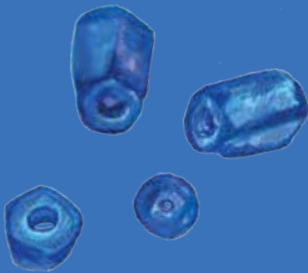


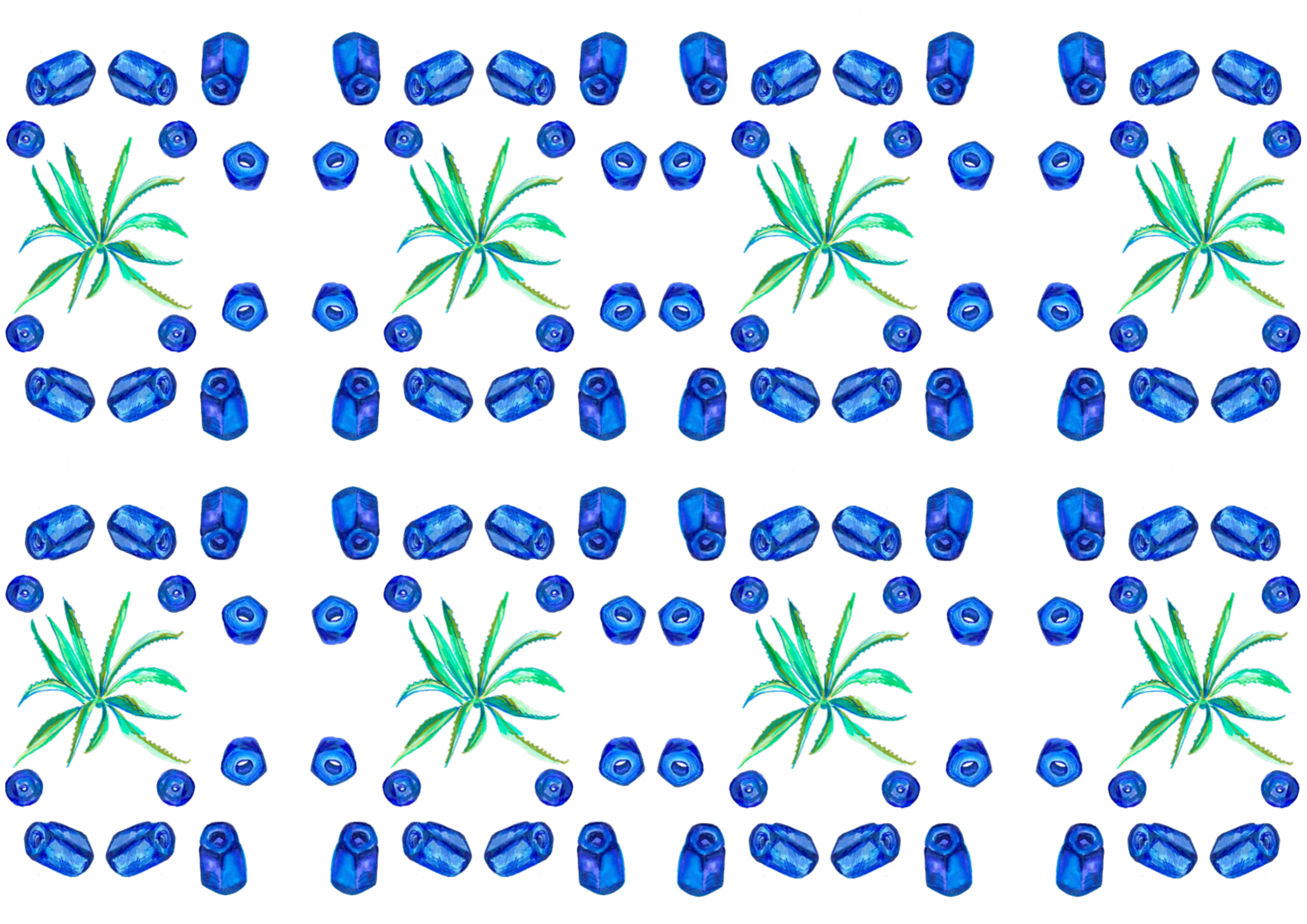


Little Scout

and other stories



Sabien Onvlee *illustrations* Amber Hyacinth



For the Children of Statia

My heartfelt thanks to Ishmael Berkel, Marleen Blokhuis, Jolly Ferwerda, Wanda Flores, Javanca Merkman, Anna van Praag, Daniela Richardson, Robert Slagt, Carla van Thijn and Rianne Vreeling.

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illustrations

Amber Hyacinth

with a contribution of **Misha Spanner**

Table of contents

A Nice Day	6
The Story of a Saladoid Girl	
From Brest to Saint-Christophe	12
The Story of Remi, a Young French Sailor 1	
Alone on an Island	18
The Story of Remi, a Young French Sailor 2	
Anansi's Threads	24
The Story of Afi, a Girl from Africa 1	
Take Me Home	30
The Story of Afi, a Girl from Africa 2	
<i>Time and place: Statia, 500 BC-1640</i>	36



Little Scout	38
The Story of Jacob from Lynch Plantation 1	
Visiting the Governor	44
The Story of Jacob from Lynch Plantation 2	
Warships in the Bay	48
The Story of Simha Swaan, the Daughter of Aaron Lopez 1	
Proclamations	54
The Story of Simha Swaan, the Daughter of Aaron Lopez 2	
They're Coming for Papai	60
The Story of Simha Swaan, the Daughter of Aaron Lopez 3	
<i>Time and place: Statia, 1776-1790</i>	66



The Terrible Mr. Moore	68
The Story of Franky from Golden Rock Plantation 1	
The Black Sheep of Hercules	72
The Story of Franky from Golden Rock Plantation 2	
The Marble King	78
The Story of Clarence from Jeems	
Our Favorite Celebrations	84
The Story of Charles from Oranjestad	
The Young Statian Planter	90
The Story of Gerald, and the Area of Glass Bottle	
<i>Time and place: Statia, 1890-1930</i>	96

A Nice Day

The Story of a Saladoid Girl



There are two kinds of days on my island. Happy days and sad days. Today is a happy day. My belly is full. It rained last night. And we are going to bake bowls out of clay.

Seven days ago, no one was happy. My little brother broke our bowls. Everyone got angry. He is still small, but they yelled at him: “You fool, what have you done?” They shouted at me too: “Why don’t you watch your little brother? That’s YOUR job!”

We both cried, my little brother and I. We were playing. It was an accident. But I understood that Grandma and Mom were angry. We need those bowls.

Let me tell you something about my island. We call it Aloi. That means Cashew Island. It’s a big island and there are trees growing everywhere. My uncle can walk from one side to the other in a day. But I can’t do that. It’s too far for me. Our island has a high mountain on one side and hills on the other. We live on the flat part in between. It’s a big island, but I never get lost. Because I know my way around.

Rain is important on our island. We don’t always have enough water. That’s why I love the sound of rain so much. When you hear it, you don’t want to sleep. You feel so happy.

Last night I heard thick drops falling on the leaves.

Tick, tick, tick.

Everyone stayed awake. I heard the grown-ups talking softly to each other. They were happy too. They made jokes and laughed together.

Sometimes it’s not nice when it rains. When it’s very windy, for example.

Then I'm afraid the roof of the house will fly off. My grandmother says: "When it's windy like that, it's okay to be scared. Because those storms are dangerous!"

No one is allowed outside when it's windy like that. We all sit close together. My mother and grandmother hold me and my little brother tight. Fortunately, our house is strong. It's the biggest house in the village. It's well built. But we're still afraid. We hope the gods will protect us.

Our house has a round shape. It stands in the middle of the village. Several families live in our house. Each family has its own part. In our part of the house I live with my mother, my grandmother, little brother, uncle and my aunt. My father is often with us too. But not always. His sister lives in another house. He helps her too. Just like he helps us.

Our leader lives in the middle of the house. If there is a dispute between the families, or between the fathers and mothers, or the sisters and grandmothers, he decides who is right. He knows a lot and always gives us wise advice. We do what he says. For example, when I get married later, we will ask the leader if we can be together.

There was no storm last night. There was only rain. That is good for the plants and for the water supply. When it rains, there is enough water. Then we can play. But when it doesn't rain, my mother calls us and says: "Stop playing! Go get water!"

Getting water is our job. It's important. Without water, we can't cook. And without water, we're thirsty. The water source is near the sea. It's not very far to the sea, but it's not close either. We walk from our village to the source several times a day.

In my village, everyone has their own job. The mothers do most of the work. They look after us. They clean fish and tie hammocks. They make sure the cassava grows. They pull the roots out of the ground and turn them into flour. They use that flour to bake cassava bread. They also make the pots, bowls, and dishes we use for cooking. Sometimes they go with us to fetch water, and they make sure the fire stays lit. They are always around us.

Our fathers hunt. Sometimes they catch a monk seal. Or they go fishing in the canoe or walking along the rocks and the reef. Sometimes they use a line, and

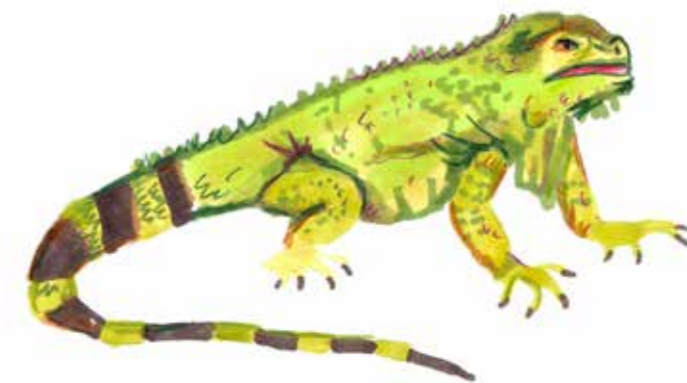
sometimes a net. It depends on the weather and what we see in the sea. They cut down trees. We use them to build our houses and boats. They make sure we can plant cassava. They sit down and talk in the men's house.

We play. And we fetch water. Before we go to the spring, we go to the beach, look for shells and suck the flesh out of the shells. We often have a competition to see who can find the most shells. My friend and I usually win. We search together and help each other. The boys only search for themselves.

I always give the last shell to my little brother. He is still small. He has to grow. And become as big as me.

When your belly is full at the end of the day, it's a good day. When we can eat turtle, seals, or fish, or maybe an iguana, and when there is enough cassava bread. Then we are all happy. Then my father lifts me up and puts me on his shoulders. My father is strong. I am already big, but he can still carry me. Then he shouts: "Today is a celebration. You can eat as much as you want!"

But sometimes there isn't enough cassava bread. And no fish have been caught. Then you're so hungry that your belly won't stop grumbling. Then it's a sad day. When we go to fetch water on a sad day, the spring seems much further away. My little brother cries and we hope that the gods will give us rain, and more cassava, and more fish.



Maybe it was because his belly was grumbling that we had that accident a week ago. I noticed that my little brother was hungry. My stomach felt empty too. "Come on, let's play hide and seek," I said to him. That made him happy. But he wasn't paying attention. He's still small and just wanted to play. But he tripped. He broke two bowls. My mother cried when she saw it. We ran into the forest

because we were afraid of being punished. I understand why my mother was angry. Without the bowls, we can't bake cassava bread.

Making cassava bread takes a lot of time. You must grate the cassava roots. That's hard work. Our mothers do that. Then we squeeze out the juice. Because cassava juice makes you sick. *You must never drink it.* Only when all the juice has been squeezed out, you can bake the bread. Cassava bread keeps for a long time. The day we bake the bread is a happy day. Because on that day, you can eat as much as you want.

Because we didn't have any bowls, we couldn't bake bread. When my mother had finished crying, she said to my father: "We have to make new bowls. I need clay." So, my father went with my uncle to the Little Mountain. They got some red soft soil there. And with that clay, we are going to make bowls today.



I am happy. Today no one is angry with me and my little brother anymore. And my mother is the best bowl maker in our village. It's difficult, you know! You have to be careful about many things. The clay must have the same thickness everywhere. And the bowl must be smooth. When you bake clay, it can crack or break in the fire. You have to be very careful. My mother never breaks anything. And she can decorate beautifully too. She makes lines in the clay with a shell. I want to bake bowls and pots when I grow up. Just like her.

When the bowls are the right shape, we let them dry. The men then make a fire in a pit. Then we bake them. We put the bowls in the fire. The grown-ups know exactly when the fire is hot enough. *How do they know?* I want to learn that too when I grow up. I love it when we bake the bowls and dishes in the fire. I could watch it for hours. When we take new bowls out of the fire, we all feel proud.

We are not the only island in the sea. But our island is the best. Not far from us is another island, Liamuiga. It lies behind the white rocks. Beyond the high mountain with the pit. Plants that grow in the pit help us when we are sick.

Liamuiga is even bigger than our island. And the mountain is higher. My father has been there many times. With other men from my village. He always says: "Liamuiga is fine. But Aloï is the best island of all."

The men from Liamuiga sometimes come to visit us. We are happy when they do. They bring tobacco. And cotton. The men smoke together if they come. We don't go to Amonhana, the small island on the other side of the sea. It seems close, but the sea between our island and Amonhana is too deep and the waves too high.

Recently, my uncle and I climbed the Little Mountain, all the way to the top. The weather was clear. Standing there, I could see all the islands around us, all together. Liamuiga, in the distance, Amonhana close by. And I could also see the two other islands that you can see from the turtle beach.

Far away, there is that small island behind the big mountain of Liamuiga. It is called Oualiri. So, there I stood. High up on the mountain, with the wind in my hair. I could see everything. Our island, right in the middle of the sea, with all those other islands around it. And the sun shone brightest and most beautifully on us, on our island.



From Brest to Saint-Christophe

The Story of Remi, a Young French Sailor — 1

Remi sits under a tree and looks out over the sea. He is so thirsty! He feels like he could drink the whole ocean dry. That's how it feels. But then, if you drink salt water, you go crazy. But if you don't drink water, you go crazy too.

There is no water on this island. It is a small island: Sint Eustatius. It is hot and no one lives here. There are five of them: himself, his friend Joseph, and three French soldiers. They arrived four weeks ago by boat from another island, Saint-Christophe. It's not far from here. You can see it. You can sail there in a day. There are people who live on Saint-Christophe. There is plenty of water there.

Remi, Joseph, and the soldiers built a fort on Sint Eustatius. The captain ordered them to do so. It had to be built on the large rock above the bay. The work was tough. They toiled for weeks. And then? Then the captain just left. And he left them behind. Joseph, Remi, and the soldiers hope that someone will bring them food and water soon. Their supplies are almost gone, and it hasn't rained for a long time.

All day long, they just look out over the sea. They sit by the fort, waiting for a ship to come. At night, Remi lies awake and looks at the stars. There are so many! He thinks of home. Of his grandmother in France, on the other side of the ocean. It seemed like an exciting adventure to come here, but now he wishes he had never come. He misses Brest, his city. He misses his grandmother. She used to sing to him when he couldn't sleep. It feels like a lifetime ago since he was with her.

When Remi turned twelve, his grandmother said: “Remi, I am old. When I am no longer here, you will have to take care of yourself. You must learn to earn your own money.”

Remi started working in the harbour. It was hard work. But he was strong, and he earned his own money. One morning, when he was about to go to work, there was a tall man standing in the middle of the street, wearing expensive clothes, and he had a wart on his nose.

“Seize your chance!” the man shouted. “Sign up for Saint-Christophe!” He saw that Remi had stopped to listen. “Young man,” he asked, “how old are you?”

“Sixteen, sir!” said Remi. *Why did he say that?* He was only twelve. But he was big for his age. He had a lot of muscles from working in the harbour. The man with the wart believed him.

“Sixteen years old. Good,” he said. “And what’s your name?”

“Remi, sir.”

“I am Monsieur Leblanc. May I ask you something, Remi? Have you ever heard of the island of Saint-Christophe?”

“No, sir,” Remi had said.

