

LOUISE ANDREWS KENT

He Went With
Vasco Da Gama



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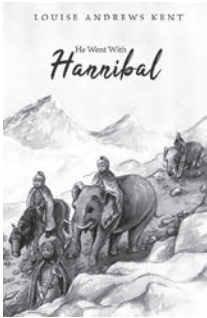
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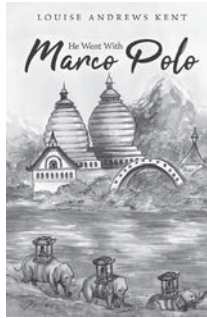
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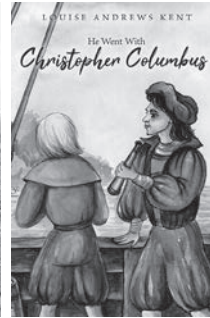
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Hannibal



Marco Polo



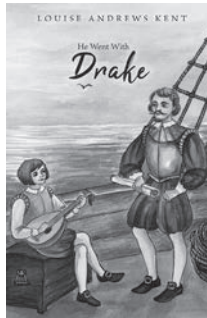
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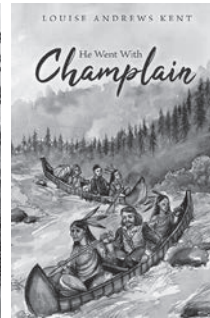
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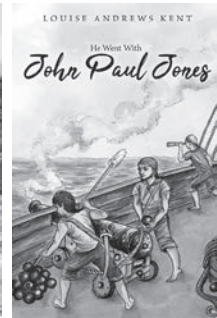
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DEAR PRENT:

Either I don't write fast enough or you grow up too fast. I thought I'd get this book written for you before you were taller than I am, but what can we do about it? Not much at this point, except hope that you will still like to read about the red-headed boy who went with Vasco da Gama.

I remember your asking me once how I began work on a book. This time I began by reading all the books I could find about Portugal. The one I liked best was Philip Marden's *A Wayfarer in Portugal*. For the main facts about Vasco da Gama I used two books published by the Hakluyt Society: Ravenstein's translation of *A Journal of Vasco da Gama's First Voyage* and Gaspar Correa's *Land of India*. Both books have been translated from the original Portuguese, so I was able to get along knowing only a few words.

One thing I did find out was a little about Portuguese pronunciation. When you see an *h* after an *n*, or an *l*, you pronounce the *h* as though it were a *y*. That is: *Senhor* is *Senyor*; *Coelho* is *Co-el-yo*, and so on. Words that in English we'd say in one piece are spoken in two pieces. For instance, the name of Captain Coelho's brother looks like a girl's name, João, but it is *Jo-an*. The Portuguese really write it this way: João, and expect us to know that we must put in an *n* after the *a* and drop off the second *o*. Someone said you ought to pronounce the *n* as if your mouth were full of chewing gum, and you chewed

a few times after you had said the *n*. This seems like a lot of work to me, and I don't like gum anyway. I think it will be all right if you call him 'Jo-an.' After all it's only Portuguese for 'John,' a useful name that sounds much the same whether it's French 'Jean,' Spanish 'Juan,' Dutch 'Jan,' or Irish 'Shane.' The two boys, João Coelho and Shane O'Connor, really had the same first name, though I doubt if they knew it.

Then there is that disagreeable old party, Judge Calves, whose name has nothing at all to do with young cattle—the kind I saw you roping at the Rodeo! Better pronounce it 'Cal-ves'—that will be a little more like it.

Both Shane and Dennis O'Connor remind me a little of you. They both had your habit of drawing pictures. You might have liked them, but you may be glad you didn't have to make the voyage with them when I tell you that the Berrio was somewhere near the size of a fifty-ton schooner. Get your brother to show you one in Bar Harbor some day.

When you come to Kents' Corner we will sing you Shane's songs. We know the tunes because we made them up. Of course, they have to be played on the accordion instead of the harp. We got the ideas for the words mostly from Camoens, who was a great poet in Portugal not long after Vasco da Gama's time. Camoens wrote a long poem about Vasco's voyage to India: interesting, but I like his short ones better.

I never supposed Portuguese people in 1497 would be much like Vermonters in 1937, but I discovered that they liked to make up little tunes and fit words to them, adding new verses whenever they felt like it. So as that's a favorite sport at Kents' Corner, these Portuguese explorers might fit in there better than we'd think offhand.

