

PORTION OF THE *SEA*

BOOKS BY CHRISTINE LEMMON

Sanibel Scribbles
Portion of the Sea

PORTION OF THE SEA

A NOVEL



CHRISTINE LEMMON



PENMARK PUBLISHING
FT. MYERS, FLORIDA

PORTION OF THE SEA

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2005 by Christine Lemmon.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review. For information, address Penmark Publishing.

Cover art by Chris Tobias

Book design & typesetting by Windhaven Press (www.windhaven.com)

Sincere thanks & appreciation to Andrew Phillips & Nancy Hanger at Windhaven Press for a superb job line-editing *Portion of the Sea*.

Penmark Publishing, LLC

Penmark Publishing

6900-29 Daniels Parkway #162

Fort Myers, FL 33912

Visit our Web site at: www.penmarkpublishing.com

First Trade Printing: September 2005

Second Printing: March 2006

ISBN: 0-9712874-5-7 (pbk.)

Printed in Canada

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

TO JOHN



AUTHOR'S NOTE



This is a work of fiction. I wrote it while living on Sanibel and my love for the area has inspired the writing. It has always fascinated me how generation after generation of families who could vacation anywhere in the world continue returning to Sanibel. My grandparents were the first in our family to fall in love with the area and move to the island.

They passed their passion on to my parents who began vacationing there from the Midwest. I was two years old when I first walked the white beaches in search of seashells and I continued doing so all the way through college, spending spring breaks with Grandma on Sanibel. I like to think of my love for the area as being inherited.

My husband and I did most of our dating on Sanibel and later held our wedding reception there. A portion of my heart stayed even as the tides of our careers carried us geographically near and far from Florida over and over again throughout the years. John and I have lived all over the country. But just as two songbirds travel to far-off places seasonally only to return to the same nest year after year, so too did we find ourselves returning to Sanibel, this time to live. Living here has inspired the writing of *Portion of the Sea*.

The history of the island has always interested me, however, in this story I did not intend nor attempt to portray real people or real-life experiences of any of Sanibel's historical residents or visitors. For information on the history of Sanibel, I recommend a visit to the Sanibel Historical Village & Museum. I created this story and its characters from my imagination, however, I did read historical books and they were valuable to me. I recommend them. They include:

Dormer, Elinore M., *The Sea Shell Islands*, Tallahassee, FL, Rose Printing Company, 1987

——— *A History of Sanibel and Captiva*

LeBuff, Charles, *Sanybel Light*. Sanibel, FL, Amber Publishing, 1998

——— *An Historical Autobiography*

O'Keefe, Timothy M., *Seasonal Guide to the Natural Year*, Golden, CO, Fulcrum Publishing, 1996

——— *A Month by Month Guide to Natural Events*

Oppel, Frank and Meisel, Tony as Editors with multiple authors, *Tales of Old Florida*, Secaucus, NJ, Castle, 1987

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



PROFOUND THANKS TO JOAN SANGER,
EDITOR EXTRAORDINAIRE

“You hurled me into the deep,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers
swept over me.

I said, ‘I have been banished from your site;
yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’

The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the
mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.
But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.”

—*Jonah* 2: 3–6



IV



SANIBEL ISLAND
1890

AVA

*There is a beginning, middle and end to every
woman's life.
But once a woman arrives at what she thinks
might be her end,
all she must do is reach deep down into her
innermost depths
and there she will find a new beginning.
A woman is as hardy as any perennial flower
And deep as the sea.*

I feared my mother had reached her end as the boat started across the wide bay on its trip over to the barrier island of Sanibel. The sun would soon be peeking out from the eastern horizon and the island before us



stood like a heaping black mound in the distance. The bay, having no natural light in these moments before sunrise, looked black as ink and it made me want to dip my pen and start writing in my journal all that I was witnessing. But I knew this early in the morning my writing would only look like chicken scratch and so my journal remained tightly in my hands. It was still too dark to write.

We were used to seeing dark rather than light. The winter in Kentucky had been wet, dark and bitter and my mother's eyes turned gray in the winter.

