



Lembrook

Judah A. Kessler

Lembrook

Judah A. Kessler

Copyright © 2017 by Judah A. Kessler

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write/e-mail to the author, subject “Attention: Permissions” at the address below.

judahakessler@gmail.com

First Edition

It'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

rather subdued. I walked along, as slowly as my excitement allowed. Some-where along this street was a building where a flat was to be mine, that arrangement had been made already, well enough in advance. And, as I was to understand, just closer was the building where I was to be employed. I walked along, taking in the surroundings, the place, the places, the people, paying attention to the stores I'd need to frequent once settled. I allowed myself the luxury of absorbing the atmosphere of it all and being absorbed by it. As I continued on my way, the crowd seemed to increase and the pace quickened a touch. Ever so soon I found myself in the midst of quite a considerable crowd of shoppers and just those others who were out to enjoy themselves, to chat with neighbours and simply live their lives amongst and with each-other. I knew I had to pay attention to where I was and where I was going too because some-where along the way there was an alley to my left where I'd have to leave the bustle and get to my interview. Paying attention was no effort because as I progressed I was committing my surroundings to memory as best I could, noting any subtle differences in architecture, the shape and size of windows, colour of doors, even to the slightest variations in the cobble-stones of the street.

Just beyond the point on the street where it bent slightly toward the left, I came upon the entrance to the alley-way I was to take. There was a little sign affixed on the corner of one building to the right of the entry that had, at some time in the distant past, indicated that the alley had been given a name of some sort or another, or perhaps, it was an indication of what or who resided in or along it, but the little sign was rather worn and barely decipherable. Folks here didn't depend on such things as signs, they didn't have to, they just knew where they were, where they were going and how to get there. But the little store-front of the

building to the right fit the description I'd been provided: the large window displayed all sort and manner of rather rustic house-wares: cast iron skillets, kettles, wood utensils and bits of hand-painted and hand-crafted artistry. Yes, this was the exit from the world of the busy and the entrance into the world of the very un-known. I stepped out of the current of the ever-moving flow of people and stepped my way out of the crowd and into the heavily shadowed, narrow passage-way between two ancient relics of massive grey stone. The alley was barely wide enough for two average-sized bodies, three at most, to traverse, and even at that, not with-out rubbing shoulders with any-one else passing through. Space on this little island was a treasured luxury, none was wasted and all was suitably utilised.

Rather amazingly if not stunningly, at the end of the way, the world opened considerably, into an enclosed court-yard of sorts. There were many people mulling about, little hand-carts here, there, round the perimeter, draped with yard-goods of deep indigo, burgundy, deep golden-yellow and what appeared to have been at some time in ancient history, white, but was now more what could only be described as a "sooted-white". It was considerably darker in here than out on The Main, almost as if time had passed some-where along the alley and had gone from high noon into the later twilight hours of the day, nearing night-fall. Obviously the sun rarely, if ever, shone in this cavernous square, the 4-storey stone walls on all sides blocking its life-giving light. I thought it rather "Dickensian" in its darkness and though the dress of the inhabitants decried a some-what impoverished lot and class of person, there was no sense of poverty, urgency or trepidation; every-one was civil with one-another, some smiled, and others simply appeared occupied. It was, in appearance, a little "Chor Bazaar", a "Beggars' Market".

From the conversations over-heard I discerned that some of these people were employees of the business I was hopefully to be taken into, and in the carts were the textiles that little company produced. Bolts of cottons, linens and wools produced in the building to my right were brought down to the transporters who pulled the carts away to various tailors and other manufacturers about the village. Some fabrics would be sold to the locals as yard goods, others would be clipped, snipped, cut and sewn into blouses, trousers, shirts, skirts, dresses, draperies, blankets and all sorts of necessities produced by other companies located on other floors of other buildings in the village. Lembrook was, to its greatest possibility, self-sustaining, quite sovereign in many, if not most, ways. Food was the major import, there being not but the most minute spots and parcels of actual "land" on-island, every bit of space being built upon. There were, in front of some of the houses on the side streets, the smallest of front "yards", but these were no more than perhaps 3 metres in depth from street to house-front, not much in the way of providing any space sufficient to raise "crops" of any sort. Wood and metals too were imports, as raw materials that were worked by local artisans to create other necessities like cook-ware and some home furnishings like chairs, small tables and the kind. The textiles produced were manufactured in small mills, turned out of the raw materials brought in from the farms off in the distant mainland, and once and again, some would be imported pre-made to be decorated, printed, dyed locally. Lembrook was ambitious, to be certain, and its people proud and delighted in what-ever occupation they held. Each and every one understanding that his and her effort was a contribution of support to each and every one else. The little island functioned as if independent from the entire world across the river that served more as a moat round a

castle, and it functioned perfectly well as such. This court-yard was as part of the great machinery that daily churned-out just some of the products that Lembrook required. In this darkness, hidden from sight, here were the textiles that clothed. Else-where in the village, in similar yards, food-stuffs were prepared for the local markets while even else-where, other sundries were being produced and readied for deliveries up and down The Main.

