

THE SAGA OF HALVAR THE HIRELING

# MAYHEM IN MANATAS



## ***"BY THE EDICTS OF THE CALIF DON CARLUS..."***

"...and his fathers before him, and the word of Calif Don Felipe, there is to be no disruption of the peace on matters of conscience in Al-Andalus or in any lands ruled by Al-Andalus! No Jihad! No Crusade!"

He repeated the words loudly in Arabi and then again in Erse for the benefit of anyone who did not understand Arabi.

"Islim rules, but the followers of the Redeemer may worship as they will, and the Yehudit are allowed to settle where they will, so long as they observe the calif's laws, pay their tolls, and do not disturb the general peace. Prester Nicodemus, if you continue to disturb the Calif's Peace, you and your followers will be subject to the calif's displeasure."

"And who are you to tell me what I can and cannot do?" Prester Nicodemus sneered.

Halvar raised his head and glared across the plaza at the crowd.

"I am Halvar Danske, the Calif's Hireling, and his personal representative in Manatas. I carry the calif's own seal, and what I do is by his orders. Right now, I order all of you to go about your business and allow us to do the same!"

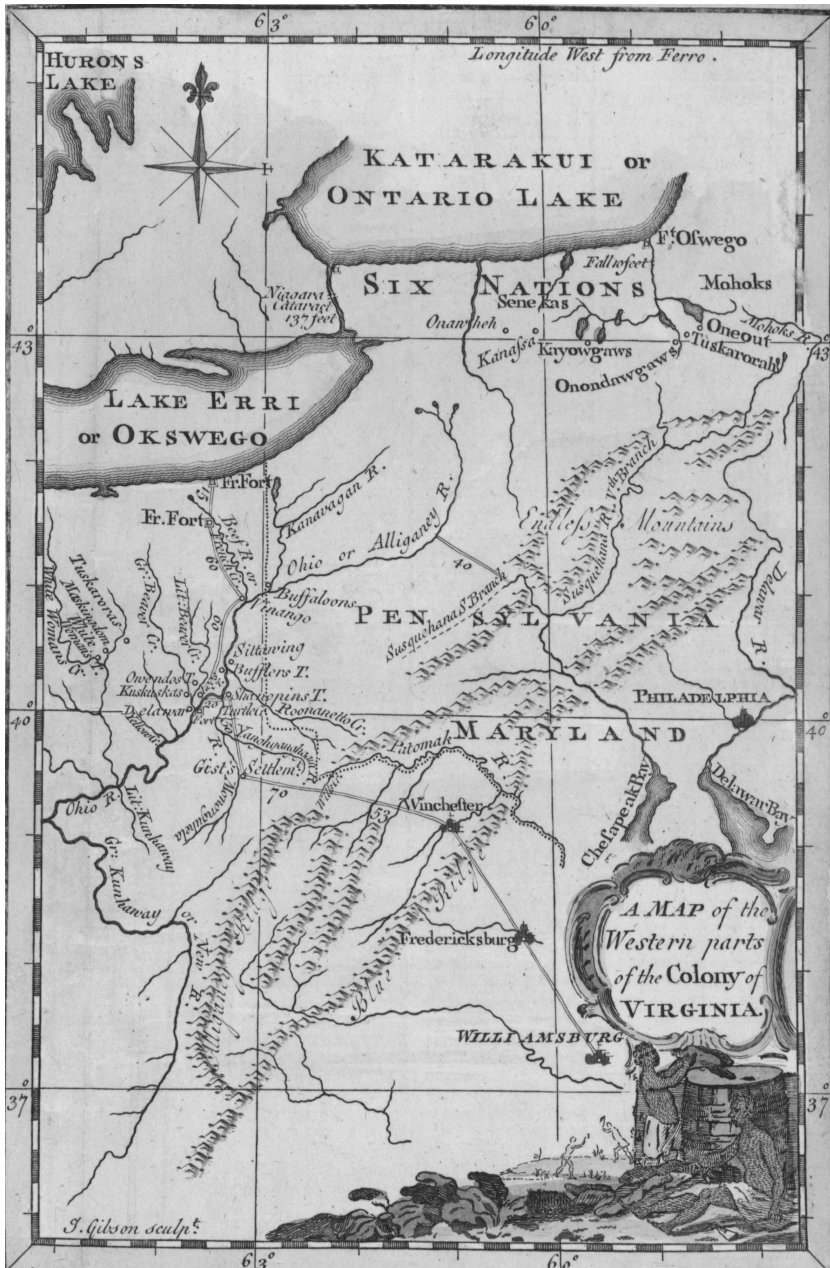
There was an ugly muttering from the crowd. Ruiz stepped forward, one hand on the cudgel at his belt. The Guards behind him unhooked the cudgels from their belts and held them ready to enforce the calif's will on anyone who dared defy it.

"The mullah will hear of this," the imam said as he retreated to the muskat at the entrance to the plaza.

"This is not over," threatened Prester Nicodemus, with a nod to Jehan.

Halvar was suddenly aware of a sharp pain in his side. He pressed his hand to his back and realized that it was wet and, when he looked at it, red.

"You're bleeding," Ruiz observed.



# MAYHEM IN MANATAS

The Saga of Halvar the Hireling  
Book 2



ROBERTA ROGOW

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.

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# TO MY MOTHER

SHIRLEY WINSTON

1917 – 2013

A woman ahead of her time, my inspiration,  
critic and sometime collaborator.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Lynne Holdom and Rachel Kadushin  
helped formulate the Universe of Manatas.

