

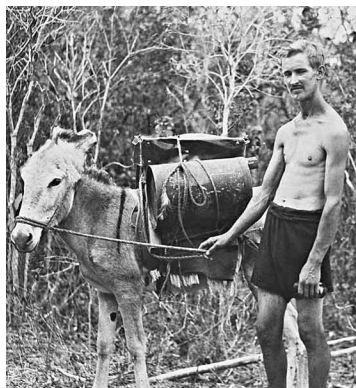
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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MARGRET AND THE BARONESS

This short excerpt describes the disappearance of the Baroness and Philippson and the death of Friedrich Ritter.



Left: Rudolph Lorenz in January, 1934, just two months before the disappearance of the Baroness and Philippson.

Below: The Baroness and Philippson during Captain Hancock's January, 1934 visit to Hacienda Paradiso, and their signatures in John Garth's notebook.

Over the years, the social climate on Floreana did not improve. And then one fine day in March, 1934, as Margret would write later on, the Baroness came up to announce that she and Philippson were off to Tahiti with friends who had just arrived on their yacht. According to Margret, Madam desired Lorenz to "let bygones be bygones," to remain in charge of the hacienda and await further instructions. On March 28th, the Baroness took her leave of Mrs. Wittmer, of Floreana, and quite possibly, of this world. Neither she nor Philippson were ever seen again.

Margaretha Wagner Bausquet
Robert Philippson



Obviously, the story about the yacht and Tahiti was a lie. But whose lie? Did the Baroness lie about the yacht, or did Margret lie about the Baroness? If there were in fact a yacht, then it's conceivable Madam would have gone off to Tahiti to see what mischief she could get into there—in which case she might have stopped by Margret's to leave instructions for Lorenz. But in that case, the world would surely have heard more news later—about the yacht, the friends, and to be sure, the further adventures of the Baroness Eloise Wehrborn de Wagner-Bousquet. Or if the yacht went down in the Pacific, then that news would have eventually reached the papers, and we should at least know its name. But there is no record of a yacht calling at Floreana. There is no record of a yachting party from Galápagos reaching Tahiti. There is no record of a Tahiti-bound yacht lost at sea. There is no record—none but Margret's.

Given the evidence—or in this case, lack of it—it's a bit of a stretch to accept Margret's report at face value. No doubt Madam was entirely capable of lying about whatever suited her purposes, but it's unlikely she would have concocted a nonsensical Tahitian tale on the eve of her demise. On the other hand, if Margret was in on the lethal little surprise that awaited her neighbor, a concocted story about friends on a yacht might serve as a convenient "explanation" for a disappearance—not a very convincing explanation, but better than no explanation at all. It may have been more than enough to satisfy authorities who were as pleased as Margret and family to be rid of this foreign pest.

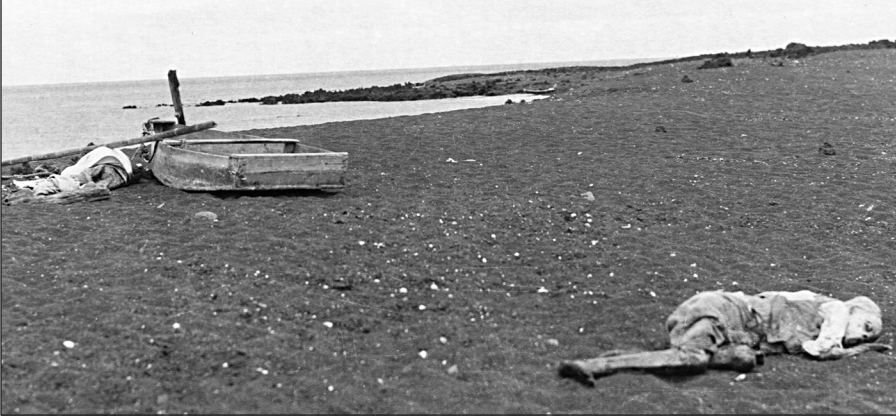
And now with the Baroness conveniently disposed of (one way or another), Lorenz sold off everything Madam had left behind with amazing efficiency, then set about getting himself off the island. Some months later he succeeded in hitching a ride over to Isla Santa Cruz with Trygve Nuggerud, a Norwegian fisherman whose boat *Dinamita* was locally celebrated for its fickle motive power. Not

content with deliverance from Floreana, he persuaded Nuggerud to take him over to nearby Isla San Cristóbal, where he might have better luck booking quick passage to Guayaquil. His plan was to spend a few months there recovering his health before continuing on to Germany and home. Nuggerud made the fatal mistake of obliging him, and the pair sailed off. And that was the last time anyone saw them alive.