On the outer wall of the building of my destination was an old, wooden stairway climbing as old ivy might do, clinging to the stone-work and appearing as if it had been so-doing since the dawn of the creation of such things as "stairs". Each flight was steep in its angle as the whole rose from the cobbles of the court-yard up to the 4th storey above. The entire way was roofed and the rails and balustrades heavy and strong. They, the stairs, were considerably wide too; lifts (elevators) were non-existent here and these stairs were the sole means by which people accessed the upper storeys and products were brought down to the streets. Though strong in appearance, these old stairs too were stained dark from the many years of use, abuse, weather and wear. From the place in which I stood, just distant enough, I could look up to the 3rd storey where I was to be in just some moments' time, and it seemed a bit of a challenge because I'd have to wind my way up those stairs amidst and amongst the many others ascending and descending, some, most bearing all sorts of goods and merchandise. Ah, but the thought that this was to become my daily routine, once hired, only made it more the welcomed and so, I took a breath, relieved that I'd made it as scheduled and promised, and with light-hearted determination, I wheeled my way toward and up the stairs, dodging as necessary, dashing along with the flow of humanity about me. Up one

flight, and the next, on and up and so forth.

There was no “office”, no “reception area” behind the heavy, aged wooden double entrance door. As I stepped off the stairway landing and in, I was immediately part of the din and drum of all that was the little company that occupied the entire floor. Through length and breadth of the area there were no partitions of any sort, the entirety of the space left open, occupied by someone or another, and every person of the many was busily occupied in his and her responsibility. The far wall which faced the front of the building, over-looking The Main, was, from side to side, end to end, ceiling to floor, windows through which the day-light beyond and out-side poured in through numerous, obviously ancient glass panes, donating in its fashion, additional and needed illumination. It seemed my presence wasn't even noticed as I stood, glancing about, searching for my interviewer. Through the melee I spotted one, solitary antique-like desk, cluttered with stacks of papers and other such “office paraphernalia”, behind which sat a portly sort of gentleman of some certain age who appeared to be porting over ledgers and the likes. I could only believe that he was the owner of this establishment here and I made my way zigging and zagging through the throng to his place on the floor.

When, at what seemed a long “at last” I found myself standing at the desk opposite the gentleman, he looked up, smiled and bade me “Sit down, please. It's good to see you made it.” His tone was warm, welcoming, as if I'd been invited to tea more than as a professional call, and he immediately broke into conversation which felt more like old chums meeting at a local pub for a drink after a hard but productive day at the office. He asked about my

travel to Lembrook, how well I'd navigated about the village, my opinion of the place and people I'd seen thus far, where I planned to take residence. As for the professional, job-related particulars, he clarified that those had already been established and settled and that our meeting this morning was merely a formality, an introduction, a means by which both of us would assess the situation at hand so to approve or not, the atmosphere and environment, the duties and responsibilities to follow. Where my employment was concerned, the matter was already settled, I was, as far as he was concerned, very much "hired"; I was to begin in a week's time, giving me the opportunity to find and settle in my new place of residence. There was no rush, no hurry at present, those would come with the establishment of my position. He explained the history of the little corporation, the purpose, the current situation and conditions, took me round the floor and showed me my own little desk, off in a corner by the large window-wall. The desk appeared almost abandoned for quite some time, every paper, clip and pencil laying still, as if the previous occupant had only just stepped away momentarily. My predecessor had, I was told, left one Friday evening and, after having served many long years, gone home, as usual, and there, had "passed into the night and on into time and warmest memory".

"It's like that here." my new employer explained, "The people you see here are, for the most part, Lembrook, always have been, always will be, one way or another, in one sense or another. We all rather know from early age, where we want to be, what we want to do with our lives as we grow, and once established and settled, very seldom does anybody ever move or change. It might seem horrible to some, but it's kept us all very comfortable and

alive for a great many generations and it's what has kept us who we are, where we are and how we are. People from out-side come and go, marry into and die out of Lembrook. Seldom does anybody ever actually leave, and when some-one does, it's been very rare, indeed, that they do so with any sort of malice or ill feelings toward the village or any-one in it. We're a good village of good, hard-working people who keep pace and keep busy with one common goal and purpose: we keep each-other well, and we keep our village strong. You're quite welcome here... Welcome home."

He stood, leaned across the desk, extended his hand to me and with a firm, warm and hearty shake, he smiled and said,

"Now, you get out there, walk about casually, commit the place to memory. There's not much of it, but what's here can get a bit confusing to those who aren't born into it. We're not much on giving directions when asked, unless it's to somebody specific. It's not that we're unfriendly, mind you. It's more the matter of simply knowing the place, it's idiosyncrasies, the ways around, which alley gets you to which destination and which buildings you can walk through, front to back; you'll find some that lend passage side-to-side as well. They're particularly useful in the inclement weather. You've got a bit to learn and a place to be settled where to rest your head at a day's end so be off with you and we'll see you back here in a week's time. By then I expect you'll be just another body in the village, just another local. Welcome."

