

THE HIGH BARBAREE

*Charles Nordhoff &  
James Norman Hall*

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THE  
*HIGH BARBAREE*

by  
CHARLES NORDHOFF  
*and*  
JAMES NORMAN HALL

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*To*  
*CHARLES*  
*and*  
*MARGARET CURTIS*

# The High Barbaree

## *One*

The hundred and sixtieth meridian of east longitude bisects the island of Guadalcanal. The same meridian, nearly a thousand miles to the north, narrowly misses Ponapé, in the Caroline Group. Truk lies west of Ponapé, Kusaie east-southeast. Six hundred miles to the southeast and below the line is Nauru. Seven hundred miles west of Nauru, but above the Equator, is a tiny island with a formidable name: Kapingamarangi. From the point where the hundred and sixtieth meridian crosses the Line, no island closer than three hundred miles is laid down on modern charts.

The islands of this distant sea, with their wild inhabitants and outlandish names, were only less familiar than the New Bedford waterfront to the American whalers of a century ago. In the great days of sperm whaling, shortly before the Civil War, this region was a part of the Line Grounds, resorted to by schools of cachalots at certain times of the year. Here the beamy old vessels from New Bedford and Nantucket filled their barrels with oil and spermaceti, some to be carried home in their own bottoms, some to be transhipped from Russell, New Zealand. On the rich volcanic islands, where a runaway sailor stood no chance of escape and hogs, fruit, and vegetables abounded, the skippers would give their men a run ashore, and fill their ships for a week or two with Micronesian girls. The Yankees were the great explorers of these out-of-the-way corners of the Pacific; they were on the lookout for whales and bound nowhere in particular. At night they hove-to, like old East Indiamen; at daybreak they made sail once more, with men aloft, on the watch for the bushy, forward-slanting spouts of their prey.

When petroleum put an end to sperm whaling, and steam, little by little, put an end to sail, these regions, formerly frequented by whalers, were rarely visited by white men who now kept to the arbitrary sea lanes. A few vessels, most of them flying the British flag, still plied among the islands, in search of copra and indentured labor. At the close of the last war, the Marshalls and

Carolines, mandated to Japan, were closed to other navigation, becoming forbidden islands to any but Japanese, where the farsighted Yamamoto was building great air and naval bases in defiance of the League of Nations.

The Japanese gave no encouragement to cartographers, nor to the British and American scientists who wished to study Micronesia; white travelers who wanted a glimpse of the mandated islands found visas impossible to obtain. At the outbreak of the present war, our charts of the Caroline and Marshall groups were old and unreliable. Save for a scattering of Germans, the whalers had been the only men of white blood to know these regions well, but they had trusted more to seamanship than to sextant and chronometer. Today, with the tide of Japanese triumph ebbing fast, Americans have again penetrated the lonely regions their forefathers sailed.

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On a morning late in the year 1943, calm reigned over a wide stretch of that equatorial sea. The constellations of the tropics paled with approaching dawn and the first shafts of sunlight revealed an unbroken horizon fringed with stationary tufts of fair-weather cloud. A flock of pelagic birds of the gannet kind rose from the water and trailed off to begin their day's fishing. The sea was empty in all directions save one. Scarcely more than a mile distant from where the birds had rested, a navy patrol bomber rode the gentle swell, a sea anchor keeping her head to a light easterly breeze.

She was a Catalina, or PBY, one of those dependable old ships of the American and British navies, built in San Diego and known and admired by airmen the world over. Catalinas had fought bitter combats with German subs in the Caribbean, marked down the mighty *Bismarck* for destruction, helped turn the tide of war in the Aleutians, and torpedoed Japanese men-of-war in the Battle of Midway.

The name on her hull—*High Barbaree*—and the squadron insignia, a spitting tomcat, were half obliterated by splinters of AA shell. Both of her engines had been wrecked beyond repair and her wing riddled by flak.

Prone on the wing, near the starboard engine nacelle, Lieutenant Alec Brooke kept watch. He was a tall spare fellow in his early twenties, with unkempt blond hair, a deeply tanned face, and blue eyes reddened by a sleepless night. He was dressed in a singlet and a pair of shorts. The sun was an hour high when his navigator, Lieutenant Eugene Mauriac, crawled through the hatch onto the wing. Mauriac was an American of French descent whose family through four generations had lived in Napa County, California. He wore a handkerchief knotted at the corners over his head. Stretching out on the wing beside the pilot, he stared at the sea with a stony, incredulous look.

"I've slept like a fool," he remarked, presently. "Sorry, Alec."

"Good thing you did. . . . We're lucky. She's making very little water. . . .

You'll need more than a handkerchief over your head in another hour."

"Lucky, you say? I'm not so sure. The still's wrecked."

Brooke turned to glance at his companion.

"Why did it have to be that? Well, we can't expect to have all the luck in the world. . . . How far from here to Guadal?"

"About five hours."

"If they waited for first light they could be here by eleven."

Mauriac nodded.

"Go down and get some sleep. My turn now. Toss out my cap, will you?"

Alone on the wing, Mauriac stretched out, his chin resting on his crossed arms. For a little while he forgot their predicament as what seemed a nightmare, in retrospect, took on the hard outlines of reality. Of the crew of the *High Barbaree* only he and Brooke remained.

There had been five of them, bound together by the closest of all associations. He thought of Willock, the bombardier, the crazy kid from Texas who could perform miracles with a pair of dice or a pair of 500-pound bombs. Over the interphone he had heard Willock, bleeding to death in his compartment in the nose, announce in a weak voice: "One egg left, and she's hot!" He thought of Meyers, the tough little radioman from Brooklyn, with his cynical humor and his passion for Jap souvenirs which he expected to take home on his first leave. George Lyman, the co-pilot, had died of his wounds late in the afternoon. He and Brooke had buried the three of them during the early part of the night. Mauriac's thoughts shied away from that memory, back to the beginning of the patrol when they had taken their final jeep ride down to the revetment area at Henderson.

The Navy had reason to suspect that an enemy convoy was setting out from Truk or Ponapé in an attempt to relieve the Gilberts; the situation at those islands was becoming desperate from the Japanese point of view. The *High Barbaree* had taken off before dawn, bound on a solitary long-range reconnaissance with orders to proceed 800 miles on a course of 335 degrees, and then to fly 300 miles at 112 before heading home for her base.

The big amphibian had droned hour after hour on her course, flying at 8000 feet. The sun rose in a cloudless sky, illuminating horizons such as only the airman knows. The Pacific stretched away without land in sight, a flat boundless desert of blue. As the morning advanced, heavy cloud banks appeared to the northwest; raising them on the horizon and watching their swift approach had given Mauriac his only impression of the rotundity of the earth. A little before noon he had informed Brooke that it was time to turn to starboard on their new course. They had sighted nothing so far.

It was midafternoon when they emerged from a rain squall to come suddenly upon a big enemy submarine on the surface not three miles distant.

The Jap made no attempt to crash-dive, realizing, perhaps, from the sound of the engines, that he had only one plane to deal with. Nothing but a slow patrol bomber would be so far distant from any American base. The enemy had decided to shoot it out, with a fair prospect of bagging the PBY like a sitting duck. They'd come close to finishing her with their first salvos. The black bursts with momentary cores of scarlet, blossoming at short intervals, had riddled the Cat with fragments of hot metal. Brooke had made two runs on the sub, straddling it with a pair of 500-pounders and scoring a near miss astern. Then, with one engine dead, he swept down through a storm of flak to 500 feet. As the pilot banked to turn into his final run, Mauriac caught himself yelling while his fifty-caliber Browning in the port blister stitched a seam fore and aft on the pigboat. Next moment the last of Willock's bombs exploded in a beautiful direct hit, amidships. The plane lurched, staggered, and leveled off. Score for the *High Barbaree* even if they couldn't fetch the captain's pants back to Henderson.

Both engines were dead now and Henderson Field seemed very far away as Brooke brought the plane down in a flat glide. Glancing aft, Mauriac had seen the sub rise bow up and disappear in seething water mixed with oil. Then a great explosion shot spray and debris high in air. Scarcely a mile distant, the *High Barbaree* squattered down unsteadily and came to rest. Turning, Mauriac had seen the radioman slumped beneath the starboard waist gun in a pool of blood. Then he heard Brooke calling: "Gene! Gene!"

Torn and gashed as she was by shellfire, some freak of battle had preserved the Catalina's hull from serious damage below the waterline. She rode the sea well, but her topsides were so badly riddled it seemed a miracle that neither Brooke nor Mauriac had been hit. The radio compartment was a wreck and three of their water breakers had been holed by machine-gun fire or fragments of shell.

The two survivors spent a grim afternoon plugging what holes there were below the waterline and bringing some order from the chaos within the plane. The night, when they buried their dead comrades, was grimmer still, and lonelier.

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Toward midday the breeze freshened and heavy rain clouds were banking up in the east. Drifting slowly astern as she rode to her sea anchor, the Catalina faced the wavelets that slapped briskly at her bow. At noon when Mauriac took a latitude, Brooke was awake. Together they examined once more the plugged holes in the hull. So little water had seeped through that they were able to clear it easily with their hand bilge pump. Neither of them had eaten in more than twenty-four hours. They now felt a sudden sharp appetite. There was plenty of food for the time being, including a hamper filled with fruit.

The Catalina was equipped with five three-gallon breakers for water and all had been filled before the take-off. Two gallons had been used during the patrol. A full breaker had been so holed that no water remained in it, and another had lost half its contents. Being hopeful, the two men allowed themselves a pint of water each at this first meal.

The distant curtain of clouds, bearing slowly down on them, cast its cool shadow over the sea. Then the sun was hidden; the breeze slackened as the squall approached, to be succeeded by a sharp cold gust that made the plane dip and roll uneasily. Then it was dead calm once more and a light vertical rain began to fall. They were prepared for it and saved two gallons before the shower ceased. The sky brightened a little and it was soon evident that no more rain would come. Brooke handed the containers down through the hatch to Mauriac, who stowed them safely below. A moment later the navigator heard him calling: "Gene! Come up here, quick!"

Listening so intently that they scarcely dared breathe, the two men heard the droning of far-distant motors, now clearly audible, now dying away to silence in the flaws of air. Little by little the volume of sound increased. It was coming from the west.

Though the ceiling was still low, the clouds were beginning to break; here and there golden shafts of sunlight fell upon the sea. Brooke pulled out the pin of a smoke grenade and they watched the dense murky billows trail slowly to leeward, a signal that would have been visible at a great distance on a clear day. The plane was still hidden by clouds though the sound of its motors now filled the air.

"It's a Cat," Mauriac said, in a tense voice. "Oh, God, let 'em see us!"

They stared upward, their hopes high. Then, for the fragment of a second, they had a glimpse of the friendly plane, indistinct and wreathed in vapor as it flitted like a ghost across a lane of partially clear air between two clouds.

Straining their eyes they stood silent, expecting every moment to hear the subdued sound of the engines as the Catalina turned to glide to a lower level. But the steady droning remained unchanged, save that the sound diminished, to die away completely at last. The silence of mid-ocean flowed into the vacuum made by its passage.

## Two

They had no illusions about the gravity of their situation, but they were young, full of life, and, on the evening of the fourth day, still hopeful. The sun was near to setting and the light breeze died away until only the faintest cat's-paws blurred the reflections of a few scattered clouds that seemed as motionless as the derelict plane. Presently Mauriac said: "You can't see it, Alec, but there's a kind of aureole around your head—an angelic golden light. Nearest thing I've ever seen to a halo."

Brooke smiled.

"Already? I don't see any around yours."

"That's where a towhead scores. You don't know how other-worldly you look with that corona."

"What were you thinking about just now?"

"I was going to tell you. I was thinking of the jam we're in; and then, all of a sudden, the lines of a song I heard over the radio popped into my head."

"What song is that?"

"An old-timer, I guess. It sounds like one:—

The Cat came back;  
He couldn't stay no longer  
So the Cat came back  
The very next day . . .

Pretty, don't you think? And comforting to men in our fix."

Brooke clasped his hands around his knees.

"I know that song," he said. "It is an old-timer; I've heard my dad sing it. It's a Capital-C Cat with wings, with an old spitting tom painted on the hull. But not this one. She'll never come back anywhere again."

"One of ours will. I don't know about 'the very next day.'"

"That means tomorrow. Gene, we'll make that our Vesper hymn. Let's have it again. Come on, now; wring it out, this time."

The Cat came back;  
He couldn't stay no longer  
So the Cat came back  
The very next day.  
Yes, the Cat came back;  
He couldn't stay no longer  
*But* the Cat came back  
'Cause he wouldn't stay away.

"I'll bet that's never been sung with more enthusiasm," Mauriac said. "You put a lot of conviction into it, Alec."

"Brother, I've *got* conviction. That was one of our outfit, certainly, that we caught a glimpse of."

"Sure it was. They won't give up after one search on a cloudy day. But there's an awful lot of sea to cover."

"Gene . . ."

"Yes?"

"What did you say our position was, yesterday, at noon?"

"One hundred and sixty-one degrees, twenty-nine minutes east; forty-six minutes north."

Brooke was silent for some time; then he remarked: "That's curious! More than curious!"

"What's curious about it?"

"Ever hear of Turnbull's Island?"

"Never."

"It's not a hundred miles west of where we are now, and in the same latitude."

Mauriac smiled.

"Dream on! You're telling this to your navigator? You don't really believe there is such an island?"

"I've believed in Turnbull's Island ever since I was ten years old."

"You're crazy, Alec! It's not on the charts, and I've got the best Uncle Sam provides."

"I've heard you admit that they're none too accurate for this region. Furthermore, the Hydrographic Office hasn't checked on every square mile of the Pacific."

"It doesn't have to. Was this what's-its-name island supposed to be high or low?"

"High. A thousand feet high."

"Not a hope, Alec. Not a hope. Do you suppose *any* island, high *or* low, would have a chance to remain undiscovered?"

“Why not, in this part of the Pacific? It was a mighty lonely region up to the outbreak of the war. . . . Got a copy of Yardley’s *Pacific Directory*?”

“Never heard of it.”

“I suppose it’s out of print in these days. There’s an account of Turnbull’s Island in Yardley; at least there was, in an edition I saw years ago.”

“Remember what it said about the place?”

“I read it so often when I was a kid that I believe I can still quote it, almost word for word.”

“Okay. Let’s have it.”

“I got interested in the island back in those days. That’s why I remember Yardley’s account of it so well. This is what he says:—

This island was first reported to the U. S. Hydrographic Office in 1842, by Captain Ezra Turnbull of the whaling barque *Gay Head*. Two of his boats were fast to whales when the clouds broke to the west and he sighted land at a distance of about four leagues. He estimated its height at a thousand feet, and described a sheer cliff on the eastern side, between two sharp volcanic pinnacles. Night was falling and he was unable to stand in closer because of his boats which were far from the ship. The island was again reported in 1857 by a Captain Eastman of New Bedford. He claimed to have caught a glimpse of it far to windward, in the position given by Turnbull. No further report of it has ever been received. In the opinion of the Editor, the existence of Turnbull’s Island is doubtful indeed.”

“That goes for me, too,” Mauriac remarked. “If there were such an island, the fact would have been known long since . . . definitely proven.”

“Not necessarily. Think of the size of the Pacific.”

“In the old days. Not now. Even if there were such an island the Nips would have it, way up here.”

“Yes, I suppose they would. Well . . .”

Chin in hands, their elbows resting on their knees, bare feet braced on the gently sloping wing, the two men fell silent, as though suddenly awed by the immensity of the solitude which enclosed them. They stared to the west, still glorious with the fading splendor of the afterglow.

“I’m going down for a cigarette,” Mauriac remarked. “Want one?”

“Better go butts on yours, hadn’t we?”

“Just as you say.”

The Catalina rocked gently as Mauriac climbed down from the wing. Ripples moved out from the hull as though they were visible waves of the small distinct noises made by the navigator as he proceeded aft to the tail

compartment beyond bulkhead seven. Brooke could follow his progress until he reappeared, the lone cigarette behind his ear.

“That’s an odd notion of yours, stowing the cigarettes all the way back in the tail,” Mauriac said. “What’s the idea?”

“We’ve only got the one carton.”

“Not a bad idea at that. They’ll last longer, certainly, if we have to go all the way aft for them, one at a time.”

“In the old days of sail they had a system like that when a ship was short of water. They kept a musket barrel in the main-top. When a man wanted a drink he had to climb-up there for the musket barrel, come down with it to the scuttlebutt outside the galley, suck up his drink, and carry the gun barrel to the main-top again. A seaman wouldn’t take the trouble unless he was really thirsty. . . . Everything okay below?”

Mauriac nodded, soberly.

“I wish we could live on the wing,” he said. “I hate going down. They’re still there, in a way . . . all three.”

“I know. I feel the same.”

“It’s the loneliness, and the emptiness; their being there and *not* being there.”

Mauriac lighted the cigarette, and after two or three inhales passed it to his companion. They smoked in silence, passing the cigarette back and forth until there was little left but the coal. Brooke tossed the butt into the sea.

“Gene, let’s have it out now . . . what do you say?”

“About ourselves?”

Brooke nodded.

“Our chances are . . . well, what do you think?”

“One in twenty, perhaps.”

“That’s about where I’d put them. This is the fourth day.”

“We can hope, at least, for another three. After that . . .”

“They’ll keep on searching as long as they think there’s a ghost of a chance.”

“Sure they will,” Mauriac replied. “Now we can forget it, for tonight, at least. Alec, we’ve been together through a lot of hell, haven’t we?”

“You said it. We’re going through this, too, and come out on the other side.”

“The other side of what?”

“I’ll tell you that when we get there.”

They had no further speech for some time. Mauriac let his glance travel over the wrecked plane, its outlines becoming indistinct in the twilight.

“How well she rides,” he said. “You know, there’s something safe about a Cat, no matter how rugged things get.”

“She’s a good old crate.”

Mauriac smiled.

“It’s just as well we’re out here by ourselves. We can praise the old girl as she deserves, with no dissenting voices.”

“Don’t say ‘the old girl.’ This is a Tomcat.”

“*High Barbaree* . . . is that masculine? Pretty fanciful name for a PBY, if you ask me.”

“No more so than a lot of other names.”

“But what does it mean? I don’t see why you’ve always kept so quiet about it.”

“I haven’t meant to,” Brooke replied.

“But you’ve never explained it, have you? All you’ve said is that the name took your fancy a long time ago.”

“So it did. It’s a dream name, if you want to know.”

“A dream name?”

“Yes. I got it out of a dream . . . that is, partly. Do you really want the story of it?”

“Sure. Why not?”

“I’d have to go back to when I was a kid to give you the picture. Tell you the story of my life.”

“Well, that’s jake with me. It looks as though there’d be time enough. Remember the night at Port Moresby when I told you my sad story? You were damned polite, Alec.”

“Polite, hell. I was interested.”

“All right. Now it’s my turn to be interested. We’ve got the night before us. Shoot!”

Brooke was silent for a moment or two. Then he said: “There’s something uncanny about this. I mean, about our being in this particular part of the Pacific, somewhere near Turnbull’s Island. . . . Gene, Turnbull’s Island is the High Barbaree. At least it’s *my* High Barbaree.”

Mauriac peered at his companion through the gathering gloom.

“You haven’t had a touch of the sun, I hope?”

“No fear!”

“Then what in hell are you talking about?”

“Give me time to explain, will you? I said there was something funny about this. You’ll soon see the connection.”

“Go ahead.”

“I’ve told you that I come from Iowa. You know what people say about us Iowans: that we’re always ‘from’ our home state. We’re no more ‘from’ than the people of any other state. We like to move around, of course. We’re great travelers, but we always have round-trip tickets. I’ve got one in my pocket

now. I'm going to use it, too . . . maybe."

"That's talking, Alec! You and me both. Mine reads: 'Good *until* used to any destination in Napa County, California.'"

"We'll travel that far together when we get leave," Brooke said. "Farther, if I can persuade you to come to Westview. It's the prettiest little town; got 'em all beat, in my opinion—east or west. My part of Iowa began to be settled in the forties of the last century; we'll be having our centenary in 1949. I've got to be back for that."

"I thought all forty-niners were Californians."

"That's what all you Native Sons think. Ours were: going-to-be Californians. But when they saw Iowa they forgot about the gold rush. They found a better kind of gold right there than you pan out of gravel beds. So they stayed. And the descendants of those pioneers are still living in Westview.

"A generation after the town was founded the people began building their homes. Their real homes, I mean, where their grandchildren and great-grandchildren were to be born and live after them: substantial, roomy, comfortable homes made to last. Architects of these days can't see them, but they belong to the country; they're as native to it as the trees that shade the lawns around them.

"The town hasn't changed much since the early days, and the people living there are the descendants of the old-timers. Maybe Westview was lucky in having the kind of people it did; those who founded it, settled there and stayed there. They were men and women of good blood and education, some from New England, some from upper New York State, some from Virginia and Pennsylvania. They were individuals, every one, and they loved the land. It needed only a generation to make Iowans of them. They were hard workers—they had to be in those early days—but it wasn't long until they could take things easier and get some real pleasure out of life.

"The name, Westview, doesn't really fit; there is no wide view from the town itself. It was sited, originally, three miles to the west, where there is a superb view. The first log cabins were built there, but when the railroad came it was decided to move down beside it. For all that, Westview has always seemed to me exactly right for the name. Ever since I was old enough to see I've looked to those hills where the old town stood. To me, the song 'Over the Hills and Far Away' has always meant those particular hills; and 'far away' has meant west, as though there could be no end to 'far' in that direction.

"Our house is on a broad street shaded by elms planted sixty years ago. It isn't much to look at; the homes of country-town doctors rarely are, but I wouldn't trade it for any of the others. It had been my Grandfather Brooke's home, and when it was built, his office was built into it. That shabby old room with its rows of bottles and its smell of drugs has always been a romantic place

to me. Dad followed my grandfather in his profession and I would have, too, except for the war. Country-town doctoring seems to be in the blood of the Brookes.

“From the time I was six I used to ride with my father on his calls around that part of the country. He had an old Ford that everyone in the county knew. He also kept a surrey, if you know what that is: a two-seater carriage. It was built by the long-since-defunct Spaulding Wagon & Carriage factory, of Grinnell, Iowa. That was my dad’s real love. Often, when he had a country call to make, if there was no hurry, he would hitch Toby to the surrey and take me with him.

“There was one road that led due south out of the town. It had never been paved, and is no wider now than it was in the old days. The strip of ground on either side is still a part of the old prairie, with wild roses and geraniums, goldenrod and black-eyed Susans growing there according to the time of year. This was my father’s favorite road, and I came to love it as much as he did. A mile beyond the town it turns west and mounts the long slope leading to the hills I’ve spoken of, and by the time you’ve reached the top it is a westward-leading road with a view across miles of country. You’ll have to imagine what you can see from there. I couldn’t begin to tell you of the beauty of the landscape, particularly on a still midsummer afternoon, with nothing to break the silence, perhaps, but the call of a peewee coming from far away. I’ve always associated that view with the faint lonely call, ‘Pee-wee . . . Pee-wee,’ as though it were the very voice of silence and midsummer peace.

“I’ll not take you any farther along that road. You’ll see why I’ve brought it in. But there’s something else I want to speak of in this connection. It concerns my mother and her piano.

“She was twenty years younger than my father, but they were a happily mated pair. She rarely called him by his first name, John. It was usually ‘Doctor’ and somehow that was just right, the way my mother said it. You seemed to feel in it the gap in years that separated without dividing them.

“They were both music lovers. My father played the flute and had been a member of the Westview orchestra as long as I could remember. Mother was really good on the piano, though she rarely played except at home. I remember how I used to stand beside her as she played my father’s favorite songs, or accompanied him as he played the flute. He had old-fashioned tastes in music. So did Mother. Maybe that’s why my own tastes run somewhat in the same direction: into the past.

“I must have been six or seven when I first heard Mother play Paderewski’s Minuet in G, and I seemed to know immediately what it meant to me. All kinds of things have associations for kids at that impressionable age, music in particular, and the Minuet in G was my perfect description of that

westward-stretching country beyond the hills. It was the country itself as I saw and felt it, as I took it in through the pores of my skin. I've heard the Minuet played hundreds of times since those days, but I never get tired of it. It always brings back the old deeply loved country beyond the hills, but idealized, more beautiful than any earthly landscape could be. I can't tell you the kind of emotion it gives me. It is not communicable. It seems to come from the realm of pure spirit, as music itself does.

"It wasn't long until I'd learned to finger the first two bars of the Minuet. I didn't try to go any farther; all the rest followed; I could hear it in the imagination. The note 'G,' by itself, came to have a special significance; not the G of the upper register, but the one just below the middle octave. I would strike it and put my ear against the piano to listen to the sound dying away; and I would imagine it as traveling, first, south along the road I've spoken of, then west, over the hills, and on and on until it was lost to me, but I knew that it was still traveling westward through country more beautiful than any I'd seen or could imagine.

"Mother noticed this pastime of mine. I don't remember how it came about. I suppose she questioned me, and I explained about that particular note and where it seemed to go. She was very quick in understanding the workings of a kid's mind. I felt that the Minuet-in-G country was as real to her as it was to me. She told my father about it, and we came to speak of that south-and-westward-leading road as 'The G-Note Road.' But the name was never mentioned in any other company. It became a kind of secret code word for us alone.

"A little girl was connected with it, too, but she didn't know it until some years later. Her name is Nancy Fraser. Nancy came into the picture at an early age; in fact, I don't remember a time when she wasn't there, during those early years. Her parents lived only a little way down the street from us, in a handsome old brick house that seemed a palace to me. The Frasers were cattle feeders and breeders and owned a large stock farm four miles east of the town. I remember how Nancy's father, with his foreman, used to drive two or three hundred head of cattle through the town to the stock pens by the railway yards, with Nancy, almost a baby, riding in the saddle in front of her father.

"Her parents and mine were the best of friends. Mr. Fraser and Dad were great rivals at chess, and they were both interested in Iowa history. They knew the names of all the founders of Westview and where they came from, and were real authorities on all questions connected with the settlement of our part of the state.

"And now, Gene, I'll do some skipping and tell you about my mother's only brother, Thaddeus Vail. It was from my Uncle Thad that I first heard of the High Barbaree."

## Three

Uncle Thad Vail was my boyhood hero; I all but worshiped him. The Vails had been New Englanders, an old seafaring family from Nantucket. My great-grandfather, Alexander Vail, was the first member to turn his back on salt water. The story was that he'd had some bad luck on a whaling voyage, and, as a result, he vowed to go as far inland as the continent would let him and stay there. He was one of the founders of Westview.

"My guess is that he was a homesick New Englander for the rest of his life, but he was never known to admit it. His love for the sea was, certainly, passed down to some of his descendants, myself among them, but I'm speaking now of my Uncle Thad. He was never cut out for an inlander, and at seventeen yearning for the sea sent him to Boston, and that was the last Westview saw of him except for the rare visits at our house. He was in sail, at first; then he entered the merchant service, worked his way up, and, at the time I'm speaking of he was a first mate in the Atlantic trade.

"My mother thought the world of her brother, although she never quite forgave him for deserting Iowa, and her hope was that he would some day tire of the sea, marry a good sensible woman from Westview or thereabout, and settle down to farming. An upstairs room in our house was known as 'Uncle Thad's room,' and Mother always kept it ready, as though he were expected to return next week or the next day. It was a large sunny room looking out on the plum and cherry trees and the strawberry beds of the back garden. I loved this room. There were all kinds of souvenirs and knick-knacks in it that Uncle Thad had sent or brought home from his voyages. A New Englander who didn't love sea shells wouldn't be a New Englander and Uncle Thad had a superb collection gathered in all parts of the world. Among them was a matchbox filled with shells so tiny that I thought at first they were nothing but grains of coarse sand. On rainy days I used to spread them out on a sheet of white paper and examine them under my dad's reading glass.

"The most important piece of furniture in the room was a tall 'secretary,' as they called them, that had belonged to my Grandfather Vail. It was half desk, half bookcase, with drawers below and glassed-in bookshelves above. Here my uncle kept his favorite volumes, mostly narratives of travel and exploration. He had Drake's *The World Encompassed*, Hawkesworth's *Voyages*—which included Wallis's, Cook's, Byron's, and Carteret's—in three volumes bound in scuffed and powdery calfskin; Anson's *Voyages*, Commodore Porter's *Journal of a Cruise made to the Pacific Ocean in the U. S. Frigate "Essex,"* Ellis's *Polynesian Researches*, and dozens more. It was a first-rate collection and I'd

read the lot before I was through high school, some of them two or three times. I can't imagine a better education for a kid than to be turned loose in such a library, though it's not the kind to fit him for living in the cockeyed world we know. Of course, in those days I'd not yet come to the reading stage. I merely leafed through the pages to look at the old foxed engravings of heathen lands and people and the charts of bays and coves and landlocked harbors.

"On the wall, on either side of the secretary, were two large charts showing both hemispheres, with particular reference to the oceans. On these my uncle kept a record of his voyages, adding the latest ones whenever he came to Westview. Each was beautifully marked in, showing the ports touched at both outward and homeward bound. I used to climb on a chair and study these charts. In this way I followed my uncle all over the world, and I could string off the names of ports as easy as A B C.

"Two portraits on the opposite wall had an endless fascination for me. One was an oil painting of my great-great-uncle, Oliphant Vail, lost with his ship on a whaling voyage to the Pacific in 1836. The portrait shows him standing on the deck of his ship, the *Harriet*, holding in his right hand a harpoon attached to a line beautifully coiled in its tub. The figure is that of a man of thirty or around that, the face bold and determined looking; the eyes seem to be gazing through or past you to a school of cachalots far out to sea.