I don't really expect Vasco to turn up there, but don't think

you aren't expected, Prent. Here is your invitation, printed, you observe. When you get an invitation like that, you answer it *in person*. I know that must be etiquette because it was invented by

Your cousin who sends you this book

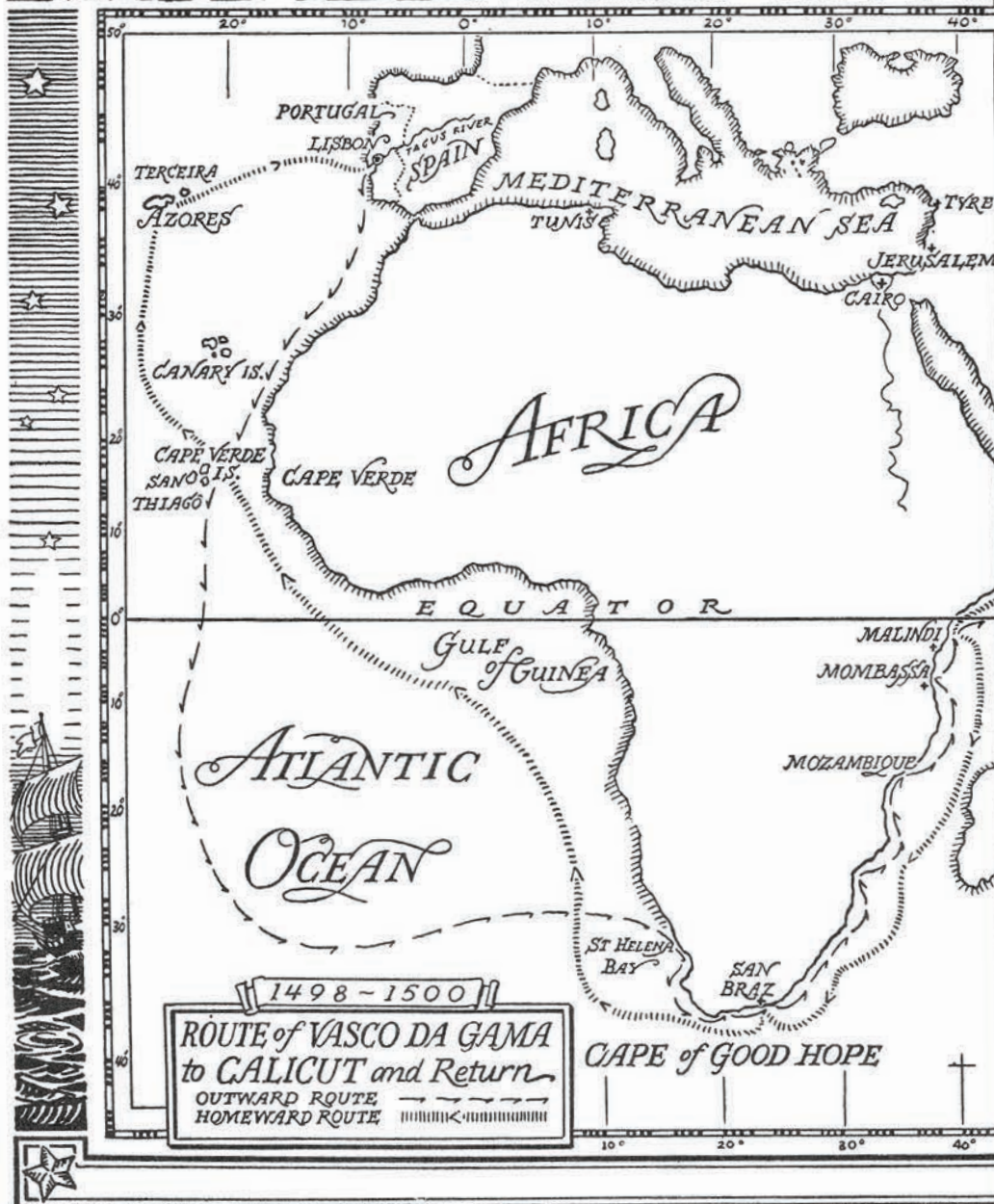
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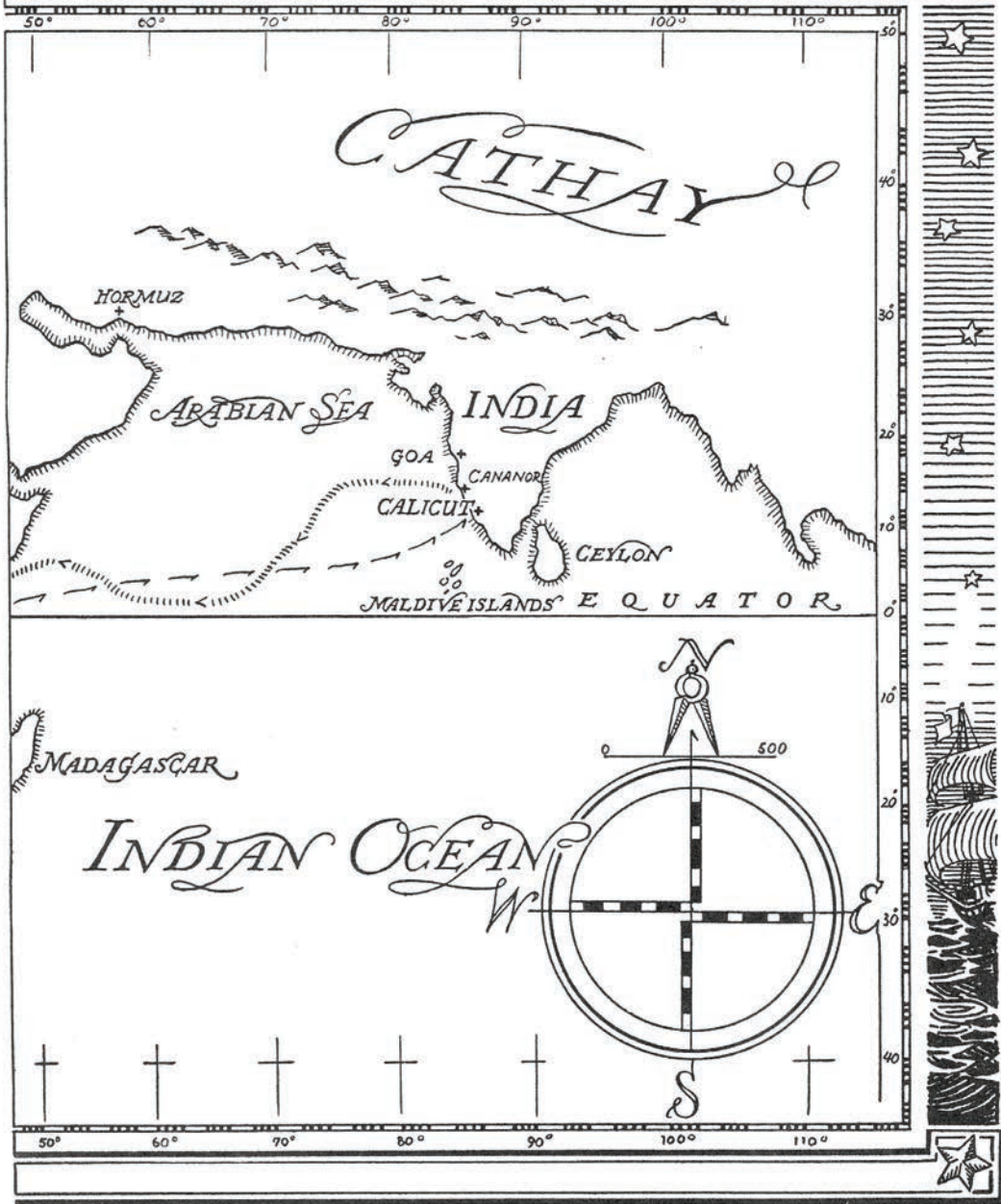
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CHAPTER 1

