THE DARK RIVER

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FALCONS OF FRANCE
MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY
MEN AGAINST THE SEA
PITCAIRN'S ISLAND
THE HURRICANE
THE DARK RIVER

By Charles Nordhoff

THE PEARL LAGOON
THE DERELICT

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and
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The Dark River

CHAPTER I

At the southeastern extremity of the island of Tahiti, and connected with it by a narrow isthmus, lies the peninsula of Taiarapu, where ancient weathered mountains, green to the topmost pinnacles, rise abruptly from the sea, rank beyond rank, until they are lost to view in shrouds of rain. On the northern side, a grass-grown road, which branches from the main thoroughfare at the isthmus, follows the sunlit coastal land through groves of coconut palms, breadfruit and mango trees, until it reaches the village of Tautira, the farthest settlement on that side of the island. Beyond this village, and extending for a distance of nearly twenty miles, lies a region known as the *Fenua Aaiheré*,—the Land of Forests,—long since depopulated, and bearing to-day scarcely a sign of human habitation.

On a February afternoon a small canoe with two occupants was skirting this lonely region along the lagoons that border the eastern side of the Taiarapu Peninsula. The man on the stern thwart was a native, about sixty years of age, with a lined, rugged, and kindly face, and the muscular frame common even to the older men of his race. He was naked to the waist and wore a weather-stained pandanus hat pressed over his thick gray hair. He paddled with the unconscious ease of breathing, first on one side, then on the other, and the canoe, slipping along with a faint seething hiss, appeared to be guiding itself through the channels of vivid green water, darkening at times to deepest blue, amongst the scattered coral shoals that rose here and there to within a few inches of the surface of the lagoon. His companion, a girl of sixteen, sat forward, using her paddle with the same effortless skill, scarcely aware of her movements as she dipped her blade into the sunlit water. Presently the man looked over his shoulder as a faint breath of air fanned his cheek.

“Enough,” he said. “Rest, Naia; the breeze is coming.”

The girl glanced back, then drew in her paddle and gazed dreamily before her as the old man took up two green palm fronds that had been lying in the

bottom of the canoe. These he stood erect, tying the butts to the thwart in front of him and attaching a line to the stems higher up, making the ends fast to cleats on either side of the canoe. The breeze, faint at first, gradually freshened; the tall fronds made an excellent sail for so light a craft, which was soon moving quietly on again, looking smaller than a child's toy in that wide landscape, between the mountains that towered above them on the right hand and the empty sea on the left. In this latter direction the sky was clear, but inland, masses of cloud, gleaming in the afternoon sunlight, clung to the shoulders of mountains whose peaks pierced through them here and there or showed in canyons of clear air between, thus giving them the appearance of fantastic height and of stretching away, summit beyond summit, to infinite distances.

The girl glanced back once more.

"How smoothly we go," she said. "We are lucky to have so fine a breeze from the north."

"It will hold," her companion replied. "We shall be at home in another hour."

The old man, glancing to left and right as he steered, let his eyes rest fondly upon the figure of the girl from time to time, seeming to deny himself the privilege at one moment that he might enjoy it the more a moment later. After a long silence he spoke again.

"Naia, a strange thing has happened these past few weeks."

"Strange? What is it?"

"It is of yourself I speak. You do not know, perhaps, but your mother must have seen."

"But what are you telling me?"

"You have changed of a sudden. You are no longer a child."

The girl smiled back at him. "Well? And what is there strange about that?"

"Only yesterday you were a baby; so it seems to me. Do you remember how you would ride on my shoulder with your little fingers fast in my hair? Happy days they were!"

"Happier than these, you think?"

"No; only different. . . . Then, before I knew, almost, the baby was a little girl needing me no longer; proud to do everything for herself."

"She wanted her grandfather often enough."

"I know. . . . But now, perhaps . . ." He broke off and shook his head wonderingly. "Yes, it may well be said: I looked away for a moment and the child was gone. A young woman stood in her place. That is the way it happened."

"And you are sad, for this?"

"Perhaps a little. I needed more time. I would have liked to say good-bye

to her."

Naia turned in her seat and sat facing astern, her chin in her hands, gazing at the old man with misty eyes.

"Never fear," she said. "The child is still there. She will always be there, for you."

"I hope so, Naia. I hope so."

"How have I changed?"

"Well . . ." Again he broke off and shook his head. "It is wonderful. There's no explaining it."

"You think I am prettier?"

He smiled faintly. "Enough. Would you have your grandfather praise you to your face? There is no need for that, surely. Look ahead, Naia. Our friends are there again."

They were now moving through deep blue water, and a little way before them a school of porpoises had appeared, crossing and recrossing the path of the canoe, so close at times that Naia could almost touch them and their breathing was plainly heard as they broke the surface. They played close by for some time, then their forms became shadowy and they next saw them far in the distance, making toward a break in the reef.

"Are they always the same ones?" she asked.

The old man smiled. "Why not? They know you. They are always here by the passage to welcome you home."

The great valley of Vaihiva now opened up before them, and the girl turned to gaze inland over the groves of palms and the belts of forest that bordered the river to the high upper valley where a waterfall could be seen, so far distant that it appeared as a mere shining thread clinging to the wall of rock. The valley which looked eastward was now filled with deepening shadows, but high above it the fantastic weathered peaks of the interior still glowed with the last light of day. A quarter of a mile to seaward, near the break in the reef called the Vaihiva Passage, the outlines of a small islet with its fringe of bush, and its scattered clumps of coconut palms and pandanus trees, were blurring in the dusk. The breeze died away as they came within the shelter of the land, and for a moment or two the canoe was allowed to drift with the barely perceptible current moving down the lagoon to join that of the river. Then the old man wielded his paddle once more. Entering the mouth of the river, about thirty yards wide at that point, he brought up at the end of a wooden pier.

Naia sprang out and, taking various small parcels handed up to her, went along a footpath toward the house which stood midway on the point, at some distance from the riverbank. A slender, middle-aged native woman stood awaiting her at the top of the steps leading to the verandah. She kissed the girl lightly on the cheek as she helped to relieve her of the parcels.

"You are late, Naia," she said. "I've been expecting you since midday."

"Scold Papa Ruau for that," the girl replied. "He met some of his old fishing friends. It was one of his *parau-parau* days. I had to drag him away."

"You didn't forget the tin of kerosene?"

"No." She sighed happily as she seated herself on a sofa. "It is good to be at home again. Two days at Tautira are enough—more than enough."

"You mean it? You like home best?"

"Much the best. Mother, do you realize that it's been six months since you were last in Tautira? All of your friends were asking if you meant never to go again."

"I know. I shall, soon, on my way to Moorea. I must see to the copra making on our lands there."

"You don't want me to go with you?"

"Not unless you wish it."

"Then I shall stay at home. How long shall you be gone?"

"Two weeks, perhaps. Now give me your news. What has happened in Tautira?"

Mauri, the elder woman, seated herself beside the girl, stroking her hand as she listened to the recital, prompting Naia with questions from time to time, allowing her to pass over no slightest detail concerning any event that had been brought to her notice in the distant village. In all of the Taiarapu Peninsula's forty miles of coast line there was no household more isolated than theirs. It was Mauri rather than Naia who missed the small distractions of village life, and twenty years of absence from them had only served to increase her interest in the lives of her distant friends and relatives. Although she was skilled in all the pursuits of a native woman, her life had set her apart, in more than a physical sense, from her own people, who treated her with the deference of acknowledged superiority, and this had been increased by her marriage to a white man, an American named Thayer, who had died some years before. A widow at thirty-four, in sole charge of her own widely scattered family lands, Mauri proved herself thoroughly competent as a business woman. Native managers, connected with her family by blood or marriage, lived on her lands on the island of Hao, in the Low Archipelago, and at Moorea, in the Windward Group. As the years passed her absences from Vaihiva grew less and less frequent, and those who knew her best were both surprised and puzzled at her seeming preference for a life so solitary when a woman of her possessions might have lived where she would. Since her husband's death, the household consisted of herself, Naia, and her father, Raitua; and their only near neighbors were three families who lived far up the valley and performed the work on her plantations.

Raitua was a native of the old school, proud of the Polynesian learning

with which his mind was stored, and secretly contemptuous of nearly all that the white man had to offer. Something childlike in the old man's nature appealed to a side in his granddaughter's nature to which Mauri had never gained access, and the girl had listened all through her childhood, with believing wonder, to Raitua's tales of old gods and heroes, of ancient voyages across thousands of leagues of sea, of the drawing up of new lands from the deep, and of the creation of those children of the gods who first peopled them.

Coming through the hallway from the rear of the house, Raitua stood listening while Naia completed her account of happenings in the distant settlement.

"I have filled the lamps," he said. "We could bring only one tin of kerosene in the small canoe. Terii will fetch the other. He will pass this way next week."

"There were no letters, I suppose?" Mauri asked.

"*Aué!* To be sure there was—one," Naia replied. "Where is it, Papa Ruau?"

"Ah, *é*—the letter." The old man scratched his head. "I put it in my hat, perhaps."

While he was gone in search of it, Naia turned to her mother.

"It is from Amanu, I think," she said. "I was about to open it; then I saw written on the envelope: 'To be read only by Mauri.' What secret can this be?"

"No secret, surely," Mauri replied. "Some business matter, perhaps."

She took the letter from her father, opened and glanced through it hastily; then she slowly folded it and placed it in her bosom.

"What is it, Mother?" Naia asked.

"Nothing—a request. It is of no importance. They are always wanting something, those people from Amanu." She rose. "Open the *himaa*, Father. I have two fine mullet baking there and sweet potatoes from the garden up the valley. You must be hungry, you two."

The house on the point at the entrance to Vaihiva Valley was a substantial frame dwelling with a wide verandah facing the lagoon and a hallway running through to a second verandah at the back. Beyond, and connected with the main building by a covered passageway, was the kitchen, spacious, airy, and spotlessly clean.

Late on this same evening, Mauri was seated at a table here, a lamp before her and writing materials at hand. Naia had gone to bed long since, and Raitua had retired to his own little house a quarter of a mile distant along the beach. Mauri, having looked into the girl's room to be certain that she was sleeping, returned to the kitchen and opened and read the letter her father had brought her.

To Mauri Vahiné, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Greetings and health to you, and to Raitua, your father, and to Naia, your daughter.

It is of our son, Maunga, that we speak, with his good will and in the name of our family. You know him well. You last saw him when you passed this way two years ago, on your voyage to Hao. He was then a youth. He is now a man of twenty-one. It is our wish that he be provided with a wife, and that in the children of this marriage the blood of two ancient families may be mingled. Your daughter, Naia, is his choice and ours, and if our son is pleasing to you little more need be said. He will have lands here, at Amanu, equal to those which will come to Naia, at Hao. If these two are united, our desire is that they should live at Amanu, but we will meet your wishes and those of your daughter in this matter.

Finished is this little letter. We await your word, hoping that this union in our families may be found pleasing to you, to your father, and to Naia.

KAUPIA TANÉ
KAUPIA VAHINÉ

Having read and reread this letter many times, Mauri continued to gaze unseeingly at the lines of neatly written script. At last she took up the sheet of paper, held it to the lamp until it was alight, and carried it to the stove, where she watched until it was consumed by the flame. Having put away her writing materials unused, she turned the lamp low and went through the hallway to the front verandah, where she stood for some time listening to the rasping and rustling of the palm fronds. The sky was now overcast and a damp wind blowing from the southeast, but the moon, a little past the full, shone wanly through the clouds. She went softly down the steps, crossed the point of land, and walked rapidly northward, following the contours of the beach. For an hour she proceeded at unslackened pace until she came to the entrance of a small valley that showed itself as a pit of deeper blackness against the hills that rose steeply on either side. She turned to the left here, groping with her feet for the pathway and pausing for a moment until her eyes became accustomed to this intenser gloom. Proceeding then, she went slowly until she felt rather than saw a small thatched house immediately before her. Making her way to the doorstep, she halted.

"Taio Vahiné!"

There was no response. She called again, more loudly. "Taio Vahiné, O!"

Presently she heard a slight stirring within doors. "*É*," a voice replied. "*O vai tera?*"

"It is I—Mauri."

"Wait, then. I will light the lamp."

A moment later the hut with its walls of split bamboo was outlined, like a small cage, with bars of light. An old woman, her scant hair hanging in a single braid, opened the door, the lamp in her hand, as Mauri mounted the steps. Her figure was scarcely larger than that of a child, forming a striking contrast to the snow-white hair and the lined and rugged face of a woman of eighty.

"Enter, Mauri. It is a late hour you come." She turned to peer at her again before leading the way into the small bare room. "There is nothing wrong at home?"

"You shall hear," Mauri replied. "You will forgive me, Mama Taio, for disturbing your rest? I have not come without reason."

"*Aita é péapéa.* The slumbers of the old are light. The visit was expected. I dreamed of you—when was it?—three nights back."

"Of me? What was this dream?"

"I could make little of it. But it was of a time when Naia was a child at your breast. I see you still, as it was in the dream, rocking her in your arms and weeping."

"I was directed to you of a certainty," Mauri replied, in an awe-struck voice. "I am greatly troubled, and it is of Naia I would speak."

The old woman drew up her only chair for her guest. Going to a shelf in a corner, she returned with a coconut shell in which she kept her smoking materials. She offered it to Mauri, who shook her head. Taio Vahiné seated herself on the floor, her small bare feet tucked beneath her, with the lamp at her elbow. Peeling a leaf from the cake of black tobacco, she toasted it over the flame of the lamp, then rolled it in a strip of dried pandanus leaf. She lighted the cigarette and let the smoke curl slowly from her nostrils.

"I am waiting, Mauri," she said, presently; "but speak in your own good time."

Mauri looked searchingly into the wrinkled face of her companion.

"You are no gossip, Mama Taio," she began. "No one could say that you have ever betrayed a secret."

Taio Vahiné smiled. "You say no more than truth. There must be one woman worthy of trust in every district. An old woman, without family, is best for this. You may speak without fear."

"If I had come to you long ago," Mauri replied, ruefully. "*Tirara*—nothing is to be gained by thinking of that. I did not come. Not even you did I trust. But now I must speak. You shall tell me what I must do."

Taio Vahiné waited, her small brown hands resting lightly on her knees.

"It is hard," Mauri said, at last. "I am overproud . . . but the truth must be told. . . . Mama Taio, you will not have forgotten the two English people who

came to Vaihiva to live many years ago? The man who was ill and his young wife? They had their child with them, a little boy of four years. They lived in the house we built for them across the river from our own house."

Taio Vahiné nodded. "I remember them well. Let me think . . . Makla we called them."

"Their name was McLeod in the English speech. Their little son's name was George."

"*Te haamanao nei au!* I saw them often as they passed this way, and never did they pass without coming in to greet me. I remember still the young woman's laughter as she tried to speak in our tongue. How pretty she was! And the poor husband, so soon to die!"

"You will not have forgotten how quickly the young wife followed him?"

"I remember well. It was at the time of the great storm. Were not you and the English girl alone at your house?"

"So it was," said Mauri.

The old woman shook her head sadly. "Ah, *é*. She was with child, and it came before its time—born dead. And the mother died as well."

"Mama Taio . . ."

"*É*. What would you say, Mauri?"

"The mother died, but her baby lived. She is living to-day. She is Naia."

"Mauri! You tell me . . ." The old woman broke off and stared blankly at her. "You tell me . . .?"

"It is true. Naia was her child, not mine. We were alone when the mother died, and none could know the truth. I have carried the secret till this moment. Now you must bear it with me."

The old woman clasped her hands tightly. "*Aué*, Mauri! What is this you say? But . . ."

"You shall hear. Listen well. You remember that the English girl and I were both with child at the same time? We were expecting our babies within a week of each other. There remained two weeks, so we thought, before either would come. The English girl was to have gone to the hospital in Papeete for her confinement and all had been prepared for this. I wished to have my baby at home, and my father had gone to Tautira to fetch Mana, the midwife. He had gone early in the morning expecting to return with Mana the next day. But the great storm broke in the afternoon of the day he left. You will remember how swiftly it came, with little warning; the wind was at its height almost at once, and in less than an hour it was as dark as night. The English girl had left her own house across the river and was staying with me at this time. The child in her body was heavy for her, and she was a delicate girl; not strong like me. She had been resting in bed since morning, on the day of the storm.

"When the wind came, I made all as safe for ourselves as I could, fastening

doors and windows. I went out to let down the wooden shutters along the east verandah. While I was doing this I was struck a heavy blow in the side by the butt of a frond torn loose by the wind from one of the coconut palms to seaward. The pain of the blow was great; I lay by the steps for a long time, drenched by the rain and unable to move. I called and called, but the English girl could not hear me in the roaring of the wind. At last I managed to rise and go into the house. That night my baby came, born dead."

"*Aué*, Mauri . . ."

"So it was, Mama Taio. It was a little girl. A prettier daughter was never seen, so beautifully formed, with such tiny hands and feet. And she was dead.

"Nina was the English girl's name. She helped me—there was no one else to help. She knew little of such matters, but she rose from her bed, heated water for me, and did all that she could. Hard it was for her, but she had the courage of a man.

"All that night and the next day the storm was at its worst. You remember, Mama Taio?"

"Aye, well," the old woman replied. "But I was sheltered in this small valley from the full force of the wind."

"It was not so at Vaihiva," Mauri continued. "There were times when I thought the house would go. And the rain! Never have I seen such a weight of water as fell then, and it came, and it came. We were alone and I knew that no help would reach us. The rivers for miles on either side were flooded far beyond their banks, and the sea at Vaihiva Point showed me what it would be elsewhere. The great combers swept over the reef and across the lagoon and far up the beach, almost reaching the house. We waited, Nina and I, all the second day. At last we could wait no longer. What must be done can be done, but how we did it I scarcely know. At a late hour that night the rain slackened a little, and the wind. I was very weak, but I rose from the sofa where I lay. I begged Nina to stay in the house, but she would help me even at the risk of losing her own child. I put the body of my baby in a little box and we went out together, supporting each other as best we could. We could not go far in so black a night. I scooped out a little grave in the sandy soil near the house and covered it over quickly, and Nina knelt beside me, sheltering the lantern from the wind. It was a terrible thing to leave my baby alone, in the storm, but it was done. When we reached the house again, Nina was at the end of her strength. I helped her to remove her wet clothing and got her into bed.

"That same night her pains began. She had great courage, as I have said, but her small body was not fashioned for childbearing. I lost no time in making all ready. I was able to forget my grief and my weakness at this time in my sorrow for that poor girl whom I could help so little. Her labor was terrible; no woman could have suffered more cruelly. For long afterward my arms bore the

marks of her fingers where she had clung to me. And we were alone. No one could come from up the valley. The river had flooded Manu and his sons out of their houses, and they had been forced to climb with their children to a cave on the mountain side and wait till the storm should pass. George, Nina's little son, was with them. Manu's daughter-in-law had taken him into the valley the day before to play with her children. It was one thing to be thankful for that he was not with us.

"The next morning Nina's baby was born. I took it at once, slapped its body lightly, and tossed it in my arms, and it breathed! For this little time I thought only of the child. Then I laid it aside and turned to the mother. She gave a sigh and was gone. She died without knowing that her child had come.

"I had no time to grieve for her then. Hard it was to do all that had to be done, for I was very weak. But in the end, the mother lay in her bed as though asleep, with her pretty brown hair lying loosely around her shoulders. Death kept no memory of the pain she had suffered. All that had been smoothed away.

"I sat by the side of the bed with her baby in my arms, and when the time came I suckled the little daughter. My milk flowed strong and good. To feel that little mouth at my breast, and those tiny hands . . . it gave me a feeling of peace, Mama Taio, of deep happiness. I forgot the loss of my own. It is truth I speak: I could even believe, at moments, that the little daughter was mine. All the day I sat there, holding her, and so my father found me on the evening of that day. He had come, swimming the flooded rivers. It was a journey few men could have made in such a storm.

"I knew then what I would do. The need to lie was stronger than myself. It was so easy to explain. I told my father the child was mine and that it was Nina's that died. I seemed to have been given the power to claim it. My father believed at once, nor has there been the least doubt in anyone's mind from that day to this. My husband was in the Low Islands, at Hao. He came within the week, and there is no need to tell you how he loved the little daughter he believed his own. Never, till the day of his death, did he suspect that Naia was not his own flesh and blood. I felt neither shame nor guilt. I could believe that Nina herself would have wished it so, for who could care for that fatherless, motherless child as well as I? And whose need could have been greater than the child's and mine for one another?

"Enough. The truth is told at last, and we two alone know it. Naia's true name is McLeod. Had she come from my own body, I could not love her more."

Mauri broke off, waiting anxiously for her companion to speak. The old woman moved the lamp a little more to one side and sat for a time gazing at the floor in front of her, rubbing her knees gently with her open palms.

“Mauri, why have you told me this?” she asked. “Your secret shall be well kept, but why have you told me?”

“Naia is no longer a child,” Mauri replied. “There have been times, many times, when I have felt deeply the wrong I have done her. And I have felt the grief, the anger, of the parents in their graves. Is it they who accuse me or my own heart? Naia is of English blood. What right have I to keep her?”

“You have some reason for speaking of this now. What is it?”

“It is true. I have received a letter from the Low Islands. There is a family on the island of Amanu well known to me. They seek a wife for their son. The parents, at the young man’s request, have asked for Naia.”

“She would accept him?”

“She knows nothing of the offer. Nor does she know the young man except by sight.”

“You would consent to this marriage?”

“Consent? Never!” Mauri exclaimed. “Can you believe that I would consider it?”

“Why, then, do you speak of it?”

“Because I see that the time has come when I must think of Naia’s future. This I have never done; I had not the courage. The fear that I might have to give her up has been more than I could face.”

“But now you are willing, if the need comes? You would let the truth be known, for her sake?”

Mauri bent her head and sat with her hands tightly clasped between her knees.

“I cannot say, Mama Taio! I cannot! I would try, perhaps, but . . . it might be more than . . . more than I could do.”

“What became of the little boy, Naia’s brother?”

“I should have spoken of him. You will remember, perhaps, that after the mother’s death he was sent back to England, to a friend of his father who wished to rear him with his own son. I have heard of him through the British consul in Papeete. He is now a young man.”

Taio Vahiné shook her head slowly. “Mauri, it is a grievous thing you have done. My heart is sore for you both, but what remedy there could now be . . . Think what it would mean if you were to tell Naia the truth. She looks upon you as her mother, and Vaihiva as her home. Her life is here; her thoughts are those of our people and our ways are her ways.”

“Have I not thought of it!” Mauri exclaimed, bitterly. “And yet, she is young . . .”

“What would you do?”

“You shall tell me, Mama Taio. This matter is too hard for me. I have thought to no purpose. You can see into the future; that is known to all. Many

things have you foretold that are hidden from us. I would know where Naia's happiness lies, here or elsewhere."

"And if it should be elsewhere?"

"Then I would tell her—if I can," Mauri replied in an anguished voice. "If it must be, I could, perhaps, for her sake."

Taio Vahiné stared at the small flame of the lamp in silence. At last she rose and laid a hand on Mauri's shoulder.

"Mauri . . . let this be for now. The time may not be far when you will need to know what I can tell you. Come to me then."

Mauri regarded her anxiously. "Aye, it will be better so," she replied. "I shall do as you say."

The old woman stood in the doorway holding the flickering light above her head as Mauri went down the path and vanished in the darkness.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Robert Tyson, His Britannic Majesty's consul on the island of Tahiti, having dined late and alone, came out on his verandah to enjoy his coffee and liqueur in the cool of the evening. The sun had set half an hour since, and the afterglow was fading slowly from a cloudless sky. The lagoon, motionless in the evening calm, still reflected an ashy light which brought into clear silhouette a small gemlike island with its cluster of coconut palms near the entrance to the harbor, and the monthly steamer from San Francisco, just then steaming out through the pass on her lonely voyage to New Zealand and Australia.

The consul sank into an easy chair with a sigh of content and, for a moment, let his gaze follow the departing vessel, her lights beginning to twinkle as she moved farther out into the gathering dusk. He selected a cigar, which he clipped carefully with a penknife and lit with the deliberation of one who finds keen enjoyment in the small amenities of life. He was a man in his early fifties, sturdy of frame, with thick snow-white hair which set off to advantage his tanned, weather-beaten face. A stranger, meeting him for the first time, might have noticed a humorous, rather obvious cynicism of manner, bespeaking the man, tolerant and humane by instinct, who makes a conscious effort in the presence of others to conceal the qualities upon which his nature is based.

Mr. Tyson had long since come to be regarded as a fixture at Tahiti, as much so as the consulate itself. On a voyage across the Pacific, some years before the war, he had stopped over, presumably for a month's sojourn, but liking the place he had remained. He was then in his early twenties, without family ties, and in easy circumstances which suited well with an indolent temperament. To give him the illusion, at least, of an occupation, he later accepted the office of acting consul during the absence in England of the then incumbent, an elderly career officer who had died at home. As Mr. Tyson continued to fill the post to the satisfaction of the Foreign Office and cared nothing about salary, a successor had never been sent out from England. Mr. Tyson was still acting as consul pro tem, without pay, after a period of nearly thirty years.