"The other was an engraving—from a drawing by Webber, who was Captain Cook's artist—of an old Polynesian chief. He is bare-chested and bare-legged, a man of lean but powerful frame, with snow-white hair, and dressed in a kirtle of white tapa cloth. Beyond is an idyllic background of coconut palms reflected in the still waters of a lagoon. That old native became almost as real to me as my dad.

"I used to study these portraits by the hour. Mother could tell me little of my great-great-uncle, Oliphant, and nothing at all of the Polynesian chief. She would say: 'You must wait till your Uncle Thad comes home again.' She had letters from him once or twice a year, but never knew when we might expect him at Westview.

"You will understand what a romantic figure my uncle became, in my eyes. I thought about him, dreamed about him, boasted about him to kids of my own age. I was the only boy in Westview who had a seafaring uncle, and this gave me an importance I made the most of. I would show my friends Uncle Thad's room, and many a rainy Saturday was spent examining his charts and the engravings in Hawkesworth's *Voyages*.

"I was between three and four when I first saw my uncle and barely remembered that visit. He came again when I was ten. I remember what a shock it was to see that he was not a big man. We had no photographs of Uncle Thad, and I'd pictured him as standing head and shoulders above other men;

but he was no taller than my mother, and weighed around one hundred and forty-five pounds. He had a deep resonant voice and eyes of a deep blue that flashed and burned with energy.

“My disappointment at his size wore off in about ten minutes. When my uncle stepped into his upstairs room, with me at his heels, he was right back on his pedestal. He treated me as an equal, a companion, and that flattered me a lot. He had enough of the boy left in him to make him a comrade in the best sense of the word.

“The moment we were in the room, with the door closed behind us, he said: ‘Sit you down, Alec. I want your advice about something right now. I’ve come prepared to stay two weeks. Will it be okay to make such a long visit?’

“I didn’t realize it then, but he was pulling my leg. It pleased him to see how upset I was at the thought that he might shorten the visit.

“I blurted out: ‘Okay? Gosh, Uncle Thad! I should say it will be!’

“‘You’re sure?’

“‘Yes, sir.’

“‘Good! That’s settled. I’ll stay the full time. . . . Now there’s one other thing. I’ll need your help in this; you must back me up. Every time I come to Westview your mother starts to work on me to get me to stay. She wants me to leave the sea and take to farming. What do *you* think about it?’

“‘Why . . . you couldn’t do that, Uncle Thad,’ I said.

“‘That’s the ticket!’ he said, heartily. ‘You’re a true Vail; got salt water in your blood. Now your mother loves the land the way you and I do the sea. So does your dad. It’s all right. Nothing against ’em, and Iowa’s a beautiful state. But there’s no water, to say nothing of salt water, and how’s a man to live without it?’

“‘Oh yes there is!’ I replied, eagerly. ‘You’ve come at the wrong time of year, Uncle Thad. You ought to have been here in April when we had the heavy rains. The Chaquaqua River went right out of its banks. It flooded the bottom lands for miles, out north.’

“‘That’s right. I remember. There used to be those bottom-land floods when I was a kid, and how I loved ’em! Got a skiff?’

“I shook my head, glumly.

“‘Dad won’t let me have one till I’m twelve.’

“‘I’ll bet that’s your mother’s doing,’ said Uncle Thad. ‘Twelve . . . well, that ain’t so long to wait, if you don’t think about it too much. Tell you what, Alec. On your twelfth birthday I’ll give you something that’s got a skiff beat a thousand miles. I’ll get you a canoe like they use in New England and there ain’t none better. And I’ll come with it if that’s possible. You fix things up with the weather man that year. Tell him to send plenty of spring rain so’s we can roam all over the bottom lands. Is that a bargain?’

“‘Yes, sir,’ I replied, eagerly. ‘You won’t forget?’

“He gave me a stern look, but the expression softened immediately after.

“‘I want you to remember this, Alec: the Vails don’t forget their promises. When’s your birthday?’

“‘April twenty-second,’ I said.

“‘Okay. Two years from now, on or about April twenty-second, you can count on having your canoe.’

“My uncle stayed the promised two weeks but it seemed more like two days. I lost some of the pleasure in having him in worry about losing him again so soon. He loved to loaf when ashore. He would sit on the back porch, his chair tipped back against the wall, watching the summer clouds drift across the sky. On these loafing days I couldn’t get him to budge, but it was not time wasted. As a storyteller he was in a class by himself. He had an odd way of beginning without any preliminaries. He told his stories with the minute, circumstantial detail all boys love, skipping from one experience to another, from one part of the world to another, picking out the plums and high spots of his adventures, and I never tired of listening. Sometimes we’d be sitting in his room, with Great-great-uncle Oliphant Vail gazing down at us. ‘Look at him, Alec,’ my uncle would remark. ‘Ain’t you proud to stem from a line of whalers like that one?’ And then he would give me a funny sidelong glance. ‘Of course, I know you’re goin’ to be a doctor. Your mother’s got her heart set on that. I keep forgettin’, so don’t pay no mind to me when I get to talkin’ about the sea.’

“One morning I reminded him that he’d not yet plotted on his wall charts the voyages he’d made since last coming to Westview.

“‘That’s right,’ he said. ‘Come up to my room. We’ll get it done straight off.’

“We rolled back the rug and laid the charts out on the floor. He had half-a-dozen voyages to mark in and he began with those farthest back. I lay on the floor, my chin propped on my hands, watching him as he worked. One of the voyages had been across the Pacific, and as he laid out his course from port to port he kept up a running commentary that was better than a year of geography lessons at school. ‘The Vail’s ocean’ he called it. ‘That’s our old home, Alec. Room enough there even for Vails to move around in.’ He used a special kind of blue ink, the color of the sea when you’re well inside the tropics, he said. Then he changed his mind about that.

“‘No, I’m wrong. There’s no such color, in ink. They couldn’t get that shade of blue in a thousand years. Even if they did get it, it wouldn’t be the same. No sir, Alec. You’ve got to see that particular blue to believe in it.’

“‘I’m going to see it someday,’ I said.

“‘Sure you are. You wouldn’t be a Vail if you didn’t hanker now and

again for the tropical Pacific.’ He glanced up at the portrait of Oliphant Vail. ‘Ain’t that a speakin’ likeness?’ he said. ‘If only he *could* speak he’d have something to tell us about whalin’ a hundred years ago.’

“ ‘Were all the Vails whalers?’ I asked.

“ ‘There’s an old saying about our family:—

As long as ships have masts and sails  
There’ll be Vails to hunt the whales.

But there’s none of ’em left in Nantucket now, to follow the old trade.’

“ ‘Would they follow it if there were any left?’ I asked.

“My uncle sat back on his heels and looked at me, an angry light in his eyes.

“ ‘Nantucketers? No, sir! They’d think shame to hunt ’em the way it’s done now. These what-you-may-call-’em whalers go out in big 10,000-ton ships, all the way to the Antarctic, and they take a flock of seagoing tugs along. Then the mother ship waits while the tugs go in amongst the whales and explode shells in ’em, shot from guns on deck. The whales ain’t got a ghost of a chance. Belly-up they come, dozens, scores of ’em. The tugs tow ’em to the mother ship to strip the blubber and render the oil. Mark my words! If they keep this up there won’t be a whale left in any of the seven seas in a few more years.’

“My uncle was so burned up at the thought of these modern methods of whaling that he could speak of nothing else for a good five minutes; then he cooled off and went back to the charts. It was while he was pointing out some of the old whaling grounds in the Pacific that I asked about a mere speck of an island I’d noticed. This particular dot lay almost on the Line and was marked, ‘Turnbull’s Island.’ Beneath it were the letters ‘E-D.’

“ ‘It’s queer, your noticin’ that,’ said Uncle Thad. ‘You’ve got bright eyes, sonny.’

“ ‘What does E-D mean?’ I asked.

“ ‘Existence Doubtful.’

“ ‘They don’t know whether the island’s there or not?’

“ ‘That’s right.’

“ ‘Why doesn’t some ship go and find out?’

“ ‘That’s a lonely part of the Pacific even in these days,’ said Uncle Thad. ‘It’s away off the sea lanes.’

“ ‘Haven’t you ever passed near it?’

“He shook his head and pointed to the track of one of his earlier voyages.

“ ‘That’s the nearest, and it’s a good thousand miles off Turnbull’s Island.’

“He went to the bookcase and took down a heavy cloth-bound volume. It was Yardley’s *Pacific Directory*. I’d glanced at it, but was too young at that time to pay much attention to it; there were no pictures. My uncle turned to the

index and thumbed the pages until he found what he was looking for.

“‘It’s queer your spottin’ Turnbull’s Island,’ he said. ‘Guess it’s because you’re a Vail. That part of the Pacific is what they called the Line Grounds in the old days of whaling. Nantucketers and New Bedford men cruised there a lot back in the eighteen-forties and fifties. Your Great-great-uncle Oliphant was lost somewhere in that region. I’ll read you what it says about the island in Yardley’s *Directory*.’

“Then he read me the passage I’ve already quoted to you, and from that day Turnbull’s Island became a place to dream about. I felt that an island that had been twice reported must really be there. You know how it is; not much is needed to set a young kid’s imagination to work, and I had my uncle’s books with their engravings of scenes on tropical islands to set me to wondering about Turnbull’s Island. It burned me up that the editor of Yardley’s *Directory* should have doubted the reports of two old whaling captains. What could *he* know about the matter? Captain Turnbull’s reference to the two volcanic spires with the great eastern cliff between them stuck in my mind. I could see the place looming through the mists of a rainy day, cliff and spires looking immensely high as they appeared dimly through the clouds. Or I would imagine a ship approaching it toward sunset, under a cloudless sky, the wall of cliff changing color as the light faded until it showed the deepest purple in the dusk of evening. The ship, of course, was always my Uncle Thad’s, with me on board.

“So it was from that time on. Of an evening as I looked toward the hills west of town, with the last faint light of day streaming up from behind them, I would imagine that the sea lay just beyond, and that the light was reflected from the highest mountains of Turnbull’s Island.”

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Brooke halted in his narrative to peer at his companion who was lying on his back, staring into the sky.

“Sleepy, Gene?”

“No.”

“Want me to go on?”

“Of course. I’m glad you got wound up on this story. It’s a life-saver. Makes the time pass.”

“That’s kind of a backhanded compliment.”

“No; I’m interested, Alec. No kidding.”

“How much time has passed so far?”

Mauriac glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

“It’s a quarter to ten.”

“No later than that? . . . Gene, there’s one thing we’ve got to get used to: minutes as long as hours.”

“The story’s a big help; they pass a lot faster while you’re talking.”

“Pretty quiet out here, isn’t it?”

“I was thinking of that. Remember how sick we got of the perpetual sound of engines, back at Guadal? Sometimes I’d have given a month’s pay for a quarter of an hour of pure silence.”

“And now we’ve got nothing else but.”

“Would the sound of a pair of Pratt and Whitneys be celestial music right now!”

“Lay off that! We’ll never hear it when we’re expecting to, that’s sure.”

“I know, but this waiting’s getting me down. You get so damned impatient wanting to *make* something happen. . . . If only we knew whether Meyers got our position through to Henderson before he was killed!”

“Yes, it *is* pretty rough, not being sure. What do you suppose they’re doing back at Guadal?”

“Shut up, Alec! I’m at Westview, or I was. Go back there and straighten me out.”

“Okay, but you’re putting another nickel in me. Get me started on boyhood and my Uncle Thad and I don’t know when to stop.”

“You’ve got me guessing . . . about the High Barbaree, I mean. How does that come in?”

“Keep your shirt on. I’m coming to it. First, I want to tell you a little more about Nancy Fraser.”

## *Four*

Nancy meant a lot to me all through those early years. The Frasers had no son and my parents no daughter, so the pair of us lived between the two homes and were members of both families. I was two years older than Nancy, and she sort of took the place of a sister. She hero-worshipped Uncle Thad, the same as I did, and he thought the world and all of her.

“She was an independent little thing; I couldn’t get away with bossing her around. She wasn’t a tomboy, but she had any amount of guts. She would ‘take a dare’ without thinking twice about it. Once I got into an awful mess with both sets of parents by daring her to climb with me up the narrow iron ladder to the top of the standpipe, as we called it—the town water tower which is one hundred and ten feet high. I went first, and before we were halfway up I was sorry I’d given the dare. The top of the standpipe was a long way off, and as I glanced down I had a sick feeling at the pit of my stomach. Nancy looked like a little doll against the great column of riveted steel, but she was climbing on, slow but sure. We reached the railed platform on top, but I can’t say that we got much kick out of the view spread out beneath us. We were too scared. At last Nancy said, very quietly: ‘I’m going to start down now, Alec.’ That was real pluck.

“We’d not been seen going up, but someone had spotted us on top, and now a crowd of terrified parents and neighbors had gathered at the foot of the ladder. They were afraid to call out for fear they’d rattle us, but we could see their white faces turned toward us. Nancy’s father climbed up for her and she had barely strength enough left to clasp her arms around his neck as he carried her down the last thirty or forty feet. I made it all the way, but my arms and legs felt numb by the time I reached the ground. I deserved a good hiding, but I guess my dad thought I’d learned a lesson that would stick, and so it did. I never again gave Nancy that kind of a dare.

“She had the good sense not to butt into boys’ games, but at most other times I liked having her around better than any boy. In summer I spent more time on the Fraser farm than I did at home. We both had horses to ride. I still like to remember the times when we helped drive cattle from the farm to the loading pens by the Westview depot. But I’m off the course again: I’ll get back to why this old Dumbo wears her high-sounding name, and that’s connected with my Uncle Thad.

“He was lousy at writing letters. Mother would hear from him two or three times a year from some faraway port, when, I suppose, he would have a real touch of homesickness for Iowa and his own flesh and blood. And now that

he'd come to know Nancy and me, he would send us gifts that made us popeyed. Once, from a Norwegian port, he sent me a model of a Viking ship, with a striped silk sail, a carved prow—everything as it should be, even to the Vikings' shields ranged along the gunwales. Maybe you can imagine what that meant to me. But he said nothing about coming home and he never mentioned the canoe promised for my twelfth birthday. How I longed for that canoe! The thought of it was always in the back of my mind, particularly in the spring of my eleventh year when the Chaquaqua River overflowed its banks again.

"I call it a river, but the Chaquaqua was little more than a prairie slough that winds in loops and turns in a general south-easterly direction. In a dry summer there was little water in it; even our old swimming hole would be no more than chin-deep. But it was all the river we had, and to say that it meant a lot to us kids is putting it mildly. A fringe of timber land follows it most of the way through our part of the country and this was a wonderful place for spring flowers. Hepaticas, violets, Dutchman's-breeches, bloodroots, May-apple blossoms, jack-in-the-pulpits grew all through those bottom lands and the bordering hills south of the river. But best of all were the lady-slippers because they were so hard to find. It was a real event to stumble across one. I always gave mine to Nancy.

"She looked forward to my twelfth birthday as much as I did. We counted the weeks, then the days. Mother tried to break it to me that I might be disappointed. 'Now don't be too sure, Alec,' she said. 'You know how it is with your Uncle Thad: he may not be able to come just when he said he would.' But he'd promised, and I was dead certain that he'd show up on April twenty-second. Nancy and I met both westbound passenger trains that day but there was no Uncle Thad, and no canoe. There was a disappointment that topped any I'd known, and to make it worse, heavy spring rains had again flooded the bottom lands for miles, out north. There could have been no sadder pair of kids in the State of Iowa than Nancy and me. The Frasers, to relieve a little the awful ache in my heart, invited me out to their farm to spend the spring vacation. I passed the first few days of it there; then, early one morning, my father called for me in the car. He said that Nancy and I were wanted at home, but he didn't explain why.

"We were a bit puzzled by Father's manner, but we didn't suspect anything. Instead of taking the direct road home, Dad turned off toward the river; he said he had a call to make on the way. Between two wooded hills bordering the river where the Chaquaqua makes a wide bend there is an enchanting little valley we called 'the cove,' carpeted with wild flowers at that time of year. Dad halted the car at this spot.

"'Alec,' he said, 'what about you and Nancy and me picking some hepaticas and violets to take home to your mothers? It won't take us ten

minutes.’

“The road was no more than a hundred yards from the cove. Dad led the way down the slope and disappeared among the trees. Nancy and I followed, gathering wild flowers as we went. And then I spotted a lady-slipper, and you’d have to know how rare they are in our woods to understand the thrill it was to find one. I called Nancy and gave it to her. I still remember how she handled it as though she couldn’t believe it was real. Then we heard my dad calling from the cove. We hurried down, and, as we came within view of the river, there was Uncle Thad, sitting in my canoe with a paddle laid across his knees.

“The picture I then saw has been stamped in memory since that day, to stick there as long as I have memory. There was a faint mist in the air, and the April sunshine slanting through the branches of the trees, just coming into leaf, had a golden quality. With hepaticas growing so thickly, the air was filled with their fragrance which is the very breath of spring. I’ve seen Maxfield Parrish landscapes that have in them the same quality of ideal beauty that belongs to my recollection of the cove on that April day.

“‘Alec,’ said Uncle Thad, ‘you’ll have to excuse me for bein’ a bit late. Couldn’t be helped, but it looks like I’ve come at the right time after all. Come aboard, you and Nancy, and we’ll make a day of it. I’ve got sea stores laid in for a long voyage.’

“The day was perfection itself, the Mount Everest of my boyhood peaks of happy days. I can still see the changing lights and colors of the sky reflected from the glassy water, and the canoe, with the three of us, mirrored against it. There was a little wicker seat for Nancy amidships, and Uncle Thad and I paddled from the bow and stern. He did the steering to begin with, but later we changed places, and I soon got the hang of it.

“We explored the flooded lands for miles; the water lay over them to a depth of three or four feet in the level tracts, with bits of higher ground making widely scattered islands and peninsulas to be coasted around and visited. Uncle Thad entered into the spirit of the day as though he himself were twelve years old. He had made such voyages many a time when he was a kid.

“‘But never in a canoe, Alec,’ he said; ‘and that’s what I always wanted: a real Indian canoe, made out of birch bark. I couldn’t get you one of those, but this Old Town, Maine, canoe comes pretty close to it.’

“We had our lunch on an island miles down the river, and the sea stores my mother provided were just what they should have been. Then, about midafternoon, we started back.

“Uncle Thad had a fine bass voice and he loved to sing. He knew any number of sea songs. As we were paddling along in the mellow misty light he started singing one that made an impression on me I’ll never forget. The air is

a haunting one, in a minor key, and the way he sang it gave it the kind of magic to stir a boy's blood and make a few miles of flooded bottom lands seem as wide as the sea. He didn't sing the whole of the song; only the first two stanzas. I'll try to sing them for you, Gene, but you'll have to imagine my uncle's really fine voice and the expression he put into it. This is how it goes:

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There were two lofty merchantmen  
From Plymouth town set sail.  
Blow high! Blow low!  
And so sailed we.  
One was called *Prince Rupert*  
And the other *Laird of Dee . . .*  
Rolling down the coast of the High Barbaree.

'Aloft, there! Aloft, there!'  
Our jolly bosun cried.  
Blow high! Blow low!  
And so sailed we.  
'Look ahead, look astern,  
Look aweather, look alee!'  
Rolling down the coast of the High Barbaree."

The sound of Brooke's voice seemed to linger in the wide air of mid-ocean, as though it were reverberating more and more faintly against the vault of the sky itself. Presently Mauriac said:—

"You're right, Alec. It's got something—that song. I don't wonder you remembered it."

"You'll understand the impression it made upon a twelve-year-old with an inherited love and longing for the sea. It sank right down into my subconscious mind to remain there, for good and all.

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"My uncle broke off at the end of the second stanza. We'd tangled with some snags and half-drowned trees. 'Keep a sharp lookout forward,' he said. 'Mustn't let her scrape on any of these snags.'

"'Sing some more of it,' Nancy said.

"'Some more of what?' said Uncle Thad, for, sometimes, he didn't know that he'd been singing.

"'About the High Barbaree.'

"'Nancy, don't get me started on *that* song! There's a lot of verses to it.'

"'Well, sing some of them,' said Nancy. 'What is the High Barbaree? Is it an island?'

“ ‘Might be.’

“ ‘Have you been there?’

“My uncle shook his head.

“ ‘You can’t go every place, Nancy. Too many of ’em.’

“ ‘Well, *I* want to,’ said Nancy. ‘I want to see every country in the whole world, and Alec does, too. And we’re going to, aren’t we, Alec?’

“I was responsible for Nancy’s attack of world-wandering fever, but Uncle Thad was the indirect cause. I’d been showing her his charts and the illustrations in some of his books of travel.

“ ‘Tell you what, Nancy,’ said my uncle. ‘When you and Alec grow up we’ll go, the three of us, to visit the High Barbaree. That is, if I’m not too old then.’

“ ‘Sing some more of the song about it,’ Nancy said, and I was as eager to hear it as she was.

“ ‘Wait till we get home,’ said Uncle Thad. ‘I’ll ask Alec’s mother to play the accompaniment for me on the piano.’

“ ‘Will you sing it tonight?’

“ ‘Sure I will, right after supper, if you want me to.’

“Dad was waiting for us at the cove. I couldn’t leave the canoe there, of course, so we hoisted it on top of the car and took it home. There was no room in our garage, so we left it on the Frasers’ back porch. I still couldn’t leave it and had my supper with the Frasers. I bolted my food and hurried out to give the canoe a polishing with a flannel cloth. While I was at this I noticed a little scratch on the paint near the bow, and that simply *had* to be fixed. Nancy was impatient. She reminded me that Uncle Thad had promised to sing all of ‘The High Barbaree’ and that he’d be waiting for us. But the canoe came first, so Nancy ran out to their garage to bring me a little can of green paint and a brush. I painted over the scratch with the greatest care, and Nancy was saying: ‘Hurry up, Alec! I’m getting sleepy, and I want to hear the song. Why are you so fussy about a tiny little scratch?’ At last I was ready and we hurried along the street in the spring twilight, so magical to me on that particular evening. The breath of lilacs was in the air, and lights were just beginning to appear in the windows.

“Our living room opens right off the front porch. When we got there Mother was already trying over the accompaniment to ‘The High Barbaree,’ and Uncle Thad was standing beside her, ready to sing. Dad was seated in his easy chair near by, holding the bowl of wild flowers we’d picked and breathing in their fragrance. There was a contented expression on his face—that of a country doctor who is able to hope for an evening at home. As we came in Mother glanced over her shoulder and smiled. Uncle Thad gave us a wink, but said nothing; his mind was on the song. Then he began.

“Nancy and I were good and tired, for we’d been up since daybreak, and the excitement of the day and the long canoe voyage had made us so drowsy that we could hardly keep our eyes open. Nancy’s head began to nod before he was halfway through, and about a minute later she was asleep, snuggled against my shoulder. I tried hard to keep awake till the end, but I heard the words dying away until I was dead to the world, too. But it was a wonderful song for two tired kids to go to sleep on. I don’t remember how I got into bed that night. I must have walked upstairs still sleeping.”

## Five

“And now, Gene, I come to the strange part of all this: what I’ve been leading up to from the start. Not long after my uncle left, I had a dream that has repeated itself, at intervals, ever since. It was a dream of such unearthly beauty that it made my waking life, happy as that was, seem colorless. It was always the same dream in its principal features, but the details varied considerably. But they were all connected with a journey, starting from our house, in Westview, on a search for the High Barbaree which I, somehow, identified from the very beginning with Turnbull’s Island. In fact, I seemed to know that Turnbull’s Island *was* the High Barbaree, and that its existence was anything but doubtful if only I could find it. I’ve had scores, hundreds of dreams like everyone else, and most of them were nonsense and vanished even before I was fully awake; but never the ones connected with the High Barbaree. That part of my dream life seemed as real, and any amount more memorable, than things that happened in Westview. I’ll tell you about the first time it came.

“I seemed to be standing beside my mother at the piano and she was playing Paderewski’s Minuet in G. Then, suddenly, she wasn’t there and I was riding with my father in the old surrey, along the G-Note Road, and the sound of the note, G, was traveling on before us, but a long way off, and growing fainter and fainter. I said: ‘Hurry, Dad, or we’ll lose it!’ He shook his head. ‘We’ll never lose it,’ he said. ‘That’s *your* note.’ Presently I asked: ‘Where are we going?’ and he said: ‘To meet your Uncle Thad, of course,’ as though surprised that I should have asked the question. I said: ‘But this isn’t the road to the cove,’ and he replied: ‘Oh yes it is,’ in such a way that I was completely satisfied. The road seemed to be the actual road leading south out of Westview, then turning west to mount the hills, but both the road and the country it passed through were out of this world. Father said: ‘This is the Minuet-in-G country,’ and I replied: ‘I know. I’ve been here before.’ Meadow larks were singing, and every now and then I heard a peewee calling as though miles and miles away. Nothing was said about the High Barbaree, but I now knew that was where I was going, and I knew that my father knew.

“Presently he said: ‘We’ll stop at Ben Bolt’s mill on the way. You’ll want to see that.’ I ought to explain that ‘Ben Bolt’ was one of the old songs my father loved. In one of the stanzas the lines go:—

And a quiet which crawls round the walls as you gaze  
Has followed the olden din.

That had made an impression upon me when I was little. I could imagine the quiet as being something you could actually see, moving, as you looked, around the walls of the old abandoned mill. There was no such mill anywhere near Westview, but there was in my dream, and it was just the kind of moss-grown ruin it should have been, with the silence and the sunlight moving slowly over the walls. Then that was gone and we were in the surrey again, and old Toby seemed to take forever in plodding up the hill. I could hardly wait to reach the top, for I knew that the sea lay beyond.

“And then I saw it, in the light that never was; a sea more vast than any earthly ocean could be. There seemed to be no horizon. The measureless expanse of blue water—of that shade of blue my uncle had said it was impossible to describe—stretched on and on as though, far away, the sky were a continuation of the sea itself.

“Then my father and Toby were out of the dream, and I was going down a zigzag path to the cove. I wanted to run but couldn’t because of the twists and turns in the path and the rocky steps, wet and moss-grown, so slippery that I had to go down them carefully. But the cove had a kind of resemblance to the one on the Chaquaqua River. The slopes were gay with hepaticas and Dutchman’s-breeches; but what was so wonderful—lady-slippers grew in hundreds here; the borders of the path were thick with them. I wanted to stop and pick some for Nancy, but I thought: ‘She’s probably gathered all she can carry on the way down.’ I seemed to know that Nancy was already at the cove with Uncle Thad, waiting for me.

“At last I came to the beach, of pure coral sand, with gorgeous sea shells, like those in my uncle’s room, scattered over it. The rocky portals of the cove, flushed with sunset light, made a framework for a sight that filled me with the joy that comes only in dreams. A little ship with Uncle Thad aboard was afloat just off the beach. It was larger than my Old Town canoe and a thousand times more beautiful. The hull was painted sea-green, with pale gold below the waterline and a gold stripe running along the rail. The prow was high and richly carved: a pure white swan’s neck and head. The stern, too, was high, with a little platform extending beyond the deck, made to resemble a swan’s outspread tail feathers. A little forward of amidships a single mast carried a yard for the sail which was of white silk with vertical red stripes. The hull of the little dream vessel was like that of the model of the Viking ship my uncle had sent me from Norway.

“I called out: ‘Where’s Nancy, Uncle Thad?’ And he said: ‘She’s up yonder, on lookout.’ I then noticed for the first time a tower that seemed to reach to the sky itself. It was round, like the Westview standpipe, but vastly higher and of pure white stone that stood out in gleaming contrast with the blue of sky and sea. Uncle Thad had a silver bosun’s whistle attached to a cord

around his neck. He blew a clear call on the whistle, and then, at the top of the tower, I could just make out Nancy peering down.

“I had the same sickening fear I’d felt the time Nancy and I climbed the standpipe. ‘She’ll fall!’ I said. ‘She’ll never be able to make it all the way down!’ But Uncle Thad wasn’t worried. ‘Don’t you believe it,’ he replied. ‘Nancy’s spry as a little monkey. Watch her!’

“He blew again on the whistle, and Nancy came running down so fast her arms and legs made a kind of blur against the ladder. I was both surprised and not surprised to see that she had a single lady-slipper pinned on her dress. I said: ‘Nancy, why didn’t you pick more? There are thousands growing along the path.’ She said: ‘I wanted only the one you gave me. I’m going to plant it on the High Barbaree.’ ‘But it hasn’t any roots,’ I said. Uncle Thad laughed. ‘Lady-slippers don’t need roots. Didn’t you know that? Come aboard, now, you and Nancy. I’ve got sea stores laid in for a long voyage.’

“I didn’t remember our getting away. Suddenly we were far out, no land in sight, and although the sea was perfectly calm—so calm that the little ship was mirrored in the water—our sail bellied out as though to a fine breeze and we moved swiftly along. Nancy sat in her cushioned chair amidships and I was on lookout, leaning against the swan’s neck. Presently Uncle Thad called: ‘Alec, how’d you like to take the helm for a while?’ I’d been longing for that with all my heart. Then, as I was running aft, I woke up.”

