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Mélusine surprised me, all right, but not in the way that I expected.

When I awakened – and my privacy partition had been rolled down – I saw that she was not in the opposite bunk. I saw that it had been neatly made up. Automatically, I checked that the Walther and the money were still beneath my mattress beneath my pillow and head. They were. I refused to believe that even with my lack of concentration, assisted by medication and the security-giving guards in London, that anyone could get beneath my head without suffering grievous bodily harm.

Then I saw that her orange plastic garbage bags were still stowed away in her upper bunk, bunks I used to hold miscellaneous items of all sorts. Ordinary storage space was scarce on *Jester*, a natural result of the *orembai* concept. It had so many other advantages, that I had long since accepted the few, but very real, limitations. And then I also noticed the lovely smell of fresh-brewed Colombian coffee. And after that I saw the head of the bog oak (as I had learned) Breton harp peeping around the pillow that secured it carefully in the upper berth. So, Mélusine would return.

In the process of getting my coffee, though, I felt *Jester* shuddering a little. This could not be wave action, not with that protecting maze of breakwaters spaced at intervals along Brest's rather estuary-like harbour approaches. This was wind, and it was gusting. Given that, I dressed quickly before even sampling the coffee, and went topside to check the mooring lines. As soon as I left the shelter of the wheelhouse, slanting cold rain assailed me from the west. *Jester* tugged at her moorings and tried to frolic ponderously at the concrete mole. There were now two other boats tied up to the government wharf and room was becoming limited. As un-seamanlike as I can be, on occasion, I actually tied a square knot atop the bollard hitches. I don't trust hitches, for some reason, although I had once used a Blackwell hitch around a crane hook just to show off for Marcel Bouchard.

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Then, I looked very carefully at the hull. It was a bit difficult to tell with *Jester's* slight motion, but I thought she was down by the bow again. Thankfully, I went below and, while going through the wheelhouse, gave a burst of air to the keel compartments. I had discovered a way of telling when the water was expelled – the air pressure began to drop more rapidly than it did when there was still some water to be blown out through the holes in the bottom of the keel.

I went back into the cabin though the uninviting steel door that had once belonged to a refrigerator in a Toronto meatpacking plant. Not knowing what the day might bring, I slipped on the Walther's shoulder holster and put on another, and even bulkier, denim 'shirt'. This was something of a 'jacket' itself, it was so thick, but I thought that the day deserved it. And I kept the bulky windbreaker close to hand if I had to venture out again.

Finally, I got to the coffee. And I soon discovered that Mélusine had made a Havarti and roast beef sandwich – that was the last of both – and it was waiting for me in the refrigerator. How had I missed all this activity? I must have been more worn out than I thought. On impulse, I glanced at my Seiko and discovered that it was, indeed, seven-thirty. The day outside was dark enough for six-thirty and it had not alerted me.

No witchcraft, Wicca or sorcery was needed to dictate staying at a snug Brest mooring today. So, I pulled down the table and again contemplated the lunacy of sailing across the Bay of Biscay in September. Maybe I *was* getting fey. It didn't look any saner with all the measuring I could do. But something was pushing at me. The Devil? I found that I was fretting about staying in Brest for the day and I had the temptation to head for the canal entrance and be heading for Aiguillon *somehow*. I knew, in some way, that was an even bigger waste of time.

By about nine-thirty, I heard muted voices speaking rapid French and felt *Jester* heel a fraction to port. A few moments later, I heard the hatch slide back and then Mélusine's Nikes squeaking down the aluminium ladder into the wheelhouse. The door opened. Her tatty windbreaker was streaming rain

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and she held a plastic bag in her hand. She had one of those accordion-plastic rain bonnets over her head. I also heard someone else coming down the ladder, but slowly, uncertainly and in leather-soled shoes.

Mélusine glanced back and, seeming flustered, darted back into the wheelhouse and I heard the hatch being closed firmly. Then I heard the sounds of wet clothing being placed on the hooks and more rapidly whispered French. She reappeared in the cabin doorway. "I hope you do not mind," she said. "I have brought someone who wants to meet you. Le professeur, Docteur Pierre Falardeau," she said proudly. "De Paris... from Paris."

"It's alright, Mélusine," I smiled.