His only absence from the islands had been during the war, when the consular duties had been performed by his secretary, a competent, middle-aged spinster who was better acquainted with the small intricacies of consular business than he himself. Badly wounded in 1916 and invalided out of service, he had then returned to Tahiti, where he settled down once more to his quiet,

easy-going life with a relish heightened by his experience as an infantry officer in France. He loved the changelessness of life in this remote island world, and would have loved it still more had it been even farther removed from the turbulence of post-war Europe. His official duties being far from exacting, he had ample opportunity to travel amongst the lonely scattered archipelagoes composing French Polynesia, until there was scarcely an island within a radius of five hundred miles that he had not visited. But, having seen all or most of them, Tahiti was still the island of his choice, though he was careful to give strangers the impression that he could barely contrive to tolerate existence in such a tropical backwater and was prevented from leaving the wretched place only by an unconquerable inertia. And of all the bays, coves, rocky promontories, and stretches of sun-drenched alluvial plain around its one hundred-odd miles of coast line, he loved most the site where the consulate stood, toward the western end of the little port town, with its fine old trees shading lawn and road, and its view to the north and west over lagoon and sea. And that view he liked best when the wide expanse of ocean was made to seem emptier still by the dwindling shape, showing black against the afterglow, of the monthly steamer proceeding on its long voyage to the Antipodes.

Having watched the vessel disappear around a distant headland, the consul switched on his reading lamp and took up his newly arrived copy of *Blackwood's*. He loved the old periodical and looked forward to its coming from month to month. He found there a picture of England and the outposts of Empire as he had known and thought of them in his younger days, and it reassured him to believe that, despite the vast changes wrought by the war, the old life still persisted; that it contained in it the seeds of health and vigor to perpetuate itself down the generations to come. He was in the midst of the first article when the bell in his office tinkled faintly. Looking up, he found a young man in gray flannels standing at the top of the verandah steps.

"Mr. Tyson?"

The consul, after a quick appraising glance, rose from his chair.

"At your service, young man. Come in."

"If I'm intruding, please say so, frankly. I can come just as well at another time."

"Not at all, not at all. I'm merely loafing after the exhaustion of steamer day. You came by the *Makura*?"

The young man nodded. Tyson sized him up rapidly and found his first impression distinctly favorable. His visitor was a tall fellow of the fair-haired Norman type. Under his loosely fitting clothes the consul could detect the sturdy structure of his body. His manner was easy and the gray eyes, set widely apart under level brows, met his own in glances direct and unself-conscious. The consul asked his usual perfunctory questions about the voyage

and felt rather silly at having done so, for his visitor failed to make the customary perfunctory replies of the transpacific passengers. He seemed to take it for granted that the consul was interested, and replied with intelligence, humor, and good sense. Tyson noted that he spoke with an engaging emphasis of understatement. He approved of that: a good English trait.

"You like Tahiti, what little you've seen of it?" he asked, presently. "You're here for a month, of course. Now that the steamer has gone you'll have to stop whether you like it or not."

The young man hesitated in replying. "I hardly know, sir. I'm here with a friend. This is my first visit to the tropics. I must say that I was deeply impressed with the view of the island as we saw it coming in early this morning. I was eager to be ashore. And then . . ."

"Later impressions not precisely favorable?"

"Well, no; they're not, if you don't mind my saying so?"

"Mind? Why should I? But tell me a little more of how the place strikes you; in a general way, I mean."

"It's presumptuous to speak of it, after one day ashore. I've been charmed and repelled at the same time. The town seems a bit on the sordid side. I dislike squalor, and I've seen a good deal of it in rambling about to-day. My friend's enchanted with the place. He thinks Papeete is just what it should be."

Tyson smiled. "He'll be the first to want to move on."

"What makes you think so?"

"Experience—long experience. Those who dislike the place at first are the ones who stay longest. It's not to be explained, but so it is. You might be an exception, but take care! I loathed the island when I first came. I've been here thirty years. Lord knows why!"

"Yes, so my father told me."

"Your father?"

"He claims to be a friend of yours. I'd not venture to say how often I've heard him speak of you."

Tyson sat up in his chair. "The devil you say! What's your name?"

"Hardie. Alan Hardie."

The consul got up with alacrity and strode over to grasp the young man's hand. "Hardie, you rogue! God bless my soul! Why didn't you tell me when you first came in? Claims to be? I should think he might. You're here with a friend, you say. Someone from home?"

"Yes. You'll remember him, sir. At least you'll remember about him—George McLeod."

"You don't tell me," the consul exclaimed, his face beaming. "That infant? But of course he'll have managed to grow up by this time. Where is he?"

"He's wandering along the waterfront. He thought we'd be putting you out,

coming to call on steamer day. I decided to drop in for a moment, anyway."

"Putting me out! Nonsense! Hardie, I'm the idlest man in the whole of French Oceania. Why didn't you let me know you were coming? I might have been off somewhere, fishing. That's my chief occupation as consul."

"My father insisted that we shouldn't trouble you in advance."

"That's your father. I can see he hasn't changed. Now tell me about him. Why didn't you bring him with you?"

"He's coming, sir, shortly."

"That's the best news I've had in many a day," said Tyson, warmly. "You mean to wait for him here?"

"I'm not so sure of that," Hardie replied. "McLeod and I rather thought we'd go on to New Zealand or Australia and wait there. But we can decide this later."

"Of course you can. Don't make any hasty decisions about pushing on. Your father's still in the Army, of course?"

"Yes; but he's retiring soon. He doesn't yet know just when he can leave, but he means to take life easy from now on."

"Good! How he's been able to stick that deadly life all these years is more than I know. Sense of duty, I suppose."

"He loves it," said Hardie. "I've never known a man happier in his profession."

"I know, I know. He's wrapped up in it. Always was. What of yourself, Hardie? Somehow, you haven't the look of Sandhurst about you."

"My interests run in another direction. I've just come down from Cambridge. This voyage was my father's idea, and by good luck it fitted in with McLeod's plans. When my father joins us we expect to go home by way of the Straits Settlements and the Dutch East Indies. We'll be gone close to a year."

"I hope your father will give me a month of that time," said Tyson. "I must try to persuade him. It's curious: we were in the war together, but we almost never write. But what does it matter? There's a great deal of useless letter writing done in the world."

"I've heard my father say the same thing," Hardie replied. "But he spent most of a day, just before we left, writing the letter I've brought you. I fancy he's tried to make up for a long silence."

He took a letter from his breast pocket and handed it to the consul.

"By Jove! He has, evidently," said Tyson as he felt of the bulky packet. "I've a treat in store." He laid the letter on the table beside him. "There's nothing like the old war comradeships, Hardie. You don't know that, of course, but you can take my word for it. Well I remember meeting your father in September, '14. I'd just arrived in London from here, and was joining one of

Lord Kitchener's New Army battalions. Your father was a lieutenant then and got me posted to his platoon. Alan McLeod, George's father, was there too, and I took up two old friendships where I'd left off with them years before. Does George remember anything of his parents?"

"Very little."

"It isn't likely that he would. He was a mere infant when they died."

"But he's become interested now. He means to ask you all about their coming out here."

"He does? Well, I shan't tell him. It was too damnably tragic. I don't mind telling you, though, if you'd care to hear about it?"

"I'd like to, very much, sir."

"You know, Hardie, you make me feel a veritable relic of antiquity. I remember hearing about you one night during the battle of the Somme. Our battalion was in and out of that slaughter during the greater part of it. One week, I remember, we'd gone into support and your father was given three days' leave. You were very ill—I've forgotten with what—and it was touch and go whether you lived or died."

"It must have been when I had the accursed scarlet fever," Hardie replied. "I know that it played the devil with my eyes. They've been weak ever since."

"That was it—scarlet fever. Well, on the day your father returned we were pitched into the mess again, another of those incredibly stupid and costly attacks which gained us nothing but casualties. Your father went from company to battalion commander in the course of one day.

"That same evening, he and I were lying at the lip of a huge shell crater in the midst of desolation. It was pitch dark and raining hard, and for an hour or two we had a blessed release from shell fire. That was when your father spoke of you. You were out of danger, the doctors had told him. He'd seen Nina McLeod, too, while on leave, and young George. George's father was not with us then. He'd been badly gassed six months before and was still in hospital. By good luck I had a canteen half full of brandy and, b'gad, your father and I drank long life and health to you. How well I remember that night! I've thought of you as an infant ever since. A precious big one you've grown to be! I was knocked out the very next day, and that ended the war, for me."

"You returned to Tahiti then?"

"Yes, as soon as I was able to travel, and Alan and Nina McLeod came too, and young George with them. Alan was done for, after his experience with gas, but he'd lost none of his old courage. The climate at home was impossible for him and his doctors had urged him to go to the tropics. I had no difficulty in persuading him to try Tahiti.

"They stopped with me at the consulate for a fortnight while plans were being made. They wanted a little place in the country, with a house of their

own, where they could have a garden, fowls, and the like, and loaf in the sun to their hearts' content. We looked at half a dozen places on the main island, and one day I took them to the farthest peninsula, a glorious stretch of coast called the *Fenua Aaiheré*. It is far and away the most beautiful part of the island, though I doubted that they would want to live in so lonely a region. I was mistaken; they loved it at sight, so we lost no time in getting them settled.

"I saw a good deal of them in the months that followed. For all their urging, I disliked intruding upon them, for they knew and I knew that he hadn't long to live. They were trying to crowd a lifetime of companionship into a few short months. However, I made it a point to go fishing on that side of the island at least once a fortnight. It wrung my heart to visit them. They tried to deceive themselves about his condition, and he was looking death in the face every moment.

"Six months later he was gone. Nina bore the loss like the thoroughbred she was. She was expecting a baby in a few months' time. I wanted her to return to Papeete, but she was not to be moved from their little home in Vaihiva. I didn't insist overmuch, then, for she was in excellent hands, with a native family, friends of mine, living close by. However, I made her promise to come to the hospital here well before the time of her confinement.

"Those plans went for nothing. I was to fetch her in my launch, on the Monday, I think it was. Three days before this a storm broke that came close to being a hurricane; it was one of the worst I remember here. I went to Vaihiva the moment wind and sea would let me, but I was too late. Nina had died in childbirth in the midst of the storm, and her baby with her."

Tyson was silent for some time. "Tell young McLeod as little of this as you like," he said. "One thing you can say with truth: his father and mother loved Vaihiva. They were as happy there as his health would let them be. George was too small, of course, to remember much about it. By good luck, he was not with his mother at the time of her death."

"He was trying to remember the name of some woman who used to take care of him," Hardie remarked; "the one he hated so to leave."

"That would be Mauri. She still lives at Vaihiva; she owns the valley, in fact. She'll want to see George. She's asked about him from time to time. If you like, I'll take you both out there one of these days. . . . By the way, where've you put up—Hôtel du Port? Why not stop with me? The hotel's nothing to boast of."

"We'll accept with pleasure, sir, if you'll ask us a bit later. For the next few days we thought we'd like to wander about on our own."

"Of course. So would I in your place. You want your first impressions fresh and unspoiled by the consular atmosphere. Well, come when you please. You'll be welcome at any time. Meanwhile, perhaps you could have dinner

with me on Friday?"

Hardie rose and took up his hat. "We'd like nothing better. What time shall we come?"

"Dinner at seven-thirty. Any time you please before that."

"We'll be on hand. Good night, sir."

"Good night."

Tyson stood at the top of the steps, looking after his guest until he was lost to view in the shadows of the avenue. Returning to his chair by the shaded lamp, he took up his old friend's letter, carefully slit open the envelope, and drew out the sheaf of closely written pages. He lit a cigarette and began to read.

"North Camp: Aldershot." As Tyson's glance fell upon the familiar heading, a gust of emotion swept across his senses. North Camp—how vividly he remembered the place and his own experiences there twenty years before! He saw the rows of old brick barracks, the bare parade grounds with their borders of dusty trees, and men armed with ancient Boer War rifles at squad, platoon, and company drill in the first autumn of the war. "Move to the right in fours! Fo-o-rm, fours!" . . . "At the halt, on the left, form close column of platoons!" He could hear the voices of those old dependables, the sergeants, whipping Lord Kitchener's First Hundred Thousand into shape. And what men they were, those early volunteers! Never in England's history had there been such an army as that, nor would there be again. He recalled the spirit of those days—the never-to-be-forgotten comradeships, the sense of great events at hand, and, above all, the mingled feeling of happiness and poignant sadness that seemed to be a part of the wan autumn sunshine. He remembered the route marches, the brigade and divisional field days in the early spring of '15, when the bitterness, the tragedy, the disillusionment, of war were yet to come; when the roads of the English countryside were filled with high-spirited lads in the perfection of health and hardness after nine months of training. He saw them marching, rifles at the slope, singing the songs of those days: "Hold Your Hand Out, Naughty Boy!" . . . "Hello! Hello! Who's Your Lady Friend?" and a score of others. He heard again the bugles of Aldershot sounding retreat, last post, lights out. He sighed deeply. Best to let those memories lie buried with the men who might have shared them with him.

Turning to the letter, he read slowly, with deep enjoyment, reluctant to come to the end of each page. It was as though his friend were there beside him, talking in the blunt incisive manner he remembered so well.

> We're not so young as we were, Tyson, but damned if I'll admit it. Why should I? I'm as sound as ever I was. I'm a better man at fifty-four than most of these post-war company commanders

scarcely half my age. I've got a division now, and I'm proud of it, in a way. But it's not a patch on old Wing's lot that went overseas in May, '15. How could it be when the best blood of England was drained into French soil? We'll never again be the nation we were, old friend. We're bled white: that's the plain truth.

Enough of this. Now about my son—or should I say, my two sons? The truth is, Tyson, that I'm closer to George McLeod than I am to my own boy. At least, I understand him better. I think you'll like the pair of them, but you will find George easier to get on terms with in the beginning. Alan is more reserved; at any rate, with me, and I've only myself to blame. I played the blasted fool with him when he was a youngster. From the day he was ten, I tried to steer him toward the Army, with no success. It used to exasperate me to see the little interest he took in whatever interested me. I thought, then, it was pure stubbornness, and having plenty of that in my own character I naturally resented Alan's. At last I had the sense to see that I was on the wrong track with him. Since then I've let him go his own way. A good job, too. I might easily have spoiled his life for him.

Alan has made an exceptional record at Cambridge. I've the arrogance to be proud of him, Tyson, but I've got to admit that he got his brains from his mother. It amazes me to learn that I not only could have, but do have, a son with an original, scholarly mind; but such, it appears, is the truth of the matter. Old Grayson, Plumian Professor of Astronomy and Experimental Philosophy,—whatever this latter may be,—is so impressed with the lad's abilities that he's taken the trouble to advise me about his future. He tells me that Alan has the makings of a brilliant mathematician, or astronomer, or the two combined, and shows a remarkable gift for independent research. Grayson says Alan should now go on to London University to work for his D. Sc. That's what Alan wants. Damned if he hasn't pretty well mapped out a career for himself! He's got his eye, ultimately, on the Observatory in South Africa.

I'm pleased, of course, but it's no thanks to me, all this. What a pity that his mother could not have lived to see his promise! But the disheartening thing, from the point of view of his future, is this: he's worked at a terrific pace the past four years, with the result that he's badly injured his eyes. They have never been strong since the time during the war when he caught scarlet fever. The best oculist in London tells me that the damage is extremely serious but not necessarily lasting. Alan is very sensitive, so say nothing to him

about this. As a matter of fact, he doesn't know how grave the danger is. But he has consented to give his eyes a complete rest for the better part of a year. We had hard work persuading him to knock off for so long, but he realizes that rest is essential. Hence this voyage.

Luckily, George could go with him. George has a good level head and will make the best possible companion. Alan is headstrong, idealistic and impulsive, and he's lived so much in scholarship that he scarcely knows there are other worlds to explore. He's a curious mixture of innocence and of wisdom beyond his years. Or, I'd better say, of knowledge beyond his years. It's George who has the wisdom.

I've said enough—too much, perhaps, on the subject of Alan. But he's all I've got left, Tyson; the war damned near wiped out the Hardies. I'm as fond of young George as though he were Alan's brother, but the fact remains that he's not. Neither of them will be a burden to you. They'll go their own way, and I'm afraid you'll see very little of them. They will have told you of my plans. If you can, persuade them to stop with you, and to stay on there till I come.

CHAPTER III

Strolling through the Papeete market place on Sunday morning, Tyson found George McLeod awaiting him in front of a coffee shop at the end of the busy *Place*. McLeod was a slight, wiry young man, with dark eyes and hair, and something in his carriage reminded the consul of the alert manner and the easy grace of a lightweight boxer.

"Hope I haven't kept you, George," the consul remarked, as they exchanged greetings.

"I've only just come, sir," McLeod replied. "Alan will be along in a few minutes. He said not to wait for him."

The consul led the way into the restaurant and they seated themselves in a corner of the large bare room well filled with early morning breakfasters. On the floor beside nearly every table stood baskets filled with the day's marketing. Waiters moved briskly back and forth with trays of fruit, coffee and rolls, white wine, sausage, and omelets. Tyson ordered breakfast for three in the curious mutilated Polynesian jargon used with the Chinese. He then turned to McLeod.

"You won't remember it, George, but you had breakfast with me here with your parents, seventeen years ago. Shouldn't wonder if it was at this very table. It was when they first came. How old are you now?"

"Twenty-one."

"If you want to know what your father was like at your age, you've only to look in a glass. It gave me a start when I caught sight of you a moment ago, as I came down the square."

"General Hardie's told me the same thing, sir."

"No doubt. Now then, before Alan comes in: he went to see Dr. Brocard?"

"Yesterday afternoon. I went along to make sure he did it."

"Good. Brocard's an excellent man. He was one of the best oculists in Paris. He came here to retire and enjoy life, not to practise, but I knew he'd be willing to see Alan for my sake. What did he say?"

"When he'd finished the examination I understood that there was something he didn't want to tell Alan, so I went back alone, later. He'll be seeing you too, of course. He says that, unless Alan is extremely careful, there's about an even chance of his going blind."

"Good God! I'd no idea it was as serious as that."

"It bears out what the London oculists said. Alan doesn't know it, but his father does."

"What did Brocard say about treatment?"

“There is nothing much Alan can do beside giving his eyes a rest from all strain. He advised him to spend an hour or two every day in a darkened room, but he’ll never do that. And he’s to wear dark glasses from dawn till sunset. I’m afraid he’ll not do that, either.”

“You must see that he does, George, if you can.”

“I’ll try, of course; but Alan’s damnably stubborn. He tells me to go to hell if I’m too solicitous.”

“His father warned me that he is more than sensitive about it. What foolishness! Why should he be?”

“I know. It’s absurd, but I’ve found there’s no joking him out of it. He seems to feel that there’s something shameful in having anything wrong with him . . .”

“Here he is!” warned Tyson. He pulled back a chair as Hardie made his way among the crowded tables. “I’ve ordered your breakfast, Alan: bacon and eggs. Thought I couldn’t go wrong on that.”

“Thanks; just what I want.”

Hardie seated himself and removed a pair of dark glasses which he passed to McLeod. “How do you like ’em, Mac? Pretty swanky, aren’t they?” He turned to the consul. “I’ve just bought them, sir. Your friend Brocard advised it.”

“You’ll make no mistake in following his advice. The sunlight here isn’t what you’re used to at home, Alan. Don’t forget that.”

Hardie smiled wryly. “All I need now is a false beard and I can pass for a first-class amateur sleuth. How much time have we?”

“Before the bus goes? Any amount. Takes them at least half an hour to get the thing started. I’m more than put out about the launch,” he added. “I’d counted on taking you out myself. They’ll be another week, at least, overhauling the engine.”

“It doesn’t matter, sir, but we’re sorry to miss going with you,” said Hardie. “We’re to get off at . . . what’s the name of the place?”

“Tautira. It’s at the very end of the road, so you can’t miss it. You’ll see something of native life there—what remains to be seen in these days. If I were you two, I’d stay on for a bit.”

“That would suit me. What do you say, Mac?”

“I’ll decide when we get there,” said McLeod. “Can’t say that I’m tired of Papeete, so far. Alan thinks this place is the hell hole of creation, Mr. Tyson.”

“See here, George, drop the ‘Mister,’ will you? And that’s for you, Alan, as well. I was ‘Tyson’ to both your fathers and I see no reason why I shouldn’t be to the sons.”

“Good. We will, sir.” He smiled. “You don’t mind that one bit of respect?”

“No. ‘Sir’ me, if you like. It’s a good old fashion, though it seems to be

falling into disuse among young men in these days. I'm glad to see that it hasn't with you two. What's this about the hell hole of creation, Alan?"

Hardie grinned. "I like to get George's back up. It's not a bad little hole, but I've seen more than enough half-castes. I want to look at a few real Tahitians, if there are any left."

"They're still to be found," Tyson replied, "and Tautira is as good a place as any to find them."

"How do you feel about the natives, sir? You must know them well after all these years."

Tyson wrinkled his nose in an odd grimace. "They belong to the human race, Alan. Yes, I do know them well, and I endure them well. That's about as far as I care to go in the way of praise." His eyes twinkled. "Don't take that too seriously," he added. "The truth is I'm rather fond of Polynesians. I'm preparing, already, to defend them against your father."

"You can count on my support," McLeod said.

"Do you think he'll like it here?"

"He's certain to," McLeod replied. "He'll be walking your legs off. You know how he loves mountains."

"Yes, but I'm speaking of the inhabited part. He's always disapproved of French colonial administration. He believes that England is the only nation on earth that knows anything about government."

Hardie smiled. "He's not to be shaken there. And he has a very decided color prejudice."

Tyson nodded. "I remember that. He'll be shocked to see the natives here treated with perfect equality. . . . Hello! There's your coach."

An ancient three-ton bus drew up outside, its motor jarring and clattering to a stop. The driver, a broad-faced half-caste lacking most of his front teeth, gave a shattering blast on his horn, and waved to Tyson through the open doorway. The consul rose, and McLeod and Hardie followed him to the street.

"We've fifty miles to go in that?" Hardie asked, incredulously. "We'll never make it, surely!"

"Oh, yes, you will," said Tyson. "This is the mail coach. It always gets there sooner or later. George, you know cars. What's your guess about this one?"

"I wouldn't venture even a guess," McLeod replied.

"You'd never believe that it came from the U.S.A., would you? Nevertheless, it did. It was a Buick originally. Now it's a *peréoo uira* and more Polynesian than the natives themselves."

The bus was furnished with half a dozen seats, each of them capable of holding seven or eight passengers, at a pinch. The roof, enclosed with a kind of pig wire, had been made into extra cargo space. On its wabbling supports it

sagged from one side to the other when the car was in motion. It was now loaded with crates of live fowls, some lumber and sheets of corrugated iron, two or three bicycles, a sewing machine, and a disorderly heap of battered household furniture. Festooned along the sides of the bus were strings of fish, bunches of bananas, green bamboos filled with *taioro* and other island delicacies from the market, and bundles belonging to the various passengers, tied up in faded *pareu* cloth. All the seats were filled with the exception of a small space on the front seat which the consul had reserved in advance for his two guests. Observing how small the space was, Tyson went forward to speak to the driver.

"See here, Tihoni! Do you call this room for two?"

The driver grinned apologetically. "I didn't know how big a two you wanted it for, Mr. Tyson. There's some could squeeze in it."

"Well, these two can't. And they're going all the way to Tautira. You've got to shift someone."

Tihoni turned with a hopeful glance to examine the seats behind. They were crowded to more than capacity. The two rear seats were packed with Chinamen who looked like truck gardeners or country shopkeepers. They had been fitted into their space with remarkable skill, and bulged out over the ends of the seats. The others, occupied by natives and half-castes, would have held not even the ghost of a passenger more; nearly every woman had a child on her lap and some had two or three. Tihoni scratched his head, but his face lit up as his glance fell on one of his fares in the second seat. This was a little old man at the end, sound asleep and clutching a three-gallon demijohn against his breast. With a nod to his supercargo, a burly youth with a cigarette hanging from his lower lip, Tihoni got down from his seat. The supercargo shinned up to the roof, which swayed perilously as he did so, and reached down to receive the aged sleeper as the driver boosted him up and tossed the demijohn after him.

"Good Lord, Tihoni!" the consul protested.

" 'Sallright, Mr. Tyson. I always put him there anyway, when I got a load. He can't fall off. Now, then . . ."

Another front-seat passenger obligingly moved to the place thus emptied, and the others squeezed over a few inches so that Hardie and McLeod were able to wedge themselves down at the end of the seat. Their bags were tossed up to the supercargo, who stowed them away on the roof and then slid nimbly down. With a huge splay thumb, Tihoni pressed the button on his horn, which emitted a deafening blast.

McLeod winced. "Good-bye, Tyson," he said.

"You haven't gone yet, George," Tyson replied. "That's merely Tihoni's signal that he's ready to go if the engine is."

“That’s right, Mr. Tyson,” Tihoni said with a grin. “I ain’t never sure just what she’ll do, but sometimes I can scare her into it. . . . Hey, Méa!”

The supercargo seized the crank and spun it until the sweat poured down his face, the passengers looking on hopefully. Presently the driver got down to take a turn. Tyson chuckled as he watched them.

“Tihoni has been driving this bus for the past fifteen years,” he said. “Every morning he has the same job, getting off, but the miracle always happens. I’ve never known him to fail to make his run.”

“What nationality is he?” Hardie asked. “He doesn’t look Tahitian.”

“You may well ask,” Tyson replied. “Not even the League of Nations could decide it. George, I ought to have told you something more about Mauri. She’s certain to ask you to stop at Vaihiva. Fara, the man you’re to stop with in Tautira, will direct you to her place. It’s eight or ten miles farther down the coast.”