## Six

“That was rough, waking up just then. I’m not sure I didn’t shed a few tears at losing the dream when I was about to take the helm of that marvelous little ship, and I was sunk because we’d not sighted Turnbull’s Island. I tried to go to sleep again, and did, of course, very soon, but there was no more dream. Then, late in the summer, it came once more. The principal events were much as they’d been the first time: my father was in it to begin with, and when I reached the cove, there was the ship floating above its own reflection, my uncle standing by the rail with the lines to the sail in his hand. Nancy was again at the top of the tower, but this time, as she started to climb down I was suddenly aware that our parents with a crowd of friends and neighbors were gathered at the foot of the tower, watching in a kind of agony in fear that she’d fall. None of them spoke, but the way they glared at me gave me a feeling of despair. Then they vanished and we were again far out at sea, and my uncle was singing ‘The High Barbaree.’ I knew that when he’d finished the song he would call me to take the helm, but he sang on and on, and this time I woke up with the words, ‘Rolling down the coast of the High Barbaree,’ ringing in my ears.

“After this second dream I told Nancy about it, but I never spoke of it to anyone else. Nancy was intensely interested. I can still see her as she was then, sitting opposite me in our lawn swing, looking at me with an expression of deep happiness on her face. The dream was almost as real to her as it was to me.

“When I’d finished, she said: ‘Alec, why can’t I have it, too? Why can’t we both have it at the same time?’

“We agreed to try, and so we did, but never with any luck. She would tell me her dreams, and some of them were strange enough, but they had no connection with Turnbull’s Island. And neither did mine, except on rare occasions, but I never had the satisfaction of telling her that we’d reached the High Barbaree. The dream always ended before any land was sighted, and Nancy would say: ‘Alec, aren’t we *ever* going to see it?’

“All this time we were growing up, but the companionship that had begun, I might say, with babyhood carried right on until I was fourteen, when the Frasers moved to Montana. Nancy’s father had long wanted to go farther west. Finally he made a trip out there and found a cattle ranch that was just what he was looking for. A few months later they sold their farm and their home in Westview, packed their furniture, and left, and that was the last I was to see of Nancy for many a long year.

“It was tough, saying good-bye to each other, and for our parents as well. Nancy and I agreed to write once a month, and so we did, the first year. Then the letters dropped off—you know how it is—until we stopped writing altogether. For all that, I never forgot Nancy; she left a hole in my life that couldn’t be filled. I can’t say that I was in love with her at that tender age, though I may have been without knowing it. Anyway, all through high school and college I never thought twice about any other girl.

“During those years, I became more and more interested in the islands of the tropical Pacific. I read all my Uncle Thad’s books and what others I could find. I knew by heart long passages from Captain Cook’s *Voyages*. I learned about island birds and trees and flowers, the customs of the natives; how they built their canoes and houses, their methods of fishing, and the like. Everything about the South Seas was right down my street. Uncle Thad made two more visits to Westview and we would talk about islands and voyages by the hour. He missed the Frasers as much as we did, and mourned over Nancy’s absence as though she had been his own daughter.

“I entered Grinnell College when I was seventeen. Even before this it was a settled thing between Dad and me that I was to enter Harvard Medical School as soon as I’d finished at Grinnell. Dad was no businessman and was never far ahead, financially, but he’d taken out educational insurance to carry me through medical school. I was certainly grateful to him for that, especially in June, 1941, when I got my Bachelor of Science degree at Grinnell, and had before me the prospect of entering medical school in the fall. To top it off, I received a letter from my uncle. He was in Boston and offered me two weeks with him there, as a graduation gift.

“Mother and Dad came to Grinnell for Commencement. It was perfect June weather. The glee-club concert, held out of doors, on the steps of Blair Hall, came on the evening of the last day, and the Alumni Song, sung at the end of the concert, had never seemed so beautiful to me as it did that night. There is one stanza that always made me think of Nancy Fraser:—

When soft whisperings from the southland  
Coax the trees to take their green,  
And the leaves cast phantom shadows  
Where the moonlight sifts between;  
When with raptured hearts go strolling  
Manly youth and pretty maid,  
And afar is heard the music  
Of an evening serenade . . .

It’s a beautiful old song; there’s no other college song in the same class with it, either for words or for music, but maybe that’s prejudice. This one stanza

always gave me an ache in the heart for Nancy. I guess I thought about her a lot more than I was aware of at the time. As I look back, I wonder that I didn't break the long silence between us. Maybe a feeling of hurt pride had something to do with it. We'd stopped writing at about the same time. I suppose we both felt that the other was the one to speak first.

"Uncle Thad was on hand to meet me in Boston. I'd not seen him in three years, but he'd not changed except that his hair was grayer. He was the same old uncle who'd brought me the Maine canoe. He had a full two weeks between voyages and his plans for our holiday together couldn't have been improved. I wanted to see the ocean first of all, and the next day we set out for Nantucket. My uncle said: 'Guess the old Atlantic's about as salty there as anywhere,' and so I found it. We took the boat from New Bedford, but June had decided not to be June that day. The sky was cold and gray and a raw east wind was blowing which pleased my uncle more than a blue day could have done.

"'It's just as it should be,' he said. 'The Atlantic's got no business ever trying to look like the Pacific. Don't it taste good, that spray? Flavored just right for us Vails.'

"I must have inherited memories from the Vails who had lived on Nantucket in the past. As we stood in the bow looking toward the land dimly outlined in the gray murk, I was thinking of the times when my great-grandfather and my great-great-uncle, Oliphant, had seen it just as I was seeing it then.

"We spent two days on the island and it was hard to tear ourselves away, after so short a visit. The old Vail home was still standing and still occupied. I shouldn't wonder if it would last for another century. The Vails were well remembered on the island. One old-time Nantucketer told us a yarn about a Vail—at least he said he was a Vail—who had waited to get married until he was forty-five, and who went off whaling again a week after the ceremony. He hadn't even bothered to kiss his bride good-bye. Wasn't hardly worth while, he said. He didn't expect to be gone more than two years, that voyage. Uncle Thad's laugh when he heard this yarn was a real belly-shaker, and he kept chuckling over it on the train as we were returning to Boston.

"'Alec,' he said, 'that was the Vail I stem from, and your mother still thinks she's going to get me married and settled down to farmin'! If ever I did settle, Nantucket would be the place. That's where we belong.'

"Then he spoke of the time he'd brought me the canoe, and I was tempted to tell him of my High Barbaree dreams; but for some reason I couldn't. Uncle Thad was a practical hardheaded seaman; there was nothing fanciful in his make-up. I was afraid he might think me a bit 'queer' if I told him about those dream voyages. But I did speak of the deep impression the 'High Barbaree'

song had made upon me.

“‘Sure it did,’ he said, dryly. ‘I remember how you and Nancy went right off to sleep in the middle of it.’ He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. ‘But you’re right, Alec. It’s a fine old song. I still sing it now and again.’

“He went on to say that it was a favorite with the members of a club of merchant seamen that he belonged to, who had a meeting place on the Boston waterfront. He promised to take me there one evening before I left.

“We had a happy time together during the next ten days. We went over to Charlestown and climbed the Bunker Hill Monument. We visited the old churchyards and made excursions around Boston Harbor in a boat from my uncle’s ship which was anchored out there, waiting for cargo. We spent a day at Concord and saw the bridge that had replaced ‘the rude bridge that arched the flood.’ I had been steered early to Henry Thoreau by my father, and I wanted to see Walden Pond almost as much as I had Nantucket. But in these days it’s lousy with hot-dog and Coca-Cola stands, and the woods are full of old newspapers, paper cups and napkins. It was hard to imagine that Henry Thoreau had ever lived there. But when we left Concord, late in the evening, I noticed that the elm trees along the streets were still ‘chandeliers of darkness’ against the starry sky, as they’d been in his own day.

“I wanted to go out to Harvard Medical School and get set for entering in the fall, but Uncle Thad seemed to want me to put this off till the end of my stay. I felt that he was worrying about something connected with my plans. At last he came out with it. We were loafing on Boston Common when he said: ‘Alec, are you sure it’s the thing you want to do? Going to medical school, I mean?’

“‘Why . . . of course it is,’ I replied. ‘I’ve planned for it ever since I was a kid. You know that.’

“‘Yes, I know you have, but the plans of a lot of young men are going to be changed before the year’s out, and so they should be. Don’t you think so, yourself?’

“‘On account of the war?’ I asked.

“‘What else?’

“It’s unbelievable, when I think of it now, but up to that time I’d not considered it possible that the U. S. A. would be messed up in World War II. Middle Westerners, most of them, have never been what you would call world-minded; that is, until very recently. We thought about our own country and our own problems. It had been a cat-and-dog business in Europe for centuries past, and probably would be for centuries to come. It was their funeral, not ours: that’s how we felt about it.

“I’d taken it for granted that my uncle believed the way a lot of us did; that our country should stay out of this war and hang onto what civilization there

was left in the world. I was good and wrong. Uncle Thad got right to work straightening me out. We talked all that day and the next. I saw the light, and wondered that I could have been so blind to what was happening in the world. I gave up my plans for medical school. In July of that summer I joined the Navy. You know the rest of that story. It has little to do with the one I'm telling.

"The evening before I left for home my uncle took me to the seamen's club he'd spoken about. It was housed in an unpainted, weather-beaten building at the end of a long wharf jutting out into the harbor. You go up a flight of foot-worn stairs, into a vestibule for hats and coats. Beyond that is a large pleasant room lined with books and furnished with tables, sofas, and easy chairs. About a dozen members were present that evening, skippers and mates off merchant vessels in the harbor. After dinner, which was served from a shipshape little galley, the evening was spent in talking, smoking, and singing songs, with Scotch flowing pretty freely from the bar. Finally, when Uncle Thad was in just the right mellow mood for it, he was called on to sing 'The High Barbaree.'

"That same night I had the dream once more, and this time my mother was in it. I was walking with her on a path through the woods by Walden Pond. I was trying to persuade her to let me give up the plans for medical school, and, at the same time, it seemed absolutely necessary for me to gather the old newspapers and broken Coke bottles left by picnickers and carry them to a rubbish can near by. Mother said: 'Hurry, Alec, or you'll be late to class!' 'But Mother, I'm not going to medical school. Don't you remember?' 'But your father went,' Mother said. 'The Brookes have always been doctors. It will break my heart if you aren't too.' The conversation seemed to go on endlessly, and all the time I knew that I ought to be on the G-Note Road, but I couldn't find it.

"While I was picking up more trash, I found a piece of Uncle Thad's chart, one from the wall of his room at home. I knew that I *had* to find the rest of it. Mother was now out of the dream and I was alone in the woods, in wintertime, and still searching desperately, but I forgot what I was searching for. I only remembered that it was something of enormous importance. It was bitter cold. I heard a strange, rhythmical, humming sound and found that it was coming from a telegraph pole. I put my ear against the pole to hear it better. It was my G Note. Walden and winter vanished and I was back home again in the surrey with my father, traveling the old westward-leading road. I could hear the quiet squeak-squack of Toby's harness as he plodded up the long hill, and see and smell the dust, golden in the afternoon sunshine. And there was the old landscape, with the call of the peewee giving a voice to midsummer peace.

"But it was not a bird calling this time. It was my Uncle Thad whistling the

call from the cove. Nancy was in the ship beside him with the single lady-slipper still pinned to her dress.

“As I came running down the beach Uncle Thad sang out, ‘Bo-o-oard!’ Just as the conductor of the westbound local used to call it at the Westview depot.

“The dream ran true from this point on. The same mirrorlike sea holding the wavering reflection of the swan’s head as the ripples moved out from the prow, the beautiful striped silk sail bellying out as though to a fine fair wind. Nancy was seated in her little chair amidships, and time seemed endless, and our happiness perfect, as before. You know how it is, in dreams: sometimes you know you are dreaming and sometimes not. I was never aware, in my High Barbaree dream; it was as real as any waking experience. The end of this one was perfect.

“I was standing in the bow, watching the reflection of the swan’s head as we cut swiftly through the sea. Then I seemed to hear the Minuet in G, more beautiful, even, than I had remembered it. I glanced up, and there was the island, just as I had pictured it all through boyhood: the ghost of an island, as though the faint music were creating it before my eyes, all color and light against the western horizon. The two pinnacles mentioned in Yardley had bold jagged outlines, clearly etched against the sky at one moment, faint the next, and I seemed to see, between and beyond them, a great peak whose summit was lost in cloud. The eastern cliff was a wall of purple shadow, deepening as I looked at it. Then the music became louder—that part of the Minuet where it thunders down to the bass notes—and I realized that what I heard was not music but the faint thunder of surf along coral reefs. I was so happy I wanted to call out to Nancy and Uncle Thad, but I seemed to have no voice. I tried again, and next moment I was back in my room at the Hotel Lenox, in Boston, with the rumble of early morning Boylston Street traffic in my ears.

“And there you are, Gene. . . . Or, rather, here *we* are. And now you know why this PBY wears the name she does.”

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In the pause that followed, the silence of mid-ocean, precariously held at bay by a single human voice, closed in once more upon the two men adrift on the derelict Catalina. The ship lay all but motionless, a black silhouette against the starlit mirror of the sea. Of a sudden, Mauriac was seized with a feeling close to panic, as though he had become aware for the first time of the true desperate nature of their situation. The need to thrust it back cost him an effort of will that made his voice tremble a little when, at last, he trusted himself to speak.

“Damn it, Alec! Why couldn’t you have dreamed on?” he said, with an attempt at lightness of manner. “Well, *this* High Barbaree is real enough . . . so

far.”

“You don’t believe in the other one?”

“What good would it do if I did; if we both did?”

“We’re not sixty miles off the position where the island was laid down on the chart.”

“I know, but . . . that’s crazy. A high island, unknown to navigation? In these days?”

“Doesn’t it seem strange to you, if there’s no such island, that it should have been twice reported? Those old whaling skippers were as sea-wise as they make ’em. They were not likely to mistake cloud for land.”

“My guess is that they were both tight. You can see a lot of things that don’t exist, through an alcoholic haze.”

Brooke was silent for some time. Then he said: “‘Turnbull’s Island’ . . . Could anything sound more real, and solid? Gene, supposing it *is* real, just over the horizon!”

“With a lot of real Nips on it,” Mauriac added.

“Yes, there’s that to think of.”

“Forget it, Alec. But keep on talking. Have you had the dream again, since Boston?”

“No, that was the last time.”

“Tell me something more about your Uncle Thad. What’s become of him?”

“He’s skipper of an army tanker now, the *Huron*, and somewhere in the Pacific at this moment.”

“You’ve heard from him?”

“Not lately, but I’ve heard about him.”

“Who from? Your mother?”

“No . . . Gene, I’ve got something more to tell you. About Nancy. I’ve seen her.”

“What! Out here, you mean?”

“Yes. Remember the day we were sent out to search for those carrier pilots? It was the next morning. You were still in the sack. I’d slept till around noon; then I went down to the strip to see if they’d checked the starboard engine. As I was coming back, half an hour later, I saw a truck crossing the field from a transport plane that had just landed. I stopped my jeep to wait for it; wanted to see if they’d brought mail. They had the mail, all right, but I wasn’t much interested in that, at the moment. Nancy was seated in the front seat with the driver. We’d not seen each other since we were kids, but I recognized her right away, and she knew me.”

“For Pete’s sake! Why haven’t you told me this before?”

“I don’t know. I guess I just wanted to keep that meeting to myself. None

of our crowd except Dakin saw her. I didn't give 'em a chance."

"What is she? A nurse?"

"Yes. She'd come over from Espiritu Santo to take wounded back. The plane was to return as soon as they had them aboard. We had a little more than an hour together."

Brooke fell silent again. Mauriac said, "You needn't tell me the rest, if you'd rather not."

"No, I'd like to. It was as though we'd never been separated. She said, 'Hello, Alec,' and I said, 'Hello, Nancy. Hop in with me and I'll take you wherever you have to go.'

"She had to report to the Medical C.O.; then she was free until the casualties were loaded. We hadn't time to go anywhere, but there's no place to go anyway, to get away from the war for a few minutes. I drove to a spot where we could have a little privacy, in view of the field; then we sat in the jeep and talked.

"We had so much to say and so little time to say it in that we didn't even try to bring each other up to date. We didn't need to. That was the happiest meeting, and the saddest, in a way. . . . But Nancy did no weeping on my shoulder. I guess she was too tired. And we had to keep watching the time.

"She told me about meeting Uncle Thad at Nouméa. He was carrying aviation gas from San Pedro to the islands out here. He expected to be back as soon as the *Huron* could fill up and return.

"Gene, she's the loveliest girl. But I'll not try to describe her. She looked, and was, dead tired, but that made her all the more beautiful. She'd lost none of her old spunk and none of her independence of mind. She proposed to me, right there in the jeep!"

"My God! You let her?"

"I didn't have a chance to speak first. I don't know that I could have, even if she'd given me the chance. I was scared, that's the plain truth. I was thinking: 'Alec Brooke! What a stout-sized idiot you've been, all these years, to let Nancy get away from you! Why haven't you written to her?' She wasn't wearing a ring, but that meant nothing. It didn't seem possible that she could still be free. Nancy—God bless her!—was bound I should know how I stood with her."

"How did she manage it?"

"We'd gone right back to Westview for the start. It was, 'Nancy, do you remember' . . . this, and 'Alec, do you remember' . . . that. One of the first things she wanted to know was whether I'd had any more High Barbaree dreams. I told her about the one in Boston. We talked about Turnbull's Island and what a freak thing it was that we should have met, after all these years, in the same region of the Pacific where it was laid down in Uncle Thad's old

chart.

“And we talked about after the war. I said I hoped to go on to medical school, if I were not too old and decrepit by that time. Nancy said: ‘I know. I’ve always taken it for granted that you would be a doctor. That’s why I’m a nurse.’

“She spoke so quietly that what she said didn’t click with me. Then she went on: ‘Alec, do you remember the trouble your father used to have, finding a first-class nurse when he needed one? He said that all doctors should marry nurses so that they would always have one on hand, in a pinch. Well, I decided to be the best nurse to be found anywhere between Billings, Montana, and Westview, Iowa. You can draw your own conclusions as to why I wanted to.’

“I did draw them, right there in the jeep, parked under some old coconut palms with a few ragged fronds left to show that they still had life. Jeeps and trucks and cars went roaring past all the time, and planes were coming in or going out. We wouldn’t have known they were there except that we had to shout, sometimes, to make ourselves heard.”

“Taking a long chance, wasn’t she? Supposing the prospective Dr. Brooke had not been available?”

“Don’t suppose anything of the kind. Nancy knew that he would be, somehow. And . . . you see? He is . . . or was. I mean to say, I hope he will be. Well, that’s all except that . . . Gene, we’ve got to come through this! We’ve got to! And we’re going to,” he added, quietly.

“Sure,” Mauriac said. “Did you make any plans?”

“How could we? Nancy’s been eleven months out here, between New Cal, Espiritu, and Moresby. How’s this for luck? She was at Moresby when we had our two days’ leave there, and I knew nothing about it.”

“What about malaria?”

“She’s missed it so far, thank God! She thinks her outfit is going to be relieved soon, but she doesn’t know where they’re going, of course.”

“No scuttlebutt?”

“Plenty, all pointing to Europe, Nancy says, after they’ve had leave at home. If only we could be going north at the same time!”

“Maybe we will.”

Brooke smiled wryly.

“All but certain, what? We’ll go aboard a transport at Nouméa, and there’ll be Nancy, waiting for me at the gangplank!”

“Could be. Stranger things have happened.”

“There’s one thing that might happen. If we get leave, we might be at home at the same time.”

“Call it settled, Alec. The wedding will be the week after we land at San Francisco, if it is San Francisco. I’ll be your best man if you’ll promise to stop

off at our place in the Napa Valley on your way home.”

“There’ll be no such luck as that. Nancy won’t hear of our getting married until the war’s over. There’s no persuading her.”

Hands clasped behind their heads, the two men lay on the wing, gazing into the sky. Presently a shooting star made a track of light halfway across the heavens before it vanished in outer darkness.

“It was traveling right in the direction of home,” Mauriac said.

## Seven

On the fifth day there was a high overcast, and a light breeze that made it possible for them to lie on the wing in comfort. Mauriac announced that they were about thirty miles west of their position on the first day. They had not yet begun to suffer, and the deepening anxiety in his heart each man kept to himself. There had been a promise of rain in the morning, but the overcast became lighter, and by midafternoon the sky was clear and the sea dead calm once more. It was at this time that they saw the frigate bird.

Brooke spotted it first, winging its way across the lonely sea high above them; then it turned, circling the plane, coming lower and lower until its reflection showed clearly in the water. A moment later the bird came to rest on the wing, regarding the two men with the aloof disinterested gaze common to all sea fowl.

They had no desire to kill it, although it would have been an easy shot. Thirst had not yet become an obsession with them, and the thought of drinking its warm blood offered no temptation. So they merely watched it, comforted by the brief companionship of another living creature. The frigate sidled back and forth at the end of the wing, cocking its head to one side as Brooke made a little squawking noise in his throat.

"It's his inning now," said Mauriac. "Remember the flock of sea birds we splashed through that morning off Russell? Maybe he's one of the survivors taking his revenge."

Brooke smiled faintly.

"I'll tell you where he's from—Turnbull's Island. He was homeward bound when he spotted us."

"Sure he was! He's come down to give us sailing directions. . . . Alec, I'd give something for a photograph of the old Cat and ourselves on it, and this bird, just as we are now. What a memento to take home!"

"How would you caption it?"

"'The Conquest of the Air,' or maybe, 'Flight: the Last Word.' Think of it! If he wants to he can be flying over Henderson a few hours from now."

"Why bring that up? Can you imagine any bird wanting to?"

Of a sudden Brooke seized his companion's arm.

"Gene!"

"What? . . . What's eating you, Alec?"

"He might save us! It's a thousand-to-one shot, but if we can catch him and tie a message to his leg, with a long streamer to mark him . . ."

"Come on, boy! You're nearest."

Brooke nodded. With infinite caution he turned to face the end of the wing where the bird rested. Then he inched along until he was almost within reach. His heart beat fast. The frigate regarded him with complete unconcern until Brooke, with a lunge, seized him by the leg. He squawked raucously, beating the air with his strong wings; then he disgorged, all over the pilot's chest, a gulletful of stinking, half-digested fish.

"Take him for God's sake!" Brooke said. "I've got to have a bath."

Mauriac laughed.

"You're not very grateful. Those were his emergency rations; he wanted to share them with us. Whew! What a stench! This will keep us from being hungry for a week!"

Mauriac took a firm grasp of the bird while Brooke slipped over the side into the sea. When he had washed, he pulled himself aboard through the open waist blister. Presently he came on the wing again with a paper, a piece of twine, a tiny glass medicine vial, and a long streamer of blue cloth in his hand.

"This is what I've written," he said. "'Alec Brooke, pilot, Eugene Mauriac, navigator, five days adrift on derelict PBY. 160° 45' East, 36' North. Urgent.' That tells the story, doesn't it? I've put the date."

Mauriac held the bird while Brooke folded the paper into a tight roll and slipped it inside the vial, pushing the cork firmly in until it was flush with the top. The small bottle was bound high on the bird's leg. Then the long narrow streamer was attached at the base of one wing. They took their time over this, testing the fastenings carefully to see that they were secure.

"All right. Let him go!"

Mauriac got to his feet and tossed the bird high. Catching the air with his powerful wings, the frigate skimmed the surface for a few hundred yards, then turned to circle the plane while steadily mounting, the blue cloth streamer fluttering out behind him. Shading their eyes with their hands, the two men gazed after the bird in silence until it was lost to view.

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Although they kept record of the days that had passed since the battle with the submarine, they lost their customary sense of the passage of time. The departure from Henderson Field seemed an event that had happened months before. Sometimes Brooke found it hard to recall with any clearness the occurrences of that day: which of them had first sighted the sub, and whether it was on the first or the last run that the direct hit had been made. He even found himself doubting that they had actually caught sight of the plane whose engines they had heard on the following day. He became uneasy about this fuzziness of his memory, though he said nothing of it to Mauriac.

The weather was both friend and enemy. Only the faintest cat's-paws darkened the surface of the sea, giving some relief to their eyes, dazzled at

times by the glare reflected from the glassy water. Lying as they did, almost on the Equator, they had expected calms, but not so long a period of continuous calm. With the blisters wide-open day and night they had shipped no water. They carefully watched the plugged holes. So little water seeped through that they were able to keep the hull almost perfectly dry.

Their enemy was the burning sun and the cloudless sky, with never a promise of rain since the day when they had caught the frigate bird. During the hottest hours, from ten in the morning until late afternoon, they remained below, but the shade offered by the hull seemed to be a part of the heat itself: a viewless blanket of heat that sapped their strength and made any activity a kind of dull misery.

But they had not lost the will to live, nor the hope that they might yet be rescued. They encouraged each other by speaking of men they knew, or had heard of, whose situations had been even more desperate and who had yet won through to safety. They omitted none of the small tasks, devised partly for safety and comfort and partly to lessen a little the heavy burden of slowly passing hours. They shaved daily, taking pride in the fact that, despite their situation, they were not assuming the forlorn, unkempt appearance common to castaways. Fortunately, they had found among the effects of their dead comrades a shaving cream that required no water, and enough of it to last for as long as they might need it.

Having shaved, they would sit down to their meager breakfast of emergency rations. They allowed themselves a quarter of a pint of water, each, at this meal. They would then examine the hull from stem to stern and pump out the little water that had seeped in during the night. Following this, they would lie in the sea, beneath the wing or on the shady side of the hull, until the sun was well up. They found real refreshment in this, taking in what water they could through the pores of their skin; and throughout the day they would soak their singlets and shorts in the sea and put them on sopping wet. This gave them the illusion, at least, of a little coolness when the air was astir.

Day after day slipped by without change, and they watched their dwindling water supply with increasing anxiety. One aspect of their situation surprised them: only once had they seen any fish. On that occasion, when Brooke had come out to wet his shirt, he noticed a school of thousands of small fish hovering in the shade of the hull; but when they attempted to dip some up, they had vanished in a flash. Thereafter, not a fish did they see, and no birds save for the lone frigate. The vast Pacific seemed to be as empty of life below the surface as above it.

As the days passed, there was no more singing of the Vesper hymn. Their mouths and throats were dry and their lips cracked and peeling. Their need for speech seemed to decrease with their power of it, but in the increasing gravity

of their situation they were drawn together as though members of one body. Once, when they were having their nightly ration of water, Mauriac said: "Alec, since we have to be where we are, I'm glad it's you and I together," and a gust of deep feeling welled up in Brooke's heart preventing a reply save a nod of the head. The brief interchange seemed to give them renewed strength and courage.

A great resource to them was a pocket Bible which had belonged to the pilot, Lyman. At first they read aloud, turn and turn about; later, silently, passing the book back and forth. But as they grew weaker they found it hard to concentrate upon what they read. They would lie in their bunks for hours at a time, in a half-doze, but conscious of their misery, with confused thoughts and fancies passing through their minds. And all this while the sun beat mercilessly down upon the derelict plane which appeared to suffer with them, and the stars and the waxing moon shone upon it at night, from a serene and cloudless sky.

Only by a strong effort of will were they now able to carry through the daily routine of tasks. They came to dread the moment when they had nothing more to do and crawled out on the wing to stare across the empty sea. Nevertheless, it was always with the ghost of hope that they strained their ears for the sound of motors that was never heard, and searched the horizon for the ship that never appeared.

Late one afternoon thirst became so great a torment that they relaxed their rule against drinking their ration before nightfall. They drank it when the sun was still an hour high, then crawled out on opposite ends of the wing to stare into the blue depths.

Suddenly Mauriac grunted: "Fish! Going toward you. Don't move!"

A moment later Brooke saw it. The fish was about eighteen inches long, with a curious blunt body covered with brownish skin mottled with green spots. The body appeared rigid, giving scarcely at all as it moved through the water. Its fan-shaped tail moved swiftly and the small pectoral fins appeared to be more of an ornament than a necessity in keeping this anomaly of a fish on even keel.

Despite his weakness, Brooke lost no time in going below for tackle. He brought up a line for each of them with a small hook attached, for the fish had a tiny mouth, and baited with bacon rind. With great caution they let their hooks sink to a level a little below that of the hull. In this moment of excitement they forgot present misery. The fish had disappeared; then Mauriac saw it approaching his hook. It seized the hook and a moment later he had it safely on the wing.

The easy catching of the fish seemed to the two men, so desperately in need of encouragement, an event of great importance. Their carefully hoarded supply of emergency rations was enough to last them for another two or three

days. Though weakened by hunger it was not a torment to them, like thirst. Therefore, as they examined the fish, they were thinking less of the nourishment it would provide than that the catching of it marked a turn in their fortunes. It was as though a ban had been removed, a hoodoo lifted. A gap had been made in the endless, changeless circle of nights and days. The smallest favorable event may encourage men in a desperate situation to hope once more; and, hard-pressed by necessity, to relax a little of the sternness of self-denial, as though hope for better fortune had changed to belief in it.

They decided to allow themselves another quarter of a pint of water, each, lest with dry mouths they should lose all the pleasure of eating the fish. Only men so tormented by thirst could understand what the meager extra ration meant to the two airmen. They wished to drink slowly, but the demands of the body overcame the resistance of the will, and they swallowed the water at a gulp.

The fish was so fat that they could fry it in its own grease. The liver seemed unusually large. They sliced it in two portions and laid them in the frying pan with the flesh which was taking on a rich golden brown as they basted it with the grease. They begrudged the moisture lost in the wisps of steam and removed the pan from the stove before the fish was thoroughly cooked. They ate eagerly, in silence, till not a scrap remained. Then they stretched out on their bunks, watching the light fade slowly as though it were being drawn by capillary attraction from within the body of the plane to mingle with the last faint glory of departing day.

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Brooke awoke with the confused sense that someone was calling him and that he was trying vainly to reply. For a moment he had no recollection of where he was, but as consciousness returned he recognized Mauriac's voice.

"Alec! Alec!"

