



# Lembrook

Judah A. Kessler

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**First Edition**

**I**t's not so much an island as it is a village and yet, perhaps not so much a village as an island, but as remote as one could possibly imagine, many kilometres from its nearest neighbouring towns or villages. It's settled quite peacefully and contentedly in the middle of a river that argues the term "rural" in every sense imaginable of the term.

The river in which the little island rests, is about as wide as the island itself, approaching and departing at a width of about double the island's girth. For the most part, the waters pass calmly in almost imperceptible motion, with only the slightest ripple, mirror-like, reflecting the brilliant light of a day's sun above that provides an illumination almost all round. On either bank, for as far as the eye can see, the land-scape lays flat, open, unfettered, treeless, green with lush grasses, liberally speckled by the tiniest of wild flowers, spots of whites, reds, yellows and a bit of blue here and there.

Point to point, North to South, or, in this case, South to North since the only means of trespass is by way of a single bridge at the Southern end, just above the South Point, a rather casual stroll of not more than 15 minutes covers the length in all of its entirety. As for girth, one would have to make great effort to take longer than perhaps 5 minutes if, that is to say, there were any direct routes cross-wise, which there are not. In a rather odd manner, considering, all of the real estate on and of the island, save the very rare and small yards of a very few houses on the side streets only, has been cast into obscurity, built upon with impressive, ancient, heavy, old grey stones.

At the one end, just above the access bridge, a bit of stone on the river's bed creates only just enough of a rapid to so slightly churn

the other-wise stillness of the waters, lending a regular but still docile splash. It's here where the "market place" is situated, cobbled as the streets are, but furnished with small umbrellaed tables, bistro-style chairs and a few benches along the river edge. Once the centre of imports and exports, this open space now serves as a place of peaceful leisure to those so blessed with the time to sit and exchange the latest news and gossip, and those who bring small meals to partake of or share at the tables. There are neither fences nor walls at the island's edge. The stone pavement ends, neatly trimmed by larger-cut stones and drops perhaps 2 or 3 metres directly into the river below. It lends a sense of openness with the river and the surrounding countryside, an opportunity to breathe all the air around and luxuriate in the brilliance of the great sun above.

The streets are so very narrow, given that the island itself isn't all terribly large, never mind wide. Even at it's widest, there is barely space for The Main and the two side streets that cut vertically from point-to-point, end-to-end, North to South. On either side of The Main there are only single buildings, front on the street, the backs facing the side streets behind, and on the side streets are the same, single buildings, backed as tightly near the river as is possible, just before the laws of Nature would have them tumble into the river. Buildings on The Main vary in height, from single to 4 or 5 storeys, most are 4 at minimum, casting their cool shadows over the cobbles for most, if not all the day long. They are impressive in their mass, constructed as if intended more as fortress walls than places of habitation.

The centre street, The Main, is only but a bit wider than the side streets, and it curves at its mid-point, extending, in time not

distance, the travel from point-to-point, the length of the island. The two side streets follow the contour of the shore-line. All streets are cobbled with old, grey stone complementing the hue and colour of the buildings on their perimeters, but as textured as the building stones remain, the cobbles are as worn, smoothed, from centuries of pedestrian traffic. There are not now, nor has there ever been a motor vehicle in Lembrook. First and fore-most, the sole access to the village is by means of crossing a rather simple and very aged wooden bridge that was built and has been maintained over the years at a width of only about 4 people across. The main street is barely wide enough to allow for any motor-vehicular traffic, and even then, it would permit only one vehicle at a time. As it is, deliveries and such are made by horse- or man-drawn cart and carriage which are the only wheeled vehicles ever to be seen, and even then, such sights are seldom, and on the main street, people must yield to the sides when such an occasion as a delivery is made. On the side streets, people are forced to step quickly aside and into the door-ways lest they be trampled, so narrow the passage.

Access to the side streets is given by small breeze and alley-ways between some of the large buildings. There are no direct streets perpendicular to The Main. One must be aware of the correct alley to take and it's location in order to arrive where one wishes on the side street because there are some alleys which end rather abruptly at a court-yard from which there is no exit. These court-yards tend to be much darker than the rest of the village, enclosed, as it were, on all sides with only the opening of the alley to break the confinement of the walls that surround them, rising many storeys into the sky above so as to thwart any attempt made by the sun to shine down onto the cobbled ground below.

In most of these court-yards there are stairs that lead up to the higher storeys. Most often, these some-what ancient stairs are made of wood, old and often in need of attention or care. They're quite wide though, to suit their purpose of means of transporting goods, most of which are manufactured for the local businesses, in the lofts and other spaces located in the upper lofts. A few stair-ways have been re-constructed of steel, but these are few and even they clearly show the signs of time's wear and much use, worn and some-what rusted in various spots along the metallic skeletons, rising up and clinging to the massive stone walls.

