The Amulet

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It had been twenty new fires since the last of DeSoto’s army had landed and marched north from the Bay of Espirito Santo in 1539. Tanpa was approaching full manhood. He was taller than most of the young men of his village and his skin was much lighter in color. A birth defect made him even more distinctive as two of his toes were grown together on each foot.

But Tanpa had grown up among a scarred tribe of people. A trail of ravage was left in the wake of the advancing army of DeSoto. Those remaining, suffered through the rebuilding of their villages, sacred shell mounds, and attempts to salvage their lives. Those few months following the landing of the strangers would be remembered as the ‘terrible times’. Among the survivors were many women who were left pregnant and cast aside as used utensils of male animalistic desire by the ‘conquistadors’, as they called themselves.

The Cacique and Shamon met with the principal men of the tribe to decide the fate of the children born of their women who were raped by the Spanish. Traditionally, names were passed from father to son, but it was decreed that the first male child born of these unions would be named for the village of his birth. Other male children would be named after the first animal the mother saw after birth and female children after the first bird the mother saw.

**DE SOTO’S FAVORITE**

Tanpa’s mother, a handsome woman, had won favor with one of DeSoto’s captains and her life was spared and she became his personal attendant. He had shared her thatched house during his stay in her village and they knew their lives together were only for the present. Her memories of him were softened by his kindness to her.

The terrible times had changed the destiny of Tanpa’s people and the tribes near and far who were touched by DeSoto’s army. He knew the story well. From Cuba, DeSoto had sent Juan de Anasco, the chief pilot, the year before to find a suitable landing site to unload the Andalusia horses, mules, pigs, and over a thousand men with supplies and armor for his invasion of the land called Florida. The coast near the huge shell temple mounds had been selected for the landing of the great ships as they came into the open bay and the conquistadors had made their base camp in his coastal Timucan village. Their purpose was to claim this land for their native Spain; to take back gold, jewels or other valuables; and to teach the people found there about their God.

The Timucan village called Tanpa had been selected because DeSoto knew that in the village with many shell mounds would be people he could subdue and capture and use for slaves to carry the heavy supplies and equipment north into the interior of this new land.

**GIANT CANOES APPEAR**

In the spring of that year, the scallops had begun migrating from the deep Gulf waters into the bay of the coastal village. The people were gathering them when they first
THE AMULET
sighted the giant canoes with white clouds hovering over them coming into the bay. As the great ships came closer, the sunlight played on the shiny armor and helmets the foot soldiers wore, and they could be seen by the natives from atop the mounds. Brightly colored banners were hoisted up the masts with strange designs.

The smell of penned animals on the ships was blown toward the shore; a strange stench to the natives. The horses began braying as they smelled fresh water, green grass and the foliage of the land and they became more restless. This startled the cargo of pigs and they began their high-pitched squealing. These strange noises drifted to shore. This story had been told to Tanpa many times by his mother and each time, as he grew older, he understood a little more.

The half native-half Spanish children of the tribe were scorned and were assigned the hardest tasks of the village. Tanpa and those like him were constant reminders to the survivors of the terrible times of Spanish cruelty.

**THE FIREWOOD DETAIL**

Tanpa was assigned the chore of bringing firewood to the village every day. He would leave the village at dawn and be gone for most of the day. Through his searching, he was familiar with the area around his village. Most days, he used the canoe, paddling up and down the coast and into the rivers and streams to find firewood. He knew all the animal trails, the various watering spots, and the rivers and streams that flowed near his coastal village. In his search for firewood, he became an expert hunter and many times upon his return to the village he would have a deer piled on top of the wood in a canoe he pulled behind him. Tanpa was known for his height and strength; his strength gained it partly by this arduous work. He was the winner of most tribal games, but his rewards were never enough to satisfy him.

He was the first born in his village of a native mother and Spanish father and his tribesmen scorned his mother through no fault of her own. The tribe would not permit her or the other women who bore light-skinned Spanish children to have any part in the tribal ceremonies or rituals. They had made a special place for themselves at the end of the village near the turtle crawls and the manatee traps. Crabs and fish were kept alive and fed in the salt water traps near the village. No native man would take one of these women as his mate so the mothers and father-less children had grown accustomed to their life of work, including the care and feeding of these delicacies which belonged to the whole tribe. It was a lowly job, but necessary if they wanted to live and eat; as without a husband, these mothers were dependent on the village for all their needs.