At last, after prolonged and exhausting efforts at the crank, the worn-out engine burst into a clattering roar. Tyson waved good-bye. The ancient ruin leaped forward as the driver released the clutch, the heavily loaded top swaying from one side to the other on its rickety supports. The supercargo, who had turned to speak to a girl at the curb, swung himself aboard without taking his eyes from her face, and continued waving as long as she was in sight.

McLeod squirmed down more firmly in his seat. “I’ve a feeling that we’re going to enjoy this ride,” he said.

Hardie grinned. “Shouldn’t wonder. Who’s this sitting next me, did you notice?”

“Can’t say I did. Why don’t you look?”

“It’s impossible without rubbing noses.”

“Well, that’s an ancient island custom.”

“For all that, Mac, there’s something more than pathetic about it.”

“About what?”

“This thing we’re on.”

“Remember, it isn’t a motor bus. It’s a—what did Tyson call it? Anyway, something purely native.”

“Imagine traveling in the old days: twenty or thirty paddlers on a side in one of their superb canoes. And now, this contraption!”

“Well, there’s nothing we can do about it. I’ll bet these people are having just as good a time as their ancestors did in their canoes, and they don’t have to work so hard. What a jolly lot they are! I’ve heard more honest laughter in the past five minutes than you’ll hear in as many months, at home.”

“Wish I understood the language. I’d like to know what they’re so merry about.” Hardie regarded the swaying top. “Wonder how our old friend is,

upstairs? He was tight, wasn't he?"

"Tight! He didn't even know they hoisted him up."

"I'm beginning to like these people, Mac."

"I've liked them from the day we landed. I can understand why Tyson's stayed on here, all these years."

"He's a good sort, isn't he?" said Hardie. "Hello! What's all this?"

A vague sound of screaming was heard high above the clatter of the bus, then bowling along at its full twenty miles per hour. The driver brought the coach to a shuddering stop, and with his head turned over his shoulder backed fifty or sixty yards to a bridge over a small mountain stream. Having halted, he sat contemplating his bare toes while shrill cries of "*Tapéa! Tapéa!*" continued to be heard. They came from a small screened enclosure made of palm fronds at the bank of the stream, about a dozen yards from the bridge. The head and shoulders of a woman, evidently of huge proportions, could be seen above the enclosure. Tihoni, the driver, leaned across to speak to Hardie, regarding the old woman with disgust as he did so. "Ain't she got a voice?" he said.

"What does *tapéa* mean?" Hardie asked.

"Stop," said Tihoni. "Well, I *have* stopped, ain't I? But old grandma don't seem to know it."

The old lady, certain at last that the bus was waiting for her, ceased her outcry, smiled amiably up at the passengers, and went quietly on with her morning toilet, exchanging gossip with several women aboard the bus while she toweled her head and bare shoulders vigorously. Meanwhile, the supercargo filled a gasoline tin with water at the stream and replenished the supply in the leaky radiator, which was steaming violently. When he stepped down he threw what water was left in the tin over the enclosure, where the old lady had just finished drying herself, wetting her thoroughly again to the delight of everyone, including the bather herself, after the first shock of indignation had passed. She then gave the young man a tongue lashing that must have been a diverting one, judging by the hilarity it caused. A moment later she emerged into full view with a *pareu* wrapped tightly around her fat body, and with one last "*Tapéa*" warning she waddled slowly toward her small house, thirty or forty yards distant. Some of the passengers got down to stretch their legs while waiting, and mothers led their small children behind convenient bushes; or, if the bushes were not convenient, it didn't seem to matter. Ten or fifteen minutes passed before the old lady appeared again, dressed in a black Mother Hubbard and carrying a huge bundle which Méa tossed on top of the bus. She was about to scramble aboard when she remembered something she had left behind and returned to the house once more. McLeod slapped his knee. "Alan, we don't have a bus ride like this every day. Tautira's beginning to look farther and farther away."

“I don’t care if we never get there. . . . Here she comes again. Maybe she’ll be ready now.”

This time she was, in fact, prepared to go, and, after scanning the various seats, the supercargo boosted her into one that already held six passengers, where she sank down on the joint laps of two protesting youths, and the bus proceeded on its way.

The early morning air was cool and refreshing and the sun still hidden behind the mountains. Stops were made frequently to unload parcels or passengers. Other travelers replaced the ones who descended, and for all the great variety of things delivered along the way, the bus seemed to be as fully loaded as when it had left the market place in Papeete. They crossed the mouth of a great valley where Hardie and McLeod had a glimpse of far-off jagged peaks, so blue with the color of distance that they were hardly to be distinguished from the sky itself.

Some miles farther on, another halt was made before an unpainted two-room house, as decayed as it looked deserted. The driver twisted his neck to question a passenger on one of the rear seats, and several others took part in the discussion which followed. Presently people began to climb down from the bus, the men helping the driver and supercargo to unload a great assortment of articles which had been stowed away beneath the seats. Two live pigs were hauled out from some place in the rear and tethered to the verandah posts. Then, from the roof, came a crate of fowls, the sewing machine, an old-fashioned gramophone with a horn, several family portraits in heavy gilt frames, enlarged and colored from photographs, and all the other household furnishings that had been piled there. While the perspiring workers stacked their burdens on the porch, an elderly native appeared from behind the house and stood regarding them with an air of detached benevolence. At last the job was done, the seats replaced, and the passengers were getting aboard once more. Dashing the sweat from his forehead, Tihoni now found time to greet the aged spectator, who smiled and made some brief and casual remark. To McLeod and Hardie, looking on at a distance, the pantomime which followed revealed its meaning with perfect clearness: the furniture had been unloaded at the wrong house. Back it all went on the bus, the desperate cranking of the engine was repeated, and they got under way once more. The driver turned to Hardie.

“What do you think of that old lizard-neck letting me unload all that stuff at the wrong place?” he said.

“Didn’t he say anything?” Hardie asked.

“Not a word till we was all through. He musta thought I was making him a present of it.” Tihoni grinned, good-naturedly. “I called him seven kinds of sons-of-bitches, in native. But it was my own fault. I ottua ast him first.” He

winced and started at the sound of a loud report and the unmistakable hissing of a burst tire. "*Sacré nom de Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "And I ain't got no spares with me!"

He had no jack, either, but with a boulder for a fulcrum and a lever of four-by-four pine borrowed from the lumber that was part of the freight, the wheel was soon raised. Two or three of the heaviest passengers sat at the end of the four-by-four, including the old lady who had halted the bus while she finished her bath. Méa removed the inner tube while Tihoni made an anxious search for a patch among the odds and ends of gear under his seat. At last he found one, and after prolonged scrapings of the rubber with a bit of rough coral and squeezings of an almost empty tin of cement, the patch was pressed into place and allowed five minutes to set; then the pumping began. Hardie and McLeod took their turns at this with the other men passengers, for the pump was as old as the bus itself and very little air went into the tube. But at last Tihoni thought the tire would do. The wheel was carefully lowered, but no sooner was the weight upon it than a dejected hissing was heard, the sound of which seemed to deflate Tihoni at the same time. "I ain't havin' no luck to-day," he said. But such emergencies were, apparently, everyday affairs with him, and his usual passengers thought nothing of this one. The wheel was raised again; meanwhile children scattered along the road and into the near-by plantations to gather fallen palm fronds, stripping the leaflets from the central ribs. Armfuls of these were brought to Méa, who stuffed them into the empty tire and rammed the mass tight with a stick. Tihoni stood by to inspect the job, giving the tire a tentative kick from time to time with the ball of his bare foot.

"Do you think we can make it on that?" McLeod asked.

"Sure," said Tihoni. "This ain't the first time I've had to do it. Mebbe I can borrow an old spare when we get to Taravao. That's the village on the Isthmus where we'll stop to have lunch."

"How's the old fellow upstairs? Still asleep?"

"Upstairs. . . ?" Suddenly the driver smote his low forehead. "I forgot all about him," he said. "Ain't he off yet?"

"I haven't seen him go," said McLeod.

"He belongs in Punaauia," said Tihoni. "That's ten kilometres back. Hey, Méa!"

The supercargo glanced up from his work, grinning with brazen delight at the dressing-down given him by the driver. The old native on the roof was awakened and slid to the ground much refreshed, turning at once to receive the demijohn that Méa lowered after him. It was filled with red wine, which he shared generously with the passengers. He offered the cup to McLeod, who drained it with relish, patting his stomach and murmuring "*Maitai! Maitai!*" as he handed it back. The others smiled with pleasure at this venture into their

own speech, and a merry time was had while the repairs were being finished. Then all climbed aboard again except the old man himself, who sat by the side of the road, his greatly lightened demijohn between his knees, smiling and waving his tin cup in farewell as the bus proceeded on its way.

"He doesn't seem to mind your carrying him past," McLeod said. "Is he going to walk home?"

"No, I'll pick him up to-morrow on my way back," said Tihoni. "He ain't in no hurry, and he's got a good *copain* there in that demijohn, as long as it holds out. . . . It don't ride so bad, does it, on that tire? But they won't be much left of it by the time we get to Taravao."

It was well past midday when they reached the settlement on the Isthmus. Here a stop was made for lunch at a Chinese restaurant. The bus, rested and refilled with water and gasoline and with a well-worn but usable tire to replace the other, which had been cut to ribbons, seemed as much refreshed as the passengers themselves when they started again, and sped along the Afahiti coast at twenty-five miles per hour. The road wound through an enchanting landscape. Innumerable mountain brooks flowed into the lagoon, and sometimes a larger stream where groups of native women were at work washing clothes. Here on the peninsula the cottages along the road had a well-kept look, and the gardens, watered by almost daily rains, made patches of vivid coloring in the afternoon sunshine. The sun was setting as they rounded a promontory where the open sea dashed at the base of the cliffs, filling the air with spray shot through by rainbow lights. A short distance beyond they crossed a bridge at the mouth of a wide valley and entered the village of Tautira. Tihoni brought the bus to a halt in front of a Chinese store.

"You're going to Fara's house, ain't you?" he asked Hardie, as they got down. "I'll take you on there in a tick. Won't be half an hour."

Hardie smiled, inwardly, at this island conception of a "tick."

"How much farther is it?" he asked.

" 'Bout a quarter of a mile."

"I shouldn't mind walking. What do you say, Mac?"

"All right, then," said Tihoni. "You can't miss Fara's place. It's the last one you come to, on the lagoon side of the road."

"What sort of a man is Fara?" McLeod asked.

"*Numera hoé!*" Tihoni replied, warmly. "He's a great friend of Mr. Tyson's. They go fishing together."

"That's all we need to know," said McLeod. "Thanks for the ride."

The driver grinned. "Hope you enjoyed it," he said. "I'll leave your things at Fara's."

The two men walked slowly along the grass-grown road, looking about them with lively interest. Turning to glance back, they discovered a crowd of

small children following them at a distance, and from every house along the road they caught glimpses of heads peeping out at them from doorways and windows. The road dwindled to a footpath at Fara's house. Wheeled vehicles could go no further, and from this point on, around the windward, southeast end of the peninsula to the settlement of Teahupoo, twenty miles distant, the few inhabitants were obliged to travel by canoe.

Fara's house stood well back from the road with its well-kept lawn shaded by majestic breadfruit and mango trees. He came out to meet them as they approached his steps, and greeted them in very fair French. They were then introduced to Mrs. Fara and a married daughter and her husband, while a numerous brood of bashful curious grandchildren peeped up at them from below the verandah railings. Chairs were brought forth, and when a child had been sent for his spectacles, Fara scanned Tyson's note of introduction with ceremonial gravity. He glanced benevolently at them over the top of his spectacles.

"Good," he said. "Mr. Tyson's friends are my friends. You are welcome here, as long as you wish to stay."

CHAPTER IV

The sun was an hour high the following morning when they started down the lagoon. McLeod sat in the stern of the canoe Fara had loaned them, trying to keep it on a direct course while Hardie paddled in the bow.

"Don't put so much muscle into it, Alan," he said. "Let me get the hang of steering first."

Hardie paused and looked back at him.

"I supposed an old Tahitian like yourself would know all about outrigger canoes. We've eight miles to go, according to Fara."

"There's plenty of time. Take it easy."

They paddled on for an hour, with scarcely a word exchanged between them. The stillness of early morning rested upon land and sea, deepened by the thin clear crowing of jungle cocks in the forest that covered the lowlands and the hills beyond. Above them, far inland, they had glimpses of plateaus crossed by bands of golden light, narrow canyons filled with purple haze, the head walls of valleys, and, higher and farther still, the peaks of mountains dimly seen through veils of mist. At times they moved along the brink of shoals that shelved steeply into the depths; here they drifted or paddled slowly. And on the right hand stretched the lonely coast, broken by small bays and coves and promontories, with no sign anywhere of human habitation.

"I've always wanted to see one of the ends of the earth," Hardie remarked, presently.

"There's something sad about it. Don't you think so?"

"It's true of any place that nature has claimed for its own again. Tyson was telling me that, in the ancient days, this was one of the most thickly settled parts of the island."

"I'd like to have seen it then."

"I believe I prefer it as it is. . . . How far to go now, do you think?"

"We must be better than halfway," said McLeod. "Put your back into it a bit more now."

"Getting impatient?"

"Yes."

"You must have come this way more than once with your father and mother."

"I suppose I did. If they'd lived, Alan, I might have spent all my boyhood here. Who knows—I might never have left the island."

"I doubt that. Your parents would have gotten too homesick for Devonshire. Even if they had stayed, you'd have been sent home to school."

“What do you see ahead there, off to the left?”

“Nothing.”

“You don’t!”

Hardie looked again, more carefully, rubbing his eyes and then shading them with his hand. “Well, something, perhaps. It’s a blur to me.”

“Damn it, Alan. You’ve forgotten your dark glasses. You know what the orders were.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“You know better! I’ll take care of them after this. You can’t be counted on, that’s plain.”

“What is it you see?”

“A small island offshore. It must be the one Fara told us about, at the entrance to Vaihiva Valley. You see it, surely?”

“Looks like a point to me.”

“No, there’s clear water between it and the mainland.”

Half an hour later they were abreast of the islet. Leaving it on the left, they now had in view the valley with its two great terraces, foreshortened from their vantage point. All the upper part was canopied with cloud, but the lower reaches lay in full sunlight.

“Alan, I’m beginning to remember it now,” McLeod said. “Our house stood on that point across the river. That’ll be Mauri’s house on this side, and the little pier by those trees is where my father used to take me swimming. It must have been my father.”

“You’re dreaming,” Hardie said. “You weren’t five years old when you left here. I doubt if you remember where your house stood.”

“We’ll soon know,” McLeod replied. “I don’t see anyone, but they must be here somewhere.”

“What a glorious spot! I don’t wonder your parents loved it.”

They paddled across the smooth waters of the lagoon and entered the river which wound before them in a still deep channel shaded by great trees along its banks. Making the canoe fast to the pier, they took the path to the house.

“Let me speak first,” McLeod said, in a low voice. He knocked lightly on one of the verandah posts. There was no response. He knocked again.

“Where are they all?” he whispered.

“All? How many are there to be? I don’t remember Tyson speaking of any great family.”

“There’s Mauri’s old father, at least, beside herself. And didn’t Tyson say something about a daughter?”

“I’ve forgotten.”

“Let’s go around to the back. They can’t be far off.”

A walk strewn with coral sand and shaded by tall hibiscus bushes led

around one side of the house. Before them stretched a wide area of land bordered by the river on one side and the lagoon on the other. It was carpeted with a lawn that had the appearance of being grazed by cattle. Coconut palms, lime, orange, breadfruit, and mango trees laden with fruit cast their shadows on the grass, and clumps of banana plants partly concealed various outbuildings with bamboo walls and thatched roofs that descended in long sweeping lines to the low eaves. As they stood there, entranced by the sunny silence of the place, a bird with snow-white plumage appeared from behind a corner of the house. Immediately it saw them, it walked away with an air of dignified anxiety, turning its head as though to make certain it was not being followed. Then, flapping its wings, it took the air and disappeared to seaward.

"That's a pet, evidently," said Hardie. "I've never seen a more comical air of astonishment and disapproval in a bird's behavior. What was it?"

"Belongs to the heron family, I should think," McLeod replied, absently. "Alan, this place is like a dream to me. All sorts of dim memories seem to be coming back. You can't imagine what a strange feeling it gives me."

"Listen, Mac. I think I'll leave you."

"Leave me? What for?"

"You should have come alone. I would have wanted to, in your place. Don't know why I didn't think of this before."

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does. You'll want to talk with Mauri about your father and mother, and your childhood here, and all the rest of it. I'll walk to Tautira. Fara said there's a footpath along the beach that can be followed without much trouble. You don't mind paddling the canoe back?"

"Not if you're sure you want to go."

"I do. I'd like to see the coast from on shore."

"There's one thing," McLeod said. "If they ask me, I think I'll stay on here for a day or so."

"Of course. I won't expect you till you come. I'll be off now while there's time."

McLeod stood looking after his friend until he had disappeared among the trees in the direction of the beach. Then, finding that there was no one at hand, he took a path leading into the valley and followed it for some distance. At a turn near the river he came face to face with a slender, dark-haired woman with a basket on her arm. She stopped short at sight of him and drew back a pace or two.

"Madame Mauri?"

She set down her basket, regarding him for a few seconds with a grave questioning glance.

"Yes," she replied.

"You don't know me?" he added, smiling.

She continued to regard him in the same grave manner, then shook her head.

"But perhaps you will remember a little boy who was here many years ago with his father and mother? Didn't they live in a house just across the river?"

An expression of astonishment that seemed almost painful in its intensity came into Mauri's eyes.

"*Aué!*" she exclaimed in a low voice. "Yes, but . . . you are not . . ."

"I'm the little boy, Mauri—George McLeod."

He regretted his abruptness. Mauri had been only a vague memory of his childhood and he supposed that she must have forgotten him long since. He now realized that the forgetting had been on his part. Tears brimmed into her eyes, and in a manner that touched him deeply she stepped forward and kissed him on both cheeks; then she clung to him, unable to speak. She raised her head and held him at arm's length, her mouth quivering as she gazed at him.

"George, do you remember what you called me when you were little? You couldn't say 'Mauri' then. It was always 'Mau'i.' "

"Did I?"

"And I called you 'Toti.' Did you know me just now?"

"I guessed it, Mauri. I'd even forgotten your name—think of that! It was Mr. Tyson, in Papeete, who told me."

"Of course. You were such a baby when I had to let you go."

"But I believe I remember that time. I remember how I hung on to you when some strange woman came to take me away. It was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Mr. Tyson had to send you back to England. I took you to Tautira and he met us there with the Frenchwoman who was going with you on the steamer. It was a sad day for me, Toti. I wanted to keep you."

She fell silent. The silence lengthened until McLeod was conscious of a slight feeling of embarrassment. He was about to speak when Mauri looked up once more.

"You must forgive me, Toti. I'm forgetting my English."

"You needn't apologize. I don't remember a single word of Tahitian. Didn't I use to speak it a little?"

"Yes; you learned very fast."

"And you've always lived here? Ever since . . . ?"

"Always. I like it here."

"I don't wonder. I've never seen a more beautiful spot. I'm beginning to remember it again."

"Toti, did you come . . . all the way, to see me?"

"Of course. One of the first things I asked Mr. Tyson was about Vaihiva and you."

"I mean, did you come all the way from England, just for this?"

"Oh. . . . No, I can't say I did. Tahiti is so far away, Mauri. I don't think I ever expected to see it again."

"Then why did you come?"

"It was a great piece of luck. I have a friend who is making a voyage around the world and he asked me to come with him."

"How long will you stay on Tahiti?"

"Only a month, I'm afraid. We think we'll go on to New Zealand by the next steamer. . . . You don't remember ever hearing my father speak of an old friend of his—George Hardie?"

"Hardie? . . . I don't know . . ."

"I'm traveling with Mr. Hardie's son, Alan. He was named for my father and I was named for his."

Mauri glanced up with a startled expression.

"Hardie . . . Yes, I do remember that name now! *Aué!* Yes . . . Why . . . was he the man you went to live with in England?"

"That's the one. And I've lived in the Hardie family ever since. Alan is just my age. We've grown up together."

Mauri fell silent again. McLeod could see that she had been profoundly moved by this unexpected meeting, and was both surprised and touched by her agitation.

"I'm glad you remember about me, Mauri," he said. "I didn't suppose you would. I'm afraid I've disturbed you, coming like this. I should have let you know, in advance."

"No, no. It is a great surprise to see you, and a great pleasure. But . . . if you will excuse me a little? I've forgotten something in the valley. I must go back."

"I'll go with you if you like."

"There is no need. Wait for me in the house. I will come soon."

Mauri returned the way she had come, walking quickly until she was well out of sight; then she halted by a *mapé* tree whose great flanged trunk offered her yet further concealment. Safe from observation and torn between conflicting emotions, she turned toward the tree, pressing her face against the smooth bark. What must she do? What *could* she do? It was willed, this coming. It must have been so. From their graves the dead parents had willed that Naia's brother should return here to claim her. What if, in some strange way, the brother and sister should recognize each other? But that could never be; she was alarming herself for nothing. Certainly, there was no danger on Naia's side, nor would George remember his parents. But he must have seen their photograph. What if he should discover in Naia some resemblance to their mother? It was there—Mauri herself could see it: Naia had her mother's

dark hair, the same grace of body, the same poise of the head. But the mother's eyes had been gray, and Naia's were deep brown, like her father's. But for all this there was no great likeness in Naia to either of her parents. Had there been, would it not have been remarked, by others, long since? Mr. Tyson, the consul, had known both parents well, but in all these years he had suspected nothing. Nor had anyone else.

But they must not meet, those two! To see them together . . . no, no, no! It would be more than she could bear! But how prevent the meeting? Naia had gone off early that morning, but whether down the lagoon or up the valley she did not know. She could not herself go in search. There would be no time. A moment later, to her relief, two children appeared on the path.

"You have seen Naia, Tomi?" she asked the elder of them.

The boy shook his head.

"Then find her for me, will you? Meina, you must help, too. And listen, Tomi. Tell Naia that she is to have her lunch at your mother's house and to wait for me there. I want her to go with me to the upper valley this afternoon. Go now, and be sure you find her. And don't forget: she is to wait for me at your mother's house."

The boy nodded and the children ran on up the path by the river.

Mauri had herself well in hand by the time she returned to the house, but the effort to maintain her composure taxed all of her strength and all her woman's skill at dissimulation. She found McLeod waiting for her on the verandah.

"This is the same house, isn't it, Mauri?" he asked. "The one I used to come to?"

"Yes."

"There's something else I seem to remember," he went on. "I was with some people . . . not here, I think; somewhere else, and it was dark and raining hard. I wanted my mother and couldn't find her. Was that something that really happened?"

"Yes. It was when your mother died, Toti. There was a great storm at that time."

"Where was I then?"

"In a little house up the valley."

"That room at the end of the verandah must have some association for me, but I can't think what it was."

"You slept there with your father and mother when you first came, until your own house was finished."

"Could I look into it, Mauri? It's strange how I'm beginning to remember, now that I'm here once more."

Mauri stood at the doorway while McLeod stepped into the room and

looked about him.

"It's not as it was when you were here," she said. "This was my husband's room. He died six years ago. I keep it just as he left it."

"I can see that it was a man's room," McLeod replied. "He was a great reader, evidently."

"Yes; all those books were his. He was an American. It was just after we were married that we came here to live. We built this house at that time."

"How long was that before my father and mother came?"

"Let me see . . . four years, I think."

McLeod halted before a framed photograph that hung on the wall by a writing table.

"What a lovely girl! Who is she?"

"My daughter, Naia."

"Oh. . . . I didn't know that you had a daughter."

"Mr. Tyson didn't tell you?"

"Perhaps. But he told us so many things, and I was trying to take them all in at once. . . . You must be very proud of her. How old is she?"

"It was Mr. Tyson who took the photograph one time when he came here. My husband thought Naia looked very much like a sister of his who died when she was about our daughter's age."

"When was this taken?"

"Two years ago. Naia was fourteen then."

"Why . . . she must have been born when I was here!"

"Yes; she was a tiny baby when you left—four months old. . . . *Aué*, Toti! Here we stand talking, and you must be very hungry, after that long paddle down the lagoon. Come, I will get you some lunch. It is time."

"Does Naia live here, with you?"

"Yes. That is, sometimes. Now I will get your food. Wait on the verandah. It will not be long."

"I'm afraid I'm being an awful nuisance."

"You mean you make *péapéa* for me? No, no! I hope you are very hungry? The food is all ready, in the *himaa*. You remember the *himaa*, the oven in the ground? You will have some nice *maa Tahiti* for your lunch."

Half an hour later Mauri called him to his meal. The table on the back verandah was set for one.

"But what about you?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I'm not hungry. I ate some fruit this morning when I was up the valley. I always do that and spoil my appetite. Eat well, Toti."

"But you've enough food here for a dozen! I don't know where to begin."