Then the man with the wart on his nose and the expensive clothes told him a long story. He said that Saint-Christophe was a wonderful island. He said you could get rich there in your sleep. You could earn good money. The French king made sure that everyone had a house. You were given food. And after five years of work, you were given a piece of land! It sounded like a wonderful opportunity. *Why would the king do such a thing?*

“You are thinking: why is the king doing this?” Monsieur LeBlanc said. “I’ll tell you, Remi, I’ll tell you. Not only French people live on Saint-Christophe. English people live there too.” He looked at Remi sternly. “And what do we know about English people?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“Well, Remi. We know that the English *cannot be trusted!* That’s why the king is sending soldiers to Saint-Christophe. To turn them into *mincemeat!*”

Remi stared at the man. Was he supposed to work, or fight?

Again the man guessed what he was thinking. “The king isn’t just thinking about fighting, Remi. He’s also thinking about the future. That’s why he’s looking for boys like you. First, we’ll defeat the English. Then you’ll go to work and

earn money, lots of money. You’ll bet that,” the man winked, “you’ll quickly find a nice girl.” His face showed a satisfied smile. “How much do you think it will cost, young man?”

“I don’t know, sir,” said Remi. “I don’t have any money.”

“Perfect, because it costs NOTHING!” Remi remembers the man shouting this. His face was very close. Remi can still feel the spit that landed on his cheek.

“And Remi, what do you think? Do you want to come along? Come to the harbour tomorrow morning. Seize your chance!”

Remi went home. “I’m going to earn money, Grandma,” he said. “I’m going to take the boat to an island. The king will give me a piece of land. Then I can take care of myself.”

Grandma cried a little. “Oh, my boy,” she said. But she didn’t say, “Don’t go, Remi, stay with me.”



The next morning, Remi went to the harbour. There were nine warships. His ship was called *The Three Kings*. It was the largest one. There were other boys like him. Boys who had also lied about their age. But Remi was the youngest. When the ship left the harbour, there was no one to see him off.

Remi immediately felt sick. He leaned over the railing and threw up his grandmother’s last porridge into the sea.

From that day on, nothing went right. The work on board was hard and boring. He had to scrub the deck and polish the cannons. The soldiers on the ship bullied the boys. They often pretended they would throw them overboard. Especially when the soldiers were drunk. *Imagine if they really did this?*

Remi's only happiness was his friend Joseph. He helped him with everything. "Be careful, Remi, don't fall," Joseph would say when there was a hatch open on the deck. And: "I'll hold you," when the wind was strong. Sometimes the rats ate their food. Joseph chased them away. He taught Remi how to drink the water, when worms were wriggling in it. "Grit your teeth, Remi," he would say, "use your teeth as a sieve!"

The food on board wasn't very tasty. Jerome, the cook, served the same gray porridge every day. Some of the men became ill. Not seasick, but different. They developed purple spots on their legs. Their teeth fell out. They could no longer eat anything. They called it scurvy. One of the soldiers was so ill that he died. They gave him a seaman's grave. Jerome and Joseph laid him on a plank, and the soldiers slid him into the water. He sank straight to the bottom.

No, without Joseph's help, Remi would never have succeeded. Joseph was also from Brest. And just like him, he had talked to the man with the wart on his nose. At night, when they lay in their hammocks, they dreamed aloud about the island together. "We'll cook chicken every night," Joseph said. "And then we'll go dancing with the girls."

"Be careful. Before you know it, you'll be married," Remi teased him.

The captain never showed himself. He always stayed in his cabin. They didn't notice much of the war. They didn't see any English ships at sea. Sometimes the soldiers practiced fighting. They would march across the deck and fire a cannon. It made a loud bang! Afterwards, they drank rum.

"Well, that was the war," Joseph would say.

The weather at sea was unpredictable. You never knew when it would be windy or when it would rain. One day, there was a terrible storm. Remi was so sick he couldn't work. He thought he was going to die. Sometimes there was very little wind. That was terrible too. Once they were stuck for five days. No wind. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. It was sweltering hot. They all got sunburned.

Every time they saw land, they thought they had arrived. But no, not yet. First, they went to Portugal. Next to Tenerife. Then they crossed the ocean. After seven weeks at sea, they occasionally saw an island.

"We're almost there. Saint-Christophe is just a day's sail away," the soldiers said.

Remi and Joseph stared at the sea day and night. They were almost on the island of their dreams. But the soldiers were getting restless. Because they had to fight the English. Remi was also getting a little nervous. *If the English fire at us, he thought, what will happen?*

"Joseph, can you swim?" Remi asked.

"Uh, no. Can you?"

"Me neither," he said.

They looked at each other. They both thought of Brest.

To be continued



Alone on an Island

The Story of Remi, a Young French Sailor — 2



Remi and Joseph were standing on the deck of *The Three Kings*. Two boys from Brest. Together they stared at Saint-Christophe. The island of their dreams. It looked beautiful: a snow-white beach, and trees they had never seen in Brest. A mountain rose up out of the sea. They couldn't see the top. It was hidden in the clouds. The sun shone on the deep blue water. So, this was their paradise. This island was their new home.

But first, of course, they had to fight the English.

"The English don't call the island Saint-Christophe, but Saint Kitts," said Joseph, who always knew everything. And then they counted the English warships. There were six of them.

The captain emerged from his cabin. He was a small, fat man with a harsh face. He called the soldiers over to him and shouted: "*Vive La France*. Long live France! *Vive roi Louis*. Long live King Louis."

And the soldiers shouted: "Long live France, long live King Louis!"

Then the captain began to give orders. "Load the pistols!" he shouted. "Aim the cannons!"

The captain shouted louder than anyone! Everyone did what he said. He sent a message to the English: *Surrender! Otherwise, we will shoot*. The English wanted to think about it for a day. The captain found this amusing. "A whole day! What are they thinking? They can have fifteen minutes," he said.

After fifteen minutes, the captain gave the order to fire. And then all hell broke loose. The noise was deafening. Cannons roared. Bullets hissed past their ears. The English soldiers screamed and shouted. One of their ships had caught

fire. They were in a panic. Soldiers jumped into the sea, terrified. Most of them couldn't swim, just like Remi and Joseph.

Remi and Joseph had never seen anything like it. It was scary, but it was also exciting and even thrilling. If you didn't lose, that is. And they didn't lose, they won. After half an hour, the English surrendered. It was over.

"That was the war," said Joseph.

Everyone got into small boats and rowed to the beach. French people were standing there, cheering. "Long live our soldiers! Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" Everyone was happy, but Remi felt terrible. He asked Joseph: "Why exactly did we fight?"

Joseph tried to explain. "The English and the French both want this island. So it was split up. But I think the English kept crossing our border. And King Louis didn't like that."

Jerome, the cook, who was also in the rowboat, said: "Exactly, Joseph. That's the case." He cooked terrible food, Jerome, but he was always cheerful. He made a lot of jokes. Jerome had seen a lot of the world. But Saint-Christophe, he said, was his home. He was one of the first Frenchmen on this island. "It may sound strange," he said, "because I work on a warship, but I don't like fighting. It makes me sad. Especially when they wage war on my island."

Remi and Joseph nodded.

"I won't smile again until I hold my Pearl in my arms," Jerome said, scratching his head.

"Your Pearl? Do you have a sweetheart here, Jerome?" Joseph was teasing him.

"No, no sweetheart, boys. My Pearl is my neighbor." Jerome scratched his head again. "I'll tell you something about her. It's a sad story. Before the English and the French started fighting each other, they fought together against the people who had always lived here: the Kalinago. They didn't call this island Saint Kitts or Saint-Christophe, but Liamuiga. It's awful, but together the English and the French killed almost all of the Kalinago in a single day. Can you imagine? It was a terrible massacre. They sent the people who survived to Anguilla and Dominica. Nobody ever talks about it here. But it did happen. They spared no one. One little girl survived though. She was left behind on the beach. My neighbors are taking care of her. I call her my little Pearl.

It was dead silent in the boat after that story.

“Remi and Joseph,” Jerome then said, “I’m telling you this because it must not be forgotten, do you understand?”

They nodded again. They were now very close to the beach, where people were cheering.

“Oh, there’s my little Pearl!” Jerome cried. “Ain’t she cute? Seeing her makes me want to live again! See you later!” He jumped out of the boat into the water and ran onto the beach.

It seemed as if everyone knew Jerome. So many people hugged him! He quickly left with his friends. His little Pearl sat on his shoulders, smiling.

Joseph and Remi stood next to the boat, their feet in the warm water. They looked around. Among all the people, there were five boys roughly the same age as Remi en Joseph. They were wearing dirty, old clothes. The boys came up to them. They were also from Brest! They gave Remi and Joseph delicious fruit that they didn’t recognize. They said it was sea grapes. And then the boys told them the real story of Saint-Christophe. The man with the wart on his nose had also told them in France that they could become rich.

“But that’s not how it is,” said the biggest boy in the group.

“No! It’s different here,” said another. “You have to work hard. The food is bad. Many boys are sick.”

“A few have died,” said the big boy.

“We want to go home,” said the little boy standing next to Remi, “but we can’t. There’s no way back.”

“If you have a choice, don’t stay here,” said a boy with red hair and freckles. “We miss France every day.”

Joseph and Remi looked at each other. Saint-Christophe, or Liamuiga, or Saint Kitts, or whatever this island was called, wasn’t a paradise at all. Remi felt like crying. But he didn’t.

The rest of the afternoon, Remi and Joseph sat on the beach under a tree. They said nothing. When the sun went down, they rowed back to the boat. Once again, the captain gave a speech.

“Tomorrow you boys will meet your new landlords,” he said. Joseph and Remi stared at the planks of the deck. “We must conquer more land,” the captain continued, “for the honour of France. There is a small uninhabited island

nearby: Sint Eustatius. We are going to build a fort there. Sint Eustatius will become French. Long live King Louis! *Vive La France.*”

“*Vive La France,*” a soldier shouted, but he burped. The other soldiers laughed. No one listened to the captain. They were all drunk.

But Joseph whispered to Remi: “That’s it! We’ll build that fort, Remi! It’s better than staying here.” And Remi thought: *Joseph is so clever.* Because at that moment, he didn’t know how things would turn out.

The next day they sailed for Sint Eustatius. The island was smaller than Saint-Christophe and the sand was not white, but black and stuck to their feet. Above the bay, they built a fort. Well, it was more like a wall of wooden posts. When it was finished, they dragged three cannons up from the ship. The work was finally done.

The captain said he needed five people to guard the fort. Joseph and Remi volunteered, with three other soldiers. The men were friendly, not bullies. Remi and Joseph winked at each other. Now they could relax on this small island.

But when the ship left the bay, something strange happened. The captain did not sail in the direction of Saint-Christophe. He turned the other way and disappeared like a dot on the horizon. The soldiers were furious.

“What is he doing?” shouted one. “What is he doing?” Another clenched his fist. And they all shouted: “He’s abandoning us! The bastard!”

“What do you mean?” Joseph asked.

“I was afraid this would happen,” said the lieutenant, who was in charge. “This captain cannot be trusted. He only thinks about himself and money. He’s not going back to Saint-Christophe. He’s going to become a pirate and attack ships. We’ll never see them again.” He spat on the ground. “That means we won’t get any food or water. We’re trapped here like rats.”

And that’s how it happened.

Since that day, Remi, Joseph and the three soldiers are waiting and waiting, behind the wooden wall of the fort. All day long they stare at the ocean, which is full of water you cannot drink. And the blazing sun above it. They feel the hot wind on their faces and the pain in their stomachs from being hungry. Their

tongues are thick with thirst.

At night, when he cannot sleep,
Remi looks at the stars. He thinks of
his grandmother in Brest. He prays
for a miracle.



Anansi's Threads

The Story of Afi, a Girl from Africa — 1



Afi feels the sand under her feet. Black grains stick to her toes. Warm wind brushes her cheeks. On board the ship, she was always nauseous. Nauseous because of the waves. Nauseous from sadness and fear. Now she is standing on the beach. But she is still nauseous. It seems as if the beach is moving under her feet.

The men with red faces are also standing on the beach. They have driven all her people off the ship. First the men. Then the women and children.

Afi takes Mamle's hand. Mamle speaks her language. She is not her mother, but Mamle took care of her on board the ship. In the dark hold where she lay on the wooden planks. Tied up as if she were an animal, not a girl. There in the dark, Mamle lay next to her. Every day, Mamle would tell Afi the story of the spider Anansi, who had sneaked aboard on the ship.

"Listen, Afi. Anansi is clever. They can't catch him. The wide world is his web. He weaves strong threads that no one can see. Only we will find his strings. And they will take us home. So don't be afraid." And then Mamle wiped the tears from Afi's eyes with her fingertips. It was difficult because of the chains. She could barely reach.

Mamle is on the beach with Afi. Where have they ended up? And where are their men? They are nowhere to be seen. The bad men with red faces have already taken them away. Afi looks at these unfamiliar men, with their red faces. Do these men live on this island? She doesn't understand their language, but she can see they understand each other. They talk and talk. They drink from a stone jug. And they laugh loudly. They all carry fire sticks. The men from their ship also have whips. They crack them through the air. They point at Mamle and the women on the beach. And then they laugh again.

Afi carefully lets her eyes wander over the rest of the island. It is green with lots of forest. Trees, sea, sand. It almost looks like home, like the place where the river flows into the sea. Only the sand is dark grey instead of white. *If only her father, mother, and sisters were here.* Not these men with fire sticks and whips who laugh so weird when they look at her.

A few ships lie anchored in the bay. On the cliff, in the distance, Afi sees a small fort. It is not as big as the fort in Elmina. But this fort, too, has cannons.

Elmina, such a beautiful name, for such a terrible place. *Do they lock people in that fort as well? Do they sell people there too?* Afi doesn't know. It's not as busy and crowded here as it is in Elmina. Except for the women and children on the beach, there are no people like them. There are also fewer people with red faces than in Elmina. And fewer buildings. A few wooden sheds and a few unfinished stone houses. And that fort on the cliff.

The men with the fire sticks start shouting at the women: "*En nou lopen!*" Afi knows a few words of the language of the men with red faces. She knows the word *Middelburg*. And *Compagnie*. She doesn't know what those words mean. But she does know what *en nou lopen* means. Mamle and Afi do as they are ordered. They know what happens if you don't follow orders. All the women and children know that.

They start walking. Not toward the fort, but in the other direction. Mamle and Afi are the last in line. Everywhere along the edge of the beach, there are men with red faces watching them. Afi avoids their gaze.

But then she feels someone is looking at her. Only at her. Eyes are burning into her back. She turns around. There is a young man with dark curls. He is different from the rest. He is not smiling. And he is only looking at her. Afi doesn't know what to think. What is the sparkle in his eyes? Is that a tear? Men don't cry. And these men certainly don't. She turns her head and follows Mamle.

They walk along the beach to a wooden shed with no windows. The men shove them inside. It is warm in the shed, and the air is stuffy. Once all the women and children are inside, they sit close together. The door closes. No one says anything. But a child starts to cry. Everyone is afraid. You can smell it. *What is going to happen to them now?* Afi holds Mamle's hand tightly.



Without Mamle, Afi would not have survived. Mamle was the only woman in Elmina who spoke her language. Afi tries not to think about what happened before she came to Elmina Fort. But she can't. She doesn't want to think about that morning when she and her sister were kidnapped. They had been playing on the riverbank. *If only she had listened to her mother.* How many times her mother had told her: "Don't go to the river without me, Afi! It's dangerous there! They steal children there."

Afi had laughed. "If thieves come, I'll climb a tree, Mom!" *If only she had listened.* Men with fire sticks had grabbed her and her sister. They had pressed their hands over her mouth. She couldn't scream. And then she had to walk for days with her sister. Often, they had to walk at night, so no one could see them. Sometimes they walked during the day, in the blazing sun.

In her dreams, that empty spot keeps coming back. That empty spot next to her in the hut. When she woke up without her sister. The thieves had given her to other men. Afi had to keep walking. Alone. And that's how she ended up in Elmina. In a large prison with people from all over. She had no one to talk to. No one spoke her language. Until she met Mamle. Mamle knew what she meant. Mamle comforted her and told her about the spider Anansi. Thanks to her, Afi knows that Anansi travels everywhere. He is smarter than anyone else. And he weaves strings across the sea.

In the barn, Afi sits close to Mamle. Now that they are not tied up, Mamle is holding her. Afi lays her head in Mamle's lap. She stays silent, but tears roll down her cheeks. Mamle whispers in her ear: "What did I tell you, dear Afi? Look above your head!"