Liz Burton took a chance and published the  
Saga of Halvar the Hireling.

My thanks to all who made this book  
possible.

**Part 1**

**Death  
on the  
Docks**



# Chapter 1

**HALVAR DIDN'T MEAN TO KILL TWO PEOPLE BEFORE BREAKFAST.**

He tried to think what he could have done to prevent the slaughter. He had been in Manatas a week. The first three days were spent in nonstop action, the next three in the cell assigned to him in the Rabat dealing with the aftermath of multiple attacks. He'd been bludgeoned, stabbed, shot, drugged, and garroted. He'd been poisoned by odd food eaten at odder hours.

Now he stood before the enraged ruler of Manatas Town like a schoolboy being berated by the head of the Madrassa. He shifted from foot to foot, his shoulders constricted in a coat that had been remade from the standard uniform issued to the Town Guard, with extra inserts at the bottom and seams to suit his tall frame.

As the personal Hireling of Don Felipe, the Calif of Al-Andalus, in whose name the sultan ran the outpost called Manatas Town, he deserved no less; but he hated not having his own common gear.

He mourned the leather jacket that had been sliced to ribbons by assassins. At least he had retained his own cap, the leather-lined item with its plain ribbon band whose hidden boiled-leather lining had saved his life and his wits more times than he chose to count. He had added a leather vest that served as perfunctory armor under the light coat.

He wished he could have strapped his belt and dagger over the coat instead of having to button the coat over the belt and dagger,

but he'd left one of the toggles open so he could get his hand onto the dagger if he had to fight.

He glanced at the young man sharing the force of Sultan's Petrus's wrath.

*How does he do it?* Halvar wondered, taking in Tenente Ruiz's dapper appearance.

The tenente's green coat, although taken from the general stores provided for the Town Guard, fit him as if it had been made for him, not a wrinkle marring his sleek form. The braid on his sleeves that marked his elevation in rank from mere guardsman to tenente fairly gleamed in the morning sunlight that filtered through window of the tower room where Sultan Petrus held court. Even the regulation bludgeon that swung from his belt had been polished, and the ivory inlay on the butt of the pistoia thrust into his belt seemed to wink every time he moved.

Under the tall tarboosh worn by the Guards, Ruiz's regular features were stony, only the quiver of the line of mustache on his upper lip and a twitch at the corner of his neatly trimmed beard revealing his anger.

Petrus stumped back and forth across the floor of his personal apartment in the Rabat, the fortress that had been built at the southernmost tip of the island to guard Manatas from invaders from the sea. One foot booted in expensive leather, the other replaced by a silver-embellished ivory peg, the old soldier fairly exploded with wrath, waving his arms and sending the sleeves of his silk caftan flapping. His elaborately folded turban wobbled on his head, its plume bobbing as he wagged his head at Halvar.

"Only seven days here, Don Alvaro, and the death toll is mounting! How do you do it? Is there some daemon, some djinn that sits upon your shoulder and carries its bane with it so that you bring destruction with you?" the sultan fairly spar at the tall Dane.

Halvar tugged at the yellow mustache that swept from his upper lip down to his chin.

"I had no choice," he protested. "The killing of the frater in the Feria was not my doing, and Tenente Gomez, who actually did the deed, tried to kill me, so I had to defend myself. As for the young Mahak, Otter Tail, that was Gomez again. Am I to be blamed because you trusted a man who was untrustworthy?"

"And what about the Franchen?" Sultan Petrus shot back. "Not one, not two, but *three* in one morning! And one of them a woman!"

"They were trying to disrupt our money system," Halvar explained. "They were responsible for dyeing white wumpum purple to get more goods for false coin. And they killed one of your own wife's servants who discovered what they were doing and left her naked body to be swept away in the East Channel. It was only because the killer misjudged the tides that she was found by the Local women who gather clams there. And I wasn't the one who killed Jacques Tavernier, that was Ruiz, here. He's the one with the pistoia."

Tenente Ruiz stiffened even more under the sultan's scrutiny. He had been hurriedly appointed to Gomez's position when the former tenente of the Town Guard was forced into the Great River to be swept upstream where he might (or might not) have been captured by the Mahak.

Now he put on an ingratiating smile and said, "I really had no choice. The innkeeper Jacques Tavernier and his wife Lizette were engaged in criminal activity. You might say I saved you the trouble of a hanging."

"I wanted to take Jacques alive," Halvar interjected in protest. "I didn't want him shot."

"That was unfortunate," Ruiz admitted. "I did not shoot to kill, but you know how unreliable those handguns are. I meant only to frighten the man."

The sultan stamped his ivory peg-leg, a souvenir of the Italia Campaign, in fury.

"What kind of Hireling are you, Don Alvaro?" he demanded. "You come here, unbidden and unwanted, and in a week you've managed to upset everyone and everything here."

"I serve Don Felipe, Calif of Al-Andalus, may he have long life," Halvar stated flatly. "I can't help it if crazed women try to kill me with pokers, or if their servants try to strangle me with garrotes. I defended myself, Excellent Sultan. You would do the same."

"No doubt," the sultan huffed.

"And I did want them alive, to tell me whose idea it was in the first place." Halvar continued to press his position. "I don't think either Tavernier or that wife of his had the wit to think of it on their own. As for their servers, the only people I know of who use the garrote are the thieves of Parigi, and I'm sure you will agree, Excellent Sultan, that Manatas is well rid of such vile persons."