McLeod did full justice to the meal, while Mauri sat near by, replying briefly to his questions. When he had finished they returned to the front

verandah, and McLeod became increasingly aware of a feeling of constraint on Mauri's part that puzzled him. He could not doubt that she had been sincerely glad to see him, but now he felt that she was uneasy in his presence and wishing him gone. She became more and more silent, and his own embarrassment grew as he tried to bridge these silences with talk of his voyage from England, his impressions of Tahiti, and his plans for further wanderings. He spoke again of Naia, but Mauri was as vague in her replies about her as she had been at first. It was plain that, for some reason, she did not wish to discuss her daughter. Nor was anything more said of his father and mother. After waiting vainly for her to suggest it, he asked if he might see their graves.

"Yes, Toti. I wished to speak of that," she said. "Come, we will go now."

She led the way in silence to the pier where the canoes were tied. Having crossed the river, they followed a dim path that wound through dense undergrowth to a great ironwood that lifted its branches high above the surrounding thickets. She halted at this spot.

"You remember this place?" she asked. "The house was here—such a pretty house, the native kind. It is gone long ago."

"I believe I remember this tree," McLeod replied.

"You played under it often. Your father and mother would sit here of an evening and you brought them shells from the beach. You see the tree over there, all in blossom? It is one your father planted."

"They were happy here, weren't they, Mauri?"

"At first they were very happy. They hoped your father would be well soon. But after . . . he wanted so much to live, and they knew it couldn't be."

"It's strange," McLeod replied. "What you just said about my bringing the shells almost gave me a picture of my mother."

"She was beautiful, Toti; not much older than you are now. And she had such a lovely voice; it was like music to hear her talk."

"Were you with her often?"

"Every day, after your father died. She stayed at our house most of the time then. She had great courage. I shall never forget how brave she was. . . . You must forgive me that I don't keep the land cleared any more."

"There's no reason why you should."

"I did at first. It was beautiful then. Your mother loved her garden, and there were only these great trees to shade the grass. It was all open and sunny. Then I let things grow as they would. To see it as it was, before, made me too sad."

"I understand."

"But the graves—you will see."

The burial plot was not far from where the house had stood—a green sunlit place enclosed with a high hedge filled with blossom. It was in perfect order;

the three graves were bordered with shells and strewn with white coral sand, making a contrast to the green lawn around them. Slabs of white coral stood for headstones.

"Your father chose this place when he knew he would die. He wanted only a coral stone to mark it. Mr. Tyson thought the others should be the same."

McLeod nodded. He was deeply moved at the sight of these lonely graves. His parents had been scarcely more than names to him; he had long since come to think of Alan Hardie's father as his father and their home as his. Now, for the first time, he was conscious of a poignant sense of loss, of what might have been. Fond as he was of General Hardie, he realized that he had not taken the place of the father who lay here. He thought of the home in Devonshire where so many generations of McLeods had lived and died; it had been let to strangers since his childhood and held no memories for him. Only in this solitary place could he recall in a dim way the parents who had loved him and planned for his future so many years ago. He could imagine his mother's anguish when both knew that the end, for his father, could not be far off, and her loneliness after the end had come. He looked at the tiny grave beside hers.

"Mauri, will you tell me . . . I don't even know whether it is a brother or a sister that is buried here."

"It was a little girl, Toti."

"Did she . . . did she die when my mother . . . ?"

"Yes."

Of a sudden Mauri sank to the ground and buried her head in her arms, weeping with a desolate intensity of passion that surprised and moved him deeply.

"Mauri! Forgive me! I didn't know. . . ."

He broke off helplessly, stirred by this sorrow so much sharper than his own. It gave him a changed conception of the warmth and tenderness of Mauri's nature, and of the relationship that must have existed between her and his mother. At last she rose and led the way back to the river. When they had crossed she stood on the pier in silence for a moment.

"You will forgive me, Toti, to cry so much? I loved your mother, I don't go often to their graves."

"I shouldn't have asked you."

"No, no. It was right I should go with you. But not since a long time have I gone. It is my father who takes care of the graves."

She kissed him as she had before.

"Now, Toti, I will say good-bye. You have far to go, to Tautira, and you will need the daylight. It has been a great pleasure to see you. I think of you often, and I always will. I hope you have a happy journey with your friend."

As he left the mouth of the river and rounded the point, McLeod stopped

paddling for a moment and looked toward the house, but Mauri was nowhere to be seen. He turned once more to look back at the great ironwood on the opposite side of the river. A little beyond, he could see the flowering tree his father had planted so long ago, a blaze of crimson splendor against the sombre green of the forests.

CHAPTER V

A faint light showed in the window at the east end of the room in Fara's house. Fowls were cackling as they prepared to flutter down from the trees, and a numerous colony of *maina* birds that roosted in a mango tree near the house filled the air with their early morning clamor. Hardie opened his eyes drowsily, then closed them again, in the pleasant state between sleeping and waking which he enjoyed more than sleep itself. A quarter of an hour later he rose, feeling a little stiff from his walk of the day before, threw a towel over his shoulder, and went out barefoot, across the lawn to the bath house. McLeod awoke as he was dressing, and it was broad daylight when they sat down to their coffee on the front verandah.

"I had the devil of a time getting back," McLeod remarked.

"I was surprised to see you," said Hardie. "I thought you'd stop at Vaihiva for a day or two."

"I took my time, returning. It was dark before I knew it and I got tangled up in a lot of coral shoals."

"Did you find what's-her-name—Mauri?"

"Yes."

"Was she glad to see you?"

"I don't know. I thought so, at first. In fact, I'm sure she was. Then—well, she seemed to cool off. I'd a feeling, at the end, that she was wishing me away as hard as she could."

"That's odd. Anyway, she showed you about?"

"In a reluctant sort of way. I had to ask to see my people's graves. And there, Alan, she burst out crying, with such genuine sorrow that I was touched by it. A few minutes later she said good-bye to me, very hastily, and left me standing by that little pier on the riverbank. I was more than surprised. There was nothing to do, then, but come back. I'm certain she was glad to see the last of me."

"Nonsense, Mac. We don't know these people, that's all. They're very emotional, so I've always heard. You probably upset her, coming so unexpectedly after all these years."

"One thing I'm convinced of: she was very fond of my mother. By the way, Mauri has a daughter."

"What's she like?"

"I didn't meet her, but I saw her photograph—a kid of sixteen or seventeen. A real little beauty she must be, if she's anything like as pretty as the photograph. Mauri was vague about her, but I gathered that she lives with

her mother. Her name's Naia."

"Are there other children?"

"She didn't speak of any. Oh yes . . . I met Mauri's father on my way back. He was coming down the lagoon in a canoe, and we halted to pass the time of day."

"How did you manage to pass it? Does he speak English?"

"Not a word, but we got along with two or three words of French and the rest gestures. He seemed to be greatly interested when I told him my name, and tried to tell me a lot of things I couldn't understand. He kept on saying 'Makla,' which I took to be native for McLeod. I believe he remembered me as a child. Apparently he was urging me to go back, but I couldn't do that very well, after the dismissal I'd had from Mauri. A fine old chap, with a face full of dignity and character. What time did you get back?"

"In the middle of the afternoon. It's a glorious walk; I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more. And mountain streams every mile or so. I stopped to bathe in half of them. All the way I didn't meet a soul."

McLeod smiled. "I know how that would please you. I believe you'd like Tahiti better if it were a complete solitude."

"No I shouldn't, but I do like to find solitude at hand when I want it. I've decided to stay on here for a while."

"How long a while?"

"I don't know, but Tautira's just what I hoped it would be. This is Tahiti, Mac—what's left of it."

"It's just a village, like a good many others we passed through. A dull little place, if you ask me. I prefer Papeete."

"But you don't want to go back!"

"I believe I will, Alan. You don't mind, do you? As a matter of fact, it gave me a sort of melancholy feeling, that visit to Vaihiva, and it seems to be staying with me, even here."

"I can understand that, but it'll pass. I want your company."

"You'll have to come with me, then."

"Back to Papeete? Damned if I will! You won't see me there again till steamer day, but you needn't tell Tyson. See here, Mac: if you're bound to go, send out the rest of my things, will you?"

"All right. I may come out again, later. Wonder what time the bus starts from here?"

"You needn't worry about that. They've probably just started cranking the engine. We can ask Fara to send one of his grandchildren down to tell them you're going."

When McLeod had said good-bye to Fara's household, Hardie went with him to the Chinaman's store, where the driver was preparing his mail coach for

the return journey. There were not many passengers from Tautira and most of the cargo was filled with fish and fruit.

"Alan, don't forget your dark glasses," McLeod said.

Hardie smiled. "I won't, Grandma; and my flannel chest protector and the wristlets."

"That's all right, but you wear 'em," McLeod replied grimly. "It's damned important."

"I know. Cheerio, Mac. I'll see you on steamer day, if not before."

Hardie was lonely for a day or two, after McLeod's departure, but he soon found his time passing so pleasantly that he scarcely thought of his friend. Tautira was very different from the cosmopolitan half-civilization of Papeete. It was a purely native community, little influenced by whites or Chinese, almost self-contained in an economic sense, and connected with the rest of the island only by the arrival of the bus. Each morning at dawn the villagers scattered to their self-appointed tasks for the day. Some went inland to cultivate their gardens of yams and taro, to make copra, or to feed their swine. Others set out in canoes to fish along the reefs. By midmorning the day's supplies of food began to come in, each family sharing with others any delicacy that had been secured and receiving other gifts in return. All of these people were landholders and there was an air of peace and prosperity about the settlement that appealed greatly to Hardie. Their world was this one small village, on a crumb of land in the middle of the Pacific, and he realized, much more keenly than the natives themselves, how fortunate they were to be so far removed from the turmoil of great continents. He liked, particularly, the two or three hours in the middle of the day when all the village had the appearance of being sunk fathoms down in silence and sleep. Not even the children would be astir then, but he would see them stretched out in pools of deep shade beneath the mango trees, and old men and women sitting motionless on the shady sides of their little houses, lost in a kind of waking trance. Not being accustomed to the siesta, Hardie would walk abroad at this time, feeling that he had strayed into some enchanted world and would wake up, presently, to find himself still in England. And the enchantment was no less active at night, when the older men carried on endless conversations, seated on the floors of their verandahs with a lamp beside them while the women sewed or ironed near by. The lights of the fishermen would be strung out along the distant reefs, and from some lonely spot along the beach would come bursts of music and laughter, where the *taurearea*—the young men and unmarried girls—would be dancing by torchlight. To his surprise, Hardie felt a keen desire to join these gatherings, but the language barrier seemed to him an insuperable one, and he was shy about intruding himself where he felt that he might not be welcome.

One morning, shortly after McLeod's departure, he set out for an all-day excursion, by sailing canoe, along the cliffs of the Pari, the loneliest part of all that lonely coast. There was a fresh easterly breeze at sunrise, and the small tufted clouds along the horizon gave promise of a fine day. During his boyhood in Devon, Hardie had spent a good deal of time on the water, and had acquired a love of boats and a taste for sailing which he had had few opportunities to indulge since he left school. He had studied the native sailing canoes with interest, realizing that they were among the fastest small craft in the world.

Fara's canoe lay at anchor in shallow water near the beach. It was about twenty-five feet long, with a beam of less than twenty inches, so narrow that it would have capsized at a breath save for the long outrigger made fast to a pair of light booms on the port side. He hoisted the sail and steered out through the passage onto the open Pacific beyond the reefs, making a long board to sea, close-hauled on the starboard tack. The breeze held fresh and steady from the quarter of the rising sun, and a light chop broke the surface of the easterly swell. The canoe made little leeway and footed it at the speed of a power boat. Hardie turned to glance back from time to time at the panorama of sea and sky, with the majestic outlines of Tahiti-nui far astern, sweeping up from the blue plain of the sea. At last he saw that he could fetch his destination and came about to bear away on the other tack.

Toward midmorning he found himself close in with the reef, abreast of the islet he had seen some days before on the journey with McLeod. It marked the end of the lagoon; from this point onward to the south and west the sea reared high over sunken banks offshore and broke at the foot of thickly wooded cliffs —the region known as the Pari. The islet, not more than ten acres in extent, rose from the shallows on the inner side of the reef. Its beach of coral sand, against which the waters of the lagoon rippled gently, made a white foreground for the green wall of bush. A wide passage led in through the reefs and beyond it he could see the valley of Vaihiva, hemmed in by its green precipices.

The islet had the air of a little paradise. Hardie wondered if it had an owner, and envied him, whoever he was. What a place for small boys to play at Robinson Crusoe, or shipwrecked mariners! The Pari could wait. Many a time, in his daydreams, he had seen just such a small green South Sea island, with himself as sole tenant. He slacked away and steered into the passage. Ten minutes later his anchor was dropped into clear knee-deep water and he waded ashore.

The place proved even more enchanting than when viewed from the sea. Save for the coconut palms whose fronds glinted in the sunlight high above the other trees, the vegetation was very different from that of the mainland. There was little undergrowth, and the trees, many of them of great size, were of kinds

he had not seen before. The beach was bordered by a creeping vine which made a floor of rich green, like a lawn, and small plants of many varieties that loved the shade were scattered over the sandy loam farther inland. Here and there he saw shrubs with broad, pale green leaves and long sprays of blossom, waxen-white, and with a fragrance that seemed to be that of wind and sea and the spume of the surf. There was no sound but the soughing of the wind in the trees and the subdued thunder of the breakers, flashing in the sunlight as they gathered themselves to race forward, flinging back manes of spray. Strolling around the eastern end of the islet, under the spell of beauty and loneliness, he came to a halt.

A small canoe, which contained a bamboo pole and other fishing gear, lay on the beach above high-water mark, and a few yards distant a girl lay asleep on the sand. Her head was pillowed on a green frond, and a beam of sunlight, filtering down through the gently swaying foliage, seemed to caress her hair, rippling over it with lights of gold and bronze. She lay in the trustful attitude of a child, one bare arm outstretched and the other resting lightly on her breast. A string of colored reef fish was suspended from a branch near by, and beneath them, like a careless sentinel, a snow-white heron stood on one leg, asleep, its head buried among the feathers of its back.

The little scene was so unexpected and so charming that, for a moment, Hardie stood gazing in wonder, scarcely daring to breathe. Some light sound or movement awakened the bird, who extended his long neck and looked at him with a bright incurious eye. Recollecting himself, Hardie was about to retrace his steps, softly and reluctantly, when the girl stirred and opened her eyes. She looked at him for a moment as though not realizing that he was there; then got to her feet with swift, easy grace. Her brown eyes were still misty with sleep, and there was a half-surprised, half-startled expression in them as she stood facing the intruder.

“I’m sorry,” he said, with some embarrassment. “I’d no idea there was anyone here.”

She threw back her short curly hair and brushed the sand from her frock and her bare legs, glancing at the sun as she did so.

“What a time to be asleep,” she said, with a faint smile—“in the middle of the morning! I was up very early, fishing.”

She pronounced the English words with a slight accent very pleasing to Hardie’s ear.

“I see that you were,” he replied. “You’ve had good luck. I didn’t mean to disturb you. I came down the lagoon from Tautira. This little island looked so pretty that I couldn’t resist coming ashore.”

“Were you coming to our house?”

“I meant to go along the cliffs of the Pari. Do you live on the point there, at

the entrance to the valley?”

She nodded.

“Then you must be Naia?”

She nodded again. “And you’re George McLeod, aren’t you?”

“No; but I’m his friend. My name is Alan Hardie. I came down here with George a few days ago, but I didn’t meet your mother. I walked back to Tautira along the beach.”

“My mother told me he came. I didn’t see him. Why did he go so soon?”

“I don’t know, exactly. I suppose he wanted to reach Tautira before dark.”

“My mother said he wouldn’t come again. Is that true?”

“Well, yes—that is, I think so. He returned to Papeete several days ago.”

“Doesn’t he like this part of the island?”

“Not as well as Papeete.”

“That is strange. Which do you like better?”

“This, a thousand times better! I’m staying on at Tautira.”

The heron approached the girl with mincing, deliberate steps and Naia caressed his head absently.

“I saw your bird the other day when I came down with George,” Hardie remarked. “The moment he spied us he took to his wings. He seems a bit more friendly, with you here.”

“I’ve had him ever since he came out of the egg.”

“Are they hard to tame?”

“This one wasn’t. He follows me everywhere. I’ve a pet frigate bird, too, and a pair of *itatae*.”

“What are they?”

“The *itatae*? You call them ghost terns, in English.”

“Oh, the white ones?”

“Yes. Look—those are mine, but they won’t come down while you are here.”

“I don’t see them.”

“You don’t! There.”

“Oh, yes. I believe I do, now. They’re hard to make out against the sky.”

“You think so? But they’re lovely against it, aren’t they? Or the blue sea.”

“Is that why you choose snow-white pets?”

“Partly. But my frigate bird is black, of course. . . . I must take my fish home. Do you really want to go on to the Pari?”

“Not particularly.”

“Then if you’ll come to the house I’ll get you some lunch. It’s time, and you must be hungry. Didn’t you mean to come to see us at all?”

“Why, yes, I suppose so . . . but, of course, your mother doesn’t know me . . .”

“But you must have known that your friend, George, would speak to her about you? She was very sorry he had to go so soon. I feel that I know him, a little. I’ve helped my grandfather take care of his parents’ graves. We’d better go now.”

“You’re sure your mother won’t mind my coming unexpectedly?”

“She wouldn’t, if she were at home. She’s gone to Moorea, but my grandfather will make you welcome.”

“I’ll come with pleasure, then,” said Hardie.

He untied the heavy string of fish and carried it to the canoe, which he helped her to launch. She pushed it across the shallows, stepped in, and took up her paddle. “Where’s your canoe?”

“On the other side of the islet,” Hardie replied.

“Follow me, then,” she said.

As the canoe glided away, the heron sprang into the air to overtake his mistress with slow wing beats, his long legs trailing behind him awkwardly. Hardie stood for a moment looking after them. A striking picture they made, he thought: the girl in her blue frock, her hair blown about her shoulders as she dipped her blade in water ruffled to the deepest azure by the breeze, and the bird circling about just over her head. And in the background stretched the valley of Vaihiva with the shadow of a cloud—dazzling in the purity of its whiteness against the sky—moving slowly across it.

Hardie crossed the islet to where his canoe lay, got up the anchor, and had nearly overtaken Naia when she entered the river. They moored their little vessels to the pier he had seen before and she led the way to the house.

“Come round to the back,” she said. “I want to leave my fish in the kitchen.”

“That’s what George and I did the other day,” said Hardie. “There was no one here when we first came.”

“And you hurried away before anyone did come,” Naia added. “And then George went, as soon as he could, before I had a chance to see him.”

“It did look as though we were in a great hurry,” Hardie replied. “But we didn’t mean to be.”

A stalwart, middle-aged woman met them at the door of the kitchen. Naia spoke to her in the native tongue, while the woman regarded Hardie with friendly interest. “This is Teina,” Naia said. “She lives two miles up the valley. She remembers George very well. He used to play with her children.” Hardie took her hand with a word of greeting. “Now we will go to see Raitua, my grandfather,” the girl added. “He has his own house across the point. I stay with him when my mother is away.”

A lone *tamanu* tree, gnarled by exposure to the gales of a century or more, shaded the old man’s cottage. Hardie was struck by the contrast between this

dwelling and Mauri's, but he remembered that the other had been built by Naia's white father. Both suited the landscape, but the grandfather's house was as native to it as the old tree that threw its dappled shade over the low thatched roof. A fishing net was hung up to dry on the beach; a canoe, beautifully made, was drawn up there, and on trestles by the canoe shed lay the trunk of a tree partly adzed out, with fragrant chips scattered thickly beneath the beginning of another. They found Raitua seated on the sand between two mighty roots of the *tamanu*, with his back to a comfortable depression in the trunk. He smiled at sight of them, rising slowly to take Hardie's hand, while Naia spoke rapidly to him in the island tongue. His benevolent glance appraised the Englishman's features, his stature, and the breadth of his shoulders, while Naia made her explanations. Then he spoke in his turn.

"My grandfather says you are welcome here," the girl interpreted. "He met George on the lagoon the other day."

"I know. George told me," Hardie replied. "He was sorry that he couldn't understand what your grandfather wanted to tell him."

"He was inviting him to stop with us for a while. He asks you, if you care to?"

Hardie's face lighted up. "I'd like to very much."

Naia turned again to her grandfather. "Then it's settled," she added, a moment later. "We'll send someone to Tautira to fetch your things."

Hardie was as surprised as he was pleased at this unexpected invitation, offered so simply and with such evident sincerity. "I'd never hoped for such luck as this," he said. "You're sure I shan't be putting you out?"

"No. All of our house shall be yours. My mother will be glad when she knows you've come."

Hardie felt slightly troubled, remembering what McLeod had said of the coolness of Mauri's welcome to him. But Naia spoke of her mother with such quiet assurance that he thought it more than likely that McLeod had been mistaken in this matter. "Then I'll stop with pleasure," he said. "Oh . . . my canoe. It belongs to Fara, in Tautira. I'll have to take it back."

"The man who goes for your things can sail it up, with his own canoe behind," Naia said. "I'm glad you will stay. Now I will go and see about your lunch. Wait here, if you like," she added, smiling with a glint of mischief in her eye. "You can have a silent chat with my grandfather."

CHAPTER VI

Hardie awoke early the following morning, and went out, barefoot, to the front verandah. He stood by the railing, gazing out at the bright, wind-ruffled lagoon, the green islet near the passage, and the sea beyond, blue and flecked with whitecaps. He walked to the end of the verandah, where he had a view up the valley. Far above him the weathered peaks of the mountains were clothed in mist, dense masses of vapor dissolving to transparent veils through which he could see, dimly, mountains yet higher and farther away. The aspect of the scene altered from moment to moment in the light of early morning. This was a landscape unlike any he had known, but too strange, too melancholy, he thought, to be lived with for long. He had a sudden momentary homesickness for Devonshire. That friendly countryside seemed to belong to another planet.

He looked about him with interest, getting his bearings anew, for his sense of direction had been confused by the change in the configuration of the coast. Then the broad clear river flowing smoothly seaward not fifty yards away offered an invitation not to be resisted. He returned to his room, put on a *pareu*, and went out for a bath. He swam upstream for a quarter of a mile, conscious of a feeling of deep happiness, such as he had often felt in boyhood at the prospect of some wished-for event. He tried to persuade himself that this was merely the result of physical well-being: the healthy, lazy, open-air life he had been living was beginning to have its wholesome effect. He was surprised to find that the thought of Naia intruded, and realized that, for the first time in his life, a girl had become something more than a figure dimly seen in the background. “It’s because I’ve been letting my mind lie fallow,” he thought; “and a good thing, too. I feel wonderfully refreshed even after this brief time. I shall be able to work twice as hard when I’m at home again.”

When he came up from the river he found a table laid for breakfast on the verandah and Naia sitting at the top of the steps awaiting him.

“You’re very lazy,” she said, regarding him gravely. “Do you always sleep so late?”

“Late! At home I’d have slept a full two hours longer! What do you consider a proper time for getting up?”

“When the light first comes. It is the best of the day. You’ll be doing it too, in a little while. Now I will get your coffee while you dress.”

Hardie glanced at the table, which was laid for one. “But what of yourself and your grandfather?” he asked.

She shook her head. “We’ve finished. Grandfather has his coffee at his own place. He’s gone down the coast for shellfish.”

Hardie shaved and dressed hurriedly, then went along the passageway to the kitchen, where he found the girl seated on a low stool, grating the half of a coconut into a basin.

"Can I help?" he asked.

She rose from the stool, giving him the half-grated nut. Hardie seated himself astraddle on the stool and held the nut firmly. He set to work vigorously, putting his strength in it, so that the meat came away from the shell in thick chunks. Naia watched him for a moment, then broke into a laugh. "Enough," she said. "What hard work you make of an easy task! Here, let me. You are no good at such things."

"Wait, I'll soon get the hang of it," Hardie replied; but after trying various ways of holding the nut and of moving it on the grater, he shook his head and rose from the stool. "It looks so simple, the way you do it," he said.

"And so it is," the girl replied. "You see? Like this"—and turning the nut swiftly she grated it at the same time, the shredded meat falling in a shower of snowy flakes. A moment later she tossed the emptied shell into a basket. Then she turned the heap of flakes into a cloth, caught up the corners, making a bag of it, and squeezed the milky juice into a pitcher.

"There's the cream for your coffee," she said. "Do you like it? You must have tried it before now at Fara's house."

"Very much," Hardie replied. "I've never tasted such coffee as you have here on Tahiti."

"Why should it be better than coffee in your own land?"

"I don't know, unless it's because of the way you roast it, in small quantities, just as it's wanted."

"Of course. How else should it be roasted? But that's not everything. You must know how to make it, too."

Hardie attacked his breakfast with appetite, while Naia perched on the verandah railing. He liked the girl's simple manner that had in it not a hint of coquetry, and felt completely at ease with her. She had what he considered a rare quality in a girl—the ability to sit quietly, without speech when there was no occasion for speech. Silence, he felt, was an important part of any real companionship, perhaps the best part. Naia had the gift for it, and he felt certain that it was not the silence of a vacant mind.

"You speak English well," he said, presently.

Naia turned her head. "My father taught me."

"I know; but you told me that he died when you were ten. How old are you now?"

"Sixteen."

"You can't have had much occasion to speak English since then?"

"Mother and I often do, and I speak it with Mr. Tyson whenever he comes.

And one doesn't forget what was learned as a child."

"That's true. A good thing for me you haven't. I wish I could talk to your grandfather."

"He likes you," Naia said. "He hasn't told me so, but I can see it. I was surprised that he invited you to stay with us. Nothing like that has happened before."