Afi doesn't want to open her eyes. She wants to pretend she doesn't exist and taste salty tears in her mouth. It's dark in the barn too. You can hardly see anything. Just to please Mamle, she looks up for a moment.

Right above her head, a black spider hangs from a thread. The roof of the barn is high. Even for a spider, this isn't easy. But this spider dangles from its long thread and dances up and down in front of her face. Afi smiles through her tears. It's true, Anansi has come along with them.

To be continued



Take Me Home

The Story of Afi, a Girl from Africa — 2



Afi stays with Mamle in the barn for seven days. And every day, she cries. She cries without making a sound. Because if she does, the men get angry.

She has caught the spider Anansi, when it came down above her head, and keeps it gently in the palm of her hand. She takes good care of it. She talks to it as if it were a friend. She strokes its hairy back softly and lets it walk on her arm. Holding Anansi makes Afi feel a little less alone. When she is not playing with Anansi, she puts her food bowl over the spider. So Anansi won't wander off. "Because I have to follow his silk threads all the way back home," she tells Mamle.

All the women and children in the barn have one bowl to eat from. They got it on the ship. They eat their porridge from that bowl. They eat porridge every day. Always when the sun is at its highest. Then the door opens. The light from outside hurts their eyes. They hold their hands over their faces when they are allowed outside. It is their one free moment each day. A quick walk around the barn, then porridge. The guards keep a close watch and threaten them with their fire sticks and whips. They are only allowed outside because the men with red faces don't want Afi and the others to get sick.

"That would be a waste of money," they say to each other.

Afi is beginning to understand what the men mean. She learns fast and picks up a few words of their language. She understands that the shiny flat stones that men carry in leather bags are called *money*. They swap the shiny stones for what they want to have. They call this *betalen* or 'paying'. There are also men who pay with blue beads.

Afi and Mamle know that men will come to pay for them. That's how it went with other women and children. On the second day, twenty disappeared. They

were taken to another island, they said. On the third day, a man from the island came. He looked at all the women for a long time, then took three of them.

“But we will stay together, little princess,” says Mamle, “no matter what happens.”

On the sixth day, the door opens. It is not yet time for porridge. The men look into the dark room. They poke Afi’s arm with their fire stick.

“You! Come with us!”

Afi is so scared she feels like throwing up. She takes Anansi gently in her hands and walks outside. In the bright light, she sees only a mass of dark curls, without a face. But she knows immediately who it is. It is the young man who looked at her on the beach.

Afi’s eyes stare out to sea. *Don’t look into their eyes.* That’s what the women in the barn say. She feels Anansi’s legs in her hands.

The young man starts talking in a strange language. She doesn’t understand a single word.

Remi knows that the girl cannot understand him. But the words pour out of his mouth. “I saw you when you got off the boat,” he says. He speaks calmly and softly. “You saw me too. The woman walking next to you is not your mother. I was your age when I came here. I was alone. Just like you.”

He sees that the girl takes a glance at him. Remi points to his chest. “Me Remi,” he says. Then he points to her. *Et toi?* And you?

“Afi,” the girl whispers.

“Afi,” says Remi. “I know you can’t understand me. And you don’t know anything about me.” The words keep coming. “But eleven years ago, I was there,” he points to the fort, “and I almost died. Together with my best friend. A boat came just in time. I lived on Saint-Christophe for years. In Jerome’s house. I saved money. Then I heard that Dutch people had come to Sint Eustatius. I rented a piece of land from them. I built a house there.”

Remi takes a deep breath. He feels his heart thumping in his throat. “Afi, I want to cultivate that land. But I have no help and no money left. Maybe I can buy you? You’re still small. And you’re a girl. You don’t have to be afraid. I won’t hurt you.” Now he has finished speaking. He looks questioningly at Afi.

Afi says nothing. The boy points at her. And then at himself. He turns around and points to the mountain behind him.

He wants me to say something, Afi thinks. She concentrates on Anansi in the palm of her hand. She understands what he means. He is going to buy her. *He is pretending to be nice. He is acting like he is different from the others.*

The boy points at her again, then at himself, and spreads his hands. As if he wants to ask her: what do you want?

Afi feels an unknown force flowing into her body. She stands tall and says loudly and clearly in her own language: “Take me home.”

She sees the boy does not understand her. So, she says the words she learned from the men in Elmina: “Casa — House — Home.”

She wants a house! Remi thinks. He nods happily. “Yes! *J’ai une petite maison.* I have a little house, Afi. I’ll be back tomorrow. Then I’ll take you with me and you can see my house.”



That night in the barn, Afi snuggles close to Mamle. “Mamle, we really have to find Anansi’s threads tonight. I have to go home.”

Mamle doesn’t answer. Afi whispers again, “I have to find his silky strings, Mamle. And so do you.”

Then Mamle finally speaks. “Afi, I have to tell you something. I’m sorry. I think you’re going to cry. Will you promise me you’ll cry quietly?”

“What is it, Mamle?”

“I know how much you love Anansi. And Anansi loves you too. But listen. Remember when I told you that we are the only ones that can see Anansi’s threads?”

Afi nods.

“Do you know why that is? It’s because Anansi weaves his threads into your heart. Into your heart and into your head.” Mamle takes a deep breath. “Anansi’s threads don’t really take you home, Afi. They help you not to forget home. And they make sure home doesn’t forget you. Do you understand?”

“No! Mamle! No!” Afi screams loudly.

“SSSSST,” the other women hiss. They are afraid of the men and their whips.

“Mamle! You promised!” Afi doesn’t just scream. She kicks her feet and waves her arms wildly. She throws the bowl across the room and sees the spider run away. Afi bangs her head against the ground in despair.

Mamle kneels beside her and gently covers Afi’s mouth with her hands. “Hush, dear Afi. Hush,” she says. “Sshhhhhh.” She holds Afi tightly and rocks her back and forth. At first, Mamle needs all her strength because Afi is so angry. She wants to hurt not only herself but Mamle too. But then Afi lets herself be comforted. She sinks into Mamle’s arms and cries silently.

“I didn’t lie to you,” Mamle whispers. “It’s true. Anansi has woven a web in your heart and head. Your father, mother and sisters are tied there forever.”

“But Mamle, I don’t want threads in my heart. I want Dad and Mom here with me. I don’t want sisters in my head. I want them to be here.”

“I know, Afi. I know. But these strings in your head and heart are very strong. They can’t be broken. Anansi has tied us two together forever. So that you can be strong, dear Afi. It’s difficult, I know. But you have no choice. We must be like Anansi, Afi. Smarter than the rest. Smarter than the men with red heads. And then hold on to the threads.”

Afi doesn’t answer Mamle. She wants to fall down and never get up again, to hide and never be found. But she knows Mamle is right. She’s a grown-up now. She must pick up the pieces and get on with her life.

The next day, Remi comes to the barn. He has brought clothes for Afi. There is also a girl with him. She is slightly older than Afi. Her skin is not like that of

the men with red heads, but it is not like Afi’s either. The girl points to herself.

“Pearl,” she says. And then she points to Afi.

“Afi,” says Afi.



Time and place: Statia, 500 BC-1640

The Saladoid Girl and Bowls of Clay

500 BC-800 AD

The Saladoid people were the first inhabitants of Sint Eustatius. They lived in large round houses called malocas. The Saladoids settled on Statia long before Europeans and Africans arrived. This was discovered by Jan Peter de Josselin de Jong, a Dutch archaeologist from Leiden. In 1923 he carried out excavations near the airport, where he found pottery shards, food remains, and bones. These discoveries showed that the island's first inhabitants made their own bowls and pots from clay. These bowls were beautifully decorated and could withstand high temperatures.

Remi and the French Fort

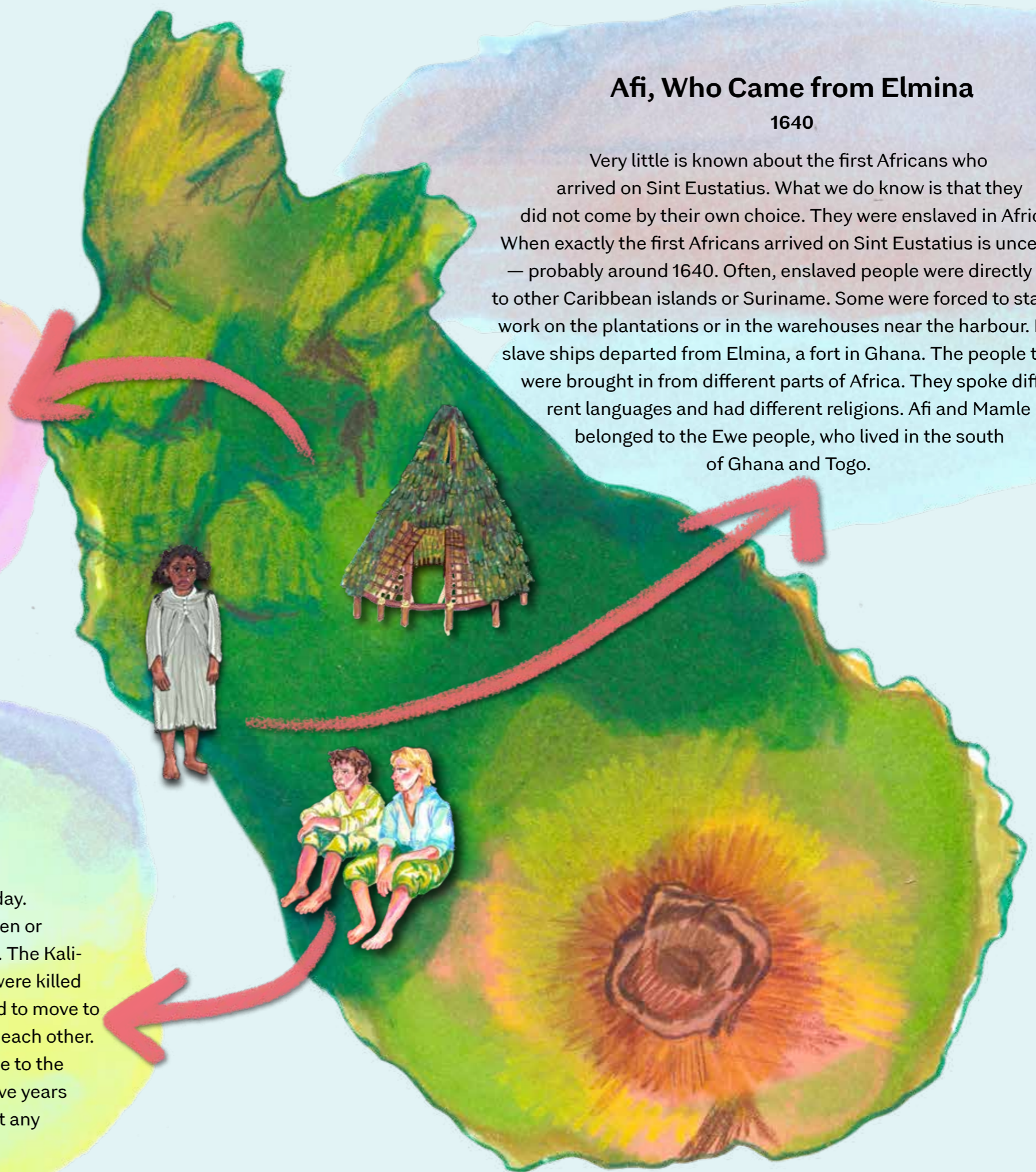
1629

The first Europeans on Sint Eustatius were not Dutch, but French. They built a wooden fort on the location where Fort Oranje stands today. The French fort no longer exists. We don't know exactly when or why the French left, but we do know they came from Saint Kitts. The Kalinago were native inhabitants of Saint Kitts. Almost all of them were killed by English and French colonists in 1626. The survivors were forced to move to Dominica and Anguilla. After this, the English and French fought each other. The English and French brought over young men from Europe to the Caribbean. They promised them a small piece of land after five years of labour. The young men had to work hard and did not get any wages. If they lived, they could get a piece of land. This is called indentured labour.

Afi, Who Came from Elmina

1640

Very little is known about the first Africans who arrived on Sint Eustatius. What we do know is that they did not come by their own choice. They were enslaved in Africa. When exactly the first Africans arrived on Sint Eustatius is uncertain — probably around 1640. Often, enslaved people were directly sold to other Caribbean islands or Suriname. Some were forced to stay and work on the plantations or in the warehouses near the harbour. Many slave ships departed from Elmina, a fort in Ghana. The people there were brought in from different parts of Africa. They spoke different languages and had different religions. Afi and Mamle belonged to the Ewe people, who lived in the south of Ghana and Togo.



Little Scout

The Story of Jacob from Lynch Plantation — 1



A strange ship sails into the harbour, just as I am standing on the quay looking out. Little Scout, that's me. *What strange kind of flag does that ship have?* I've never seen it before. I squint my eyes against the sun. It looks like an English flag, but I see red and white stripes. The English flag doesn't have those.

Should I go to Fort Oranje? Maybe the Commander has already seen the ship and needs my help. The Commander came up with my nickname, Little Scout. Sometimes he wants to know what I see. Then I'm allowed inside the fort and to look through his spyglass at the ships on the sea.

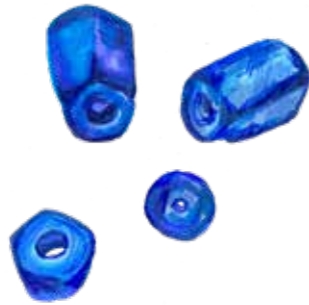
"Everyone has a talent," my mother always says. My talent is my eyes. I see every stain on the tablecloth, the smallest hummingbird in the tallest tree, and I spot a ship at sea before anyone else. When I tell the Commander what I see, he often gives me something tasty: a johnnycake, banana fritters, or a piece of candy. Sometimes he gives me a coin. Once I even got a blue bead! That made me so happy! Because everyone knows blue beads bring good luck.

The ship is slowly getting closer. I run to Fort Oranje as fast as I can. I run through the busy street of the lower town to the Slave Path. I almost trip over four piglets running loose in the street.

"Mr. Jackson, watch out for those pigs!" I shout to the vendor.

"You have such good eyesight, don't you? Watch out yourself!" Mr. Jackson shouts back. He is a wealthy merchant from Saint Kitts. Sometimes I do odd jobs for him. During the day, he sells pigs, cattle, and sugar cane. But at night, when no one is looking, he sells gunpowder — powder for firing cannons. Mr. Jackson's warehouse is full of it.

The street along the bay is narrow and always crowded with people. Ships come to Statia from all over the world. Around me, I hear English, Dutch, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Papiamentu, and other languages I don't know. The tall warehouses are full of coffee, cotton, tobacco, and sugar. And in front of the shops, merchants display their wares: silk dresses, Persian rugs, lace gloves, gold jewellery, rolls of ship's rope, copper pots and pans, leather boots, jugs of wine, beer or gin, wooden barrels of rum. And everyone, absolutely everyone on the street, smokes a pipe. Except me. I'm only eleven.



Out of breath, I arrive at the Slave Path. I climb the steep path to the upper town. It is quiet there. This is where the rich people live, the people in power. The largest house belongs to the Donckers family. It has two floors and a balcony. Next to it is the house of Governor De Graaff. That house is not small either. It is close to the fort. In front of the fort's gate, I see the Commander, Mr. Ravené. He looks around, searching. My cheeks feel hot with joy. He's looking for me! I wave at him and call out: "Mr. Ravené!"

He waves back and holds the gate open for me. "Little Scout! There you are."

My real name is Jacob. I live with my mother on Lynch Plantation. She has to work on the land there. She ain't free. I don't know who my father is. My mother says it doesn't matter. But because of my father, I am free, she says. I don't understand exactly how that's possible, but I am the only one on Lynch Plantation who is free. When I grow up and become rich, I will buy my mother's freedom too. That is my dream.

The fort's gate slams shut with a loud bang. I follow the Commander across the courtyard. He lifts me up onto the wall and gives me his spyglass.

"Do you want me to look at the ship with the strange flag?" I ask.

"You've already seen it, Little Scout!" the Commander says.

I take the spyglass and look at the ship, which I see clearly now. I spell out the letters of the name on the bow of the ship: "A, N, D, R, E, W..." Mr. Ravené has taught me a little bit of reading. "D, O, R, I, A. The ship is called *Andrew Doria*."