"Again, this is true." Petrus collapsed into his padded chair, a large item made in the Oropan fashion to accommodate his inability to fold himself down to the level of most Andalusian cushions.

Halvar glanced at the fourth person in the room. The youth stood in the light shining through a small window that revealed the bay and the ships that brought the goods that were bought and sold at the Feria.

"May I add, Excellent Sultan, that your son Selim was held by Tavernier and his wife, and that now he is restored to you, as you requested?"

Sultan Petrus pulled at his beard.

"I told you to find him, and you did. That's true, too."

"Excellent Sultan, I obeyed your order," Halvar stated. "So, with your permission, I will do what I was sent here to do by our esteemed calif, Don Felipe, may he reign long. I will go back to that Fraternity at Green Village, and I will persuade Leon di Vicenza that he must return to Al-Andalus with me, before it is too late and the Franchen overrun all of Al-Andalus, with their guns blazing fire and their men tearing through every village, raping and plundering, and their mad fraters splashing water on everyone, claiming them for the Redeemer whether they believe or not."

He looked far beyond the windows, seeing scenes that still burned in his memory.

"You may go back to Green Village," Ruiz said, with a knowing smirk, "but I don't think you'll have much luck prying Leon out of the Fraternity. The Kristos have him, and they won't let him go that easily. Of course, knowing Leon, he's probably got some scheme in mind for getting away from them."

Halvar's blue eyes narrowed over his beak of a nose. "I thought you didn't know Leon," he said.

"I don't, but you couldn't miss him, could you?" Ruiz said with a shrug. "The way he strutted around in his garish garb with Selim trotting beside him like a puppy. Oh, yes, Don Alvaro, Leon di Vicenza made himself well known in Manatas from the moment he came here with the Excellent Sultan."

"He's needed in Al-Andalus," Halvar repeated stubbornly. "It's what I was told. It's why I was sent here. Those are my orders."

"I thought you were supposed to oversee the revenues from the Feria," Ruiz said slyly.

"That, too," Halvar admitted. *And to make sure those revenues get back to Al-Andalus*, he added to himself.

The sultan grunted again. "If you must, then go back to that houri in Green Village and find out from her what is going on there," he

ordered. "There are too many Bretons in that den of thieves and vagabonds for my liking."

"But beware of vipers in Paradise," Ruiz warned.

Halvar grinned at the two of them.

"I'll bear it in mind."

The Afrikan who served as the sultan's doorkeeper poked his head in and announced, "There is someone here to speak with Don Alvaro."

The new arrival was a scrawny young man in the long striped shirt and loose trousers favored by the shopkeepers in the souk and on the waterfront. His long hair was tied back with a ribbon under the broad-brimmed hat favored by the Franchen. Behind him was one of the Town Guards, a burly fellow with a bulbous nose over a round beard, his face scarred by smallpox.

"Tenente!" the guard announced. "There has been trouble at the waterfront!"

"When isn't there trouble on the waterfront?" grumbled the sultan.

"I am worried about Manolo, the pawnbroker," the shopkeeper blurted "He hasn't opened his door in two days."

Halvar frowned at Ruiz. "I thought you said he never closed."

"He doesn't, as far as I know."

The young man went on.

"Manolo is my father. He named me Yokanan, but in the True Faith, I am called Jehan. He lived behind the shop and almost never closed, except for one day every year when he would do no business but locked himself away. The following day he always opened. Two days ago, during the big storm, was that one day when he closed.

"The boys who clean the shop, Gavril and Gamal, they went yesterday, and it was closed, tight. I thought perhaps my father mistook the day, because of the storm, so I did not worry, but I went today, and the shop is still closed. I tried to open the door, and it is barred from the inside."

"Locked?" Halvar's eyebrows went up.

"We have a chain and a lock on the front door, but that is only used when both of us are away from the shop and the boys are not there. There is a bar across the door on the inside so that it can be defended. The outside lock was not fastened, only the inside bar."

"And what has this to do with me?" Halvar asked. "Tenente Ruiz is in charge of the Town Guard, let him do the investigating. I have other business to attend to. I can't waste my time chasing mur-

derers and counterfeiters and Franchen spies. My orders are to get Leon back to Al-Andalus, and that is what I am going to do!"

"But you saw my father Manolo just before he locked the store," Jehan protested. "Please, Don Alvaro, come to the waterfront."

"Don't you trust the Town Guard to do their work properly?"

Jehan shrugged. "Tenente Gomez was known to take money from us shopkeepers—to keep the riffraff away, he said. If you didn't pay, Scavengers would come and sit in front of the shops and harass the buyers. Or there would be thefts, or worse. And his men weren't much better."

"I could use your help, Don Alvaro," Ruiz said with another of his wry grins. "Why not go to the waterfront with me and solve this little problem for friend Jehan? After you take care of that, you can chase Leon and have another spat with your redheaded houri Dani Glick."

"Better go and see what this fellow wants," the sultan agreed. "I'll have more to say to you later."

Halvar surrendered. "Very well. I wanted to have a word with Manolo anyway. He has to know more about that wumpum plot than he told us. Leon's not going anywhere, and the Feria's on for another week at least."

"Then let's get to it," Ruiz said, bowing to the sultan.

Young Selim moved to join them.

"Where do you think you're going?" Sultan Petrus demanded.

"Don Alvaro told me he needed someone to write for him," Selim said. "I'm going to be his secretary."