"Yes?"

"Do you feel strange?"

Brooke was still trying to rouse himself, to conquer the feeling of immense languor which seemed at first to make it impossible for him to speak or stir.

"What?"

"Can't move my arms and legs. You all right?"

"I don't know. Been asleep. . . . Yes, I believe I do, a little."

"There's something wrong! That fish must have been poisonous."

"Feel any pain?"

"No; only numb. God, I'm thirsty!"

"That's to be expected."

Neither of them spoke again for some time; then Brooke said: "I've read about poison fish. If we'd eaten one of those we'd be suffering torments."

“Maybe there’s more than one kind.”

“There might be. Feel sick?”

“No, but I can hardly move. If it is the fish we should drink water. Dilute the poison.”

“There’s only a quart.”

“Let’s finish it. There’s no use hoping any longer.”

“We can’t, Gene. We mustn’t!”

“Then half a pint each? We may die of this if we don’t.”

“You want to risk it?”

“Yes. It’s a risk either way. Could you get it?”

“I’ll try.”

Slowly Brooke rose to a sitting position and slid his legs over the side of his bunk. He was scarcely able to reach the breaker containing the last of the water. He filled a glass to within an inch of the brim. Claspng it in both hands, he moved slowly to his comrade’s bunk.

“Hold it for me,” Mauriac said. “Can’t trust my hands.”

Brooke’s own hands trembled as he held the glass, tipping it while his friend drank eagerly; then he fell back on his pillow.

“God in heaven, but that’s good!” he said.

Brooke measured out his own portion and drank as eagerly and rapidly as Mauriac had done. He then set the glass down and crawled into his bunk.

“There’s a full moon,” he said. “I wish we were lying on the wing.”

“Could you make it, up there?”

“No.”

“Neither could I. . . . Alec, we’re at the end of our rope, aren’t we?”

“Pretty close, but not yet.”

“We’re together, whatever comes.”

“That comforts me, too.”

After a long silence Mauriac said: “Alec, not E-D. It’s E-A-E.”

“What?”

“Turnbull’s Island. Existence Absolutely Essential.”

“I still believe in it, Gene.”

They spoke no more after that.

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Brooke opened his eyes and stared around him at objects dimly revealed in the faint light. The numbness in his body seemed to be increasing and thirst was a torment scarcely to be borne. He called Mauriac but there was no answer. He listened intently but could hear no sound of his friend breathing. He managed to rise from his bunk and shook Mauriac gently by the shoulder. There was no response. Deeply anxious, he took the glass, filled it, and returned to Mauriac. After a vain attempt to rouse him he put an arm under his

shoulders, lifted him a little, and tried to pour water between his lips. It was useless; the precious water ran down the chin and over the chest of his comrade. Setting down the glass he felt Mauriac's pulse, then listened vainly for the beating of his heart. He did this again and again, unable, at first, to grasp the truth. Mauriac was dead.

Brooke sank to his knees, holding Mauriac's hand in both of his. For a long time he remained thus; then, lifting his head, he called his friend's name once more, but the sound of his voice only made his loneliness the greater. He found himself staring at the half-emptied glass on the floor between the bunks. Seizing it with trembling hands, he drank the water remaining. Then he rose, slowly, and taking the sheet from his own bunk laid it over the body of his friend.

## *Eight*

Lying in his bunk with closed eyes, Brooke had a confused awareness that he was in his room in the Hotel Lenox where he had lived during the happy fortnight in Boston with his Uncle Thad. "It must be morning," he thought. He seemed to hear the rumble of traffic beginning again on Boylston Street. Then the sound ceased. Presently he heard it again. No—it was not the noise of traffic. It was something else. It must be something else, if only he could remember. It was like the sound of . . . the sound of . . .

Rousing himself with an effort he listened intently. As his mind cleared and awoke to a despairing realization of his circumstances, he made out the grimly familiar surroundings in the dim light filtering in from the compartment aft. Again, but distinctly now, he heard the sound that had wakened him: a long-drawn whisper, the unmistakable sigh of a roller breaking gently on a coral reef.

He rose to a sitting position. The numbness which had been rising like a deadly tide was now leaving him. He got to his feet, made his way to the starboard blister, and stared out. The moon was high and the night gloriously serene. What he saw gave him a surge of emotion so deep that, in his weakness, he could scarcely endure it. He rubbed his bloodshot eyes and peered out once more. As his numbed faculties awakened he realized that what lay before him was not illusion but reality.

Less than half a mile distant and clearly revealed in the silvery light, two volcanic pinnacles seemed to tower to immeasurable heights; from the ridge that joined them a great cliff fell vertically to the gently sloping wooded land below. An encircling reef upon which the sea broke with deep whisperings stretched northwest and southeast farther than his eye could follow in the deceptive light. The sheltered waters of the lagoon glimmered softly, and a faint land breeze brought the scent of earth and night-blooming flowers. Close by to starboard, he saw that the flashing line of surf was broken by a clear passage into the lagoon. He turned and made his way forward, trembling so that he could scarcely stand.

"Gene!" he called. "We're close in with the land! It's Turnbull's Island! The High Barbaree!"

Then he remembered. Tears gushed to his eyes as he called his dead friend's name once more. He returned to the blister, half doubting what he had seen, and stared again at the moonlit land. There was need for haste; the plane was drifting in a southerly direction and was already nearly abreast of the passage. Dragging out the smaller of the two life rafts, he pushed it through the

blister, inflated it, and made it fast alongside. He pressed his hands to his eyes as he tried to remember what things he should take ashore. Quick thought was necessary, but he found it almost impossible to think. In a canvas bag he placed some cooking utensils, a clasp knife, toilet articles, Lyman's Bible, and what clothing he had. By the time the bag was stowed on the raft his little strength was almost spent. He realized bitterly that he would be forced to leave Mauriac's body in the plane. He knelt beside his dead comrade for a moment; then, stumbling aft once more, he lowered himself to the raft and began to paddle with faltering strokes, while the Catalina drifted away to the southward.

Each stroke of the paddle cost him an effort of will, but at last he reached the passage and entered the lagoon, scarcely a quarter of a mile wide at this place. As he approached the land, the cliff towering above him seemed to gather height and majesty, but in his forlorn condition he gave it no more than a dazed incredulous glance. At length the raft grated gently on a beach of coral sand as white as snow and laced with the inky shadows of overhanging trees. He stepped out into the shallows, drew up the raft, and staggered off in search of water.

It seemed that he had walked, and stopped to rest, and walked and crawled again for a great distance before he came to a stream of clear water running into the lagoon. He fell on his knees and began to drink. His parched body seemed to absorb the water as fast as he could swallow it. He paused to regain his breath and drank again, then rested, his head in his hands. A memory flashed into his confused mind: the recollection of a carrier pilot, adrift on a raft for eleven days, whom he had picked up far from land, and the piteous sight it was to see him drink. Tears came into his eyes once more as he thought of a sight more piteous still: Mauriac dead in the Catalina. If only land had been sighted a few hours earlier! He rose and walked unsteadily to the beach. Staring over the moonlit sea, he saw nothing of the plane. Too spent for further movement he sank down on the warm sand and fell into a troubled sleep.

It seemed that he was once more aboard the plane, rising and falling in the long Pacific swell. Gene was calling for water, but the breaker was empty. Now he was lying on the wing beside his friend and could hear him say: 'Even if there were such an island, the Nips would have it, 'way up here.' Then he heard Willock speaking over the interphone: 'One egg left, and she's hot!' Half waking he would realize, though unconvincingly, that he was on Turnbull's Island. At last the grim visions ceased and gave way to quiet slumber.

When he awoke he had no recollection, for a moment, of what had occurred. He sat up quickly, gazing around him in astonishment; then a surge of relief filled his heart as memory returned. He knelt by the stream to drink long and greedily, feeling immeasurably refreshed. The shadow of the great

cliff now extended far eastward to a wooded islet across the lagoon. He found a place on the beach where a break in the forest gave him a clear view of the mighty wall of weathered rock, flanked by its twin spires. He stared up in wonder. There could be no further doubt of it: Turnbull's Island and the High Barbaree of his dreams were one and the same! How was he to account—how *could* he account—for a fact so strange?

He was haunted by the fear that the island might be in Japanese hands. It would be like the Japs, if they had discovered the place ten or twenty years earlier, to keep the secret to themselves. He could not yet judge of the size of the island but it appeared to be roughly circular and perhaps twelve to fifteen miles in circumference. Returning to his raft he was relieved to find everything as he had left it, and no footprints save his own on the beach roundabout. He deflated the raft and carried it, with his sack of belongings, to the stream, making his way inland to a spot where he could lie well hidden. Then he returned to obliterate as well as he could his own tracks in the sand. By this time the day was far spent. The voices of the birds were hushed and no sound broke the silence save the murmur of the stream and the rumble of breakers on distant reefs. He prepared himself a bed of fern; then, feeling hunger for the first time in many days, he set out in search of food.

Night was falling when he returned to his camp, his canvas bag filled with fruit which he found growing in abundance everywhere. The food had revived him wonderfully and he brought enough with him to last for several days in case it should be necessary to lie hidden; but he had seen no sign of human habitation and became increasingly sure that the island was a solitude, perhaps never before visited by a human being.

Relaxing on his bed of fern, he stared up at the canopy of rich foliage. The stream was bordered with huge old trees of varieties unknown to him: the virgin forest of a South Sea island. Presently his thoughts returned to the great eastern cliff flanked by the two lofty spires, precisely as he had seen them silhouetted against the afterglow from the prow of the little dream ship.

He knew that there was authority for the belief that men were sometimes given a glimpse of the future, in dreams. The conviction that such a glimpse had been given him filled him with awe. He recalled a book he had read at college: *An Experiment with Time*, by an Englishman named Dunne. The Englishman had found that he often dreamed, in full circumstantial detail, of events that time brought to pass exactly as dreamed. His own experience had been similar. He had dreamed, not of the future, to be sure, but of a place he was to visit in the future. What could this mean? That the future already existed, together with the present and the past? Such an admission, he felt, was impossible, for it implied that every act in life was foreordained. Thinking of the war, he could not bring himself to believe that all the horror and misery

endured and yet to be endured by mankind was inevitable; that his friend, Mauriac, had been doomed even before his birth to die in a derelict plane when safety was close at hand. Realizing the futility of these thoughts, he dismissed them from his mind. Come what might, he would be deeply grateful for the gift of life.

He awoke with a sense of profound well-being and happiness like that common in childhood, with neither forethought nor afterthought to mar its purity. Herons waded in the shallows on the lookout for fish. Small snow-white terns—the most beautiful of all sea fowl, he thought—wheeled and dipped in pairs over the treetops, in a kind of silent aerial ballet. Tropic birds, as aloof and ethereal as disembodied spirits, were flying seaward from their nests among the cliffs and crags of the interior, at so great a height that they were all but invisible against the blue sky. Leaving the beach to turn inland, he heard the booming notes of the fruit pigeon and the shrill crowing of jungle cocks, birds like slim, long-legged bantams, feathered in gorgeous colors that flashed in the sunlight as they took wing. He was following a stream that made a still pool at the mouth of a valley, and halted to admire a purple gallinule, with scarlet bill and frontal plate, standing motionless on the bank. The bird showed no fear and let him pass so close that he could have stooped to touch its iridescent feathers.

The valley steepened and the stream became a mountain torrent, foaming around moss-covered rocks and leaping down in bright cascades. The going proved harder than he had expected, but he pushed on, hoping to scale a peak or high ridge which would give him a wide view of the island. At last he reached the summit of a bracken-covered ridge. The sun was now well up; innumerable tiny whitecaps were springing out against the blue of the sea beyond the reefs. The view from this height was magnificent. He could now follow the lagoon for miles as it curved northwest and southeast, fringed on the seaward side with gemlike islets. It was a miracle of coloring, shading from the palest emerald to rich turquoise in the shallows, while the deeper channels showed as broad winding tracks of sapphire. But what seized and held his attention was a mountain higher than any he had dreamed of encountering which cut off all view of the western side of the island. The mighty volcanic cone, smothered in green nearly to the summit, dominated the entire landscape. Brooke gazed at the lofty peak with a sense of mingled awe and wonder. There was no mention of this peak in Yardley's *Directory*, but he had seen it in his dream, dimly showing through cloud and mist. Now it was revealed in its full majesty. He resolved to climb that central peak one day. While studying intervening ridges, plateaus, and upland valleys, his glance fell upon something near at hand, so incredible in that lonely place that, for a moment, he doubted the evidence of his eyes. A little below him on the ridge where he

stood was a huge flat-topped rock. A human figure was seated motionless there, gazing out over the sea. It was an old man, dressed only in a kirtle of white material. His shoulders were broad and his body, though lean, was splendidly proportioned. His beard and mustache were as white as the thick hair that covered his head. His posture of tranquil immobility was like that of some Tibetan hermit whose mind and spirit had been harmonized and made one with the solitudes in which he dwelt.

He was scarcely thirty paces from the spot where Brooke stood. At that moment he turned his head, then rose to his feet and with a friendly gesture stood awaiting the pilot. He held out his hand. As Brooke clasped it the old man said, "O Tangaroa," in a deep pleasant voice. He then motioned Brooke to sit beside him. Presently he spoke again, asking some question, Brooke thought. He shook his head, apologetically, but he felt no embarrassment in the old man's presence, even though they had no speech in common. It was hard not to stare at him, for he was an imposing figure. His strong brown arms and legs as well as his body were tattooed in strange and beautiful designs. He had the appearance and the air of some ancient Polynesian sage, the last survivor of a forgotten race. Brooke thought he had never seen a nobler head.

At last the old man rose and beckoned the other to follow. Walking swiftly, with a strong elastic step, he led the way down to the lowlands by a path far easier than that of Brooke's ascent. He halted, when they had reached the beach, at a spot where a grove of ironwood trees cut off the view of the lagoon. Here a small outrigger canoe rested upon forked sticks set firmly into the ground. Brooke's heart leaped as he gazed at the graceful little vessel. It was about twelve feet long, adzed out of a log of some light, reddish wood, rubbed smooth with coral and beautifully polished with coconut oil. The outrigger booms were seized to the gunwale and to the outrigger itself with bright yellow coconut sennit laid on in ornamental patterns. The paddle and bailing scoop in the bilges were intricately carved, as were the ornamental pieces at stem and stern. The old man lifted the canoe and carried it to the lagoon, setting it lightly in the water. Taking the paddle he placed it in Brooke's hand, clasping both of his own about that of the pilot as he did so. Then, with a smile and a nod of farewell, he turned and was gone.

Brooke stared after him, scarcely able to convince himself of the reality of the meeting. Evidently, the old native had meant him to use the canoe. He examined the little craft with fascinated interest, studying its beautiful lines and the carving, running his hand along the gunwale and the sides, so perfectly smoothed and polished. Hefting it, he was astonished at its lightness. The temptation it offered was not to be resisted. Never before had he paddled an outrigger canoe and he found it a little difficult to manage, at first; it was so light that it answered immediately to the slightest touch of the blade. But he

soon got the hang of it and gave himself up to the delight of its swift easy motion.

He landed first at one of the reef islets, and from there he could see the ridge he had climbed and the very rock, far inland, where he had met the old native. Who could he be? Where did he live? He seemed as native to Turnbull's Island as the ironwood trees that lined the beaches. Brooke felt strangely comforted. He was not alone here. As he gazed toward the mountains, dappled with cloud shadows moving slowly over the high plateaus, the realization that another human being shared this solitude added to his pleasure in it.

While wandering along the seaward side of the islet he caught sight of a flock of sea birds making for the land. There was something uncertain and disordered in the way they flew, as if the place were strange to them and they scarcely knew where to land. After a few moments of aimless circling over the lagoon they alighted on the islet, close to where he stood. They seemed utterly spent; their feathers were unkempt and bedraggled and the breasts and wings of some of them were stained with blood. Then came another flock, and another, in the same confused manner. There were gannets, frigate birds, and various kinds of terns—birds of the atolls. They seemed to distrust the high land and settled on the islets on either side of the passage. Soon there were hundreds resting on the coral sand around him. He could imagine what had brought them here. There must have been a battle somewhere out to the east; the birds had been driven away from the low islands where they had nested in peace for ages past. They were refugees from the horrors of a war they understood as little as the natives of those islands. Brooke thought of the devastation he himself had seen, but never before had the plight of sea birds been brought home to him so vividly as now. He imagined that these dazed and frightened birds glanced at him with fear and suspicion, so he pushed his canoe quietly into the water and left them in peace.

The wind had died away when he returned to his camp with the shellfish he had gathered on the islet. The air was strangely still; there was no slightest movement of twig or leaf in the branches above him. It was the trancelike hour he had always loved: the pause between midafternoon and late afternoon. He was about to kindle a fire to prepare a belated meal when he halted to listen.

What he heard, or thought he heard, was not sound but the very ghost of sound—a vibration in the air, a sudden faint trembling of leaves. It ceased, and then was felt, rather than heard, once more.

“Gunfire!” he thought. “A battle at sea, perhaps, but miles and miles away.”

Once again the air quivered, almost imperceptibly.

## Nine

The level rays of the sun striking through the trees wakened him from a dream of human voices speaking a language he had been trying vainly to understand. At first he believed it was the murmur of the stream; then he again heard them, distinctly, coming from the direction of the lagoon. Deeply anxious, he made his way to a spot where he could stand hidden, with a clear view of the beach. A moment later a procession of several persons came into sight.

Two middle-aged men were in the lead. One was a white man, sturdy of frame, with a deeply tanned face, that looked gaunt from privation. He wore steel-rimmed spectacles and his head was protected from the sun by a wide-brimmed pandanus hat. His coat and trousers were of black alpaca, and his appearance was that of one of those English or American pastors among island folk whom Brooke had occasionally met in the Solomons and elsewhere. The man beside him was an islander of about forty who looked like a Polynesian. The others, too, appeared to be of the same race. There was a slim old lady of seventy, perhaps, a motherly woman of about half that age, and two children, a boy and a girl whose ages would be around ten and eight years. Brooke's heart lifted at sight of them. As he stepped into the open he called: "Don't be alarmed. I'm a friend."

The group on the beach stopped short, gazing wide-eyed as he emerged from amongst the trees. The white man stepped forward to meet him, a look of mingled astonishment and relief on his kindly face.

"You gave us a start, young man," he said. "We supposed the island uninhabited. My name is Wilcox. These friends with me are members of one family. This is Ru, the father of the children . . . and Mata, his wife . . . And Mama Ruau, Mata's mother."

They stepped forward to take his hand warmly while the children continued to gaze at him with shy wondering glances.

"You are alone here?" Mr. Wilcox asked.

"Yes. I'm a navy pilot. My plane was shot down at sea. I had to abandon her."

"Your name is not Brooke, by any chance? Alec Brooke?"

The pilot stared at him.

"How in the world could you know that, sir?"

"God be thanked that you are safe!" the other exclaimed. "Where is your comrade?"

"He is dead, sir. He died at sea. But how could you know . . ."

“It was your message, Mr. Brooke. By the mercy of Providence we found the frigate bird that carried it. He lighted on our canoe.”

“Then you have just come?”

“We have been ashore scarcely an hour. The canoe is down the beach, about a mile from here. Are you camped near by?”

“Yes,” said Brooke, “only a short distance up the river.”

“Would you mind if we came here, too? This is such a pretty spot . . .”

“Mind? I would like nothing better, sir. I confess that I was getting a bit lonely, here by myself.”

“You’ll find us quiet people, Mr. Brooke, easy to get along with, and perhaps we can be of service to you. I’ll tell the children’s father to fetch the canoe.”

A moment later Ru set off down the beach, the children running beside him. Mata and her mother, talking excitedly in their native tongue, walked inland along the stream, halting at every moment to examine the trees and flowers and shrubs.

“They are as happy as the children themselves,” Mr. Wilcox said, looking after them. “We come from Punavai, a low island. This is the first time they have seen mountains or streams of running water. Everything here is strange to them.”

“Punavai—I believe I’ve seen the name on a chart,” Brooke said.

“It is no more than a name now,” Mr. Wilcox replied, sadly. “As a homeland for its people it has ceased to exist.”

The two men sat in silence for some time. Brooke was thinking of other islands such as Punavai that he had seen, so wrecked and ruined by the grim necessities of war that never again, perhaps, could even a semblance of their old life return to them.

“But I’ll not speak of that,” Mr. Wilcox went on. “It was God’s merciful love that brought us here, using you as his instrument. Let me tell you how it was. We had been ten days at sea, fleeing such horror of destruction and death as it has remained for this age alone to reveal. We knew only in a vague general way where we were. I had no navigating instruments, and even if I had possessed them I would not have known how to use them. We were not yet at the last extremity; we still had left a little food and water, but a few more days would have seen the end of both. After that our plight would have been desperate, hopeless. Toward evening we saw the frigate bird. We thought it might have been one of those from our own island, a refugee like ourselves. We were becalmed at the time. As the bird approached we saw the long streamer fluttering out from its wing. It circled the canoe several times and then alighted on the prow. Ariki, Ru’s boy, caught him. You can imagine my feelings when I read the message which I found in the little bottle, and how the

others felt when I told them what was written there. Two men, lost like ourselves, were floating somewhere on a derelict plane, but we had no way of knowing whether you were north, south, east, or west of us, or at what distance.”

“Where were you bound, sir? You had some destination in mind, surely?”

“Yes . . . we did. I will speak of that presently. All we could do at the moment was to hope that we might sight you while we sailed on as the wind would permit. Two days later our situation was grim indeed. We had no more food and only enough water for one more day. We had kept the frigate bird, to be killed and eaten as a last resource, but being islanders and knowing the habits of sea birds, we also knew that he might guide us to land. The following morning having united in prayer to Our Heavenly Father, we freed the bird. He flew in a direction far to the south of the course we had been following. What little wind there was favored us, and we altered our direction at once. At dawn the next day the sea was still empty before us but we were not dismayed. We all felt that we were under guidance. And so we were. Late in the afternoon we sighted Turnbull’s Island.”

“Turnbull’s Island!” Brooke exclaimed. “Then you know of it, sir?”

“I’ll tell you a strange thing, Mr. Brooke. I’ve known of Turnbull’s Island for years.”

“So have I, sir! I first read of it as a boy, in an old edition of Yardley’s *Pacific Directory*.”

The missionary turned to stare at him.

“Bless my soul! Then you remember Captain Turnbull’s account of it?”

“Yes, sir. Very well. And the island was marked on an old chart we have at home, with the notation ‘Existence Doubtful’ beneath it.”

“And yet you believed in it?”

“More than half, sir.”

“So did I, Mr. Brooke! So did I! I’ll tell you what just about convinced me. A good twenty years ago, Captain Turnbull’s report was verified for me by an old Punavai man, now dead. Many a notebook I’ve filled with his stories and legends of ancient days. I too had a chart dating back to the seventies on which the island was marked. One evening I brought this out and showed the old man its position as noted there. I asked if he had ever heard of an island in that region. He said that he had, and that, in very ancient times, it was a place sacred to the Polynesians and to them alone. The black-skinned races, he said, had never seen it and knew nothing about it. As you may know, Mr. Brooke, there are isolated colonies of Polynesians scattered through Micronesia and Melanesia. Bellona, south of the Solomons, is an example, and Tikopia, in the Santa Cruz Group. Punavai, the island from which we came, is another.”

“Did the old native have a name for the island?” Brooke asked.

“Yes. He said it was called the *Henua a Tangaroa*, which means the Land of Tangaroa. That is a name of great antiquity and still common throughout Polynesia. Perhaps a chief of the name once lived here, or it may have been purely legendary.”

“Mr. Wilcox, a Tangaroa still lives here,” Brooke replied. “I’ve seen him.”

“Why . . . what do you mean?”

“I say that I’ve seen him, but it was only for a moment. If it were not for the canoe, I could almost doubt that I did see him.”

“The canoe?”

Briefly, the pilot told of his strange meeting.

“I couldn’t, of course, speak with him, but as he took my hand he said, ‘O Tangaroa.’ I supposed he was giving me his name.”

“And so he was,” the missionary replied, wonderingly. “Is his canoe near by? Could I see it?”

Brooke led the way along the beach to where the canoe lay concealed by a screen of bush. Mr. Wilcox examined it with deep interest.

“Mr. Brooke, in ancient times canoe-making was the highest of all the Polynesian arts. This one is a little gem, a veritable masterpiece! It might have been designed and built by a member of the guild of canoe makers who lived centuries ago.”

“I can well believe it, sir. It is so beautiful that I’ve been almost afraid to use it, but I believe Tangaroa meant me to. After meeting him as I’ve told you, he came here with me and placed the paddle in my hands.”

“Did he clasp his own hands over yours as he did so?”

“Yes, he did.”

“Then you are luckier than you know. That is an ancient gesture of bestowal. He meant it as a gift.”

“You think so?”

“I’m certain of it. . . . I can scarcely believe in this little miracle even as I look at it. As for its maker, who can he be? The carving on the stem convinces me that he is of the Polynesian race. In that case I should be able to speak with him.”

“We’ll see him again, surely.”

“I do hope so. I’m as curious as a child. But we must make no search. I’ve no doubt he will reveal himself in his own good time.”

Far down the lagoon they saw Ru returning with the children in Mr. Wilcox’s sailing canoe. The sail, of worn brown matting, was run up to a long slanting yard. There was only a breath of wind and they were approaching slowly.

“It looks like pictures I’ve seen of old sailing vessels,” Brooke remarked.

“She’s modeled on the old *vaka motu*,” Mr. Wilcox explained—“the single

canoes that were used for long passages. She's no masterpiece, but, God be thanked! she got us here. . . . Turnbull's Island," he added, musingly. "Mr. Brooke, who could have believed that our planet yet held such a refuge as this? I remember the fragment of a chant the old Punavai man I've spoken of sang for me when I inquired about the island. It is not easy to put the native speech into English, but this would be a rough translation:—

Fortunate the wanderer  
Who sights the twin spires,  
The hollow mountain and the face of the mighty cliff.  
Let him steer between the islets  
Bordering the passage called. . ."

He paused to reflect for a moment. "The name of the passage is something of a puzzle. The nearest equivalent in English would be 'Enclosed Peace.' What name could be more fitting? If only all the island people could be safely gathered here!" he added, sadly.

## Ten

When Brooke awoke that morning he found Mr. Wilcox sitting on the doorstep watching the play of dancing light reflected from the lagoon upon the leaves of the old trees that shaded the beach.

“You’ve had a good sleep, young man,” he said. “The sun is two hours high.”

“I’m not always so lazy,” said Brooke. “I was out fishing with Ru till well after midnight.”

“Ru will make a real native of you before he’s done. You couldn’t have a better teacher.”

“I’ve found that out for myself,” Brooke replied. “It’s curious how well we understand each other, without a word spoken. Why haven’t you taught him English? Didn’t any of the natives speak it on Punavai?”

The missionary shook his head.

“I suppose it’s because I loved their own language so much, I spoke nothing else until I was a grown boy.”

“I’d like to learn it,” said Brooke.

“There’s no reason why you shouldn’t. We may be here for a long time.”

“You think so?”

The missionary didn’t reply at once. Then he said: “It’s not so much a matter of thinking as of feeling. It’s as though I’d received assurance that we will not be disturbed here. That may be wishful thinking on my part,” he added, with a smile.

“Do you mean that? Would you like to stay here indefinitely?”

“What of yourself? You’re not becoming restless already?”

“Far from it, sir: I’ve dreamed about islands from boyhood. But I wouldn’t have believed I’d ever find one like this. Something strange seems to have happened to me. I don’t know how to explain it.”

“What kind of thing?”

“I’ve felt contented since the day I landed,” Brooke said. “But there’s been a sadness, too—an ache in the heart. Then, last night when Ru and I were coming in, that was gone—all of a sudden. I felt it go. And something else earner just as quickly—happiness, deep happiness.” He smiled as he added: “You’re a minister. What have I done to deserve it?”

“Mr. Brooke, I don’t think we are qualified to speak of desert. We must leave that to Our Heavenly Father. Look!” he added, getting to his feet. “Here comes the personification of happiness at its best and purest.”

Brooke saw Hina, Ru’s small daughter, running toward them along the

beach, her dark hair flying in the wind. The two men watched as she stopped to examine something that had attracted her attention; then she came dancing on, her bare feet scarcely seeming to touch the ground. The missionary called, and the child came running to where they stood. She smiled at Brooke and then spoke rapidly to Mr. Wilcox.

“Her grandmother has sent her to search for *autè*,” the latter explained.

“What is that?” Brooke asked.

“The cloth plant. Hina’s grandmother is a very foresighted old lady. She knows that we’ll be needing tapa cloth one of these days when the few clothes we have are worn-out. I’ll go with Hina. Her mother has your breakfast ready. She sent me to tell you.”

Late in the afternoon when Brooke returned from a solitary excursion on the lagoon, he found Mr. Wilcox awaiting him. The missionary was pacing the beach, and Brooke gathered from his manner that something unusual must have happened.

“Mr. Brooke, I’ve seen him!” the missionary said as he helped the pilot carry the canoe up the beach. “Tangaroa, I mean!”

“You have? Where did you meet him?”

“It was extraordinary! Hina and I went into the little valley you must have noticed with the grove of flowering trees at the entrance. We spent a delightful morning, but found no *autè* plants. I’m afraid we didn’t search for them as carefully as we might have. Hina was entranced with the butterflies; so was I, for that matter. There was one in particular, of the shade of blue so impossible to describe, the wings bordered with silver. We followed it from place to place for a good quarter of an hour, I should think. Presently we halted to rest, and the butterfly flew back and forth in the sunlight as though to give us a better view. Hina held out her forefinger and said, ‘Please come down, you beautiful little bird, and let me have a good look at you!’ Imagine her astonishment, and mine as well, when it fluttered down and landed on her finger. I wish you could have seen the child at that moment. I don’t know which was the more charming sight, Hina or the butterfly. The two of them together made a picture I shall never forget. Presently she said: ‘Thank you. Now you can fly away again.’ She moved her finger a little and away went the butterfly, and that’s the last we saw of it.