"I don't know that ship," the Commander says. He rubs his forehead. "And what about the flag?"

"I see the English flag. In the left corner. But I also see white and red stripes."

"How many stripes do you count, Little Scout?" the Commander asks.

"Maybe thirteen."

The Commander looks at me. "Oh dear, thirteen stripes," he mutters. "This is a problem, Little Scout. This is a problem."

"I also see cannons, sir."

"Cannons? Is it a warship?"

"It looks like a normal ship. But I also see cannons. They seem to be loading one right now."

"And Little Scout, can you see..."

BAM..!

I can't hear the Commander because of the enormous bang. It hurts our ears. *Andrew Doria* has fired the cannon! It's not a real shot, but a salute. When a ship fires a salute, the Commander must respond. He also has to fire shots. There are rules for all of this.

Commander Ravené rubs his forehead again and talks to himself. "Strange! Very strange! Where does this ship come from? Is it a warship or not? How should we greet it?"

"They're about to fire a second shot, Commander," I say.

He doesn't listen. "Little Scout, we have to tell the Governor about this. Come with me. You can tell him what you saw."

Another loud bang echoes across the bay: another salute. Ravené turns around. He walks across the courtyard to the gate. I have to run to keep up with him. To the Governor's House! I've never been there before. What will it look like?

To be continued



Visiting the Governor

The Story of Jacob from Lynch Plantation — 2

I run after Mr. Ravené. He wants to speak to Governor De Graaff about the strange ship in the harbour, the *Andrew Doria*. The ship fires a salute. BAM..! And another one: BAM..!

The Commander shakes his head. Sweat runs down his face. The Governor's House is close to the fort. Mr. Ravené does not wait at the door. He simply walks into the dining room. Governor De Graaff has just gotten out of bed. He is sitting with his wife at a large breakfast table. There is a beautiful white tablecloth on the table. On it is a large bowl of fresh fruit. I see jam, corn porridge, salted fish, freshly baked bread, and a delicious sweet potato pie. The Governor and his wife are eating from porcelain plates, with silver knives and forks. They are drinking tamarind juice from crystal glasses. I wish I could have a breakfast like that!

I have heard many stories about Governor De Graaff. He only thinks of himself. Everyone has to do what he wants. Whether you are black or white. Or light-skinned, like me. Everyone on Statia has to listen to the Governor! Because he has money and power. Those who don't listen are fined. The other day, we laughed so much. The butcher was fined because he refused to give the Governor's wife a discount. So silly!

The Governor is not happy when the Commander walks in. He looks sour. "Ravené? What are you doing here? It's still early. I'm having breakfast."

BOOM. Another salute. The crystal glasses clink on the table.

"Excuse me, Governor. There's a ship in the bay flying an unknown flag. It's firing salutes."

"I thought I heard something," says the Governor. He takes a piece of cake. "Where is it from? What kind of ship is it?"

"That's the problem, Governor. We don't know."

The Governor takes a bite of his cake. He raises his eyebrows. "*We don't know? We don't know?* How come? A ship is a ship. A flag is a flag." There is impatience in his voice.

"I understand your question, Governor, I understand your question," the commander says. He continues, "I brought this boy with me. He has good eyesight. He can tell us what he saw." Ravené pushes me and takes a step back. Everyone is looking at me. My face feels hot.

"Mr. Governor..." My voice trembles. I turn my head and look at the Commander. He gives me a wink. I take a deep breath and say, "The ship is called *Andrew Doria*. It looks like a normal ship. But it also has cannons. The flag resembles the English flag. But there are differences. I see a small English flag in the corner and also thirteen white and red stripes."



"Thirteen stripes? Did he say *thirteen stripes?*" The Governor isn't looking at me, but at the Commander.

"Yes, Governor," Ravené says.

"What do you think about this ship?" the Governor asks.

"I don't know, Governor. We've never seen this flag before. It could be a ship from America. And it has cannons on board. Now that there is war between England and the thirteen American states... Now we are caught in the middle."

BAM! Another salute.

The Governor nearly chokes on his cake because of the bang. He is silent for a moment. Then he says: "Follow the rules. Greet that ship as a cargo ship from a friendly country. Respond with two fewer shots than the ship fires."

"At your command, Governor." Ravené and I want to leave the dining room. But then the Governor's wife asks: "Is this wise, Johannes?"

The Commander stops abruptly. The Governor chokes on his cake. Women don't ever interrupt when men are talking about work. The Governor's face turns red. "Judith! Stay out of this!"

The Governor's wife continues talking. She says: "Johannes De Graaff, this boy sees a flag with *thirteen* stripes. There are *thirteen* rebellious states in America. Maybe this is their flag? You also know that there is a war between those *thirteen* American states and England. If you officially greet the ship, it means that you recognize those thirteen states as a country. You recognize their *independence*. No country in the world has done this yet, Johannes! No one! Do you want this? Do you want to be the first? Statia could get into a lot of trouble! England will be angry. And Holland too. You already have a lot of problems with that gunpowder smuggling. Do you want to take that risk?"

It is dead silent in the dining room.

"Judith, dear, listen..." The Governor tries to sound friendly. "Everyone wants the Golden Rock to remain the Golden Rock. We also must think about trade, you understand?" He doesn't wait for her answer. "We're not doing anything wrong. We're not greeting the ship as *a warship*. We're greeting it as *a normal ship*. There's no problem, Judith! And that's the end of it!" The Governor wipes the crumbs from his mouth with a napkin. He pours himself a cup of coffee and calls out: "Ravené, invite the captain of the *Andrew Doria*. Have him come to my house tonight." He says to his wife, "Judith, we're going to make this visit a big celebration."

Mrs. De Graaff says nothing more. But does she roll her eyes for a moment?

As we stand in the street, we hear another salute. And before we enter the fort, two more. In total, the *Andrew Doria* fires thirteen shots. The Commander orders eleven shots to be fired from the fort. Then he sends his soldiers to the harbour. They invite the captain to visit the Governor.

Mr. Ravené clenches his teeth. "Little Scout," he says quietly to me. "I'm worried. What the Governor is doing is dangerous. Do you understand that?"

I nod. But I don't really get it.

The Commander explains it to me again. "Mrs. De Graaff is right. The *Andrew Doria* may be a warship. A warship from America. You counted thirteen stripes on the flag. And there are thirteen American states at war with England.

We have officially greeted the ship. And the Governor is going to throw a party for the captain. Little Scout, if the English hear about this... I don't know what will happen.

"But why is the Governor doing this, then, Mr. Ravené?"

"I don't know. I don't know. Maybe it's trade? Americans buy weapons and gunpowder here. It's forbidden, but it happens."

I know what Mr. Ravené means. Everybody knows what happens on Statia at night. Gunpowder is sold secretly. It's not allowed, but you can make loads of money with it.

Ravené takes his handkerchief out of his pocket. He wipes the sweat from his forehead.

"I don't know, Little Scout. I expect trouble!" He takes a coin out of his other hand. He gives it to me. "You helped me a lot today. Give this to your mother. Tell her I'll come visit her soon."

I put the florin in my pocket. A coin for my piggy bank. A coin for my dream. I run all the way home.

Warships in the Bay

The Story of Simha Swaan, the Daughter of Aaron Lopez — 1



“Swaan with no clothes, everyone knows!” Gideon and his friends shout. Swaan pretends not to hear the boys. But she hears everything. Why are they doing this? Why do they always tease her? Because she has no brothers or sisters to fight for her? Or because her hair is blonde, and not brown or black, like the hair of the other kids in the synagogue? Are they jealous of her father’s big shop? Simha Swaan doesn’t know.

Don’t react. Don’t run. Don’t complain to the grown-ups. That’s what Jacob, who works for her father, taught her. “Don’t give them anything, Miss Swaan!” he says, “then they’ll stop.” He also says: “Always stand up straight!” So when Gideon runs after Swaan and throws stones at her, she pulls her shoulders back and walks steady to her father’s shop. The door sticks, she has to push hard. Then she hears the little doorbell. She can breathe again. Is Jacob there?

Jacob is already sixteen. Her father doesn’t allow her to talk to him. But when her father isn’t there, she does it anyway. She tells Jacob about the nasty boys at school. And they talk about hummingbirds in the garden, and about the kittens at Jacob’s mother’s house on Lynch Plantation.

But Jacob isn’t there today.

Swaan kisses her father and crawls into her corner of the store. She pulls her legs up under her skirts and watches her Papai. How he talks on and on and on. Aaron Lopez talks all day long. He talks to customers, to traders, to the island officials, the men from the synagogue, the soldiers from the Company.

And when no one is around, he talks to himself. When he talks, his hands move in all directions.

Today he talks about the hurricane of five months ago. He thinks the island council is working too slowly. They have repaired almost none of the damage. And so much was destroyed! They had never had a storm like that on the island before. When it was over, nothing was where it used to be.

Swaan would rather not think about that storm anymore, because then Sarah comes into her head. And into her dreams, and then she wants to play with Sarah when she wakes up. But during the storm, the roof flew off Sarah’s house, and Swaan doesn’t want to think about what happened next. It’s better if Sarah stays out of her head, much better.

She gets up and starts sweeping.

An hour later, Papai finally shuts up. He sits down at the wooden table and picks up his quill pen and his thick book. How much did he earn today? How many kilos of sugar did he sell? What needs to be ordered? How many liters of rum? How much tobacco is left? When he has finished counting, the sun is almost down. And then comes the moment Swaan loves so much. Her father takes the key, opens the door wide, and makes a deep bow to her.

Swaan sticks her nose in the air and walks out of the shop. In a posh voice, she says: “Will you lock the door, Aaron?”

And her father says, “As you wish, Mrs. Lopez, as you wish.” He bows again. And then they laugh together, Swaan and Papai. Arm in arm, they walk home.

That evening, Swaan asks at the dinner table, “Can I come to the store with you again tomorrow, Papai? I can help you count.”

He nods. It’s okay! “Be ready when I come out of shul,” her father says. He means the synagogue. He goes there almost every day for morning prayers.

“Tabitha baked cornbread today,” says her mother. “You can take it with you tomorrow for lunch.”

The next day, Jacob is in the store. Swaan is so happy she wants to dance. But instead, she nods to Jacob. When her father isn’t looking, Jacob winks at her. Swaan quickly looks the other way. In the afternoon, her father goes into the room behind the shop to talk to Mr. Downing Jennings. He is a tobacco

merchant and one of the richest men in Statia. He leaves the cornbread on the table. “Swaan dear, will you help yourself to lunch?” he asks.

Swaan takes a piece of bread and scoops water from the barrel. She walks outside. There is a bench at the back of the shop. You can’t see it from the street. You look out over the sea. What she hopes for happens. Jacob comes and sits next to her.

“Would you like some bread from Tabitha?” she asks.

“Delicious!” says Jacob. “Thank you, Miss Swaan.”

Together they eat the bread and look out over the sea. The bay is full of ships. There are at least a hundred of them. Jacob tells her about the time he saw the strange ship with the flag, when Mr. Ravené took him to the Governor’s House.

“I was your age then, Miss. I was just a *Little Scout*. Oh, it was all so exciting! I’ll never forget that breakfast at the Governor’s House.”

Swaan remembers it too: “Everyone was talking about it, about those gun salutes. Papai came home in the middle of the day. He kept shouting, ‘The Governor has gone mad!’” She moves her hands just like her father does. Jacob has to laugh. Swaan feels very warm again.

Jacob says: “Mr. Ravené was almost dying of nerves. Every day he said he was afraid of war.”

“Papai was also afraid of war,” Swaan says. “He still is.”

“I understand your Papai. In Holland, they were angry too. De Graaff had to come to Amsterdam to explain what he had done.” Jacob starts laughing again. “But then the Governor said he had a stomachache.”

Swaan laughs along with him. “Yes, and that it’s too cold in Holland in the winter.”

“And that his child had a toothache.”

“He didn’t go to Holland until two years later!” says Swaan. “Papai hoped they would fire him. He hates the Governor. But he ended up coming back.”

“For us, it doesn’t matter who’s in charge,” Jacob says. “For us, they’re all equally bad.” His eyes wander across the sea. “Mr. Ravené was the only one who was always nice to me. Mr. Ravené and you, Miss Swaan.”

Swaan fans herself a little fresh air with her hand.

They eat Tabitha’s bread in silence and look at the sea. The sun is almost at its highest point. Small dots appear on the horizon. Slowly, they grow bigger.

Suddenly Jacob stands up. He bends his head forward. Swaan sees him staring. “Miss Swaan, look! Those dots. What kind of ships are they?”

Swaan squints her eyes. All she can see are dots.

“Aren’t those warships?”

Suddenly, Swaan feels a chill running down her spine. Her throat feels dry. If they are warships, there are so many!

“Get your father, Miss. He must see this too.”



Swaan runs to the shop. The bell rings out loudly. She runs to the back room and bangs on the door. “Papa, come and look! We see warships in the bay!” she shouts.

Immediately, her father rushes outside. Swaan sees that he is shocked. Mr. Jennings also looks concerned. They walk to the bench behind the shop. Jacob is right. A large fleet is sailing into the bay. They count sixteen warships. English flags are flying from the masts. And there is only one Dutch warship in the bay. It is called *Mars*.

“Mars!” her father snorts. “That ship is named after the God of War! But the English are far too strong.”

Mars fires just a single shot. Immediately the Dutch ship comes under heavy fire from the English warships, but is not really hit. Then there is silence. People gather on the quay to watch what’s happening.

“What’s going on?” they ask. They look worried. Everyone knows that there are not enough cannons on Sint Eustatius, not enough soldiers, and not enough warships.

They all see a rowboat full of English soldiers approaching the quay. The soldiers climb out of the boat and slowly walk up the steep path to Fort Oranje in their thick uniforms.

“I think the Governor will be very polite this time,” says Jacob. “I’m sure he’s not as talkative as he was five years ago.”

The soldiers enter the fort. Nothing happens for half an hour. The street is eerily quiet. But then they look up... On the fort, the Dutch flag is lowered along the flagpole.

“Ohhhhhh.” All the people on the quay make the same sound. Then the English flag is raised. Swaan’s Papa and Mr. Jennings whisper to each other. Papa moves his hands even more than usual. “What’s going to happen? What should we do?”

Mr. Jennings, who is English, doesn’t seem too worried, “I supplied goods to them last year,” he says. “I gave them a good price. I’m sure I can arrange something. Do you sell gunpowder to the Americans, Lopez?”

Swaan’s father doesn’t answer. He says, “We’ve had some golden years, Jennings. Except for the hurricane. But otherwise, golden years. We’ll see what

happens now.” He walks into the store and looks at his merchandise. “Yes, yes, yes, golden years,” he mutters. He takes a handkerchief from his pants and wipes his hands.

“Jacob, drag as much as you can to the basement. Cover it with blankets. Lock the door and bring me the key.” He takes his account books under his arm. And then he says, as if this were just a normal day: “Mrs. Lopez, give me your arm. We must go! They’re waiting for us at home.”

To be continued

Proclamations

The Story of Simha Swaan, the Daughter of Aaron Lopez — 2

Swaan's mother is waiting on the porch. She hugs Swaan tightly. "Sweetheart! There you are! Oh, I was so worried about you."

It has been a long time since her mother hugged her. Swaan has almost forgotten how it feels. She presses herself against her mother. But Mom quickly lets her go. She strokes her father's beard with her hands. "Thank God, you're here too, Aaron Lopez."

"That's right, it's me, the one and only Aaron Lopez, your faithful husband!"

"This is no time for jokes, Aaron. Tell me what happened today." She walks ahead of him and opens the door to the dining room. "Come on, come on, Tabitha has food ready."

Swaan is not allowed to come in. "Your mother and I are eating together tonight, Swaantje," her father says.

"There's food for you in the kitchen," her mother says. "Go to bed right after dinner. Forget about today. Maybe things will be better tomorrow."

As Swaan walks down the hall after dinner, she hears her parents through the door. She can't make out what they're saying. Her father is grumbling and her mother is whispering. Then she hears her mother's high-pitched voice: "*No, Aaron! No!*"

Swaan walks up the wooden stairs to her



room. She lies down on her bed fully clothed. Suddenly she feels really tired. But she doesn't want to sleep. Because Jacob is coming to bring the key to the shop later.