When I left that old man and his old desk, my heart was full of all sorts of the merriest music, my head full of the brightest

thoughts. Even the dark court-yard seemed brilliantly a-glow and all the strangers who'd occupied the square on my arrival felt familiar, as if and though we'd always known each-other, as if I'd been part of the history of the place from the first shovel-turned bit of soil. It even seemed they smiled at me, gladdened by the assurance of my presence. It had all begun as a new day in a new place and with-in only the shortest of a very few hours, all was as if all had been for all time, as if Lembrook had been my home, my only home, forever. I wasn't a new-comer to the place now, I was, all too simply, relocating from one place in the village to another. There was nothing "new", nothing "strange", just everything "good", copacetic, assuring and assured, peaceful.

As if I'd been so-doing my entire life-time, I walked my way across the court-yard to the alley, out of the cavern and through the canyon, back out to The Main. The sky above was deep, infinite, pale blue, shining brilliantly, illuminated by a resplendent sun, lending a warm glow all about the place. I merged into the flow of people wending their way up and down the thoroughfare, and headed toward the open market-place. There, I took a chair at a little table on the cobbles, in a position at the river-side where I was afforded a full view of the little village and I sat, looking at my neighbours, my village, my "home". Above me was a sky of now sapphire blue, behind and to my left the river splashed rhythmically and delightfully. Just across the water was an immense expanse of uninterrupted green meadow beyond which was, I knew, the rest of the world that was, for the most part now, unimportant. Before me, across the ancient, worn cobbles, the village of Lembrook rose up from the island, setting and settled, solid and firm, old and established, living, thriving,

growing strong. This was my “home”. I was accepted and accepting here and nothing else existed nor mattered. The village itself was “peace”, I was a part of it, and I was at peace... with self, the world, all of Creation for as far and wide as it spread out before and around me. The air moved and with it carried the freshest and the slightest scent of the river, people passed, some came to rest at other tables or on benches, they talked with one-another or simply enjoyed the company of their own thoughts... and I sighed, a deep breath in... a long breath out... This was the end of a life-time here, and from this point forward, onward, there was nothing other than Eternity... and all was perfectly well.

I closed my eyes for a brief moment, lost in personal reverie, to ponder in my own soul, the absolute beauty, the splendour, the wonder of this village, the events of this day, the blessing that I was awash in. The sound of people conversing round and about me dulled and the air seemed a wrap, a blanket round my shoulders, only the slightest bit perceptible as a comforting cover under and in which to doze and dream of the glorious present and the future, full of promise. This after-noon I would walk into my new home, a little flat located on a third storey in one of Lembrook's ancient fortresses. The kettle waiting and ready to provide a cup of delightful tea, a comfortable chair across from the ancient stone fire-place hearth, set by a large window with a view open to the village and beyond to the farthest horizon, and tonight, a magnificently comfortable bed on which to lay and sleep peacefully, soundly and restfully.

As I sat there, still and satiated with the jubilance of this day's events, the sun-light peered through the lids of my yet-closed

eyes. I woke slowly, calmly, peacefully, comfortably, well-rested. There was a new day to face ahead, matters to be attended, the usual trials and tribulations of any day. I opened my eyes slowly, still basking in the sun, scent and air of the market-place, turned my head on the pillow, toward the window, put the warm blankets under which I'd been sleeping to the side, and with only slightest hesitation, sat up, placed my feet on the floor, stood and ventured off and away. There was coffee to be made, shower to be taken, dressing and errands, responsibilities to be attended. There were buses and subways, throngs and masses of people to face, tend with and to. It was new day, another day, but on this day I felt more assured and more at peace at my core because no matter what would come and for how long it would come, one thing would remain, steady and certain, from now until the end...
Lembrook.

Appendix

Disclaimer:

Lembrook© the village, and it's residents are fictional elements. Any and all resemblance to any place or person now and ever in existence is purely and absolutely coincidental. No claim to the existence of such village or person is made or other-wise implied. This work is a depiction of an actual dream of the author, nothing more, less or other.

Other publications:

Bitter-Sweet Bitterness - A Journal of the Working Homeless

Journal Days - Voices of the Working Homeless

I've Done It! - A Brief Introduction to Self-Publishing

(Available at: <https://judah-a-kessler.selz.com/>)

Madelaine duBois - A Short Story

(Available at: <https://judahakessler.wordpress.com/>)

For further information:

<https://judahakessler.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.minds.com/JudahKessler>

<https://twitter.com/judahkessler>

<http://www.writers.net/writers/114398>

For Self-Publishers:

https://selz.com/?tap_a=8735-a5f61e&tap_s=53887-2aea46

Cover Art: Judah Kessler