“I reminded Hina that we seemed to be forgetting her grandmother’s errand, so we went on, looking more carefully for *autè* plants. But we didn’t find them, and at last the child said: ‘I don’t believe there are any here. We’d better go home now and look again tomorrow, in some other valley.’

“And then we met Tangaroa. He was standing with his back against a tree, the mottled light and shadow concealing him almost perfectly. I confess that I was startled, but not Hina. She halted and looked at him with a quiet,

wondering glance. The old man's smile was just as you described it. He held out his hand to Hina and said, 'Come with me.' She obeyed without the slightest hesitation, and we walked on in silence for perhaps a quarter of a mile. I don't believe I would have been able to speak at the moment, even if Tangaroa had addressed me; I was too astonished at the strangeness and suddenness of the meeting. But I was even more surprised when he led us to a spot filled with a little wild forest of the cloth plant. He seemed to know—indeed he must have known—what we were seeking."

"Did you speak with him then?" Brooke asked.

"Yes. At first, as I've said, I felt . . . well, awed by his presence, but that quickly passed. He has great dignity; I was aware of that immediately, as you were, but his manner is as gentle and kindly as that of some of our old men on Punavai. Hina felt no shyness, even from the first. She stood at his knee, and the old man stroked her hair as we talked."

"Did he speak about himself?" Brooke asked.

"Not a word. I had some trouble in understanding him, for he speaks the ancient tongue, as different from that in use today as Chaucer's English is different from that of Shakespeare. But I've been a student, all my life, of the various dialects of the Polynesian language. I could understand most of what he said."

"And what has he told you?"

"Extraordinary things," the missionary replied gravely. "His knowledge of the history of the Polynesian race is truly remarkable; it checks with everything I have read. I doubt if there is an archipelago or an island known to the Polynesians that is unknown to Tangaroa. He knows how they were peopled and when. But some of his replies to my questions were cryptic, to say the least. I asked whether he could tell me where his people came from in the first place. He said, 'I can. They came from the west.' I then asked how it had been possible for them to reach islands so widely scattered over so vast an ocean. He replied, very quietly, 'By searching for them.' I then asked about their method of search, and he gave me so vivid an account of one of the migrations that I could all but see the fleet of great sailing canoes, filled with men, women, and children, and their fowls and pigs and dogs, against the lonely unknown sea. But he told me nothing of the peopling of this island, or of what had become of the inhabitants who must, at some time, have lived here. I was tempted to inquire about this, but, for some reason, I couldn't. Before we parted he gave me a message for you."

"For me!"

"Yes. I don't in the least understand it, but knowing what I now do of Tangaroa, I advise you to follow his counsel."

"And what is that?" Brooke asked.

“These were his words: ‘Tell the young man, Pupurè’—that is the native word for a fair-haired man—‘to go westward around the island. He is to go alone.’ ”

Brooke gazed wonderingly at the missionary.

“Why in the world should he want me to do that?” he said.

“I know no more than yourself.”

“Did he say when I was to go?”

“No. I have given you his message, complete. But I gathered, from his manner, that the journey will be for your good.”

## *Eleven*

As he paddled westward down the lagoon, Brooke was surprised to find how quickly his first sense of wonderment, upon learning of Tangaroa's message, had vanished. The sense of well-being, of deep happiness, was with him still as he proceeded on his way, entranced by the beauty of the coral forests passing beneath his canoe, and of the varied landscape opening up before him. No two of the valleys were the same. Some were dense jungles; others, open and sunny, had breadfruit, orange, and mango trees scattered over the green turf. Surely, he thought, Turnbull's Island had been inhabited at some time. He saw a number of banyan trees, and remembered, from his reading, that the banyan was considered sacred by the Polynesians and was planted in the vicinity of their temples; and that wherever the breadfruit was found, there too lived, or had lived, the people who planted them.

At last he reached a part of the coast he had not visited before. Here the shore line trended northwest toward a rocky bastion that cut off further view in that direction. It extended far out into the lagoon. Having skirted it, he could now see nearly the whole of the great central mountain, hidden from view on the eastern side of the island. As he examined the ridge leading from the headland, he saw that it extended to a tract of gently sloping land far inland. He decided to climb the ridge and return to the beach by another enclosing the valley to the north.

The ascent was steep in places, and the ridge narrowed as he proceeded until he could look down the steep walls into the valleys on either side. At last he came to a plateau so deeply shaded by great trees that there was little undergrowth to impede his passage. He meant to cross it in a northerly direction and soon realized that he had lost his way. He halted to take his bearings, not really caring whether he found them or not. He could not go far astray in any case, and this high inland region had a beauty entrancing to his northern eyes.

While resting in one of these glades he heard a bird call that brought him to his feet. It was the call of the peewee. He stood listening, and a moment later heard it again: the identical call that, all through his boyhood in Iowa, had given voice to midsummer stillness and peace. And here, as there, it seemed to come from an infinite distance. But this, he knew, was deceptive. The bird could not be far away, and in his eagerness to see it he set out at a fast pace in the direction from which the call had come.

Halting again to listen, he became aware of the stillness of the forests; of the sudden absence of other birds that he had seen and heard only a little time

before. It was as though their songs had been hushed that he might hear and follow the old familiar call. And hear it he did, with long intervals of silence between. As he went deeper into the forest, while looking at the actual landscape before him he could see, in the imagination, that other dreamlike country beyond the hills of Westview. Instead of confusing and puzzling him, the sense of being in both places at once and of enjoying both at the same time seemed quite natural. He did not even pause to wonder about it; nor did it seem strange that the peewee should be here to bring back boyhood memories and associations in that faraway place. The migrations of birds were miracles in themselves, and he could well believe that some, common in spring and summer to Iowa, might have winter homes even on such a remote island as this.

But he caught no glimpse of the peewee, though its call led him on until he saw before him the sunlight of the open sky glimmering through the forest aisles. A moment later he emerged within view of two small lakes, one above the other. They were connected by a gently sloping waterfall, and the lower lake emptied itself over the head wall of a valley. Though surrounded by forests, a wide border of sunny land, carpeted with grass and gay with wild flowers, stretched between the lakes and the woodland.

Brooke made his way to a ledge of rock overhanging the valley below. The view was magnificent, but he soon found himself watching, with a kind of dreamy fascination, the water from the lower lake as it slipped soundlessly, in a glassy curve, to plunge sheer into the valley below. He fell into a reverie until at last he was scarcely more conscious of his surroundings than the rock upon which he sat.

“Aloft, there! Aloft, there!”  
Our jolly bosun cried.  
Blow high! Blow low!  
And so sailed we. . . .

So deep was his reverie that Brooke listened to the faint clear voice without astonishment. It seemed to have come from within himself; from the further side of silence in his waking dream. His uncle’s voice sounded in his memory almost as clearly as on the day so long ago when they had made the never-to-be-forgotten voyage in the Old Town canoe. Brooke saw again the wooded slopes, carpeted with wild flowers, above the cove on the Chaquaqua River, and the fragrance of hepaticas seemed to float in the air. He could hear his uncle say: “Alec, you’ll have to excuse me for bein’ late. Come aboard now, you and Nancy, and we’ll make a day of it. I’ve got sea stores laid in for a long voyage.”

He gazed dreamily before him, conscious of a fathomless sense of peace.

At last he roused himself, and after a brief survey of the ridges enclosing the valley, he chose the one on the right as offering the easier way down. It was midafternoon and he decided not to return to the settlement until the following day. This lonely excursion had been perfection itself and he looked forward to exploring the part of the coast that lay ahead. He would spend the night on the beach. He now believed that Tangaroa had sent him on this journey for no particular purpose. He had, merely, wished him to enjoy; to give him a foretaste of the serenity of mind and spirit that would, increasingly, be his portion as the days passed.

Halfway down the ridge was a ravine leading into the valley on the left. Descending this he came to a glade, cool and moss-grown, amongst the rocks. As he knelt to drink at one of these pools, he saw reflected there, in silvery light, a flower of such beauty that he scarcely dared breathe lest his breath should blur the perfect image in the water. It was of the orchid family, he thought, suspended by a long slender stem from the trunk of a tree that leaned across the pool. But what so astonished him, beyond its own intrinsic beauty, was that, in shape, it was an almost exact replica of the lady-slippers he had so often searched for in the woods along the Chaquaqua River. Outside it was pale gold, and its small cup held a pool of light that might have been dipped from the afterglow of a winter sunset, beyond the hills of Westview. He was about to pluck it, but drew back, putting his hands behind him. Far better to leave such a miracle untouched; to treasure, only in memory, the flower and its image in the pool.

Upon reaching the valley he found the river a larger stream than he had expected. Gazing up at the distant head wall he could now see the full extent of the cascade from which it came. The stream fell from a great height, yet not a sound of its fall could be heard. The reason was, he thought, that the water plunged clear of the head wall so that the air broke it into spume and clouds of spray. Nevertheless, it seemed strange that so considerable a stream could fall so silently.

He was hot and sweaty and his singlet and shorts stained and dirty after his long journey through the uplands. The river offered a pleasant means of reaching the lagoon, so he plunged in, swimming with lazy strokes, turning on his back now and then to float with the current. He seemed to be lying motionless, while the high leafy canopy moved slowly past.

The lagoon was wider on this western side of the island, the barrier reef so far offshore that he could scarcely hear the sound of the surf. As he scanned the beach his attention was attracted by an object that he at first thought was a log thrown up on the sand about a quarter of a mile from where he stood. But, upon looking more closely, his pulse quickened and he started toward it at a fast walk. He soon made it out to be a ship's boat, lying on its side a few feet

from the water's edge. His astonishment increased when he saw fresh footprints in the sand, crisscrossing one another in the vicinity of the boat and then leading diagonally across the beach toward the thickets of the valley.

## Twelve

For a moment he stared at the boat and the fresh footprints in the sand, following with his glance the track they made to where two tall trees stood like portals, as though marking the entrance through a green wall into some long-abandoned pleasure garden. The boat was small and clinker-built; it looked like a captain's gig. The mast had been unstepped and was lying, with the sail furled neatly around it, along the thwarts. But Brooke scarcely noticed this. He had eyes for little save the condition of the boat, which had been sprayed and splintered by machine-gun bullets. The bow in particular had been badly riddled, and there was a large smear of dried blood on the thwart astern. The bullet holes had been carefully plugged with bits of cloth.

"By the Lord!" he thought; "they've been through something, whoever they are!" and it was only then that he wondered who "they" might be. He glanced about him uneasily, remembering that Japanese castaways were more likely to be found in this region than any from American or British ships. He regretted that, in his eagerness to see the boat, he had so foolishly exposed himself. He stood in plain view, his shadow stretching far in the light of the westering sun; and there was no possible concealment within two or three hundred yards. Hoping that he had not yet been seen, he crouched quickly behind the boat, and then lay flat to peer beneath the slope of the transom, letting his glance travel slowly and searchingly the full extent of the line of bush on that side of the valley. Unless something should happen in the meantime, it would be well, he thought, to remain there until dark; then he would steal into the valley to reconnoiter. There could have been no more than a half-dozen men in so small a boat; the track they had made, going and coming, scarcely indicated so many. But his heart sank as he thought of the trouble ahead, in case they were Japs. As he lay there, he spied a well-worn leather thong lying within reach and found that it was attached to a clasp knife half buried in the sand. He drew it to him and examined it carefully. There was nothing on the knife to indicate where it had been made, but the letters "S. C." had been neatly cut on the handle. Brooke felt an immediate lightening of the heart as he studied the initials. Somehow, they seemed like a message, a greeting in his own language.

He was completely reassured a short while later when a tall lanky figure emerged from the thickets and approached the boat. The man was well along in years, in his late fifties, perhaps. His only garment appeared to be a shirt that scarcely covered his middle parts, but, upon nearer view, Brooke saw he was also wearing a pair of tan-colored shorts. His legs were so thin as scarcely to

cast a shadow behind him. His head was bald, except for a fringe of sandy hair around the base of his skull. His feet were bare, and he walked gingerly as though he had forgotten the needlessness of the precaution on the beach.

Brooke got to his feet and awaited him. The stranger halted briefly, regarded him without surprise, and then came on.

“Ain’t seen a clasp knife around here, have you?” he asked.

With a smile, Brooke handed it to him.

“Your initials on the handle?”

“That’s right. Cowles is the name—Sam Cowles.”

“Mine’s Alec Brooke.”

“Airman, ain’t you?”

“How did you guess?”

“Didn’t need to. Lieutenant, if we was to draw a line from where we stand, west acrost the Pacific, over the peak of Mount Everest, and right on around the world, wherever people ain’t supposed to be, you’d find lost airmen along it like beads on a string. Where you from?”

“Guadalcanal.”

“Is that a fact! You’re a tidy ways from home.”

“How did you get here?” Brooke asked.

The other gave a wry smile.

“Are you just makin’ conversation? See the boat, don’t you?”

“What’s left of it.”

“Lieutenant, you said it! The sons-of-heaven-bitches wasn’t satisfied with just sinkin’ the ship.”

“Sub?”

“Yes.”

“That’s what my Catalina met, too. But we got him before he got us. He sank stern first.”

Cowles’s gaunt leathery face beamed.

“When was it?” he asked, eagerly.

“I can’t remember, exactly.”

“I hope it was the one that got us. . . . You airmen are a choosy lot. You picked a nice island to bail out on.”

“We didn’t bail out,” Brooke said. “We landed at sea and managed to drift here.”

“All of you?”

Brooke shook his head.

“I’m the only one left. How many are you?”

“Three; but the skipper’s one, and thank the Lord for that! We’d never have fetched here without him. He got a ball through the thigh, but it missed the bone. He’s doin’ nicely. Look at that boat!” Cowles added, with a

wondering shake of the head. “Anybody’d have to see it to believe we could dodge bullets that good.”

“You were mighty lucky.”

“What about yourself?” the seaman replied. He looked the pilot over with a strange smile. “You don’t half know how lucky you are.”

“I’m just beginning to realize it,” said Brooke. “It’s coming home to me little by little.”

Cowles shook his head.

“No it ain’t. Excuse me, Lieutenant. You ain’t had even a glimmer of your luck . . . not yet. But come along and meet the company. We’ll make you welcome and hearty, in our modest way.”

He led the way across the beach, walking in the same gingerly fashion until Brooke said: “Are your feet that tender, Cowles?”

His companion glanced back over his shoulder.

“I keep forgettin’,” he said, walking in brisker fashion. “It’s a treat, this fine sandy beach. I ought to get the good of it while I can.”

“Don’t worry; your feet will toughen up, in time. . . . What were you, in your ship?”

“Steward,” said Cowles. He halted. “Lieutenant, if I was you I wouldn’t say nothin’ to the skipper about his ship.”

“I understand. Just what happened?”

“The first packet hit us around three in the morning. We was awash when the second one hit and it blew the captain clean off the bridge into the sea. The way he talks you might think it was his fault to be jolted off by no more’n that. He’s cheerful enough, but inside, I can tell he’s heartsick. It’s the first ship he’s ever lost, and to lose so many men with it. . . . The sub surfaced and then murder started. The little yellow devils was sure systematic about it.”

“Were you the only ones who escaped?”

“I don’t know. There may have been a few more, but I doubt it. Some of the boats was smashed, but we had rafts too, of course. The men on them was cold meat. The sub made the rounds, buzzin’ the searchlight and machine guns in every direction.”

“What was the name of your ship?” Brooke asked.

“‘Was’ is right,” the steward replied. “You know, Lieutenant, we got the captain’s gig off as easy as anything, just the two of us. As I said, the ship was awash. All we had to do was to cut the boat adrift, climb in, fend off, and pull like hell to get clear. And while we was doin’ that, we pulled right across the wake of the third torpedo! It was bright starlight, and believe it or not, we saw the wake clear as anything. The third one hit a little forward of amidships and even that didn’t finish her! No, sir. If I hadn’t been so scared I’d have felt like cheering, she was such a sturdy old ship. I guess that’s what made the little

devils so mad. They had to shell her to the bottom. And when finally she did go, it was slow and stubborn. That's when I named her 'Cowles's Farewell.' I been torpedoed twice before, once in the Atlantic and the second time eight hundred and fifty miles off the Cape of Good Hope. Well, when I looked toward where she'd been, the third ship that's been shot out from under me, I vowed she'd be the last, and that if ever I had the luck to set foot on land again, no matter where it was, I'd stay."

"And you'll keep your vow?" Brooke asked.

Cowles gave him an anxious look.

"You ain't seen no Japs around here?"

"No; you can set your mind at rest about Japs."

The steward gave a sigh of relief.

"Then I'll do more'n that," he replied. "I'll set my mind and my carcass at rest, right on this little island, for good and all."

"How did you happen to find your skipper?" said Brooke.

"'Happen'—that's just it. Pure luck. We heard a voice call, 'Is that you, Cowles?' not twenty yards off, and there he was! He climbed in spry as a monkey; this was a good half hour before we got sprayed by the sub. We lay flat in the boat. They only gave us a couple of bursts, and that was enough. They must have thought they got us with the first one. When daylight came there wasn't another thing in sight—not a boat, not a raft . . . nothing. Only a little gig with the three of us in it. . . . But come along. We found a wonderful place to camp. It ain't far."

The steward led the way between the two tall trees Brooke had noticed from the beach. A little farther along Cowles halted to point out a very patriarch of a tree at a little distance from where they stood.

"Know what that is?" he asked.

"Yes; it's a breadfruit," said Brooke.

The steward gave him an admiring glance.

"However'd you find that out? I suppose you read about 'em in college. That's our grocery store, or one of 'em. Ain't this place a paradise, Lieutenant? Coconuts, oranges, breadfruit, bananas—I reckon there ain't nothing that grows in the tropics that you can't find here. Our camp's around the spur, yonder."

The spur was a narrow one, falling at a steep angle from the ridge enclosing the valley on the right. When they had passed around it the steward halted again.

"Here we are," he said, in a low voice. "Don't say nothing for a minute. This'll be a rare surprise for the skipper." Then he called: "Everything okay, Captain?"

"Cowles, you rascal! Where've you been?" a voice replied. "Did you find

your knife?"

"Yes, sir, and that ain't all I found. We got company."

"Company? Who is it—Captain Turnbull's ghost?"

Brooke gave the steward one bewildered stare, then he ran forward through a screen of undergrowth. On the farther side, a slab of overhanging rock made a deep dry shelter before which a fire was burning. Sitting near it with legs outstretched, his back against the bole of a tree, was a small trim figure that straightened with a jerk at the sight of the airman.

"Alec!" he exclaimed. "God bless my soul and body! Now ain't this just as it should be! How'd you get here—in your Old Town canoe?"

Brooke knelt beside his uncle and hugged him close, unable to speak for a moment. Then he said: "That's right, Uncle Thad. A canoe with wings to it."

Cowles, his mouth open, his pale blue eyes all but popping from his head, stared from one to the other of them.

"Cowles," said Captain Vail, "this is my nephew. If there's any more of my kinfolk roamin' the beach you might tell 'em where we're camped. But you'd better get supper started first."

"Captain . . . he ain't . . . he ain't . . ."

"Yes he is—my nephew. Damn it all, Cowles! You must have heard me speak of him at some time or other."

"Many's the time, sir, but . . . but you never called his name, far's I remember."

"Why should I? 'Nephew' is good enough, ain't it? I've only the one. Get supper goin'. . . Alec, now that you've signed on you've got to earn your rations."

"I'll be glad to, Uncle Thad. What do you want me to do?"

"Get some fern for your bed. You'll find the mate somewhere along the path."

Cowles's face beamed as he put in, "I'll show you the way, Lieutenant. It ain't but a step from here."

"No you won't," said the captain. "My nephew can find it for himself. Just show him where to start. You can't miss it, Alec. There's a path cut. All you need to do is follow it."

As he started along the path the steward pointed out, his uncle called after him: "You needn't hurry, Alec. Tell the mate supper won't be ready for another half hour. But you'd better come back while there's still light enough to see by."

Of a sudden Brooke knew. The truth was revealed to him as though in a flash of blinding light. He hurried on, stumbling over roots, pushing his way through low-hanging branches. Not far ahead, a bend of the river caught the light reflected from a cloud high in the west.

He stopped short, a dozen paces from the bank of the stream. Nancy was seated there, her figure in clear silhouette against the dancing flickering light. Perched on the topmost twig of a tree on the opposite side of the river, a bird was singing—a full-throated song of ecstasy, as varied and beautiful as that of the hermit thrush heard of a June evening on the prairies of Iowa. Nancy sat with her head tilted slightly as she listened, the light from the water making a kind of glory around her. Slowly she turned and saw him standing there.

## Thirteen

"It was a thrush," Nancy was saying. "A hermit thrush. I'm sure of it."

"The song was exactly like," Brooke replied. "But how could it be? It's . . . it's incredible!"

"Alec, is it any more incredible than our being here?"

"Not a bit, but I don't believe that, either. I can't!"

Nancy slipped her arms around his neck, drew his head down, and kissed him.

"Now do you believe it?" she asked.

"I'm beginning to," he said, "but I need more proof."

"And that's so easy to furnish, Alec dear."

Presently she drew back a little and stood gazing up at him. Brooke could feel the trembling of her hands as she laid them lightly on his shoulders. In the deepening twilight they could scarcely see each other's faces. He drew her close once more.

"I'm losing you," he said. "I have to hold you tight to make sure . . . It's a dream, Nancy. It must be—the rest of my old High Barbaree dream."

"But that was true, all of it," Nancy replied. "All the best part. But where's my lady-slipper?"

"It's here; I'm sure of it," Brooke replied. "We'll find it. . . . Tell me this, Nancy; how did you come?"

"Haven't you seen the boat? But it's not *our* boat—not the little ship with the swan's head."

Brooke was silent for a moment; then he said:

"I'm all confused. I want to get this straight, if I can."

"You know what happened to us?"

"Yes. Cowles told me that."

"Well?"

"But how did you come to be with Uncle Thad?"

"There was nothing dreamlike about that. I told you at Guadalcanal that my unit expected to be sent on, somewhere: to Europe, perhaps, after we'd had a rest at home. Don't you remember?"

"Of course I remember."

"Well, when the orders came, the *Huron*, Uncle Thad's tanker, was back at Espiritu Santo. So I sailed with him. That's all there was to it."

"Nancy, I know this is a dream; but there's a certain logic even in the strangest dreams. I suppose you said to the C.O. at Espiritu something like this: 'Sir: As you know, my unit is about to be transferred. Well, by a happy

chance, my uncle—by adoption—is the captain of a tanker now in port. He’s about to sail for home so I’ve decided to go with him. I know you won’t mind. Many thanks! Good-bye!’ ”

“Alec, you don’t know how close you’ve come to the facts of it. Except that the C.O. made the proposal; not me.”

“What!”

Nancy laughed—the merry laugh Brooke remembered so well from their childhood days.

“That’s navy astonishment you’re expressing,” she said. “It could never have happened in the navy, of course; but the *Huron* is an army tanker. Uncle Thad spent the evening with a certain high-ranking army officer at Espiritu. The result was that . . . well, here I am! Is it clear now?”

“I’ll never say another disparaging word about the army as long as I live!” said Brooke.

“You’d better not, young man!”

“Where did you go from Espiritu?”

“Direct to Guadalcanal. Uncle Thad left the last of his oil there and took in water ballast.”

“To Guadalcanal? Then you knew . . .”

“Yes. They’d searched for days, and given you up, at last. All but your friend Dakin. He broke the news to us as well as he could . . . Alec, do you remember the spot near the field where you parked the jeep that afternoon? I went there and . . . No, that’s enough! I’m not going to think of it, ever again!”

“Nancy, what have we done to deserve such happiness?”

“To deserve it? Why, we’ve loved each other ever since we were children. Isn’t that enough?”

“Yes, I suppose it is.”

“You suppose? Alec, I *know*.”

Presently Brooke said: “There’s one more thing. After what happened to the *Huron*, what was Uncle Thad’s course? Where were you bound, in the boat?”

“To the High Barbaree, of course.”

“But Uncle Thad knows nothing of my old dreams. You haven’t told him?”

“Of course not. I’ve never told anyone, all these years.”

“But . . .”

“Wait! Let me finish. Uncle Thad didn’t say where he hoped to go; that is, at first. We had to go where we could. There was a strong wind blowing, and a rough sea. It would have been nothing to worry about in a larger vessel, but in that little boat, riddled by machine-gun fire . . . Alec, we came so near to disaster a dozen times over that even now I don’t understand how we survived.

“Uncle Thad steered the whole time. He made nothing of his wound. The

ball went straight through his thigh, just missing the bone, but you'd have thought it was a mere scratch he had. And Cowles, too, was wonderful. He bailed while I kept the holes plugged, and there were times when we both had to bail for dear life. But Uncle Thad brought us through. At last the wind slackened and the sea went down."

"How long after?"

"I don't know. Years, it seemed to me. I had no idea where we were until Uncle Thad said: 'Nancy, did you ever hear of Turnbull's Island? Did Alec ever tell you about it in the old days?' I said: 'Many a time. He showed it to me on your chart. We used to talk about it.' 'Well,' he said, 'that's where I'm heading for.'"

"Do you think he really believed in it?" Brooke asked.

"I don't know, Alec. But he wanted me to believe, that's certain. And Cowles pretended to. Uncle Thad remembered everything that had been written about it in that old copy of the *Pacific Directory*. He and Cowles would speak of the delicious oranges and mangoes we'd soon be eating, and the bananas and coconuts."

"And what did you think?" Brooke asked.

Only the faintest light, the ashes of crimson, was now reflected from the tranquil surface of the stream. Nancy peered into his face.

"Alec, do you believe in the power of faith?"

"Of course."

"So do I. And if you have faith in something, deep down, beyond the reach of doubt, or reason, or anything else . . . That's how I've always felt about the High Barbaree—I never thought of it as Turnbull's Island any more than you did. It *must* have been faith—yours and mine—that brought us here. And . . . you see? We were right to have it."

"Don't you think we ought to give some credit to Uncle Thad?"

"God bless him! He was superb, Alec. There's no other word. All the more so, I think, if he didn't really believe."

"But he must have, or he wouldn't have encouraged you to."

"I needed no encouragement," Nancy replied, quietly. "No, Alec, he would have wanted me to believe in any case. And if we'd not reached the island, he'd have given Cowles and me another one to believe in. But we did find it. . . . And we found you . . . as I knew we would."

"Nancy, what are you saying!"

"I don't know. I don't understand it at all. But I felt that it *had* to be. It was just faith, Alec. I couldn't believe that you were dead. I couldn't and I wouldn't. It's not really so strange when you think of it. Your friend Dakin couldn't believe it, either. He wouldn't give up hope. The last thing he said to me was that he was going to keep on searching. He showed me on the chart

where you had gone, that day, on patrol. I said nothing to him about it, but I knew that Turnbull's Island was in that region, somewhere. . . . Alec, I can't explain it, but I felt certain that, if we found it, we'd find you."

"When did you first see the land?"

"It was about midafternoon. Cowles was feeling pretty grim, though he tried to conceal it. There was no way of guessing how Uncle Thad felt. He kept making cheery remarks about the weather and how well the gig sailed. And the weather was everything we could have wished for at that time: a cloudless day, with a light breeze and a lovely calm sea."

"Did you have water and provisions in the gig?"

"Everything. We hadn't suffered in the least except at first, from the wind and sea. Trust your Uncle Thad to leave nothing to chance. Every boat and raft on the *Huron* was equipped and ready for sea. And Cowles insisted that I keep everything I might need ready packed, in the gig. I've blessed him for it since, and I'll keep on blessing him.

"Now and then Uncle Thad would glance up at the top of the little mast; he pretended that we had Charlie McCarthy on watch, up there. He'd say: 'Charlie, keep a sharp lookout, forward!' Then he'd reply, in Charlie's own voice: 'Aye, aye, sir!' Bergen himself couldn't have done it better. Then your uncle would grin and say: 'Smart kid, Nancy. You never catch Charlie asleep.'

"And now I come to the moment, Alec. The first view was something incredible. We had nothing but empty sea before us and around us, or so we thought. The loneliness seemed to be getting deeper and wider. Then, merely to break the silence, I suppose, your uncle started singing 'The High Barbaree.' Do you remember the second stanza?"

"I remember the whole of it," Brooke said.

"Well, Uncle Thad broke off in the middle of that verse. I was sitting with my back to him. I wondered why he didn't go on and turned to look at him. He was staring straight ahead with an expression on his face I'll never forget. 'There it is! he said. 'Nancy! Cowles! By the Lord, there's Turnbull's Island!'

"I turned quickly to look forward and saw nothing but what appeared to be the empty horizon. Uncle Thad called, 'Quick, Nancy! Look up!' I did, and high above us, like the ghost of an island floating in mid-air, I saw the faint outlines of two spires with a faint line of ridge connecting them. Then they vanished.

"I doubted that I'd seen the land, and Cowles had missed even the glimpse. But Uncle Thad knew. The amazing thing was that we again seemed to have nothing but empty sea before us, but your uncle explained that. The air was heavy with moisture—water vapor he called it—and it refracted the sunlight in a way to conceal the land completely. 'That was the cliff on the east side,' he said. 'There's not likely to be much level land beneath it. We'll haul off to

come in from the west.’ ”

“What a pity!” Brooke said. “If only Uncle Thad had known, there’s a fine pass into the lagoon directly opposite the cliff.”