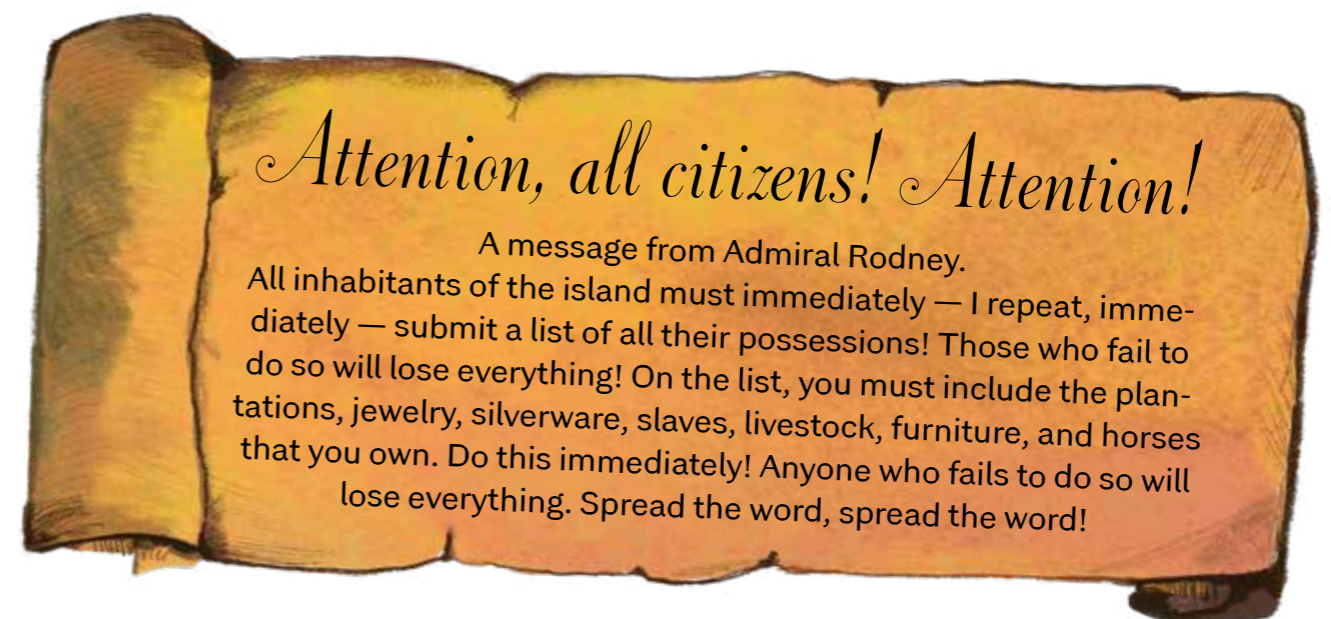
She gets up to look out of the window. It is getting dark. From her window she can see the synagogue, and behind it the sea. Gideon and his friends are standing in front of the synagogue talking. They must be talking about the war too. Because that's what it is, a war between the Dutch Republic and the English. People from the government had told Papai. This war had started months ago. But no one on Statia knew about it. *Now I'm 12 years old and I've lived through a big hurricane and a war*, Swaan thinks.

She lies down again and tries not to think about Saar. She thinks about Jacob instead. She really must stay awake. Should she wait for him on the porch?

The next morning, her mother says: "You were sleeping so soundly, still in your clothes. I decided to leave you alone."

It is quiet in the house. Papai has gone to the store. Swaan is not allowed to go outside. "It's far too dangerous," her mother says. "Go and do some embroidery." Swaan doesn't feel like embroidering. War is boring. She misses the store and the bench on the beach at the store. She misses Jacob. She misses Sara. She almost misses Gideon and his friends. The boredom lasts for days. But on the third morning of the war, she wakes up to the sound of drums. At first it is far away, but it quickly gets closer.

Swaan runs downstairs. Six English soldiers march past the house. They stop at the corner. They paste a big piece of paper on the wall. One of them stands next to the poster and starts shouting:



They yell the message in English and in Dutch. Then they march on. At the next corner, Swaan hears them shouting again. This is how they spread their message throughout the city. Swaan watches them from the porch. Suddenly, she wants the war to be boring again. Her family owns almost everything the soldiers mention: silver, jewelry, servants, furniture, horses. Is Admiral Rodney going to take that all away? And what will happen then?

Her mother rushes onto the porch: "Swaan! Have you gone mad? What are you doing here? Get inside!"

Swaan walks past her mother into the house without saying a word. She curls up in her favorite corner of the living room. Tabitha and Mom sometimes forget she's there when she sits there. Even when Dad comes home, she keeps quiet.

"Rodney is smart," she hears her father say. "He raised the Dutch flag today. That way, no one can see that we are occupied. When a ship drops anchor, the English come and take everything. Easy money for Rodney."

"What should we do, Aaron? Can we stay here?"

"We have to wait, Rebekka, and trust in G-d."

"You're right. Whatever happens, we have each other," says Swaan's mother. She sits down next to her husband on the sofa and then... she kisses him on the mouth! Swaan wished she hadn't hidden in the room. Fortunately, she can sneak out of the room without them seeing her.

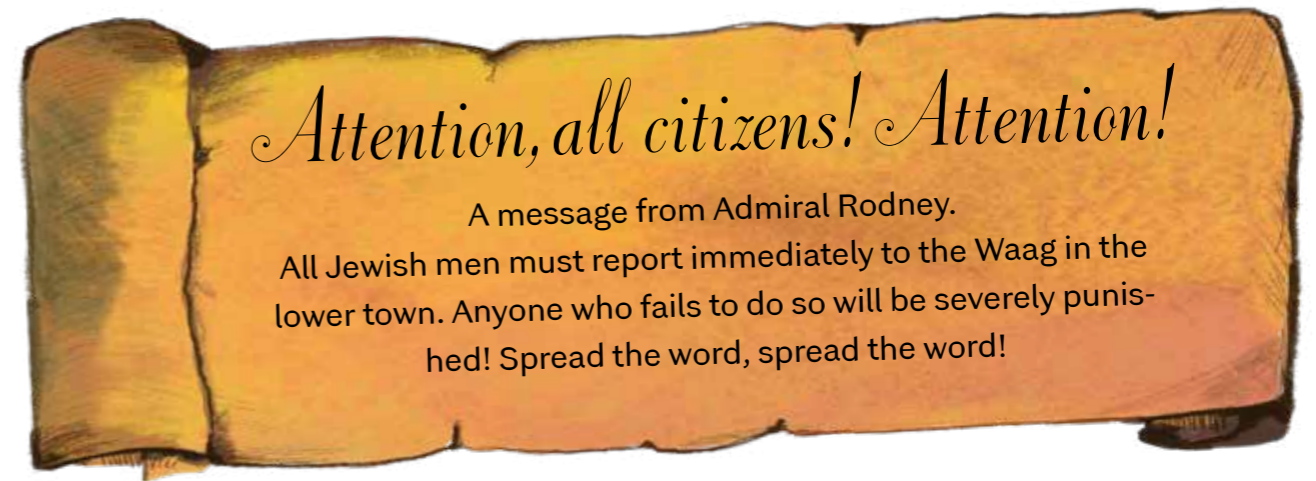
Every day, soldiers come to make new announcements. Papai has to keep handing in a new list. Those who don't will lose everything, say the soldiers. But if you do what they say, you'll lose everything too!

Soldiers search for goods all day long. They want the keys to every shop. They clean out all the warehouses. All the supplies disappear into English ships.

People say it's Rodney's fault. They grumble: "This isn't normal. Even in war-time, there should be limits." But everyone does what the English ask. Because if you protest, your business will be set on fire. The traders, the shopkeepers, the people in the administration, the plantation owners, they all lose all their money in a week. Every day, Swaan sees grown men crying in the street. She is still not allowed to go outside. And she hasn't seen Jacob anymore. Her father doesn't cry. He tries to stay cheerful. "It's just stuff, Rebekka!" he keeps saying.

But then soldiers arrive with a different message. And then everything

changes. It starts with them not walking through the whole town that day. The soldiers march straight to the synagogue and shout:



When Swaan hears this, she feels sick. This is no longer about possessions. This is about Papai. Why does he have to report? What are they going to do to him? Why do only Jews have to go to the Waag? Where is Papai now? She hasn't seen him today. Have they already caught him? She tries to swallow, but she can't. She wants to call her mother. No sound comes out of her mouth.

"Swaan, where are you?" Her mother has heard the announcement too. Her voice sounds different from usual.

"Here," Swaan squeaks.

"Listen, sweetheart. Don't worry about that message, all right? Everything will be fine." It seems as if Mom is talking to herself instead of to Swaan.

"Where's Papai?" Swaan asks.

"He'll be here soon. I expect him before dinner."

Her mother grabs Swaan. Just like she did when the war started. She looks past Swaan's shoulder toward the street. Swaan hears the voices of women coming into the street. They are calling out the names of their husbands.

"Oh look, there's your father, sweetheart!" says Swaan's mother. "Here he comes, together with Jacob."

To be continued



They're Coming for Papai

The Story of Simha Swaan, the Daughter of Aaron Lopez — 3



When Swaan sees Jacob, she almost forgets the war. How tall he is! And how straight he stands! She feels like dancing again. But there is no time to be happy. There is so much to do.

“We’re not safe anymore — not on the street, not in the store,” Papai says. “We will all stay inside now. And we must make sure the soldiers stay outside. Jacob is here to help us.”

Together with Jacob, he closes all the shutters. They hardly ever close them, only when there’s a storm. Jacob drags barrels of water and straw bags into the room. Swaan’s mother is busy too. But Swaan doesn’t know what she’s doing. She keeps running up and down the stairs. Tabitha is preparing food. No one pays any attention to Swaan. Only Jacob sometimes tugs her braids — not hard, just teasing.

When Swaan looks outside, she sees familiar fathers from the neighborhood passing by. They are carrying bags and wearing hats. They are looking at the ground. There is Gideon’s father, together with his uncle. Behind him walks Sarah’s father. No one says anything. Everyone must be going to the Waag, just like Admiral Rodney said, Swaan thinks. Only her father is staying here. *Is that okay?*

When the shutters are closed and the food is in the living room, Papai says: “Well, that’s all we can do for now. The soldiers already have all my stuff. There’s nothing left in the store. We’ll stay in our house and not let anyone in. They’ll leave us alone here.”



Swaan rests her cheek on her father’s arm. “But what if they still come, Papai? They say you’ll be punished if you don’t listen.”

“Simha Swaan, they won’t come! Nothing will happen to us.” Papai puts his hand on his heart. “I promise you.”

“Aaron...” says her mother, “Aaron...” She shakes her head.

“Rebekka, do I have to promise you too?”

Her mother says she chooses to place her trust in G-d, if she must. Even though Aaron Lopez is a good man.

“You’re right, Rebekka, Aaron Lopez is a good man. I don’t know anyone better.”

Her mother shakes her head. “Aaron Lopez, you and your jokes.” She taps his nose with her index finger, as if he were a little boy. And as if nothing were wrong.

Then Swaan’s parents drag the large cabinet from the living room into the hallway and place it in front of the door. Papai locks the dining room door. The dining room is now completely dark. They can’t see when night falls. They light candles. The five of them — Swaan, her parents, Tabitha, and Jacob — sit in the dining room all night. That’s never happened before.

Swaan doesn’t know what time it is when she hears the soldiers in the street. Papai hears them too. He puts his index finger to his mouth.

“Ssshhh,” he whispers, blowing out the candles. Swaan can no longer see her own hands. The soldiers come close to their house. They sound drunk. Swaan doesn’t want to hear what they are saying. But at the same time, she does want to hear it.

“Tomorrow we’ll come and get you all!”

Swaan listens to their footsteps fade away. Everyone has heard it. She is sure of that. And she is also sure that her father is not laughing now. He makes no jokes for the rest of the night.

The soldiers do what they said they would do. In the morning, they are back. They bang on the door. They shout: “Aaron Lopez! Come outside!”

In the dining room, everyone holds their breath. No one says anything or makes a sound.

“We know you are in there!” the soldiers shout. They keep banging on the door. First with their fists, then with something else. The wooden panels begin to creak.

And then Swaan’s father says: “Let’s give them some coffee. Otherwise, the door will be destroyed.” He lights a candle. “Gentlemen, hold on. Just a moment,” he says through the door. With Jacob, he pushes the cupboard aside. Swaan holds her mother’s hand. She squeezes it. Everything in her body feels scared. She wants to scream and scratch the wall with her fingernails. But she stands still and upright in the hallway, and she doesn’t make a sound.

When the door opens, the soldiers storm in. They don’t want coffee. They want Papai and grab him by his upper arms and drag him outside. His feet drag through the sand. Mama runs after him and gives him his leather bag. Gideon’s father had a similar bag. The bag contains his nightshirt and his tallit, his prayer shawl. It all happens so fast. Before they know it, Aaron Lopez is gone.

From that moment on, Swaan’s mother keeps saying: “Don’t worry, sweetheart. Your papa will be home before you know it,” she says. She rubs her hands together as she says this.

Jacob asks, “Should I go to the Waag, Mrs. Lopez?”

Her mother says, “Stay away from them, Jacob. You just help Tabitha in the kitchen. Swaan and I will go. We will protest. Because this is not normal. You’ll see, Aaron Lopez will be home in no time.”

At the end of the afternoon, Mama talks to the other Jewish women. They meet in the synagogue. Swaan is allowed to come along. Sarah’s mother has heard the men were treated roughly and cruelly. The soldiers were looking for gold, silver, or jewelry again. Everyone had to hand over their bag. They also had to take off their clothes. Because maybe they were hiding something.

Sarah’s mother says, “Rodney’s men ripped open the hems of all the coats and shirts. They found nothing, of course. But our men’s clothes are ruined — and so is their pride.”

Swaan thinks of her father’s best coat. Poor Papai. He always takes such good care of his clothes.

Gideon’s mother has heard that you can bring food. She is going to try

tomorrow. Swaan and her mother agree to go with her. When Swaan is in bed, she realizes she hasn’t thought about Jacob all day — or about Saar.

The next morning, there is no sun. The sky is dull and gray. Tabitha has made a fish stew with coconut for Papai. Gideon’s mother has corn porridge. Gideon isn’t going to the Waag himself. All the mothers are worried about their sons. Are they safe? They are not allowed on the street. Gideon stands in front of his house and raises his hand briefly. When he smiles, he doesn’t seem so bad, Swaan thinks.

The women walk down the path to the harbour. They are not the only ones. More women and girls are on their way with food. In front of the Waag are the same soldiers who took Papai from the house. No, no one is allowed in, they say. But in an hour, the men will come out. Then there will also be a proclamation.

That hour feels like the longest hour of Swaan’s life. It lasts longer than the entire hurricane. And that lasted a long time! But then the moment arrives. The men come out. They walk in single file. Their heads bowed, as if they are ashamed. They are all wearing hats. Except for Papai. Her mother forgot to give him one. Swaan squeezes her mother’s hand. She wants to run to her father. She wants to wrap her arms around his waist and rest her head on his belly.

“Don’t be scared, Papai, everything will be fine!” That’s what she wants to say. She wants her father to hug her and say, “Don’t worry, Mrs. Lopez. It’ll be okay.” And then laugh together.

But she can’t go to him. Because between her and Papai are English soldiers with guns. One of them reads a new proclamation:



What does *banished* mean? What does *confiscated* mean? Swaan looks sideways at her mother. Her face is pale as a sheet. “Mom, what’s going to happen? What are they saying?” She gets no answer. “Mom!” She tugs at her mother’s sleeve.

Only now does her mother hear what she is saying. She turns to Swaan and takes her by the shoulders. “Listen, Swaan. Do you see that ship? Your father is going to board that ship. Before he leaves, we have to make sure he gets his fish stew, do you understand? Maybe we can talk to him for a moment. Then we’ll tell him that everything will be all right! That everything will be all right, with us and with him. Do you understand?” Swaan nods.

The men are forced to walk in line by the soldiers. Her father looks around. She and her mother wave to him. They don’t dare call out. They can see in his eyes that he sees them. They push through the crowd to get closer to him. They are now very close. They can almost touch him. There is still a soldier between them.

“Tabitha made fish stew,” her mother says softly.

“Aaron Lopez could use that,” her father says.