"I suppose it was because of his meeting George McLeod. Your mother may have told him that George's father and mine were great friends."

"Yes, he knew that."

"It's strange, my coming here, to the place where my father's best friend is buried."

"Why is it strange? You were meant to come."

"Do you believe in things happening so?"

"Of course. Don't you?"

"Who could have meant me to come?"

"George's father. Mother said you were named for him."

Hardie was conscious of a shock of surprise at Naia's quiet, confident manner of speaking of the dead as though they were still conscious beings, concerned with what took place among the living. But this would be natural enough, he thought, in a half-native girl, reared and instructed by a Polynesian mother. He made an evasive reply, and was interested to see how Naia, having stated what she considered a simple fact, let the matter drop as though there were nothing more to be said.

She sat with her head turned, gazing over the forests toward the mountains, whose narrow canyons were filled with blue shadow. The veils of mist had vanished, now that the sun was well up, and the peaks stood out clearly against the sky.

"Would you like to go into the valley?" she asked, presently. "It will be a fine day. We don't have many like this."

"It's what I was going to suggest," said Hardie, rising with alacrity.

"I'll feed my fowls first," said Naia. "Come too, it is on our way."

Hardie followed her to a thatched hut not far from the house. It was open at the sides, scarcely more than a roof, in fact, supported on posts of *tamanu* wood with a floor of freshly strewn sand. In the centre was the native oven with its heap of volcanic stones beside it, used in preparing food in the island fashion. On a table was a basin piled high with grated coconut, which the girl took up. The fowls came running from all sides at her call, "*Pe-é, pe-é, pe-é,*" and flocked around her as she scattered the grated coconut on the ground.

"I've not seen any Tahiti fowls in pens," Hardie said. "Do they all run wild?"

"Yes, we never keep them in pens," Naia said. "They are much healthier

so.”

“But don’t you have trouble in finding their eggs?”

“Not at all; and it’s fun looking for them. . . . *Aué!* I forgot Tutu! I must tie him up or he’ll follow us.”

A little black pig came scampering toward her with grunts of pleasure. She stooped, talking to him and caressing him as though he had been a kitten, feeding him with grated coconut out of her hand.

“That’s another pet, evidently,” said Hardie.

“I must always have one little pig,” Naia replied. “But they grow so fast. They have more intelligence than most animals. . . . Tutu, you can’t go. It would be too far.”

She tethered him with a strip of bark to one of the posts of the outdoor kitchen, and when she had placed food and water within easy reach they proceeded on their way. The path followed the river for the most part, winding amongst magnificent trees whose branches met those of the trees on the farther side of the stream. At a distance of forty or fifty yards from its banks, the natural forests gave way to groves of coconut palms, although many giant trees, *purau*, *mapé*, and *hotu*, were scattered through the plantations as well. When they had gone some little distance, Naia halted for a moment.

“Does it please you, this valley?” she asked.

“Very much,” Hardie replied. “Shall I tell you what I like best in it? These groves of coconut palms. Who planted them—your family?”

“Yes. The valley has belonged to us, I don’t know how many generations. We have land on other islands, too. Raitua, my grandfather, was born at Hao, in the Low Islands, and he has land there. When he was a young man he came to Tahiti on a voyage and married my grandmother, who owned this valley. It was wild land then, and no one lived here. When my mother married, she and my father came here to live. It was they who cleared this part and planted most of the palms.”

“Your father was an American, wasn’t he?”

“Yes; he came from Boston. He used to tell me about his home there; but he loved the islands more than his own land, and so he stayed.”

“Did he never go back to Boston?”

“Never. He told me that he would take me sometime, when I was older. But when I was ten, he was drowned going across the reef of one of the Low Islands. Their boat capsized in the surf. My father and two other men lost their lives. . . . You really like this planted part best?”

“Yes. I like to see order.”

“My father was like that. He used to talk about conquering the forests. He meant to clear and plant all this valley. I’m glad it wasn’t done.”

“You like the wild land best?”

“Much the best. Wait till you see it. The plantation is only a small part, about one hundred hectares. Shall we go on now?”

“But who does all the work here?” Hardie asked as they walked along.

“There are three families beside ourselves,” Naia replied—“Manu and his two married sons. Manu is my mother’s uncle. It was his daughter-in-law, Teina, that you saw at our house. We will soon come to where they live.”

The path now left the riverbank and turned to cross a low spur that descended in a gradual slope from the mountain wall on the far side of the valley. When they reached the summit, Hardie saw an open glade spread out below them, where the main river was joined by a smaller stream that came foaming down a narrow valley on the right. On the tract of land at their juncture were three thatched houses that stood well clear of the forests. Scattered over this broad sunny slope were breadfruit and orange trees growing as nature would have them, to their full height, and laden with fruit. A little beyond, the river, making a bend, entered a deep gorge and was lost to view, but below the bank on which the houses stood it flowed quietly, along a rampart of enormous black stones so well fitted together that they seemed to have been cut for the purpose. From deep within the gorge, the sound deadened by its walls, came the roar of falling water.

“It would be worth a journey all the way from England to see such a spot,” Hardie remarked.

“It is beautiful,” Naia said. “I often come here. But you see it at its best now. It often rains here when the coastal land is in full sunlight.”

“Is this the end of the plantations?”

“Yes. Now come the wild lands.”

Hardie threw back his head to gaze up a sheer wall of moss-covered rock. “But where are they?” he asked.

“Beyond that wall. Come, I’ll show you. It isn’t a hard climb.”

They descended the spur and crossed the sunny point where the houses stood. The place seemed deserted, but when Naia called there was an answering call from close by. An old woman was seated in the dooryard by one of the houses with a heap of pandanus leaves beside her. These she was stripping into long slender ribbons, for hat making. Two children playing near by looked up with startled glances as Hardie appeared, and dashed away like small frightened animals, vanishing so quickly that he had scarcely a glimpse of them.

Naia laughed and called after them, but they didn’t appear again. “What an awful-looking man you must seem to children to scare them so,” she said. “Do they all run from you like that?”

Hardie smiled. “Not always. I didn’t know I was such a terror.”

“Don’t be troubled,” said Naia. “They’re wild little things and almost never

see a strange face. This is Manu's wife, the children's grandmother. Mama Tu, we call her."

She stooped and kissed the old woman lightly, on either cheek. Hardie looked on as they spoke together, thinking that he had never seen a more striking picture of youth and age than those two made. The old woman had the dark eyes, the soft voice, and the gentle manners of her race, and on her face was the look of peace, of contentment, that one sees on the faces of those in lands where Nature is a kindly nurse and mother to all of her children. When the talking was finished she rose and took Hardie's hand between her own, patting it as she smiled up at him.

"I've told her who you are," said Naia. "She hopes that you will come often into the valley."

She then preceded him along a path that crossed the mountain stream and entered the ravine to the right. "We will go this way," she said, "to pass around the great wall there before us."

When they had climbed for half an hour, Hardie was forced to halt. "Wait, Naia," he said, breathing heavily. "Is this what you call an easy climb?"

The girl perched on the root of a tree above him and looked down with a disdainful smile.

"Yes," she said. "And you are a man, a young man! Aren't you ashamed to be tired so soon? There must be mountains in your own land. Do you never climb them?"

"I used to, often, but they are a different sort of mountains."

"How different? Easier to climb, you mean?"

"Some of them are harder, much harder."

"Well, then?"

Hardie felt irritated at the girl's mocking persistence and, at the same time, ashamed to find himself so out of condition. "Go on," he said, brusquely. "Let's get up and then talk."

"You'd better rest for a while longer, don't you think?" She was perched almost directly over him and peered down through the foliage.

Hardie smiled, feeling his irritation vanish. "You wait, Naia," he said. "I'll soon be better at this than you are. Those little bare feet of yours are worth two pairs of hands."

"I always take off my slippers for this part," she replied. "You should learn to go barefoot; you'd know, then, what your toes are for."

She went on, climbing swiftly, easily, zigzagging up a wall that seemed to Hardie all but perpendicular. Nevertheless, trees of a considerable size grew there, the gnarled and twisted roots reaching out in all directions to find support. Hardie had no chance to look about him as he climbed; he was forced to give all his attention to the selection of secure hand- and footholds. After

another quarter of an hour of steady mounting he came to a cleft in the rock filled with masses of moss-covered stones which made a kind of rude staircase. He climbed this slowly and a few moments later found himself at the very summit of the wall he had viewed from below. There was a place half a dozen yards in extent where the rock was almost as level as a floor. Here the river plunged smoothly over the precipice in a sheer fall of four or five hundred feet into the gorge below.

All the lower valley was spread out beneath them, and Hardie could see how small a part was occupied by the plantations. Turning to gaze inland, he drew in his breath sharply at the sombre beauty of the scene. He now had the whole extent of the valley within view, and saw that it descended to the sea in two gigantic terraces, about equal in extent. Some two miles farther on rose the head wall with a cleft near the centre of it where the river fell in another cascade that seemed even higher than the one below. This was the fall he had viewed from the house.

"Are you glad we came?" Naia asked.

Hardie nodded.

"But you don't like it. I can see that you don't."

"You're mistaken: I do. I've never seen a more beautiful place. But it has a savage, melancholy beauty. I'm . . . well, overawed by it. You don't come here often, do you?"

"Never a month passes that I don't come at least once if the weather will let me."

Hardie shook his head. "I shouldn't. Once is enough. I can't believe that people could ever be happy in a place like this."

"But they were," said Naia. "In the ancient days many people lived here, even in this upper valley."

"But how do you know they were happy?"

"I am. My blood is theirs, half of it at least. Perhaps it's because they are all gone, long ago, that makes the place seem sad to you."

"It might be that. What does Vaihiva mean?"

"The Dark River."

"That proves it. They must have felt about it as I do to give it such a name."

Naia sprang to her feet. "Come," she said; "you haven't seen this part. There's a good path and no more climbing."

The sun was now high overhead, filling the valley with light. Scarlet dragonflies darted about, skimming the surface of the river, and the occasional drone of insects impinged sharply on the ear: tiny meteors of sound that made silence seem the deeper. The path was an ancient one, in some places paved with smooth flat stones that looked as though they had been placed there

centuries before. Naia halted now and then to show him stone platforms where houses had once stood and walls along the banks of the river, like those he had seen below. There was evidence on every side that many people had once lived here, and Hardie tried to imagine the valley as it had been then, cleared of the dense jungle, paths leading off through groves of plantains and breadfruit trees to the houses on the higher slopes. The silence seemed all the more impressive and melancholy because of these many signs of the work of men's hands. Of a sudden it was broken by a clear unearthly call that seemed, at first, to come from every side at once, and then to die away among the farthermost recesses of the island.

Hardie stopped short. "What in the world was that?"

"Wait," she replied. She stood listening, and a moment later the cry was repeated. "Spirits of children of the ancient people have come back to play," she said, regarding him gravely. "I often hear them so. We may even be able to see some of them."

Hardie stared at her with so strange an expression that the girl laughed softly. "I could make you believe that—almost," she said.

"You could, Naia. Anything could seem possible here. I believed that you meant it."

"And so I did, a part of it. I was not wrong about there being children near by. But I can guess whose they are."

She waited, leaning back against the trunk of a huge tree, looking along the path they had come, and a moment later Hardie caught a glimpse of two small figures approaching them, chattering busily to each other; but the instant they caught sight of Hardie they vanished into the thickets. He recognized them as the children who had fled from him in the valley below. Naia called, and at last they reappeared, but would not approach until she went to fetch them, holding a hand of each.

"I'm very fond of these two," she said as she brought them forward. "I thought they would follow us."

"You don't tell me that they came up here alone?" Hardie asked.

"Of course, but not the way we came. There is a much easier path to this upper valley. We'll take it on our way down."

The children stood looking at him with shy glances, ready to bolt the moment Naia released their hands. They were a boy and a girl. The brother was dressed only in a wisp of cloth twisted about his middle. His sister, a year or two younger, had on a tattered frock fastened behind with a strip of bark in place of the missing button. Hardie knelt down and held out a hand to each, and after some urging they consented to approach him. Presently, at a word from Naia, they ran on ahead and were lost to view.

"It was they who called," said Naia. "There is a spot a little way down on

the path they came where the voice will carry to the far end of the valley and echo back three times. I often sit there calling to myself. The children love to do it."

The path led away from the river for a considerable distance, amongst groves of trees that looked as ancient as the land itself. So deep was their shade that nothing grew beneath them save a velvety moss that reflected a greenish light mingled with that from the vault of branches overhead. Then they came to open ground with the river before them once more, flowing deep and still and clear, a mirror for the sky. At the end of this open stretch was an enormous rock which all but blocked the channel, the stream flowing around it on either side in a series of small cascades. High up on it they saw the two children, their figures dwarfed to elflike stature against the mountains beyond. When Naia called, they leaped from the rock, far out, their hands clasped around their knees, into the still water below.

Naia turned to Hardie. "And you think it a sad place?" she said. "Look at those two in the water. Imagine what it was here when that great rock was crowded with children, leaping off one after the other."

"I've never seen such a pool," Hardie replied warmly; "but I don't mean to let the youngsters have it to themselves."

"Nor I," said Naia. "Let's see who will be in first."

She stepped behind a screen of bushes to change to her *pareu*, and when Hardie was ready he found her racing before him toward the boulder with the children, who were ready for another plunge. Following them behind the rock, he saw that the other face of it sloped gently up. It was plainly footworn, and at the summit, on the side next the pool, was another slight depression where countless generations of children had stood for a moment before leaping out to meet their own reflections in a shower of silvery spray. More than anything else he had seen, this huge footworn rock gave Hardie a sense of the antiquity of the Polynesian race. How many centuries had it taken for bare feet to leave those unmistakable traces? He seated himself at the summit of the rock, lost in reverie until Naia aroused him. Her wet *pareu* was clinging to her slim body like another skin. "I can guess what you are thinking," she said. "But they're gone, all those others. It will only make you sad to think of them. It's our turn now. We must be happy in their places."

Hardie watched as she dived once more, swimming far down the pool close to the sandy bottom before she rose to the surface again. He plunged in after her.

It was late afternoon when they started homeward. The children, now quite at ease in Hardie's presence, ran on before them, darting into the thickets and reappearing far beyond. The path for the homeward journey followed a heavily

wooded spur on the far side of the river that descended in a gradual slope to the lower valley. Before they commenced the descent Naia halted at an overhanging rock that emerged clear of the forests and gave a view up the entire extent of the valley.

"This is the place where the children called," she said. "Listen."

She turned to face the great rocky walls, now in deep shadow, that rose above them far inland, and gave a clear high call. A moment later came the response, echoed and reechoed at distances that seemed infinitely remote. It was as though some lonely spirit, dwelling in those solitudes, had given a voice to silence itself, and were being answered by others, hidden in the deep glens and gorges, in etherialized cries of half-mournful ecstasy.

"Call again," Hardie urged. "I've never heard anything so beautiful!"

Naia repeated the call, in a different manner this time, and they listened until the farthest echo had died away. Then Hardie was about to call, but the girl laid her fingers lightly over his lips.

"No, don't," she said.

"Why not?"

"There's an old saying about this place. My grandfather told me. Let me see if I can tell you, in English. . . . This would be it, very nearly: 'Who calls here will stay here.' "

"Will stay here?"

"Yes; in this valley. Whoever calls leaves a part of himself, something of his spirit that will always draw him back."

"Do you believe it?"

"More than half I believe it. And it might well be so. Who can be sure about such things?"

Hardie smiled. "I'll risk it. I want to hear my own voice coming back." Cupping his lips with his hands, he shouted, "Good-bye!"

Naia looked at him soberly. "You heard?" she said. "It was like another voice mocking you."

"Naia, I think you do believe it," Hardie said. "Well, I must leave Tahiti before the month is out. It can mock as much as it likes till then."

CHAPTER VII

On days when the sky is deeply overcast, when clouds heavy with rain are swept landward by the trade wind and cling to the high slopes of the mountains, the valley of Vaihiva well justifies its name. Its gloom is that of neither night nor day. The green twilight of the land seems to rise and mingle with the gray of the sky to form a darkness peculiar to the place and confined there by the mountain walls that mark its boundaries. The silence, too, has a quality of its own. Rain squalls sweep down the valley, their coming announced by a faint roar, growing in volume, that mingles with the thunder of surf on the offshore reefs.

As one of these downpours lightened, Hardie saw Naia approaching under an umbrella, from her grandfather's house, with a parcel under her arm. She ran quickly up the steps and placed the parcel, carefully wrapped in a towel, on the table.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Your shirts and other things. Teina washed them and I've just finished ironing and folding them."

"I'd forgotten all about my washing. I've already strapped my bag."

"I suppose you could unstrap it again?"

"Yes, I suppose I could. . . . Naia, now that I'm ready to go I don't want to. Not in the least."

"Then why do it?" she asked, quietly.

"Would you like me to say?"

"Of course, and so would my grandfather. But we haven't urged you. You said that you wanted to visit the Leeward Islands."

"I know. I did want to, on George's account. He thinks we ought to see them before we sail, and there isn't much time."

"Did you write to him about coming out here?"

"Yes, but he's bound to go to Raiatea and Bora-Bora and the other places. I thought I wanted to see them, too, but . . . well, I seem to have changed my mind."

"What caused you to change it—the rain?"

"It might be that; it would be a miserable journey up the lagoon." He smiled. "Or it might be the echo in the upper valley. Perhaps I did leave a part of myself there that doesn't want me to go."

"You can't say that I didn't warn you."

"Naia, I'll stay, if you're sure . . ."

"Of course I'm sure. I was sad to think of your going so soon, and you may

never come back again." She took up his bag. "Unpack your things at once. But no—let me. There's another squall coming. Stay here and watch it."

She reappeared a few moments later. "It's done," she said. "Now you must stay. You can't change your mind twice in the same day."

"You don't suppose I would? I merely wanted to be sure of my welcome."

She smiled. "Have we been so cold to you, then, my grandfather and I? We haven't meant to be. I'm sorry if you think so."

"I don't! You know it! It's curious . . . You remember what I said about the valley the day I came? I thought it a melancholy place, and such a glorious day that was. I don't feel so now, and here it is, almost as dark as night and raining as though it would never stop. How do you account for that?"

"Vaihiva was strange to you at first. Now you're beginning to know it a little."

"And to know *you* a little. You must give yourself some credit."

She gave him a glance as frank and open as a boy's. "Shall I tell you what I was thinking a little while ago, when I was ironing your shirts? I was thinking that we were born to be friends. Perhaps we were. My grandfather believes it."

"Why? Because of the McLeods?"

"Yes. You are Mr. McLeod's godson. Grandfather says you were certain to have come here, sooner or later."

"Has he told you much about the McLeods?" Hardie asked.

"Yes. We often talk of them. Grandfather never forgets people or anything about them. That's why I feel that I know them."

"And I know almost nothing of either of them."

"But your father must have told you?"

"A little. No doubt he would have told more if I had asked. Naturally, I was not very curious about a godfather I'd never seen."

"Alan!"

"What is it?"

"Come to my father's room. I've something to show you."

Hardie followed her to the room next to his own, where she searched in various drawers of a desk by the window.

"What are you looking for?" he said.

"For the key to that box," she replied, nodding toward a small camphorwood chest that stood against a wall. "It belonged to the McLeods."

"What's in it?"

"Books, mostly. After Mrs. McLeod's death, Mr. Tyson came out to take charge of their property. It was sent back to England, but this box, Mr. Tyson said, might as well be left, and here it has been, all these years."

"I'd like to see the books," Hardie said. "You have, of course?"

Naia shook her head. "I've read all of my father's but none of these. I

didn't feel that I had the right."

"That's nonsense. Why shouldn't you read them? Did your mother forbid you?"

"No, but I think that she feels as I do about them. I've looked inside the box. It was a long time ago. But it's something else I want to show you. I've just remembered about it."

She knelt in front of the chest and inserted the key. As she raised the lid, the musty fragrance of old volumes, mingled with that of camphorwood, rose from the chest and seemed to fill the room. Lying on top of the books was a large manila envelope. The girl drew forth a photograph, examined it for a moment, and passed it to Hardie. It was one of himself, as a child of four or five, standing beside his father. Beneath it was written: "For Alan's godfather, from his friend, George Hardie."

Naia sat back on her heels, looking up at him. "It's you," she said.

Hardie went to the window, examining the photograph minutely in the dim light. "My father must have forgotten, long since, that there was such a photograph," he said. "Isn't it strange that I should have first seen it here, so far from home?"

"You've never seen it before?"

"Never." He knelt beside the girl. "I'd like to see the books. There can be no harm in that."

She sat with her hands clasped around her knees while Hardie took up several volumes, examining the titles, and glancing at pages here and there. "Most of these seem to have been Mr. McLeod's books," he said. "*Lord Jim*, *Victory*, *Under Western Eyes*—he was a great lover of Conrad, evidently."

"Who was Conrad?"

"An English writer; or, rather, a Pole. You wouldn't care for him, perhaps. *Wuthering Heights*; *The Story of an African Farm.* Those two must have belonged to Mrs. McLeod. You'd like them, Naia. Be sure and read them sometime. . . . What's this?"

He took up a small volume in red covers with the numeral "1919" stamped upon it, and glanced through half a dozen pages. "You've not seen this?"

She shook her head. "What is it?"

"A journal—Mrs. McLeod's. By Jove, this *is* interesting!" A moment later he closed the covers reluctantly. "I don't think we've the right to look at it."

"You mean it's about their life here?" the girl asked, eagerly. "Why shouldn't we? I would have if I'd known it was here."

"You have a strange kind of delicacy. This journal is a much more personal thing than the printed books, and yet you wouldn't look at those!"

"But don't you see the difference?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

“But Mrs. McLeod wrote the journal. She must have wanted someone to read it. Perhaps it was for the little daughter when she had grown up. She would have wanted it to be read, Alan—I’m certain of it. Any woman would. Don’t you want to know about your godparents?”

“Yes, but . . .”

“Then say no more, but read it. We can soon tell if she meant it to be secret.”

“Wouldn’t George be interested to see this!” Hardie replied, musingly. “He’s the man to read it.”

“But supposing it’s very sad?” Naia said. “About his father’s death, and all that? If it is, he mightn’t want to see it.”

“Yes, that’s so,” said Hardie. He hesitated. “Well, we’ll do it. I’ll read a little, anyway.”

“Sit there by the window. The light is better.”

Naia waited in silence while he turned the pages. “It’s all right,” he said, a moment later. “I see nothing that she wouldn’t have wanted us to know. It begins with their leaving England, but I’ll read the Tahiti part.”

June 16th, 1919

> The house is finished, and to-morrow we shall move in. Alan and I planned it together, but we could have done nothing without Mauri and Raitua. All Mauri’s people have helped: Manu and his wife, and their sons and daughters—even the children. The women plaited the palm fronds for thatch and split bamboo for the walls, and the men have brought the timbers from up the valley. The corner posts and rafters are all of *tamanu* wood, the bark taken off and the wood smoothed but left in its natural state, with the gnarled joints where the limbs were. It has something of the color of mahogany, and nothing could be more beautiful or fitting for a Tahitian house. How quickly all this has been done! A fortnight ago the point across the river was wild land—a thick jungle of trees and vines and bush. It has now been cleared, leaving only the great trees to shade the ground which will soon be green with grass. And beneath them stands the perfect little house with its views to seaward and up the valley. Our house—Alan’s and mine! Dear heaven, grant him health to enjoy it! And don’t let it rain to-morrow!

“It’s as though she were speaking with us,” Naia said. “She wouldn’t have minded our reading this. Go on.”

July 3rd, 1919

A splendid day for Alan, the best he has had in three weeks. We walked along the beach for half a mile. This afternoon we paddled up the river in one of Raitua's canoes and drifted down with the current. We were carried out of the river, across the lagoon, past the little island on the reef, through the passage and into the open sea, without having to use our paddles except for steering. Mauri says there is always this current, and we discovered it for ourselves. The sea was so calm that we paddled along outside the reef for a mile or more before we turned to come home. Alan and I have been almost too happy to-day. After supper we sat on the beach at the end of the point and watched the light fade and the moon rise. He's in bed now, having such a refreshing sleep. This may be the turning point we have waited for so long. It must come! It must and will come!

July 16th, 1919

Mauri has been with me all this week. We take turns in nursing Alan. His suffering during these coughing spells is almost more than I can bear, and I can do nothing, nothing. God may forgive the monsters who invented poison gas, but never shall I—never, never! To-day I saw a look of hopelessness in Alan's eyes. He tried to hide it from me, but I saw it.

July 29th, 1919

Thayer, Mauri's husband, is here. He has come from Moorea where Mauri has land that Thayer has been clearing and planting. Mauri brought him over to see us the moment he arrived, and later we had dinner with them. It was one of Alan's good days, and a merry party we were. Alan and Thayer liked each other at sight. He is a big man, intelligent, wholesome, and with Alan's high spirits. We were like a party of children rather than sober married folk. I like Thayer as much as Alan does. He seems to have all the good qualities, but what pleases me most is his devotion to Mauri. He has only learned, since he came home, that Mauri is to have a baby, and I have never seen a prospective father so delighted with the news. Then Mauri told him about me. Our babies will come, as nearly as we can tell, almost at the same time, in February. Nothing would do but Thayer must bring out a bottle of champagne to drink to the health of the coming children. The men want sons, but Mauri and I drank to our daughters.