“Is there? We saw nothing of that, of course. We had only the glimpse of the high lands. But it wasn’t a pity. I wouldn’t have missed the view we had a little later for anything in the world. No words could tell how beautiful it was.”

“It couldn’t have equaled my first view of the cliff, in the light of the full moon.”

“Hush, Alec! You can’t know what you’re saying. What we saw was beyond anything either of us could have dreamed, or imagined. We had only the lightest breeze and the gig slipped through the water as silently as a ghost. Cowles said, ‘Captain, are you sure you saw it?’ ‘Ask me that presently, Cowles, if you think you must,’ said Uncle Thad, and the words were scarcely out of his mouth when the island began to create itself as though from sunlight and empty air. At first the merest shadows of peaks and ridges seemed to be etched in sunlit vapor, by an invisible hand. Not a word was spoken from that moment on. We simply gazed and gazed, too deeply moved for speech. Veil after veil of the most delicate filmy vapor, suspended in the air between us and the land, seemed to be lifted, one by one. Now color began to show: faint golden greens, at first, where the sunlight lay on some high grassy slope or the mossy shoulder of a mountain; valleys and gorges of the palest azure deepening in hue as the mists vanished. At last, there it lay, in full clear sunlight; mountains and valleys, and forests, and high plateaus, and deep shadow-filled canyons; and between the boat and the land, the lagoons, dotted with islets, edged by the creamy line of surf breaking gently along the barrier reef.”

Nancy broke off, and, after a moment of silence, added: “Alec, it’s the fulfillment of your old High Barbaree dream; the part you were never able to tell me in the old days. Do you remember how I used to say: ‘But aren’t we *ever* going to reach it? Can’t you dream the rest and tell me about the island?’ And now I’m telling *you*! Now we both know.”

“When was this, Nancy?”

“When was what?”

“I mean, how long have you been here?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? Of course you know! Did you come yesterday, or the day before, or when?”

“Maybe it was yesterday, or last week, or a month ago. I haven’t bothered to think.”

“Nancy, be sensible!”

She put her arms around him once more and kissed him.

“There!” she said. “Does that make sense? We’re here. What does it matter when either of us came?”

“But . . .”

“Alec, have you forgotten how it used to be? I never could keep proper track of the days. Don’t you remember the time when you said it was Friday and I said it was Saturday? And I made you believe it *was* Saturday? We went to the woods instead of going to school? It’s going to be Saturday, always, on the High Barbaree.”

“But I have a particular reason for wanting to know if it *was* yesterday you came.”

“Then call it that—any yesterday you like.”

“Nancy, you haven’t changed a bit! You’re just the same as when we were kids.”

“Did you want me to change?”

“Never, never! But you’re a thousand times more beautiful than I could have imagined you would be, in those days.”

“Didn’t you think I was pretty, when we were children?”

“I don’t know. Maybe. I guess I didn’t think much about it then, one way or the other.”

“If I’d known that, at Guadalcanal, I’d have made you sweat for it, Alec Brooke!”

“Nancy darling, I did sweat! Drops of agony . . .”

“Until I proposed to you?”

“You didn’t!”

“Yes I did! But I had to, Alec. There was so little time. If I’d waited for you to speak first . . .”

“I couldn’t, Nancy. I was afraid to. I wouldn’t have believed there was a ghost of a chance for me.”

“Then speak now. Tell me what you should have said then.”

“Do I have to say it in words?”

“Not necessarily.”

A moment later they saw a light glimmering toward them. It was Cowles with a lantern in his hand, his grotesque shadow huge against the mountain wall.

“Lieutenant! Miss Nancy!” he called.

“We’re coming, Cowles.”

“Chow’s ready. Come and get it.”

## Fourteen

Brooke said: "I'm waiting here for Nancy. I'll see her in a moment or two. I'm going to take her to the high country where the two lakes are."

By speaking thus to himself he could conquer the feeling of unreality that seized him at moments when he lost the assurance of their presence on the island; when a sudden fathomless despair came flooding over him and he would imagine that he was lying in his bunk on the Catalina with Mauriac's voice sounding in his ears and he helpless to respond. Then the mists would vanish and the awful burden of not knowing, of not being completely sure, would be lifted from his spirit as suddenly and strangely as it had descended there. And, as though in recompense for an instant of suffering that seemed timeless in duration, came a returning tide of happiness at its purest, without forethought or afterthought to mar it.

A moment later, as Nancy emerged from the trees and ran down the beach to meet him, the early morning sunlight streaming up from behind the mountains seemed the happiness itself, made real and unmistakable. His heart filled with tenderness and thanksgiving as he watched her standing for a moment, arms outstretched and her hair blown back by the fresh breeze that came in strong eddies, sweeping around the nearest headland.

"Alec, it's all alive!" she exclaimed as she came forward and placed her hands on his shoulders. "The air, the lagoon, the sea—everything! And *we're* alive to worship and enjoy!"

She clung to him for a moment, neither of them able to say more in the fullness of their hearts. Then she said: "I'm ready. Which way do we go?"

"Up the ridge on the far side of the valley. Do you see the notch in it?"

"Yes."

"It marks the entrance to a little ravine. I came down it that day—the day I found you. There's something there I want to show you."

"What is it?"

"You'll see when we reach it."

"All right. And let's go on and on, miles beyond, as far as the island will let us go."

"You think you're equal to it?"

"How familiar that sounds! Do you remember the day when we climbed the Westview standpipe? It's what you asked then. . . . No it isn't; not quite. You said: 'Nancy, think you can make it?'"

Brooke smiled.

"And, you remember? You didn't."

“Yes I did! All the way to the top, and I’d have gotten down by myself if Father had let me. Alec, no more ‘brothering.’ That status is out; it doesn’t apply any longer. Now lead on. I’ll climb you ragged before the day’s over.”

“I want to wait a little before we start, until the sunlight spills into the glen through the notch. It won’t be long. Where’s Uncle Thad?”

“He and Cowles have gone into the valley for oranges.”

“Good old Cowles! He beams like a harvest moon.”

“I know; and Uncle Thad is just as happy, but he hates to admit it. Now that his wound’s healed he has nothing to grumble about. It’s astonishing how quickly he’s recovered.”

“He has you to thank for that.”

“No, it’s his own healthy blood. And yet, I’ve seen many a wound of that kind, but never before known one to heal so swiftly. It must be the air. There’s balm in every breath.”

They crossed the stream where it spilled in golden shallows down the beach and Brooke led the way into the valley beneath the ridge that enclosed it to the north. They walked slowly, stopping to examine some tree or flower or fern that had attracted their attention, Brooke keeping a sharp lookout for the entrance to the glen where he had found the orchid. When they reached it he said; “Now we start climbing. It’s fairly steep till we get to the ridge.”

Halfway up the glen he spied the pool by the overhanging tree, and within it lay, as before, the perfect reflection of the orchid suspended above it. Nancy was a little way behind. When she reached him Brooke placed a hand over her eyes.

“This is the place,” he said. “Keep your eyes shut until I tell you to open. Take my hand.” When they stood at the brink of the pool, he said, “Kneel here . . . Now look!”

At first the cool silvery light of the glen was like that of the late afternoon when Brooke had first passed that way. Nancy gazed into the mirror of the pool, at the reflection of the orchid hanging motionless above it. Suddenly the quality of the light changed. The first shafts of sunlight, striking down through the notch in the ridge and glancing along the moss-covered rocky walls, were shattered into a golden mist that seemed to be sifting slowly down through the fronds of the tree ferns. One slender spear of direct light caught and held the orchid for a moment or two so that the pool glowed with color and seemed to be globing itself around the image of flawless beauty that lay, depth beyond depth, within it.

Nancy gazed as Brooke had done, first at the image, then at the flower itself. She sat back on her heels so that she might see the two at once.

“Alec, what can we say?” she remarked, in a low voice.

“Nothing . . . nothing that’s adequate.”

“Are there others here?”

“I don’t know. I’ve seen none so far. Even if there are, we’ll never see another to compare with this. . . . Do you remember the lady-slipper we found at the cove the day Uncle Thad came with my canoe?”

“We? It was you who found it.”

“And I picked it—remember? I wanted you to have it. I want you to have this one as well; but just as it is.”

“These two, Alec; one for me and one for you. Which do you choose?”

“I don’t need to choose. I’ll have mine in the pool as long as you have yours above it.”

“Then it will be always, for both of us. It’s an immortal lady-slipper; it must be. How did you happen to find it?”

“I didn’t happen to,” Brooke said. “Nancy, I’m going to tell you a strange thing . . . about Tangaroa. It was he who sent me around to this side of the island on the day I found you. He sent me because he must have known that you were here. Let me tell you what happened, but don’t say a word to Uncle Thad. He’d think I’d lost my wits.”

He then related briefly the events of that day. He spoke of Tangaroa’s message, brought to him by Mr. Wilcox; how he had started west around the island; how he had then gone inland and lost himself in the forest until he heard the call of the peewee which had led him to the twin lakes and the silent waterfall where he had heard, or thought he had heard, his uncle’s voice singing “The High Barbaree,” and how he had found the orchid on his way down to the coast.

“I must have been led,” he added. “Do you think I’m crazy to believe that?”

Nancy shook her head, gravely.

“Why should I?” she asked. “We were led, Uncle Thad and Cowles and I. Tangaroa must have known, just as I knew that I would find you when we reached the island. But the mystery, Alec! The mystery! It was the power of faith . . . and the power of love,” she added, in a low voice.

“Maybe I’m still dreaming,” Brooke said. “Nancy, maybe we’re still kids in Westview.”

“And maybe there’s been no World War,” Nancy said.

Brooke smiled, forlornly.

“That’s done it! There’s no ‘maybe’ about the war, is there?”

She gazed silently at the orchid, the light from the pool shimmering on her face.

“I don’t know,” she replied, slowly. “I can’t believe in the war any longer . . . not here. . . . Surely it hasn’t happened and isn’t happening now—all that horror and suffering.”

“There are moments when I doubt it too. . . .”

“It’s love that makes us doubt it. If only love were strong enough, everywhere in the world . . . It will be, it *must* be, some day. . . .”

Of a sudden the light faded swiftly from the pool and from the glen itself. Glancing up, Brooke saw that a single white cloud was passing across the face of the sun. Elsewhere the sky was blue.

“Nancy, let’s have it out. What do you say?”

“About ourselves?”

“Yes. Do you think it’s wrong for us to be happy here . . . while we can?”

“Darling, there’s so much misery in the world now. How could it be wrong to add to the store of happiness? I know what you’re thinking: that we have no right even to a little, in such times as these. That isn’t true, believe me! Everyone, everywhere, has the right to happiness if it comes, and we must take it when it comes.”

“If we harm no one by accepting it.”

“Of course. That goes without saying. Alec, let’s not speak of this any more. Look!” she added as the shadow of the passing cloud melted into sunlight once more and the orchid in the pool seemed to rise from the depths and float lightly on the surface, like a tiny shallop of pure gold. “It’s an offense against the very spirit of life to be sad in the presence of such beauty!”

They halted again when they reached a rocky ledge that marked the upper side of the notch on the ridge. From that point they could see the lagoon with its border of scattered islets curving away to the north and south, and valley after valley descending fanwise from the mass of the great central mountain.

“Do you see the green slope, the farthest one, that looks like a well-kept lawn?” Brooke asked. “Well, it *is* a lawn. The lakes are hidden in the forest beyond. That’s where we’re going.”

Nancy gave a sigh of deep happiness.

“I know now why we were never able to reach the High Barbaree in the little swan’s-head boat,” she said. “You were too young, then, even to have dreamed of this.”

“One thing’s certain,” Brooke said. “Captain Turnbull was far out in his estimate of the height of these mountains. He said a thousand feet. We’re at least twice that where we stand, and look at the peak above us!”

“Wasn’t he a long way off when he sighted the island?”

“Twelve miles, I think it was. That makes a difference, of course. Even so, the highest mountains must have been hidden by clouds when he saw them. There are the same plateaus and upland valleys on the east side as there are here. I’ve seen them.”

“And I’m going to,” Nancy said.

“We’ll visit that side next week. I’ll take you around by canoe.”

“‘Next week’ . . . There you go, dividing time into neat little bundles! Alec, can’t you think of it my way? Today goes on and on . . .”

“Until it comes to an end.”

“No, it blends right into tomorrow, and that goes on and on. I don’t know where the joints are! It’s true. I’m getting all confused about time. When was it we found each other?”

“Why . . .”

“You don’t know. Do you?”

“I can’t remember exactly.”

“And I can’t remember at all. Don’t you feel as though we were out of time—somehow beyond the reach of it?”

“But we’re not. We mustn’t forget that.”

“I can’t even remember when it was that I first saw Tangaroa, except that we were together; or when Mr. Wilcox came with Ru’s family from the other side of the island and built the houses for us. The houses weren’t there, and when we looked again they were finished and ready. It all happened as strangely as that, in no time at all.”

“It doesn’t take long to build the native kind of houses,” Brooke said.

“Yes it does. It must—that is, to know how to build them. Could anything be more perfect? They seem to have grown rather than to have been made by human hands. They belong to the island fully as much as the ironwoods and the breadfruit trees.”

“There’s just one more I want to see.”

“Oh? What one is that?”

“Our house—yours and mine.”

“Well . . . and so do I.”

“Nancy! You mean it? You really mean that . . . that we needn’t wait, any longer?”

“I thought you would *never* ask me that. I was afraid I’d have to speak first once more.”

“But . . . don’t you remember how you cut me off when I *did* speak, at Guadal . . . ?”

“Alec, don’t! . . . Guadalcanal . . . Henderson Field . . . Espiritu Santo. . . . Are there such places?”

“And what you told me at the last moment before you took off to return to Espiritu? You said we must wait until the war was over.”

“That was ages ago. It must have been. And we’ve waited, all that time. . . . And now the war is over, for us.”

“You believe that?”

“Yes . . . Alec, it’s all right, whatever happens; even if we must go back to it. Don’t ask me how I know. I can’t tell you. But I’m certain of this: we’ll

never be separated again.”

“If only I could be sure of it, too!”

“Then trust to my faith until you *are* sure. You told me that you believed in the power of faith. I have enough for both of us.”

Climbing slowly on, pausing here and there to view the widening prospect while they talked of their plans and the happiness in store for them, they came toward midday to the forests that concealed the lakes from below. Brooke took a roundabout way through the woodlands so that Nancy’s first view should be from the higher of the lakes where she could see both at once and the sunny glades around them. Nancy gazed in silence; then she said: “I don’t want to go any farther. This is as much beauty as I can take in, for now.”

They stood on a high ledge at the brink of the upper pool where they had a clear view of the sloping rocky channel leading to the lower lake, down which the water glided swiftly, without a ripple.

“It’s as smooth as glass, that channel,” Brooke said, “a perfect chute-the-chutes.”

“Is that a dare?”

“If you need one.”

Without waiting for a reply Brooke dived, rising to the surface halfway across the pool, in time to see the clean dive Nancy made. She reappeared with her thick brown hair plastered against her head. Brooke called: “Nancy, it’s perfect!”

“Better than perfect,” she said. “The water’s as clear as air.”

“I’m not speaking of that. I mean the illusion. When you came up just now, with the curl out of your hair, you looked just as you did when we used to swim in the cove at home.”

“Now you *are* dreaming,” Nancy said. “And what was it you told me? That you didn’t know whether I was pretty or not, in those days?”

“‘Pretty’ was never the word. It couldn’t have been, even then; but I was too young to know.”

They swam to the farther side and climbed the bank for a closer view of the rocky slide leading to the second pool, about thirty feet below.

“It might have been man-made,” Brooke said, wonderingly. “Not a bump in it. Here goes!” and he let himself be carried down, feet first. Nancy followed. The exhilaration of the swift smooth descent was glorious. They repeated the plunge again and again. At last, having wrung out their clothes, they stretched out on the warm flat-topped ledge where the sun quickly dried them. Brooke lay with his head in Nancy’s lap, watching the wreaths of mist forming and re-forming around the central peak towering above them. They heard the occasional shrill drone of a bee as it winged its way through the sunny air like a small meteor of sound, giving them something with which to

measure the deepness of the silence.

“Alec, tell me about the valley you spoke of—the one we’re to see on the way down. Have you been there?”

“No; I’ve only seen it from high up on that southern ridge. I’m not sure that I can find it again from here, but it’s a little paradise, the very place for us to live.”

“Does it open on the lagoon?”

“Yes, not more than two miles from where we’re living now.”

“Do try to find it!”

“We will. There must be a way into it from somewhere hereabout.”

Both turned their heads as they heard a cheery hail from the border of the forest. The sturdy figure of Mr. Wilcox emerged from the trees on the far side of the lake. In his hand he carried a branch covered with small white blossoms which he waved as he came toward them.

“Well, well!” he called, in surprise. “I didn’t expect to find you two away up here! Nancy, you’re as spry as a mountain goat!”

When he had reached the rock where they sat he gazed in wonder at the scene outspread below them.

“My, my!” he exclaimed. “Could anything be more beautiful! Alec, are these the lakes you were telling me about?”

“That’s right, sir.”

“I’ve come all the way from the east side of the island,” said the missionary; “but I could never have found my way alone. Tangaroa came with me. I couldn’t keep up with him, but he must be somewhere close by.”

He seated himself with a sigh of relief, carefully laying the blossom-covered branch beside him.

Nancy bent her head to examine the blossoms and breathe in their perfume.

“What beautiful flowers!” she said. “They have the very fragrance of lilacs! Smell them, Alec.”

“You’re right,” he said. “Nancy, we’ve only to close our eyes to imagine we’re at home in Westview, on a spring evening.”

“Do you know what they are?” Mr. Wilcox asked.

Brooke was about to shake his head as he examined them; then his eyes lighted up.

“Wait a minute!” he said. “There’s a name coming! I’ve never seen them before, but I believe I know what they are. They’re called the . . . the *tiaré apétahi*.”

Mr. Wilcox gazed at him in astonishment. “How in the world could you know that?” he asked.

“I’ve seen a sketch of them, sir: one of Dr. Solander’s, the botanist who was with Captain Cook on one of his voyages. The sketch was of just such a

branch as this.”

“Now isn’t that strange!” Mr. Wilcox exclaimed. “You have a good memory. You’re right: this is the *tiaré apétahi*, one of the rarest flowers to be found anywhere among the Pacific Islands. It belongs to the gardenia family. You see how some of the blossoms are still closed? Well, as the sun warms them the petals suddenly open with a little pop . . . There! You see? Soon they will all be open to the sunlight.”

“Where did you find them?” Nancy asked.

“I have Tangaroa to thank for that . . . I’m afraid I’ve done an awful thing,” he added. “I was so pleased at finding so rare a flower that, before I thought, I broke off this branch, there in Tangaroa’s presence.”

“Did he resent your doing it?”

“No, no! It was nothing like resentment. But I saw a shadow of deep sadness pass over his face. Then, as though speaking to himself, he said, ‘It must be.’ I don’t know what he meant. What a thoughtless thing for me to do!” He smiled, forlornly. “And now I must carry my badge of vandalism in my hand! Oh dear! There! Did you see? Another one popped open. Every little pop is like a reproach.”

Nancy smiled.

“You mustn’t feel so guilty, Mr. Wilcox. I’m sure Tangaroa will forgive you.”

“I know. I felt that I was forgiven the moment it was done, but . . . here he comes,” he added, quietly.

They got to their feet as the old native approached. He was scarcely visible at first in the mottled light and shadow of the forest’s edge, but a moment later he stood in the open, his kirtle of tapa cloth gleaming white in the sun. In his hand he carried just such a blossom-covered branch as Mr. Wilcox had.

“Look, Mr. Wilcox! He has one, too,” Nancy said.

“He must have done that for my sake,” the missionary replied. “He didn’t want me to be shamed. Tangaroa is the soul of courtesy and kindness.”

The old man came toward them along the margin of the lake and mounted the rock where they stood. He smiled at the two young people, then spoke briefly to the missionary, who turned to his companions.

“Tangaroa says that you have found your way to the happiest spot of a happy island. He hopes that you plan to come here often.”

“That we shall,” Brooke replied, heartily. “Will you ask him, Mr. Wilcox, if he knows all parts of the island?”

The missionary spoke briefly with the old man; then turned to the others.

“He says there is not a valley that he has not visited many times, nor a peak that he has not scaled.”

“Even that highest one?” Nancy asked.

"I believe I understood him correctly, but I will inquire again. . . . Yes, that one as well," he added, a moment later. "He says there is a lake within the hollow peak far more beautiful than either of these. It is like a nether sky at night. If you would care to visit it, he will take you there at a later time."

"Thank him for us," Brooke said, "and tell him we would like nothing better."

Tangaroa then seated himself, and the others with him. While speaking with the missionary, the old native ran his hand lightly over a slight smooth depression in the rock.

"Tangaroa tells me an astonishing thing," the missionary explained. "He says the little hollow, here in the rock, was made by the bare feet of countless generations of island children who stood at this spot to leap into the pool."

"Why . . . it must have taken centuries!" Brooke exclaimed. "Will you ask him what has happened to the island people?"

Mr. Wilcox listened with deep attention while the old native replied. His face was a study as he translated.

"I . . . I don't know how to tell you this," he said. "I really don't. But Tangaroa asks . . ."

He broke off, looking at them with an air of such amazed bewilderment that Brooke smiled, in spite of himself.

"What is it?"

"There's a word or two I don't understand, but I'm sure that I got his meaning. He wishes to know if . . . if you would care to witness a scene that happened often on this spot, centuries ago?"

"Tell him we would very much like to see it," Nancy replied, so quietly that Brooke's own feeling of bewilderment vanished. The old man rose and led the way to a grassy knoll at one side of the lake, at the border of the forest. They had no sooner seated themselves when the landscape changed in a strange, scarcely discernible fashion. It was the same, and yet not wholly the same. Brooke was aware that the contours of the forest on the opposite side of the lake blurred momentarily and then became perfectly clear again. Flowering trees of various kinds still made vivid splotches of color, blue and gold and flaming scarlet, along the borders of the forest, but in altered positions; and piled-up masses of cumulous clouds suddenly materialized in a sky that had been cloudless only the moment before.

But all this he was aware of only with the fringes of consciousness. As Nancy placed her hand in his he glanced quickly at her and saw that she was gazing with an absorbed, dreamlike attention toward the rock from which they had come. He now saw that the rock, the two pools, and the flower-beset banks around them were alive with brown-skinned children whose laughter and merry shouts filled the air. The little ones were naked. The older boys and

girls had strips of tapa cloth trussed about their loins in a fashion to give them such covering as modesty required but offering no impediment to swimming. A line of them, of all ages between six and sixteen, stretched from the rock, up the grassy slope to the border of the woods, as they waited their turns to leap into the pool, and from there they slid down the long water slope into the pool below. Now and then two older boys would make a saddle of their clasped hands to swing some little fellow far out, thus giving an extra zest to his delight in plunging into the pool.

Bathers, resting from their sport, looked on from the banks. Groups of young girls basked in the sunshine, drying their hair, while others came from the woods laden with flowers which were woven into many-colored wreaths; and they fashioned bracelets and necklaces of blossoms with which they bedecked themselves so charmingly that Nancy gave an involuntary exclamation of delight.

Immediately the scene of past days faded from view; the merry shouts died away, and Brooke heard, from mid-air it seemed, a ripple of gay laughter that vanished into silence like a wreath of mist melting into sunlight, in the depths of blue sky.

## Fifteen

The old native, lost in the depths of reverie, continued to gaze across the pool, but a moment later he spoke briefly to the missionary who then remarked, as though speaking half to himself: "You see? As Tangaroa said, it was a happy place."

"But that was long ago," Brooke replied, sadly. "Where are they now? What has become of them, and their parents, and grandparents? Does Tangaroa know?"

During the pause that followed Brooke studied the old man's face. He saw there no expression of sadness; only one of peace, of deep tranquillity. The missionary turned to them.

"I'm not sure that I understand," he said, in a puzzled voice. "It's as though the past still exists, for him."

"But that's impossible," Brooke said. "The past is something that's . . . that's gone."

"That's how I look at it," Mr. Wilcox replied, with a perplexed smile. "I'll question him again. Perhaps I misunderstood."

He then spoke slowly and haltingly to the old native who listened with an air of deep attention. His reply was brief.

"What does he say?" Brooke asked.

"He asks, merely: 'Gone where?'"

"And a very sensible reply it is," Nancy said, in the quiet positive manner Brooke remembered so well. Nancy, as he knew, could believe the most astonishing things, and matters beyond her grasp were none the less credible for that reason. "Don't you think so, Mr. Wilcox?"

"I don't know *what* to think," he replied, shaking his head with a give-it-up expression.

"But don't you see? Tangaroa is simply telling us that the past hasn't gone anywhere. There's no place for it to go."

"That's too deep for me, young lady."

"Deep? Why, it's nothing but common sense. Alec, you see it, don't you?"

"Then what about *our* past?" Brooke replied. "Is that here, and now?"

"Of course. It's as real as when we had it. I can shut my eyes and bring it all back in an instant."

"But you're depending upon memory," Mr. Wilcox said. "What about the glimpse of the past we've just seen: something that happened centuries ago? Whose memory was that?"

"We saw it, Mr. Wilcox. You saw it and Alec saw it and I saw it. You're

sure of that, aren't you?"

"Completely sure."

"Then what does it matter? I don't believe that memory has anything to do with it. The past simply *is*, just like the present. And it always will be.

At this point Tangaroa spoke once more.

"What does he say, sir?" Brooke asked.

The missionary smiled as he gazed at the two young people.

"Something that I myself might have told you," he replied. "Something that I have been convinced of since the day when I first saw you two together. He says that you were born for each other."

"We've known that ever since we were children," Nancy replied, quietly.

"And he says that you are not to be suspicious of your happiness, or afraid of it. You are to accept it with grateful hearts."

"Alec, what did I tell you?"

"That we shall," Brooke replied, with deep feeling. "Ask him one more question, Mr. Wilcox . . . only one. Are we to have it long?"

The moment he had uttered them Brooke regretted the words spoken so impulsively. Nancy laid a hand quickly on his arm.

"No, Alec! Don't ask that! Don't you see? You're afraid of it already!"

Tangaroa spoke again, whereupon the missionary said: "He must have read your thought. He says: 'And tell them they will not be parted again.'"

"That's all I wanted to know," Brooke said. "Nancy, I'll doubt no more . . . Never!"

Tangaroa rose, and the others with him.

"We're going down to your side of the island," Mr. Wilcox said. "Ru is bringing his family around by canoe. They are going to fish on the reef islet near your pass. We will all spend the night there. Would you like to join us?"

"Very much," said Brooke.

"Then I'll speak to Captain Vail as we go down. He can bring you out to the islet. Unless you wish to come with us now?"

"We'd like to go down another way, if possible. There's a beautiful valley I've looked into from a ridge. I want Nancy to see it. Will you ask Tangaroa if we can reach it from here?"

He then described the valley, and Mr. Wilcox, after speaking with his companion, replied: "Yes, Tangaroa knows it very well. He says that you could find no lovelier place for your home. In ancient days it was called *Topanga Ra*, the Valley of the Setting Sun."

"Can we go down that way?"

"Tangaroa says the descent is steep, in places, but it can be done. Enter the woods there to the left and bear off with the sun at your right shoulder, following the slope of the land. You will soon come to the great valley leading

to the one you wish to see.”

He then put into their hands the two branches of the *tiaré apétahi* which, having been laid in a shady spot with their stems in water, were as fresh and fragrant as when they had first seen them.

“When you reach your valley,” Mr. Wilcox explained, “Tangaroa wishes you to plant them in a spot pleasing to you both. They will quickly take root, he says.”

“You see? You needn’t have felt guilty at all,” Nancy replied.

“I’m truly relieved. You must let me know where you plant them and I’ll come, later, to see. They will be fragrant reminders to all of us of this happy day.”

“But the day isn’t ended yet,” Nancy said.

“I know. We have all the happiness of the evening to come.”

When they had parted from the others, Brooke led the way down gently sloping wooded land whose widely scattered trees framed enchanting vistas on either hand; but presently they came to the brink of a mountain wall so steep that they halted to peer uncertainly into the depths below.

“This is the way Tangaroa said to come,” Brooke remarked. “Nancy, it’s going to be tough from here on.”

“No ‘brothering,’” Nancy said; “it’s not as steep as the Westview standpipe.”

“But at least we had a ladder there to hang onto. Okay! Here we go!”

Slowly and carefully they made their way down, Brooke choosing hand and footholds, pointing them out to Nancy as he relinquished them. He was soon reassured, seeing with what ease and confidence she followed. They halted by a tree whose gnarled roots were thrust deeply into fissures in the rock. It was growing at a narrow angle to the mountain wall.

“Nancy, you haven’t forgotten the white stone tower?”

“Of course not. You were afraid I’d fall, coming down.”

“That’s right. And Uncle Thad said: ‘Don’t you believe it! Nancy’s spry as a monkey.’ And so you are. Where did you get the practice?”

“In your dream. Where else? Think of the times you had me running up and down that tower! It’s a wonder I didn’t rebel. Why didn’t you dream what I could see from the top?”

“I don’t know. I suppose I could think of nothing but the little ship just then.”

“Isn’t it amazing? Strange as dreams are they’re nothing like so fantastic as reality. Here we are . . . and think of how we came! And of all the years between!”

“Give me your hand so that I can be sure . . . No, don’t! Hang on where you are.”