She waved the plastic bag. "I found some Havarti," she said, "but could only find Schwarzenwalder jambon... er... ham." She went to the fridge.

Falardeau followed her in and I rose politely, while lifting the table up to the ceiling. I tossed the chart and dividers onto my bunk. He seemed a fairly tall, about my height, but dapper man with a trim salt and pepper moustache and a carefully shaped beard. His concession to informality was an expensive casual jacket, shirt and knotted tie and whipcord-looking trousers, rather soaked and definitely upscale.

I held out my hand. "Professor Falardeau."

He shook it. His handclasp was firm. "Captain Rennsalaer." He looked around and finally did the obvious. He sat down on Mélusine's bunk.

As for Mélusine, she lowered the table again. "C'est bon... okay...?"

I nodded and smiled. Presently, almost immediately, she put a cup of coffee in front of Falardeau and then me. I noted that she even provided saucers. To my surprise, she put cream and sugar containers on the table between us. I had forgotten that I had any. I heard her making a new carafe-full of coffee.

If Falardeau disdained my Colombian, he didn't show it. "Captain Rennsalaer, to save us both time, let me tell you that I know most of what the newspapers reported about you and Mariko O'Shaugnessey. But," he added, "I know

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O'Shaugnessey because I am doing the French translation of her English text of the Magdalene document.”

Here, he withdrew a letter from his inside breast pocket and handed it to me. It was, indeed, a letter confirming his translator's role and it bore Malcolm Stewart's genuine signature, which I had reason to know well. I read it carefully, nodded, and handed it back across the rather narrow table. It confirmed, also, *because of his international stature as an academic*, that he would not just be translating Mariko's English text. That would save time, but he was free to differ from her English rendition with his own translation from the original Anglo-Saxon-based language.

“I also met Mariko O'Shaugnessey once at Oxford two years ago,” he said. “She must have remembered me when the question of a French edition of the book came up, as it inevitably would, although my work confirming hers about North African linguistic elements in the *Book of Ballymote* was well known to her. I was always impressed with her work and, ah, sympathetic to her... ah... situation. I have spoken recently with her by phone.”

He looked at me while he creamed and sugared his cup of coffee. “By the way,” he said, “she warned me not to underestimate you if ever I should meet you.” Falardeau's English was fluent and without any discernable accent at all.

“I'm flattered.”

He nodded. He paused and studied me. “So, taking O'Shaugnessey's advice very seriously – what would be your reaction if I told you, Captain Rennsalaer, that a version of the Pentateuch may exist which claims to have been authored by Akenaten?”

I took my time answering. Then at last I said: “I would say that such a thing would be highly dangerous to whoever has it.” I creamed and sugared my own coffee. “The Mossad had better not find out about it.”

Falardeau laughed. “Right to the point, just as Mariko O'Shaugnessey said.”

Now, Sigmund Freud back in his 1939 book, *Moses and Monotheism*, had been the first to suggest that supposedly Jewish Moses had really been the Pharaoh Akenaten, who

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had tried to introduce a form of Monotheism to Egypt. This was a highly unpopular move for the majority of Ancient Egyptians, they eventually rebelled against Akenaten's intolerance and fanaticism, and he was deposed. It had more recently been suggested, on the basis of some intriguing evidence, that Akenaten's wife and queen, the exquisitely beautiful Nefertiti, had been a victim of the popular uprising. Akenaten fled with his supporters and this was 'The Exodus'.

More recently, various scholars had both amplified and supported this notion with linguistic, historical and geographic research. Kamal Salibi, Chaim Rabin, Bernard Leeman and Ahmed Osman had all fleshed out this idea. I was familiar with some of it. Scholars had managed to publish some books, but so long as there was inordinate Jewish ownership of North America's mass media, no newspaper article along these lines would ever get published. I had never even bothered to write one ten years ago when I was working as a Toronto freelancer.

According to these scholars, the Israelite 'Promised Land' was not in Palestine, which was solidly held by the Philistines at the time of the Exodus, but somewhere on the Arabian Coast of the Red Sea. Chaim Rabin and Bernard Leeman had pinned the location down more exactly, and Leeman had provided a map in his *Queen of Sheba and Biblical Scholarship* published in 2005 by the Queensland Academic Press of the National University of Australia.