August 15th, 1919

Another splendid day for Alan. He went with Thayer into the valley and walked as far as the first waterfall. Poor Alan! He loves rock climbing and did a great deal of it in England. And now he must be content to look at these mountain walls from below. Mauri and I spent the afternoon together in my garden. Mauri says that I must have Polynesian blood in my veins to love Tahiti so much. Now that I am so burned by the sun, I might almost pass for an islander. Mauri is the best of companions. What a comfort it is to have her near by! I could scarcely be fonder of her if she were my own flesh and blood. She has great dignity and force of character and comes from one of the oldest families on this part of the island.

September 18th, 1919

I must face the truth. Alan is dying. For the past fortnight he has suffered beyond what I would have believed it possible for anyone to suffer and live. The little strength, so carefully built up from day to day, has gone. Only his unconquerable spirit keeps him alive—that and our love for each other. . . .

Hardie broke off. "I will read no more of that day," he said.

Naia nodded, without speaking. Her eyes glistened with tears. Hardie cleared his throat, turned the pages slowly, and resumed.

September 26th, 1919

Thayer came to bid us good-bye. He is leaving for Hao, in the Low Islands, to be gone four months. . . .

Naia interrupted the reading. "I've been there, Alan," she said. "I used to go with my father. I wish you could see Hao; it's a beautiful place, five hundred miles from Tahiti, with a great lagoon inside the land. Go on—what else does she say of my father?"

Alan and he spent the afternoon together. I sat with them, my heart filled with bitterness at the contrast between them: Thayer so brown and strong, so full of life and energy, and my beloved husband like a ghost beside him. I was ashamed of my bitter thoughts, for no one could be kinder than Thayer has been. I am certain that he would gladly share his health with Alan if he could. . . .

"He would have," Naia put in, eagerly. "My father was like that. He was

always helping others. Poor Mrs. McLeod! I can understand how she felt on that day. What was it about poison gas? Was that what caused her husband's illness?"

"Yes," said Hardie; "it was a kind of gas used in the war. Thousands of soldiers were killed by it, but sometimes they would live for a year or two after they'd breathed it."

"Read about the happy days," said Naia. "Leave out the others. I can't bear to think of them."

"There don't seem to have been many. She was a brave woman, Naia. She made the most of what happiness they could find. . . . Here's one, I think."

October 11th, 1919

Alan is unbelievably better. He has had only one coughing fit since Monday and that a light one. I almost dare to hope again. I must and I will! Mr. Tyson came out on Tuesday, bringing our letters from the last mail boat. Scarcely a week has passed that he has not come, busy man that he is, and it is a long hard journey by sea. His visits do Alan more good than all the doctors. When he had gone I read our letters aloud. There was one from George Hardie, enclosing a photograph of himself and his young son, the same age as our small boy.

Hardie turned the page. "I'll skip the rest of that," he said.

"No you won't!" said Naia.

"It's nothing, really. It merely tells about the photograph."

"I want to know what she says about it. Begin where you left off and read it through!"

. . . the same age as our small boy. He was named for Alan, who is keenly interested in his godson. We have talked of him and his father all the evening, passing the photograph back and forth. If the coming baby is a daughter, Alan says she must marry this lad. They will be just of an age for one another. It really isn't so impossible. What could please the parents of both sides more than such a match? How strange it would be if it should come to pass! And why should it not? However, I shan't begin scheming until I'm sure of the sex of my infant.

"It might have happened," Naia said, musingly. "It might well have happened if she and her baby had lived. She would have been just my age. Her mother would have taken her to England and you would have known her

there.”

Hardie grunted. “And you think we must have fallen in love because our parents wanted us to? That doesn’t follow. More than likely, we’d have hated the sight of each other.”

“Who can say? . . . *Tirara*! It didn’t happen. Read further, Alan.”

October 16th, 1919

Four months ago to-day we moved into our house at Vaihiva. During these months Alan and I have had twelve happy days. I have counted them to make certain, and only the days when we forgot everything but our happiness. Alan has the faculty for living in the moment. I think he must have been born with it, and I have learned from him what a precious gift it is. Here, in the shadow of death, we have had twelve happy days. This much solid gain can never be taken away from us. We have it forever!

October 29th, 1919

Mr. Tyson came again to-day, bringing Dr. Cassiau with him. After the doctor had examined Alan he walked with me on the beach. I asked for the truth, which he gave me. There is no hope. Alan cannot survive until Christmas, he thinks. Dear God, let him live to see his child! Surely, that may be granted! It is so little to ask.

November 18th, 1919

Alan is gone. He died a week ago, on the eleventh—Armistice Day. There is bitterness enough in that. I have one thing to be thankful for: he died without pain, holding my hand. I would not have him back if I could. Now I must live for my darling son and the baby to come. I shall wait here for the baby. After that, I don’t know.

Hardie closed the book. “It’s the last entry,” he said. “Do you suppose your mother has seen this?”

The girl shook her head. “She would have spoken of it. I shan’t tell her about it. It would only make her sad. You must take it, Alan.”

“For George?”

“Yes. You could tell him about it first. I see now that he should have it to read if he wants to.”

“You’re right—he should. And these books.”

She nodded. “You can take the chest when you go,” she said.

They returned the books to the chest; Naia locked it and placed the key in the desk again. She stood by the window for a moment. “The sky is clearing,”

she said. “Let’s go for a swim.”

When he had changed to his swimming trunks, Hardie joined Naia on the pier.

“I was thinking about the current that Mrs. McLeod mentioned,” he said. “Does it run out the pass all the time?”

“Yes, except for a few minutes at midday when the tide is full. Even then there is a little current. It’s because of the river, and the sea pouring over the reefs. There is only this one opening for it to go through.”

“Let’s try it. We might swim to the islet and back. . . . But I forgot: what about sharks?”

“You see them, sometimes. We’d better take the canoe with us; but there is no danger until we’re close to the passage.”

Hardie dived in and Naia followed with the canoe. “Don’t swim for a little—float,” she said. “Even from here, with the river helping, the current will carry you around the north end of the islet and straight for the pass. You could do it with your eyes shut.”

Hardie lay motionless on the water, face down, watching the coral mushrooms two or three fathoms below moving slowly beneath him, and the small gayly colored fish darting for shelter amongst them. He turned on his back.

“It’s glorious!” he said. “What a perfect swimming place for a lazy man! You’re right about the current. We’re moving along at a good rate. . . . What are you thinking about, Naia?”

“I wish we hadn’t read it. It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have urged you to.”

“The journal? Don’t think of it,” Hardie replied. “All that was long ago.”

“I know . . . but it was so real. I never felt sad about them before, but I do now. They must have done just what we are doing—many times. How lonely she must have been when he was gone! All those months . . .”

“*Tirara!* Is that what you say in Tahitian? It means ‘enough,’ doesn’t it?”

Naia smiled sadly.

“She wouldn’t want you to mourn for her. Look, Naia, at that shaft of sunlight falling straight on the islet! Come along! Give me a little start and I’ll race you to it.”

CHAPTER VIII

A fortnight after his arrival at Vaihiva, Hardie set out with Naia for an excursion, by canoe, along the cliffs of the Pari, the farthermost coast of the Taiarapu Peninsula. The sun was rising as they left the river and headed south, along the lagoon.

"How far is it to where we're going?" Hardie asked.

"An hour, perhaps."

They passed the islet by Vaihiva Passage, skirted the reef which extended for some distance south of it, and began to rise and fall on the swell of the open Pacific. Ahead of them, on the right hand, the sea broke heavily at the base of tall green cliffs, and a mile offshore the waves reared and feathered over a maze of coral banks. Naia pointed to the broken water.

"Never go there, Alan, without someone who knows the place. I'm glad I stopped you from going alone the day we first met on the islet."

"I can handle a canoe," he replied.

"It doesn't matter how well you handle it. Unless you know those sunken reefs you'd capsize in a minute, and the place is full of sharks. You'd never see land again. You must keep well inside, as we're doing. Look: there's Vairupé! Steer in a bit more, now."

Hardie altered their course for the mouth of a gorge about a mile distant, admiring the beauty of this savage stretch of coast. The sea and the cliffs along shore lay in full sunlight, but the mountains of the interior were concealed beneath their perpetual mantle of rain. As they approached he saw that the valley terminated in a narrow cove, walled in by cliffs, where the sea rose and fell, almost without breaking, against a steep black beach. As they entered the cove the girl motioned him to back water and turned her head to watch the following waves. "Now!" she said. "Paddle hard!" The canoe sped forward, rising swiftly as the swell passed under them. They sprang out as it grounded, holding it as the sea poured back down the steep incline with a prolonged hollow knocking of cobblestones.

"You timed that well, Naia," Hardie said.

It was a lonely and savage place. A brook flowed swiftly down its stony bed, spreading, close to the beach, in a still deep pool which swarmed with crayfish and bright speckled *nato*, resembling trout. A stone wall, green with age and perpetual dampness, kept the stream within bounds on one side. On the other it was overarched by the branches of enormous *mapé* trees with flanged roots that seemed to be in motion, writhing over the dank soil.

"People used to live here," Naia said. "They would come for refuge, my

grandfather says, when their tribes had been conquered and most of the men killed in battle or sacrificed to the war god. There's a wall farther up where a few men could hold Vairupé against an army."

"It's an uncanny place," Hardie remarked.

"I don't like it," said Naia, "but it's one of the best along the coast for mullet. We'll catch some and go on."

With her casting net in hand, she led the way around the south side of the cove, to a narrow fringing reef at the base of the cliff. Here she stopped and spent some time in draping the net on her left shoulder, coiling the line to pay out as it was cast. "Wait here, Alan, and don't move," she said.

There was a wide pool in the coral, twenty yards away, fed by an inlet from the sea. Naia approached it with infinite care, crouching lower and lower, with her eyes fixed on the foam-flecked water ahead. Her right hand crept up and across to grasp the edge of the net. Suddenly she rose, and, swinging her shoulders in time with the cast, she flung the net. It flew out horizontally, to descend upon the pool in a perfect circle. The gesture, and the pose in which it left her, were superbly beautiful and Hardie gave a cry of admiration. Naia turned, her eyes shining.

"I've got them! Come see!"

The net, weighted with small leads about its circumference, held within its meshes a dozen or more struggling fish. Hardie waded in and helped to extract them, one by one; then Naia placed them in a basket and covered them with green leaves. A few more casts filled the basket, which they left in the shade before proceeding to the outer edge of the reef. The tide was low, and a great variety of shellfish were to be found in the weed-grown pools and crannies of the coral. Naia was more intent on showing Hardie the curiosities of the place than on securing food.

"Take care where you set your feet," she warned him. "Rubber soles won't protect you from some of the creatures here." She pointed to a sort of flattened sea urchin, of a reddish color and covered with thick short spines. "That's one of the worst—we call it *taramea*. If you stepped hard on it the spines would go through your shoes. They are very poisonous. . . . Wait, Alan! There's a *nohu*, another bad one."

Almost indistinguishable against its background of rock and weed, Hardie made out a villainous-looking little fish lying motionless on the bottom of a pool.

"What does he do?"

"You see the spines on his back? They're hollow and more poisonous than the *taramea's*."

"Did you bring me out here to frighten me to death? I'm afraid to take a step!"

Naia laughed. “It’s not so bad as it seems,” she said. “You might walk along the reefs for miles without seeing another *nohu*.”

“If there were scores, I’d never see them,” said Hardie. “They look like pieces of old dead coral.”

“Follow me and you’ll be all right. I’ll tell you when to be careful.”

They had their lunch at Vairupé. Hardie built a fire of driftwood and Naia prepared the food. When the fire had died down to a bed of coals she broiled some of the fish and they ate them with sweet potatoes they had brought, which were baked in the hot ashes.

“What shall we do now?” Hardie asked when the meal was finished.

“Whatever you like.”

“How far is it to the nearest settlement in this direction?

“About fifteen miles.”

“Is there a way to go, on foot?”

“Yes; but not an easy one. We could go part way, if you like.”

“Good. Let’s do it.”

The girl rose. “We must be starting, then. There’s some climbing to do, but I think we can go as far as Toapéha.”

They pulled their canoe into the shade and hung the basket of fish from a branch out of reach of rats. Naia set out in the lead, at a rapid walk.

For a time they followed the inner ledge of the fringing reef, but at the entrance of the next narrow valley she turned inland, crossed a rapid stream, and climbed the shoulder of the ridge on the farther side. Only a kind of short bracken grew on the decomposing basalt which crumbled under their feet. It provided the most unreliable of handholds, but Naia went up without a halt till she stood at the summit of the ridge five hundred feet above the sea. Hardie was well blown when he reached it, but Naia allowed no time for rest. “You can get your breath as we’re going down this side,” she said.

“I’ll do nothing of the sort,” he replied. “I’m going to sit here and look at the view for a while.”

“Sit, then,” said Naia. “Cross the ridge on the far side of the next cove; then follow the ledge at the base of the cliffs until you catch up with me.” A moment later she was lost to view, below.

Hardie obeyed the directions, but an hour passed before he caught sight of Naia again. She was standing at a spot where further progress seemed impossible.

“I was beginning to think I’d lost my way,” he said.

“You couldn’t have,” Naia replied, “or I shouldn’t have gone ahead. But we’ll have to help each other around this cove.”

The inlet was about forty yards deep in the shape of a long horseshoe, with the inner curve shut in by perpendicular cliffs. The swell raced in between the

heads and dashed with hollow reverberations in the half-submerged caverns at their feet. They made their way around the northern head, clinging to the volcanic rock, well above the surf. The roar of the sea made ordinary speech impossible.

Hardie put his lips close to Naia's ear. "We're not going there?" he asked, incredulously.

"If you like," Naia replied. "It's not so bad as it looks. Wait a minute and you'll see."

The last of three great seas was bursting, and as it receded from the rocky wall Hardie saw that a narrow ledge of coral extended around the base of the cliffs. It was buried beneath tons of broken water each time a great wave broke, but there were intervals, of half a minute, perhaps, when the sea fell a little below the ledge. The girl turned to him in the lull that followed.

"We run along that ledge between the coming of the big seas. It's easy."

"It doesn't look easy to me, but I'm game to try it," Hardie replied.

"Climb down, then, to the ledge just below. And wait till I give the signal. I'll watch the seas."

"And what if I get caught halfway?"

"You won't if you run. But if you should, turn and dive straight in and swim under water for a little way toward the entrance."

"And then what?"

"Swim on out and around to the far side of the head. There is a little beach there where you can land easily. But you won't have to do it unless you're very clumsy. When you are around the cove, just there, climb up a little and watch the seas for me."

Hardie moved down to the place directed, where he was above the sea, though thoroughly drenched by the spray. He watched Naia intently while the seas thundered in, but she was looking far out beyond the cove, giving no heed to him. Of a sudden she waved her arm. Hardie sprang down to the ledge and made a run for it, slipping and stumbling on the weed-grown coral, but he managed to keep his feet. The excitement of it was exhilarating and he was well out of danger on the far side before the sea came tumbling in again, burying the ledge he had followed a good fathom deep. He climbed until he had a wide view to seaward. Naia was ready and awaiting his signal.

He felt more than a little nervous as he faced his task, finding it harder than he had supposed to judge the run of the swell. The waves seemed to come in groups: three or four big ones, closely spaced, followed by a prolonged lull. He saw a huge one rearing its back, far out, and waited for it to break and recede. The ledge was clear. He signaled Naia to go.

She ran swiftly, her hair flying, her small bare feet scarcely seeming to touch the rock, but she was not yet halfway when Hardie saw another great sea

sweeping into the cove. He shouted a warning at the top of his voice. Naia paused and glanced quickly out and saw that she was caught. She looked small and childish with her wet frock clinging to her body. “Oh, my God!” Hardie exclaimed aloud; there was the taste of anguish in his mouth as he looked on, knowing his helplessness, but the next instant Naia dived. As the wave came on, it reared as the water shoaled, and burst with an impact that sent the spray cascading far up the cliffs. Then, well away from the rocks and close to a great patch of creamy foam, her head appeared. Swimming easily and carried swiftly out by the backwash, she raised an arm to wave at him.

The swim was a long one—four or five hundred yards. Hardie climbed slowly around the base of the promontory, never taking his eyes from the girl, scarcely daring to breathe as he watched her. He remembered what Naia had told him of sharks on this wild southern coast, and of barracouta, more dreaded by the natives than the sharks themselves. Though she swam strongly, her progress seemed interminably slow, her head appearing and disappearing just beyond the break of the sea.

At last she was around the point and making her way into the next cove. There was a beach of cobblestones, with black sand at its head, and he awaited her there. The girl allowed herself to be swept high by a wave, and as it receded Hardie seized her in his arms and carried her well beyond reach of the following sea. She was breathing rapidly and smiled at the sight of his woebegone face. She put her hand over his lips.

“*Mamu*, Alan! I know what you would say. It’s nothing.”

“Nothing! Naia, I all but murdered you! What an idiot I was! What must you think of such stupidity!”

“Hush! The sea is very irregular to-day. We have a name for it: *miti vavau*. It means a cross-swell, coming from a great distance. Anyone might have misjudged it. Now we both need to dry out in the sun. This is Toapéha, the place I wanted to show you.”

“Are you very tired?”

“Not in the least. It’s an easy swim, and the current helped me.”

“I thought you’d never get here. I’ve been punished a little, but nothing to what I deserve. I thought of . . .”

“Alan, will you please stop it?”

“Yes, for the present, if you insist.”

They lay basking in the sun for half an hour while she told him of Toapéha Valley. At last she got to her feet. “So you see,” she said, “it was a sacred place in the old days.” She slipped her hand into his. “I would never come here alone, but I’m not afraid with you. Now I will show you the *marae*. It’s the old heathen temple, and you will be one of the few white men who have ever seen it.”

They walked into the valley for a quarter of a mile, where Naia pointed out a large stone pyramid that mounted from its base in huge steps. The roots of century-old trees had displaced many of the stones, but the original shape of it was still plainly discernible.

"Think of the work to build it!" Naia said. "That was the priest's chair; he sat above the others. Those upright slabs were the kneeling stones where they said their prayers."

Peering through the dim greenish light of the jungle at the half-obliterated work of men long since dead, Hardie felt again—as he had at the footworn diving rock in Vaihiva Valley—a sense of the great antiquity of the island race who had crossed the unknown Pacific, probably from an Asiatic homeland, long before Columbus had crossed the Atlantic. He was about to climb onto the lower steps of the pyramid, but Naia seized his arm.

"No," she said. "It is *tabu*. People who walk on *marae* fall ill and die."

"Do you believe it?"

"I know it."

She spoke with such conviction that Hardie was impressed despite his disbelief in native superstitions. They went farther into the valley, following the stream for the most part. Not a sound was to be heard except the music of falling water. Shadows were already creeping up the steep eastern wall, though it was early afternoon. Naia seated herself on a rock with her bare feet in the clear cool water.

"You're tired," Hardie remarked, presently. "We've come far enough."

She shook her head. "Could you climb up there?" she asked, pointing to the cliff on the far side of the stream.

"It looks pretty hard."

"It is hard, but I've been up. You see that ledge where the bushes are? There's a little cave behind it. I'll take you up, Alan, if you'll promise to touch nothing. No white man has ever seen it."

"I'll promise. What's in it?"

"Long ago, one of my mother's ancestors lived here. The cave was his. He kept his god in it, and many other things."

"Are they still there?"

"Yes. Take off your boots. You'll need your toes for this climb."

They scrambled over the talus of loose stone and gravel at the foot of the cliff and began the ascent. Naia climbed fast and steadily, profiting by every irregularity of the rock. At one place she squeezed her way up a sort of chimney between two basaltic columns and halted at the top to glance down at Hardie, who was following her cautiously, for a slip here meant a serious accident. At last she drew herself over the rim of the ledge and a moment later Hardie was beside her, breathing hard and well content that the climb was at an

end. They were about one hundred and fifty feet above the floor of the valley. Their perch was no more than a fathom wide for a distance of three or four yards, diminishing at either end to a mere cranny in the cliff.

"Now you must help me," Naia said. She parted the screen of bushes and Alan saw a slab of coral standing on edge over the entrance to the cave. It was bone-white and gave a metallic ring when struck. They lowered it and crawled into the cave on their hands and knees.

The floor of white sand, fetched from some distant beach, was overlaid with dust. Hardie peered about him with interest as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light. A row of skulls was ranged along a shelf hewn out of the rock, and on the other side he saw a variety of weapons, laid out in orderly fashion: clubs and spears of ironwood, black with age. On a carved wooden stand was an elongated bowl of dark polished stone, a yard long from end to end, provided with a spout, and standing on four short legs. Its finish and the beauty of its design convinced Hardie that he was looking upon a neolithic masterpiece. Naia glanced toward the back of the cavern.

"Tuatau!" she whispered.

On a kind of short-legged couch of wood lay something long and shapeless, as large as a man and vaguely suggestive of human form. The head, if it could be called such, was out of all proportion to the body. The whole was covered with lashings of sinnet, seized on in a pattern of intricate beauty and adorned with tufts of feathers that had once been crimson.

"He sleeps by day," Naia went on, in the same low voice. "We must not waken him. You see the last skull in the row? He was Mother's great-great-grandfather. This was his *omoré*."

"Could I examine his war club?" Hardie asked.

"Yes; that won't matter, but touch nothing else!"

The weapon was of casuarina wood, as dark in color, and nearly as hard and heavy, as iron. The edges of its lozenge-shaped head were sharp, and the grip had been designed for a hand of more than ordinary size. As he hefted it, feeling its balance and ponderous weight, Hardie marveled at the strength of a man able to wield such a weapon.

Naia was nervous and ill at ease and a moment later they left the cave, carefully replacing the slab of coral at the entrance. The going down proved much more difficult than coming up, and Hardie moved cautiously, making sure of every handhold and foothold before trusting it with his weight. He caught glimpses of Naia on the cliff below him, descending with an assurance that made him uneasy. At last she sprang down on the talus and stood gazing up at him, her hands on her hips. He was no more than twenty feet above her when he reached down with his foot for a cranny he could not see. His handhold on the ancient crumbling rock gave way and he slid helplessly,

turning on his side, to fetch up with a shock on the loose material at the foot of the cliff. Naia was beside him at once.

"Alan! Are you hurt?" she asked anxiously.

He was badly shaken and had lost a good deal of skin, but he contrived to smile. "I'll be all right in a moment," he said.

She ran to the brook and returned with water in a cornucopia made of a wild taro leaf. She bathed his face and washed his bruised hand and knee. He made an effort to get to his feet and then sank back with a groan.

"Sorry, Naia," he said. "I'm afraid I've sprained my ankle. I'll have to wait for a bit."

Despite his remonstrances, she took his foot in her lap, touching it with gentle fingers at the joint. He winced in spite of himself.

"It's not broken," she said, "but it's beginning to swell. We've a remedy for that, but first I'll make you comfortable."

Borrowing his pocket knife, she cut armfuls of fern, stripping off the leaflets. She carried them to a level spot a few yards distant and strewed them thickly over the ground. She then got him up on his sound foot, and with his arm around her shoulders he managed to hobble to the place prepared.

"What cursed luck," he said. "There never was such a clumsy beast as myself."

"You aren't clumsy. It was the fault of the rock; it's old and decayed. You're too heavy for it, Alan."

"Not so heavy as the kind of men who wielded those war clubs. How they managed to carry those things up there is more than I can guess."

"They were used to it. And more than one of them may have had a fall here, as bad or worse than yours. Now I'll get the remedy for your ankle."

"You mean you can find it here?"

"I'm certain to. I shan't be long."

Half an hour later she returned with a viscous milky fluid which she carried on a banana leaf. "It's the sap from the breadfruit tree," she explained as she spread it gently over his ankle, now swollen to twice its normal size. "It's an excellent remedy. You'll see."

She bandaged the foot with leaves bound on with strips of hibiscus bark.

"What a mess I've placed us in," Hardie said. "We'll have to spend the night here. I could never hobble on one foot all that distance to where we left the canoe."

Naia laughed. "Do you mind? I don't."

"But what of your grandfather?"

"He'll be worried, but there's nothing we can do about it. He'll come in search of us to-morrow."

"And how is he to find us?"

"I'll go down to the beach and build a fire. It won't take him long to see the smoke, and he'll know it couldn't be anyone but us. . . . I'll get supper now. It's not late, but it gets dark much sooner in these valleys than on the beach."

"Supper?"

"There's plenty of food here. Give me your matches."

Hardie felt in his trouser's pocket and brought forth a small handful of what had been a box of safety matches, so repeatedly and thoroughly wetted that not one was usable; and the chemical paper of the box had been reduced to a pulp.

Naia shook her head. "These are no good. I must find a fire stick."

"You know how to make fire that way?"

"Of course, but I must go down to the beach to find the wood."

She returned with a piece of light driftwood, the outrigger of some wrecked canoe, now white and dry as a bone. She split off a bit from one end, whittled it to a point, propped the larger piece against a stone, and seated herself upon it. Hardie had read of the fire plough of primitive man; he now saw it in practical use. Gripping the smaller stick in both hands, Naia moved it up and down, wearing a groove in the log. Faster and faster she worked as a tinder of wood dust gathered at the lower end of the groove. Her lips were tightly closed and beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead. All at once a thin wisp of smoke rose from the dust. Naia leaned forward quickly, cupping the tiny heap of dust with her hands and breathing on it very gently. The dust glowed and she fed it with bits of dry leaf and twigs, laying on larger pieces as the flame caught. When the fire was well alight, she sank down beside it, breathing hard.