THE LETTER WITH A SCARLET SEAL



IT WAS growing dark in the Street of the Rat. Far to the west of Lisbon the sun was dipping into the Atlantic, but only a little of its red glow reached into the narrow street that twisted uphill among the old brown houses. They were already old in the year 1497. Columbus had made his famous voyage only five years before.

The tall boy in the black velvet coat hurried up the street after a fish-seller. As he watched the sun he had been thinking about Columbus. He forgot the explorer as the shallow baskets of sardines swaying from the end of a long pole caught his eye. The fishman's crimson sash and cap and baskets swung around a corner.

The boy ran, caught up with the man, panted out his question: 'Can you tell me, please, where the Jew, Abraham Zacuto, lives?'

The fish-seller waved toward a house at the top of the hill. It was taller than those below it. It seemed, João Coelho thought



as he looked at it, like a dark tower against the pink of the western sky.

He took a letter fastened with scarlet wax out of his belt and went up the steps towards an oak door banded with iron and bristling with iron spikes. João was just going to knock on it when he heard voices inside and stumbling footsteps.

The door swung open suddenly, almost hitting João in the face. He sprang aside. A boy about his own age, a redheaded boy with a big red dog at his heels, plunged through the door. The boy landed sitting down on the stone steps. The dog stopped with a scratching of toe-nails and began licking his master's cheek. He whined softly and waved a silky red tail.