"You know what maddens me most about winter?" My mother, Abigail, asked, her eyes staring outward at the black silhouette of the shrimp-shaped island in the distance.

"No, what?"

"It couldn't care less about spring. Winter stomps right over spring. And poor little spring hardly gets noticed anymore. And do you know what I loathe most about fall?"

"What, Mama?"

"Fall is winter's predecessor," she said.

My father and I hadn't seen beauty in the changing seasons for some time. We only noticed Abigail's eyes turn colorless as the weather turned cold. Her face wilted downward and her body crumbled to the ground when the sun disappeared in the fall. And come winter, her spirit retreated, surviving deep down in an underground and all we could see was her crown, until spring, when her eyes, blue like the petals of an iris, opened widely again, turning us all into happily chirping birds.

I always paid close attention to my mother's eyes. They told me more than her lips ever did. And so I grew accustomed to watching everyone's eyes, for the eyes continue talking when the lips stop.

When her eyes suddenly looked awestruck, as if they were looking at the Lord Himself, I turned my attention ahead, for the rising sun had painted the sky over Sanibel with strokes of orange and pink and the clouds were now lit and floating before us like flames on candles. It was as if the old world I had known for all fourteen years of my life had passed away and a new world was appearing before me. There was now morning light and it was good.



Then creatures with wings of at least fifteen feet came out of the sky and were heading at us with outstretched necks.

“Flying beasts!” howled my grandmother Dahlia, seated on a bench at the front of the boat. “Woe, woe! They’re going to kill us!” Dahlia’s arms were stretched overhead in the form of a cross as if that alone might turn the things back to where they came from.

As they glided straight toward us, I could see they were mammoth birds with black and white wings. “They’re only birds,” I declared. “Nothing like we have in Kentucky, but they’re birds.”

I still jumped up from my seat, ready to take hold of a ribbon on Dahlia’s sleeve so they wouldn’t carry her off to where they might pick apart her elaborate dress and use its shreds for their nest and her soft, plump body for cushioning in that nest, but Dahlia dropped to the floor and the birds soared by.

“Angels,” I declared, shaking my head as they disappeared into the sky behind the boat. “They had the wings of angels, don’t you think?”

“Pelicans,” the boat captain corrected.

“Damn birds,” Dahlia hissed. “That’s what they were. Scared me to death. Now help me off this damn floor, someone.”

“Mother!” scolded Abigail. “Watch how you speak in front of Ava.”

I took my mother’s wrath as a good sign. Whenever Abigail was feeling herself, she cared about the world, about her husband and most of all, about raising me to become a lady. But when she was down, she could care less that Dahlia liked the word “Damn.” And now her eyes watched me pull my grandmother up off the floor of the boat as if she knew she ought to be helping me. But I didn’t want her help. I wanted her preserving all her strength for the adventure that lied ahead of us. Besides, I didn’t mind pulling Grandmalia up by myself. I’d do anything for her. She had lived with us ever since I first learned to speak and back then, I found it too difficult to say “Grandma Dahlia” and so I combined it into Grandmalia and everyone laughed and she liked it, so it stuck and is what I call her to this very day.

I had to use most of my might to get her up and off the floor of the boat. Naked, Grandmalia probably weighed a ton, but her new dress and



its bustles and nipped waist and yards of heavy fabric and lace added a good thirty pounds to her. It was the heaviest dress she ever wore and my mother and I were wearing ones just like it. We had an independent seamstress make them for us, for the day we arrived on the island. It was the day we had all been waiting for and my mother wanted to make a good first impression.

The boat had reached halfway across the bay by the time I returned to my bench, sat down and caught my breath. I had to write about the angelic birds. I had to write about everything, for there was nothing I loved more than to write. But the sun, now larger and higher, was bringing the water to life and I couldn't reel my eyes in. They wanted to float forever in that water that God so carefully gathered into one place—the bay. It was green over there and blue over here! Turquoise surrounding the island! And in spots, the crests were glistening in silver as if Thomas Edison himself had turned on the switch to his electricity, setting light to the Gulf of Mexico. The water was a color I had never known water to be.