"You see why we buy matches?" she said.

"You're a wonder, Naia," Hardie said. "I wouldn't have believed you could do it. Will you teach me?"

"If you like. The trick of it is to work faster and faster. You can't stop for a second. Now I'll build up the fire and go for food."

During her absence Hardie's thoughts were sober ones, and none too complimentary to himself. Never in his life before had he had any contact with primitive nature, in an environment where man must depend entirely upon his own ingenuity and resourcefulness to provide food and shelter. He was in the self-accusing mood common to those who have lived sheltered lives, in the midst of society, when faced, briefly, with such a situation as this. Of what real use, he thought, was an education like his, or the work to which his life would be devoted? He knew the specific gravity of many stars, of what they were composed, and their distance, in terms of light-years, from the planet Earth. But his ignorance of the simplest matters of existence, such as Naia and himself were faced with in Toapéha Valley, was abysmal. How well fitted she

was to cope with her environment, to survive the dangers of mountain and sea, to procure food, to make fire and dress the food. Her life was solidly based on reality. His, he felt, was based on mathematical formulæ which only a handful of men could understand and which had no use whatever in the earthly sense. But Hardie was a creature of his time and place. He had the pride and something of the arrogance of learning above the common reach; and by a simple process of reasoning he soon brought himself round to a more comforting view of his own peculiar gifts. After all, perhaps never again in his life would he have need of the knowledge of primitive man, and he had no desire to see the clock turned back to an age when such knowledge would again become current and useful.

Twilight was deepening when Naia returned with the materials for a meal. She had plaited a basket of coconut frond, and from this she took two breadfruit, some wild yams and mountain plantain, an abundant supply of large crayfish, from the stream, and half a dozen eggs from a jungle fowl's nest, carefully wrapped in moss to prevent breakage.

"Where did you find all this?" Hardie exclaimed as she emptied her basket.

"Back there," she replied, with a nod inland.

"I didn't know that breadfruit grew wild, like this."

"It doesn't. All these valleys were once inhabited. You'll find breadfruit trees wherever people have lived. But the yams and the *fei* have always been wild plants."

"Which are the *fei*?"

"These," she replied, indicating the mountain plantain.

"I thought they were bananas."

"They look like them, but they are quite different. You've already eaten them, at our house. You're fond of them, too. You ate three or four."

"Oh, those yellowish things? I should think I am fond of them! But I'd only seen them cooked, with the skins off."

The fire had died down to a fine bed of coals. Naia placed the breadfruit in the midst of it, with the yams and *fei,* and buried the eggs in the hot ashes a little to one side. She had cut a segment of green bamboo, four or five inches in diameter and more than twice as long. She dropped the shrimps into the bamboo container. This she then filled with water, propped it up with stones, and heaped live coals around it. The water soon boiled, cooking the crayfish to the color of boiled lobster. She drained off the water and set Hardie to peeling off the shells while she turned the breadfruit over on the coals till the thick green rinds had been charred black. When they had cooled so that she could handle them, she removed the rinds and split them open in segments. The food was laid out on a cloth of broad green plantain leaves and they set to with keen appetite.

“I’ve never eaten a meal that tasted so good as this one,” Hardie remarked. “All it lacks is a little salt. I’m surprised that you couldn’t find any. There’s everything else we need.”

“I could have, if there’d been time. Do you like shrimps cooked this way?”

“They’re delicious! Lobster can’t compare with them. What about the eggs? Are they safe, do you think?”

She nodded. “I tested them in the stream.”

When they’d finished, nothing was left but the half of a breadfruit. Hardie leaned back on his elbow with a sigh of content. “I’ve made a pig of myself, Naia,” he said, apologetically. “I’ve eaten three times as much as you have.”

“You should,” she said; “you’re three times as big. I ought to build a shelter for us. It might rain in the night.

“Don’t you think you’ve done enough? Look at the sky. It’s perfectly clear, what I can see of it.”

“It wouldn’t take me long to make it,” Naia replied; “but I’m willing to chance it, if you are. How does your ankle feel?”

“Not so bad.”

She put more wood on the fire and laid some larger damp pieces around it to dry. Then she sat near Hardie and they watched the light flickering through the deepening gloom of the valley.

“Naia, could anything be better than this?” Hardie asked, after a long silence.

“Nothing . . . as long as it doesn’t rain,” she added, smiling.

“It won’t; I’ve forbidden it,” he replied. “We might ask the old god up there in the cave to see that it doesn’t. What was his name?”

“Tuatau.”

“What was he for? What kind of things would he do?”

“For one thing, if people were lost at night—at sea, perhaps, blown out of sight of land—they’d only to call: ‘*Tuatau O! Tauturu mai!*’ and he’d come to guide them home.”

“How would he come?”

“We call him Big-Headed Tuatau. When he flies about at night, his head shines like fire. They had only to follow him to find land again.”

“Does he still do it?”

“My grandfather thinks so.”

“But you don’t?”

“I’ve never been lost.”

“But if you should be, would you call him?”

“Of course. He helped our people in the old days. He would help us now if we needed him.”

Hardie glanced at her half incredulously. Her sincerity was unmistakable.

But after all, were such beliefs more fantastic than some of those held by modern astronomers? He could think of men who had gone so far in their so-called discoveries that they were baffled by their findings and obliged to take refuge in mysticism when it came to the point of explanation. He wondered if Tuatau were more fabulous than some of the gods of modern science in whose honor the cherubim and seraphim of the learned world sang their weird mathematical hymns. And yet, damn it, they must be right, these men of genius whom the whole world believed, on trust. The human mind was capable of measureless expansion, limitless comprehension. Knowledge was added to knowledge in the form of an ascending spiral. There was not, there could not be, an end. It might be, as some thought, that human intelligence was the highest to be found in the universe—in any universe; that man was God in the making. No! That was blasphemy. He recoiled from the thought in horror, as he recoiled from the arrogance of those who offered it as an explanation of the riddle of existence. Nothing could be more certain than that. . . .

"How old are you, Alan?"

Hardie returned with something of a start from his musings. "I was dreaming, Naia. What was it you said?"

"How old are you?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know."

"I'll be twenty-two in June."

"Truly?"

"Yes," he replied, somewhat nettled. "Don't I look it?"

"Sometimes you seem much older than that," she replied; "and other times I feel old enough to be your grandmother."

"When are these other times?"

"I never know when. They come by surprise. It's something you say, or do, or don't do."

Hardie smiled. "You might tell me the next time you're feeling aged in my presence."

"Perhaps I will. . . . Is the ankle hurting much?"

"Why remind me of that? I'm trying to forget about it. Yes, there's a pretty angry feeling inside."

"It will be better in the morning, I promise you."

"I'm glad I sprained it. If I hadn't . . . Isn't it glorious here?"

"Yes. I love it."

He took her hand and held it. "You're the best of companions, Naia. I've never known a girl like you. There aren't any like you. I'll miss you terribly when I go."

"And I'll miss you."

“We won’t think about it. We’ve another ten days to be together.”

“It’s such a little time, Alan.”

“I know, but we’ll make it last and last, as long as we can. Ten days—that’s two hundred and forty hours, fourteen thousand four hundred minutes.”

“Let’s not waste one of them!”

“We won’t.”

Hardie lay back, his hands behind his head, watching the firelight flickering on the branches overhead. Naia stretched out facing the fire, her chin in her hands. Far down the valley they could hear, faintly, the incessant sullen pounding of waves on the beach and the knocking of cobblestones as they rolled down the steep incline in the backwash. The sound reminded Hardie of a distant hollow clapping of hands, as though a great concourse of people were gathered there applauding the tireless activity of the sea. And thinking of the endlessness of this activity, it struck him, of a sudden, as well worthy of applause; or better, perhaps, the silence of awe-struck wonder.

A few moments later Naia turned to glance at him. He was sleeping quietly, his head pillowed on his arm.

CHAPTER IX

It was still dark when Hardie awoke. The fire had been freshly kindled and was burning briskly, with a clear flame. Naia was already up and away. The summit of the ridge on the far side of the valley was outlined against the first pale light of dawn. Hardie felt stiff and sore in every muscle and his damaged ankle made him wince as he rose to a sitting position. A few moments later Naia returned with another supply of breadfruit sap. She made a little hollow in the ground and put down her leaf container carefully, so as to lose none of the juice. Then she stood before the fire warming herself.

"I've had a swim," she said, "but the water's awfully cold, so early. How did you sleep, Alan?"

"Splendidly—too well. I meant to wake up in the middle of the night and listen to the silence. Before I went to sleep I promised myself I would. That's all the good it did."

"Is the ankle hurting much?"

"Not particularly. But I feel sore all over."

"I should think you would, after such a fall."

She seated herself and placed his foot in her lap, gently removing the leaf bandages. "It's a bad sprain," she said, as she examined the swollen joint. "You'll not be able to walk for a week, at least. But it would have been much worse if it hadn't been for this."

She bathed the ankle and then, with her fingers, lightly spread on the fresh sap. "Am I hurting you?" she asked.

"Hardly at all. You're better than a trained nurse, Naia."

"I woke up for you, in the night," she remarked, as she massaged his ankle. "I was tempted to wake you, but you were snoring so sweetly I hadn't the heart to do it."

"Snoring! I was not!"

Naia laughed. "You were! Not loudly, though. It was the prettiest whistle, like that of a little bird, a long way off."

"I don't snore," Hardie remarked, indignantly. "That's one thing I am certain of."

"Oh, is it? Well, you do, but you ought to be proud of such a gentle little squeak. I listened for quite a long time; then *I* gave a whistle—through my lips, not my nose. You heard it in your sleep and stirred a little, and it was all very quiet after that."

"I don't believe a word of it!"

"Don't then. Are you hungry?"

"Ravenous!"

"I'm sorry, for all the breakfast you're going to have is the half of the left-over breadfruit."

"All right. I don't mind as long as you share it with me."

"It can't be helped, Alan. I must go down to the beach to signal my grandfather. He'll have left Vaihiva, to search for us, long before this."

She placed the breadfruit on a leaf beside him. "It's for you," she said. "I'm not hungry."

"Naia, I won't have it! . . . Come back! Please! I won't eat a mouthful unless you do!"

She halted at a little distance. "There isn't time. I may be gone for several hours. Don't try to move until I come." A moment later he lost sight of her among the trees.

The waiting was long for Hardie. He lay on his back watching the valley fill with light. Then the long shadow of the eastern ridge began its slow creep down the opposite wall until there was no more shadow to be seen. A small bird with a breast dark blue, shading to purple, appeared suddenly from nowhere and circled over him for two or three minutes, making no sound save the soft rustle of its wings. It belonged to the swallow family, he thought. Tahiti seemed to be very poor in land birds. He had seen scarcely any since his arrival save the *mainas*; they were an imported nuisance and throve only too well. This little fellow was, certainly, native to the islands. It seemed like a spirit of Solitude, enamored with silence. It disappeared without his knowing how, and he saw it no more.

His glance rested on the breadfruit Naia had placed beside him. Well, he would eat his share, but he would see to it that she had her own when she returned. He munched the delicate flaky morsels with relish. What could this food be compared with? Nothing. Breadfruit was a good name for it, and a poor one at the same time. It wasn't a fruit, or a nut, or a vegetable, but a combination of the three; and whatever it was, it *was* good, and filling to a hungry man. Small wonder that Captain Bligh of the *Bounty* had been sent all the way from England to transport breadfruit plants to the West Indies. They were worth transplanting. And then Bligh's men had mutinied and returned to Tahiti with the stolen ship. When was it? A century and a half ago, at least. Some of the mutineers might have hidden themselves away in this very spot; they could not have found a better refuge than Toapéha Valley. He could imagine two or three of them sitting around a fire, roasting breadfruit in the coals as Naia had done. . . .

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed aloud, sitting up so hastily that his ankle gave him a sharp twinge. Naia had forgotten to take any lighted sticks with her to make her signal fire! She would again have to go through the exhaustion of

using a fire stick. What an idiot he was not to have reminded her! It was strange that Naia had not thought of it herself; her practical little mind was not often at fault.

He fell to thinking of Naia with an ache in his heart that he no longer pretended was not there. Ten days more; but if he prolonged his stay until the latest possible moment, he could promise himself twelve days of companionship with her. And then—what? He imagined himself saying good-bye to her, returning to Papeete, going on with George McLeod to New Zealand and Australia, where they would wait for his father. He would not return; that was certain. He couldn't. He would never see Naia again.

What had happened to him? He went over in his mind the events of yesterday, and felt again the anguish with which he had waited for Naia when she was swimming around the point from the cove. Anguish he would have felt in any case, whoever the girl might have been, but not this kind. And when he had taken her in his arms and carried her up the beach, he had wanted to keep her, to hold her so forever. He remembered how gladly she had seemed to cling to him during that brief time, and the glance, half frightened, half joyous, she had given him as he set her down. Never before had she looked at him like that. And then, instinctively, it seemed, both of them had striven to bring the relationship back to the old footing of comradeship.

It must be kept there. No other way was possible. But *could* it be kept there? Hardie was conscious of a hunger for Naia, a need for her, that came from the depths of his nature. This was something new in his experience. Never before had a girl aroused in him anything beyond a detached friendly interest. But Naia . . . No! He must not think of it! For her sake, he must not. A flash of complete understanding might kindle a fire impossible to quench. He must keep himself well in hand. His course lay plain before him. Naia could not have been stirred so deeply as himself. He must do nothing to make her unhappy. It would be well, perhaps, if he were to leave Vaihiva the moment he was able to hobble with a stick. . . . Yes, he must. For both their sakes he must go.

He resolved to think of her no more. He summoned his will to change the current of his reflections. He fixed his thought on Canopus, which he had studied with such fascinated interest at home, but had never seen until he came to these tropical latitudes. The attempt was a wretched failure. The greatest of all the giant suns was nothing compared with Naia. He lay back once more, with the palms of his hands pressed tightly over his eyes. She was there, before him, in all her loveliness. He realized that she would always be there.

The sun was high overhead when he heard her call. His heart leaped at the sound of her voice, and he sent back an answering shout; then he saw her as

she appeared at a bend in the stream not far below. Raitua was with her, and Tavaé, one of Manu's sons whom he knew well by this time; a stalwart fellow of thirty. Tavaé waved his arm at sight of him and a moment later they were at his side. Raitua gave him a searching glance; then his face lightened, as a landscape lightens with the passing of the shadow of a cloud, and he squatted beside him in the old friendly fashion.

"Were you tired of waiting?" Naia asked.

He shook his head. "I spent all my time thinking about yesterday," he replied. "It was perfect, Naia, all the latter part of it, from the time we came to Toapéha. I wouldn't have missed spraining my ankle for anything. But what numbskulls we both were, this morning!"

"Why?"

"You forgot to take fire with you down the valley.

"I didn't need it."

"Oh. . . . You met your grandfather at the beach?"

She shook her head.

"Well then . . . ? Good God! You didn't go back along the shore—around that cove?"

She smiled. "It was easy. I knew when I woke up this morning that I could do it. Didn't you notice? There was scarcely any sound of surf. I skipped around that place without the least trouble. The canoe was at Vairupé, just as we'd left it, but our poor fish . . . ! I had to leave them for the land crabs."

"If I'd known . . ."

"*Mamu!* You didn't know, and it's done, isn't it? Here I am. Now we'll get you down to the beach."

"I can make it easily with my arms around Raitua's and Tavaé's shoulders."

"You're not to walk a step," the girl replied. She turned to her grandfather. Hardie was helped to his feet and Raitua stooped, motioning him to get on his back. He protested vigorously, but was obliged to give in, and he felt less guilt about it when he saw the ease with which the old man carried him.

"It's extraordinary, Naia," he said. "I doubt if there's a grandfather in England who could carry me over such ground as this."

"He could take a pair of you," she replied, "if he had you balanced at the ends of a carrying pole. He brings great loads of *fei* all the way down from the upper valley."

With the two men taking turns in carrying him, they soon reached the beach, and Hardie saw that the sea was, in fact, much quieter than on the day before. They shot the breakers without trouble. Tavaé took the small canoe, with Naia, Raitua, and Hardie in the other. Vaihiva was reached in less than two hours and Hardie was installed on the seaward verandah, propped up with

pillows on a mat-covered couch where he could stretch out his injured leg.

During the days that followed, Hardie realized that he must face honestly, without further delay, the situation that confronted Naia and himself. He no longer doubted the nature of his feeling toward her. He loved her with an intensity that frightened him. He longed to speak, to take her in his arms, to hear her reply in words of love. The effort of will required in the attempt to keep their relationship on the old basis exhausted him and made him irritable. Naia cared for him with a tenderness that touched him deeply, but he was short and gruff with her to the point of rudeness, hating himself for the pain he caused her. Her manner toward him gradually changed. She had pride equal to his own. Rebuffed by his harshness, she fell silent in his presence and was with him only when necessary: to bring his food, to change the dressings on his ankle. She brought him books from her father's library and left him alone for hours at a time. Though he was forbidden to read, he nevertheless tried to engross himself in Dickens, Thackeray, Hawthorne, Victor Hugo, and found the effort useless. Naia had read all of her father's books, and had been read to, through her childhood, by her father himself. Hardie had already discovered that she read aloud with understanding and appreciation, surprising in a girl born and reared as she had been, and lacking the background of common knowledge shared by English children from their birth. They had started reading *Lorna Doone* together shortly after his arrival at Vaihiva. He longed to have Naia proceed with it now, but dared not ask her.

On the evening of the fifth day after their return from the Pari, she had lighted the lamp on his table, brought him his supper, and then left him. She returned half an hour later to clear away the remnants of the meal. There was no longer need for dressing his ankle. The swelling had greatly diminished and the joint was now tightly bandaged, a task which he performed himself.

"I can walk now," he said. "I walked up and down the verandah half a dozen times, this afternoon, with the stick your grandfather gave me."

"I'm glad, Alan," she replied.

"There's no need for me to make a nuisance of myself any longer. If you'll be good enough to pack my things, I'll be leaving to-morrow."

She halted, with the tray in her hands. "Oh . . . you . . . you think you must go, so soon?"

"I must," he replied, with an attempt at carelessness. "It's little more than a week until the southbound steamer arrives. I've various things to do in town, and George is back from the Leeward Islands by now. He'll wonder what's become of me."

She stood for a moment, turned away from him; then proceeded along the hallway to the kitchen. He saw her once more that evening. She came to the

entrance of the passageway.

"I've packed your things," she said; "all but those you will need to-night and in the morning. I have seen Tavaé. He will take you to Tautira in the sailing canoe."

"There's no need for that," Hardie replied. "I'd much rather go alone, if there's any way of getting the canoe back here."

"You can leave it with Fara. He can send it by one of his sons."

"Good. That's settled, then."

"There's . . . there's nothing more you want, Alan?"

"Nothing, thanks. I'm going to bed, shortly. I want to get an early start."

"Then I'll say good night."

"Good night. Don't bother about coffee to-morrow. I'll have it when I reach Fara's house."

But his breakfast was ready when he awoke the following morning. He made an attempt at eating heartily. Naia sat near him on the verandah railing, as she had on the morning of his first breakfast at Vaihiva. After an effort at conversation both fell silent. Hardie finished his coffee hastily and rose from the table.

When he had made his farewells to the household, Naia went with him to the beach. Raitua had already put his luggage in the canoe, which was riding at anchor in the shallows near his house. The old man put his hands on Hardie's shoulders as he bade him good-bye, looking in his face kindly and searchingly. He took his hand with a warm clasp; then, with a word to Naia, he left them.

Naia stood looking out over the lagoon, her brown hair tumbled by the breeze and touched by faint coppery gleams in the early light. An old coconut palm that leaned far out over the water threw its shadow in the place where she stood, the delicate pattern of the leaflets moving to and fro across her face and her slim bare arms and legs. Hardie turned toward her, an unbearable ache in his heart.

"With this breeze, you'll reach Tautira in an hour," she said. "You'll be going on, to Papeete, to-morrow?"

"Yes . . . that is, I think so. . . . Naia, I have no words to say how I shall miss you. I . . . I've been a beast, these last few days. I didn't mean to be. Will you forgive me?"

She raised her head slowly and looked at him, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Forgive me, too," she said.

He took her hands. "You? Naia, it was my fault—all! I'm so wretched. . . . Forget these last days. Remember the others. Will you think of me sometimes?"

Suddenly she was in his arms. They clung to each other; she put an arm

around his neck and drew him down till his lips met hers. He felt her warm breath on his cheek. “It’s all right, Alan,” she said. “We’ve this to remember. I couldn’t have borne the other.”

“Naia, you understand, don’t you?”

“Yes; a little, perhaps. . . . Go, now. Go quickly, Alan.”

He took her hands again and pressed his lips to her small moist palms. She gazed wanly at him, her lips trembling as she tried to smile. “Good-bye, Alan. Be careful of your ankle, won’t you?”

Hardie limped to the canoe, drew in the small anchor, and hoisted the sail. He took the sheet in his hand; the canoe gathered headway, heeling over slightly to the breeze. He dared not look back, nor could he summon up courage for a farewell wave of the hand. Naia stood with an arm around the old leaning palm at the water’s edge, looking after him until the canoe, well out at sea, had vanished behind a distant headland.

CHAPTER X

On the morning of the following day, Mauri, having completed the business matters connected with her lands on the island of Moorea, embarked on a motor launch for the return to Tahiti. Fifteen miles of sea divided these neighboring islands; the launch was crowded with passengers, and with the usual rough sea met with in the Moorea Channel the crossing required three hours. To Mauri it seemed an endless time. She had been absent from home for more than two weeks, and her anxiety, and her longing to see Naia, had increased with every passing day. The coming to Vaihiva of George McLeod had so disturbed her that she had been on the point of postponing the voyage to Moorea; but, upon reflection, she had felt convinced that he would not return to Vaihiva. She had, therefore, carried out her plans, although with much uneasiness of mind as to what might happen during her absence. The southbound mail boat, from San Francisco to New Zealand and Australia, was not due at Papeete for another week, so that George and his friend would still be on the island; but it relieved her greatly to know that they would soon embark and the danger be past. Her heart misgave her as she thought of the possibility of a chance meeting with George on the streets of Papeete. Usually, during her infrequent visits to the little port town, Mauri called to see Mr. Tyson, the British consul, who had been a close friend of her husband; but no doubt George was stopping at the consulate, and she must, by all means, avoid another meeting with him.

It was nearly midday when they drew up alongside the Papeete wharf. For lunch Mauri went to a restaurant near the waterfront little frequented by Europeans. As she entered the crowded room, her glance fell upon two natives at a table in a corner, with their backs toward her. She paused to look at them more narrowly, then made her way quickly to where they were seated.

"*Ia ora na, orua*," she said, as the men glanced up from their plates. Their faces lighted up in broad smiles, and they took her hand warmly.

"*Éahahoia!*" the elder man exclaimed. "It is you, Mauri! *Haéré mai tamaa!*"

Mauri took a seat opposite them. "It is well that I have found you, Miti. Kaua, what news of your family? But wait. I will order my food; then we can talk."

The two men, Low Islanders from Hao, in the Tuamotu Archipelago, waited in silence while Mauri was ordering her lunch from the Chinese boy. Miti, the elder, was a powerfully built man of sixty-five; his son, Kaua, was about thirty. Like most Tuamotu folk, they were darker-skinned than the

Tahitians, with coarser features, and what they lacked in stature, compared with the High Island people, was made up for in breadth of shoulders and girth of limbs. Twice yearly, Miti, with one or another of his married sons, made the voyage to Tahiti to sell the family copra in the Papeete market.

Mauri turned again to her companions. “You have just come from Hao?” she asked.

Miti nodded. “A week ago,” he said. “We were long in coming—twelve days. A light breeze all the five hundred miles. But Kaua and I were content to have it so; the cutter was deeply loaded. . . . Copra is scarcely worth the making, Mauri.”

“How many tons did you bring?”

“Twenty-two. The price given was only seventy centimes the kilo.”

“I know; it is hard upon us all, but you were luckier than some have been. Not a month ago the Papeete price was only fifty centimes. It will better, but slowly, I fear. You have finished your business here?”

“Aye. What news of Raitua, and your daughter, Naia? They are well?”

“I hope and believe it. I have been away from home for more than two weeks, and have just now returned from my lands on Moorea.”

“Kaua and I were speaking of you only a moment ago,” said Miti. “We are ready to sail, and will put in at Vaihiva, as usual, before setting out on the homeward voyage.”

“Good,” said Mauri. “Then I will go with you. I dread the long journey around the island by the bus.”

“Come and welcome, Mauri,” said Kaua.

“You could sail this afternoon?”

“It is what we had planned,” said Miti. “You have plenty of fruit at Vaihiva this year?”

Mauri hesitated. “Not so much as last year, but I can sell you what you want, I think.”

“What will you ask for oranges?”

“Four francs the hundred.”

“Four francs!” Miti exclaimed. “You ask four francs of us poor Tuamotu Islanders, with copra as low as it is?”

Mauri smiled. “That is why I ask it. As you say, copra is scarcely worth the cutting. I make up the difference in the sale of my fruit.”

Miti shook his head, regarding Mauri with an expression half reproach, half admiration. “You are a good business woman, Mauri,” he said. “You will not suffer, though the price of copra drops to nothing.”