"The best help you can give is to stay out of our way," Ruiz growled. "You've already caused enough trouble. Stay put in the Rabat, and let the rest of us do our work."

Halvar grinned under his mustache.

"Let the lad come with us. He may be of use yet. Bring paper and pen and ink with you," he added as Selim bounded forward, glad to be away from his father's heavy-handed care.

The youngster snatched up some loose sheets of paper on the table in the middle of the room and tapped the pen case that hung at his belt where someone else might keep a dagger.

"I'm ready!" he proclaimed and followed Halvar down the steps to the stone-paved courtyard of the Rabat.

A squad of four Guards awaited them with one of the ever-present donkey carts that were the principal form of transportation in Manatas Town.

“Better bring Dr. Moise,” Halvar decided. “If what this fellow suspects is true, we’ll need him.”

Ruiz yelled, ‘Hoy, Doctor Moise! We may have another patient for you at the waterfront.”

The tall Afrikan physician emerged from his quarters and joined the group as they clambered into the official donkey cart. Halvar clung to the sides of the frail vehicle as it rattled along the streets and down the hill to the waterfront and wondered whether the possible death of an old pawnbroker was anything more than an accident, or a robbery gone wrong. He’d already uncovered one plot against the Calif. Was there another one?

## Chapter 2

**THE PROCESSION WOUND OUT OF THE COURTYARD OF** the Rabat down the cobbled street to the East Channel. There, a paved plaza had been laid out and wooden pilings set up for the barges, dhows, and other watercraft to tie up and unload their cargoes of foodstuffs and trade goods.

Passengers from the islands across the channel were deposited at one end of the wharf while fishermen dumped baskets of flopping fish at the other. Local women in leather skirts and colorful woolen shirts vied with Afrikan women in dyed kuton wraps and towering headdresses for the best bargains in fish and vegetables. They would carry their wares in baskets into Manatas Town to be sold to Andalusian women confined to their homes by the Laws and rulings of Islim and the Prophet.

The air was full of the scents of salt water, rotting fish, and smoke from braziers where small fish and cakes of maiz were being grilled to satisfy the appetites of the men who loaded and offloaded the cargoes and those who were on the docks to purchase them. The cries of the vendors mingled with the shrill yawps of seagulls swooping down to snatch fish from the boats or offal thrown into the channel.

Ruiz and his squad of green-coated Town Guards swaggered ahead of the donkey cart and its passengers—Halvar, Selim, and Dr. Moise. They pushed through the crowd of curious onlookers to the shack where the pawnbroker Manolo did his business.



Just as Jehan had said, the door was closed. There was no sound from within.

Halvar had last time been here at night. In the daylight, he saw the painted sign with three coins, the universal Oropan symbol for pawnbroker. A small window was set into the wall next to the door with a mirror attached, so the pawnbroker could see who was about to enter.

The shack was constructed of rough planks set upright between heavy beams. The door hung between two of those beams, a solid slab of wood with a large wrought-iron brace on one side. An iron chain was threaded through one side of the brace, but the lock on the other end hung uselessly to the ground.

Halvar frowned at the door.

"No hinges?"

"It opens from the inside," Jehan explained. "There's a bar inside that can be pushed against the door to keep it shut.

"A careful man," Halvar murmured to Ruiz.

"Or a frightened one," Ruiz replied in the same tone.

"Let's see what this door is made of."

Halvar lunged at the door, with no result but a bruised shoulder.

"It's solid oak," Jehan stated. "When we came here, Manolo insisted that this house should be built so he could bar the door from the inside. That way, no one could break in."

"What about the back? There can't only be one way in and out of here."

Jehan led the group around the shack, nodding to a Local woman who sat beside one of the ubiquitous braziers grilling ears of maize. She looked up from her work long enough to nod back to him.

"My wife, Morning Star," he said. "She sits here all day. She keeps watch for Manolo, so the back door is never locked."

They edged along the narrow alley to the back of the shack. Jehan pointed to the crudely made door.

"I tried that one, too," he said. "I could not budge it. Manolo must have set the inside bar on this door, too."

Halvar could see no outside handle or knob on the blank face of this door, either.

"How do you get in?"

"You push," Jehan said, demonstrating. "But, as you can tell, the door is barred."

Halvar frowned at the blank panel in front of him. There were no windows in these plank walls, no opening for air or light.

"Must have been hot in there in summer," he mused.

"The door was opened to allow a breeze," Jehan explained. "With Morning Star in the alley, Manolo felt safe enough. At night, of course, it was barred."

"Who took care of the shop at night?" Halvar asked. "The old man had to sleep sometime. And he told us he went to the public latrine behind the taberna."

"Sometimes I worked at night," Jehan admitted. "Or Gavril or Gamal would stay in the shop to take care of any business that might come. Manolo slept in the room behind the shop."

"All these precautions. Was the pawnbroker expecting trouble?" Ruiz asked.

Jehan shrugged. "There are those who believe we keep great amounts of gold and silver here, which we do not. And there are sailors who have pledged their goods who want them back but do not have the wherewithal to redeem them."

"Did Manolo have any particular enemies?" Halvar asked as he ran his fingers over the top of the back door. There was a slight gap between the panel and the lintel. His fingers found a tiny groove in the top edge of the door.

"None that I know of," Jehan said.

"Then why bar himself in like this?" Halvar demanded. "And only one day a year?"

Jehan licked his lips, looking uncomfortable.

"I am not sure why he would not open. It was never the same day each year, but always one day in the fall. He would close the shop, bar the doors, and keep to himself. The very next day, he would open early, and all would be as usual.