They give him the food. The soldier pretends not to see anything.

“We’ll be fine, Papai,” says Swaan. “We’ll be fine. Don’t worry.”

“Good to hear, Mrs. Lopez,” her father says, his voice rough and tired. “Good to hear. I’m going to rest for a few days on Saint Kitts and hope to see you again soon.”

Then the soldier pushes Papai. “Come on, old Jew, keep walking!”

They can no longer walk with him. They can only watch him. Her father turns around one more time.

Swaan and her mother wave with all their strength.



Time and place: Statia, 1776-1790

Swaan and the Attack of Admiral Rodney

1781

In 1780, England went to war against the Netherlands, which was then called the Dutch Republic. Admiral Rodney was ordered to capture Sint Eustatius, which he did in 1781. The takeover was easy because the island was protected by very few soldiers. The English looted everything they could find: ships, warehouses, and shops. They also captured many Jewish residents and deported them to Saint Kitts. The conquest of Sint Eustatius made Rodney rich, but his luck didn't last long. Later in 1781, the French took over Statia and reclaimed everything Rodney had stolen. Three years later, the island was returned to the Dutch Republic. Trade picked up for a while, but after 1790, the island's fortunes declined rapidly. Fewer and fewer people lived there, and the Golden Rock era came to an end.

Jacob and Swaan and the Golden Rock

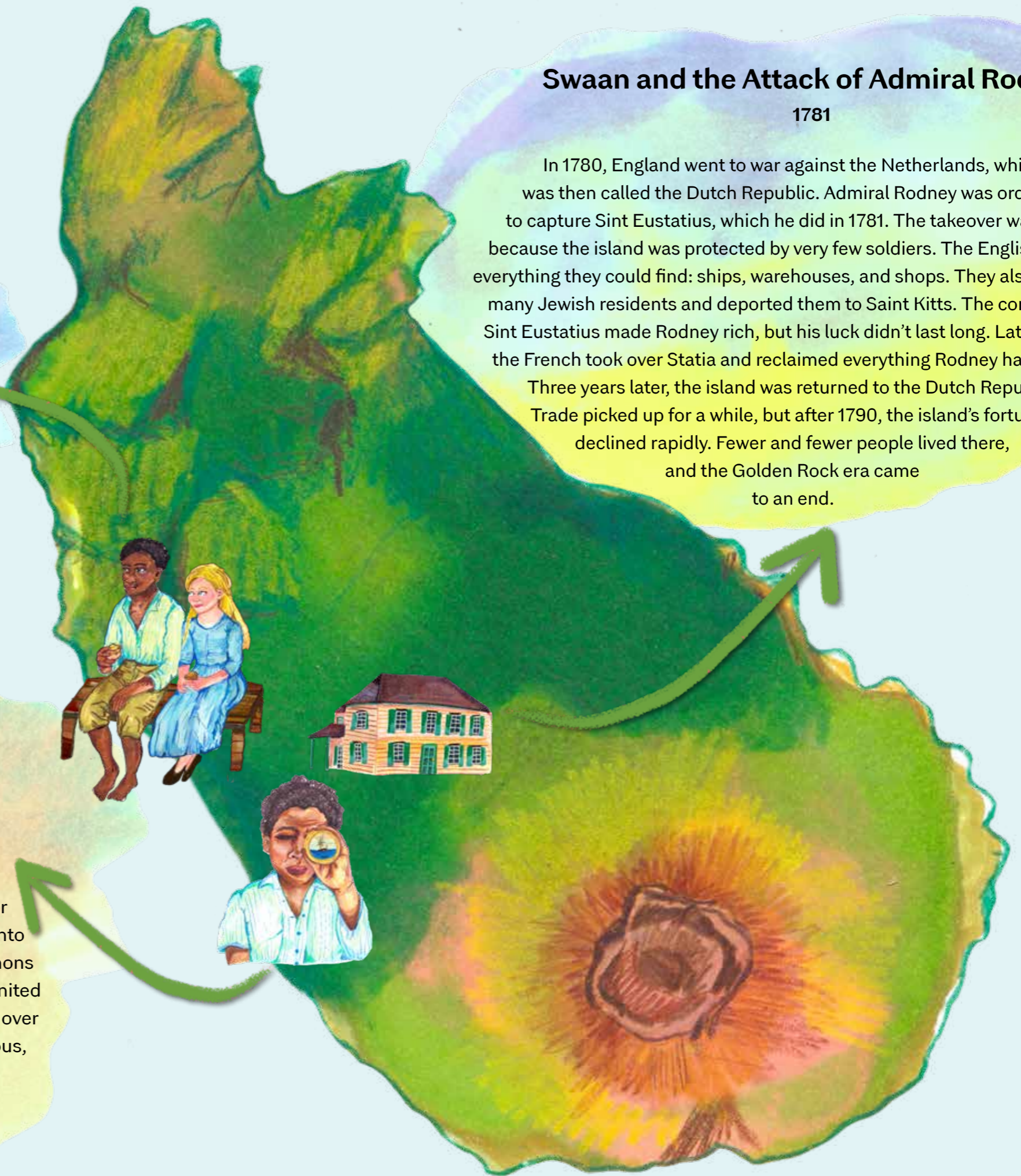
1776-1781

White people earned a lot of money on Sint Eustatius. They paid almost no taxes. That is why many people came to Statia to trade. Many Statian traders secretly sold weapons and gunpowder. On the plantations, tobacco, sugar, and cotton were grown. Because the island made European traders rich, it was called the Golden Rock. Around 1775, there were about 10,000 people living on Statia!

Jacob and the First Salute

16 november 1776

In the eighteenth century, America still was a part of England. But white Americans wanted to have their own country, free from the English king. That is why they started a war. They created an army and built their own ships. One of their warships was the Andrew Doria. On November 16, 1776, it sailed into the harbour of Sint Eustatius. From Fort Oranje, soldiers fired cannons to greet it. That was a special moment, as it was the first time the United States of America was recognized as a new, free country. People all over the world talked about this First Salute. But the English were furious, and difficult times began for Statia.



The Terrible Mr. Moore

The Story of Franky from Golden Rock Plantation — 1



“Franky!” Mr. Moore’s voice echoes through the house. He’s calling me again! I’m sitting on the porch and want to cover my ears.

I already know what he’s going to say: “Franky, go get some tobacco!” Now I have to walk to Oranjestad and ask people for chew. That’s the kind tobacco you chew — it turns your teeth yellow and stinks. It’s really disgusting. Mr. Moore chews it all day long.

“Franky, damn it, come here!” Mr. Moore yells. For an old man, he can still shout pretty well. But that’s about all he can do now. He’s half-blind, almost deaf, and walks with a limp. His face is full of wrinkles, and his back is bent. I don’t think he ever combs his hair. It looks like old rope. He always sits in the same chair by the window.

My mother says, “Go on, Franky. You know how he is.”

I get up and shuffle over to Mr. Moore’s house. It used to be the most beautiful house on the island. Mr. Moore also owned the most land — the Golden Rock Plantation belonged to him. Now the house looks terrible. The paint is peeling, the doors won’t close and faded curtains with holes flap through the open windows.

Mr. Moore still has plenty of money, but he’s stingy. And no one on the island wants to work for him anymore. Everyone hates him. That’s why his house is falling apart. Nothing grows on his land either — only a few scruffy sheep are left.

I walk up to his porch. The old man is in his usual spot by the window. He spits out a wad of tobacco — that nasty brown stuff nearly hits me. I jump out of the way just in time.

“Franky, go get me some tobacco.”

“Yes, Mr. Moore,” I say politely. But inside I’m thinking, *you mean old man*. I never say that out loud. But I often dream that I do. And even worse.

The house where Mom and I live belongs to Mr. Moore. That’s why we must do chores for him. I can’t say no — otherwise he’ll kick us out. And where would we live then?

I walk down the garden path. It’s almost half an hour from Golden Rock to town, and it’s so hot. Almost every day I have to beg for tobacco. I ask people who grow it in their gardens. I don’t get any money for it — sometimes they give me a bit out of pity. They like me, but they hate Mr. Moore.

My grandfather says, “Mr. Moore is a bad man.” He should know — he lived through the time of slavery. And everyone knows Mr. Moore was the worst of them all. That’s what all the old people say.



I follow my usual route to town. I know exactly who to ask. But today I’m out of luck. No one wants to give me any. After an hour, I’ve had enough. *Figure it out yourself, you stupid stinking Moore*, I think. *I’m going to Grandpa’s*.

I love Grandpa. He lives in my aunt’s house — my mother’s sister. She has lots of children, so I’ve got plenty of cousins to play with, and a Grandpa to go fishing with. I love being there. My aunt has a brick oven and bakes the most delicious cassava bread.

Everyone is happy to see me, especially my two little nieces. “Franky!!” they shout, grabbing my legs — one on each side — so I can hardly walk. I laugh so hard I almost fall over.

“Franky, we’re about to eat,” says my aunt. “Do you want some?”

“Yes, please! It smells so good!”

We sit together in the shade on the ground — my seven cousins and me. Grandpa rocks gently in his chair. My aunt gives each of us a warm piece of

cassava bread, and we pass around a cup of fresh milk, taking turns for a sip.

“No one gave me any chaw today,” I say.

Grandpa nods. “They did the right thing. That Moore is pure evil.”

Mom always says Grandpa is a gentle man. He’s never hit me or any of my cousins. He’s old, just like Mr. Moore, but his back is straight, and his teeth are white as pearls. He doesn’t chew tobacco. His eyes always sparkle when he talks — except when he talks about Mr. Moore. Then they go dull, and his voice changes. He doesn’t like talking about that time, but he tries. He wants us to know what it was like. Mr. Moore was his master once. “He tried to destroy us,” Grandpa says, “but he didn’t succeed! Because here we are, Franky — free as birds.” He puts his arm around me. “Free as birds.” Then he tickles me until I squeal.

My cousin Ralph says, “I heard Mr. Moore is having a grave dug in the cemetery.”

“I hope the devil comes to get him soon,” Grandpa grumbles.

“Do you know what they say?” Ralph goes on. “It’s a grave just for him. And old Moore fears being buried alive. That’s why he’s having a secret tunnel dug under his grave — so he can escape if he wakes up in his coffin!”

We all burst out laughing. What a ridiculous idea!

Grandpa sighs. “It’s awful to say this, but I wish they would indeed bury him alive. Serves him right, for what that man did...” And then he begins to tell.

To be continued



The Black Sheep of Hercules

The Story of Franky from Golden Rock Plantation – 2



My grandfather is sitting on the porch in his rocking chair. He takes a deep breath. “You have to understand. Back then...” When my grandfather says that, he means the time of slavery. “Back then, a master could beat his people as much and as often as he wanted. And I mean really beat them. With a stick or a whip. Many masters had someone special for that. A whipper. Imagine that — a man who owns a slave, just to beat his other slaves.” He pauses for a moment. “Franky, do you know the tamarind tree in front of your house?”

“Yes.”

“That was the tree Mr. Moore had us tied to.”

That tree is my favorite climbing tree. A chill runs down my back.

“Then he had Hercules beat the slaves,” Grandpa says. “Because Hercules was his whipper. Did you know that?”

We didn’t know that either. We all know Hercules — a big, strong, kind man who hardly ever talks. He often gives me tobacco.

“Hercules hated his job. Moore drank a lot back then too. And when he was drunk, he wanted someone to be beaten. He enjoyed watching that. But he couldn’t remember our names. ‘I have so many,’ he used to say. Can you imagine? So he always called the same name. It was always Jimmy. Jimmy was a sweetheart. He never hurt no one. ‘Hercules, get Jimmy,’ Moore would shout. And then poor Jimmy would get beaten up. Everyone felt sorry for him. But you were also glad you weren’t Jimmy, you know?”

We nod. We know.

“Slavery tore people apart, I tell you. It brought us together, but it also tore us

apart. Moore said to Hercules, ‘You beat him until I’ve smoked my two cigars.’ That man was pure evil.” Grandpa sighs deeply and is quiet for a moment.

“Hercules always tried to hit as gently as he could with his tamarind branch. But Moore noticed. One day he said, ‘Then we’ll beat you instead!’ And they tied Hercules to the tree. They whipped him until he bled. Those things really happened.”

Grandpa swallows hard. He doesn’t speak for a long time. “Do you know what the worst part was?” he finally asks.

We don’t know.

“I can hardly bring myself to tell you. Don’t let the little girls hear.”

I look at my two nieces. They’re no longer listening to Grandpa — they’re playing in the yard.

“Moore also had women beaten. Even if they were pregnant.” Grandpa looks away from us. I see tears in his eyes. “That bastard made someone dig a hole. Then the woman had to lie on the ground with her belly in the hole — so she could still be beaten, without hurting the baby. Because that baby was his property. It was worth money.”

We all fall silent, listening to Grandpa’s story. Who could do something so cruel?

“At least we’re free now, Grandpa,” I say — just to say something. “Free as birds.”

“You’re right, Franky,” Grandpa says. “You’re right. But you know, Franky, your grandfather is still angry. I’m angry because that man got a lot of money from the government when we were freed. And what did we get? Nothing. I’m also angry that you have to run errands for that man. Do you understand? That’s why I don’t talk about those days. Because it makes me angry. And I don’t want to be an angry man.”

“Grandpa, you’re not an angry man!” my cousin Arabella cries and throws her arms around his neck. “You’re the sweetest!”

“Yes, Grandpa, you’re the sweetest!” we all shout.

Grandpa blows his nose and gets up from his rocking chair. “Enough stories for today. I’m going to rest for a while. And Franky, you’d better head home. It’ll be dark soon.”

On the way home, I think about Grandpa’s story about that terrible Mr. Moore — and that I still have to work for him. If only we had our own house. I hope Mr. Moore is asleep when I get home. I don’t want to see him, not now. But from a distance, I see the old man is sitting by his window.

I also see something else. Someone is walking behind Mr. Moore’s house. There’s a path there that leads to the sheep pasture. Mr. Moore used to have lots of sheep. But there are fewer and fewer now, and no one knows why. A man is walking on the path, carrying a large black sheep on his shoulders. It’s Hercules.

From a distance, I hear Mr. Moore shouting, “Franky! Is that you?”

Hercules answers for me, “No, Mr. Moore, it’s me — Hercules.”

“Oh, is that you? I thought it was that boy. He’s coming to bring me some chaw.”

Hercules has seen me too. I shake my head — I don’t have any tobacco. Hercules gives me a wink.

“I don’t think that boy will be home before dark, sir. I don’t see him on the road.” It’s nice that Hercules is helping me. But what will happen when Mr. Moore sees the sheep on his shoulders?

Moore says, “It seems so dark out here. What do you have there?”

Hercules is now standing right in front of the window. He’s tall — with the sheep on his shoulders, he blocks the last bit of sunlight.





“I think it’s going to rain, sir. I see a big black cloud in front of the sun. The sky’s almost black!”

“Oh, it’s going to rain! That’s why it’s so dark. I thought I couldn’t see anything. But it’s a thundercloud!”

I can hardly stop myself from laughing. Mr. Moore thinks the sheep is a cloud!

“Exactly, sir — a big black thundercloud. You’d better close the windows before it rains,” says Hercules. “And go to bed.”

“You’re right, Hercules. That tobacco can wait until tomorrow.” Mr. Moore shuts the window. We hear him shuffle toward his bed.

Now we both burst out laughing.

“Franky, come see me tomorrow. You’ll get tobacco — and mutton,” Hercules says, “Good thing old Moore’s almost blind!”

And I say, “He’s probably lying in bed right now, counting sheep.”

We laugh even harder. Then Hercules turns around. “See you tomorrow, Franky.”

“See you tomorrow, Mr. Hercules.”

I watch him until he disappears into the darkness — carrying his black sheep cloud on his shoulders.

The Marble King

The Story of Clarence from Jeems



My pockets are bulging with marbles. They rattle with every step I take. I can't wait to get home. My home is in Jeems, my village near Zeelandia. There I will count how many marbles I have. Charles and I really beat the big boys. It was great fun. They even said, "Well played, Clarence."

Actually, there's nothing better than playing marbles. I'd rather not go to school. I'd rather not do chores for my mother. I'd rather play marbles all day. Playing marbles is the best thing there is. On Statia, we play marbles with marbles and cashew nuts. You make a circle with nuts and try to hit the nut with your marble. If you hit it, you can take it. We usually play in the small park in front of the Catholic church.

