”

They converged. Osacan thumped Wanchese’s right shoulder.

Andacon had been studying the down slope. “You slept here, not by the canoe?”

“There was no need.” Wanchese brushed moisture off a section of his deer skin.

“You did well here?”

“It was good.” He looked at the ashes of the fire.

The brave standing beside Osacan spoke. “I know what happened.” He jerked his right thumb toward Etchemin’s dwelling.

Etchemin had exited it. "You had fish." He and his companion hunters laughed. "Not deer, rabbit, duck, or beaver. Fish!"

Wanchese straightened his back. "We did. Excellent perch." He fixed his eyes on the hunter that had spoken.

"We had excellent deer stew, Wanchese." Osacan extended his right arm. "I would have brought you some but I forgot."

The hunter whom Osacan had apparently befriended stooped. He picked up from the fire pit the end of a branch not incinerated. "We allow him to live here," he said to the wood, "because he builds canoes. Except for that, he is worthless." He stared at Etchemin, standing next to his stacked branches. "Is that right, Useless?!" He hurled the piece of wood. Etchemin stepped to his right. The wood struck the side of the dwelling.

The hunter faced Osacan and Andacon. "He is useless and he is a coward! Watch!" The man strode toward Etchemin, who waited. "Show them I am right! Tell them you are a coward!"

Etchemin stared past him. The hunter slapped him, the sound of palm against cheek distinct.

Etchemin regained his balance, resumed his stance.

"Say it! Say it or defend yourself! No? Then here!" The hunter slapped Etchemin again.

"That is not necessary!" Andacon declared.

"Let him be!" Osacan responded.

"You see?" The hunter, facing them, grinned. "This is what we live with!"

Andacon motioned toward the river. "We have nothing here we must do. Down to the canoe," he ordered. He stepped off. Osacan; Nootau, ever silent, looking tense; and Wanchese, red-faced, followed.

"Why not take him with you?!" the hunter shouted. "He can build you canoes! If you need to warm your hands, slap him!" They heard a third slap.

Wanchese stopped. He turned about, started up the incline.

"Wanchese!" Osacan exclaimed.

Wanchese heard Andacon's stern voice. "No!"

He was twenty feet away from the hunter, then ten, then standing in front of him.

“Ah, the coward has made a friend!” the hunter mocked.

Wanchese grabbed the hunter’s skull feather, pulled it out of its groove, held it in front of the hunter’s astonished face, broke it in half. He dropped the two pieces. Locking his eyes on the brave’s face, he waited.

A deep red covered the hunter’s countenance. He swore. Wanchese saw the man’s right hand, of a sudden, move upward. Blocking the upward thrust, Wanchese kneed the hunter’s genitals. He heard instant distress. The hunter doubled over, Wanchese kneed his forehead. The brave went down. Wanchese pinned the hunter’s head to the soil with his right foot.

Breathing fiercely through his nose, Wanchese watched the hunter’s legs thrash. He applied greater pressure. The man emitted a plaintive cry.

He was aware suddenly that the others were close by. The thought that he might be attacked penetrated. He would bring each of them down! “You!” he shouted at the hunter immobilized under his foot. “I will let you up! If you choose to fight, I will kill you!” Three more fierce breaths and he removed his foot.

Chapter 14

Aranck had come into Andacon's, Osacan's, and Wanchese's longhouse to talk. Rain pelted the bark roof, its drumming sound deafened sporadically by blasts of wind. Wanchese welcomed the sounds. He did not want to hear Andacon's voice.

"If this rain stops at midday, will the water be high enough to navigate?" Andacon asked.

"No."

"Would another day of rain?"

"It might."

"How would you know?"

"When you try."

Andacon raised his hands high, allowed them to descend.

Aranck's eyes followed the gesture.

"You are Mesickek's guide for traveling through the swamp!"

"I have done it more than any other."

Wanchese detected no arrogance.

"If you cannot give me assurance of success, I cannot agree to make the attempt!" Andacon, Osacan, and Wanchese were seated on a bench opposite the guide. Andacon placed the heels of his hands on the tops of his knees, tapped his right kneecap.

Aranck showed no desire to speak.

"You say the distance up the river to the swamp is not that far," Osacan said.

Aranck nodded.

Several seconds elapsed.

Osacan spoke sideways to Andacon. "Should we not investigate?"