In November 1934, Alfred Rudolf Lorenz and Trygve Thorvaldsen Nuggerud achieved some passing fame when news of their whereabouts reached the international press. Their desiccated corpses were discovered on the unforgiving shore of yet another enchanted place, the waterless Isla Marchena. Far to the north of San Cristóbal, far from the wake of friendly ships, far even from the slimmest hope of salvation, the pair waited until it was too late and then they waited some more. Finally, chance brought the American tuna clipper *Santo Amaro* close enough to see a sign of their distress. Atop a lonely pole, a few rags waved in the sightless breeze to mark an unhappy beach and two sun-baked bodies face down and asleep forever on the sand. It was not at first certain which was which, or even if it was them at all. In fact, the *Santo Amaro* crew thought they had found a man and a woman, and that news was relayed by wireless to Los Angeles. By chance, Captain Hancock had planned his next Galápagos departure for later that same week, and he thought the bodies would be Heinz and Margret. But before leaving the harbor he learned that the Wittmers were still quite alive on Floreana, and surmised correctly that it was Lorenz and Nuggerud who lay silently waiting for him on the beach.

But what strange business would have brought them to Marchena in the first place? The best guess is that *Dinamita's* engine had once again failed, and this time for the last time. As the current swiftly carried them away from

their intended destination, captain and passenger probably abandoned ship in the lifeboat, which was also found on the beach. The *Dinamita* itself and another crew member were never found.



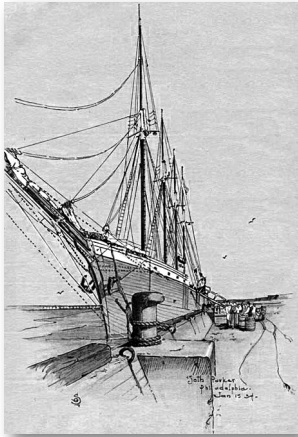
December, 1934. On Isla Marchena, the lifeless bodies of Trygve Nuggerud (left) and Rudolph Lorenz were photographed by the Hancock Expedition a week after they were discovered by the *Santo Amaro* crew.

Hancock was anxious to reach Galápagos, for he had received an ominous note from Ritter. "We hope you will come once more to the island. Then I will tell you what I cannot write, because I have no proof of it." Did Ritter have news of what had really happened to the Baroness? If so, Hancock wanted to know about it. But the doctor would now have to wait upon events. The course of *Velero III* was shaped for Isla Marchena, where the Captain found and photographed his late acquaintances. He regretted that he had arrived too late to do any good, then sailed off to Floreana and the Ritters. And again he regretted a late arrival. The doctor was dead.

Friedrich Ritter, philosopher and physician, prophet and vegetarian, had been done in by a chicken.

A strange end for a strange person, but Ritter was known for frequent dietary lapses. On one such occasion he went to the cupboard for a jar of his own potted pork, but discovered the meat had gone quite bad.

This was on November 13th, 1934. Radio personality Phillips Lord had just arrived on his four-masted schooner *Seth*



Parker, named after the country preacher character he played on his radio show. He looked on as Dore tossed the pork to the chickens, who enjoyed it immensely and expired later in the day.

Left: Phillips Lord's *Seth Parker*.

While Lord was visiting with the Wittmers the following morning, his ship's crew came up to report that the chickens had died of meat poisoning

Never one to quit in the face of adversity, Ritter next set about potting the birds, against such time when he might again feel a lapse coming on. But alas for his skills at preservation, the birds followed the beast's example and turned bad. Ritter, a slow learner when it came to such matters, insisted that with a little boiling they would be as good as new. But he was wrong. Dead wrong. That night he and Dore enjoyed their last supper. The date was November 19th, 1934; earlier this day news of the Marchena bodies reached the American newspapers.

The next morning Ritter was one very sick philosopher. And to make matters worse, there was only one physician in town—him. Dore watched his condition deteriorate for a day or so, then wandered off to find the Wittmers. Margaret was at home and at once accompanied her back to Friedo, where together they presided over the deathbed festivities. Years later, both witnesses described the scene in their

respective books. The accounts offer the reader a superb example of Galápaguan comparative literature:

Dore:

Suddenly he opened his great blue eyes and stretched his arms toward me.

His glance was joyously tranquil.

He seemed actually to say to me: "I go; but promise you will not forget what we have lived for."

It seemed to be as if he would draw me with him.

Then he sank back, and I began to caress his forehead tenderly.

He became quite still, and that was death.

Margret:

Whenever she came near him, he would make feeble movements as if to hit or kick her.

He looked up at Dore, his eyes gleaming with hate.

[He] wrote his last sentence: "I curse you with my dying breath."

His eyes filled with a wild feverish flame.

Dore shrieked, and drew back in horror. Then he collapsed soundlessly, falling back on the pillows.

He had gone.

Friedrich was dead, and on that one point the girls agreed. But that's about all they agreed on, and one of them was lying, but nobody knew then—or now—which one. And Hancock never did find out what was on Ritter's mind. Did Herr Doktor know something about the fate of the Baroness? Did Lorenz? Did the two of them share some terrible secret? Neither were in a position to say. For that matter, what did Margret know?



End of Chapter 15 excerpt