Another fine article of accurate historical detail with a fictional flair, "The Amulet," by Kenneth IV. Mulder, Immediate Past President of The Tampa Historical Society, appears here.

In the historical writings of Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda, a shipwrecked lad who lived among aboriginal Indians of the Central West Coast of Florida for 17 years circa 1575, wrote of a large Indian village named TANPA. The name was later changed by map makers to Tampa, our beloved city, whose beautiful bay shares the same name. It was this bay that DeSoto named Espirito Santo when he arrived here in 1539. "The Amulet" is a beautiful story that follows DeSoto’s landing in the Tampa Bay area, doorway to the New World in North America.

TONY PIZZO
Hillsborough County Historian
A GIFT FROM DAD

During the years that Tanpa’s mother raised him, she spoke often of his fattier. She gave him a small amulet made of a hard substance, that looked like two sticks, one laid across the other. It hung from his neck on a strand of the same material which gleamed brightly in the sunlight. Tanpa wore it constantly and proudly, as it was the only thing his father had given to his mother.

The women were not the only ones to suffer by the hands of the Spanish invaders. The men of the coastal tribes were also brutally treated by the Spanish. Some were instantly killed. Those who fought bravely were powerful warriors. Their accuracy with a bow and arrow tipped with shark’s teeth points was devastating to the conquistadors. But they were no match for the powerful cross bows and arquebus (long sticks that spit fire). The horses, never before seen by these people, struck terror in them. When the men were captured after a battle, the Spanish were brutal and cruel, cutting off their hands, cars or fingers, leaving them disfigured for life.

Many were forced to be slaves and made to carry the heavy armor and supplies the Spanish brought with them. Steel collars or leg irons were applied so they could not escape. They were carried in bondage for many miles from their villages before being released, to be replaced with slaves from a new village.

LIFE AS A HALF-BREED

For some time, Tanpa had wanted to leave the coastal village and follow the trail northward where his father had gone long before. There was no future for him in the village, scorned as he was; but, it was the only home he knew. He knew he could never hold a tribal office or take part in any of the sacred rituals. His mother’s recent death had left his life empty. He could not take a wife from among the native village girls and his days were spent without purpose.

Yet, Tanpa's life as a half-breed was not nearly as bad as the banished members of the tribe. He knew what happened to men declared outcasts; the loneliness, scorn and solitude of their lives. He came upon many of the outcasts in his wood hunting trips. Many had gone completely mad and were no better than the wild animals who shared their part of the woods. He was forbidden to speak to them, and they to him.

His decision was made while chopping the trash fish to feed the sea turtles. The osprey, who's nest had been built high in the black mangrove tree nearby, came screeching and swooping in for his free handout of fish scraps too. Tanpa loved these birds. Many of the village rituals and dances took their form from the mastery of their flight.

The bald eagle, their nest high in the virgin pine trees along the coast, were the supreme masters of the air. The buzzards (the death birds) were plentiful with their rookeries everywhere. The fierce Caloosa tribe to the south, enemy of the Timucans, worshipped these hideous rednecked birds and were called the Buzzard Cult.

THE EAGLE’S NEST

Tanpa knew the birds well. The eagle, who mates for life, builds his nest strong to be used year after year until a storm destroys it or the tree rots down. If this happens, they
stay in the same area and build again. The eagle’s nests along the coast and inland rivers were mileposts for the Timucan people. Tanpa knew them all as did others in his tribe.

As a young boy, he had compassion for birds and doctored them with herbs and aloe oil, and saved many of them from death.

His decision made, he knew that he would leave today on his search for wood and would never come back to his birthplace. Past the manatee pens he walked. No more would he have to tend them. Gathering his bow and shark tooth tipped arrows, his throwing stick and shell tools he had made, he headed for the canoe for his daily wood gathering trip. No one noticed anything different as he had done this most of his life. Walking through the main village toward the huge temple mound at the other end. Tanpa looked up at the houses of the Shamon and Chief built high on top. As a young boy, he played in the many storerooms where the ceremonial masks of the tribe and the village’s winter supplies of maize, dried beans, pumpkins and nuts were stored; along with the discarded relics left behind by the Spanish in his village.