“I’m going to, but I’ve one foot to spare.” She rested it lightly on his shoulder. “Do you feel it? Are you sure again?”

“I guess so.”

“Alec dear, what a doubter you are! Just what Tangaroa said you were not to be.”

“I know. But I’m so unbelievably happy.”

“Darling, it’s not happiness that’s incredible. Not to me, at least. It’s the hatred and cruelty and greed and selfishness that make the world’s misery.”

Some distance below they saw a rocky ledge. Upon reaching it they found it much wider than had appeared from above—a broad natural platform from which they could see all of the upper valley with the ravines and canyons opening into it. Far inland the great cone-shaped central mountain stood revealed from base to peak, the afternoon sunshine falling full upon the peak, though the lower half was in shadow. It was a spectacle of awe-inspiring grandeur, and they gazed in silence at the mighty wall of rock that formed the western bastion.

“And Tangaroa has climbed even there!” Nancy said, gazing at the peak, clearly outlined against the blue sky. “How in the world does he reach it?”

“Not from this side, certainly,” Brooke replied. “From other views I’ve had, I believe the ascent is made from the northeast.”

Behind the ledge upon which they stood the rock was undercut for a distance of a dozen feet, making a shallow cave, well sheltered and perfectly dry.

“What a glorious perch!” Brooke said. “This is the way the kids must have come up from the valley. Think of it, Nancy! Centuries ago, and we saw them today!”

“Today for them and today for us,” Nancy replied. “My kind of today that goes on and on and on. . . . Alec, what does this place make you think of? Something we’ve read about, not seen.”

“I was about to ask you the same question.

The splendour falls on castle walls . . .

Is that what you had in mind?”

“No, I was thinking of Rip Van Winkle. It was among mountains like these that he wandered off with his dog, on just such a still sunny afternoon.”

“But these mountains are even more wild and lonely and rugged. And where’s the lordly Hudson?”

“There below us, only ours isn’t so lordly. Do you see the blue canyon below the ridge on the far side? That’s where the old Dutchmen were playing at bowls.”

“Maybe it is,” said Brooke. “Maybe Rip is still there. I’ll hail him.”

Cupping his hands around his lips, he called: “Rip Van Winkle! . . . Rip Van Winkle!”

They waited, and a moment later the answering call came back so beautifully clear that Brooke felt a thrill of delight. And, immediately after, the words echoed and re-echoed as though the ravines and glades and upland valleys of Turnbull’s Island opened into the fastnesses of the Catskill Mountains. Innumerable voices seemed to be calling from cliffs and crags on both sides of the valley, heard more and more faintly until they died away to silence.

They were like children again. They called in turn and together. Brooke filled that high and lonely place with answering calls of Nancy’s name and she with his. They sang fragments of old school songs. Then Nancy, completely changing her voice, called in a precise, firm, commanding tone: “Alexander!”

“Nancy, for the Lord’s sake!” Brooke exclaimed. “That was Miss Prouty herself, calling on me to recite! A dozen Miss Proutys.”

“Do you remember how mad it used to make you when she used your full name? What became of her, Alec?”

“She’s principal of the grammar school, or was when I was last at home. . . . Now it’s my turn again. I’ll sing this: it ought to be superb, for echoes:—

Blow high! Blow low!  
And so sailed we . . .”

They listened until the last echo died away in the farthest recesses of the island. Nancy gazed at him strangely.

“It was your voice and not your voice,” she said. “It seemed pure spirit at the last.”

“I wish we could hear Uncle Thad sing it from here.”

“It wouldn’t be the same. . . . Alec, isn’t it strange how we’ve loved the same things ever since we were little? Do you remember the rock in the woods by the river? It was the only place we could find for echoes. . . . And now—this!”

“We’ll come here again,” he said. “Time to be moving if we’re going to find our valley and reach home before dark.”

“‘Home’ . . . I like to hear you say that. It makes me think of Westview.”

The ancient talus from the mountain wall, now earth-covered and forested, reached almost to the ledge upon which they were standing. From there the descent was easy. Upon reaching the river they followed it to a place where it divided around a rocky hill whose highest pinnacles were like the ruined towers of some old castle with shrubs and trees growing amongst them. They chose the left branch of the stream which plunged down a ravine that fell in a

steep curve around the base of the hill. Here again they were obliged to go carefully. Below them, at a bend in the canyon, shafts of sunlight struck in at an angle along the moss-grown walls, transforming the mist into golden water dust through which the stems of the trees stood out in dim silhouette. "I'm not sure where we're coming out," Brooke said, "but we'll soon know."

"It will be our valley, of course," Nancy said. "I'm not in the least doubtful."

"Wait, Nancy! Stand just as you are for a moment."

"Why?"

Brooke gazed wonderingly at her.

"You can't imagine how beautiful you look, in the mist."

"Alec, what a left-handed compliment! You think the mist is needed?"

"Left-handed nothing! There's a kind of angelic golden light around you."

"Angelic? Then it doesn't belong there."

"I hope not, but it's there just the same."

They emerged from the ravine upon a high ledge from which the stream fell in a vertical cascade into an open sunny valley whose smooth turf and scattered clumps of trees were bathed in a greenish-golden light from the westering sun. On the seaward side rocky portals framed with a magical effect the white beach beyond and a segment of the lagoon where two ghost terns were hovering over their own reflections. No sound save the music of falling water broke the stillness.

Hand in hand, they gazed about them without speaking for a moment or two. Then Brooke said: "This is the valley."

Nancy nodded.

"I know—our valley. It couldn't have been any other."

"*Topanga Ra*—the Valley of the Setting Sun . . . Why, that's Westview, of course! Westview, the High Barbaree. . . . Doesn't it sound fantastic?"

"Not to me," Nancy replied. "There's where we'll have our house, under the trees by the loop in the river."

"That's just what I was thinking. We'll plant our *tiaré apétahi* where the doorstep will be. But we've got to get down, first."

## Sixteen

The sky was ablaze with stars as they trudged northward along the beach. A gleam of firelight cast a bright path across the lagoon from the reef islet, a mile and a half offshore. They found Cowles waiting for them.

"Thought you'd lost your way," he said. "Lieutenant, are you as hungry as I am? Seems like I can smell fish broilin' even from here."

"We've had a wonderful day, Cowles," Nancy said. "Where's Captain Vail?"

"He's gone over with the others. Got tired of waitin' so he sent me back to fetch you."

"Aren't you afraid to trust yourself on salt water again?" Brooke said.

"You're right, Lieutenant! Even in the lagoon, I'm still that jittery I more'n half expected to see a periscope risin' up when I went over with your uncle. Well, I guess there ain't no danger here. But why the Nips ain't found this place is more'n I know."

They pushed the boat into the water and Cowles took the oars.

"It gives me a shiver to be in the gig again," Nancy said.

"We sure went through it, Miss Nancy—you and me and the captain. Even now I can't hardly believe we're here, safe and sound."

"My uncle's made a mighty neat job of repairs," Brooke said.

"He's a wonder," said Cowles. "But I guess you know that already. There's nothin' about boats, or ships, he can't turn his hand to, even with no tools to speak of."

He rowed in silence for some time; then he added: "I asked him: 'Whatever do you want to bother fixin' the gig up for, Captain? We ain't goin' nowheres.'"

"What did he say to that?" Nancy asked.

"He kind of smiled and looked at me. 'How do you know we ain't?' Then I says: 'You won't try to get away in her?' 'Try?' says he. 'There'll be no tryin' about it. I could sail this gig to San Pedro, but we ain't got that far to go.' 'We?' I says. 'Captain, excuse me, but I signed off for good when the *Huron* went down.' 'You can do as you've a mind to,' he told me. 'My nephew and me'll go. I can pretty well count on a beam wind. With luck we ought to reach Guadalcanal in anything from a week to ten days.' . . . That's what he told me. I can see he's got his mind set. He said they'd send a plane from Guadalcanal for you, Miss Nancy, and the parson, if he wants to go." Cowles rested on his oars. "Think of it! When he don't have to! When he's got every right to wait here till they find us, if ever they *do* find us!"

He rowed on again. Presently Nancy asked: "Did he say when he plans to leave?"

"I oughtn't to have spoke, Miss Nancy," the steward replied, apologetically. "It came out before I thought. Don't tell the captain! He'd give me hell! But it ain't right away. He wants you and the Lieutenant to have the full good of the island while you got the chance."

A moment later he went on: "Can you beat it? He said to me: 'Why, God dammit, Cowles!' . . . Excuse me, Miss Nancy, but that's what he said. 'There ain't a thing to grumble about in a place like this. I ain't even heard *you* grumblin'.' 'No, sir; and you never will,' I says. 'This island's a paradise, if you ask me.' 'That's just the trouble,' the captain said. 'It's too perfect. Can't find nothin' to swear about. When a seaman gets to that point it's time for him to move on.' "

They were now approaching the reef islet, a ribbon of land about three hundred yards wide that followed the curve of the reef from the pass for a distance of a mile or more. A fringe of bush bordered the beach. Beyond it, on the level land, a bright fire was burning. There they found Mata, Ru's wife, and her mother, roasting shellfish over the coals. Mr. Wilcox and Captain Vail were watching while Ru uncovered a native earth oven that had been prepared near by.

"Here they are!" Mr. Wilcox said. "Alec, we were about to send out a search party. Did you find your valley?"

"Yes, sir, but we had a hard time getting into it," Brooke replied. "That's why we're so late."

"And we planted our branches there," Nancy said. "You really think they will grow, Mr. Wilcox?"

"I'm sure of it. In that rich volcanic soil a branch or cutting will quickly take root."

Hina came running to Nancy, who stooped to kiss her. Then the child seated herself near by. Chin in hands, she gazed into the face of the older girl with unself-conscious absorption. Her brother, Ariki, was helping his father remove the cooked food from the native oven.

"There's a fine pair of youngsters," Captain Vail remarked. "Were there many like them on your island, parson?"

"Dozens, scores," the missionary replied, bleakly. "And where are they now—and their fathers and mothers?"

"Alec, they're about the age you and Nancy were that spring we went boatin'. These two have all the water they want for *their* boatin'. Guess they don't know how lucky they are."

"If we're to speak of that, Captain, what of the rest of us?" Mr. Wilcox said. "If only we could gather all the island people into this haven of peace!"

Captain Vail ran his fingers through his thick gray hair.

“What beats me is that we’ve not seen the sign of a plane all the time we’ve been here. How do you account for it, Alec?”

“I *can’t* account for it,” Brooke replied. “We’re only three hundred miles from the Carolines and about twice that west of the Gilberts.”

“And no planes, no ships—nothing.”

Cowles spoke up.

“You know that song, Captain?”

I got plenty of nothin’  
And nothin’s plenty for me . . .

That’s how I feel, far as ships and planes go.”

“There’s something queer about it. You might think we was clean off the planet.”

“What puzzles me even more is that Turnbull’s Island has remained unknown to the world all these years,” Mr. Wilcox said.

Captain Vail glanced up at him.

“And it’s had the wrong name, all these years,” he remarked.

“The wrong name . . . ?”

“Yes. I’ve just found it out . . . Cowles, you haven’t told ’em?”

“No, sir. You said you wanted to.”

“What is it, Uncle Thad?” Nancy asked.

“Parson, you said you had a copy of *Yardley’s Directory*.”

“So I did, at Punavai.”

“Remember what he wrote about this place? ‘In the opinion of the editor, the existence of Turnbull’s Island is doubtful indeed.’ ”

“Yes, I recall that, very clearly.”

“Doubtful!” Captain Vail scooped up a double handful of sand and let it fall again. “I’d like to pour this over the man’s head! He ought to have known better than question the word of a Nantucketer. The only thing that’s doubtful is the name. It should have been Vail’s Island.”

Brooke stared at his uncle.

“You mean that some of the Vails have seen it?”

His uncle nodded.

“More than that, Alec: they’ve landed here.”

“Uncle Thad! That’s incredible!” Nancy exclaimed.

“What’s incredible about it? There wasn’t a sturdier, farther-farin’ whalin’ family in New England than the Vails. Many’s the year they cruised the Pacific, the Line Grounds included.”

“But . . .”

“They’ve filled their water barrels yonder across the lagoon, not three

miles from where we're sittin'. And they never reported the island. Ain't that just like a whaler? What was islands to most of 'em except places to run ashore and freshen up for a few days? 'Sperm ile' was what counted. That's how the Vails felt about it."

"And . . . they were here before Captain Turnbull?" Brooke asked.

"Captain Turnbull never *was* here, if you remember, Alec. He only sighted the place. Oliphant Vail, your Great-grandfather Alexander's brother, came ashore."

"But how do you know. . . ."

"Wait a minute! I'll tell you how I know. A few days back Cowles and me was trudgin' down the beach, yonder across the lagoon, lookin' at this and that. It was around midday, pretty warm in the sun, and we was dry. A bit farther along we spied a thread of water falling down the rocks into a thicket, so we went in there to get a drink. It's a pretty little glen that don't go back more than a dozen yards or so. That water tasted mighty good, didn't it, Cowles?"

"Sure did, Captain."

"We was about to come away when I noticed that the rim of the pool the water fell into was as round as you could have drawn it with a pair of dividers. 'Cowles,' I said, 'whatever kind of a rock can that be, under the moss?' So we put the ferns aside and scratched a bit of the moss away. And what we found was a kettle—a copper, the whalers called 'em. . . . Well! That was somethin' of a surprise. Kind of fetched us up, short of breath, didn't it, Cowles?"

"Yes, sir. I ain't got mine back yet."

"We scraped right around the rim, and presently we come to some letterin' embossed on the outside. It was a name—*Harriet*. That right, Cowles?"

"Yes, sir. It was plain as anything, in raised letters."

"Remember, Alec? That was the name of your Great-great-uncle Oliphant Vail's ship. He went on a cruise to the Pacific in 1836, and was never heard of again. He watered his ship here, sure as the world, but why he left that fine copper . . ."

"Maybe he didn't," Brooke said. "Perhaps he was wrecked here."

"That's about the way I figger it out. Or he might have planned to come back, later, and was lost somewhere else. . . . Cowles, you tell the rest of it."

"The captain and me managed to tip the kettle over," the steward proceeded. "Then we cleaned off the moss and scoured it with sand till it shone as bright as new. We got a rope from the gig, rigged it to the handle, and tossed the free end over the limb of a tree. The two of us managed to heave it up till it swung free, a couple of feet off the ground. And was *that* hard work!"

"Never saw a finer bit of coppersmithin'," Captain Vail added. "It's got a beautiful tone when you strike it. Deep and clear as a bell."

“Can we see it?” Nancy asked.

Captain Vail smiled.

“I don’t wonder your asking, Nancy. I more than half doubt, myself, that it is there.”

“It’s there all right, Captain,” Cowles said. “This afternoon while I was waitin’ for the lieutenant, I went down again to make sure.”

“Just where did you find it?” Brooke asked.

Captain Vail got to his feet and walked through the screen of bush to the lagoon beach, the others following. He stood at the water’s edge, studying the dark mass of the mainland, clearly outlined against the starry sky.

“There,” he said, pointing. “It’s about two miles down the beach from where we’re living, near the head of the pretty cove you must have noticed.”

“Why, that’s where our valley is, the one Alec and I came down this afternoon,” Nancy said.

“I didn’t see any valley. There’s a bluff rises behind the cove.”

“But it’s there above the bluff,” Brooke said. “You can’t see it from the beach.”

Supper was ready when they returned to the fire. Mata and her mother had laid out green banana leaves, for cloths, on the clean sand. There were roasted breadfruit, yams, and taro; packages of fat fresh mullet, baked in the native oven, flaky and done to a turn; lobsters and other shellfish from the outer reef. Nuts and fruits had been brought from the mainland, and fresh-water shrimps, to be boiled in lengths of green bamboo; and sweet puddings of banana poi served with a sauce of coconut cream. As they looked at this plenty spread before them, Captain Vail said: “Mr. Wilcox, I doubt if there are people anywhere in the world more favored than ourselves this night.”

The missionary nodded, gravely; then bent his head, the others with him.

“Our Heavenly Father: we, whom Thou hast led from tumult to quietness, thank Thee with reverent hearts. We thank Thee for this sanctuary in a world maddened by the lust of war. All Merciful Father, let Thy mercy once more be known upon earth. Teach men to have mercy, one toward another, lest, in blindness and hatred, they utterly destroy themselves and their heritage, this once so beautiful world. Father, look in pity upon the island peoples scattered over this great sea. Their homes are shattered and gone; their very homelands wrecked and torn asunder. Father, comfort them, if any comfort remains to those who yet live. And grant them what we have found here, the blessing of Thy peace.”

When the meal was over they sat around the fire, talking a little, but, for the most part, enjoying in silence and with grateful hearts the peace and beauty of the night. Presently, at Mr. Wilcox’s request, Ru brought out his flute, a slender length of bamboo, and began to play. It was as though the lonely islet

had been given a voice; as though the very Spirit of mid-ocean solitudes were singing to itself of a world which man had never profaned. The children lay with their heads in their mother's lap, staring drowsily into the firelight, but they soon fell asleep. Presently Ru put away his flute and carried them to a small lean-to of plaited palm fronds already prepared to shelter them from the night dews.

Still under the spell of the lonely music, Brooke and Nancy walked through the groves toward the outer beach. When they had gone a little way they turned to look back. The stems of the coconut palms and pandanus trees stood black against the firelight which cast wavering shadows amongst them and into the foliage overhead. Beyond reach of the firelight, the lagoon was like a nether sky, giving the illusion that the islet was adrift amongst the stars shining so brightly there.

Nancy said: "Alec, we'll never forget this. Think of the happy memories we have to share together!"

They walked on to the outer beach where the long rollers of the open sea were thundering across the reef, casting up clouds of spray faintly luminous in the starlight.

"What was it Mr. Wilcox said in his prayer? 'This once so beautiful world . . .' And now there's so little of that world left."

"By the time the war's over there may be none of it left," Brooke said. "Even this island . . ."

"Don't say it! They'll never come here!"

"If only we could be sure."

"Alec, don't think of it as Turnbull's Island; not even as Vail's Island. It's the High Barbaree. They'll *never* find it. If you can't believe with your mind, then believe with your heart."

They went to the far end of the islet and were returning by the lagoon beach when they met Captain Vail strolling in the opposite direction.

"I looked to meet you," he said. "Let's sit here on the beach for a little."

"This couldn't have happened better, Uncle Thad," Brooke said. "There's something Nancy and I want to tell you."

"I might be able to guess it, if you'd give me three tries. . . . Well, then?"

Brooke spoke, then Nancy, then the two together, Captain Vail listening in silence. When they had finished, he said:—

"And it's my consent you want? . . . Then you have it, free and hearty. Ever since you two were little I've hoped you'd make a match of it some day."

"And you don't think we're foolish for wanting to marry now?"

"No . . . I don't, Nancy. Not for a minute! I'm kind of surprised at myself for saying that. The war's not over yet, and we may be in it again, but . . . I'm speaking for the Vail family, and the Brooke family, and the Fraser family: if

ever there was a right marriage and a right time for it, it's yours—here *and* now. When do you want it to be? The sooner the better, I'd say."

"That's how we feel," Brooke said, eagerly.

"Then why not here on the islet, first thing in the morning?"

"You . . . you think we could?"

"Don't you? We've got all our little colony together." He got to his feet. "Come along! We'll talk it over with Mr. Wilcox if he's still up."

They found the missionary reading his Bible by firelight; it was the Bible belonging to the co-pilot, Lyman, that Brooke had brought ashore from the plane. Of a sudden the scene before him became blurred and confused. He saw Mauriac lying on the wing of the Catalina with the Bible open before him, and the old feeling of despair again seized him. He could hear Mr. Wilcox's voice, as though from a great distance, saying: "My own Bible is in the native speech of Punavai. It's an excellent translation made by my grandfather, but what could ever compare with the King James version?" Then his uncle spoke; then Mr. Wilcox. He could hear what they said, but neither voice had reality until he felt Nancy's hand in his; then the feeling of desolation, of awful uncertainty, vanished once more.

"And a prettier spot than this couldn't be found," Mr. Wilcox was saying. "Nancy, if you and Alec will allow me to make a suggestion?"

"What is it?"

"I would propose an early morning wedding, at sunrise, or thereabout. You found your valley what you hoped it would be?"

"It's even beyond our hopes," Nancy said.

"Then, if you wish it, we can have your home ready for you there by tomorrow evening."

"You mean it, sir?" Brooke asked.

"Under Ru's direction I can promise it. Give us the day for the work, with the captain and Cowles to lend a hand; it will be finished and awaiting you by nightfall."

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He awakened slowly from the depths of dreamless slumber. A faint light still came from the dying fire.

"Alec! Alec!"

"Oh . . . It's you, Uncle Thad."

"Listen! What do you hear?"

Brooke sat up, not yet fully awake. From far away, so faintly at first that he thought his ears were deceiving him, he heard the sound of motors. His pulses quickened.

"It's a plane!" he said.

"I know . . . Ours or theirs?"

Brooke listened again.

“I can’t be sure yet . . . Sounds like a Cat, but it might be one of those Nip Recco boats.”

“Smother that fire first thing we do,” said Captain Vail.

Quickly they heaped sand upon it until the last gleam of light faded. It was a still full night, but there was the promise of dawn in the air.

“There’s no need to wake the others—not yet,” said the captain. “We can get a clear view from the outer beach.”

They walked swiftly across the islet and stood there, listening intently. The sound was increasing; presently the droning of a two-engined plane filled the air.

“It’s a Cat!” Brooke exclaimed, and as he spoke, the islet was illuminated as though some mighty hand had snapped on a switch. A moment later another parachute flare, and another, and another, were floating in the air, lighting up the sea for miles around. Well offshore and clearly revealed in the pitiless glare of magnesium, a cruiser and three destroyers sprang into sight. Brooke’s dazzled eyes made out the odd hunched appearance of the cruiser’s superstructure.

“Japs!” he said. “She’s a Mogami! Our bombers must be on the way!”

Searchlights from all four vessels swept the sky and tracers streaked upward, followed by the rapid staccato of machine-gun fire. This died away momentarily, then rose to a crescendo once more as they heard the droning of many powerful engines, seeming to fill all space. Smoke belched from the cruiser’s funnels; the destroyers maneuvered around her at great speed. They were not far out, and the watchers held their breath as one came directly toward them as though she meant to crash, bow-on, into the reef. She turned in a narrow arc when scarcely fifty yards from the break of the surf.

A moment later the first of the dive bombers peeled off and came screaming down on the destroyer. A column of water rose to a great height just off the vessel’s stern, hung poised for an instant, and crashed down upon the sea. A second plane followed; its bomb struck the destroyer squarely amidships, bursting with a mighty detonation in sheets of flame. The watchers felt the force of the mighty concussion and Brooke saw the coconut palms bend to it.

Farther out, they saw the cruiser attacked by plane after plane. She was hit once and hit again, and a few moments later she lay helpless, a beacon to illuminate the scene of destruction and death. Then, with stupefying suddenness, the flaming cruiser rolled to starboard, raised her stern high, and was gone. The last of the parachute flares winked out; the bombers droned off to the southward, the sound of their engines dying swiftly away. Silence flowed back to replace the tumult of battle, and starlit darkness with it,

concealing, as though it had never been, the scene they had witnessed. Brooke felt a hand on his arm and turned to find Mr. Wilcox beside him.

“What’s happened?” he asked. “Whose ships . . .”

“Japs,” Captain Vail replied, with grim satisfaction. “Our boys got the lot of ’em. Never saw such bombin’!”

“Where’s Nancy?” Brooke asked.

“It’s astonishing, but they’re still asleep—all of them.”

“Good!” said Captain Vail. “Let’s say nothing of what’s happened. There’s no reason for them to know. Unless there’s survivors,” he added, soberly. “There’ll have been at least a thousand men on that cruiser.”

They continued to gaze westward where the sea was now touched with the first ghostly light of dawn.

“Look! There’s a boat!” Brooke exclaimed.

“Where?” Mr. Wilcox exclaimed anxiously. “I see nothing, Alec.”

“Beyond the point. And another one farther out!”

Soon they clearly made out two large ship’s boats rowed slowly this way and that while tiny figures stooped over the gunwales to draw swimmers from the sea. Oil slicks gleamed faintly in the increasing light; elsewhere the sea was ruffled by a fresh breeze from the southeast. Brooke turned to his uncle.

“I’m going to get Nancy!”

“Wait, Alec! Not yet,” Captain Vail said. “They’re well hidden at the camp. We’ve got to think fast. . . . We’ll be all right where we are for the present. They’ll not come ashore here, that’s certain.”

“So I think,” said Mr. Wilcox. “They’ll see the pass and go straight across to the mainland.”

“But they may come here later,” Brooke said.

“And we’ll not be here later. After nightfall we can sail around to the east side of the island. We can hide in the mountains where they’ll never find us.”

Well screened by the thick fringe of bush along the seaward beach, they peered out toward the enemy boats scarcely a mile offshore and about the same distance to the south. The Japs had stepped masts in both boats and were hauling aloft the yards of their big lugsails. One boat, then the other, trimmed its sail and filled away on the starboard tack. At first they appeared to be headed directly for the passage, but as they drew near, instead of slacking away to enter they held on their course to the north. Scarcely daring to breathe, Brooke stared through the bushes. He could plainly see the enemy seamen; some gazed in the direction of the island, but listlessly, without apparent interest or curiosity. The second boat passed, missing by a few yards only the bulge of the reef beyond the entrance. Soon they were far to the north, hulls and sails dwindling and blurring in the early light.

“God be thanked!” Mr. Wilcox exclaimed, fervently.

Captain Vail continued to gaze to the north where, briefly, the peak of the lugsail of the second boat was outlined against the horizon line; then it vanished to be seen no more. He shook his head slowly.

“We’ll never understand the Japs—never!” he said. “They’ve hauled their wind for the Carolines.”

## Seventeen

It was well past daybreak, but the sun was hidden behind the mountains and the great cone-shaped peak still threw its shadow across the lagoon to the islet and beyond, to the open sea. Shafts of golden light radiating from behind it seemed to be coming from some inexhaustible source of light and life within the mountain itself.

Brooke was seated beside Nancy who was still sleeping, one arm outflung, the other across her breast. She stirred and turned toward him, but did not waken. He looked away for a moment to watch the birds flying seaward at a great height from their nests far up in the mountains of the mainland. As he turned again, Nancy opened her eyes. Slowly she rose to her knees, gazing wonderingly into his face as though in doubt of his reality; then she held him close, her face against his breast.

“‘Oh, Mavis! Awake and remember . . .’ Do you remember, Nancy? Mother used to sing that song. It came back to me just now while I was waiting for you. I’ll make it my Vesper hymn . . . I mean, my morning hymn.”

Her voice trembled a little as she spoke.

“I was dreaming,” she said. “Oh, Alec . . .”

“What was it?”

“It was my turn, after all these years. You remember how I wanted to in the old days and couldn’t?”

“About the High Barbaree?”

She nodded.

“But my dream was not like any of yours. It was terrible, the first part. And then . . .”

“Tell me.”

“I was searching for you, and . . . No! I don’t want to think of it! Not now. I had to wake up to find you.”

“That’s just the way it should be.”

“You’re sure I *am* awake?”

“Nancy! *You’re* not going to doubt?”

“Give me a little time, darling. It was such a vivid dream.”

She scooped up sand in her two hands and let it trickle slowly through her fingers.

“Yes, it’s real . . . Uncle Thad said: ‘I’d like to pour this over the man’s head!’ . . . Pour some over mine.”

“Wouldn’t water do as well?”

She smiled and was herself again in an instant. “Yes,” she said, springing

to her feet. "I'll be ready in half a minute."

"But I'll not pour the water this morning, Nancy. You ought to keep your hair dry. We're going to be married as soon as we've had our swim."

Nancy turned to look at him. "Say it again," she said.

"It's true. We're going to be married as soon as we've had our swim. They're waiting for us now."

"Alec, that's how I've always hoped it would be: simple and natural and unprepared for. . . . All right. I'm ready."

The two children were already in the lagoon, standing on a coral mushroom, barely awash, a little distance offshore. Hina called joyfully when she saw them, waving both hands. Brooke and Nancy swam out and found the children feeding crabmeat to the tiny coral fish gathered in hundreds around them. The fish were like living jewels: black with orange stripes, purple and gold, green and gold, deep azure, scarlet, and pale blue. As they moved from the shadow of the coral into the sunlight the effect was so beautiful that Brooke could scarcely believe in their reality. The children chattered excitedly as they watched them floating motionless in the clear water, then darting here and there to seize the morsels of food.

Presently they heard Mr. Wilcox calling from the beach.

"Alec, we're waiting for you!"

"Coming, sir!"

He dived from the coral mushroom, Nancy and the children following.

"I forgot about my hair," Nancy said, as she broke water beside him. "But what does it matter?"

"It *doesn't* matter; not in the least," Brooke said. "Nancy, think of it! We'll be in our own home this evening!"

"Westview, the High Barbaree. If only your parents could be here, Alec! And mine too."

"Uncle Thad will have to represent both families."

Captain Vail, Ru, with Mata and her mother, had joined Mr. Wilcox on the beach. Ru and Mata were still wearing clothing that had been brought with them from their own island, but the old lady, Mama Ruau—Grandma, they called her—was dressed in a tapa gown of her own making. It was gathered under the arms and descended in voluminous folds to her small bare feet. With her white hair drawn smoothly back from her forehead and hanging in a single thick braid, Brooke thought she might well have been some sweet-faced old chieftainess of ancient times.

"We didn't like to hurry you," Mr. Wilcox was saying; "but if we're to have your house ready by nightfall we must be going soon."

