

The Thrice Born

A Writing Sample

-Part I of The Novel Trilogy- *Pray for the Angels*

- a Novel & Film Trilogy By Carlos Lopez Avery & Johnny Blue Star

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El Tesoro de Cielo is a Spanish ship hunting gold in the dangerous waters of the Caribbean's Dragon's Teeth. They are led there by Rufio Catalan, a sailor with a mysterious insight as to the location of a strange island, a purported citadel of gold. Having spotted what may be the island, the Captain, launches three small exploration boats One of them seats Rufio and Albert, an English sailor, when captured, crossed over to the Spanish side. Rufio has ultimate contempt for the English traitor and his semi-reconciliation with Albert is part of the charm of the following scene:

CHAPTER 1

Ten minutes later the three small boats pulled away from the *El Tesoro de Cielo* in the morning light. The occupants were well aware of the dark clouds accumulating behind the ship, hovering ever nearer, as if creeping up on the unsuspecting vessel anchored off the reef of the island. Before the boats, the island rose in a magnificent splendor of greenery and fragrant trees that broke from the water in an invitation of fresh water.

And gold, many of the sailors hoped.

It was a small island, not so small that it would not be charted, but not large enough to be considered an outpost by any of the naval powers of the time. The Captain was in the leading chinchorro, his alert attention on the island that was bordered by thick trees and shrubs, and then to the inlet that broke from the short sandy beach to a hidden cove that was heavily bouldered on the seaward side.

The first boat rounded the immense rock protruding from the cove like a sentinel, and the sight beyond made every sailor in the three vessels gasp. The cove waters were surrounded by an arch of white sand beach, trees overhanging the inlet, the waters skimming the chinchorro sides almost clear and pale blue to the depth of a meter.

The Captain smiled, chuckling at the beauty of the island, hoping for a greater sparkle inland. He turned to look back at the ship, and his smile tempered.

Behind the ship the sky was dark, stalking the anchored vessel, as if waiting for a command from a hidden authority. Superstition, he told himself, thinking of Estefano. Stories abounded around treasures, he knew.

As if to prove this, one of the crewmen had brought a net and was letting it dangle into the water beside the boat as the others pulled oars to propel them into the cove. At the other two boats, sailors were doing the same, each fruitless.

They were midway into the cove when a glimmer at the beach tinkled at them. Each sailor on the three boats looked to the sand, each excusing the sparkle as their imagination. The Captain turned in his seat of the boat, and then stood to see better, eyes on the strange glint at the shore.

Suddenly a cry went up from the man with the net in the water. "What's this?"

He pulled the net up higher as the sailors around him shifted, making the boat keel slightly. In the net was a greenish mass of seaweed, and something else.

Rufio was the first to reach the net. He grabbed the stringy contents out of it. He held it up, letting the seaweed fall away to reveal a string of ivory rounds. He grinned, laughing heartily as he swept away the remaining seaweed, and then bit into the small beads.

"Hmm," he said, nodding in satisfaction, holding the strand up. "Pearls, men!" He looked to the man with the net. "Is there more?"

At the boat running to their left another man shouted, holding up a net, drawing attention from the other boats.

The Captain looked to Rufio and then the other boats. He chuckled, nodding as more finds were announced. "Bring it up, men!" he called, glancing back at Rufio.

Albert settled closer on his bench seat across from Rufio as the men resumed oaring. "Them's real pearls, aren't they?"

Rufio's hand closed vice-like around the strand as he sat down. "Keep your trap shut, Alberto!"

He sat back, miffed. "Such rudeness! Why be like that, Rufio? I'm just trying to be polite."

Rufio glanced to where the Captain was eyeing the island, still trying to determine the strange glint at the shore in the early morning light. "I don't know why the Capitán tolerates an English dog like you," he said lowly. "We should have thrown you back into the sea."

Albert's face darkened instantly and he lunged for him.

The Captain stepped between them. "Enough! No more or I'll have you both stretched on the top mast and be done with you!" He looked to Rufio. "Albert's fought in two battles with us. He's helped us take down two English ships. He's proven his merit."

Rufio made as if to spit, but didn't. "I know what he's done," he grumbled, staring at the Englishman, leaning closer in the boat. "That's what spies do. Pretend they're someone else –"

“Protected you, I did,” Albert reminded. “Manned your damn *bombardeta* myself. Showed you how to work a real cannon.”

Rufio looked to the Captain. “I tell you, he’s a worthless shit!”

“It’s my call, Rufio,” the Captain said.

Rufio frowned, sitting back on his seat as he sent a threatening look to Albert. “You’ve one more day to live – at the Capitán’s behest, English slime.”

Albert was about to say more about his service to the Spanish ship when a cry went up from the sailor with the net. All eyes from the three boats went to the man as he hauled a small wooden chest from the water with the straining net.

It tumbled into the boat, dragging a trail of green and brown seaweed with it. Half a dozen hands tore away the stringy vegetation, tearing at the thick chain at the bolted lock at the lid.

“Step aside,” the Captain said, pulling a falchion from his second scabbard. While most of the crewmen carried a single sword, and only during times of battle, the Captain generally wore the falchion along with his usual sword. For this trip to the unknown island, every man was armed.

The Captain slipped the edge of the sword beneath the snail-encrusted lock and gave it a quick flip. The old lock broke and the chain fell to the boat bottom. The sailor with the net pulled open the lid.

