

The Story of My Island

I was a stunning Arabian bride—
Dina Harobi. Those Portuguese, though
they called me Isle of Swans, didn't find me good
enough, would you believe? Gallant Dutch ships,
blown off course, then began flirting with me

in 1598. It took them *just*
forty years to settle. They then used me
for about seventy years (time during
which I briefly rejected them but they

coaxed me again), keeping at bay all my
French and British beaux, despite having no
military force. They bequeathed me their
main vessel's name—*Mauritius*. Cute deer were

brought, released, and hunted for fun. I don't
know why history complains that the Dutch
couldn't bear my mood swings. Maybe they just couldn't
face the fountain of rats flooding them. Did

they grow vindictive? It seems, as they pushed
the dodo down their towering throats and
it never came back, as they emptied the
shell of my giant tortoise, as they slew

my virgin forests for black ebony,
which they carried on their knightly chest to
their land. Would you believe, they even skimmed
the ambergris off my briny froth? But

they were sweet enough to adorn me with
the hues and scents of rice, maize, sugar cane,
tobacco, indigo, and cassava.
They flogged obstinate slaves, burned them, or broke

their bones. Cadavers were hanged as snacks for
birds; that wasn't sweet! And when they found that my
soil didn't have the jewels they were looking
for and my ebony was exhausted
they ran out of patience. The coup de grâce:
1695. That savage cyclone.
My disheartened Dutch lovers forsook me
in the arms of maroons, and the French, who
christened me Île-de-France, their new belle.



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