"I take it this... document... must be in Sabaeen?"

"Actually, no," said Falardeau, "although you've just saved me a lot of background. It is Ancient... very ancient... Coptic."

I raised an eyebrow. "So it is a copy or a copy of a copy... maybe more."

"Right."

"How do you know that it is genuine?"

"Because, according to my colleague... *colleagues*... on the spot, it has been in the possession of Coptic monks for at least a thousand years. They've kept it secretly hidden. It is very probably genuine for that reason."

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Now, such an unlikely person as Thor Heyerdahl had visited the Coptic monks at the source of the Blue Nile when he was researching reed boats for his 'Ra' expedition to sail a reed ship across the Atlantic in the early 1970s. Heyerdahl was also looking for a good source of papyrus because no papyrus then grew in Egypt because of modern Nile pollution. The Papyrus Institute in Cairo babied a small pond of papyrus with which to make Ancient Egyptian paper.

Tourists bought copies of tomb paintings on this paper – at fairly exorbitant prices too, because the supply was severely limited. Heyerdahl needed twelve tons of papyrus for his reed ship replica and he found it in the Rift Valley lakes at the source of the Blue Nile. In *The Ra Expeditions*, Heyerdahl had mentioned the priceless manuscripts in the possession of Coptic monks who lived, for safety's sake, on islands in those lakes. He had seen the books with his own eyes.

"On which island in which Ethiopian lake?" I asked. Mélusine had sat down beside Falardeau by now. She was gazing at me in some surprise, but Falardeau burst out laughing.

"Lake Zwai," he said.

This was one of the southernmost of the Ethiopian lakes, if I remembered my Heyerdahl correctly, not too far from the border of Kenya. Only Lakes Rudolf and Turkana were closer to Kenya along the Rift. Little Lucy the Australopithecine hailed from near Lake Rudolf and the early *Homo erectus* 'Turkana Boy' was naturally from Lake Turkana. Now, as it happened, Heyerdahl's *The Ra Expeditions* and *The Tigris Expedition* were, along with Graves' *The White Goddess*, among those treasured twenty real books of mine aboard *Jester*.

"Mélusine," I said and pointed, "in that shelf beside you, there's an old paperback book called *The Ra Expeditions*, by Thor Heyerdahl. It has a white cover... I think." She knelt on the foam mattress to get a better view, and finally took the book out and laid it on the table. I pulled it over and thumbed through to the chapter 'Among Black Monks at the Source of the Nile'.

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“No one knows about this,” said Falardeau.

“Hmmm.”

I finally located Heyerdahl’s forty-year-old account of the manuscripts he had seen on Lakes Tana and Zwai. I selected the pages and passed the open book over to Falardeau.

He read about how Heyerdahl had illicitly spent the night on one of the monks’ sacred islands precisely so that he could see their sacred manuscripts. Their existence had been rumoured since the 1850s. Me, I sipped coffee. “Mon Dieu,” he said. “I thought only scholars knew about these manuscripts.”

“Just goes to show you,” I said.

“But it says nothing about this Pentateuch *specifically*,” said Falardeau.

“True enough. If you think the Mossad would miss a broad hint like that, someone is sadly naïve.” I saw Mélusine stiffen. “Heyerdahl was an immensely popular author,” I said to soften my remark somewhat, “his books sold in the millions of copies, and in at least twenty languages.”

Falardeau, himself a bit shocked, recovered quickly and eased the situation by saying, “You’re damned right.” Mélusine relaxed, but looked at me oddly.

“Remember,” I continued, “that book” – I nodded – “was published... when...? Sometime back in the early 1970s?” I saw Falardeau looking at the publication data in the front pages.

“1972. And this is the paperback. The hardcover would have been when? 1971?”

I nodded. “That’s reasonable. Okay. And what was Israel doing then, in Ethiopia?”

“Involuntarily airlifting the *falasha* back to Israel.”

“Hmmm. And why were they doing *that*, I wonder.”

“Under the guise of ‘repatriation’... to gather up any source of Ethiopian traditions of the Exodus among the Ethiopian Jews.”

“Bingo.”

“That means that my... colleagues... are in grave danger.”