There are always old men in the park. They say they come to chat. But I think they come to watch us. They also played marbles when they were little. I think they regret that they can't play anymore. They always watch us. And they shout very loudly. They tell us what to do. Or what not to do. And they clap like crazy when you make a good throw.

All the old men know me. Because I'm so good. I'm actually a bit like the marble king of Statia. That's what the old men call me: Clarence Abram — the Marble King. When I walk by, they bow. Just for fun. And then they slap me hard on the back. And they laugh. I pretend I don't care. But it's kind of fun to be the marble king of Statia.

I prefer to play with Charles. He's good too. He's the viceroy of marbles in Statia. Together we challenge everyone. And we almost always win. We have a very good tactic. Charles defends. I attack. It's complicated to explain exactly how the game works, but it's really super exciting.

The new marbles in my pocket make me feel proud. I don't show it. But I see people on the street looking at me. "He's won a lot of marbles!" they must be thinking. "He's good at marbles." And they're probably also thinking, "Luckily, he's not a show-off." Because I always treat everyone the same. I don't act differently just because I happen to be the marble king. I'm a normal boy. Just like everyone else.

This morning, my mother gave me her small pan to take to school. "Go buy some salt at the store when you get out of school," she said. She didn't give me any money. "Just tell them to put it on my tab."

Shopping isn't bad. But when you don't have any money, it's not fun. We don't go shopping very often. We mainly buy sprats, those little fish. They're tasty and not expensive. Grandpa catches crabs on the Quill. We eat those too. Sometimes we go sprat fishing ourselves. At Cora Cora. I often help Grandpa. Fortunately, that means we hardly ever have to go to the store.

"A little salt for the pan," I say to Stella. The store is hers. I put the pan on the counter. "My mother will pay. Later." Fortunately, there is no one else in the store.

"That's fine, Clarence. Did you have fun playing marbles?" Stella has seen my marbles.

"Yes, it went pretty well today," I say. I get the salt and walk to the door.

"Have a nice day, Mrs. Stella."

"Bye, kid. Say hi to your Mom."

It's quite a long way from the shop to Jeems and it's hot today. But the marbles are rattling in my pocket.

I live with my mother and two little sisters. My father went with the whalers. They sometimes sail past here. In a big boat. All the way from America. Then they ask, "Who wants to come whale hunting?" Sometimes as many as twenty men go with them. First they go to America. And from America they go with the whaling boats. Some fathers send letters and money home. Mine doesn't. I think he's just busy. He hasn't caught a whale yet. When he catches a whale, he'll send the money. That's what my mother says. She has a wrinkle above her forehead when she says that. Recently, I heard her crying in bed at night. Our house has one room. So I can hear her at night. She thought I was asleep. But I heard her. I think she misses my father.

When I walk out of Oranjestad, I see a little boy at the fence of the last house. Little children are cute. This little boy especially. Why don't I know him? He smiles at me. I put down my pan and take a marble out of my pocket. I have so many of them anyway.



I roll the marble toward the boy. He toddles after it with his chubby bottom. I hope he doesn't eat the marble! I walk after him. The boy picks up the marble. I hold out my hand to him. He puts the marble in my hand. I roll the marble a little further. He runs after it again. Again, he gives me the marble back. The two of us run after my marble. I forget the time.

Next to the boy's house is another house. Actually, it's more of a shed. Suddenly, the door of the shed swings open. An old woman comes out. I've never seen her before. She looks very angry. She has a belt in her hand. I look around. I think: *who is this grandmother going to lick?* Stupid marble king. *Why didn't you run?* The old woman wants to hit *me*. By the time I realize this, it's already too late. The woman has a firm grip on my upper arm. I struggle, but she has me in a tight hold. She raises her arm. Immediately, I feel the belt on my back. It really hurts. She may be old, but she's still feisty.

"What did I do?" I shout, trying to break free. "Tell me, what did I do?"

The old woman says nothing as she licks me. My little friend has immediately run home. I can't see him anywhere. In fact, I can't see anything anymore. Except the leather of the belt. And the sun in the sky. With every blow to my back, I squeeze my eyes shut. I scream in pain and anger. "What did I do?"

It seems to take a long time before the old woman lets go of me. She takes my pan and puts it in my hands. Then she pushes me hard in the back. I almost fall over, pan and all.

"Now, go to your mother! That will teach you to skylack." She turns around and disappears into her shed.

I still have a long way to walk home. I squeeze my eyes shut against the sun and bite my lip. The marble king of Statia doesn't cry. He can take a few blows. I feel something burning in my throat. Just keep squeezing your eyes shut, I tell myself. And I walk criss-cross across the street to my house. Cross. Turn. Cross. Turn. Cross. I'm not crying.

When I tell my mother about this later, she'll go straight to that old woman. She'll say, "Hey! Don't touch my child! He didn't do anything."

Sometimes you get hit by someone on the island. But that's when you're messing around with your friends. But now I was alone. And I hadn't done anything.

I come home and put the pan on the porch. My mother comes outside.

“What’s wrong with you?”

Now I’m starting to cry after all. “I was just playing with that little boy. And then that woman came. With a belt. She hit me!” I’m crying really hard now.

My mother grabs me by the shoulder and turns me around. “Look, Clarence! Your school shirt. Completely ruined! How did that happen?”

“But...” It takes a while for the words to come out. I’m shaking as I talk. “I... didn’t... do anything.” Through my tears, I look at my mother. I want her to hold me. I want her to ask, “Where does that woman live?” And I want her to say, “I’m going to tell her! What was she thinking?” But she doesn’t.

She says: “How will you go to school tomorrow? Why are you so late? Clarence, you know very well that if someone hits you, you must have done something. People don’t hit for no reason. And now your shirt is ruined! What are we going to do? I have to punish you, Clarence!” She walks inside. I know what’s going to happen. And yet I can’t believe it.

The marble king of Statia has won today like he’s never won before. And what does he get as a reward? A licking! Not once, but twice! Should I run away? Out of the garden? To the sea? Stay there until it’s dark? And then hope that my mother doesn’t feel like hitting me anymore.

I am too slow in my thinking. My mother is out again already. She has tears in her eyes. But no belt in her hand. She looks at me. She covers her eyes with her hands. “Clarence, baby, I can’t hit you today. I’m tired. I won’t do it. I can’t.” She takes me by the shoulders and gently pulls me toward her. I lay my head in the hollow above her waist. And I cry. I don’t look up. But I can feel that she is crying too. We stand there in the garden in front of the house. While the sun sets.

“Come on,” my mother says. “Take off that shirt. I’ll turn on the lamp and see if I can get your shirt clean and whole. Then you can watch your sisters.”



Our favorite celebrations

The story of Charles from Oranjestad



Today I laughed so much at school with Clarence and Clasina. We had a celebration contest!

My name is Charles, but everyone calls me Skinny — you can guess why. I'm eleven, almost twelve. Clarence is my best friend. He's already twelve. He's the marble king of Statia. And I'm the viceroy. We play marbles together every day. I have lots of brothers and sisters. Four brothers and three sisters. I'm the oldest. My father works on our land every day. When I wake up, he's already gone. He doesn't come home until it's dark. We have cows, pigs, and donkeys. And we grow all kinds of things: cassava, sugar cane, sweet potatoes, avocados, peanuts, and much more.

My mother has a bakery. She gets up early. So do I, by the way. Because I deliver the bread every morning. It's always a rush. Maybe that's why I always walk so fast. Even when the sun is blazing. Clarence always says: "Slow down, Skinny. We're going to melt." Or, if he wants to tease me: "Are you running from the police or what?"

Sometimes I'm late anyway. No matter how fast I run. Then I have to deliver too many loaves of bread. This was the case today. I was late, just like Clarence. He had to help his grandfather on the farm. Because I was late, I wasn't allowed inside. I had to sit on the bench in front of the school. If you're lucky, you can go inside at ten o'clock. But sometimes you must wait outside until noon.

We were just sitting on the bench when Clasina came running up. She also goes to our school. She's ten and very funny. She's often late too. She just said, "I really did my best." Clasina also has to help a lot at home. Almost all the children at our school have work to do at home. It was actually quite cozy on our bench. It's almost Christmas. We're looking forward to it.

“Christmas is definitely the best celebration of all,” said Clarence.
Clasina disagreed: “Don’t talk nonsense, you. How do you know that?”
“One hundred percent, Christmas is the best,” Clarence said again.
I said, “It’s not a competition, is it? I love all the celebrations on Statia.”
But Clarence said, “Christmas is just the best. Everyone knows that.”
Clasina and I laughed at him. But quietly, so the teacher wouldn’t hear us
inside. Then Clarence had an idea: “Why don’t we have a celebration contest?”
“A celebration contest?”
“Everyone says what their favorite celebration is and why. And then we
vote.”

Clarence was very pleased with his plan. Clarence is always very pleased
with Clarence.

“Charlie, you go first. We’ll go alphabetically,” he said.
We had to think about that for a moment. All our names start with a C. But
Clarence was right.

“Okay,” I said, “I’ll start.”
Clarence said, “You have to speak really nice and stuff. It’s a competition.
And stand up straight. But keep your voice down!”

I stood up and whispered, “Ladies and gentlemen!”
Clasina and Clarence burst out laughing.

I continued. “Ladies and gentlemen. The best party on Statia is, of
course...” — I pretended to beat a drum. Clasina and Clarence thought that
was funny — “Queen’s Day! What could be better than Queen’s Day? I say:
Nothing! And why? Because of the donkey races, of course. The whole of
Statia goes crazy for the donkey races. This boy,” I said, patting myself on the
chest, “came second last year, together with his world-class donkey, Moto!”

“Second place!” said Clarence. “If you had let me ride Moto, we would’ve
come first!” He said to Clasina: “Skinny fell off three times, but Moto just kept
racing.”

I pretended not to hear Clarence and just kept talking. “There’s always lots
of good food on Queen’s Day. And who doesn’t want free money? When the
Governor throws money off the wall at the end of the day, this boy will be at the
front of the line! Three guesses who picked up five half-cent coins off the street
this year!” I patted myself on the chest again. “So that’s why, ladies and gentle-



men, you should vote for Queen’s Day. Long live the Queen. Hooray, hooray,
hooray!” I bowed and sat down. Clasina and Clarence pretended to applaud
seriously.

“Nice story, Skinny,” Clarence said.
Then it was Clasina’s turn. She stood up and said: “Noble gentlemen of this
bench!” That was such a good start. Clasina winked and continued. “The best
celebration on Statia is the First of July! Simple. The First of July picnic is the
best. Everyone participates. We dance the best dances. Our mothers’ white
dresses are the most beautiful dresses. The parade through the city with the big
drum is the best parade, and the flowers from the July Tree are the best flowers.
So it’s simple. But that’s not all. It’s also the best holiday because of *what* we
celebrate.”

Clasina now looked very serious. “My grandmother lived in those days. I some-
times listen to the old people when they talk about it.”

Clarence and I nodded. We listen to the old people too — our parents don’t
talk about it, but the old people do. Our parents never want to talk about it. But
the old people talk about it together.

“It was a really bad time. We should celebrate that it’s over. And we
shouldn’t forget it either. So that’s why, gentlemen, vote for the First of July
Celebration in honor of emancipation.” She sat down again. “That’s all.”

Clarence and I nodded. “Well said, Clasina,” I said. And Clarence said, “I love the Flamboyant too.” He patted Clasina on the back and stood up.

“I’m starting to have my doubts, Clasina,” he began, “but folks, Christmas is still the best holiday.” And then he started talking very childishly. Just like the teacher talks to the youngest children at school. Very slowly and with long pauses. Clarence imitated him so well. Clasina and I couldn’t stop laughing.

“Well, children, I’m sure you want to know why Christmas is so wonderful? I’ll tell you. The First of July and Queen’s Day are fun. But of course, not as much fun as Christmas. Because Christmas lasts much longer! Before Christmas even starts, there’s already lots to do. And it’s a party until New Year’s Eve. So there are more ac—ti—vi—ties. That’s a difficult word, isn’t it? With four syllables! Count with me: Ac—ti—vi—ties.” Clarence counted on his fingers, and we nearly fell off the bench laughing. Clarence really was the perfect teacher.

“Think about it, children. What is there to do at Christmas? We walk through the streets with music and sing Christmas carols. Just like the First of July Parade, Mr. Lijfrock is there with his drum. And then there are the Christmas games! We all love *The Children of Israel*, don’t we? When the men put on masks? And dress up in their beautiful costumes? With those feathers, tall hats, and long scarves with mirrors? Who wouldn’t want it to be Christmas every-day?” Clarence spread his hands apart. As if he were asking us a question. Just like the teacher always does. Clasina and I were shaking with laughter.

“Can the latecomers on the bench keep their mouths shut?”

We were startled by the teacher’s voice. He must have heard us inside. Clarence quickly sat down. He whispered, “And don’t forget the plays at the people’s yards. You don’t want to miss that, do you?” Clarence was right. Every year, people put on plays about funny or strange things that happened — to tease others in a friendly way. I wondered what they’d perform this year.

The rest of the morning we sat quietly on the bench. But every time we heard the teacher talking to the youngest children, we burst out laughing. He said at least four times, “That’s a difficult word, isn’t it?” Clarence was really good at imitating him.

We voted quietly for the best celebration. I said that I thought Clarence’s story was the funniest. But I voted for Clasina. Because Emancipation Day is

an important celebration. Clarence voted for me. Mainly because of the donkey races. And Clasina voted for Clarence because she loves singing so much. So then we all had a vote. It was a tie. See, all the celebrations on Statia are wonderful!



The Young Statian Planter

The Story of Gerald, and the Area of Glass Bottle

By Misha Spanner

Gerald was a young Statia boy. He was eleven years old. He lived with his family in the Golden Rock area, a suburban part of Sint Eustatius, which was named after the island's rich and prosperous heyday. Gerald came from a family of farmers and planters. Agriculture or planting as it was locally called, was their main source of income. Gerald knew that someday in the near future, it would be expected of him to carry on his family's tradition of farming and planting. His grandfather Ezekiel Dinzey, a well-known Statian planter and farmer, was known for his knowledgeable planting skills. These skills were passed down to him from his ancestors of African descent, who once toiled the many plantations all over Sint Eustatius, centuries ago.

You see, Grandfather Ezekiel was born on the 1st of August, 1863, exactly one month after the abolishment of slavery. He was very lucky to be born during a time of freedom. At the tender age of three, both his father and grandfather who were former slaves, already began teaching him the basics of planting. They usually took him to the fields, and former plantations, so that they could teach him different techniques of planting. Grandfather Ezekiel was also taught the skills of recognizing good and fertile soil. He did not only learn many skills and techniques from his father and grandfather, but also from many other skilled local planters on Sint Eustatius.

Grandfather Ezekiel loved planting, and took great pride in it. Anytime he



spoke about planting, he would say: “I am a descendant of slaves. I never went to school a day in my life. I was never taught to read nor write. But, one thing I know for sure, nobody can plant better than me!”

Every time Gerald heard his grandfather recite his well-known sayings, he often chuckled at his expression, because Grandfather Ezekiel spoke so loudly, that sometimes people thought that he was in an argument with someone. Nevertheless, this goes to show how serious and passionate he was about planting.

In truth, Grandfather Ezekiel did like to argue a lot. He would practically debate and boast about everything that he had accomplished, amongst other planters and locals. Because on Sint Eustatius, after the men finished planting, fishing or generally working, they gathered around in different areas, and chatted for hours.

Gerald knew that planting was indeed his grandfather’s greatest passion and pride. So, he understood why his grandfather kept fighting so hard to maintain his image and title, as a great planter of Sint Eustatius.

Oftentimes, Grandfather Ezekiel would carry Gerald and his other grandchildren to *the Country*, or another area called *Glass Bottle*, where he had two large gardens. He wanted to teach and pass down his knowledge to all his grandchildren, so that one day, they too could preserve the family’s traditional way of planting. Planting is very important, because it sustains the island and its people with food to eat. Because of planting, Sint Eustatius was well known, as it also supplied many countries and Caribbean islands with provisions and vegetables, centuries ago.

