



# *The* Tale *of* Tales

*the book collection*

 SILVERSEA®

It sprang – as all remarkable tales do – from a deep well of imagination. An idea both exciting and simple: to merge the power of storytelling with the beauty of travel.

The setting? Sumptuous luxury and comfort, aboard the elegant *Silver Whisper*. The plot? Unfolded at glorious leisure, across five continents, 31 countries and 133 days.

The characters? Intelligent, eloquent, curious, passionate travellers – joined by nine enriching, amusing, world-renowned tellers of tales.

You who were there – you lived this story. Indeed, you created it. Journeying deeper to 52 ports, spanning the globe, you were muse and protagonist. You made it unique: the Tale of Tales.

Now it is time to relive it...

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SAN FRANCISCO TO LONDON  
6 JANUARY – 19 MAY, 2019

Every Silversea guest knows from personal experience that stories and travel are close companions. Yet the two have never been so deeply interwoven as they were for the Silversea Tale of Tales World Cruise 2019.

This anthology celebrates all those who were part of that extraordinary voyage. Those who travelled further into the world to discover its beauty. Those who were fascinated, amazed and delighted by the stories they encountered – the stories they shared – and the story they created.

Like the voyage itself, this volume is enhanced, once more, by our company of esteemed Tale Tellers, who played such a stimulating role in the Tale of Tales narrative. They mirror our guests' world perspectives and inquisitive natures. And their creativity is a testament to our planet's limitless wonders. It embodies the quest for authenticity, hidden beauty and unique travel experiences – each of which Silversea is dedicated to delivering in utmost comfort.

May our Tale Tellers' writings, images and recollections re-immense you in your own memories and stories – and beckon further, enriching explorations.

**Barbara Muckermann**  
*Chief Marketing Officer*



CHAPTER 1

# *Into the Blue*

SAN FRANCISCO

Nuku Hiva  
Rangiroa

Moorea  
**PAPEETE**

SAN FRANCISCO – PAPEETE  
6<sup>TH</sup> – 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2019



## PICO IYER

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An eloquent and incisive observer of global culture, Pico Iyer is a celebrated travel writer whose stories have taken him to the snowy mountains of Japan and a North Korean film studio. Author of fifteen books on crossing cultures, he is also an essayist for periodicals such as Time, Harper's, The New York Review of Books and The New York Times. Born in England to parents from British India, raised in California and educated at Eton, Oxford, and Harvard, Iyer began criss-crossing the globe at the age of nine. Pico lives in Japan and spends part of each year at a Benedictine hermitage in California.

# Found at Sea

Three small figures huddled under umbrellas as a furious wind tried to tear their protection out of their hands. The largely festive buildings along the shore were smudged into a no-color haze. For 17 days, California had been enjoying radiant skies and Tahitian blue seas, as if midsummer had abruptly hijacked midwinter. But now the downpours that many had been praying for were erasing everything, and all we could see were thick walls of gray.

“Nothing to see but sea,” quipped John, the passenger beside me, as our bus hydroplaned through the streets of central San Francisco towards *Silver Whisper*. “For seven days!”

Eight, actually; or maybe nine, as Captain Destefano, warned of storms that might pursue us for a hundred hours across the Pacific, wisely chose to delay our departure till the following morning.

Twelve hours later, still anchored in San Francisco, my wife and I walked up to Deck 10 as the day came up, and saw unexpectedly clear skies rising above the harbor. The Bay Bridge gleamed in the rinsed new light. The sun, fighting to break through clouds, was turning a whole

patch of sky into a pulsing golden plate. Not many yards across the bay, a rainbow arced shyly above the sea in front of Alcatraz.

I'd thought I knew San Francisco pretty well: I'd been coming here ever since my parents moved to California in 1965. But never had I enjoyed a 360-degree view like this. Walking along the deck, I could inspect the whole expanse of the bay in the round, each step disclosing a fresh angle. And every time we made a further revolution, the weather had made the city new again, something different. I'd never noticed how the massed skyscrapers of downtown abutted the rounded hills, Coit Tower at their top.

We set sail at last, and, three hours later, a medical emergency after the very first lecture forced us back the way we'd come, as if we were destined never to leave. But as we drifted under the ethereal, burnt-red expanse of the Golden Gate Bridge for the third time that day – we had been scheduled only to pass under it once, after dark – even excited crew members started snapping pictures of one another along the shining decks. The storms, the medical challenge (fortunately breaking out while we were still close to port), the enforced return: every one of them had opened up wonders beyond imagining.

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What kind of mischievous games are the Fates playing with me, I'd begun to wonder? When Silversea invited me to join its 2019 World Cruise almost two years earlier, I could hardly contain my excitement: in 44 of almost constant travel, I'd never been to many of the ports listed on the itinerary –

Mombasa, Zanzibar, Mahé, even Lisbon. And now, on my wife's first cruise ever, she was going to get to see them, too. I eagerly signed up – the first time I'd ever accepted an invitation to speak on a cruise ship – and then consulted my calendar: in February 2019 I had recklessly committed myself to teaching in New Jersey. So too in March 2019 and April and May.

The only time Hiroko and I were free to join the ship, therefore, was the opening leg, which meant that Hiroko's first day on board a luxury liner – and her second and third and fourth and fifth and sixth and seventh and eighth – would be spent at sea. Yes, the subtitle of my last slim booklet had been "Adventures in Going Nowhere," but I'd never expected those words to be taken so literally.

My job on the ship was to be the first of nine special guests for "Tale of Tales," diverting my fellow passengers with vignettes from my trips to Yemen and North Korea and Iran. But even before we'd boarded *Silver Whisper*, I'd learned an essential lesson: the true tellers of tales on this craft would be my fellow passengers. At the Bon Voyage dinner in San Francisco, the elegant Czech lady next to me began reminiscing about her life growing up in Belgium and South America – after arriving on a train platform in Austria at the age of five with just one suitcase in hand and nowhere to go; the man across from us was talking of his home in Marrakesh. These veterans of World Cruises were swapping names of atolls and ports that might have been places on the moon to me; one person was describing staying on Marlon Brando's private island, while others were assessing the scuba-diving in the Seychelles.

The hidden treasure of any trip is one's fellow travelers, I'd always known, but for someone invited

to tell tales, this could present serious problems: my stories of joining my mother to see in the new millennium on Easter Island and then taking shelter in a Papeete cinema to watch *Austin Powers 2* as we awaited our 2:00 a.m. flight back to California began to sound very prosaic indeed.

An hour after we boarded the ship, I realized that I was in even greater trouble: there were four or five hundred other professional travelers and tellers of tales among us, in the waiters and suite attendants and hosts who carried six trays, worked 16 hours and always smiled with perfect politeness, even as almost all their lives (and loves and family dramas) unfolded at sea.

They had been circumnavigating the globe for years, for 8 or 10 months of every year. “What did you see in Antarctica?” I asked one. “Oh,” she said softly, “just whales and penguins and glaciers.” Then she caught herself, and remembered: when she’d told her kids back in Manila about what she’d seen, they marveled as if listening to Marco Polo.

At breakfast, a friendly neighbor was telling me about his time living in Saudi Arabia and flying across indigenous Australia for “The Ambassador.” I met a diplomat and then, seconds later, another, who spoke of their time in Havana and Tanzania and Peru. Wonderful, 90 year-old Joan was telling us how robins in Minnesota sip at fermented cherry blossoms in the fall and then stagger around drunk.

Just behind the glittering place-names were deeper stories – two husbands buried, a love lost forever in Minorca – but even without prying too deeply, we realized we were riding on a glorious anthology of stories. “This is a human library,” Hiroko marveled. Soon we hardly noticed that we were hearing about

the seven year-old Japanese girl a friendly couple from California had somehow been given to raise or how that vascular surgeon from Mumbai had spent his boyhood in South Sudan and Somalia.

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I’d been on cruises before – four of them, through Alaska and the Baltic States, and around the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. But I’d seldom been in the company of such experienced voyagers as here. No one thought anything of visits to Tristan da Cunha or a courtship on *Silver Whisper* (with a proposal in Rio); our lecturer Jon was recalling to us that French Polynesia is larger than all of Europe while two new friends were telling us how more people summit Everest in one year than visit the most memorable place they’d encountered, South Georgia Island.

A member of the staff explained how he awoke at 3:00am every morning so he could Skype his family back in the Philippines; his one year-old already knew to reach for her mother’s smartphone and cry, “Da-da, Da-da, Da-da.” Someone else was telling us how FaceTime had transformed her life aboard ship; now she could always see and hear her loved ones, even across oceans. The smiling staff were true citizens of the world, coming from everywhere and feeling at home almost anywhere. And when I’d thought of this community as a family, I’d never guessed in how many directions that could apply: a grandmother from Florida, widowed for 26 years, had grown so close to her butler and her suite attendant that she wanted to see their families when they came aboard to visit, too, as if they were her own.

Why, you're asking now, am I not writing about the rocky and forbidding slopes of Nuka Hiva, the famously remote port at which Herman Melville jumped ship? Why no word of the Happy Valley where he'd stumbled into an unfallen idyll of beautiful, hospitable people without lawyers or police officers or jobs? "The Marquesas!" America's great novelist had exclaimed, "What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up!" Yet on arrival there, he found utopian pleasures beyond the farthest reaches of outlandishness, and quickened the Golden Age fables that would gain momentum through Gauguin and Stevenson and Brando.

But we spent little time thinking of our first port as we grew accustomed to our days at sea. Every hour – every minute – the ocean was disclosing fresh colors. It was a landscape painting that never allowed us to grow used to it. We came to know its moods as we might a neighbor's, but still we could never anticipate the color-field painting it would present outside our window every morning: red above gold, yellow above blue, turquoise above emerald.

My wife slipped out of the suite just before midnight, as we were sailing from midwinter to midsummer, and stood at the prow, on the anniversary of her father's death, sending prayers out to the heavens. Sunsets started exploding later and later and then the clocks were changed and changed again as if to remind us that nothing mattered but the calendar of the sea. I had wild dreams – of a string of beaches around the coast at Rio, of red mountains in Bolivia – and when we awoke at 4:30am one morning, we walked up to see the Southern Cross pinpointed against an inky sky, almost no lights of planes disrupting the clustered constellations.

"A flying fish!" cried Hiroko, pointing to a polished silver stone skimming across the waves. "A shooting star!" Nature seemed as unresting as a member of the Silversea team as it threw off one dazzling watercolor after another.

Why am I not writing of the double rainbow improbably facing a near-full moon the day we left the ship at Papeete, the dolphins jumping along the ship as we headed to white-rimmed Moorea? Because we were living the Polynesian dream long before we disembarked at those palmy ports. "One tranquil day of ease and happiness follows another in quick succession," wrote Melville, describing the heaven he'd found in Happy Valley, and that was our life at sea. No one was going anywhere and no one was in need of anything she didn't have. "To many of them indeed," he concluded, of his new neighbors, "life is little else than an often interrupted and luxurious nap."

So with us. The ship moved, and we moved around it, and everything was moving. We had no need of land, and we inhaled the spaciousness of days without much news or the beeping of incoming messages. When I developed a cough, I descended to Deck 3 and was treated by a nurse called Angel; my warm and open-hearted new friend Hope pointed out that the doctor's middle name had "Love" in it. When I came up again, the vast colors stretching out on every side were new.