"That is why I am worried, Don Alvaro, Tenente Ruiz. He's not open. He doesn't answer. I'm very much worried about him. He could have had a seizure of the heart."

Dr. Moise stepped forward.

"Did Manolo suffer from ill health?"

"He was feisty enough when we spoke with him four days ago, just before the storm," Ruiz said.

"He was old," Jehan argued. "Old people get seizures."

"Not all of them," Halvar countered. He tapped on the wall of the shack next to the door. "You, guard!" He motioned to the burly man who led the squad. "What's your name, laddie?"

"Flores." The stout man in the green coat and high-crowned tarboosh flushed under his bristling black beard, waiting for the in-

evitable comment contrasting his poetic name with his crude appearance.

Halvar didn't oblige him.

"Help me push this plank out of the way."

Together, the two men leaned against the board that held up the sagging roof of the pawnbroker's shack. It gave way under the pressure of their bodies, and the squad of guards followed Halvar and Ruiz into the pawnbroker's establishment.

Even though one plank of the back wall had given way, the rough door still held firmly between two stout wooden pillars, fastened to the beams that held the walls of the shack in place. It had been barred using a beam that rested between crude iron brackets, a barrier against possible intruders. A leather strap served as a hinge to allow the beam to be moved up and down.

The back room was, as Jehan had said, Manolo's living quarters. A simple plank bed stood in one corner, covered with a straw mattress and a shabby but serviceable woolen blanket. There was a table and stool set against another wall with the remains of a fowl and a bowl of cooked vegetables on it, along with a goblet that smelled of stale wine. A round loaf of white bread sat on a separate plate beside a small dish of honey, already covered with flies.

Pegs rammed into the wall held Manolo's scant wardrobe: a long black coat, a short blue jacket of the kind worn by seamen, two pairs of woolen breeches, and a heavy fur garment that that might have been used as a wrapper or a blanket.

A lantern hung from the ceiling beams that held the walls in place. A small brazier in one corner would have been a source of heat in winter, but there was no sign it had been used recently. A twig broom leaned in one corner next to a large palm frond, the only green thing in the otherwise drab room.

Halvar had become aware of a penetrating odor, one that he had smelled all too often in his days of fighting across Oropa. He knew what had happened to the pawnbroker.

"Nothing to steal here," Ruiz commented as he scanned the meager furnishings.

"We haven't tried the floor. He could have hidden something under the boards." Halvar reminded him. He stamped, experimentally, but there was no sound of a hollow space.

"There is a cellar where we store roots and cider for the winter," Jehan said. "I suppose if Manolo had any treasure, that's where he would keep it, but, as I said, we do not deal in such things. Only

small items—trinkets and clothing, such things as sailors and students want to sell or borrow money on.”

“Here’s Manolo’s meal, and his clothes, but where’s the pawnbroker? I have a very bad feeling about this.” Halvar looked toward the entrance to the shop.

“He’s here!”

Guardsmen Flores had already gone through another door to the main room of the shop. He stepped aside to let Ruiz and Halvar see the body of the old pawnbroker lying on the floor behind his counter, his sightless eyes staring at the beams overhead.

## Chapter 3

**DR. MOISE KNELT BESIDE THE BODY OF THE PAWNBROKER** as Jehan let out a wail.

“Oh, my poor father! Dead in his sins, without the Redeemer’s pardon!”

Halvar let the bereaved son mourn while he looked around the shack. Shelves had been set up against the walls and filled with miscellaneous objects. Oddly shaped Afrikan carvings jostled delicate ivory statuettes, carried all the way from India or Cathay, representing strange gods and demons. Wool, kuton, and silk jackets, coats and shirts hung on pegs over a row of footwear that included Local macassins trimmed with glass beads, hemp-soled sandals favored by Andalusians, and boots with high wooden heels worn by Franchen in imitation of their notoriously short ruler Lovis. A box on the counter held a jumble of trinkets: rings, necklaces, bracelets and brooches made of metal, ivory and wood, some studded with glittering stones that might have been glass or real gems.

The shelves behind the counter held larger items. Brass urns with weird designs chased on their sides, clay pots with weirder designs painted across their rounded bellies, statues of gods with many arms and the heads of beasts were ranged at eye level, beyond the grasp of careless hands.

Halvar frowned down at a small box with an elaborate lock set on the counter for all to see.

"Moneybox," Ruiz said. "He had silver here, to make his purchases and give out as loans."

"Not taken," Halvar commented. "A thief would have gone for that right away. And those gewgaws, some of them might make some wumpum or silver in the souk or at the Feria." A thought struck him. "What about wumpum?"

"He carried strings on his belt," Jehan said.

"Flores?" Ruiz motioned for his minion to check the body.

"It's here," the guardsman replied, after a brief look.

"Not a robbery gone wrong, then," Halvar concluded. "Let's see about this door."

The door indeed opened inward, on hinges whose workmanship matched that of the handle and braces on the front.

"We had Malik the Smith come to put the door up," Jehan boasted.

"He did a good job of it," Halvar said. "Selim, come over here and show me how well Leon taught you. I need an image of this door showing how the bar has been shoved through these iron braces. No latch on this door, Ruiz." He pointed to the bar. "That would take a little strength, don't you think? To push that beam through those iron braces?"

"Manolo was stronger than he looked," Jehan said. "And the bar was usually left on the door, across the braces, so that all he had to do was shove it across the gap when he chose to barricade it."