"Risk a Mandoag ambush?! For what?! To discover not halfway there that the swamp is not navigable?! To trade three cooking vessels and three turtle shells for chunks of quartz the Nansemond may not have or may not want to trade?!" He yanked his right hand away from his side.

"The Nansemond knapper is very skilled at tool and weapon making," Aranck said. "I know him."

Osacan and Andacon regarded him. Sharp lines appeared on Aranck's forehead.

"His *weroance* makes certain he has chunks of quartz. You would do better trading for what he has made than for the chunks."

"We would receive less for our shells and vessels," Andacon said.

"Yes, which would be fair. Does your village have a skilled knapper?"

Wanchese smiled. Andacon scowled.

A blast of wind drove rain against the east side of the house.

"Too much uncertainty!"

"No question that going there would be challenging," Osacan said, seeking confirmation.

"It always is."

"If we had more to trade ...?"

"We do not. This option is no better than the others. I have decided. We will leave our vessels and shells in Menatonon's safe-keeping." Andacon rose.

Osacan, rising, looked at Wanchese, who remained seated.

"In two days Rakiock should be able to travel. By then Mesickek's hunters should be back. We know hard things that Menatonon must hear. *You*" – Andacon pointed at Wanchese – "have much to answer for!"

Andacon and Osacan left the longhouse. Wanchese remained seated.

Seconds passed. Wanchese placed the heels of his hands on the bench preparatory to standing.

The tips of Aranck's forefingers were pinching the middle of his upper lip.

Wanchese sensed an unspoken opinion.

Aranck removed his fingers.

What is it you want to say that you did not want them to hear? Wanchese thought. He had liked how Aranck, a *cohattayough* or two older than he, had conducted himself. Aranck was slight of build –

not a hunter, not a warrior – but self-confident. Andacon had never wanted to go through the swamp.

He wanted Aranck's true thinking.

"How many times have you traveled there?" Wanchese began.

"Six or seven times. Ten, maybe. I do not count."

"What is the hardest part?"

Aranck smiled. "The poling. And pushing. When the water becomes more muck than water. You need to get out and push the canoe. And worry about snakes." He grinned. "That is what I do. That is how I make myself useful. I did that for my Nansemond *weroance*, before I came to live here."

Wanchese leaned backward, stretched his calves.

"I am a guide and trader, never a hunter."

"What ... made you come here?"

Two vertical lines divided the bridge of Aranck's nose. His left hand came to his chin.

Wanchese repositioned himself on the bench. "Am I being impolite?"

Aranck looked past him. His mouth formed a flat smirk. He shrugged. "A woman."

Wanchese smiled. Aranck reciprocated. Wanchese laughed.

"Do you have a woman?"

Wanchese shook his head.

"Not even a possibility?" Aranck's eyes and teeth glistened.

"I ... have not stayed in one place long enough to want to choose" – he demonstrated distance between his hands – "or be chosen."

Aranck tilted his head. "Am I being impolite?"

Wanchese laughed.

Aranck touched his left ear. His bone earring swung.

Wanchese brought the big knuckle of his left forefinger across his chin. "If I am not being too personal ..."

Aranck interrupted. "These questions are not your friend's questions."

"He is not quite my friend."

"I saw that."

“But I am interested. You came here because of a woman.” Wanchese had to grin. “Does she have an unmarried friend? I am starved for female companionship!”

Aranck laughed. “Mesickek has taken a liking to you. A very fine necklace you wear.”

“Which Andacon wants to rip from my neck once we leave.”

“I think you will prevent that.”

They continued to grin.

Aranck continued the light banter. “Maybe you will stay here. Wear that necklace to impress. Marry the first woman that chooses you.”

Wanchese snorted, laughed afterward into his right hand. “Is that what happened to you?”

“I had a *shell* necklace. Which is what almost every Ramushouuoq man wears. I did choose her, though. Before or after she chose me.”

“So you stayed here, became a Choanoac. Like my cousin is planning to do, I think.”

“There were four of you from Roanoke?”

“From Dasemunkepeuc, mostly. My sister lives in Roanoke. I live in both villages.”

“And you are thinking maybe you could live here?”

Aranck had gotten to the crux of it. Wanchese heard another blast of wind.

“Are you close to your *weroance*?”

Wanchese nodded.

“Your parents?”

“They are dead.”

“Then your sister?”

“We have our battles, but yes. She matters. So do other people close to me.”

“You have memories.”

Wanchese looked at him. That was the difficulty. He could never cut that part of his life away. He would have to go back. But not with Andacon.