**GUMBO LIMBO TREES**

He and the other children had played with the old helmets and broken swords made of a similar hard substance as his amulet. They had gathered berries and nuts in the many
discarded colorful olive and wine jars the Spanish left behind. This was the temple mound. Built of shells from the sea over a long period of time, it faced east so the rays of the sun were seen first from its big flat top every morning. The sacred rituals were performed here.

Before turning his eyes away from the temple mound, he stared at the wood-carved bird with gilded eyes that was perched on top of the Shamon's house. It seemed to stare at him and say, "follow the trail north, you half-breed. Be gone and away from us."

The giant gumbo limbo trees surrounding the temple mound were in full bloom now. The bright green foliage stood out against the dark brown bark. Soon the pods would pop open and the bright red seeds would drop to the ground as they had done for eons of time. These giant trees were also a sacred symbol of his tribe, like the bird with gilded eyes on the Shamon's house. The trees were valuable to the tribe, yet mysterious. They provided the red seeds for decorating and trading; wood for rafts, bowls, facemasks for rituals; floats for nets; the sap and resin for treating ailments of the old people. His people loved the color red and the seeds were eagerly gathered by all members of the village. Holes were bored through them and they were strung as beads. Combined with brightly colored sea shells, they made ornaments which they placed on their arms and legs to further decorate their tattooed bodies.

BEST HUNTER IN VILLAGE

Tanpa paused and looked down at his ankles at his own ornaments made of these red seeds and remembered the Shamon had given them to him as the prize for the best hunter in the village. This was the only honor he could ever get as a half-breed.

Leaving the temple mound, he passed the large pile of wood he had gathered and stacked, soon to be used at the Ripe Green Maize ceremony when the annual new fire would be built. He would miss this part most of all, as this was the annual thanksgiving to the god his village worshipped. Near the wood pile, he bent over and picked several slivers of the aloe plant and placed them in his pouch, preparing for cuts, scratches, or burns he may get on his venture north. He had already packed smoked fish and strips of dried venison and was ready to go. The canoe, worked from a fired-out cypress log, belonged to the tribe, but as the woodman it was his to use for his work. The Shat-non demanded that firewood be in the village at all times and Tanpa had proved to be the best wood gatherer in the village.

He passed his mother's place of burial and touched again the hard surface of the amulet he wore at his neck. He thought of his
mother’s lifetime of caring for him; but he could do nothing further for her.

He pushed the canoe off from the shore and paddled north from his coastal village following the shoreline of the bay. Traveling four days brought him to another village whose people were akin to his tribe at the mouth of a large river. On his journey, he had killed a large deer and upon landing, took it to the village and laid it down next to the village central fire - a tribute to peace and offering of his friendship. He knew of this village and had been near here on his wood gathering trips.

CAMPFIRE WELCOMED

Fresh venison was a welcome gift and the principal men of the village were pleased. His ankle decorations distinguished him as a great hunter as the practice of honoring their hunters with the circle of red seeds was used by this tribe also.

The Shamon of this village assigned people to clean and dress the gift, while the women of the village prepared other dishes to go with the fresh meat. It was near night fall when Tanpa arrived at the village and the campfire was a welcome sight. The Cacique and the principal men asked him many questions about people they knew and who were kin to his people, as the two villages were in the same area confederation of the Timucan clan. This village had also experienced the atrocities of the Spanish army. Their former Cacique, Hirrihiqua, had his nose cut off and his aged mother was fed to the dogs of the conquistadors.

Tending the campfire that night were three old women who constantly worked with the fire. Standing in the shadow of the outer circle of the firelight, he saw the form of a young girl. When he looked her way, he caught a glimpse of a smile. She finally came closer carrying wood to the old women. In the light, he was immediately struck by her light skin—a half-breed like himself about his age. He inquired of the Shamon for the name of the girl as she dropped her pile of wood and retreated with the three old women.

"She is Shira (the red bird), the daughter of the wood woman," he was told. "She lives on the edge of the village by the swamp."

SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL

Tanpa was up early the following morning. The village was still asleep as he walked toward the edge of the village. He saw her near the spring. She was beautiful. Her light skin was radiant with the first rays of sun. Her eyes were bright and she stared at him with admiring approval. He was different; taller and walked with a confident stride. He was not like the young men her age in her village. He held out his hand to her and she responded. Their palms softly touched in the symbol of peace and friendliness. A strong attraction began with friendship for them both.