"We're sorry, sir," Brooke said. "We didn't realize how time was passing."

"You really think it's possible to have our house ready so soon?" Nancy

asked.

“Have no fears about that. Ru guarantees it.” He smiled as he look at them, and the children. “The four of you look like the children of the Forsaken Merman . . . you remember? In Matthew Arnold’s poem. Except that none of you looks in the least forsaken. . . . Well, Captain: we’re ready, I think?”

“Been ready for the past half hour,” Captain Vail replied. “First time I’ve known both the bride and the groom to be late at their own weddin’. Nancy, this is something for you and Alec to tell your children about: comin’ right out of salt water to be married. Wish some of the whalin’ Vails could be here to see you. They’d say it was just right.”

Mata’s mother now spoke briefly to the missionary who then said:—

“Mama Ruau wishes to know if you would care to be married, first, in the ancient Polynesian fashion? It would please her if you would accept.”

“Then we do,” said Brooke. “Nancy?”

“Tell her we’d love to, Mr. Wilcox. How is it done?”

“It is a ceremony no longer practised that was common centuries ago: a mingling of the blood of your ancestors, represented by a drop of blood taken from each of you. . . . Kneel here before her. Alec, take Nancy’s right hand in yours.”

He did so. Ru then drew a drop of blood from the back of each of their hands. The old woman stepped forward and mingled this blood on a square of snow-white tapa cloth. She spoke to them briefly and gravely, folding the cloth as she did so and placing it in a little receptacle of finely woven pandanus leaf. This she gave to Brooke, and, with a smile, motioned them to rise.

“The cloth is a sacred relic,” Mr. Wilcox explained; “the symbol of the union of your two families. . . . Now, if you will stand here before me . . .”

The missionary’s clear voice, as he read the service, and their own responses, seemed to accentuate the hush of early morning in that peaceful place. Gay-plumaged birds passed overhead, and little waves, sparkling in the sunlight, lapped the beach almost at their feet. For an instant Brooke had the strange illusion that it was his father who was speaking. He glanced quickly up. Mr. Wilcox had stretched his hands above their heads as he concluded the beautiful Christian ceremony;—

“. . . the Lord mercifully with his favour look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. . . . *Amen.*”

They stood at the water’s edge while the others embarked in Mr. Wilcox’s sailing canoe. Hina drew Nancy’s head down and kissed her, then placed in her hand a tiny parcel wrapped in a moist green leaf.

“What is it, Mr. Wilcox?” Nancy asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied, “except that it is a gift from the children.”

“Nancy,” said Captain Vail, “I’ll be back here for you and Alec around sundown; maybe a little before. Be on hand so as we can cross the lagoon before dark.”

“We will, Uncle Thad.”

“There’s no need to wish you a happy day,” Mr. Wilcox said. “Nevertheless, I *do* wish it, with all my heart!”

Ru’s wife, and her mother, now came forward and kissed the bride and groom on both cheeks. Ru hoisted the matting sail as the others climbed in, and Mr. Wilcox took the steering paddle. The canoe drew rapidly away from shore. Ariki and Hina stood on the outrigger runway waving until they were far out on the lagoon, Brooke and Nancy waving in their turn. From where they stood they could make out the low bluff at the cove above which their valley lay, but the valley itself was hidden by the wooded ridge on the nearer side.

“Look, Nancy,” Brooke said; “you see the patch of green near the head of the cove? That must be the thicket where Uncle Thad found the copper kettle.”

Nancy examined the leaf parcel Hina had given her. The edges of the leaf were neatly drawn together with a filament of bark. As she drew this out, the leaf fell open revealing what at first appeared to be a bouquet of pale blue flowers, so small that their petals were scarcely distinguishable, but she discovered that they were entwined around a ring of pearl shell, exquisitely made. She took it up, as though half afraid it would vanish as she touched it, and held it toward the sun when it showed as a band of golden light; then, without speaking, she handed it to Brooke. Taking Nancy’s hand, he slipped the ring on her finger.

“We’re a little behindhand with this part of the service. I’ll say it now: ‘With this ring I thee wed.’ ”

“Forever and ever?”

“Forever and ever.”

“It’s almost too beautiful to be real,” Nancy said, turning the ring slowly. “Alec, how are we ever to repay Ru and his family for all they have done for us?”

“There *is* no way—not in words. Mr. Wilcox told me that the Polynesians have no word for thanks. Kindness toward one another is taken as a matter of course.”

“Is Ru’s family Polynesian?”

“Mr. Wilcox says that nearly all the people of Punavai were of Polynesian descent. He says that, during the great migrations, centuries ago, groups of them remained on a few scattered islands in the Western Pacific while the others pushed on eastward. Punavai was one of those islands.”

“I wish we could know how the islands of the Pacific were first peopled,”

Nancy said.

“We know how they are being *unpeopled*,” Brooke replied, bleakly. “Nancy, what war is doing to the island folk is one of the great tragedies of history. Their homes have been wrecked, their birds and fishes killed by tens of thousands; their trees and plantations and gardens utterly destroyed, and the very soil that grew them . . .”

“Don’t speak of it! Not today, Alec! Please!”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to . . .”

“This is *our* day. We mustn’t spoil it, right at the start.”

Presently they halted to watch a hermit crab feeding on a pandanus nut. They crouched down, heads together, to examine it more closely.

“You see the funny little pair of arms he thrusts out?” Brooke said.

“There seem to be knobs at the ends,” Nancy replied. “But he sticks them out and draws them back so quickly I can’t be sure.”

“It’s like a catcher reaching down to gather up a fast low ball.”

“What is it he gets from the nut?”

“It doesn’t seem to be anything very substantial in the way of a meal. . . . Have you noticed how different the vegetation is on the reef islets? There are coconut palms and pandanus trees as there are on the mainland, but most of the flowers and vines and shrubs are of a completely different kind.”

“Yes, it’s another world,” Nancy said. “And we have both worlds to enjoy, whenever we like, and as long as we like.”

“I hope so.”

“You hope? Alec, don’t you *know*?”

“I was thinking of what Cowles said about Uncle Thad . . .”

She put her fingers quickly over his lips.

“Forgive me, Nancy. I promise: I’m not going to forget again. Today goes on and on and on . . .”

“And tomorrow; don’t forget that, either: tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. . . . *Our* kind of tomorrow; not Macbeth’s. Believe it as I do.”

“I can, when we’re together.”

“Well, now we *are* together. For always. I *know* it.”

They wandered on, soon forgetting everything but the present moment. Along the seaward side of the islet was a high rampart of broken corals torn from the reef by the storms of centuries and piled up on the landward side. They climbed to the top of it to watch the long smooth swells gathering height and majesty as they moved in to break in spouts of foam and sunlight-filtered mist.

“There it is,” said Brooke; “the sea Uncle Thad used to tell us about, with the blue he said it was impossible to describe. He was right; you have to see it to believe it.”

He felt Nancy's hand tremble a little.

"This isn't like the sea in my dream," she said; "in the first part of it."

"Tell me about it. It's your one and only High Barbaree dream. You ought to share it with me. I've told you every one of mine."

"I want to Alec, but . . . Well, I was with Uncle Thad in the *Huron* again. . . . Everything was just as it really happened, except that . . ."

"Except what?"

"Except that it was worse, much worse. I knew that you were already at home, waiting for me, in Westview. That's what made it so terrible. Cowles wasn't in the dream at all, and . . . when the ship went down there was no boat for us. It sank like a stone and I was in the sea—a cold gray sea whipped to huge waves by the wind. It was just getting light, the grayest, bleakest daylight you could imagine. Then I saw Uncle Thad. He was struggling in the water, trying to reach me, but he was far off; I could see him only when he was lifted by a wave. I heard his voice faintly, calling to me, but I couldn't understand what he said. I was getting weaker every minute and I knew that I couldn't last much longer. I don't remember seeing anyone else in the water. There was just Uncle Thad and me.

"Then, as I seemed to be at the very end, that part of the dream faded. I was lying in Mr. Wilcox's sailing canoe and Tangaroa was in the bow, facing me. The moment I saw him I knew that everything was all right."

"Was Uncle Thad with you then?"

"He didn't appear in the rest of the dream at all; that's the strange part of it. I didn't remember that Tangaroa spoke no English. I said: 'Where's Alec, and Uncle Thad?' I'd forgotten, then, that you were supposed to be in Westview. A voice behind me said: 'They're waiting for you, Nancy.' . . . It was your father. I knew it as soon as he spoke. I looked around and there he was, holding the steering paddle. He looked just as he did when we were little.

"He smiled in his old kindly way, and a flood of happiness came over me that was almost more than I could bear. He didn't speak again, except to sing, very softly, the old song he used to love so much—'Flow Gently, Sweet Afton.' It seemed to me I could hear old Toby's harness squeaking, but it was the sound of the boom rubbing against the mast. The sea was gloriously blue in this part of the dream, and a gentle breeze was blowing.

"I remember nothing about coming ashore, but it was the High Barbaree—this side of the island. I was alone again, waiting on the beach for someone, I didn't know who. Then I saw your mother coming toward me from amongst the trees. She had a letter in her hand. She said: 'Nancy, Alec is missing. I've received word from the Navy. But he can't be dead! I know he's not dead!'

"Then my dream, like some of your old ones, became confused. What I remember next is that I was coming down the mountain wall of the great

valley, but you were not there. I thought I would never reach the ledge where we heard the echoes, but I did, at last. Then Mr. Wilcox came into the dream for the first time. He and Tangaroa were waiting for me in the little cave behind the ledge.

“Mr. Wilcox said: ‘Tangaroa wishes to know if you would like to see something that happened here centuries ago.’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘I must find Alec,’ and Mr. Wilcox said: ‘Then call him.’

“I did, and instead of your name echoing back in my voice, I heard your voice calling, ‘Nancy . . . Nancy . . . Nancy,’ as though you were searching for me miles and miles away among the mountains, and going farther. I knew that I had to reach you, somehow, before I lost the sound of your voice. Then, as I started to climb on down the mountain wall, I woke up . . . and there you were!”

After a silence, she said: “Alec, why is it that we haven’t realized before how much Mr. Wilcox resembles your father? He does. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes. His voice is exactly like my father’s; and he has the same way of walking, with his hands clasped behind his back.”

“He looks like him, too. That must have been why your father appeared in my dream. . . . Well, I’ve had my wish at last. I’ve dreamed of the High Barbaree, but . . . I hope I never have another!”

“Neither of us will again; I’m sure of it. Why should we? Here we are!

‘Look ahead, look astern,  
Look aweather, look alee’ . . .

We’ve got it all round us, Nancy.” He got to his feet. “There’s a lot more to see. Let’s look aweather again, toward the mountains.”

“Is that aweather?”

“Of course. The prevailing wind comes from that direction. I believe the finest view of all is from here on the islet, across the lagoon.”

“They’re *all* the finest, and the loveliest. We’ll never be able to decide on any particular one.”

“But from over here we get the full view of the central mountain without stretching our necks so much. Aren’t you keen to see the lake Tangaroa spoke of, inside the cone?”

“Yes. It must be glorious up there at night, with the stars shining in the water.”

“We’ll see them. That’s to come. There’s so many things to come.”

“Darling, I feel like singing.”

“Well, why don’t we? What’ll it be?”

“Something we used to sing when we were kids.”

“Okay. What about . . . I know! ‘Good-bye to Summer.’ Remember it?”

“Yes, but I don’t want to sing good-bye to *anything*.”

“But it isn’t good-bye, least of all to summer. That’s just the point. Come on, Nancy! I love that song.”

“It used to make me sad.”

“But how can it here, where it’s summer all the time? Come on! I’ll start and you join in:—

Good-bye, good-bye to Summer;  
For Summer’s nearly done,  
For Summer’s nearly done.  
The garden smiling faintly;  
Cool breezes in the sun . . .”

They walked slowly on, the checkered light and shade passing over them in beautiful patterns, their voices accentuating the dreaming peace of the islet.

When they had finished the first stanza, Nancy said: “Doesn’t it seem strange to be singing it here?”

“It’s not making you sad, is it?”

“A little, maybe. I could see your mother playing it for us as she used to.”

“She might be at this moment,” Brooke said. “In the last letter I received she wrote that she keeps our old songbook on the piano.”

“If only they could all know, at home, that we’re here together, safe and well!”

“How does the next verse go? About the leaves?”

“‘Bright yellow, red, and orange . . .’”

“That’s it. All right:—

Bright yellow, red, and orange,  
The leaves come down in hosts,  
The leaves come down in hosts.  
The trees are Indian princes,  
But soon they’ll turn to ghosts . . .”

They had crossed to the lagoon beach once more, at the northern end of the islet. The broad smooth border of coral sand was unmarked save for the prints of the feet of sea birds and the wavering tracks of hermit crabs. Brooke halted to gaze in a puzzled fashion at the sand.

“That’s odd,” he said. “We came along here last night, but where’s our tracks?”

“The tide must have washed them out.”

“It wouldn’t have come this high, all the way up the beach.”

“But it did; it must have. Why think of that, Alec? They’re gone. We’ll make some new ones.”

"It was just about here that we met Uncle Thad last night. Does that seem a long time ago?"

"Ages ago," Nancy replied smiling. "And ages from now he'll come over to take us home."

"Not so many ages, even by our time. It's afternoon already."

They seated themselves to watch the changing lights on the slopes of the mountains and cloud shadows moving slowly over the high plateaus. Nancy was heaping a little mound of sand before her. Presently she bent her head to examine it more closely.

"Oh . . . Alec, look! It's not sand; not all of it! Wet your finger and stick it down. They're little shells!"

"You're right," said Brooke, scrutinizing the particles clinging to his finger. "Why, they're exactly like the ones in the matchbox in Uncle Thad's room at home. Remember?"

"Of course. Those might have come from this very beach."

She spread her handkerchief on the sand and together they started making a collection. The shells were so tiny as hardly to be distinguished from the grains of sand in which they were hidden. With the point of a sea-urchin spine Nancy carefully brushed them, one by one, from Brooke's forefinger, held over the handkerchief.

"It would take an endless time to collect enough to fill a matchbox," Nancy was saying. "Hold your finger a little closer. Some are so tiny I can hardly see them."

Brooke glanced up, then gazed around him in astonishment.

"Why, it's nearly sunset!" he exclaimed. "No wonder you can't see them! Nancy, where's the day gone?"

"It hasn't. It's simply going . . ."

"On and on and on?"

"That's right."

"And Uncle Thad will be waiting for us, on and on and on. We've got to be moving."

Nancy knotted the shells in a corner of her handkerchief and put them in her pocket. They set out at a brisk pace, Brooke in the lead.

"Alec! Don't be in such a hurry," she called. "Look at the sunset through the trees! I've never seen such glorious coloring!"

"We can see it all the better from the canoe."

"But it may be too late, then, to see it at its best."

"No it won't. Come on, Nancy. You know how Uncle Thad hates to be kept waiting."

The last faint tremors of the breeze died away and there was a trancelike stillness over land and sea. Brooke halted till Nancy caught up with him. As

they looked westward across the islet they saw the shadowed bowl of the new moon framed in a clear segment of sky amongst the trees. The arc of silver at its rim shone brightly, for all the splendor of the sunset light. A solitary bird, with the swift erratic flight of a dragonfly, seemed to be pursuing its own reflection over the lagoon.

"It's a kivi," Brooke said. "Mr. Wilcox told me."

"It's perfect, for the name," Nancy replied. "Kivi . . . kivi . . . kivi: that's what it's calling."

"It's as though it were dropping pebbles of sound into the stillness," Brooke said.

"That's right. I can almost see the little circles spreading out where it drops them."

Toward the western end of the islet was a small cove where a few scattered coconut palms leaned far out as though enamored of their own perfect reflections in the water. Here they found Uncle Thad waiting for them. He was seated in the canoe with a paddle laid across his knees. The little vessel, Tangaroa's gift to Brooke, rested so lightly that it seemed scarcely to touch the water.

"Alec, you're the one that's late, this time. I was gettin' a bit fidgety. Come aboard, you and Nancy. We've got quite a piece to go before dark."

"We're sorry to be late," Nancy said. "Blame it to the day, Uncle Thad."

"No apologies called for. Wouldn't have surprised me if you hadn't showed up at all. Alec, I only brought the one paddle. Get in the bow and take it easy."

Nancy stepped in after him and seated herself on the middle thwart, facing aft so that she could watch the afterglow and its reflection on the lagoon. Uncle Thad paddled with slow easy strokes, no sound breaking the stillness save the cool tinkle of water as drops fell from the blade.

"This has got any canoe beat *I* ever saw," he remarked. "It goes by itself, you might say."

"You've certainly got the hang of managing it," Brooke said.

"Nothing to that. Never saw the boat yet, big or little, I couldn't handle straight off. It's the Vail blood."

"Rest a minute, Uncle Thad, and look back," Nancy said.

He did so, laying his paddle across his knees.

"Ain't that a picture? Don't know as I've ever seen a prettier sunset. Nancy, you ought to see the way the light shines on your face. Guess it's comin' from inside as well as out."

"Uncle Thad, that's the first compliment you've ever paid me."

"No call to pay 'em; they'd all be too lame to meet the need." He grinned as he added: "Let you marry into the Vails and the Brookes, didn't I? That

ought to be compliment enough.

‘Aloft, there! Aloft, there!’  
Our jolly bosun cried.  
Blow high! Blow low!  
And so sailed we . . .

Alec, keep a sharp lookout! There’s some coral heads comin’. Mustn’t let her touch.”

At the same moment they heard a slight grating sound as the hull of the canoe barely scraped for an instant.

“Spoke too soon, didn’t I? But there’s no harm done.” He glanced ahead and resumed paddling. “We’re okay now. Deep water right to the cove.”

“Are the others waiting for us in the valley?” Nancy asked.

He shook his head.

“They’ve gone home, around the south lagoon.”

“Gone! Uncle Thad! Why did you let them?”

“I tried to coax ’em to stay. Knew you and Alec would want ’em to; but the parson thought they’d better get round to the east side before dark. Will you believe it? They had your house finished by the middle of the afternoon! Wait till you see it! It’s a picture and just right for the pair of you.”

“Is it where we planted our branches?”

Captain Vail nodded.

“They’re right at the doorstep, and bloomin’ something wonderful! I wouldn’t have believed you’d planted ’em, but the parson said they were the branches he gave you.”

Though fading slowly, the afterglow was still bright, and the mountains, now closing in upon them, were flushed with the soft splendor reflected from lagoon and sky. Far to the northeast, the light on a few ribbed clouds was dying to an ashy crimson, but a thin stratum of vapor impaled on the great central peak gleamed like a wafer of bright gold, the peak thrust through it into the clear air above.

“I’d a mind to show you my kettle this evenin’,” Captain Vail said. “But that can wait. You’ll want to see your house while there’s light enough to see it by. Cowles is waitin’ yonder in the little glen. He wants to ring the weddin’ bell, and that kettle’s got as fine a tone as any bell I ever heard.”

They entered the cove; the canoe glided across to the beach by its own momentum and slid gently up the sand.

“Got a place all fixed for it, Alec,” said the captain, as they lifted the canoe and carried it up the beach. “Knew you wouldn’t want it to rest on the ground.”

They placed it upon the forked sticks that had been set solidly in the earth, well above high-water level, and covered it with dry palm fronds.

“We’re not so late after all. Now, then . . .”

The captain broke off as they heard a deep belllike sound coming from the glen near the head of the cove.

“There’s Cowles,” he said. “Ain’t that a clear sweet tone to come from an old whaler’s kettle; one that’s been here for a good hundred years?”

Brooke glanced in a dazed fashion at his uncle, then at Nancy.

“Why . . . that’s my G Note!” he said.

“Your what!”

“It’s nothing, Uncle Thad,” Nancy put in. “Alec’s thinking of a game he used to play in Westview, when we were little . . . It is lovely, that tone.”

“You couldn’t have a prettier sounding wedding bell. Come along, now. I’ll go with you to the house for a minute; then Cowles and I’ll clear out.”

Brooke stared at the receding form of his uncle; at the beach before him, the low bluff, and the trees above it whose stems were touched with a faint crimson light.

“Alec, we ought to be going,” Nancy said.

“It is my G Note,” he repeated in a low voice, as though speaking to himself.

“I know, darling. It’s beautiful. I’ve never before heard anything so beautiful. Cowles must be striking it very gently.”

“Cowles . . . ?”

“He’s ringing it.”

“Oh . . .”

“Darling, we must hurry if we’re going to see our house while it’s light.”

“I know . . . I’m coming . . . I want to listen a little longer.”

“We can hear it as we go. We can follow the sound. It’s going into the valley.”

When he looked up again he was alone. The music was dying away with the dying light, far up the valley. He heard Nancy calling and made his way slowly up the rocky slope to the entrance of the valley. She was waiting for him there. He gazed wonderingly at her, scarcely able to see her face in the deepening twilight.

“Can you still hear it?” she asked.

He nodded, without speaking.

“We must hurry, Alec! It’s growing fainter.”

“Wait, Nancy. I . . . I forgot something. . . . There’s a scratch on the canoe. I must fix that.”

“But you did, Alec! Don’t you remember?”

“Oh . . . Yes, I did. . . . That’s right. . . . Where is it we’re going?”

“Home, darling. To Westview. The High Barbaree.”

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“What’s the rush?” the boy replied. “Uncle Thad can wait a minute, can’t he?”

“But he’s *been* waiting! Alec, for goodness’ sake, hurry up! What does it matter, a tiny little scratch?”

“It’s my canoe.”

“I know it is, but don’t be so fussy about it.”

“I bet you would be, if it was yours.”

“I would not! I wouldn’t even notice it.”

She stooped to peer over his shoulder.

“There, that’s enough. You can’t even see where it was. They’re waiting for us, Alec!”

“All right. I’m ready.”

“Well, it’s about time!”

“You ought to remember, Nancy: I’ve never had a canoe before. I’ve never had any kind of a boat.”

“I know. I don’t blame you, really, for being fussy. But I’m so sleepy I can hardly keep my eyes open. I want to hear the song.”

They walked quickly along the old familiar street. Lights were beginning to appear in the windows, and the fragrance of lilacs was in the air. From the topmost branch of one of the elms overarching the sidewalk a hermit thrush was singing, but the children heard him without knowing that they heard.

“Uncle Thad said there were a lot of verses to it; dozens and dozens. I want to hear them all.”

“I hope I don’t go to sleep before he’s finished,” Nancy said. “Give me a poke in the ribs if I do.”

They turned in at the walk, ran up the steps to the front porch, and halted there, listening for a moment.

“Mother’s playing it,” the boy said. “Come on, Nancy!”

They opened the door and stole quietly in, tiptoeing across the room to the shabby old davenport against the wall on the far side. Alec’s father held a small bowl filled with hepaticas in his hands, breathing in their delicate fragrance. He set the bowl on the table by the lamp and leaned back in his chair with an air of deep content. Mrs. Brooke smiled at them as she glanced over her shoulder and Uncle Thad gave them a solemn wink, but said nothing. The children seated themselves at one end of the davenport, Nancy drawing her feet up under her and leaning a little against Alec’s shoulder. Sand was in her eyes, and she winked hard as she looked toward the piano.

There were two lofty merchantmen  
From Plymouth town set sail.  
Blow high! Blow low!  
And so sailed we. . . .

Alec felt Nancy's head touching his shoulder. He gave her a nudge with his elbow. She raised her head sleepily, but only to snuggle more comfortably against him. His own head began to nod. He stared hard toward his Uncle Thad but his eyelids were heavy. He tried to follow his mother's hands as they moved over the keys, but they blurred as he watched them.

“Oh, I see naught astern  
And there's naught to fear alee.”  
Blow high! . . . low! . . .

“But a lofty ship's to windward  
And she's sailing fast and free.”  
Rolling down . . . the High Barbaree . . .

It was the very ghost of music now, traveling westward along the G-Note Road . . . over the hills . . . over the hills, until it was lost in the blessedness of sleep.

## Epilogue

A Catalina patrol bomber was heading homeward, after a long reconnaissance flight over the empty sea south of the Carolines. Her upper surface matched perfectly the calm blue waters a mile below; viewed from beneath she would have seemed a detached, fast-drifting bit of cloudless sky. Throttled down to cruising speed, her engines purred in resonant content as though they were giant relatives of the black tomcat painted on the hull. She was headed due south, following the one hundred and sixtieth meridian of east longitude, toward distant Guadalcanal.

Her skipper, Lieutenant Commander Richard Dakin, sat at the controls, relaxed but watchful. This was the very region he had searched in vain for Alec Brooke's Catalina. He knew now that he need search no more. Alec, Gene Mauriac, Meyers, Tex Willock . . . gone, all of them, as so many good men had gone before them, and would go, before the war was ended; but it was at least an even chance that they had taken the Jap sub with them. Once more Dakin tried to imagine what had happened. He recalled how the radio signals from the *High Barbaree* had ceased in the midst of the reported combat. After that, silence. It would be eternal silence now; there was no use even hoping any longer. He thought of Nancy Fraser and Alec's uncle, Captain Vail of the *Huron*. Well, Alec had been spared that bitter cup. He would never know that Nancy and his Uncle Thad had gone down with the *Huron*; torpedoed when homeward bound three hundred miles out from Espiritu Santo. Dakin's heart felt as heavy as lead. He recalled the letter he had written to Mrs. Brooke, just before leaving on this patrol, in reply to the one she had written upon receiving the news that her son was missing. Now there would be another to write, when Alec's mother had been notified by the War Department of the loss of the *Huron*.

He could hear his men chatting over the interphone. Grant was saying to Hunter: "See that slick? It's the Line; we're smack over it. Never saw it that clear before." A moment later another voice broke in: "There's something more than the Equator down there! . . . Radio to skipper: What's that way off to the west, right in the sun's eye?"

Both Dakin and his co-pilot had sighted the object at the same moment.

"Okay. We've got it," he replied.

As though of her own volition the PBY banked steeply to alter course, and leveled off again. The sun was just touching the horizon. As it sank its shape was curiously distorted by the haze, so that it resembled the globe of a huge lamp being lowered into the sea by an invisible hand. A black object that

looked no larger than a fly was silhouetted momentarily against the lower rim of the globe. Excited voices were heard over the inter-com.

“I don’t see anything.”

“Right against the sun.”

“I’ve got it now.”

“Looks like a ship’s boat to me.”

“Might be at that.”

“No, it’s a plane.”

“Give me the glasses, Mac. . . . You’re right . . . it is a plane. . . . By God, it’s a Cat!”

“You sure?”

“Dead sure. I can make her out clear as anything!”

There followed a sudden silence. The co-pilot turned for a quick glance at Dakin who was staring ahead, his mouth grimly set. Every man aboard knew that no PBY’s save their own patrolled that stretch of sea. Of those, only one was unaccounted for. Dakin throttled down.

The sea rose swiftly to meet them; presently the big flying boat was skimming along not two hundred feet above the surface. She took the water gently and before she had lost momentum Dakin opened the throttles, turning in a wide arc as though reluctant to approach what they had just seen pass beneath them. The living ship moved more slowly toward the other and came to rest not twenty yards off. The co-pilot pushed back the cockpit hatch. Dakin removed his earphones and made his way aft to the waist compartment where the others were gathered at the open port blister.

The derelict plane lay all but motionless on the placid sea. Her name, *High Barbaree*, seemed to be sounding in the air like the melancholy clanging of a bell buoy. The men stared in silence. They stared at the wrecked engines, the riddled wing and hull, whitened by bird droppings and pitilessly revealed in the clear light of early evening. A lone frigate bird, perched at the end of the wing on the far side, shifted its position a little and gave a brief raucous cry as though in protest at this intrusion upon its solitude. There was no other sign of life.

Hunter turned to Dakin.

“Shall I . . . shall I hail her?” he asked, in a low voice.

Dakin nodded.

“Hello! . . . Alec! . . . Gene! . . . Hi, Tex!”

His voice sounded small and muffled and infinitely forlorn, in the wide air of mid-ocean. The silence that followed prolonged itself unbearably.

“Get out the small raft,” Dakin said. “Ted, you come with me.”

The others watched as the two men lowered themselves onto the raft and paddled across the narrow strip of water. They moored alongside the open

blister and disappeared within the hull. The derelict ship rocked gently, with a kind of sprightly, heartbreaking jauntiness, as though she were still a living thing. The wait seemed interminable, though it could not have been longer than ten minutes; then Dakin appeared at the cockpit hatch.

“Alec and Gene are here,” he said, in a dull voice. “That’s all.”

“Were they . . . hurt?” someone asked.

Dakin shook his head.

“No sign of it. The others must have been killed. . . . Alec’s body is still warm. We’re just too late.”

“Is Gene . . .”

“He must have gone first. Alec laid a sheet over him.”

Dakin gazed to the westward. Light was ebbing fast from the cloudless sky. After a silence he added: “Well, what do you fellows say?”

“About taking them?”

Dakin nodded.

No one spoke for a moment; then Grant said: “Do you think they’d want us to?”

“I know Alec wouldn’t,” Dakin said.

“Neither would Gene. They’d want to go together, with the ship.”

“That’s what I think, Skipper.”

“We’re still a long way from Guadal.”

“Then . . . shall we . . . scuttle her? . . . No dissenting voices?”

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The living Catalina skimmed swiftly across the sea until she was airborne once more. As she turned to pass over the spot where the other had been, the men staring down saw only the ripples of their own wake gleaming faintly in the last light of day. None of them observed a lone frigate bird silhouetted against the afterglow, winging westward with a narrow streamer of cloth fluttering out behind.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The High Barbaree* by Charles Nordhoff & James Hall]