From inside an angry voice called: 'This is the last time. The very last. Go back to the bogs you came from. The dog would make a better astrologer...'

The boy on the steps looked up at João Coelho and smiled, showing very white teeth in a freckled face.

'Sure the little man's right!' he said, getting up and shak-

ing himself. 'The dog knows more than most men, don't you, Connemara boy?'

He brushed the dust off his dingy green and brown kilt.

'We'll be going, Con,' he said, and started down the hill.

'Oh, but wait!' João said. 'I have a letter. An important letter for Zacuto the astrologer.'

'It's not for me, then,' said the red-headed boy cheerfully. 'Shane O'Connor's my name. No one writes me letters with grand scarlet seals stuck all over them.'

He spoke in Portuguese, but slowly, with a rise and fall to his voice that made the words sound strange although he said them clearly.

'Nothing's to stop you giving it to him,' Shane O'Connor went on. 'The door's open wide enough. He can't do much more than kick you downstairs, which I must say he's good at. It's not often he does that. He's a good little man if you don't anger him.'

Shane smiled again and spoke once more to the dog.

'Time we left this distressful country, Con. Let's shake the dust of it from our feet.'

'You know a better country, do you?' João said, drawing his eyebrows together.

'You never heard of Ireland, I suppose,' Shane said softly.

'Yes, I have. It's over there.' João waved his hand towards the fading sky. 'I'm no dunce. Portuguese boys know about all countries. The sea's our road.'

Shane said mockingly: 'You've sailed around the Cape of Storms, I suppose.'

'No, but my brother's friend Bartolomeo Diaz did. And we don't call it the Cape of Storms now. It's named the Cape of Good Hope.'

‘You were too busy to go on that trip, I suppose. Perhaps you went with Columbus?’

‘No, I’m waiting for a better man. Columbus just found the back door to India—if he’s found it at all. We Portuguese will find the front door,’ João said proudly.

‘Columbus made one mistake,’ Shane admitted. ‘He took no Irishmen with him. He couldn’t expect to do much without someone from our green land along.’

‘Why did you go away from your green land if it’s so wonderful?’ João asked.

He had forgotten about the letter and the open door behind him as he listened to Shane’s soft voice.

Shane went on: ‘Oh, we Irish go up and down the world, looking at it, to see if there’s a place we like better than our own. If we did we’d take it, but we never have seen one good enough yet.’

‘You’d take the land of India if you wanted it, I suppose,’ the Portuguese boy said with a short laugh.

‘What would we be wanting with it? A dark land full of serpents.’

‘Full of spices. Full of jewels. Full of silks and gold and ivory,’ João corrected.

‘You make it sound pleasant,’ said Shane, moving away from the wall against which he had been leaning. ‘Maybe I’ll have a look at it. Come on, Con.’

He started off again, the red dog at his heels, but a girl’s voice from inside the house called his name and he stopped in the shadow beyond the house.

‘Shane, Shane O’Connor!’ the girl called, but seeing João stopped at the open door.

‘I thought you were Shane,’ she said. ‘Oh, can you catch him?’

He's gone, and now my father's sorry. He didn't mean to turn him away. He knew Shane didn't mean to drop the astrolabe. He's a good boy even if his fingers are all thumbs.'

'Thank you for the compliment, Rachel,' drawled Shane, stepping out of the shadow. 'This is Señor Zacuto's daughter,' he added to João. 'She'll hand the letter to her father, since I have important business down by the river.'

This girl, João Coelho thought, must be younger than his sister Luisa, about thirteen probably, much too young anyway to be standing shivering at the door this cool evening and trying not to cry. The lantern that she held had red and yellow glass in it, so there were sometimes pink and sometimes yellow stripes on Rachel's white brocade dress as she moved the light. The pearl ropes twisted in her soft black hair looked pink when she lifted the lantern up to see Shane better. The two large tears that had rolled out of her dark eyes looked like pink pearls.

'Oh, Shane, you're not going to run away!' she said, so sadly that João heard himself say, to his own surprise: 'He's not, because I won't let him.'

He grabbed Shane's arm and things became rather mixed up. João felt one of his velvet sleeves rip at the shoulder. His feet went out from under him. There was red and yellow light in his eyes and something silky and furry on his chest.

It growled, and the girl in the white dress cried: 'Con, don't bite him. Make him get off, Shane. Go away both of you if you like.'

'Just for that I won't,' Shane said cheerfully. 'Come off him, Con.'

