

CHAPTER NINE

TOOTH FAIRY SINT MAARTEN/SAINT MARTIN



photo by Billy Black

THE YACHT

While working on *Tooth Fairy* passers-by were constantly asking us where the yacht got her name. Although there was speculation that the owner must be a dentist, the following story is the one that I heard.

When an enterprising real estate investor approached a bank several years ago about acquiring funding for a mega development, he was met with a less-than-favorable response. The banker sarcastically stated that if the investor thought he could secure funding for such a project, then he must also believe in the *Tooth Fairy*. Needless to say, the investor did eventually obtain funding—obviously from another source—and he now owns one of the most prestigious resorts and real estate developments in the world. Located in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, it has since become famous among the elite, with only the wealthy residing in and visiting the expanse of upper-crust decadence. More than 13,000 acres offer all the amenities of a five-star resort, but with a limited number of people allowed to stay there at any given time, the wealthy have a rare opportunity for privacy and seclusion. Once the development was up and running, the

risk-taking entrepreneur purchased this 147-foot yacht and named it in honor (or in spite) of the skeptical banker.

A beautiful, classic motor yacht built in the '80s, *Tooth Fairy* boasts luxuries at every turn. The four staterooms each have their own marble-surrounded Jacuzzi tub and rain shower, an old-world water closet with bidet, and modern electronic entertainment systems.

The spiral staircase leads from the staterooms up to the circular dining room, and one more floor up is the bar and main salon, complete with a gorgeous baby grand player piano. The separate entertainment lounge on the same level boasts a giant flat-screen, worldwide satellite television and a state-of-the-art stereo system.

Follow the winding staircase one more floor up, or take the four-story elevator, and enter the sun lounge and gym, with a sauna and glass-bottomed outdoor hot tub. This yacht shows true decadence with its floor-to-ceiling windows, rich wood furnishings, comfortable lounges, and plenty of sun decks.

If that's not enough, there is a crew of nine to help the guests enjoy their stay on board. Whether serving luscious meals outdoors in the bow dining area or in the formal dining room, giving rides in the tenders to beaches and snorkeling spots, or arranging the water sports and toys, the crew makes sure the guests' stay on board is a pleasure.

Although this \$15 million yacht may be out of the financial realm of many people, she can be chartered for the modest price of US\$135,000 per week—plus expenses, of course. Many wealthy people have enjoyed chartering *Tooth Fairy* over the years. Speculation around the docks is that it was even chartered by the well-known Rockefeller family.

CRUISING DESTINATIONS

Tooth Fairy cruises the historic waters of the Mediterranean each summer and spends her winters in the turquoise seas of the Caribbean. While in the tropics, she moors in St. Martin, allowing her guests to enjoy the best of both Dutch and French cultures, history, and cuisines, with a splash of Caribbean flavor.

Marigot Bay, on the French side, is one of the few large harbors and marinas on the outside of the island. The harbor still has the well-preserved Fort St. Louis on the hill overlook-



ing the bay, with cannons and other reminders of a stormy history. It's not only a nice walk to the fort, but the spot offers a great view of the bay, reminding modern-day explorers of how the soldiers defended their land centuries ago. Marigot also offers great French restaurants, small baguette and croissant bakeries, and a fresh fish and vegetable market right at the water's edge. It was here that I discovered some of the local Caribbean spices being sold in bulk. The incredible aroma of turmeric, cinnamon, and nutmeg teased my senses long before I saw the vending stall.

The Dutch side of St. Martin offers quite a different atmosphere from the quieter, less populated, casual French ambiance of the north. The Dutch side is more commercialized and serves as the tourist hub, with casinos, duty-free shopping, the international airport, and cruise ship docks.

In the interior of the island is Simpson Bay Lagoon, also known as the Great Pond of Simsonbaai. Most of the marinas are located in the lagoon, such as Port de Plaisance Yacht Club on the French side and the Isle de Sol and Simpson Bay Marina, both on the Dutch side. There is only one way to enter and exit the lagoon that's big enough for yachts—and it's just barely wide enough. There is a drawbridge from Simpson Bay into the lagoon that is the only road from the busy international airport to the rest of the island, so traffic becomes an issue every time the bridge is raised. From a yachtie's point of view, however, there are bigger things to worry about. The width of the bridge opening, a mere 50 feet, is barely wide enough to squeeze many of the mega yachts through. Not that long ago, the bridge opening was considerably narrower, but one wealthy yacht owner was so determined for his yacht to enter the bay that he actually paid to have the opening widened to

accommodate his yacht, enlarging it to the current width. Thanks to that yacht owner, vessels like *M/Y Limitless*, measuring a whopping 48-foot beam, can now enter the lagoon with a spacious 12 feet on either side.