Grandfather Ezekiel had ten children of his own. When they were younger, he would teach them many different kinds of traditional planting methods, but not all followed in his footsteps when they became adults. Nevertheless, over the years, Grandfather Ezekiel worked painstakingly in his gardens, planting provisions and crops such as yams, sweet potatoes, dasheens, cassava, tancias, peanuts, and much more.

Now Grandfather Ezekiel was seventy eight years old, but always looked very fit for his age. He said that his secret to looking younger and fit was; drinking lots of water and bush tea, and eating good healthy ground food. He also believed that working hard in his gardens, and walking a lot, was a good source of daily

exercise to keep him fit.

Grandfather Ezekiel usually said that sitting around doing nothing makes you slow and old, but hard work and planting keeps you smart and fit. He believed that planting would help him live past the age of one hundred years old, just like many of the old folks on the island.

Every morning, Grandfather Ezekiel got up early around half past three or four o’clock. He would say his prayers, and prepare his bag with drinking water and breakfast to take with him. Then he would leave the house, and head to *the Country* or *Glass Bottle*, to plant and tend to his gardens.

Grandfather Ezekiel was a very brave man. He would walk all the way in the dark from the North to *the Country* alone, or sometimes he would ride on his donkey, as well. In each garden, he had a little hut, which was called a *Yam House*. Although it was used for storing provisions, Grandfather Ezekiel would also use it for resting.



Sometimes, Gerald, his siblings and cousins tried waking up early, to tag along with their grandfather to the Country, but they were never in time to catch him, before he left. And besides, they were all very afraid of the dark. A few times, in the afternoon after school, or on the weekends during the early morning hours, they would walk to their grandfather’s gardens. Whenever they went, it was always a lot of fun, especially during the holidays.

Grandfather Ezekiel loved all of his grandchildren dearly. He enjoyed it when all of them came to hang out with him in *the Country* or at *Glass Bottle*. He would carry them with him in the fields to help collect cow dung to make manure. The manure was used as a fertilizer to help the plants grow. Grandfather Ezekiel would cook soup, or boil peanuts or sweet potatoes for his grandchildren in his big iron pot, or he would roast sweet potatoes and cashew nuts under a piece of tinning. He taught his grandchildren how to dig sweet potatoes and yams from in the ground, and how to make banks in the soil for planting potato vines, and seeds. He would share many old tips and tricks with them, which will be helpful for them in the near future.

When it was harvest time, all the grandchildren would help Grandfather



Ezekiel pick vegetables and dig provisions. He would also give them the task of cleaning and bagging the provisions. Usually it was a lot of work, which mostly left everyone very dirty. The eldest grandsons were responsible for placing or lifting the heavy bags of provisions on and off the donkey cart, whilst Gerald was responsible for riding the donkey to transport the goods to town.

Grandfather Ezekiel observed all of his grandchildren and their characteristics. He realized that out of all of them, Gerald was the most eager to learn about planting. He even noticed that Gerald inherited the green thumb for planting, just like him. In fact, Gerald kind of reminded him of himself, when he was a young boy around the same age growing up. Gerald was very dedicated and persistent in all his tasks and chores. Even when his siblings and cousins would take breaks to run and play, Gerald would usually be the one helping, or staying close with his grandfather. In order to gather more knowledge, he would often ask his grandfather a lot of questions about different planting methods. Gerald always expressed his love for planting. He told his grandfather that one day he wished to have his own little garden, to carry on the family tradition in becoming a great planter just like him. Of course, this made Grandfather Ezekiel very happy.

One day, Grandfather Ezekiel surprised Gerald with a small area that he had

cleared off on the property, for him to start his own little garden. Gerald was so excited that he gave his grandfather a big hug. He shared the good news with his parents, who were both very happy for him. Although Gerald knew his assignment would call for more responsibilities, he prepared himself both mentally and physically by getting up early in the morning to tackle his chores, go to school, and then head to the country. Gerald applied all the knowledge and skills he had learned from his grandfather, whilst gardening. He would check on his garden daily, and remove any form of weeds that might hamper the growth of his plants.

Grandfather Ezekiel admired all the progress Gerald was making with his garden. He planted sweet potatoes, yams, corn, sweet peppers and tomatoes. He would sprinkle ashes on his plants, to prevent bugs from destroying his garden. Within a few months it was time for harvest. Gerald began yielding very large ears of corn, peppers and tomatoes.

It was now time for digging up the yams and sweet potatoes. Gerald started plowing and tugging through the soil, and was astonished by what he had discovered. Surprisingly, all the yams and sweet potatoes were turning out to be larger than any he had ever seen in his life. Even his siblings and cousins were very shocked at Gerald's harvest.

When Grandfather Ezekiel witnessed his grandson's harvest, he too was in shock, because they were even larger than any he had ever produced. With tears in his eyes, Grandfather Ezekiel was extremely proud to witness his grandson's success. With that being said, he hugged and congratulated his grandson Gerald, as he made incredible history in the family's tradition of planting. Grandfather Ezekiel officially recognized Gerald as *The Reigning Family Planter*.

The news of Gerald's very large harvest quickly spread all over the island. As they entered into town on the donkey, Grandfather Ezekiel would stop to brag and show everyone his grandson's large harvest of yams and sweet potatoes. Local planters were very amazed by the young boy's achievement. The provisions were by far the largest they had ever seen on the island. Everyone celebrated and congratulated Gerald as a young Statian planter, and encouraged him to continue planting.

Although Grandfather Ezekiel knew that he was no longer the reigning planting champ for now, he was extremely proud to boast amongst the local men that his grandson is now the best Statian planter.

Time and place: Statia, 1890-1920

There is a thick book in the library of Statia called *Statia Silhouettes* (1999). It contains interviews with elderly people from Statia. What they share about their childhood is similar to the experiences of Franky, Clarence, and Charles. For example, they often talk about playing marbles. Did you know that Ishmael Berkel, from the Berkel Family Museum, is also interviewed in this book? There is also a book with interviews from Saba: *Saba Silhouettes*.

Franky and Mr. Moore's Grave

Statia Silhouettes has many stories about Mr. Moore, a cruel slave owner. It is said that the grave with the stone ball, in the cemetery behind the hospital, belongs to Mr. Moore. We don't know for sure if this is true. There are many things we don't know exactly about Mr. Moore. What we do know is that a Moore family once lived on Statia and that they owned a lot of land. Historical records show that there was a man named Hercules, who 'belonged' to the Moore family.

Charles, Clasina and Special Celebrations

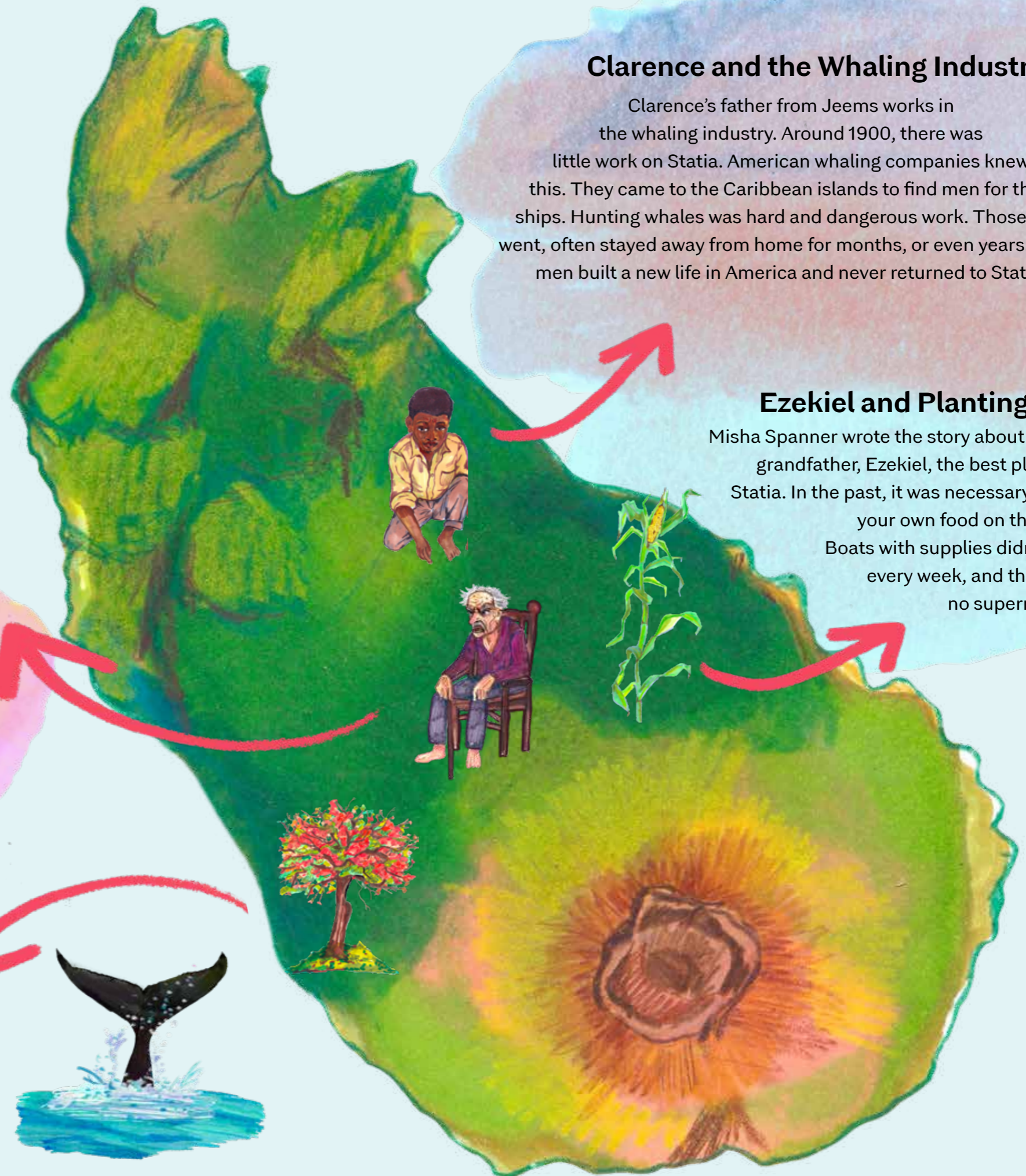
In *Statia Silhouettes* there are several stories about how people used to celebrate on Statia. We know that some traditions are very old: the Flamboyant Tree has always been the symbol of Emancipation Day on July 1, and already around 1900 there were joyful parades at Christmas. Unfortunately, some traditions have disappeared. For example: there are no more donkey races on King's Day.

Clarence and the Whaling Industry

Clarence's father from Jeems works in the whaling industry. Around 1900, there was little work on Statia. American whaling companies knew this. They came to the Caribbean islands to find men for their ships. Hunting whales was hard and dangerous work. Those who went, often stayed away from home for months, or even years. Some men built a new life in America and never returned to Statia.

Ezekiel and Planting

Misha Spanner wrote the story about Gerald's grandfather, Ezekiel, the best planter on Statia. In the past, it was necessary to grow your own food on the island. Boats with supplies didn't arrive every week, and there were no supermarkets.



About the authors

Sabien Onvlee is a historian. She worked as a teacher for many years and developed educational methods for primary and secondary education. In 2023-2024 she lived on Sint Eustatius for one year with her husband. She immediately grew to love the island's rich and layered history and the warm Statian spirit and its beautiful landscapes.



In *Little Scout and Other Stories*, historical events that took place on Sint Eustatius are brought to life through the eyes of children. Sabien Onvlee hopes that the children of Statia will enjoy listening to the stories and that they will feel proud that this special island is their home.

The final story in this book is written by **Misha Spanner**, a native Statian. She is a storyteller, playwright and actress who is well known for her character role as the humorous “Miss Aggie”. As an ambassador for history and culture of Sint Eustatius, over the years she made it her mission to showcase her island globally by telling old stories. With love and passion, she continues to carry on her family's tradition and legacy for the future generations.

Sabien and Misha met on Statia and discovered they share a love for history, stories, theatre, children, Statia, and delicious local food. This book is the result of this shared passion.

The drawings are by illustrator and visual artist **Amber Hyacinth**, who grew up in Hengelo and has a Caribbean father. She studied at the ArtEZ Academy of Art in Zwolle.

Book design was done by Carla van Thijn and Roel Siebrand.

Colophon

Oranjestad 2024 – Duivendrecht 2025

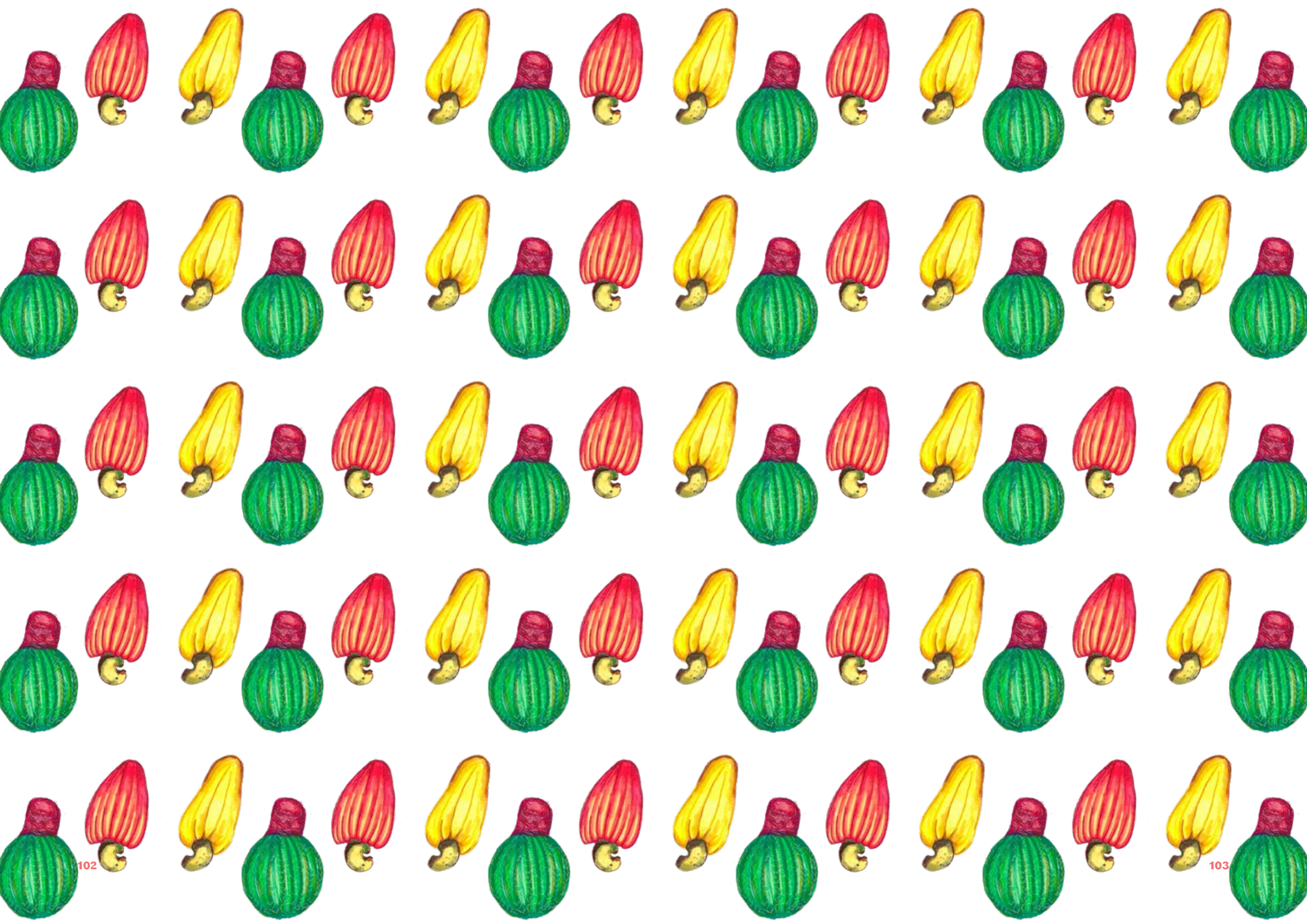
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A Dutch edition of this book is also available: *Kleine Kijker en andere verhalen* (ISBN: 9789083649009).

An accompanying (digital) teacher's guide can be found at www.littlescout.nl.





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