The dog got off João's chest.

'The King's letter!' he thought and sitting up said: 'My letter, where is it?'

Shane helped him up.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'Con thought you were going to hurt me. Here's your letter. And here's Señor Zacuto.'

A fat little man in a black robe with gold and silver stars on it was on the steps. He had a pointed cap on the back of his round bald head.

'I thought I heard a noise,' he said, looking around him vaguely. 'You have a lantern, Rachel. Such a good girl. Always know what is wanted. Hold it so I can see if I have straightened this properly.'

He had a flat round brass thing in his fat hand. It had an openwork plate of brass, fastened to a solid brass plate. It flashed in the red light from the lantern like red gold as Abraham Zacuto turned it over. There were letters and figures engraved on it, but not like any that Joãn had ever seen.

The fat little man in the star-sprinkled robe kept twisting the brass thing and saying the names of the signs of the Zodiac and the names of the stars.

'Aquarius... Pisces... Gemini... Orion... Jupiter...'

Joãn had heard the names often enough. King Manuel was always sending for astrologers and they always talked like that. Joãn thought this was the queerest one he had seen—this jolly round little man who kicked people downstairs and forgot about it; and who studied his astrolabe—that was what the brass thing was called—under a lantern on a night when there wasn't a star in the sky.

Abraham Zacuto said to Shane: 'So as I was saying, Shane O'Connor, when you interrupted me, we are entering a time very favorable for journeys.'

Joãn saw Shane try not to smile.

'When you interrupted me!' Joãn thought, almost smiling

himself. 'That's a funny way to describe kicking somebody downstairs because he dropped an astrolabe.'

The astrologer now noticed Joãn.

'A friend of yours, Shane?' he asked in a friendly voice.

'Yes, indeed,' Shane agreed. 'An old friend. Ten minutes I've known him at least. And he's brought you a letter.'

'Very kind of him,' murmured the astrologer. 'Yes, it's for me. "To the astrologer Abraham Zacuto by the hand of Joãn Coelho." Now, who could be writing to me at this time of night?'

'You might open it,' Rachel suggested.

'True. A remarkable girl! Isn't she a remarkable girl, Shane?'

Shane said she was, and Zacuto broke the scarlet seal.

He ran his round black eyes over the few lines of the letter and began dancing up and down on the stone steps. His black robe swung out around him so that the stars on it seemed to twinkle. His pointed hat fell off. He swung the astrolabe about his head by its brass chain. He laughed and panted and hugged Rachel and patted Shane on the shoulder.

'Didn't I tell you fame and fortune were coming?' he shouted. 'You're a good boy, Shane. You brought me luck out of those bogs of yours. Didn't I say this very day that I was Astronomer Royal once and I should not always be forgotten? Get my instruments, Shane. Get my charts. Rachel, what are you standing there for? Get my cloak. The black one with the hood. For I must cover my face and be secret.'

'Your cloak is here!' Rachel said, bringing it. 'But if it is a secret, my darling little fat father, hadn't you better shout a little more softly and not tell all our neighbors down there?'

The astrologer began to speak in a loud hoarse whisper.

'You are right,' he said. 'What a remarkable girl! Isn't she a remarkable girl, young Señor? Tell your mother I may be late,

Rachel. Come, Shane. Carry the bag. It wouldn't be dignified for me to carry it. I was Astronomer Royal under King João the Second.'

He wrapped himself in the black cloak and bounced off down the Street of the Rat, followed by the red-headed boy with the bag of instruments slung over his shoulder.

The red dog Connemara sneaked along the wall with his silky tail drooping. He knew he would be sent home if the astrologer saw him too soon.

'You'd better go too,' Rachel said to João Coelho. 'Aren't you going to show them the way?'

'Oh, everyone knows the way to the pal—' João began, but stopped in the middle of the word with his mouth open.

'To the palace,' finished Rachel. 'I thought I'd find out. So King Manuel has sent for my father. Thank you for telling me.'

'I did *not* tell you,' João Coelho said angrily, but he said it to the heavy oak door as it slammed in his face. He heard the bar drop into place.

João Coelho pounded on the door.

A small window in the upper part of it opened and Rachel's face appeared behind an iron grating.

'Did you want something, Señor?' she asked politely.

'When shall I see you again?'

'Better ask an astrologer. There's a good one going down the hill, so trot along to the palace, Señor-who-never-tells-anything.'

She started to shut the window as João said crossly: 'If I were to say what I think of you—'

'I wouldn't. I'm sure it's rude.'

'Not at all, I agree with your father. I think you're a very remarkable girl!'