Inside the sight of watery gold coins and tangled jewelry shone back at the men. At first they were speechless, and then a laugh erupted from the Captain. It was soon followed by the other men, triumph echoing across the waters.

The Captain scooped up a handful of gemstone and gold necklaces, lifting it high as water and coins dropped back into the chest. “By God, you were right, Rufio!” he crowed, grabbing the man’s shoulder and shaking him nearly from his seat. “Ha! The log book was real!”

The other two boats had stilled rowing, the men looking to the glittering treasure in the Captain’s clutch. Congratulatory laughter and hooting bounced off the rocks edging the cove.

Rufio smiled, eyes on the strands of pearls, rubies, and sapphires amid the gold necklaces. “Of course it’s real. But this,” he said, chancing to plunge his hand into the chest’s interior, letting the coins sift through his fingers, “is nothing. Nothing, I tell you!”

Another sailor sat closer on Albert’s seat to see the chest. He snatched a small gold statue from the treasure, smiling greedily at it.

The Captain gave him a warning look and snagged the statue from his hand. “We haven’t parted out the lots yet. You wait.”

The crewman frowned at him, and settled back at his seat. He grabbed his oar, ignoring the chuckles of the other

sailors at his reprimand.

The other two boats fell into a line behind the Captain's as they reached shallower water. Most looked to the shore where the twinkle of gold in the sand evolved into more discernible shapes in what appeared to be a double row leading from the water.

The Captain rested his boot on the seat beside Rufio, a cautious eye on any hands daring to reach for the open chest in the boat's bottom. "Did you know all this was here?" he questioned Rufio. "The log book said so little. Certainly not enough to describe this," he said, gesturing to the jewels and coins. "Why did you attach such importance to it?"

Rufio chuckled lowly, rubbing the stubble of beard at his chin. "Just a lucky feeling, Capitán. A little gift from my old mother."

Albert snorted a scoff. "Ah, that explains it. Your mother's a witch, Rufio!"

In a flash of steel, Rufio's long knife was in his hand as he bolted across to the other seat, holding the razor sharp blade at Albert's neck. The Englishman leaned back in surprise. Rufio's burly hand knotted in the other man's shirt, keeping him close. A trickle of blood started at Albert's throat as he swallowed.

"Captain, it was a compliment," he said carefully, feeling the blade edge against his Adam's apple. "I meant no disrespect."

Rufio's knuckles whitened, eyes narrowing at the man as the other sailors looked on, expectant.

The Captain gave them each a quick glance. "Alberto's harmless, Rufio," he said. "He's just got a strange sense of humor. You know how English sailors are."

"All liars and traitors," Rufio said with a grunt.

"Come on, Rufio," the Captain said, trying to allay the tension. "When we're back on the ship we'll toast your mother, and thank her for our rum and our gold. Alberto will toast her himself," he added, sparing the Englishman a sharp look. "Won't you?"

Rufio threw away Albert roughly and sat back in his own seat. "Like hell he will."

Albert shifted on the seat, straightening his ruffled shirt, aware of the other crewmen estimating him.

"Mention my mother again and I'll cut you in little pieces and feed you to the sharks," Rufio promised him.

Rufio's threat was lost on the Captain. His attention was locked onto the shore where the double line of glittering objects had now dissolved into recognizable view. The sailors noticed, every eye on the sandy shore approaching.

A double line of shimmering gold took the form of statues, one after another as they filed in tandem up from the water, each in progressing size. As the boats neared the shore the sailors gasped at the oddity. Two lines of golden statues, each larger than the preceding, emerged from the azure water,

each facing the opposite line, both columns disappearing into the heavily treed interior of the island.

“Gold!” a sailor cried from the second boat.

“Unbelievable,” murmured another crewman as the boats neared each other, all eyes on the spectacular golden statues.

In the third boat, two men had stood up to see the columns better. “There must be thousands,” one said, pointing to where the statues disappeared into the lush vegetation. “Look at ‘em! Unbelievable!”

No one had expected it. The statues rose overhead like great deities guarding the waterway, each arrayed in golden robes, their faces both solemn, gaunt, yet holding the likeness of angels the Captain had seen on illuminated pages of his hometown church’s sacred books. The statues were immensely tall and thin, with large wings opened to expose intricate skeletal patterns that seemed out of place on an angel.

It unsettled the Captain. He was aware of several sailors crossing themselves, but no one looked away at the glittering gold sight that rivaled full sunlight.

He grinned, a reverent whisper coming from him. “Oh, my God...”

Albert was also reverent, but to a different idol. He’d stood at the sight of the statues, but now he dropped to his knees – before Rufio. “Truly a godsend,” he mumbled, face pale as he looked up to the Spaniard, his tone penitent. “How could I ever have doubted you? You beautiful man... No witch could

know this; your mother is a saint. A blessed saint, Rufio. I take everything back.” He grasped the man’s hand and kissed it roughly. “A blessed –”

“Unhand me!” Rufio pushed him off. “You damnable English cur.”

Albert was in the middle of an apologetic kiss when Rufio withdrew his hand and shoved him away.

“You’re very fortunate, Alberto,” Rufio said, grinning in spite of the show of remorse. “I heard a trace of sincerity in your voice despite your wretched accent. Perhaps gold has softened your heart.”

He rumbled of chuckles went through the other Spanish men. Albert paid them no mind, his eyes flicking from Rufio to the statues.

“I’m sure I’ll regret it,” Rufio said, glancing to the Captain, “but out of respect to the Capitán I’ll let you live one more day.”