Tanpa fell welcome in this river village and postponed his travels north for a while. He learned from these people and shared with them the brightly colored shells he brought with him. He learned of their method of decorating their clay utensils and the use of flint. He saw much more of the hard shiny material of his amulet and had metal (which the Spanish brought) explained to film. He tried new foods. He gave the girl, Shira, aloe plant and stingray spikes to be used as needles to sew the heavy skins.

One morning, he met Shira again at the spring at the edge of the village. The crows and blackbirds who lived in the swamp near
the village became startled and flew from their perches, circling and squawking in an endless chatter. Shira spoke, "Someone is approaching the village from the north by way of the stream."

**TRADING PARTY ARRIVES**

"The stream begins at the water god’s spring to the north about three nights travel away and empties into the swamp," she told him. "My village trades with the people from there. It must be the traders."

Inland tribes brought many items for trading including red ocher, blue dye, flint for arrows, and copper for knives and utensils to the river and coastal tribes. They traded for smoked fish and roe, pearls, alligator hides, bright sea shells, shark’s teeth, sap and resin from the gumbo limbo tree for treating gout, and caged red birds and parakeets that the tribes from the north treasured.

There were both men and women in the trading party and they had come in three -canoes with their wares. Tired and hungry, the Shamon bid them welcome. Oysters and clams, both raw and cooked, were offered; smoked fish and fresh venison, fresh spring water flavored with wild honey, coonie bread, nuts, berries and palm hearts (seasoned with meat of squirrel and rabbit).

Tanpa and Shira joined the village in welcoming the traders. One who was light-skinned as Tanpa spoke first. His features were as Tanpa's, with the mixed blood of the Spanish. Tanpa immediately noticed the motif of the Spider Cult on the shell amulet tied around the hatchet handle of the light-skinned trader.

**COMMON SIGN LANGUAGE**

Words of understanding by both tribes, together with a common sign language, was used for trading. After all exchanges were made, Tanpa approached the speaker and admired his hatchet. It was beautifully carved of flint with markings of many designs on the handle. The amulet with the Spider Cult motif hung prominently on the hilt. Tanpa knew the traders were not of the Spider Cult (the people of his birthplace), and asked the trader where he got the amulet. The trader said, "From the tall, white-haired Spaniard who lives in the village near the stone cross marker." At this point, he noticed the bright object Tanpa wore around his neck. "The stone marker looks like that," he told Tanpa.

"Is the white soldier still alive?" asked Tanpa.

"Yes," the trader told him, "but old now. His hair is white and he walks with a bad limp. He lives with my mother's sister and has been in the area for twenty new fires. He was wounded when the big battle was fought. Our Chief spared his life because he was a brave man and lay on the battlefield two days barely alive. He had crawled to a stream and lived on snails and mussels. Near death, he was found and brought to our village."

**TANPA IS LEAVING**

"I would like to meet him some day and learn more of my father's people," said Tanpa.

The traders never spent the night in a strange village. When trading was concluded, they would start again on their return journey.
making camp along the way. The canoes were much lighter now with the heavy flint stone and copper unloaded along with the heavy leather bags of ocher. The trader like Tanpa. He was different from these village people; more like himself. He invited Tanpa to travel north in their canoes. He offered to take him to see the white-haired man he spoke of.

Tanpa had no further need of the canoe he had brought with him and he gave it to the Shamon for the village. The Shamon was pleased. Tanpa explained to the Shamon that he was leaving and asked for Shira to be allowed to go with him as his wife. Her bondage as a wood woman would be ended if she found a man who would take her from the tribe. With approval given for Shira to leave, she packed her few personal belongings, said goodbye to her mother and the wood women, and followed Tanpa and the traders through the swamp to the river landing where the canoes were left.

THE SPANISH TRAIL

New sights, different birds, and strange trees and bushes were observed on the canoe trip north with the traders. Tanpa and Shira slept together under the deerskins she brought, making a mattress of soft pine needles gathered each night as they made a new campsite on the banks of the stream they traveled. Tanpa observed the trees with bright sun-colored fruit growing in abundance. The trees were familiar to him as the trail the Spanish army traveled was clearly marked with these trees which had grown up from the seeds the conquistadors dropped as they ate the fruit they brought from Cuba.

The traders told Tanpa that they bagged them in skin sacks and took them north of their own village for trading to the sandhill people. The orange trees the conquistadors unknowingly planted along their trail would not grow in the cold area. The people had learned to love this new delicacy and had found many uses for the skin and the juice of this fruit.