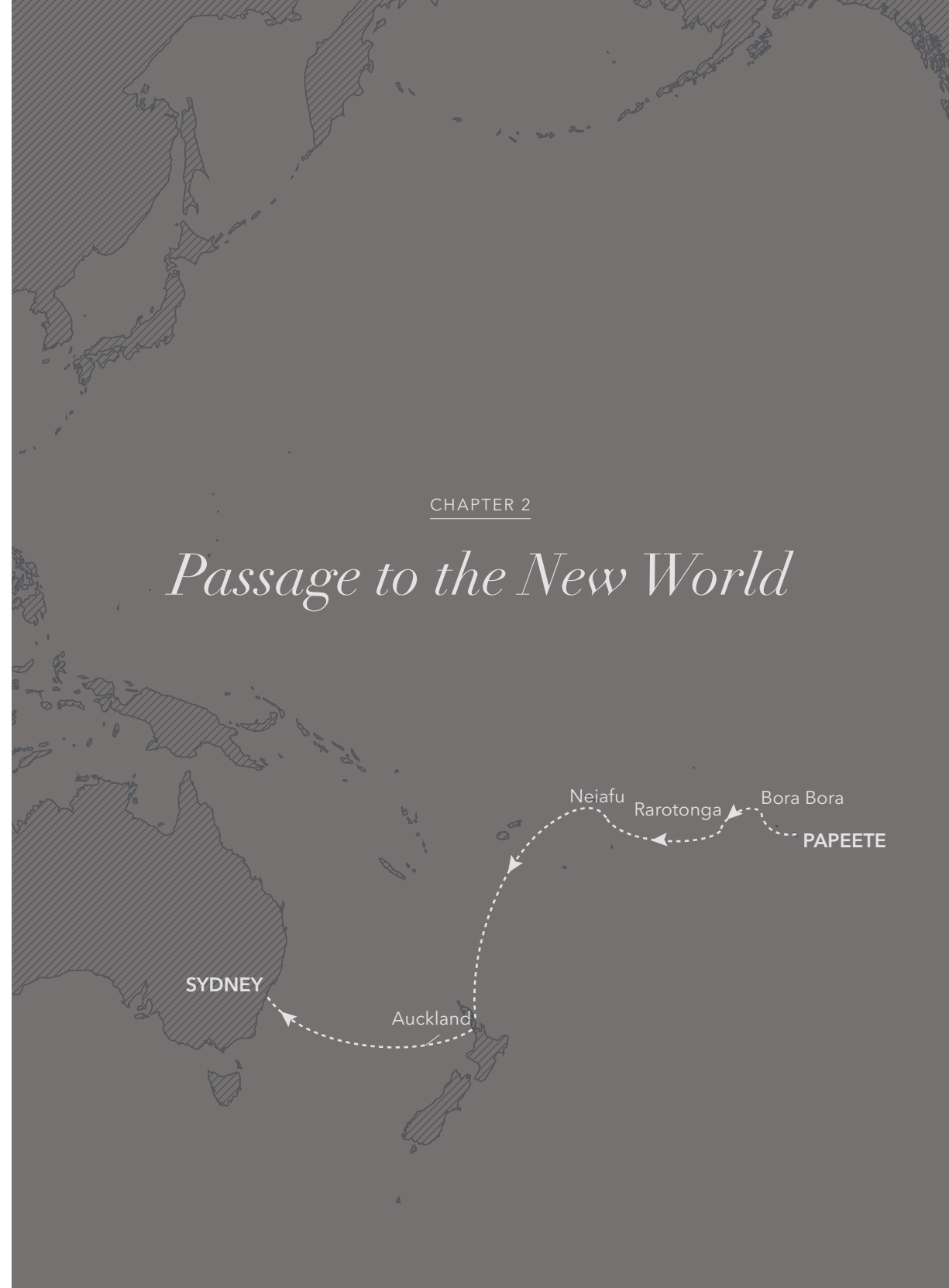
As we floated away from the sleeping beagle that was Nuka Hiva – our first land, our first boats in seven days – I started to entertain a seditious thought: to become a true Tale Teller, I could stay on the boat forever, or for the whole five months and fifty-two ports in all.

I could awaken early every morning and write

for five hours in the sun-washed quiet of my suite.  
Then I could go out to devour some of the world's  
most hidden wonders, amidst new friends from Belorussia and  
Goa and Bali. News was coming in now of “a massive  
winter snowstorm” crossing America. California was  
suffering under punishing new rains. A passenger  
from Brazil reported his friends were “dying” of the  
heat in Rio.  
Here on the ship, however, we shared old tales – and started  
creating new ones – even when it looked to the innocent  
bystander as if we were going absolutely nowhere.

CHAPTER 2

*Passage to the New World*



PAPEETE

Bora Bora

Rarotonga

Neiafu

Auckland

SYDNEY



**PAPEETE – SYDNEY**  
**18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY – 2<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2019**



## SAROO BRIERLEY

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A born storyteller, Saroo Brierley's extraordinary childhood experience became a Hollywood blockbuster in 2016. Born in 1981 in rural India, Saroo was separated from his brother at a railway station at the age of five. He boarded a train, travelling 1,000 miles to Kolkata. Unable to speak Bengali and unaware of his home town's name, he was lost. He was eventually adopted by Australians, Sue and John Brierley.

25 years on, using Google Earth, he returned to India to find his birth mother. He has written a book on his experience, *A Long Way Home*. The film, *Lion*, was nominated for six Oscars.

# Five Discoveries

When out of the blue the invitation came, without a second thought I said yes.

I've made heaps of journeys since the first accidental, terrifying one I took as a five-year-old kid, alone on a train bound for Kolkata. And looking back now, it feels like I've always been on the move to new frontiers. From being in my home town, to being lost in a city that nearly swallowed me, to being adopted, to growing up in Australia. Then life taking an incredible turn again, leading me back to the place of my birth and to my first family.

So, journeys of all kinds – ill-fated ones, luckier ones, purposeful ones, seemingly impossible ones – have undoubtedly been life-changing for me, launching me in directions I never could have imagined. But I'd never before spent two weeks on a ship, let alone explored an ocean and islands whose names conjure up almost mythical images and thoughts of unknown journeys, lives and stories. Papeete. Bora Bora. Aitutaki. Lautoka... Places bathed in turquoise water, fringed by golden sand, home to nodding palms and exotic flora and fauna.

I believe in always taking an opportunity. Having spent the last five years constantly on the move, averaging 140 flights per year, here was a rare one. An opportunity to do something different. To be in a different environment. Instead of being on a plane and flying from country to country, which can be monotonous and repetitive, having the chance to go a long distance, much slower, floating along with time to see new things and really take them in. An opportunity – like a true Silversea traveller, I would find – to relax and discover more, deeply.

## Discovery number one

My first discovery, when the day came to embark on this new and exciting journey, was the limitation of the word 'ship'. *Silver Whisper* is no mere ship. From her lean, crisp silhouette to her elegant interior, she whispers luxury. You can almost hear her soft voice inviting you to indulge, with a promise of smooth sailing.

I'd almost missed the voyage due to a delayed flight – causing panic and a last-minute re-routing of my itinerary. An airline had then lost my luggage along the way. I found this funny as I've been travelling for years without any issues. I just thought, I've had a good innings. But what a contrast it was to board *Silver Whisper*. The ground crew couldn't be more helpful in ensuring you set foot safely on ship.

And from the moment you are greeted by the most welcoming of hosts, you are enveloped in a 6-star service. Your navigations, guided onward from the main lobby by your personal butler, reveal one comfort after another. You can't help but sigh in appreciation at the quiet mention of the delicacies that are in plentiful supply on board, the main pool area begging you to recline and soak up some of the sun's rays, and the top-notch selection of spirits, wines and champagne at the poolside bar, where guests sit sipping cocktails and regaling one another with tales of the day's adventures.

You know that soon, you too will join the conversations. But first, passing stunning sculptures, statues and works of abstract art, you are led to your suite. As you sit on your private balcony gazing out at the waves, and are reminded that it is the desire of *Silver Whisper* and all her crew to see that you want for nothing whilst aboard, you know it is going to be a fine voyage indeed.

## Discovery number two

My mother was right (and so are many others around the world who have told me this): Bora Bora is the ultimate place to go for rest and relaxation. The general consensus is absolutely the truth.

But, may I add, arriving by water is the ultimate way to arrive.

The island's setting, with its beautiful lagoon, islets and barrier reef with sharks and sting rays gliding beneath the surface, is spectacular. It would be easy, I thought, to stay on the beach soaking up the scene, complete with its idyllic over-the-water bungalows.

But choosing to explore by scooter, I circumnavigated the island. In the centre the jagged remains of an ancient, extinct volcano rise to two peaks, Mount Pahia and Mount Otemanu. The towering vertical cliffs draped in lush vegetation demanded attention, contemplation and awe. There is something commanding about their presence, standing over the island, visible from every part of it, yet presenting a different face from every point in the loop. Legend has it that ancient Polynesian kings were buried on Otemanu and that their spirits remain in the sacred temple that you can still see on its slopes.

After such an experience, what could be more perfect than to stop and check out a few beaches, sample some of the local food and beer, and let it all sink in?

Each destination unlocked more beauty; Rarotonga was another place where it felt we had arrived in paradise. The crystal-clear blue water and soft sand definitely ticked all criteria for rest and relaxation. Coming from Tasmania, which is also an amazing island surrounded by wonderful beaches, I know what I'm looking for. This was heaven on earth.

## Discovery number three

One of the best things about being on a cruise ship is no one can contact you whilst out at sea past the continental shelf.

Don't get me wrong. My nearest and dearest are my rock. Maybe it's because I'd been travelling so much, that having this time was great. On *Silver Whisper* days at sea take you deeper in more ways than one. They mean you make friends, swim, converse and have an extremely enjoyable time, all whilst heading towards new experiences of different sights, cultures, languages and cuisines. The range and depth of those experiences provided plenty of stories and discussion around the pool.

Conversations sprung up and grew everywhere – even going on into the early hours of the morning when everyone else was counting sheep, as I discovered over that blackjack board in the casino. The most I will say about that, though, is what is said in the ship's casino stays in the ship's casino.

It was different from the one other cruise I'd previously been on, in that everyone was very sociable and entertaining. The musicians who were invited on board were very special too, from the singers who got the boat really rock 'n' rolling even when the sea was calm, to Vincenzo, the Spanish guitarist who made his guitar sing stories that went beyond language.

Here's something else I found that went beyond words: steak smothered in hot English mustard, salted to taste. Give it a try, you won't regret it! I also decided to try my hand at painting and with a little support discovered a talent I never knew I had.

So yes – enjoying time out, swimming and amazing food, making heaps of new friends and having profound conversations – I'm sold on that.

## Discovery number four

Silversea guests have lived very interesting lives. My story is unusual and extraordinary – yet it evokes all sort of attributes and adversities that people with their level of life experience can relate to. Many of them have conquered their own frontiers and gone through trials and tribulations to get to where they are now. We could talk about commonalities in that, and in the places we have travelled.

Listening to your dreams is a major theme for me. Hope, determination and sheer grit were the fusion of elements that created success for me. I was conscious that as a group, I was talking to people who understood what that meant. Although I was one of the youngsters on board, it sort of felt like we gelled.

It was also interesting to reflect on the different generations we represented. Talking to guests, it was clear that life for me growing up had been massively different from the time when they had grown up – different in everything from the big technological things to the everyday aspects of life. Across the board, there was this massive contrast. Yet I found similarities due to the contrast I've experienced between the environment I grew up in, in Tasmania, and the environment I have reconnected with in India.

My own story is huge – and I had come on board as a keynote speaker, so I did a lot of talking. People had many questions for me, and many times, the questions they wanted to ask were coming thick and fast, and not so much the other way round. And once we got talking, the minutes would just expand. Ten or fifteen minutes could easily become an hour or two. Hence many of our conversations were big.

That was fine. It was great to meet so many new, friendly faces and to find people were enchanted and enthralled by the story. But when I got

to ask guests questions about who they are and what they've done and where they've been, what I gained from talking to them was riveting and educating in many ways.