There are, how-ever, the other alley-ways that provide quicker access to the side streets than travelling the full length of the island to the points where all streets meet. But as it is with all alleys, there are no indications of location, nor are there any indications of which provide access into the side streets and which end at stone walls. The residents know each one though, and it's always obvious who is a resident by the rapidity with which he or she gallops along The Main and quite suddenly disappears from sight, not at a building's entrance but between two buildings. A turn to the left or right off the street, and within a few steps, pedestrians vanish from view, heading either to a court-yard or to one of the village's two perimeter streets.

Lembrook is a rather tiny island village, an old village, an extremely old village, many kilometres away from any town or settlement, seemingly forgotten or ignored by the passing of time and the ever-changing interferences of progress. It is, amongst settled and inhabited congregations of people, a "hermit" in its own right, removed, quite solitary, and perfectly at ease, at peace with its situation in the greater scheme of Creation.

But all is certainly not dreary, by any means or stretch of the imagination. The roof-tops of the taller buildings along The Main lend a subtle vibrance in that their colours vary among the greens of oxidised copper sheeting, the reds of shingles and terracotta tiles, and a deep blue-greys of slate. To the side-streets, roofing is predominantly red or rust-red, with occasional dashes of green and slate. Along The Main, large, round planters, made of the same stone as the buildings, hold multitudes of flowers of various sorts, and some have small trees of assorted species, some deciduous and others, coniferous, and on the side-streets, some of the little houses boast small front yards of trimmed grasses, planters bursting with flowers either at the stoops or along the way-side. And just about every-where windows are shuttered in shades of blues or muted reds and earthy browns, or curtains of solid colours hang inside, lending just the slightest but appreciated touches that break the hard and varying shades of the stone, on most of the sills, flower-boxes burst with eye-catching reds and whites of well-kept flowering plants of all sorts and varieties. All the while, as the roof-tops catch and reflect the light of the sun above, they give a vague but noticeable glow, tinted ever so slightly by their colours, shades and hues, even to the air.

Then too, there are the many stores and shops which are the ground floor occupants of most of the buildings along The Main. Everything one could possibly require is available at each small speciality store. There are the bakers, butchers, produce vendors and haberdashers offering every wear from rough-and-rugged to evening finery. There are shops of millinery, general dry goods and all kinds and sorts of various sundries. Over some entrances there are charming canvas awnings, others simply open their doors to and from the streets, but all are welcoming and the



displays of wares lend cheerful colouration from all perspectives and angles.

As far as any-one here knows, Lembrook has always been here, settled and established. It is, for all intent and purpose, a village whose history has existed only in lore, with no absolute, particular beginning. It is here now, was "back then" and is expected to remain long into the lengths of Eternity. No-one is concerned about it. There are no visible natural elements that appear to want the village destroyed, there are no human elements that would wish it any harm. Even its location is of no importance to any-one other than the residents, being so far removed from any other habitations in the area. Nay, Lembrook exists, and that's all that is important, if anything at all is important. It's neither disregard nor apathy that keeps the folk from delving into the history of the place, rather, it's the general attitude and spirit of the immediate presence of the place. It's age is obvious in the old stone structures which are of some uncounted elderliness and rough-hewn manufacture. Obviously, large and small, broad and narrow, they were hand-hewn and mostly stacked and settled with-out mortar of any kind. They have been pointed at their seams as time passed, but even that was more for the sake of comfort than any other purpose, blocking drafts and rains and the likes. But the construction of Lembrook boldly indicates expert craftsmanship from a time so very long passed when builders invested great effort and concentration, care and precision in their toils and labours. It is an ancient village yet still ever so very alive and thriving, come what may, no matter.

I'd come to Lembrook in response to an advert for the open position of accounting clerk in one of the local businesses. I'd

arrived only that morning, certainly fresh, completely new to the place, having no physical knowledge of it at all. I had a scheduled appointment to interview with the owner of the business and had arrived more than early enough, or so I'd thought, so as to get by bearings and familiarise myself with the place. As does every-one in the village, I was brought to the main-land side of the old bridge and deposited there. I crossed alone but most certainly not lonely. It was a wonderfully clear and bright day and as I crossed over the glistening river water I could see that The Main was already bustling with people walking, strolling or busily passing one-another, on errands, shopping, going to and coming from employment. With the exception of those already seated at the tables or on the benches at the market-place, every body around was moving. Lembrook was very, very much alive and animated. My appointment was at a location almost at the farthest, opposite end of the island and I was excited knowing that in mere moments, I would join and become part of the activity I viewed from the serenity of the edge. I'd come to work here and to become part of this little island village and although my exterior was calm and civil, my thoughts and mood were electric, elevated, jubilant. This little village was all but incredible and it was a pure joy knowing that it would, should all go as I hoped, and very soon Lembrook would become my "home".

I quietly crossed the cobbles of the market place and in the shortest of moments, I entered the flow of moving people and became part of the life of the village. The street was busy, the shops almost full of buyers and sellers, the street full with passers-by. Every-where around me was motion of some kind but surprisingly, even though almost every person spoke, there was more a "din" than cacophony. Hectic in Lembrook was