"Not like the back door," Halvar said. "That one lifts."

"Clever." Ruiz went back into the pawnbroker's sleeping quarters to observe the mechanism then returned. "I don't know about the latch, but whoever made this door wasn't much of a carpenter. There's a gap between the top of the door and the lintel. Must have been cold in the winter, with the wind blowing through."

"Someone could thread a cord around the bar, run it over the top of the door, go out and drop it down." Halvar said. He recalled the feeling of the minute groove in the top of the door.

"But why bother to go through all that for a robbery that didn't come off?" Ruiz wondered.

Before he could get an answer, the voice of the muezzin echoed across the waterfront plaza. Dr. Moise left off his examination to turn toward the east and prostrate himself to acknowledge the Prophet's words and Ilha's dominance, as did the guards. Jehan

and Ruiz knelt, made the sign of the crux, and recited the Patri Nostri. Halvar neither knelt nor bowed but clutched the amulet that could have been either the Crux or Thor's Hammer and murmured his own midday prayer.

"May the Redeemer and his Mother Mara and the god Thor help me."

That done, Dr. Moise stood up and pronounced, "This man is dead."

"I can see that," Ruiz said. "How did he die?"

"I am not sure," Dr. Moise said.

"A seizure of the—" Jehan started, but Dr. Moise cut him off.

"Perhaps, but I won't know until I get him back to the dead-house."

"For autopsy?" Jehan was aghast. "You would destroy his body and deny him eternal life?"

"There are signs that this was by no means a natural death. I must make a more thorough examination, and I can't do it here."

"What makes you think this wasn't an attack of the heart?" Halvar asked.

"For one thing, he is face up. Usually, if someone has a seizure, they fall forward. Then there is the very odd angle of the head."

"He could have fallen against the counter," Jehan insisted.

"I saw no bruising on his face or forehead," Dr. Moise countered, "but there is an odd mark here, on his neck. Also, when a body has been in place for any length of time, the blood pools downward. There are signs that this body has been moved. I want to look more closely at that before I make a final pronouncement."

Ruiz cut through the argument. "When did he die?"

"At least a full day ago, possibly two," Dr. Moise told him. "His limbs have gone through the rigor and are loose again."

"We talked to him four days ago," Halvar reminded Ruiz. "Just before we went to the Mermaid Taberna. He was alive then and showed no sign of illness that I could see."

"Are you a trained physician?" Dr. Moise sneered.

"I'm not, but you are. So, I ask you, Doctor, how did he die? If not by the hand of Ilha, then how else?"

"I can't be sure until I examine him further." Dr. Moise motioned to the waiting guards. "Take him to the Rabat. I will be able to tell you more later today."

Ruiz shoved the heavy plank away from the front door to let the squad carry the body of the dead pawnbroker to the waiting cart.

"Don Alvaro!" Selim called out from his post by the front door. "I think you'd better get out here!"

Halvar stepped into the sunlight to find a large crowd had gathered to watch the proceedings. There seemed to be at least two parties, each led by an enraged cleric, both hostile, and neither one ready to let the body of Manolo the Pawnbroker go to the Rabat.



## Chapter 4

THE FIRST GROUP WAS HEADED BY A ROTUND ANDALUSIAN with a luxuriant brown beard, clad in the striped robes and green turban worn by imams who had been trained in the ulema of Stamboul. Behind him were the Afrikan dockworkers and market-women, with a scattering of Andalusian sailors adding their voices to the hubbub.

Across from them stood a tall, gaunt frater in the black robe and hooded cowl favored by those Kristos who practiced the Roumi Rite, his thin-lipped mouth and hairless chin tight with disapproval. His followers included several Local women in their distinctive wrapped skirts and bead-trimmed blouses and a squad of Franchen sailors and their captains in tight trousers and broad-brimmed hats.

Between the two groups, Ruiz had placed his squad of guards and the wagon with its sorry burden.

"What's going on here? Who are these people" Halvar demanded.

"Imam Haroun, of the Waterfront Muskat, and Prester Nicodemus from the Kristo chapel." Ruiz nodded towards the two enraged clerics. "It's the first time I've ever seen the two of them agreed on anything," he added, with one of his sly grins.

"Prester?" Halvar wondered at the new title. All Kristo clerics he had known were called frater, indicating a Brotherhood of the Redeemer.

"You will not take this man to be anatomized!" Nicodemus declared. "It violates the words of the Redeemer!"

"The Prophet says the same," the imam said, glaring at his rival.

"Whatever the Prophet said was false, and heretical," Nicodemus countered. "But the Redeemer said that the body will be transformed at the End of Days. How can it be resurrected if it is cut into pieces?"

"It won't be cut into pieces," Dr. Moise assured him. "But I must find out how this man died."

"It was a seizure of the heart," Jehan insisted.

"Not with his head at that angle," Halvar stated. "Fratr, let us pass."

"It is the will of Episcopus Innocente, who is our Holy Pater, that those who follow the True Faith and conduct the services of the Roumi Rite shall be called prester—that is to say, Elder—to distinguish themselves from the heretical unbelievers of the Bre-tain Rite. You may call me Prester Nicodemus." The tall Kristo nodded graciously at Halvar.

"I don't care what you call yourself," Halvar retorted. "You're blocking the way, you and your people. We don't want to hurt you, but we've got to get this man back to the Rabat. Jehan can have him back as soon as we've decided how he died."

"A seizure of the heart!" Jehan repeated.