"I think a lot about my first life." Aranck dropped his gaze. He brushed imaginary wood fiber off his right knee.

Both listened to the sounds of the storm.

"I was not close to my *weroance*! He is not a tolerant leader. He has several braves he favors that were not my friends. My mother lives there. I cannot persuade her to leave. Except for her, I do not miss my native village."

"But you go back to trade, through that swamp."

"I am not a hunter. It is how I earn respect."

Wanchese felt they had come to the end of their conversation. He did not want to leave. Aranck did not seem inclined to leave, either. A final question wanted to be asked.

"You are concerned about what Andacon might say to your *weroance* that might damage his trust."

Wanchese moved his right foot, looked at its toes, placed his left heel on top of the foot. He cleared his throat. His words came out huskily. "He will say something. But I think so will Osacan, who favors me, if he and Wingina are alone. As for Menatonon, ... I believe Rakiock is on my side."

"You want to try going through the swamp, despite what Andacon has decided."

Wanchese responded immediately. "I want to bring back what Wingina wants. With or without the other two."

"That would require me."

"I know."

"You are asking?"

"I ask a lot."

2

She sat alone in the female section of the guest longhouse.

Allawa and Nuttah were probably being entertained by admiring Croatoans in another longhouse. Escaping the duties of cooking and serving, they had disappeared as quickly as the food platters had been cleared and the dancers had congregated. Where they had gone after the rain had begun Hurit herself probably did not know.

The sour-faced Sokw was yet cleaning. If not, she was socializing – at least attempting to -- with less-attractive males. And Sokanon was probably still seated behind Hurit at the council meeting.

Alsoomse wondered how much longer the meeting would continue. Piemacum's purpose had been stated -- aggressively, rudely -- and Woanagusso had answered. She, Alsoomse, had been removed, by Hurit, curtly, with one sentence: "Leave this room!"

Alsoomse recalled almost exactly Hurit's warning about disciplining herself. "There are people in this village, and at Dasemunkepeuc, who believe that you are dangerous. I will expect you to keep your thoughts to yourself." She had broken her promise. She had lashed out.

Banishment? Forced removal to Dasemunkepeuc? Wingina did not care for her either, she thought. But for Wanchese, she ...

Where could she go? Secotan, her mother's birthplace? "I am Alsoomse, the daughter of Nadie, who was born here and became the wife of Matunaagd, the war chief of Wematin. I have been banished by my *weroansqua*. Who of my mother's friends will accept me?"

Would Wanchese protect her? If she were not received by Wingina, would he hunt for her, she living out her remaining *cohattayoughs* and *popanows* by a small creek outside Dasemunkepeuc, without friends, without children – without Pules and Wapun – alone?

Rain pelted the bark exterior.

Her mother had warned her. "Be respectful, child, dutiful. Weigh what you think before you act. Accept." Kiwasa had taken away her mother and father! How she needed her mother's wisdom!

She would not cry!

Her need to mourn proved to be stronger.

I mourn not for them but for myself, she thought. I must not be weak.

She willed herself not to ponder consequences. Whatever they were, she had to accept.

Could she?

She wanted to be the controller of her life. The gods would not permit it! Did the *kwiocosuks*, *weroances*, and *mamanatowicks* feel that frustration? Did every woman? Had her mother?

Sokanon entered the partitioned room. "I thought you might be here."

"Where else could I go?"

They were silent. Alsoomse watched Sokanon remove her necklace. She forced herself to speak. "What happened?"

Sokanon waited several seconds. "Sunukkuhkau said some things. Angry things." She paused.

Alsoomse did not respond.

"Woanagusso and Hurit listened. They said very little."

"What did *you* say? Did you tell him he was lower than a snake?!"

They burst out laughing, Sokanon first, then Alsoomse, almost to tears.

Eventually, Sokanon told what Sunukkuhkau had initially declared.

"Do you allow your servants to insult their superiors?' or something like that."

"And Hurit?"

"That you are high-born, not a servant. She apologized."

"After being insulted?!"

"Yes."

"I saved her from having to be rude! I hope she knows that!"

"She would not have been rude, regardless."

Alsoomse's cheeks ignited. Any man could insult a woman! If no man objected, it was accepted! A woman's objection meant nothing!

"What else did he say?!"

"He wanted to know your name. And 'Who is this brother?'"

"What ..."

"Hurit did not tell him! She said, 'That is all I will tell you.' He wants you punished, publicly whipped."

"And?!"