## *Discovery number five*

Neiafu, Tonga, was a small place the ship visited. I decided I could see myself retiring there. I would buy a small house near the beach which came with a complimentary boat requiring years of restoration and manual labour and spend my later years thinking how amazing the world is and how lucky we are to be living here.

All in all it was a journey never to be forgotten. When I stepped off the ship in Sydney I spent several days there before going on to Melbourne for speaking engagements and then back on the road. The dust still hasn't settled and I'm on the go all the time. But I'm still thinking about the times on board. I hope I'll end up doing something like that again. The beauty of travel is never knowing what's around the corner. Never knowing who you are going to meet – and what you're going to experience. And a long journey stays with you forever. It's something that only a minority get to do. There are not a lot of people out there who will have this opportunity. And like I said, I believe you should always take an opportunity. I believe in positivity. You have to be positive in your life.

So until we meet again, happy sailing. *Namaste.*

CHAPTER 3

# *The Wizards of Oz*



SYDNEY – BENOA  
2<sup>ND</sup> – 16<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2019



## HAROLD KODA

.....

Hawaii-born, multi-award-winning Harold Koda has forged a strong reputation for himself as a leading authority in costume studies. Since graduating from the universities of Hawaii and Harvard, Koda has received Honorary Doctorates from the University of the Arts London and Drexel University. A curator, an author and an academic, Koda is best celebrated as the former Curator in Charge of The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He has authored 20 books and has won awards from many institutions. He is among the most prestigious figures of the New York fashion world.

# Komodo

Now, Komodo Island may close to visitors for at least a year or two. Poachers have been taking the oras, better known outside Indonesia as Komodo Dragons, for the black market trade in rare, exotic, and endangered species.

The route to Komodo from Sydney includes stops at Brisbane, Cairns, and Darwin with days at sea highlighting the vastness of Australia. Viewed from our ship, from New South Wales to Queensland to the Northern Territory, the coast is an unscrolling landscape of mountainous terrain dropping down to pristine sand beaches. The great mystery is the persistence of this astonishingly uninhabited shoreline. Where are the Aman Resorts and Four Seasons to set their sybaritic luxury against the spectacular isolation and topographic drama of this picturesque landscape? Or, for that matter, where is the Disney Corporation?

Maybe it is the sharks? Australia's waters are the habitat of the most diverse population of sharks in the world. An aquarium in Cairns surprised me with its tanks teeming with poisonous sea life: toxic rock fish and puffers, venomous sea snakes, barely visible stinging jellyfish and their larger, more potent cousins. Other species that simply bite like moray eels or the small sampling of the 180 shark types in the region were given dedicated tanks. Though they are also estuarine, there were none of the "jumping" crocodiles on exhibit. You realize, of course, that this is just what is in the water! Go to Wikipedia for the dangerous terrestrial fauna.



In Sydney at the Contemporary Art Museum, an artist's video critiques the current Australian policy of sequestering illegal migrants on an island of seaside beauty and tropical verdure, an Edenic Alcatraz that masks with its environmental splendor its utility as a site of displacement and detention. Two men, dark against the brilliant light of a cloudless blue sky and incandescent water enact a ritual of baptism and submersion, an invitation to salvation that appears to turn into a slowly enacted drowning. Where is this lush mangrove-ringed island? How far is it from the mainland? With the country's endless coastline and unpopulated interior is a more humane temporary detention possible? Doesn't Australia's history reside in part on the idea of penal isolation mediated by colonization and development? But the seductions of Sydney outside the darkened gallery obliterate such questions and concerns. The city is so alive with its liberating sense of youthful vigor that I yield these weightier, complicated matters to a more comfortable hedonism of material consumption.

I need Bermuda shorts, which for some reason I neglected to pack. Surprising because I seem to have stuffed my giant Tumi with everything else shy of tweeds and sweaters.

Two weeks later, in a contemplative mode I watch flying fish from my cabin's veranda scatter like shards of silver across the ship's wake. Again the persistent thoughts of the video's dark implications rise up only to succumb to the hypnotic serenity of the days at sea, all shimmering turquoise water and lambent beauty.

We pass a number of islands at sunrise, a cinematic-scaled, geological prelude to the craggy island of Komodo. The sharp volcanic mountains with steeply eroded valleys and the occasional line of palm trees in a single file along a ridgeline seem more movie set than topographic reality. My anticipation is heightened by a memo from the day before. Typically, these describe the various levels of accessibility and physical challenge associated with the different land excursion options. But this time there

is an addendum noting that women who are menstruating and people with open cuts should not participate. One passenger who had been to the island before is dismissive: "Really!? The guides just have these little sticks, this is just to create excitement." Still, the reptiles are said to have such a keen sense of smell that they can pick up the scent of blood from three kilometers and the odor of carrion from three times that distance.

However, as with any shore experience, safety and photo opportunities seem to predicate our tour. At the orientation camp, a single large, rather lethargic lizard – perhaps he had been fed – sits in an open patch of dust for the group to photograph. Guides are armed with long sticks featuring a bifurcated end, like a pitchfork with only two tines. Over the course of our hike we would see the utility of the y-shaped form, as it allowed for directing the lizards without harming them.

The optics of cellphones result in images that render the dragons proportionally larger, since the lead guide takes the photos of us all posed behind the animal rather than in front. Essentially, this is a concession to visitor safety that results in a distortion of the lizard's scale, and therefore better pictures to bring home. The visits from the ship are staggered over several hours, and our group had calculated that the earliest would benefit from the more forgiving morning sun and heat. It happens that some women I had dubbed "the Trinity," who are traveling together and easily a decade or two younger than our shipboard median, are on the tender. Two worked in finance, though one had recently retired, and one had been in magazine publishing. There is also a mysterious pair of ladies from New Orleans, whose glamorous appearance is studied by everyone on board. Dressed similarly with large-brimmed hats on deck, liquid full-cut trousers, pastel-tinted monochromatics that might be described as face-powder neutrals, dramatic evening wear, and who-would-think-to-pack black lace masks for a Venetian-themed occasion, they are said to be sisters. This is perplexing, because one is much taller than the other, and without their dark glasses, neither really looks like the other at all. They are rumored to have taken a separate cabin for their 21 pieces of luggage

and are the sartorial equivalent to another passenger who brought hundreds of bottles from his own wine cellar for the five month cruise. I move on the hike between the Trinity and the Great Dames, the former forging athletically ahead, the latter negotiating the uneven path with a delicate and measured stateliness.

The first dragon sighting in the wild is a female peering out of her nest positioned at some distance from our path. She is a bit too distant for people only shooting with their phones to secure an Instagram-able image. Soon, however, there is a clearing. It is a watering hole, more puddle than pond, with six or seven dragons scattered about rather still. Out of nowhere, two other groups of visitors converge with ours from other paths and we are now at least 30 strong. The guides with their sticks make sure that a comfortable perimeter is maintained.

One group seems to be composed of Asian honeymooners. The men are avid photographers, and since it is also the era of selfies, a number of single women peppered through their group are taking cellphone photos of themselves with their backs to the Komodos. I imagine the final images of their foregrounded faces looming and smiling with the gray lizards in the background severely reduced in scale to the size of geckos.

It happens so quickly, and is managed so deftly, that I cannot remember if any of the guides raise their voice. All I recall is looking to my right to see two of them parry their sticks to prevent a lizard behind the Asian group from moving forward. Most of the people near the potential breach seem unaware of what is happening behind them, continuing their focus on the main group of lizards. A few do move away, giving space to the guides engaged with the rogue dragon. I notice the Grand Dames beyond in the distance, oblivious to the activity, moving on with another guide down the path.

As the two guides attempt to shift the intruding lizard from moving into the crowd, the largest Komodo spots the outsider, raises its head and heaves up on its legs with a strong open-throated hiss. Almost immediately, three

other guides push the crowd back. Only at that moment does a plump young woman with her metallic pink camera step away from her position between the lizard intent on getting to the watering hole and the alpha lizard defending the space. Even as the woman in pink, her phone an apparent coordination, moves toward her friends, it is clear from her nonchalance that she is still oblivious to the surrounding tension. The guides who have through most of our hike conveyed an almost obsequious affability suddenly display a concentrated seriousness, their bodies now taut and defensive. What amazes me is the inattentiveness of the group near the breach. Even with the potential for collateral injury (the lizards seem more interested in confronting each other than attacking any of the succulent newlyweds) there is a lack of concern, and certainly no sense of alarm.

Later at lunch, Ann, one of the Trinity, says about our hike, “Doesn’t ‘almost’ count? Suddenly, one of the monsters moved, and the crowd in a panic shuffled aside. Except for a traveler who had to get the photo for Facebook.” I laughed at the image of shuffling aside in a panic, as if shuffling is the midpoint between racing away and freezing in place. But the only reason that the group had shuffled aside was they were not panicked at all.

My phone pix of the day are absent any sense of danger or dread. The lizards are, after some judicious cropping, strange and heroic, but they are neither threatening nor frightening. The metaphors deployed by the art video to confront the fraught realities of the Australian immigration system makes legible conditions outside the viewer’s experience. On the other hand, our walk through nature, no matter how controlled and choreographed, is a lived experience filled with “almosts” that are impossible to document. A photo of what happened behind the woman in pink might surprise her, but even the tense alarm on the faces of the guides, or their masterful movements diffusing a you-cannot-believe-what-just-happened moment, would not convey the excitement of the “almost.” In travel, if not always in life, almost counts.



Osaka TOKYO

Keelung  
Kaohsiung

Manila

Sandakan

BENOA

CHAPTER 4

# *Temples of Beauty*

BENOA – TOKYO  
16<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY – 2<sup>ND</sup> MARCH 2019



## LAKSMI PAMUNTJAK

.....

Laksmi Pamuntjak is a bilingual Indonesian novelist, poet, food writer and journalist. She writes for many publications including the *Guardian*. She has authored three collections of poetry; a collection of short stories, five editions of the award-winning *Jakarta Good Food Guide* and three novels. The German translation of her debut novel, *Amba*, won the LiBeraturpreis 2016. The movie adaptation of her second novel, *The Birdwoman's Palate*, premiered in Indonesia in 2018. Pamuntjak's third novel, *Fall Baby*, will be published in September 2019 by Penguin Random House.

# The Truest Note

## BALI – SANDAKAN

I am at sea, but the sea is not  
a strange place after all, it belongs  
to earth. It swells and stills,  
is occasionally allowed its rough  
patches and easy truces. In the  
evenings, there are no stars in the sky,  
but people dance as if there were.  
Mornings have the easier part of it,  
as the light does its own dance.  
But I'm the child of dusk. I wait  
for the sun to set; only then can  
I see clearly.

Today the sun hovers above the  
horizon a split second longer  
than the ocean is used to.  
I'm convinced it's for my benefit.  
It pleases me that the air still  
carries our gravity, that my feet  
are steady. There is peace  
everywhere. Peace in old  
couples clocking their miles  
on the jogging track. Peace in  
a sleepy harbour of an old  
forgotten town, in the peeled-off  
neon signs on decrepit shop houses.  
Peace in the breakaway gull  
that rises from the sea and offers  
a pose just as we're about to  
click our shutters.

This is a beautiful boat,  
and the waves acknowledge it as  
they reverberate through my feet  
and into my belly. The way  
I down my post-show drinks  
and sleep at night.

## SANDAKAN – MANILA

We set sail at sundown,  
leaving the seaside waste,  
the dusty streets, the gutted  
buildings the brochures dare  
not pronounce. For a moment  
I thought the city was in  
mourning. By the second hour,  
I can no longer remember  
why I cared. Even the most savage  
of decay fades from memory:  
we do not choose to stay in  
ruins, not even the sort that  
flares us to every hint of bigotry,  
on board or on shore—to that  
great shadow of Empire.

