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PALM BEACH GOES TO FRANCE

by Larry Freeman

A white cloud of sea gulls erupted into shrieking arcs of flight as they vied for bits of stale bread being tossed from a dark, rocky bluff that framed the eastern shorelines near Bonaventure, Newfoundland. Their raspy noises grated on the nerves of Palm Beach. He watched them warily, waiting patiently for Eva to resume washing the salt spray from his recently polished exterior. He suspected that sea gulls could be hazardous to his health.

Inside the coach, the radio played unique, 15th-century tunes, that reflected the special atmosphere of these particular holidays. Newfoundland and Labrador were celebrating the 500th anniversary of John Cabot Day. Larry was spreading a gaggle of colorful brochures across the couch. As he slowly rearranged them, he studiously contemplated a long list of events that framed Canada's most special event of 1997.

Music, parties, tours of historic sites and various reenactments of history were scheduled throughout the two provinces. The historic arrival of the English caravel, *Matthew*, and its Captain, John Cabot, at Bonaventure on June 24, 1497, was being clearly marked with year-long festivities. Even Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip would arrive soon to comment on the discovery of England's first colony. A replica of the original ship had been built for those who wished to investigate 15th-century seafaring technology.

Surprisingly, Cabot had been an Italian named Giovanni Caboto. He had arrived scarcely five years after Christopher Columbus' startling discovery of the Caribbean. Larry chuckled. The first European cruise lines had been financed by Spain and England, but it was the Italians who knew how to throw a beach party!

After morning brunch, Eva and Larry sat by the ocean sipping tea and discussing the stack of tourist temptations. Palm Beach watched with curiosity. "We'll never have enough time to see everything. The French visas will be ready tomorrow, don't you know?"

Larry responded with a casual shrug. There was never enough time for everything. Maps for a future tour of Alaska were already cluttering the shelves and hiding his radio communication books. "Well, the festivities last the entire year, but we can leave when you're ready," he replied, tossing the responsibility for their summer timetable into Eva's court. He'd let her decide when cold beer with steamed clams and fresh lobster would be replaced by the authentic French cuisine of St. Pierre and Miquelon. Since French champagne was Eva's favorite, he suspected that the Newfoundland tour would be carefully edited.

Shifting the itinerary to Eva was a safe bet. It would eliminate controversy, and leave more time to design a long-range, radio antenna to fit Palm Beach. Twenty meters would be perfect for worldwide communications, day or night. It would be a must for their future trip to Anchorage. "Don't forget, we need to call the ferry line!" Eva added.

Palm Beach gagged. He'd been daydreaming, sailing on a caravel, discovering new lands, building beach fires in the Caribbean and cruising destiny with dashing Italian sea captains. Italians had lots of fun, he had mused. Hmmm, he might even consider becoming Italian. Yes, he just might do that. But now, his daydreams were quite suddenly shattered. They came crashing inward against the reefs of reality. He awoke, startled, heart thumping!

The ferry? What were they talking about? What ferry? Even the short trip from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland had left him seasick. The holding tanks, full and very smelly, had sloshed against his innards until he was dizzy. He'd felt as "green" as his paint job. If he had known how to throw up, he would have.

Plus the gas tanks that had just been filled were seeping raw gasoline through the dried-out hoses that connected the tanks to the filler pipe. The deck captain had given them a withering look and sprayed water underneath to wash the fumes away.

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