"Hurit said, 'I will decide the punishment, not you.'"

Adrenaline sped up her backbone, reached her neck and head. Here was a woman who *refused* to accept! “Tell me more!”

“He turned to Woanagusso. ‘This is your village! We are your guests! I demand that you permit this punishment!’ He was very angry.”

“I wish I had seen it!”

“Better if you had not spoken!”

Alsoomse’s adrenaline high ceased.

“Woanagusso told him that you belong to Hurit. Only she should decide. With that, he stomped out of the room.”

They sat for awhile, silent. Alsoomse felt her cousin’s empathy. At no previous time in her life had she appreciated Sokanon this much.

“Do you think Hurit will banish me?”

“That would be harsh.” Sokanon’s eyes squinted. She quarter-rotated her head. “She knows you were defending her.”

“But ... you heard what she said, before we came here, that the priests, and other people, think I am ‘dangerous.’”

They heard hesitant feet outside the partition. Allawa’s head appeared. “Alsoomse, my mother wants to speak to you,” she said distinctly. “In the council meeting room.”

“Just your mother?”

“I think so. What did you do?”

3

Walsingham was back, interrupting her reading.

Her teeth and gums were hurting her. Reading history helped her ignore the pain. She would have preferred a trip to Mortlake to spend much of the day with Doctor John Dee, to hear his theories about angelic communication that might reveal to humans the secrets of nature. Communicating with a brilliant mind activated her considerable intellect, mundane ailments be damned. But Dee had traveled to Poland with his associate, Edward Talbot. There was no one else so unconventional, so learned, so curious.

Therefore, instead, matters of state!

She would not bid him to rise. Kneeling four feet before her, he waited for her consent to speak. Let him wait! She knew why he had come.

“Tell me what you must.”

“Your Majesty. Throckmorton has confessed all.”

“His return to the rack was predictably successful.”

“He had thought himself impervious.”

“Is it their Catholicism, Walsingham, that elevates them so?”

“The executioner’s blade cures zealotry’s excess.”

“That is certainly your cure! What has he admitted?”

Grunting, Walsingham distributed his weight onto his left knee. He sought silently permission to rise.

Instead, “Speak.”

“The plot involves the Pope, the Guise family, and the Jesuits. It is part of King Philip’s planned enterprise. Mary Stuart and Ambassador Mendoza are fully informed. We are to be invaded at four locations.”

“Where?”

“Scotland, Ireland, Sussex, and Norfolk. All coordinated by Catholic activists foreign and national.”

“Your recommendation?”

“The executioner’s blade.”

“Always.” She frowned. “Throckmorton, yes. I agree. They will know we will not countenance them!”

“The Scottish whore?” Walsingham’s dark brow furrowed all the more.

“You question God’s divine right to anoint kings?”

They communicated rapidly.

“She commits treason!”

“The punishment will be continued isolation, confinement.”

“The Council will demand execution! As will Parliament!”

“I will not call Parliament into session! The Council advises, does not overrule my decisions! Have you again forgotten yourself?!”

His anger reached, hand-like.

This would not answer! It remained for her to defuse the friction. "You, Sir Francis, serve me best, I believe, of any man of this realm. Keep your spies active. You and they keep your sovereign and her people safe! Know that I value your opinions highly, but know that I do not submit to them! Continue, therefore, to presume to declare them, even if you must smolder privately because of their rejection. Know as well that you shall be rewarded personally for your zealous service. I am not an ungenerous queen."

Thirty seconds later he was gone. She was tempted to go to Mortlake. For the recollection. It had been Dee more than anybody that had ignited her enthusiasm for colonization in the New World. He had been Raleigh's associate. Before Raleigh he had advised Gilbert. He had also associated with Walsingham. She had yet to decide whom to grant Gilbert's patent: Raleigh, who importuned her at every opportunity, or Walsingham. She would allow time to assist her.

4

Alsoomse believed the tension in her limbs was manageable. How she would respond to her punishment after it was declared surpassed her powers of prognostication. She would enter the council room as she would Hurit's private quarters at Roanoke, inwardly apprehensive, outwardly disciplined. For several moments she feared the appearance of one or more of the Pomeiooc delegation intent upon seizing her. It was yet raining. She could scarcely see.

She pushed aside the deerskin entranceway of Woanagusso's large longhouse. Turning immediately to her left, she entered the council room. Small tongues of flame curved around the tops of new logs. "Sit here," Hurit said, motioning toward the bench upon which she sat.