You told me very early on:  
you do not understand poetry,  
nor do you ever wish to.  
I told you to write poetry is to be  
somewhere between nostalgia  
and forgetting; between earth  
and water.

But I'm being heroic. Truth is,  
you are unshakeable. You trail  
me, smother me, like salt wind  
on my skin. You echo my  
indignation; you magnify it you  
handsome devil. Still later you try  
to cajole me into embracing the  
ruins. "They are the only things  
we have left," you say without  
irony. Cities preserve their ruins  
to remind them of what once was.

The woman is trapped in a glass jar,  
but backlit like a heroine.  
She's sitting on a chair,  
on some kind of a pedestal,  
with her back bent ninety degrees.  
Your name is Manila, I tell her,  
and she doesn't offer any  
resistance.

It's hard to know  
whether she's suffering,  
or who, among the likes  
of her, immured in the  
same fashion, is suffering  
most. Is she in chains, is she  
defiant, is she praying  
or readying for battle?  
Does she love her bubble,  
secretly, as she loves the way  
the light falls on her as only  
her confinement can offer—  
on her delicate knees,  
on the small of her back,  
on the curls of her hair?

## MANILA (IN THE ART FAIR)

But such is the deal, it appears.  
While the city speeds by,  
kicking dust with its big mouth  
open, the girl rests in her quiet  
shell and takes aim. Rayya thinks  
the girl is blue, and broken,  
and she's hardly ever wrong  
on such matters. But the girl's  
heart is like the city. It never  
dries up. And in this vernissage,  
where even an earthy red  
Ocampo has to cry out for  
attention, the light shines  
her the brightest gold.

## MANILA – KAOHSIUNG

The sun doesn't know what  
she wants, she keeps robing  
and disrobing. Sometimes  
she sheds a watery light  
upon unexpected scenes —  
an old man wobbling  
on the deck and falling flat  
on his face, peacocks offering  
themselves up for sacrifice,  
paunchy men dressed as  
mermaids. Sometimes  
the sky sucks her into  
a thin blade, leaving itself  
the color of brackish water.  
And it doesn't seem to mind,  
like a stoic, weather-beaten  
boyfriend.

When she goes down  
at last, the wind seems  
to recall something.  
The sweet tropics are over.  
The night turns velvet.  
I propose another round of  
Bloody Marys even though  
it's almost quarter to seven  
and Sam is about to do his  
stand-up schtick.

He's very funny, says a woman  
of some seventy summers.  
And yes, we squares will always  
laugh, often at the same jokes,  
because we don't know how  
not to. We think we are  
here to see the world  
though in truth we do not  
let the world in. But the good  
news is, the seasons come and go.  
It's the one luxury we don't  
have to pay for whatsoever.

## KAOHSIUNG

It's a new world, so Rayya  
and I take the shuttle bus  
downtown. There are three  
of us, and our new DJ friend  
keeps talking of nights in Budapest  
where money was easy  
and beauty was unsoiled.  
Music is overrated, he says.  
We don't agree with him, not really,  
but we nod, yes, yes...we  
*totally* get it, and off we go  
questing for the first rate.

Two hours later: a designer mall  
standing among ruins, an alleyway  
lined with potted flowers, a girl  
cycling circles around the palm trees  
like a stray goddess. So much for  
goodwill. This is a city of relics:  
brokeback, out of breath and  
out of tricks. Even its last-ditch  
efforts are needlessly inflated —  
the toad and the crying girl  
by the park, the giant gorillas  
guarding the harbour, the lone  
modernist tombs fading from sight  
at the slightest drizzle.

A miracle then, when sailing away  
at sunset we turn around and  
suddenly lose our bearings.  
Where are we?  
South Italy?  
Scotland?  
Somewhere in Casterly Rock?  
Then all I remember is our phones,  
out in a flash; us clicking, texting,  
doing the duty of posterity.  
We are awestruck. It appears  
that we are leaving an island so  
magnificent in our wake, we must  
have dreamed up the rest.

## KAOHSIUNG – KEELUNG

It's my partner's birthday today  
and I'm not there. The double K  
of the route punctuates my sorrow,  
brands it to my insides. If there  
is a chill in the air, it must be  
my punishment.

In mid-afternoon Rayya  
and I bundle up and dare  
ourselves to go to the deck.  
The staff do their best not to pity  
us. This is nothing, one of them  
tells us. Where I worked last,  
it was freezing all the time.  
But there were plenty of  
dog-sledding and loud glimpses  
of the Northern Lights.  
It was kinda cool.

We listen and smile politely.  
Then we order a fish and forsake  
dessert while tough Midwesterners  
take their positions in the  
swimming pool for a game  
of volleyball. This time we do not  
cheer them, or wait till the staff  
join in for some aerobics fun  
so we can take even more pictures  
of mateship and class solidarity.

Later, we're back in the cabin,  
staring at dresses. Best to dance  
it away, Rayya says, whatever it  
is. As if forgetting were a duty.  
But that evening the dance floor  
hands us no mercy.

Winter is here.  
Love is a bitch.

## TAIPEI

Poetry didn't teach me to admire  
subways and high speed trains,  
but without them I couldn't have  
known that timetables meant love, say.

Once upon a time, in Berlin,  
or in Madrid, I went into trains  
to escape love, to escape failure,  
to get away from the source of  
desire before its absence scorched  
me. The faith was blind, the feet  
unseeing, and the ear learned to love  
the sound of an approaching  
train no matter where it was going  
or where it was coming from.

Underground Taipei is so efficient  
and twenty-first century  
it makes me cry. Up above is so  
vast, its landscape so strange the  
way buildings pierce the sky, the way  
they revere the past and the present,  
as if continuity were a given.

*Generalissimo* Chiang is a hero,  
no argument there; his resting place  
is so gigantic at first you have no idea  
it is flanked by the national theatre  
and the national concert hall like  
a coddled egg. You can't help but  
think of his four wives and the way  
they must have had his back; just look  
at the way the rain keeps on pouring down,  
forming its clean, hard-headed armour.

At the Longshan Temple, people  
worship differently, though their  
love of rituals might have been  
forged in the same furnace.  
They are quieter, fiercer, bound to  
the settler's code. They pray as though  
all of life hung on it; if I could I'd stay,  
beyond that moment, watching,  
loving. Loving this, and the edifices,  
and the dreams and the timetables;  
loving words and loving charts,  
loving you and loving him,  
loving all over again.



Two days at sea.  
The wind's cold  
plunges straight  
to the heart.  
We dance in the  
dark. It is rough.

## OSAKA

And the world rises.  
Just like that. So much  
sunlight it almost bleaches  
away the features of the port,  
you'd think you must have done  
something good during the cold  
dark nights, healing the sun with  
your half-drunk tango steps  
and your *amor fati* while stars  
sink and dawn recovers its wit.  
For how could a land cave in to its  
own myth without the help of man?

There was a time when Portuguese  
merchants and missionaries bound  
for this land envisioned the Orient  
as the end of the earth, and Japan its  
utmost rim. They had no idea what  
it was like. Once there, they were  
so deeply cherished by the villagers,  
were given churches adorned by  
flowers, they could not have known  
that soon they would be hunted down,  
their vessels barred from entry. Or that  
their Christian brethren would have  
boiling water poured over their naked  
bodies for hanging on to their faith.  
I also have no idea whether it's true  
what this beloved author says, that  
if you want to feel happy you go to  
a Shinto shrine, not a Buddhist temple,  
because the latter makes people think  
of darkness and death.

But there I am leaning on the railing  
of an orange bridge, watching  
World Cruisers scoop purifying water  
from the well and practicing the steps  
of the Shinto prayer rituals,  
and thinking, well, how do you rate  
happiness? We're not put here on  
this earth to be happy, but you don't  
want to miss it because you know  
it doesn't last.

Faith is gentler, deadlier, it follows you  
quietly like family, like a buried secret.  
It roots, hides before pouncing,  
often with spectacular tact,  
until one day you find yourself  
following it home, with your tail  
between your legs.

You'll need faith, not happiness,  
when you almost didn't make it  
back to the ship that evening, say.  
The great big engine already  
roaring and folks already  
clinking glasses in the dining room  
when you boarded like a pair of runts  
wishing you hadn't been born.

## KYOTO

Beloved books<sup>1</sup> have memory; they  
direct my eyes which found them  
way back when, at the age of twenty,  
to the right shelf in my library;  
they weave the lines that had me  
riveted all those years ago into  
the word; the same set of wiles  
they used that had me remember  
all of the feelings I knew I'd have  
when experiencing for the first time  
the gentle mist over tree-thick hills,  
the sound of silence, everywhere  
the sight of women and their children,  
so contented in their good deportment.

Like every starved soul that has landed  
on Kyoto, I train myself to listen to  
the movement of water, to pause  
before every Jizō stone so as not  
to miss a single mother's lament,  
to know how to be serene and  
still accept that the world outside  
stays unabashedly the same. I sit  
in the midst of the Heian Shrine  
forest, alone, in the rain, not  
needing to find my way back  
to what I knew then. I lose myself  
in a love of myself, in a love of  
the now, and this truth is light  
on my heart.

Nothing, not even the din  
of traffic beyond the garden  
wall can touch me. I am already  
in the first flush of spring, I am  
making a harvest of my yin  
and my solitude, my crystal  
stream and my hard rock  
mountain out of the colours  
of Kiyomizu-dera. And I am  
not the least bit surprised when,  
as the last light drops away,  
I can see in the dark; I need no  
longer move to make things whole.

<sup>1</sup>Pico Iyer, *The Lady and the Monk: Four Seasons in Kyoto* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

## FINAL DESTINATION, TOKYO

I can see why it's easy to take  
the sun for granted. Perfection  
wears us so thin until we can  
no longer see it.

It's 8am, the final port of call.  
The air is crisp. Daylight  
goes all out in welcoming us.  
It is no surprise that I'm not  
unhappy to be leaving.  
It's time. The body remembers  
the seasons. Remembers  
the spring and the mirror image.  
What astonishes is the brief pang  
at the thought of never returning.  
As if this were a halfway home.

Only two nights ago, the  
penultimate night, Rayya  
and I got the Brit and the  
Swede to dance with us.  
There was so much language  
between us, yet in the end we  
all danced alone. The dance of  
beforehand and afterwards.  
Of saying goodbye that wasn't  
goodbye. Like characters in  
a Claire Denis movie. Know  
how to separate the keepers  
from the poseurs, I insist,  
this is about knowing ourselves.

When we step out of the tunnel  
at the appointed hour,  
I'm surprised to be feeling  
the cold, like a lost child.  
Then I see Viki waiting by  
the entrance, a guardian angel  
from another world, ready  
to bear me to Yokohama.  
I turn around to Rayya,  
my eyes welling. See you soon,  
I say, because I know I will.  
We have returned from the sea  
and we have not turned to stone.  
Land and water travel together,  
it's a pact they have with the wind.  
Love is not negated just because  
it's put on pause. Or because it's  
taken over by someone else,  
even for a brief while.

Funny how of all the things I've  
learned on this voyage,  
it is this teeny truth  
that sounds the truest note.



TOKYO

Shanghai

Hong Kong

Ho Chi  
Minh City

SINGAPORE

CHAPTER 5

# *Time Travel*

TOKYO – SINGAPORE  
2<sup>ND</sup> – 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2019



## STEVE MCCURRY

.....

Steve McCurry has been one of the most iconic voices in contemporary photography for more than 30 years. His work spans conflicts, vanishing cultures, ancient traditions and contemporary culture alike - yet always retains the human element that made his celebrated image of the Afghan Girl such a powerful image. McCurry has been recognised with some of the most prestigious awards in the industry, including the Robert Capa Gold Medal, the National Press Photographers Award, and four first prize awards from the World Press Photo contest.









Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong, China, 2019



At Sea - from Hong Kong to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 2019





Vinh Nghiem Pagoda, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 2019

There's always something new.  
There's always something soul-stirring.  
That's why, after photographing and working  
in Asia for nearly 20 years, I still love going back.  
Observing. Sensing. Catching the colors.  
Looking beyond the chaos and contrasts  
to reveal the unguarded images.  
Those split seconds that tell a human story.  
Those moments of pure beauty.  
For me, the essence of traveling is being  
captivated and absorbed in a place.  
Immersing myself in an environment  
and bringing it into focus.  
That's when I feel most alive and at home.





Man Mo Temple, Hong Kong, China, 2019



Man Mo Temple, Hong Kong, China, 2019





Man Mo Temple, Hong Kong, China, 2019





Hong Kong Cultural Center, Hong Kong, China, 2019





Shanghai, China, 2019



Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong, China, 2019

CHAPTER 6

# *Ocean Treasures*



SINGAPORE – MOMBASA  
18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH – 3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2019



## JEREMIAH TOWER

.....

A world-renowned chef and restaurateur, American-born Jeremiah Tower began his career as the Co-Owner and Executive Chef of Chez Panisse in California in the 1970s. He then opened branches of Stars restaurant in San Francisco, Manila and Singapore, among other locations, plus Peak Café in Hong Kong. Martha Stewart called him "The father of American Cuisine" and Anthony Bourdain said that "Tower's menus made a complete re-evaluation of not just American food and ingredients - but food." In 2017, a full-length documentary on Tower, *The Last Magnificent*, was produced by Anthony Bourdain for CNN.

# In Style and On My Own Terms

The greeting by a crisp white-uniformed man in the fenced embarkation line for *Silver Whisper* in Singapore brought memories rushing back of my first ocean voyage – on the original *Queen Elizabeth* from New York to Southampton as my family moved from Australia to England in 1951.

It wasn't just the huge platter of freshly made canapes in the suite I shared with my brother – a suite large enough for two steamer trunks opened and ready for the butler to unpack – or the deck chair I soon found on the sun deck with a card saying "Master Tower" slid into the holder above the cushion for one's head. It was all of it as a brilliantly welcoming service – as it was ...again that morning to board the ship.

① First was the view of the sparkling white ship. And then it was "Jeremiah Tower, welcome to *Silver Whisper*." Almost like a line from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it was the friendly voice of Norman, the ship's Hotel Manager, in white and gold uniform, waiting at the end of the line to whisk us aboard and suggesting we go to the bar while our butler unpacked.

Up in the Panorama Bar the music from its quartet was eerily the same as that in the Elizabeth's lounge, and I half expected my mother to appear in her Dior clothes made for the trip and tell me "for god's sake, get changed into your ship clothes."



Fortified by a couple of glasses of champagne, my suite mate Curtis and I headed down to the suite to meet our butler Abi, and suite attendant Thu Thu. Their smiles made us feel that we were in for a lovely voyage.

“Champagne, sir?”

Had the word gotten out?

The bottle and ice bucket were already there, and within minutes of helping us to unpack, a bottle of our choice of vodka was there too.

We stayed in Singapore for a couple of days in a hotel across the street from my old restaurant Stars Singapore in the old converted nunnery called Chijmes.

In 2000, right after Stars Singapore opened it was called “the most beautiful in the world.” Now it is long since gone, but the other highlights of Singapore were not: street stall dumplings (my favorite Xiaolongbao or pork soup dumplings) and the amazing, educational and futuristic botanical Gardens by the Bay. ② ③

The days at sea are when you find out who is on board.

When on the way to Sri Lanka we heard Australian accents from two deck-chaired women with vodkas in hand and looking like a lot of fun, we went over and did our version of “g’day.” More drinks appeared instantly, courtesy of one of the ever-attendant pool deck servers, and a friendship was born from stories of my childhood in Sydney and Queensland, and their lives there now, one with a macadamia nut farm in New South Wales and one with a multi-million-dollar house for sale in Port Douglas.

Then they asked me if it was true that I had asked for glasses of champagne to be served at the showing of the documentary Anthony Bourdain made about me? And having seen in the program that the film is called *The Last Magnificent*, was I – and was I the last? Great title for a movie, I told them and as I told the audience at the movie’s first showing, if a bit embarrassing for me since I certainly hope that I am not the last of

anything. The title was taken from my hero since college days, Lucius Beebe, and mentioned in my culinary memoirs. His column in *Gourmet* magazine called “Along the Boulevards” described a life I wanted to re-create, and the terms on which I wanted to re-create it. “If anything is worth doing,” he once said, “it is worth doing in style and on your own terms – and nobody goddamned else’s.” I wanted to be as James Villas described him in an article of that same magazine called “Lucius Beebe: The Last Magnifico”: the randy and dandy boulevardier, the “eminently polite, generous, witty, and kind gentleman. Who was not out to impress anybody and simply relished a civilized evening on the town over ‘a hot bird and a cold bottle.’”

Setting sail that night into a magnificent sunset, that is exactly what Curtis and I did. ④

By the time we arrived in Sri Lanka at the port city of Trincomalee, our cocktails group had grown. Two couples, one from Switzerland and another from England whose stories of making sure everyone acting in Downton Abby looked aristocratic and Edwardian had kept the ship riveted every other morning in the theater. We all gathered at the Trinco Blue beach club, where I ordered crab curry. Someone in our group timed the delay of the food arriving. It was about 45 minutes when a fisherman came running from the beach up to the restaurant carrying a tray of wildly squirming crabs who then jumped off the tray, landed at our feet, and ran for cover. Waiters rushed to catch them and in another 45 minutes a huge white tureen was put on the table. I lifted the cover and the whole area was filled with the perfumes of spices mixed with fresh crustacean. ⑤

It was the best curry I have ever had.

I had always wanted to dive in the Maldives, but it just seemed always to be too far from San Francisco where I had my base and flagship restaurant. Now, with just a few hours in port in Malé, it seemed just as much fun to







stay on board at *Silver Whisper*'s pool with its perfect service and wait for another perfect Indian ocean sunset from our Deck 5 balcony.

So far, the ocean had been very calm. That night, as we pulled away and set off, it was mirror-like. So calm that in the reflected light of the sun, the surface of the ocean took on that breathtaking gun-metal, grey color that made flying fish more silvery and dramatic, as they desperately escaped the bow waves. All this, seen from the balcony with a glass of chilled champagne in one's hand.

It is very good to be alive.

⑦ Scheduled for the next day, my presentation in the theater was on my mind. How would guests receive it? The title of my talk was "The role of chaos in success when paired with opportunity and a heavy dose of glamor." Glamor, as when, after the 1989 San Francisco earthquake rattled all the vodka bottles in my restaurant, Stars, Elizabeth Taylor quoted her famous saying to me: "When the going gets tough, pour yourself a cocktail, put on your lipstick, and get on with it." Which is what I did, I told the audience, "Without the lipstick. I sold the Stars group to a Singaporean Chinese collector and moved to New York."

We were headed for two different islands in the Seychelles, Praslin and Mahé. The biggest concern, decided over more champagne with our group, was which one had the best beaches. After hearing the brilliant lectures on each of the islands, we decided to try the Cote d'Or of the former (which is often voted "most beautiful beach in the world"), but we had higher hopes for the huge and very long beaches of the latter, Mahé.

The ship's concierge told us three places to go, in order of preference. First, The H Resort, then just down the beach from there, The Savoy and The Coral. A taxi took us on a thrilling, winding ride across the high ridge running through the center of Mahé, up to the grand entrance of the H. A majestic staircase took us to the reception.

We asked to purchase a day pass to the pool and restaurants, after a quick back and forth by the people at the desk we were (though well dressed) told they were full. After a 15-minute walk down the white sand beach, we found not only the Savoy but the Australians and the British from the ship.

Never has a first pool plunge felt so good. Nor has a very cold double gin and tonic, enjoyed while lying under a vast white umbrella on a pool chaise. Nor a lunch with friends, savored at the resort's Gecko Bar facing the beach and swept by cooling breezes.

Two days at sea followed, as we journeyed towards Dar es Salaam - a place that I thought had to be one of the most exotic places in the world, ever since learning about the destination when at school in England. Before the ship arrived in Dar, I had an appointment in the theater with Fernando, the ship's Cruise Director, and Silverseas's guests. He was to ask me questions and then I was to sign copies of my latest book, *Start the Fire*. I was a bit nervous about how a somewhat conservative audience would like my culinary memoirs - my first-hand account of "How I Began a Food Revolution in America." I told them that the final line in the book is my summary of it and a famous Russian saying: "He lies like an eyewitness." They loved it.

"As it must have been way back then, but was now more," Paul Theroux said in his book on travels in Africa, *Dark Star Safari*. The view from the ship at dock at six in the morning was not so terrifying as some of his descriptions. But make it we did to the Swiss counter and were soon in our own little pods in the airplane on our eight-hour way to Zurich. From there to Los Angeles and in 16 days we had circumnavigated the earth. Most of it in the comfort and style of Silversea.

CHAPTER 7

# *The Wilderness*



MOMBASA – CAPE TOWN  
3<sup>RD</sup> – 17<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2019



## PAUL THEROUX

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Paul Theroux was born in Massachusetts. After university, he lived in Africa, Singapore and the UK, before returning to the US in 1989. He has authored many acclaimed works, including *The Great Railway Bazaar* and *Dark Star Safari*. In 2015, Theroux was awarded the Founders Medal from the Royal Geographical Society. Approved by the Queen, the award is the highest award attainable for a traveler. He has also won the Whitbread Prize and the James Tait Black Award. Two of his works were nominated for the American Book Award and three of his novels have been made into films.

# The Magic Carpet, The Fabled Egg, and The Elephant Bird

We had left Zanzibar and were sailing to Madagascar on a calm sea in perfect weather. Standing in the open air on an upper deck of *Silver Whisper*, I felt the ship softly rising and falling beneath me, as undulant as a magic carpet – the sort of carpet mentioned in the *Arabian Nights*, in the tale of “The Three Princes and the Princess Nouronihar.” In this tale the carpet seller says to Prince Houssain, “Whoever sits on it as we do, and desires to be transported to any place, be it ever so far off, is immediately carried thither.”

This sounds fanciful and forced, typical travel writer hyperbole, gushing sentimentality about the luxury ship. But wait – this image stayed with me for days, and what came next was like the unfolding of a fable that justified the gush. I had always wanted to visit Madagascar, not only for its lemurs, a primate found nowhere else on earth, but also to see the land and people – some from mainland Africa, others descended from ancient South East Asian voyagers. I’d been reading about the island for years.

Marco Polo mentions Madagascar in his *Travels* (Book 3, Chapter 33) – he’d heard of it on his way back to Venice from China around the year 1291: “Madeigascar is an island towards the south, about a thousand miles from Scotra (an island off the Yemeni coast). The people are all Saracens, adoring Mahomet. They have four Esheks, i.e. four Elders, who are said to govern the whole island. And you must know that it is a most noble and beautiful island, and one of the greatest in the world...The people live by trade and handicrafts.”

The other great early traveler Ibn-Battuta, a near contemporary of Marco Polo, who roamed the entire Muslim world from 1325 to 1353, also mentions Madagascar as a place of wonders. He had sailed from Somalia to Kilwa on the East African coast (in present day southern Tanzania), where like Marco Polo he heard of Madagascar’s wonders.

And from the magic carpet of *Silver Whisper* I could now see the “noble and beautiful island,” the green hills and jungly coast of northwest Madagascar. After being taken to the pier near the town of Nosey Be, I boarded a small boat with other passengers and we sailed about three miles to a cove lined with bamboo and thatched huts, and a welcome at the fishing village of Komba.