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“Not really,” I said. “Not unless they try to take an old book off one of those islands. You can bet that the Mossad has all the islands under surveillance. And if you’ll read Heyerdahl there you’ll see that it wouldn’t be too hard to keep track of who comes and goes. The monks themselves make it easy. They don’t welcome visitors.”

“Captain Rennsalaer... they already have taken the... document... off of an island in Lake Zwai.”

“Where are your... ah... *colleagues* now?”

“That’s the problem. I don’t know. I had a message that they had reached Addis Ababa en route for Cairo. I’ve heard nothing since.”

“How long ago was this?” I asked.

“Four months.”

So, it was just before Mariko O’Shaughnessey had dropped into my life. “They’re dead,” I said flatly, “... most probably, anyway, and if they had a manuscript like you describe, well, it’s in Tel Aviv by now.” I stopped, then continued, “What *did* you want... of me...?” I asked cautiously.

“To help them. Like you helped Mariko O’Shaughnessey.”

“I’m afraid that’s out of the question, Professor Falardeau. For one thing, someplace like the Eastern Med is just too far from home. And, anyway, I have some extremely pressing personal concerns now. In France. The answer is a definite no.” I stood up.

Falardeau seemed in something of a daze as he stood up. He extended his hand, but somewhat vaguely. “Thank you... Captain Rennsalaer,” but he sort of mumbled it. Mélusine rose from her bunk to help him out. He stopped at the door of the cabin. “If I hear from them again, Captain Rennsalaer... if they somehow made it... out... can I contact you again?”

“You are at the University of Western Brittany?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Professor Falardeau, I must admit that I *am* intrigued. I am interested in history, as you know. I will contact you by e-mail once I reach Aiguillon. If your... ah... *colleagues*... er... *surface*, please do let me know.”

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“Do you really think they are... dead?”

“Almost certainly,” I replied, “... if this entire story has any truth to it, that is. Which is to say, if it isn’t bait for a trap.”

Falardeau regarded me oddly for a moment. I thought that either he was genuinely puzzled or a consummate actor. Was that probable with a noted academic? “Oh... yes... I see,” he said at last. “I believe that I have been rather foolish about this matter...” Then, a bit more briskly – “Thank you,” he said. He rummaged in his jacket’s pockets and finally found a card.

I took it and nodded. It had as much contact information as anyone could want.

“I can’t promise anything,” I said. “I have neglected my personal affairs much too long as it is.”

He nodded, again vaguely, as he disappeared into the wheelhouse. Mélusine was busy clucking over him, like a French mother hen.

The real question, of course, was whether Professor Pierre Falardeau was himself a Mossad agent. Perhaps... *perhaps*... his ‘colleagues’ *had* managed to get the manuscript – if it really existed – *somewhere*. Perhaps... *perhaps*... they had succeeded in giving the Mossad the slip *because* they suspected Falardeau. But *perhaps* I was also being uncharitable.

Yes, the Mossad, Israel’s secret service, was the main contender among possibly interested parties in this particular case, but there were other candidates. The Vatican? After all, the Magdalene document had struck a grievous blow against the Judeo-Christian Tradition, but a Pentateuch by Pharaoh Akenaten would pretty well finish it off.

Not that either would make any immediate difference in public opinion. But attitudes were already changing as the world was changing. Gradually, such revelations would percolate down to the mass of people. Two thousand years ago there had not been any such thing as the Judeo-Christian Tradition. Two thousand years from now there might not be any Judeo-Christian Tradition either – especially since it

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almost daily seemed to be the biggest religious hoax ever perpetrated on unsuspecting humankind.

And I also wondered... and not for the first time during the past two months... whether certain organizations might hold grudges. Why else had Mariko and, to a much lesser extent, I been guarded in London? But, I thought, any danger would be truly past once the book was out. Unless someone could hold grudges, that is. I actually doubted that. Pragmatic organizations like the Vatican and the Mossad could not afford to hold grudges.

Yes, a Pentateuch by Akenaten was more than just possible. It was probable, if Chaim Rabin, Bernard Leeman, Kamal Salibi and Ahmed Osman were right.

And it was probable, too, that if such a thing existed it would most probably turn up in one of two places. It would either be somewhere beneath the sands of Yemen or among Coptic monks at the sources of the Nile.