CAST OF CHARACTERS: THE CREW

When yacht crews have a day off, you'll most likely find them at the Sunset Bar & Grill, a St. Martin landmark at Maho Bay. This beach bar not only offers one of St. Martin's best beaches, great conch fritters, and exciting turtle races, but it is also located directly under the approach for the international airport. The bar even has an air traffic control receiver so the patrons can hear the comings and goings of the planes and the chatter with the traffic controllers. One of the "must do's" is to stand on the beach as a 747 jumbo jet takes off or lands, weathering the sandblast as the jets kick up the beach sand or trying to touch the landing gear of an incoming jet. Because the airstrip is just barely long enough to accommodate the jumbo jets from Europe and the United States, the pilots must come in as low as possible in order to land the plane successfully before running off the other end of the runway into Simpson Bay lagoon. Rumor has it, though, that the pilots prefer to approach as low as possible to get a better view of the topless sunbathers on the beach below.

One Sunday we were taking in the rays and the excitement of the jets coming and going on the beach when it got a little too exciting. I looked up from my sandy towel as I felt the engines of a jumbo jet blasting the sand from the beach as it revved its engines, preparing to take off.



Glancing toward the ocean side, I noticed the lights of an approaching 747. I didn't think too much of it, returning to my sunbathing, until the reality of the situation sank in. I nudged the captain on the towel next to me and pointed in both directions, to confirm that I wasn't seeing things. As we sat there, unable to comprehend what was about to happen, the jet on the tarmac released its brakes and started racing down the runway. Looking skyward, we saw that the jet was still approaching, almost over our heads now. We froze with petrified anticipation of the impending disaster. Before long, other beach goers had noticed the flaw in the usually well-choreographed maneuvers as well. We all stood there gaping. If these two mega jets collided, not only would they and their hundreds of passengers perish, but they would take the terminal, the beach, and probably the surrounding hotels and restaurants with them. The toll would be horrific. As the departing plane launched itself from the runway and became airborne, the incoming pilot spotted it and suddenly lurched upward and veered to the right, narrowly missing the rising plane. We weren't close enough to the air traffic controllers' speaker at the bar to know exactly what transpired then, but I'm sure there were a few unemployed controllers, effective immediately.

A day off may also find the crew heading for the surf on the windward side of the island or the nude beach on the French side the island. Although a \$1 bus fare would take you almost anywhere on the island, we preferred bicycling the island. It is volcanic, making it quite mountainous in spots, with the highest point of Pic Paradis climbing to over 1,200 feet. However, the main roads tend to follow the coastline, with very few serious hills, so the biking is just my speed.

One Sunday we decided to bike from Marigot to the Sunset Beach bar via the west side of the lagoon. We'd just moved the yacht from the Dutch side of the lagoon to Marigot Bay in anticipation of the

owners' impending arrival, and although we had traveled the main road between Marigot and the airport, we had never taken the western road, which is so unused it seldom appears on maps. Always up for a new adventure, we struck out on our bikes, heading west. At first the small road proved to be interesting, offering small beaches and quaint restaurants along the way.

Before long, though, the road dwindled and traffic was almost nonexistent. Although the scenery was pretty, with houses and pretty gardens interspersed in the wild tropical brush, the pathway became hilly and a bit more challenging than we had anticipated. Not only had our navigation preparedness fallen by the wayside, but too late we realized we hadn't brought sunscreen, drinking water, or even a shirt to put over our already-crispy bathing suit sunburn lines. With no shops around and none coming into sight, we wondered if we'd made a mistake and the ride was about to become a little too adventurous for us.

We panted and peddled, sweat running profusely over our red skin, and pushed onward in hopes of finding relief. Just as we were weakening, we thankfully came across a tacky tourist shop that offered water, sunscreen, and T-shirts, for which we were happy to pay the high tourist prices. It was just coming up to noon when we arrived at the beach, and we'd already had our fill of exercise, sun, and dehydration. Now for an afternoon of sitting on the beach! We opted instead for the shade of the tiki hut bar and a good supply of water and beer.

The *Tooth Fairy* crew of nine represented many different countries from around the world. Although yachts that fly the U.S. flag can hire only Americans for crew, those yachts registered in other countries—*Tooth Fairy* was registered in the Marshall Islands, for example—can have crew from around the world to work on her. When I was a part of the crew, we had other workers from South Africa, Scotland, the United States, New Zealand, and Canada, making a really eclectic mix of cultures.

Although I spent time cooking on board *Tooth Fairy*, I was known as a "floater." Since I had worked for several years on smaller yachts, I had experience as a stewardess as well as a chef. If a stew was needed, I filled in. Also, because of my strong boating background and because this was a vintage yacht that required a great deal of mechanical help from time to time, I also filled in as third engineer when necessary. It became a standing joke in the crew mess over morning coffee, with the other crew asking me which hat I was wearing that day. One morning the South African deckhand, after contemplating my diverse skills and my many years of traveling around the world working in various jobs, smiled and said, "Marianne, you really are a versatile vagabond." The name stuck and became my nickname.

CUISINE

These menu items and wine choices reflect the French influence that is so alive on this tropical island. The warm goat cheese salad is a popular dish on the French side, as are the soufflés and crêpes, coquille, quiche, and wines.