At the forested edges of Komba live mild-tempered black lemurs, so mild in fact that if you happen to be holding a piece of banana, a lemur will leap from a nearby branch to your shoulder and seize it with its long fingers – as happened to me – and for the time it takes to eat it, the lemur will stay contentedly on your shoulder.

I wandered away from the lemurs and the pink and blue chameleons clinging to tree branches, and the boa constrictor that had been placidly sunning itself on the top of a stone wall, and I made my way along the muddy path through Komba village. In stalls and at village huts, local women and men were selling embroidered tablecloths, and intricately stitched cushion covers, and wooden carvings, as well as spices and T-shirts.

*“Regardez, monsieur, beau,* [Look, sir, beautiful cloth]”, one woman said at the doorway of a small hut. She welcomed me with a dishtowel, the map of Madagascar picked out on it in colored thread.

And as she did so my eyes became accustomed to the darkness of the hut and I saw several large symmetrical white objects, twice the size of footballs, but the same spheroidal shape, and cream colored, and very odd.

“Carvings?” I asked.

*“Oeufs,”* she said – eggs.

“Really?”

*“Oui, d’un oiseau – un grande autruche.”*

What sort of great ostrich could this be that would lay an egg this size? I hoisted one up – I needed two hands it was so heavy, but holding it in my arms I saw that it was beautiful and smooth, made of a mosaic of many smaller pieces of eggshell, the largest egg I’d ever seen.

“How much?”

*“Cinquante euro.”*

She was delighted, and danced, when I offered her forty.

Could something this size really be a bird’s egg, and if so, what sort of bird?

In the small boat back to *Silver Whisper* some curious passengers asked me what I had in my bulging bag. I opened the bag and showed them my marvel – it was much too bulky to take out.

“An egg.”

One woman smiled, another laughed outright, believing that I had been foxed by a curio seller in Komba, and a third forthright woman said, “That’s not possible.”

Yes, it looked preposterous, but I said, “Okay, if it’s not an egg, what is it?”

To learn the answer I needed to go back to Marco Polo, and Ibn-Battuta, and *The Arabian Nights*.

One of the wonders in Madagascar that Marco Polo mentions is a mythical bird, which he takes to be a “Gryphon” – or griffin – said to be half lion and half bird. But this Madagascan bird he describes is enormous. “And it is so strong that it will seize an elephant in its talons and carry him high into the air, and drop him so that he is smashed to pieces; having so killed him the bird gryphon swoops down on him and eats him at leisure. The people of those isles call the bird *Ruc*, and it has no other name.” Then Marco Polo becomes pedantic: “But this I can tell you for certain, that they were not half lion and half bird, as our stories do relate, but as enormous as they be they are fashioned just like an eagle.”

A few decades after Polo’s observation, the traveler Ibn-Battuta sailing from the East African coast – known as the Sea of Zanj then – sees an island rising from the ocean. But instead of rejoicing that land has been sighted the sailors on his junk begin to weep with fear. Ibn-Battuta calls out, ‘What is the matter?’

They reply, “What we took for a mountain is ‘the Rukh.’ If it sees us, it will send us to destruction.” The creature was then some ten miles from the junk. “But God Almighty was gracious unto us, and sent us a fair wind, which turned us from the direction in which the Rukh was; so we did not see him well enough to take cognizance of his real shape.”

And Ibn-Battuta describes Madagascar – “The island is in the south west” – and the great bird, the Rukh – “birds which so mask the sun in their flight that the shade on the sun dial is shifted.”

Calling this enormous bird a Ruc, or Rukh, or Roc, resonated with me,

since the Roc is the bird that Sindbad the Sailor encounters in his Second Voyage. In Andrew Lang's retelling, Sindbad drops from a tree where he has been hiding, and sees a strange object, and says, "As I drew near it seemed to me to be a white ball of immense size and height, and when I could touch it, I found it marvelously smooth and soft. As it was impossible to climb it – for it presented no foothold – I walked round about it seeking some opening, but there was none. I counted, however, that it was at least 50 paces round. By this time the sun was near setting, but quite suddenly it fell dark, something like a huge black cloud came swiftly over me, and I saw with amazement that it was a bird of extraordinary size which was hovering near. Then I remembered that I had often heard the sailors speak of a wonderful bird called a Roc, and it occurred to me that the white object which had so puzzled me must be its egg."

The *Arabian Nights* (or more properly, *One Thousand and One Nights*, the sequence of stories related by Scheherazade), were composed in the 9th and 10th Centuries; so obviously the name of the bird, the Roc, was known to later travelers. This "wonderful bird called a Roc" informed both Marco Polo and Ibn-Battuta when speaking of the enormous bird in Madagascar.

The Roc was said to be able to eat a camel, and as both Marco Polo and Sindbad testify, this amazing creature could pick up an elephant in its talons (and it picked up Sindbad, too). The egg that Sindbad sees was vast – 50 paces makes the Roc's egg about 200 feet in circumference.

This sounds like something from Baron Munchausen, or perhaps a typical travel writer. It is well known that travelers exaggerate for effect, to dazzle the people back home. Both Marco Polo and Ibn-Battuta reported that they saw dragons on their travels and other improbable wonders (though the dragons might have been crocodiles). But consider that I started this little tale with a hyperbolic whopper, comparing a cruise ship to a magic carpet. Yet there is a grain of truth to that, and more than a grain of truth to the existence of the Roc, and the enormous egg.

I had the egg in my suite, resting on my sofa, more than a foot from end to end, crowding an entire cushion. I googled "Giant Egg" on my computer and immediately saw images of my egg, with the caption, "Egg of the Extinct Elephant Bird." Of Madagascar.

And, with no further effort than that, I was able to identify my egg. Mine was identical to some specimens that were shown on the Internet – the pieced-together egg, a mosaic of many fitted eggshell fragments, made whole, as though Humpty-Dumpty had been put back together again. But an intact uncracked Elephant Bird egg had been auctioned at Sotheby's in London a few years ago, the bird described in the catalogue as "a giant flightless bird, indigenous to the island of Madagascar," an average specimen ten feet tall and weighing half a ton, "the largest bird ever to live on the planet."

And since this big beaky bird, the *Aepyornis maximus*, was thought to have become extinct "at some point between the 13th and 17th Centuries," it existed tramping through the forests of Madagascar, when the stories in the *Arabian Nights* were told, and written down, and in the years Marco Polo and Ibn-Battuta sailed through the Sea of Zanj. The bird was such a marvel to behold that its reputation was known among travelers in that hemisphere.

Less than a week later, *Silver Whisper* stopped in Durban. I went ashore and in a display case of the Durban Natural Science Museum saw some leg bones of the Elephant Bird – its yard-long femur looking like a huge log.

In the tradition of many travelers' tales the magnificent bird was extolled, and given a fanciful name, and its size and its feats exaggerated, and the bird and its egg found its way into one of the world's most enduring legends. Many who read *Arabian Nights*, or the myths of the past, are right to be a bit skeptical about the creatures mentioned<sup>1</sup>.

I knew about the Roc, and as a child I had marveled at the deliverance of Sindbad by the Roc, in his voyage. But I had never imagined that it had actually lived on earth, and that I would arrive by a beautiful ship at the shore of a place I'd longed to see, and, like Sindbad, be astonished by this marvel of a giant egg, and be able to show it to my skeptical fellow passengers, and say, "Yes, this is a real egg, and there's a story behind it. Listen – it's an amazing tale."

<sup>1</sup> As I said above, I had used Andrew Lang's translation of the *Arabian Nights*. Later, I looked into Richard Burton's more scrupulous translation (1885), *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, Vol 6, (pp 16-17), where in the "Second Voyage of Sindbad the Seaman," he appends a detailed footnote to the word "Rukh." Burton speculates on what sort of bird the Rukh (or Roc) might be – Garuda, Pheng, dragon, griffin, basilisk, and concludes, "Sindbad may allude to the *Aepyornis* of Madagascar, a gigantic ostrich whose egg contains 2.35 gallons."



LISBON

Seville

Casablanca

CHAPTER 8

# *Slices of Colour*

Dakar

Banjul

Tema  
(Accra)

Lomé

Sao Tome

Walvis Bay

CAPE TOWN



CAPE TOWN – LISBON  
17<sup>TH</sup> APRIL – 11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019




## SOPHY ROBERTS

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Sophy Roberts is an award-winning writer based in Dorset, England. She holds two degrees from Oxford University, and an MSc in Journalism from Columbia University. She has worked as Editor-at-Large of Condé Nast Traveler, Travel Editor at The Economist 1843, and Travel Editor at Departures magazine. She now writes across a wide range of international titles, including The Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal, focusing on remote travel, conservation, philanthropy, and culture. Her forthcoming book, *The Lost Pianos of Siberia*, will be published in multiple languages in 2020.

# The Widower's Tale



You want to know about my wife. I'll tell you everything, or at least everything I know. But it's not a pretty story. Nor is it the kind of tale I want telling to everyone on this boat. I don't want the entire ship knowing my business before we've even pulled into the first port. Especially as a single man. We widowers are like honeypots. The last ship I was on, I had five offers of marriage before the cruise was out. But for some reason, you seem like someone I can trust. Or maybe I've just had too much to drink. But for the sake of Ella, I'll do my best to tell you who she was. I expect I'll make mistakes and misrepresent her in a way that if she were here to correct me she'd tell me I never understood. She would criticise me for putting words into her mouth. It wouldn't be fair but I know that's what she'd say.

Still, I will try. I will try and tell you why some days made her feel as if she were drowning in fresh air, and made her run away and hide among the dunes where she'd wait for the returning tide. I'll tell you about that too, how she came to live in Ireland. Now Ella has gone. It's been thirty-six years, and I'm still living away from the family home I haven't even tried to sell. For me, these cruises are just the ticket for pretending reality doesn't exist. When I'm on them for six months straight, I start to think my country is the ship. It's a way of surviving, I suppose, or maybe I'm just losing my grip, as Kerry men say a man does when he sees a selkie. They say madness comes to him and maybe they are right. A selkie is like an Irish mermaid; they can change from seal to human form. They say a selkie messes with a man's thinking, that with each tide he'll take his boat farther and farther from harbour in the

hope he'll discover her again. Eventually, they tell you, the man who has seen a selkie never returns to land. They say there's no going back, that he never finds peace on the open water or among the whales turning their pewter backs to the rain.

Ella was my first wife. We met when she'd come to Ireland to stay with her aunt. We tumbled into love, and before long, we were making a life for ourselves between the west coast of Ireland and New York. We bounced between the States, where I worked in finance. Ella's family were from Boston. We spent every holiday in Ireland, and started to restore the house which had been in my family since before the war.

It's down on the Kerry coast. I admit it's no great beauty, but it has a certain appeal: Victorian, square and grey, looking out to sea. The Gothic bay windows which stick out from the main façade are a little clumsy, and there's a castle-like porch. The sea is visible from the windows of the west-facing rooms. Behind the house sits the Corrig bog, and behind that, Old Man Lin, a treeless hump that protects us from the easterlies that blow in early March. The land on which we sit – well somebody in my family got something right when they chose this spot. It has a peculiar energy, a superabundant energy, the upper reaches of the River Lin threading down the bogland and into our demesne before stealing into the sea. The few who come across us are surprised; hidden by swollen ground, the house is so secret it appears suspended in a fairy spell.