The traders now approached their village. The smell of the sulpher water from the spring hung heavy in the air as they neared the landing of the traders village and the stream they had traveled had broadened into a larger river, clear as glass. Three nights they had camped with three days of travel. Tanpa and Shira were tired but excited as they started a new adventure and life together.

The trader's village was much larger than Tanpa's coastal village and Shira's river village. A crowd was gathering on the landing to greet the returning traders. The children were excited about the light-skinned man and woman with them. Shira and Tanpa immediately recognized that a large number of young adults about their age had the same light skin and different features, as well as a number of younger children. Tanpa commented on this and one of the traders told him, "I was but a youngster myself, but I well remember the amorous Spanish. DeSoto's conquistadors were here about three months and both of my sisters have light-skinned children born after the Spanish marched north."

WELCOMING CROWD

The trader was also a sub-chief and immediately took Tanpa and Shira through the welcoming crowd to the main Shamon's house and explained to the Shamon that the old white-haired Spaniard living near the stone cross might be a friend of Tanpa's
father. The Shamon welcomed Tanpa and Shira to the village and they realized that here they would not be outcasts.

The Shamon talked of the crippled Spaniard, now in his declining years, who had lived a fruitful life here with the village people. He, who had come to conquer and exploit, when left to die by his countrymen, had instead, become loved and respected. A devout and religious man, he used a cross carved in flint to say his prayers every morning and evening. He had taught the village people many things, customs from his Iberian peninsular, and had learned their native language. He also taught them many Spanish words and the meaning of the cross.

He had helped his own kinsmen too. Shipwrecked Spaniards from the coast were brought here by the native people. The old man would help them to regain their health. Some stayed near the spring, but many tried to make their way towards the northwest to New Spain. But those who stayed, wounded or crippled, blended in with the native people, producing more of the new race of people, Spanish-Indians.

BIG SULPHUR SPRING

Anxious to meet the old Spaniard, Tanpa and Shira were led by their friend the trader toward the sulphur spring. The orange trees were plentiful around the big spring where the conquistadors had a base camp for many months during their march into the interior. A big coral head boulder (petrified flint) marked the big sulphur spring that flowed into the stream they had traveled.

The trader told Tanpa the story of the flint cross. Blacksmiths who came with DeSoto’s army had pitched their forges near the spring and had used the cold fresh water to temper and cool the shoes of the horses and to sharpen, mend and remake the toledo swords, pikes and lances the foot soldiers carried. Tanpa began to understand metal as the hard substance of his amulet and the relics stored in the Shamon’s house in his coastal village.

It was here, he was told, the friars and priests encouraged the master blacksmiths to permit the apprentices to carve a christian cross on top of the coral flint rock. The result was a perfect cross, the lines formed of raised and carved out sections and a carved circle surrounding it.

The trader told Tanpa more stories of these Spanish invaders. Their king had told DeSoto and his conquistadors that their God would go with them and they should build this symbol of their faith along their journey. Other crosses were erected of wood. At other campsites, two trees were nailed together and left to stand, but time rotted them away. The stone carved cross on this coral flint rock would last for eternity. At last, Tanpa knew the meaning of his treasured amulet.

OLD SPANIARD DIES

The Shamon had told Tanpa that the old Spaniard had taken sick about three days ago. When they arrived at his house near the stone cross, they found his woman alone there. She told that she and other women of the village had used every know herb and tonic to cure his fever, but to no avail. Last night he died. His body was now being taken to the stone cross at the sulphur spring to prepare for burial.

Tanpa followed the procession and watched as the women removed all of his tattered clothing except for a loin cloth about his middle. The women rubbed red ocher on his body as was the custom at death. The one
rubbing his feet was his woman who had lived with him all of his lifetime in the village. Tanpa and Shira walked over to the burial ritual and in her wrinkled old hands, the woman was rubbing first red ocher on his feet and toes and then the final sacred blue. They both saw it. On both feet, the two toes next to the large one, were grown together.

The Shamon, dressed in his finest painted deerskins and feathers, led the way through the wild orange trees a short distance away to the burial place. The old Spaniard would be forever in the midst of his orange trees, near the stone carved cross and the spring of sulphur water he loved.

Their decision already made, Tanpa and Shira stayed at the village by the spring and with other half-breeds started a new race of people in the new world - half aboriginal and half Spanish - the half-breed, Spanish-Indian.