The pond behind our farm in Kentucky when we left had been a muddy color and the lake on the way to town a crap-like brown. The stream behind the school was rust-colored while the river that rolled past the cemetery a clear gray. I thought the clear graylike was nice-looking water.

But the San Carlos Bay surrounding us now sparkled like a sea of crystal and it was clearer than any bath I had ever drawn for myself. I hadn't even drunk anything so clean, except maybe a sip of gin once, but just thirsting for the water around the boat made me feel tipsier than any sips of gin ever did. And this water was teeming with living creatures and they were doing what God had originally told them to do, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas."

"They say Sanibel is a winterless paradise," Abigail muttered softly while squeezing my hand. "And that I will never have to hide from winter again."

"I think it might be true, Mama. I think it might truly be a paradise."



LYDIA

When the boat touched the dock at Punta Rassa, I turned off the flashlight and closed the journal, still feeling a little shame for reading someone's diary, as if I was a vulture, one of those birds that pick away at a carcass, and then fly off with a piece of it.

I was also disappointed. I didn't want to be leaving. I'd rather be her, a girl arriving at the island, than me, a girl leaving, and I'd much rather be on a boatload of women than one of men. Ava, her mother and grandmother were much better company than my father who had already stepped off the boat without offering me any help.

I handed the flashlight to the captain and then glanced back across the bay toward the island, that earlier was so green it looked as if chlorophyll had rained down upon it, but which now I could no longer see. It had vanished into night. I thought about the boatload of women arriving to a place they had never seen and hoping it would meet their expectations.

"Yes," I whispered as I clutched Ava's journal to my chest. "I don't know about any paradise, but it is indeed utopia, same thing, I think. Your mother's eyes won't be disappointed."

I wished they could hear my reassuring whisper echoing across water and time, but I don't think they needed to. They already believed in a paradise before ever seeing it. Some people have such a way of doing that—of believing in things they cannot see.

My father's like that. He's a man of faith. He's faithful he'll be a millionaire within two years and CEO of the bank in five and that his investments will quadruple by the time he's fifty. No one could tell him otherwise. His faith is too strong and we all feared his kind of faith.

"Lydia," I heard him call out. "I waited long enough to get off that island and now I'm waiting for you. What are you doing daydreaming at a time like this?"

"Sorry, sir," I said, hopping off the boat to catch up with him. He was



already climbing into yet another limousine, not bothering to give me a hand. I said nothing as I climbed into the backseat. I knew that when work was on his mind, my words bothered him like pestering mosquitoes. It's when work wasn't on his mind, that I became his part-time job. He was training me to become a well-adjusted American woman, future wife of someone wealthy and important.

As the car headed down a dark road, I watched the bay out my right window. I thought about my own life and feared that it was ending before ever getting started. That doesn't mean I felt as if I were about to die, not this young, but that the kind of life I envisioned for myself was ending right there—going no further than a vision. It got me to thinking that maybe that girl Ava, the one who kept the journal, knew some secret truths about life. After all, she had both a mother and grandmother to pass such information on to her. And maybe it was true what she had written in her journal, that a girl is as hearty as a perennial flower, and as deep as the sea and all she must do is reach into her innermost depths and there she will find a new beginning.

I didn't know what lay deep within me. I never went there before. I knew my outer layer—the clothes I wore, my hairstyles, the miniscule amount of makeup that I painted onto my face. And I knew my surface layer just under my skin—I knew boys gave me hives and my father made me cry when he missed dinners and holidays. And sitting in a quiet church made me laugh with nervousness. I didn't go often, only when I slept over at a friend's house, but something about the quietness of it made my body shake from trying to hold in an uncontrollable burst of laughter. Maybe because I was playing a role that wasn't me, pretending I was a churchgoing girl and knew what to do when in reality, my father and I never went. I knew my surface well. I was like any girl my age, wanting to fit in and be liked and hide anything about myself that might not be accepted.

If I were to dive deep within myself, I'm not sure I'd find much, I decided when I could no longer see the bay out my window. And when I noticed myself yawning uncontrollably, I scooted across the leathery backseat and rested my head on my father's shoulder.