But then houses, landscapes, have more potent spirits than any of us if you allow them to take hold. I'm not a superstitious person but Ella sometimes had more faith in conversations with the dead than she did with the living. Before our son was born, she told me she could sometimes hear the sound of a woman singing to a child in the next door room to ours. Sometimes she said she could feel the same woman standing behind her whenever she walked the avenue of oaks. She didn't know what it meant, if this apparition (if you could call it that, for its presence never took a form) wanted her here or not. While I never heard the steady rock of the child's cradle she described, I know exactly what she meant. The house quivers with the unseen. Take a walk through the

myrtle woods and pines. You hear the whisper of disturbed earth. You listen more closely and think you must be going mad for there's only silence and the sound of your own breath. Still, something is not quite right. Then you look up above you and see what's taking hold. Plants grow here that wouldn't survive anywhere else this far north. Tree ferns burst up like giant shuttlecocks from the wood's loamy floor.

In spite of everything that happened, I miss it still. Even here, out on the open ocean, I can smell the moisture that creeps into every picture on our walls back home, the wetness blackening the faces of my ancestors as they stare down at you in the hall. I know that back home in Ireland, the stuffed animals are being consumed by moths, that the baths are stained with brown from taps dripping peat. I know the dead hydrangeas in the vase were once a rosy pink. I know my mother's wallpaper has blistered with the damp, that the few people who ever visit the old place think it a place neglected by a family who don't give a damn.

I love that house, or at least I did before things went wrong. So did Ella in her way, at least in the beginning. The Romans called it 'Hibernia' – Ireland, that is – because they thought the land as cold as winter. Clouds scud low across the landscape and sea-fog clings to peat. Yet had the Romans bothered to invade they would have felt all the life breathing from the green. This is a land kissed by the waters of the Gulf Stream, where hermit monks have long communed with God. Plants thrive in our mild, damp climate, sustained by the warm rains that blow in from the west.

By the time I'm through, you'll start to understand why in spite of all this history, I can't go home. Fifteen minutes, no more – that's all you need to get to the end of my story. It won't be easy, for while I've always been drawn to people who feel and say what they think, when you lose a child, it's different. The thinking stops.

On the day it happened, there was a greyness to the water – the surface flat and calm. Ella had gone down to the beach where she and our son Connor collected shrimps in the rock pools – the shallow ones

which reveal themselves for an hour or two each day. The two of them went there regularly, so there was no foothold among the rocks they didn't know. I was in the boathouse at the other end of the beach. At one point I could see them in the distance. Connor was wearing his waterproofs, the pair of them like two old fishermen picking across the seaweed-covered rocks. I could smell the salt, hear the sound of their voices floating towards me in the hush that comes between waves. Like I say, there was nothing unusual to the day. The beach was widening all the time – empty except for Connor and a couple of curlews burrowing for sandworms with their beaks. It was ten in the morning and the tide was going out.

At some point I suppose I stopped watching. The way Ella told it, they'd been there for about an hour when she lifted Connor off the rocks and put him on to the flat. He'd found a crab and wanted his other bucket. So Ella left him – our little boy in yellow stood on the wet and rippled sand – as she returned to where they'd left their things at the foot of the dunes. Thirty or forty feet, that was all it was, the distance between Connor and his mother when the tide made its turn.

I sensed something was up. Why, I don't know. Because it was almost noiseless, the way the water disappeared for five, ten seconds then rose and stretched across the sand.

I remember when I shouted out to Connor how the words wouldn't come, as if somebody, somewhere understood there was no point to my speech.

Then Connor disappeared. Yet there was no roar, no ragged mane of anger to the wave that followed, just the hiss of silver water gliding high up on the beach.

You want me to tell you more? I will, but I need to get a few things clear in my head first. The order of events is muddled. My memory is unreliable. What happened remains inexpressible. A child who loses its parents is called an orphan. A husband who loses his wife is called a widower. When Connor was taken from us, I learnt why we have no word for a father who has lost a son.

What happened, happened, and even when I tell you this, it remains unspeakable, the fact that Ella and I were guilty because we'd missed our cue, because we stood in the wings when the sea did what it did and made its turn. So yes, after the accident I had to keep a lid on things. What would have been the point of talking about it – about what might have been if only we'd done more than watch events unfold? Even if I had been watching them from the shore, I wouldn't have been able to save him in time. So there was no point in going back over everything. When Ella was falling apart, it was my job to keep things together. The mistake I made is I didn't know how far she would go. It's a truth you'll discover soon enough. You think you know someone, and you don't. You live and love and when it all goes wrong, despite what anybody says, you can't rely on anybody or anything. You can't even rely on the rhythm of the tides you think you know.



LONDON (Greenwich)

Saint Malo

Bordeaux

Bilbao

LISBON

CHAPTER 9

# *Old World Alchemy*

LISBON – LONDON  
11<sup>TH</sup> – 19<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019



## TAHIR SHAH

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Tahir Shah is best known for his unusual expeditions. A British author based in Morocco, he has searched the Upper Amazon for a former head-shrinking tribe; studied magic with Indian Godmen; and combed Ethiopia for the fabled gold mines of King Solomon. Shah has authored 25 books, as well as critically acclaimed novels which have been translated into 30 languages.

He also makes documentary films, which are aired on National Geographical Television and The History Channel. Shah lives at Dar Khalifa, a mansion set in a Casablanca shantytown. He's married to Rachana Shah and has two children.

# The Magic Of Agatha C.

Helen Rathbone lay outstretched on a lounge chair at the far end of the sun deck, her floral print dress tinged gold in the syrupy light of late afternoon. Poised on her lap was Agatha Christie's classic, *Death On The Nile*, a drained glass of Pimms punch set on a low table beside the chair. The bow of *Silver Whisper* sliced fast through waves the hue of crushed lapis lazuli, the decks rinsed in golden sunlight. Lisbon was now far behind, the northern shores of the Iberian Peninsula beckoning from beyond the next horizon.

Drowsily, Helen turned onto her side and, through squinted eyes, made out a well-dressed gentleman easing himself onto the lounge chair opposite her own. His long aristocratic face was bearded, coal-black eyes ringed with a sense of gravity – as though he carried with him the weight of the world. Stepping forward, a steward served the stranger a gin martini, the glass veiled in condensation.

Unable to keep her eyes open, Helen drifted into sleep.

As a cloud passed across the setting sun, a gently accented voice broke the silence.

“Excuse me, Mademoiselle.”

Waking with a start, Helen looked up, befuddled and dazed.

“Your book, Miss... it fell.”

Sitting up, she found the gentleman standing close, the hardback thriller held towards her at arm’s length.

“Oh... um... thank you.”

The stranger smiled.

“Few pleasures are quite so perfect as being rocked to sleep by the motion of the sea,” he said. Reaching out, he kissed the back of Helen’s hand tenderly.

“Wilhelm, at your service.”

Blushing at such a display of chivalry, Helen struggled to stand.

“I was having silliest, most remarkable dream.”

“A plotline inspired by Agatha C.’s latest offering?”

Again, Helen blushed.

“Yes, indeed.”

The gentleman stepped backwards.

“Were you to accept an invitation to dine with me this evening,” he said, “I could not promise you excitement worthy of Agatha C., but I could promise you lively conversation.”

“Oh, um... I don’t know what to say.”

“Then please say nothing, but meet me in the bar at eight.”

Kissing the back of her hand a second time, the gentleman excused himself and slipped away. Helen watched him walk the length of the deck through zebra shadows, past the life-rings – each one bearing the name of the vessel. The epitome of good manners, he was the kind of gentleman found in romance novels but not in the real world.

Hastening to her cabin, Helen Rathbone asked

her maid to make ready her favourite dress – the one designed for her a year earlier by her friend Coco Chanel. Red chiffon with an extended fringe which swayed as she walked, it was the finest flapper dress ever styled – perfect for a dinner rendezvous with a mysterious stranger.

While the dress was prepared, Helen instructed her butler, Oscar, to make enquiries about the gentleman. Returning 10 minutes later, he knocked softly at the door, and reported:

“Prince Wilhelm of Albania has made the journey up from Cape Town, Miss Rathbone,” he said.

“*Prince Wilhelm?!?*”

“Yes, Miss.”

“Is he travelling alone?”

“With six members of his private staff, and 22 steamer trunks. As I understand it, he’s kept to himself the entire voyage and hasn’t once dined in public.”

At three minutes past eight, Helen strolled down the grand staircase and towards the bar. Awash with sophisticated guests, the room was a riot of colour, noise, and animation. A pianist was playing Jan Garber’s *Baby Face*, the strains of music mingling with the rattle of martinis being shaken behind the bar. A horde of elegant ladies were conversing with one another, their partners dressed impeccably in tuxedos.

Taking a deep breath, Helen Rathbone stepped into the bar, Coco Chanel’s couture doing its magic right on cue.

As if instructed to do so, everyone turned.

Brows were raised, monocles popped out, the barman fumbled with a bottle of Tanqueray gin, which



smashed to the floor.

As Helen's feet crossed the threshold, Prince Wilhelm shot forward. Gushing compliments, he escorted his guest to a table away from the noise. A waiter glided up, popping the cork on a chilled bottle of Dom Pérignon.

Toasting his good fortune at having encountered such a ravishing young lady, the prince touched the rim of his crystal glass to that of his guest.

"You must tell me all about yourself," he coaxed in an affectionate voice, his eyes staring into hers.

"There's nothing worthy of telling," Helen answered. "I'm a simple dreamer, an insatiable lover of romance, travel, and mystery."

"And of Agatha C., as I have already discovered."

"*And* Agatha C.," Helen smiled. "She provides the perfect way to escape into mysterious dreams."

"Printed words are the most powerful alchemy of all."

"I quite agree," Helen answered, adding: "May I ask how far you are travelling?"

Prince Wilhelm shrugged at the question, as though genuinely unsure of the answer.

"It depends on various matters of state," he replied. "And whether I am required in Tirana."

"Were you not needed, how far would you travel?"

"Ah, now that would be *my* dream. I would travel to the end of the earth – for nothing gives me more joy than forward movement. Nothing that is, except being in the presence of an enchanting new acquaintance."

After a second glass of champagne, the prince led the way through into the restaurant. The *mâitre d'hôtel*

seemed overjoyed at greeting such distinguished guests. Ushering them to a well-positioned table, he suggested the lobster.

A sommelier presented the prince with an encyclopaedic wine list, and appeared impressed by the Albanian aristocrat's choice of a vintage *Nuits Saint Georges*.

Through the meal, Prince Wilhelm told stories of his travels and of his life in a way that was neither indulgent nor ostentatious. Helen listened with rapt attention, her eyes feasting on every detail of the most engaging man she had ever met. Exquisite, he was sensitive, restrained, and thoughtful. Helen's attention kept returning to the delicate gold brooch pinned to the prince's lapel, bearing the twin-headed eagle of Albania.

Although a woman who liked to make decisions for herself, Helen took delight in the way the prince ordered for them both. Lobster was followed by *crêpe Suzette* flambéed at the table, flames licking the air like dragons' tongues.

As Wilhelm placed his fork and spoon on the empty plate, he peered searchingly into Helen's eyes.

"I do hope you will allow me the honour of indulging you over the coming days," he said.

Before she could reply his smile evaporated, replaced by a look of sudden and terrible fear. Squinting to the left, Helen followed his line of sight. A pair of swarthy men in dark suits had pushed into the restaurant and were pacing fast between the tables.

His brow beading in perspiration, the prince snatched the linen napkin from his lap, brushed it roughly over his jacket's lapel, before slamming it

down on the table. A moment later the brusque pair in cheap lounge suits were standing over Wilhelm.

As though in the company of his executioners, he stood up gravely and excused himself. Turning to leave, he glanced at the crumpled napkin, then into Helen's eyes.

Distressed, she watched him being led out through the kitchen. Her mind reeling, she tried to make sense of what was taking place. Unsure if it was significant, she picked up the napkin.

Something fell from it onto the table-top.

The little gold brooch bearing the twin-headed eagle of Albania.

Alarmed, she left the restaurant and made her way to the purser's office on the deck below.

"Please could you tell me in which stateroom Prince Wilhelm of Albania is staying?"