Five feet separated them, sufficient leg space for each to face the other. Alsoomse regarded her, refused to drop her eyes, yet strove not to appear defiant. She waited, as if ignorant of Hurit's purpose.

"Do you have something you want to say to me?" Hurit placed her palms on the sides of her right knee.

Alsoomse stirred. For a moment her eyes strayed. "I do." Her throat was suddenly thick. She cleared it. "I cannot excuse what I said. Despite what I promised, ... despite your faith in me, ... it came out."

Hurit nodded.

"I failed you."

"You did."

They stared at each other. She would take her punishment; she would not beg for forgiveness.

"But not without cause."

Alsoomse blinked, blinked three times more. For two heartbeats her jaw quivered.

"You need to know!" Here came the anger. "I do not need you or anybody else to defend me, or defend Granganimeo! *I* decide how to do that!"

"Yes, Hurit."

"You are young. You have much to learn. About controlling your emotions. About the ways of arrogant men. About how a woman combats such a man. Your mother has been gone for how long now, two *cohattayoughs*?"

"Nearly."

"You are deprived of her wisdom."

"I have had ..." She did not finish.

"You have potential. I have told you so. Should you reach a position of authority as I, you will need to possess skills that are contrary to your nature. You cannot be a man ready to strike out as your brother is known to do."

So she knows. That Wanchese struck her brother. Of course she would know! She knows also that I despise him!

What was to be her punishment?!

"I understand your anger, but your lack of discipline and lack of respect for my position forces me to take some sort of action." Hurit straightened her upper body, raised her chin. "Sunukkuhkau demands that you be whipped with all attending. What do you think about that?"

"It was he who insulted!"

“I agree. But *he* does not decide! I told him that, after you left. He made threats.”

It was not for her to ask.

“I think it wise that you stay with others in a place away from where they choose to go until they leave. That would be with the women who cook and clean. You are not to serve me or take your meals with the common people. Your food will be brought to you alone in our longhouse. I will have somebody – Machk, maybe – watch over you.”

“To force me to stay?”

“No, to discourage anybody who wants to drag you out to be whipped!”

“He would do that?”

“He does not respect me, Woanagusso, or any woman. Yes, he would!”

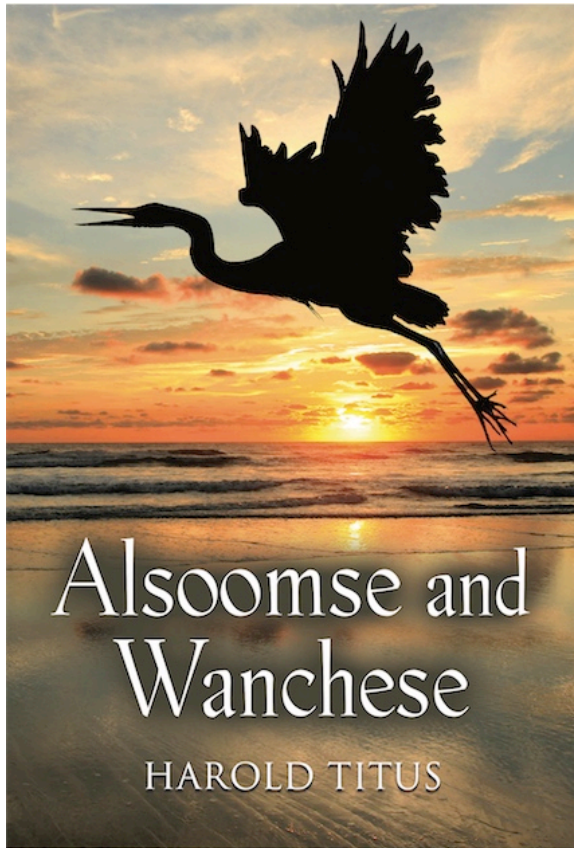
They were silent. She sensed that Hurit expected her to speak.

“Maybe I should be whipped.”

“You do not believe that.”

“I do not.” A pine log snapped. “But I believe I should be punished.”

“Your punishment is what I have already said. That and your knowing that I doubt all the more your self-control.”



September 1583. Ten months before the English appear at Roanoke Island. 17-year-old Alsoomse desires freedom to doubt, discover, aspire without tribal hindrance. Self-willed 19-year-old Wanchese seeks to become one of his mananatowick's essential men. Each abhors injustice, dangerously opposes it.

Alsoomse and Wanchese

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