"Prester Nicodemus, hah!" the imam snorted. "You think to upset the followers of the Prophet, may his name be blessed, by your antics. The Episcopus of Rouma may put a crown on Lovis the Franchen's head and call him Imperator, but Ilha, the All-merciful, may his name be praised, will take him to Sheol! For his men seize those who are sworn to the Prophet, may his name be blessed, and put the water upon them, and call them to the Redeemer's service, but their hearts are with Ilha, the All-merciful, may his name be praised!"

There was a mutter of agreement from the Afrikans behind the imam. The Franchen and Locals behind Prester Nicodemus grewled their resentment.

Halvar groaned inwardly as he saw the two religious men egging their followers on and tried to assume a soothing tone.

"Reverend Imam Haroun, Prester Nicodemus, I ask you in the names of both the Redeemer and the Prophet, allow this cart to pass. A man has been killed—"

"How do you know?" Jehan burst out. "We found him alone, in his shop, with all the doors barred. It must be a natural death, and he must be buried at once. It is true that he once was Yehudit, and faced the fire for it, but we took the water back in Oropa before we took ship, when I was a lad." He turned to Prester Nicodemus. "Am I not your decanus, your faithful layman, the head of your congregation? Does my wife not serve you your meals? Why do you let these men take my father's body to be cut apart?"

Halvar inserted himself between Jehan and the cart.

"Your father will be restored to you for burial by tomorrow," he assured the distraught shopkeeper. "But it is the calif's will that anyone whose death is in question should be examined before burial, to determine if the death was from natural causes and, if from a natural cause, whether there is a disease involved."

"Disease?" Someone in the crowd yelled.

"Plague! A shrill voice answered.

That seemed to be the signal for a riot. Before he knew it, Halvar was in the middle of a fighting mob shouting religious slogans and slinging fists as well as stones.

*Where is Ruiz? Why don't his men fight back? This is his job, not mine! It's only a matter of time before knives are drawn!*

He was shoved back and forth as he tried to reach under his long coat for his dagger. He used elbows to shove his way through the crowd to get his back to the wall of the pawnshop, but there was someone behind him, pressing against him. He turned to face this attacker and felt a stinging pain across his lower back where the edge of his leather under-vest met the top of his breeches.

"Thor's Hammer!" he roared.

At the same time, an explosion erupted behind him. The sudden noise seemed to shock the rioters into sudden immobility. Halvar jerked his head around to find the source of the noise. Ruiz thrust his pistoia back into his belt, a smug smile decorating his handsome face.

"In the name of the Calif Don Felipe, stop this fighting! By the laws of Al-Andalus, the *convivencia* holds!" Halvar roared at the crowd.

"The Sharia rules!" the tubby imam roared back.

"The Laws of the Redeemer are worth more than the sayings of an idolater!" Prester Nicodemus yelled even louder.

"The laws of Al-Andalus and the customs of Al-Andalus surpass both of them." Halvar lowered his voice to a more normal

volume. "By the edicts of the Calif Don Carlus, and his fathers before him, and the word of Calif Don Felipe, there is to be no disruption of the peace on matters of conscience in Al-Andalus or in any lands ruled by Al-Andalus! No Jihad! No Crusade!"

He repeated the words loudly in Arabi and then again in Erse for the benefit of anyone who did not understand Arabi.

"Islim rules, but the followers of the Redeemer may worship as they will, and the Yehudit are allowed to settle where they will, so long as they observe the calif's laws, pay their tolls, and do not disturb the general peace. Prester Nicodemus, if you continue to disturb the Calif's Peace, you and your followers will be subject to the calif's displeasure."

"And who are you to tell me what I can and cannot do?" Prester Nicodemus sneered.

Halvar raised his head and glared across the plaza at the crowd.

"I am Halvar Danske, the Calif's Hireling, and his personal representative in Manatas. I carry the calif's own seal, and what I do is by his orders. Right now, I order all of you to go about your business and allow us to do the same!"

There was an ugly muttering from the crowd. Ruiz stepped forward, one hand on the cudgel at his belt. The Guards behind him unhooked the cudgels from their belts and held them ready to enforce the calif's will on anyone who dared defy it.

"The mullah will hear of this," the imam said as he retreated to the muskat at the entrance to the plaza.

"This is not over," threatened Prester Nicodemus, with a nod to Jehan.

Halvar was suddenly aware of a sharp pain in his side. He pressed his hand to his back and realized that it was wet and, when he looked at it, red.

"You're bleeding," Ruiz observed.

"Someone in that crowd had a knife." Halvar sagged against the door of the pawnshop.

"Get me back inside, and tell Dr. Moise he's got a live patient as well as a dead one." To himself he added, *I've only been out of bed for a day, and someone's tried to kill me again. I must be doing something right!*

# Chapter 5

RUIZ FROWNED AS HE HELPED HALVAR BACK INTO THE pawnshop.

"You must be under the curse of a djinn," he decided. "No matter where you go, someone tries to kill you."

"It's a gift I'd prefer to hand on to someone else," Halvar said.

Ruiz and Dr. Moise got him out of the tight-sleeved coat and unlaced the leather vest beneath, revealing a slash where a blade had skidded off his belt to slice through his shirt under the coat.

"A thin, sharp instrument," was the doctor's opinion as he inspected the slash. "It was meant to penetrate to the inner organs, causing bleeding. Your leather belt deflected the blow. I have seen men walk about for an hour or more before succumbing to such an attack"

"A professional assassin's trick," Halvar agreed. "Better bind it up before I bleed to death."