The purser frowned, checked his lists, and replied curtly:

"There is no gentleman of that name on board."

"Perhaps he's travelling under a pseudonym."

The official glared in answer.

"No, Miss, I would know if he was."

Hurrying back to her suite, Helen poured herself a glass of Scotch, sat on the sofa and replayed the events of the evening.

The unexpected meeting.

The dinner.

The little brooch.

Taking it from her purse, she held it to the light. Fashioned from the purest gold, it was exquisite. But why had Wilhelm left it as he had done? Helen turned the brooch over, the tip of an index finger running

along the underside. Below the clasp was a speck of what looked like dirt. As she held it closer to her eyes, there was a muffled knock at the door.

She went over, opened it.

A thick-set man burst in. Grabbing her mouth and wrist, he forced Helen against the wood-paneled wall. Like an animal caught in a trap, she struggled for her life.

Suddenly the assailant slumped to the floor.

Behind him was Oscar the butler, a knife in his hand – its blade stained red with fresh blood.

"Whhhhhat's going on?"

"You are in terrible danger, Miss Rathbone."

Helen felt as though she were going to collapse.

"Who was he?"

"An Albanian revolutionary, Miss. One of the group that took His Highness from dinner."

"Where is Wilhelm?" Helen asked urgently.

"They have him."

"How did you know he was taken?"

The butler dipped his head in a bow.

"Because I am His Highness's bodyguard, Miss. He assigned me to your service before we left Cape Town."

Helen balked at the explanation.

"What?! I don't understand!"

"There will be time for explanations later, Miss. But now we must save His Highness."

"How?!"

"The lapel pin. Where is it?"

Helen gestured to the table.

Without wasting a moment the butler snatched the brooch, scraped the speck of dirt from the back,

and slipped it onto the bottom of a solid gold cigarette lighter, embossed with the royal Albanian crest. Holding it over the lamp, an image was projected onto the wall.

‘Is that a microdot...?’

“Yes Miss.”

“I read about them in an Agatha Christie novel.”

The butler perused the projected document, reading the lines of Albanian text fast.

“I shall send a message to Tirana at once,” he said. “Lock the door and let no one inside.”

“But what about that brute lying on the floor?”

“He’s not going to move. I shall take him out as soon as I return.”

As Helen fought to make sense of the situation, she found herself on dry land, as though time and place had shifted forwards inexplicably. The wood-paneled stateroom was exchanged for the grandeur of a throne room.

Prince Wilhelm was opposite, attired in the magnificent robes of state. The breast of his tailcoat was emblazoned with medals and imperial crests, a delegation of ministers and high-ranking officers standing to attention behind.

“The Albanian people are more grateful than you could ever know,” he said, his tone both solemn and effusive. “By saving the microdot you saved our kingdom from the forces of tyranny. As a small gesture of gratitude the Albanian nation should like to confer upon you our highest civilian honour, The Order of the Black Eagle.”

Stepping forward, Prince Wilhelm pinned an ornate medal to Helen’s dress, a star of purest gold

dangling from a green ribbon. He bowed in reverence and gratitude. Then, leaning forward once again, he kissed her on the cheek.

Truly fulfilled, Helen was about to give thanks for the accolade, when a loud sound startled her.

The sound of a hardback book falling onto a wooden floor.

Outstretched on the lounge chair in the last throes of dusk, Helen peered down at the deck. The copy of *Death On The Nile* was lying face up, a green ribbon bookmark poking out from the top.

Drowsy and confused, Helen Rathbone gave thanks for the mysterious dream, for her love of romance, travel, and for the magic of Agatha C.

# The Guest's Tale

What makes a memorable tale? A willingness to reveal remarkable experiences? Fresh perspectives? Knowledge of paths less travelled – and the paths that bring us together? Silversea travellers embody all these qualities and more. If life is the greatest story, few are more equipped to tell it. So here's to you. To each and every one of our Tale of Tales protagonists: our guests. Here's to the wealth of stories you brought on board. Here's to the convivial times you created and shared, and your unending spirit of discovery. And on that note, here's one last reflection on the journey, from celebrated writer Jude Deveraux who thinks it just might have been the best World Cruise ever... until the next time!

By Jude Deveraux

I never imagined that a writing-themed cruise could turn out to be truly wonderful. Since writing is what I do, day in and day out, I wasn't much interested.

But then, just before we were to sail, the full list of guest speakers was sent out.

Harold Koda and Steve McCurry were on it.

It's a wonder I didn't faint. As it was, I sat and stared, my heart pounding. Had Silversea read my mind?

**These two men are at the top of my list of heroes. Movie stars, famous rockers, Superman, whoever, none of them appeal to me as these men do. They are absolute legends in their fields – and certainly in my life.**

First there was Harold Koda.

Years before I discovered cruising, my life revolved around the Costume Society of America. I traveled with them all over Europe, and I owned over 6,000 books on costume history. On our tours, we were taken behind the scenes to the costume departments of great museums. I'll never forget seeing

the lavish burial outfit of one of the Borgia men. They'd dug him up, undressed him, then repaired the damage to his outfit. We nodded in sympathy about what his corpse had done to the clothes. We were all hardcore historians and could abide nothing that hurt silk brocade.

Our god was Harold Koda. We CSAers were like nuns with the pope. None of us knew him, but we worshipped him from afar. We spoke of him in awed whispers.

The cruise began and one morning in La Terrazza, a man sat at the table in front of me. I knew who he was. I think I quit breathing for about three minutes.

When I got ready to leave, I stood by my table. Should I speak to him? Did I dare? Was I worthy?

I gathered my courage. With a nervous, shaky voice, I introduced myself and said I had been on many CSA tours.

He – I still can't believe this – asked me to sit down at his table. Be still my heart!

What you have to understand

about costumers is how we duel. Gunslingers at the OK Corral aren't as serious as a roomful of costume historians. We compete. Compare. Size each other up. First off, we want to know who knows what.

Costume historians know that the best way to date a dress is by the sleeves. To stay in fashion, it's easier to change the sleeves than the 50 yard skirt. Mr. Koda and I danced around with the mention of 1893 sleeves vs. 1842. And of course there are Elizabethan corset stays, and Dior's New Look. We shot bits back and forth to each other. It was glorious! I hadn't played Who Knows the Most about Costume History? in years. It was like unsheathing an old sword and finding you still knew how to use it.

**I left his table smiling so big it's a wonder my face didn't crack.**

At Mr. Koda's speech I was the first one in the door. He had a big quote on the screen, then my name. I was stunned, pleased, and sealed as an adoring fan forever.

For the rest of his time on board, we smiled at each other in a way that like-minded people do. We knew what others didn't.



As we regular Worlders know, Silversea World Cruises are like no other. People are shocked when I say I don't travel within a herd of friends and family. "You go ALONE?!" Far from it. We regular Worlders have been together for so long that we are friends, family even.

To meet Mr. Koda in this home-like atmosphere was better than I could have written it. A truly monumental event for me!

I first saw Steve McCurry on the 13th of March. I'd just returned from a truly fabulous overland tour deep into China to see pandas. One day, I skipped the scheduled tour and wandered around a village. Many of the residents had never seen anyone who looked like me so they pulled me aside and asked to have their pictures taken with me. There was a lot of laughter and it made for a truly great trip.

When I got back to the ship, Steve McCurry was on board. He's called The Greatest Living Photographer in the World, and he deserves the title. For years, I'd watched him on YouTube, had bought his Masterclass. I'd studied his photos and read masses about his life. I am a true Fan Girl.

Because of the land tour, I missed Mr. McCurry's first lecture. I went to his Q&A with Fernando and sat in the front row, smack dab in front of them.

Fernando waved to me, then whispered something to Mr. McCurry who then looked hard at me. The woman next to me (a Seggie) asked what that was about. I said that Fernando had just introduced me to him and had said good things about me. She asked how I knew this. "Because I know Fernando."

Could have but didn't sing,  
"We are Family."

The next day I got a card inviting me to go to lunch with Steve McCurry. I had to sit down on the bed and take a few deep breaths. Greatest Living... With me. At lunch.

To say I was nervous was an understatement. I could hardly walk.

I tried hard to be a normal person but I failed. First of all, I found out that Mrs. McCurry is Hopi. I've spent most of my life in New Mexico so I know what an incredible tribe the Hopi are. Her mother grew up on the mesa, one of the most dangerous

places to live in the world. We talked about that at length.

Finally, I turned my attention to Mr. McCurry. I knew about a terrible YouTube video that had been posted about him and asked about it. That opened some deep discussion.

I'm sorry to say that I fairly excluded the others at the table. I was Fan Girl Supreme and being at the same table with my hero was overwhelming. Courtesy was discarded.

We stayed for hours and Steve – by then we were friends – said he wanted to see my photos. You what? MY photos? Joke, right?

He was serious. I knew that if I gave myself even seconds to think about it, I'd chicken out, so I ran. I nearly knocked down three people but I was on a mission.

We met in the bar (still has blue chairs, thank you, Silversea). I had nothing planned and had no idea what to show him. I just pulled up some pictures I'd lined up for a contest online.

He liked them! Said some of them were excellent – and I managed to

not burst into tears.

For the rest of that glorious day, we talked as friends. At one point I even touched his camera. Whoo hooo. (A Nikon d850 with a Nikkor 18-300 lens, if you're wondering.)

We talked a lot about future trips. I told him I was the first person to sign up for the 2021 Expedition World Cruise and said I wished he'd go with us, at least for a segment. He was interested.

After we parted, I ran to Charmaine to get brochures and schedules and they were delivered to Steve.

When he disembarked, it was hugs and double cheek kisses goodbye. I felt we were friends.

Not long after that, Paul Theroux, Steve's friend, got on board. He and I talked a bit and we shopped for an egg together. I read his book about Africa and later, on a land tour into that country, I saw what he'd been talking about.

Besides the extraordinary entertainment aboard, this year's itinerary was magnificent, with many new places. The Event in Japan

was splendid. In Osaka, we had puppeteers come onboard and they were fascinating.

We went down one side of Africa, then up the other side. I went on several safaris and got some excellent photos. A leopard walked right by our vehicle. A huge bull elephant chased us. (He thought our big green vehicle was a pretty lady.)

On the west side of Africa we went on a land tour to Ghana and the Ivory Coast, and that was an unforgettable experience. Kids hugged us and asked us to take their pictures. We returned with great photos and some horrifying toilet stories.

China, Japan, Sri Lanka. All fascinating. We got to Spain just in time for a festival that was full of beautiful women in flamenco dresses, and gorgeous men on horseback – and that was the police force! I nearly blistered my finger pushing the camera shutter button so many times.

**For me personally, 2019 was an exceptional cruise. Getting to meet not one but two of my all-time heroes was a life's dream. The land tours were extraordinary**

**and spending yet another year with people I've come to know and love was a joy.**

I'm sorry I didn't personally meet each of the Tale Tellers who got on board but everyone said good things about them. We agreed that it was great to have such interesting lecturers. I would have gone but my agent emailed that he was negotiating a new contract and I needed to turn in an outline for a trilogy, plus outlines for my next two murder mysteries, and oh yeah, could I send ideas for the covers as the art director was going on maternity leave. Etc. It's not easy having a full time job while traveling.

In trivia, Fernando said that this was the best World Cruise he'd ever been on. I agree!!

Jude Deveraux (known as Jude Montassir to her fellow Silversea guests) is the author of 43 New York Times bestsellers, including *Sweet Liar*, the Nantucket series, and *A Knight in Shining Armor*.

She recently started a series of murder mysteries, *A Willing Murder* and *A Justified Murder*. To date, there are more than 60 million copies of her books in print worldwide. Besides writing, she travels yearly on Silversea's World Cruise and is an avid photographer.