"Not likely," Dr. Moise grunted. "A shallow cut, for which Ilha, the All-merciful may be praised. You, Jehan! Have you any cloths we can use for a bandage?"

"I thought all doctors carried their tools with them," Halvar gibed.

"I wasn't expecting a live patient," Dr. Moise retorted.

Jehan produced a roll of kuton material. Dr. Moise tore a strip off and wound it around Halvar's torso.

"Another coat gone," Halvar grouched. "The shirt I can still wear, the vest I can wear, but I need another coat or jacket." He looked around at the contents of the shop. "Jehan! Is there something I can wear here? Surely, there was a big fellow who needed money, who was willing to sell the coat off his back to get it."

Jehan scanned the garments on the wall.

"There's this leather jacket," he observed. "It came from a Dane, caught here without wumpum." He took down a well-worn garment cut in the Danic style, short, with padded shoulders and horn buttons to close the front. It looked so much like the one Halvar had owned when he first came to Manatas that he had to examine it closely before he decided it was not the one he was told had been sliced apart in an attack his second night on the island.

He eased himself into it, shrugged his shoulders, and announced, "It'll do. How much?"

"A gift, if you please," Jehan insisted. "I have no idea how much it is worth, or what my father paid for it. It must have come in on the night of the big storm, after the, um, disturbance, after I had left for the day. I don't remember its being here before than."

He stopped, embarrassed by the mere suggestion of the deaths of Jacques Tavernier and his wife Lizette.

Halvar looked for something to sit on; Ruiz found a stool behind the counter and eased him onto it. He looked around the shop again, taking a mental inventory of the odds and ends.

"There's something missing," he announced.

"How can you tell?" Ruiz said with a sneer, looking around at the conglomeration of items piled on shelves, hanging from hooks, and stacked on the floor.

"There were books." Halvar pointed to the shelf farthest from the counter. "A pile of them, right there. They aren't there now. Where are they, Jehan? What happened to those books?"

"Books?" Ruiz echoed.

"Books," Halvar repeated. "I wouldn't think many folk here would be in the market for those. Yet Manolo had them here. He must have bought them, paid for them, or else he lent money on them. Where did they come from?"

"We have scholars here in Manatas," Jehan said defensively. "There are students who come to the madrassa from the Afrikan settlements in the Southern Territories. The Bretains in West Caster and the other Britain lands who can't get to the great ma-

drassas in Parigi and Oxenford come here to Manatas Town to learn our philosophy and study from our doctors.

"They stay in lodgings, but sometimes they overstay and run out of money, and have to pawn their books to pay for tuition, until their parents send them more silver. And some of them even gamble!" Jehan shook his head at the folly of young men on the loose in a town like Manatas. "They think because they have studied mathematics that they can beat the odds!"

"There are no odds," Halvar said. "Like Old Sergeant Olav told me, don't bother to gamble—the house always wins." He returned to the problem at hand. "It would appear that our thief, if such there is, wasn't after gold or silver or any of the jewels in this shop, but those books are missing."

"So, this murderer was also a thief who stole books?" Ruiz sounded dubious. "What for? Who reads them? Why bother with them? What kind of money could he get for them?"

"If those books were Leon's notebooks, they could hold secrets men might well murder for," Halvar said. "Remember—Tavernier said he'd sold some of those notebooks to make up for what Leon owed him on rent.

"Leon wrote down everything he heard, and he made images of everything he saw or thought he could make. Leon's ideas about mechanisms might be worth something to some clever Bre-tain in Green Village." He took another breath, and regretted it. Through clenched teeth, he asked Jehan, "Where did Manolo sell the books he bought?"

Jehan frowned in thought. "Behind the madrassa, in the Souk, there's a vendor called Mendel the Bookseller. He buys and sells books, and rebinds old ones, too. Manolo used to take books to him. They were friends, of a sort. No other Yehudit would deal with my father."

"Benjamin ibn Mendel, the bookseller's son, is one of my friends," Selim said.

Everyone turned to stare at the youngster, whose presence had been forgotten in the riot.

"He was one of Leon di Vicenza's followers, the Seekers of Truth."

"I'd better have a word with Mendel the Bookseller and see if anyone has offered to sell him Leon's notebooks," Halvar decided.

"What about the rest of Leon's things?" Selim asked. "We should get them, too. He wanted his paints and his inks."

"We can stop at the taberna and pick them up," Halvar said, heaving off the stool.

"Why bother? Emir Achmet the Scavenger probably had his people out as soon as the Taverniers were gone," Ruiz said with a dismissive shrug.

"And you didn't think to post a guard!" Halvar turned on the man, aghast at such a blatant lack of competence.

"I posted a guard—of course I did! I had one of my men standing by the front door of the place to discourage sightseers, but I had a few other things on my mind," Ruiz retorted defensively. "Getting you back to the Rabat, for one, and dealing with that gale, for another. I sent two more men to the taberna once the storm was over, but by that time, someone was already there, ready to take the place over. A Dane, no less. He had a signed and sealed paper written in Arabi and Rune giving him the rights to the property. It's his, by law, and for all I know, he's there now."

"A Dane?" Halvar fingered the jacket. "He may well have been the last person to see Manolo alive!"

"Except for his murderer," Selim put in.

"So, Hireling, what do we do now?" Ruiz asked.

"We go see this Dane and find out what he has to say about Manolo. Then, I think I will have a word with this Mendel, about books."



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