“You are not so poor as you make out to be,” Mauri replied. “You are richer by fifteen thousand francs from the sale of your copra.”

“Richer! It is all but spent, that money! You forget the rice and flour and

kerosene and lumber and tinned food and paint and cordage and a hundred other things I have had to buy. These Papeete merchants suck our blood. The Chinamen say: ‘Ah! These are Low Island people. Add 40 per cent to all prices.’ And so they do.”

“Miti, you are always the same,” Mauri replied. “You could buy me out ten times over—all my lands—and still have great sums to your credit at the Caisse Agricole. Yet you would persuade us that you have scarcely the price of a bag of flour.”

“There is no discussing business with a woman,” said Miti. “She will always have the last word. Well, I must have your oranges and the other fruit, whatever the price.”

“There are none so good as Vaihiva oranges; you know that well,” said Mauri. “I am eager to reach Vaihiva. How soon can you sail?”

“At once, if it pleases you. Kaua and I loaded the last of our supplies this morning.”

Miti’s cutter was moored by the sea wall near the Bougainville Club. It was the hour for the siesta and the Club verandah was all but deserted; nevertheless, Mauri gazed up at it apprehensively, fearing that she might catch sight of Mr. Tyson or George McLeod. She was relieved to see no one there whom she knew. The cutter was a broad-beamed Low-Island-built vessel, easily handled by a crew of two. Kaua cast off the lines to his father and leaped aboard. They pushed away from the sea wall, and with a breeze so light that it barely ruffled the surface of the lagoon the cutter glided down the harbor and stood out for the passage as though propelled by some mysterious principle of motion within herself.

The moon had sunk behind the mountains by the time they had rounded the extremity of the Taiarapu Peninsula and the cool *hupé* blew freshly from the depths of Vaihiva Valley. Handling the cutter with great skill, Miti tacked into the passage and across the lagoon, and brought up at the pier by the mouth of the river. Raitua and Naia were awaiting them there. The greetings over, Raitua remained on the cutter for talk with Miti and his son, for the two elder men had been friends from boyhood. Naia went with her mother to the house, where a cold supper was ready.

“We sighted you two hours ago, Mother,” Naia said; “or Grandfather did. He was fishing outside the reef. He came in, then, to tell me. ‘It is Miti’s cutter,’ he said, ‘and your mother will be with him.’ ”

Mauri kissed the girl again and held her at arm’s length, gazing at her hungrily. “And you believed him?”

“Of course. He is always right. He has the gift for seeing, like Taio Vahiné, if he cared to use it.”

“No, not that. But he guesses well; and you both knew that I would soon

come. I was fortunate to find Miti and Kaua."

Mauri talked as she ate, giving Naia the news of the vanilla auctions in Moorea, of their friends and acquaintances there, the girl listening in silence, for the most part, asking a perfunctory question now and then in an attempt to simulate interest in the narrative. She was well aware of her mother's close, though casual-seeming scrutiny, and made a desperate effort to maintain her usual composed and cheerful manner.

"You are well, Naia?" Mauri asked, presently.

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"You seem quieter than usual. You are tired, perhaps?

"I am, a little. I went to the far end of the upper valley to-day. Meina and Tomi came with me. I had a happy day with the children."

"I would not have guessed it. You look sad rather than happy. Now give me your news. What has happened since I have been away?"

"Nothing important. Grandfather is getting on with his canoe. He has all but finished adzing out the hull. All are well in the valley. Mama Tu has made me a lovely hat. She is at work on another for you."

"There have been no visitors?" Mauri asked, casually.

"Terii a Putoa came by last week. He was going down the coast and brought the other tin of kerosene from Tautira."

"No others?"

"Others? Oh, yes—one. You will be sorry to have missed him, Mother. It was a young Englishman. You remember telling me about George McLeod, the boy who came before you went to Moorea? Didn't you say that he was traveling with a friend?"

"Yes; so he told me."

"Well, this young man was the friend. His name is Alan Hardie."

Mauri well concealed her alarm. "He came alone?" she asked.

"Yes. Grandfather liked him very much. He knew that you would want him to stay, if he could, so Grandfather invited him."

"And . . . he did stay?"

The girl nodded. "He returned to Papeete yesterday. He would have waited, I'm sure, if he'd known you were coming so soon. He is leaving with George McLeod on the next steamer."

"When did he come?"

"I don't remember, exactly. Several days ago. . . . I *am* tired, Mother. There's no other news. I'm going to bed."

"Yes, do. Sleep well, Naia. Good night."

Mauri found her father still on the cutter, talking with Miti. She went with him along the beach to his house. Alarmed at what she had learned from Naia, she made no attempt to conceal her anger from her father, who was the cause

of it. Raitua was speaking of news from Hao. She interrupted him in the midst of it.

"Naia tells me that you've had a visitor here," she said.

"Aye," her father replied. "A young man I liked."

"How long did he stay?"

"How long? Let me think. Three weeks, or nearly so."

"And it was you who invited him?"

"Aye. Naia has told you? He is the friend of the other one—George McLeod."

"And you were content that he should come here, to be alone with Naia day after day, with no one to watch over her?"

"Naia needs no watching," Raitua replied, quietly; "and the young man is one to be trusted. I saw that at once, or I should not have asked him to stay."

"You are old and foolish," Mauri replied hotly. "You have forgotten what it is to be young."

"I have not forgotten that the young need companions of their own age. Never have I seen Naia happier than during these past days."

"Do you call it so? She is miserably unhappy. I saw it at once, the moment I came. And it is your doing! What a fool I was not to have taken her with me!"

"You are a strange mother, Mauri. I have never doubted your love for your daughter, but you show it in a strange way. Naia is little better than a prisoner at Vaihiva. She sees no one but ourselves."

"What has passed between them?" Mauri demanded. "Naia confides in you; that I have always known. Tell me, then, what he has said to her."

"He said good-bye," Raitua replied, sadly. He is leaving by the steamer for New Zealand.'

"You have done well, Father," Mauri said, with bitter scorn. "You permit this young man to come here, to make love to Naia, whether you knew it or not. And now he is gone, taking her happiness with him. You call me a strange mother. How proud you must feel to have been the means of robbing Naia of her peace of mind! She loves him. . . ."

"You saw that?"

"Do you think she could deceive me? It is certain, at least, that she believes she loves him."

"And her love is returned; that, too, is certain," Raitua replied.

Mauri looked up quickly. "She told you this?"

"No. I saw it for myself."

"Then he will come back," Mauri replied, in a low voice.

"Well—and if he did, what could be better? If he asks for her, would you not give him our child?"

"Never!"

"*Éahahoia!*" Raitua exclaimed. "What plan have you then for your daughter? Where will she find a better man?"

"Never!" Mauri repeated. Then, recollecting herself, she went on unsteadily: "Would you have him take Naia to a foreign land, among strangers, where we would see her no more?"

"Aye, if Naia wished it. We must think of her, not of ourselves."

During the hours of the night, at Fara's house, while he lay wide-eyed beneath his mosquito net, his hands behind his head, Hardie became fully aware of the depth of his feeling for Naia, and wondered, with youth's tragic sense of finality, whether he could ever know happiness again. He believed—almost hoped—that Naia would soon forget him. She was half native, after all, and Polynesians were said to be incapable of deep feeling. Yet, in his heart, he was aware that this was untrue of her. Could a girl brought up as Naia had been ever be happy in England? She had had the benefit, all through childhood, of companionship with her father. The results of that companionship remained. Here, on Tahiti, Naia seemed as much English as Polynesian, but how would it be if she consented to marry him, and he were to take her home? The native side of her nature might well seem to predominate there. She might be miserably unhappy; and for him to remain in the islands, giving up his career . . . it was unthinkable. That could never be.

He thought of his father, knowing only too well what General Hardie's reaction would be. The mere thought of his son's marrying a girl with native blood in her veins would be horrible to him. He would not show it, of course, but would bid him farewell with an impassive face—a definite and final farewell. Alan recalled a conversation he had had with his father six months before. "Some day," the General had said, "I hope you'll want to marry. There is no hurry, Alan. I'm the last man in the world who would wish to see you fall in love hastily and foolishly. Marriage isn't all romance and that kind of rot. It's a damned serious business. And remember, when I am gone, you alone will be left to carry the family name and to pass it on to your children. Think of this when you come to choose a wife and don't play the fool." To marry Naia would mean breaking his father's heart, embittering his old age, when he was just on the point of retirement, looking forward to his well-earned years of peace and tranquillity.

Hardie fell asleep long after midnight, but when he awoke at dawn, instead of taking the bus to town as he had planned, he limped through the village toward Vaitepiha Valley. He spent most of the morning there, sitting on a grassy bank by the river, still thinking of Naia, and vainly trying to reach a decision as to what he should do. Returning along the village street, he saw a

motor launch at anchor a little distance offshore, and a dinghy putting off from it with Tyson aboard. Hardie quickened his pace to join the little crowd of natives on the beach. The consul waved his hand when he saw him. He seemed to know all Tautira and shook hands with everyone when he had stepped ashore. His boatman slid a large tuna over the dinghy's gunwale, and a couple of men set off with it, suspended from a carrying pole, in the direction of Fara's house.

"What a beauty!" Hardie said, after they had exchanged greetings.

Tyson nodded, complacently. "A good sixty kilos, Alan," he said. "I caught that one off Tiaré on the way around. I've got three more aboard almost as large. There'll be enough to feed the better part of the village."

"It's good to see you, sir. You'll have lunch with me, of course?"

"With pleasure. I've an appetite like a starved sailor's. I can eat the better part of that tuna myself. . . . Well, Alan! You like Tautira, evidently? George was thinking you might have forgotten about steamer day."

"How is he?"

"He's just back, yesterday, from Bora-Bora and Raiatea. Had a wonderful time there, so he tells me. . . . What's the limp mean?"

"I sprained my ankle. Not badly, though. It's nearly well now. The Faras have been more than kind to me, Tyson."

"They're a capital pair. I've known them thirty years. I needn't tell you about Fara Vahiné's abilities as a cook. . . . There she is, b'gad, waiting for us. . . . *É Fara Vahiné! Mea maitai anéi outou?*"

Tyson had a happy way with the natives, Hardie thought. He spoke the language like one of them, and was, evidently, a welcome guest wherever he went. He kept up a lively round of banter with Fara Vahiné as she bustled about, dragging chairs onto the verandah and mixing a pitcher of rum punch. Presently she and her husband took leave of them, to direct the running-down of chickens and other preparations for luncheon.

"How's Mac?" Hardie asked.

The consul smiled. "Splendid. You remember my prophecy about him the day you came? You told me that he was already in love with Tahiti and I predicted that he would be the first to want to move on. Well, I was partly right about it. He's a sort of half-hearted Ulysses. He wants to beat the sounding furrows for New Zealand and to stay here at the same time. But he'll sail, that's certain."

"He found Tautira a bit dull."

"So he told me; but Papeete's a different matter. He knows everyone in the place. I've never known a man to make so many friends in so short a time. He's 'Mac' to all the whites and 'Makla' to all the natives. . . . Curse it, Alan! I've scarcely laid eyes on you since you came."

"I know it, sir, and I'm more than sorry, but . . ."

"Well, you needn't be. I don't wonder that you like this part of the island best. I do, myself. How have you been passing the time?"

"Fishing, canoeing, and mountain climbing, mostly."

"There's some stiffish climbing to be had. That how you sprained your ankle?"

"Yes. I took a trip to the Pari."

"A beautiful walk—but 'walk' is scarcely the word. Tough going, isn't it? But well worth all the trouble. I used to do it in my younger days. Now I prefer to sit comfortably in my launch and look at the coast from offshore. By the way, did you stop at the Thayers' place, in Vaihiva?"

"Yes."

"Thayer was a good friend of mine. A pity he had to be killed. Was Mauri at home?"

"No, sir. She's in Moorea, I believe."

"Oh. . . . Did you meet Naia?"

"Yes. I spent a fortnight at Vaihiva."

"The devil you did!" Tyson gave him a quick glance. "A lovely girl, isn't she? I've known her since she was a baby. You met Raitua, the grandfather, of course? He's a Tuamotu man, a native of the old school. If I had his manner, I'd be an ambassador, at least!"

"They were more than kind to me. I was sorry not to be able to talk with Raitua. We got along very well, nevertheless."

Tyson offered Hardie a cigar and took one himself. They smoked in silence for a time.

"Alan, you look a bit seedy, if you don't mind my saying so. Nothing wrong, is there?"

Hardie's prolonged attempt to come to a decision had cost him dear, and had broken down, to some extent, his natural reserve. He had liked Tyson from the first, and now felt a desire to confide in him. From the manner in which the consul had spoken of Naia and her father, he even felt an obscure hope of encouragement.

"There's nothing wrong, sir," he began slowly, "except that—well, I'm in the very devil of a fix." The other made no comment, and after a pause Hardie found words to go on. "There's something I've been trying to decide, and I'm damned if I can do it!"

"What is it, lad?"

"I've met a girl here. . . . Yes, it's Naia. I want to marry her, Tyson. . . . I know how I feel, there's no mistake about that. I think she feels the same, though I've said nothing to her, of course. What am I to do? If I should marry her, what will my father say? And if I don't . . . I can't face the thought of

giving her up."

Tyson gave no outward sign of surprise, but puffed at his cigar a full minute before he spoke. "Hmm. . . . I see."

"The worst of it is, sir, that I'm not sure Naia would be happy in England, if I did marry her. I couldn't live here; it would mean giving up all my life's work. But I believe I could almost do it, for Naia's sake."

"She'd never consent to your making such a sacrifice, Alan. Never. I know her too well to think otherwise. She's a lovely girl; there can be no two minds about that, and she has the intelligence of both her parents. I don't in the least wonder that you've fallen in love with her. I was afraid that George might, but he tells me that he didn't see her. But it never occurred to me that you would. You struck me as being rather indifferent about women."

"I have been, until I met Naia. Now . . . the thought of never seeing her again is more than I can face."

"You want my advice?"

"I wouldn't have mentioned the matter if I had not."

"Then hear me through. You must give her up. You asked just now, 'What will my father say?' You know the reply to that without my telling you. He would say nothing, perhaps, in words, but this would break his heart, Alan. Unquestionably; there's no slightest doubt of it. I can well understand your feeling toward Naia, but you have been more than wise to think of her, to consider her happiness before your own. These island girls make the best of wives down here, but take it from an old fellow who's seen it tried more than once—they never fit in at home. Naia is young, yes; and your hope would be to help her adapt herself to life in England. But there's no escape from the results of the first ten or twelve years of one's life. For all her American blood, Naia is a Polynesian, and at heart she will never be anything else. No, Alan, you must give her up. For both your sakes, you must."

For an hour, until Fara came to announce that their lunch was ready under the mango tree on the lawn, the consul talked, explaining to Hardie in the most friendly and considerate manner the impossibility of a marriage with Naia. Of her, he spoke with affection and respect, attempting with great skill to show Hardie that of the three concerned she might suffer most. Hardie listened, saying little, but when they rose to go outside and Tyson gave him a final, questioning glance, he could only shake his head.

"Don't think I'm not grateful, sir," he said, slowly. "I am. No doubt all you've told me is true, but . . . this is something I must decide for myself. And I can't decide now."

"But you must, Alan, don't you think? The steamer will be here on Saturday. I was hoping you'd return to town with me."

"I'm not sailing, sir—not by this month's boat. I can't. Tell George, will

you? I imagine he'll want to go on in any case."

"I'll tell him, of course." The consul laid a hand on Hardie's shoulder. "Well, Alan, we'll say no more of it. But I urge you, with all my heart, to make no hasty decision. Your whole future is at stake here, and Naia's happiness, and your father's. Think well what you do."

Tyson left early in the afternoon, and to his boatman's surprise he did not wet a line during the long run to Papeete. It was evening when they reached the pier before the consulate: the hour when most of the European colony met at the Bougainville Club. Tyson found McLeod there with a party of acquaintances. With a nod of apology to the others, he took him aside to a secluded table.

"I'm sorry, George. I won't keep you long. I've just seen Alan."

"He didn't come back with you?"

"No. He's not sailing by this boat."

"He's not! What's up?"

"A girl."

McLeod laughed. "I shan't worry about that. Alan's woman-proof."

"You think so? I can assure you that you're very much mistaken."

"Well, an extra month here will do him no harm. I shouldn't mind stopping over myself. Let him have his fun."

"He wants to marry her," Tyson announced, quietly.

McLeod set down his glass and said, incredulously, "Marry her!"

"Yes, definitely."

"Who is she, for God's sake?"

"Naia."

"Naia . . . ? Who's . . . Oh. . . . Good God, Tyson! Mauri's daughter?"

Tyson nodded. "He's in dead earnest, George. I spent two hours with him this morning, trying to talk some sense into him. But all I could get out of him was that he'd go slow, and wouldn't take this boat."

McLeod pondered this announcement before he spoke again. "This *is* serious, Tyson! You don't know Alan as I do. Once he makes up his mind, nothing will stop him."

"He's not done that yet, thank God!"

"But if he does . . . I must say, I approve of his choice, if the girl is anything like as pretty as her photograph. But . . . why, the blasted idiot! Doesn't he realize that this would mean the end of everything for the General?"

"I tried to make him see it, but I doubt if I succeeded. I believe he thinks his father has only to know the girl to approve of her."

"Good God! Tyson, I must go out there! I'll go the first thing in the morning and see what I can do."

“I wouldn’t do it, George. Wait a bit. To go now would only make things worse; I’m certain of that. I’ve urged everything that you could. Let him have time to think it over. But you’ll stay over, won’t you?”

“Of course.”

“Good.” Tyson rose. “Now go back to your friends. We’ll talk of this at dinner.”

CHAPTER XI

Hardie awoke during the latter part of the night, conscious of a feeling of peace. His mind was clear, now. Come what might, he knew what he would do, and he longed to see Naia at once. But for all his eagerness, he could not go to Vaihiva in the darkness and rouse the family from sleep to tell Naia that he loved her. He must wait for daylight.

It was impossible to wait quietly. He rose, dressed, tiptoed softly through the house to the front verandah, and went on to the grass-grown street. It was a glorious night; never before had Tautira seemed so beautiful. The village was hushed in sleep, the light of lamps turned low—defense against ghosts and spirits—showing through the bamboo walls of the houses. On his right lay the lagoon, with Venus making so bright a path in the water that the stems of the coconut palm bordering the beach showed black against it. On the other side the mountains threw all the lowland into shadow. The night breeze from the depths of the valleys flowed gently seaward, rocking the broad leaves of the banana plants and stirring faintly the foliage of the mango trees that lined the road.

He went on through the village and beyond, as far as Vaitepiha Valley. A cock crowed from somewhere near at hand, and all the cocks of the village took up the call and sent it back. Half an hour later he beheld the first ashy light of dawn that brought into view the scattered trade-wind clouds, inky-black against the eastern horizon. As he returned through the settlement the earliest risers were already astir, their forms shadowy in the twilight. Children were going to the streams for water, and fires were aglow on the earthen floors of the outdoor kitchens, sending shafts of light into the gloom of the groves. He stepped off the road into a path leading to the beach. The lagoon was as motionless as a film of just frozen ice, gleaming faintly in the pale light. Fara, his eyes heavy with sleep, was standing near his canoe shed, looking out to sea. As Hardie greeted him, the old native turned his head slowly, still in the depths of a trancelike reverie.

"I'd like the small canoe, Fara, if you're not going to use it to-day."

"The canoe . . . ?"

"Yes, the little one."

Fara, still half asleep, stared blankly at him for a moment.

"Ah, *é*; the canoe. . . . You wish to take it?"

Hardie nodded impatiently. "But if you can't spare it, say so. I'll borrow another."

"I shan't be wanting it. . . . But you're not going off now? You haven't had

your coffee!”

Hardie was already sliding the small craft down the slope of the beach. “It doesn’t matter. Tell Fara Vahiné I shan’t be back until evening. Perhaps not until to-morrow.”

Fara looked after him wonderingly. He shouted something which Hardie didn’t catch, but he was too impatient to wait, so he waved his hand and went on with vigorous strokes. Vaihiva was two hours distant; even so he would be more than early. Naia’s mother was now at home. What would she think of such haste? He forced himself to paddle more slowly.

He remembered, uneasily, that he had scarcely given a thought to Mauri and that he had not yet met her. He had learned from Fara that she had only just returned from Moorea. Naia, no doubt, would have told her of his visit and who he was. Knowing this, she would, he hoped, be well disposed toward him, but what would she say when he told her, thus suddenly, that he wanted to marry her daughter and take her with him? What would Naia herself think? Doubt again assailed him. His own love was born of a great need never before suspected, but what right had he to assume that Naia’s feeling toward him was of this kind? Upon what slight grounds had he based his assumption! She was disturbed at their parting, deeply so, he felt; but that outburst of emotion was natural enough, under the circumstances. Another in his place, after such a companionship as theirs had been, might easily have aroused in her the same sudden warmth of feeling, the same unfeigned sorrow at parting. Already, perhaps, she would be able to think of him quietly. She might even have put him out of mind.

“I will not touch her—not even her hand,” he thought. “I must be sure of her love. I want her to be sure of mine without anything—anything like that.” A flood of tenderness filled his heart. He ceased paddling and stared unseeingly before him, thinking of Naia with a keenness of emotion that brought tears to his eyes. The canoe grated on a coral shoal and came to a stop. Hardie roused himself, pushed into deep water, and paddled on.

His father. . . . But it was useless going into all that again. No, he must look facts in the face: it would be the end of the relationship with his father. The mere thought of his son’s wishing to marry a girl with Tahitian blood . . . But, for all his prejudices, a more honest man never lived, nor one with a warmer heart. Perhaps later, when he learned from others the character of the girl his son had chosen . . . yes, that might be hoped for. But he must not count on it.

Hardie glanced ahead, surprised to discover that he was approaching the promontory on the north side of Vaihiva Valley. He was more than early. He decided to land on the islet by the passage. He would wait there, for somehow he must contrive to see Naia before he met her mother. Having made this resolve, he paddled the harder, taking the outer channel, just inside the reef, to

keep the islet between himself and the mainland as he approached. When nearing it he caught sight of a canoe drawn up on the beach. He scanned the shore line, but there was no one in sight. As his own canoe grated on the sand, he saw there the prints of Naia's small bare feet. He leaped out, drew his canoe up beside the other, and looked about him eagerly.

The morning was profoundly still. Hermit crabs were moving up the beach, dragging their snail-shell houses into the shade of the thickets. Gannets, noddies, and ghost terns were wheeling and skimming through the smoke of the surf, their wings flashing in the early morning light. No footprints led up the beach; Naia must have walked along the shallows, he thought. He went to the right; then he saw her, standing not a dozen yards distant, with her back to an ironwood tree, the lacy foliage casting a faint blur of shadow upon her. She was wearing a frock of flowered muslin; her arms were bare to the elbow, and her short dark hair, gathered at the nape of the neck, fell loosely about her shoulders. She stood as motionless as the tree that shaded her, the pet heron beside her, busily preening his feathers. The bird cocked up an eye at Hardie with a glance shrewd and comical; then proceeded with his morning toilet, with an air that seemed to say as plainly as words that this meeting was no concern of his.

"Naia . . . you knew I was coming?"

She gave a barely perceptible nod.

"How did you know? You mean that you guessed it?"

"How should I guess it? I saw you."

He waited, eager to hear more. Nothing in all the world, he thought, was so beautiful as her voice.

"And you knew it was I?"

She nodded again with the same slight gesture.

"As far as I could see the canoe I knew who it was." Hardie was aware of a half-mournful mocking light in her eyes. "You paddled stern first, with the outrigger on the wrong side. No one but you would have done that."

"No! Did I?" he laughed. "I never even thought of it. It should have been on the left side, of course. But what does it matter? I got here. And it was your fault."

"My fault?"

"I was thinking of you all the way."

"Alan, why did you come? Why? Why?"

"You ask me that?"

"It was so . . . so wise of you to go when you did. . . ."

"But Naia . . ."

"It was over—done with, your leaving. It will be . . . hard to go through it again."

"I'm not going again—not without you. That's what I've come to say."

She looked at him proudly. "Oh? You are very sure. And I must consent, you think?"

Hardie stepped forward, but Naia checked him. "No, stay where you are!" She stooped and picked up a fragment of coral. With this she drew a line in the sand, midway in the space between them. "You are not to cross it," she said; then seated herself with her back to the tree, waiting for him to speak.

"I'm *not* sure, Naia—not of that. I am sure of only one thing: I love you. You know it. You must know it."

"Then why did you go? You wanted to . . . to save yourself from me—was that it?"

"To save myself? I went because I thought you would want me to go, while I could. I was thinking of you much more than of myself. I was afraid I might do something to destroy your happiness. I meant never to come back. But . . . you see . . . I had to come."

She looked at him mournfully. "And now—what are we to do?"

"Naia, do you love me?"

"You know it, Alan," she replied, quietly. Of a sudden she hid her face in her arms.

Forgetting his resolve, Hardie was kneeling beside her in an instant. She clung to him, her face pressed tightly against his breast.

"Naia, forgive me! I didn't mean to blurt it out like that. I couldn't help it. I had to know. I've been so wretched, not knowing—not being sure."

She raised her head, smiling at him through her tears. "Say no more," she said. "I, too. I shouldn't tell you, Alan, but it's true: I've come here every day."

"You knew I'd come back. You must have known."

"I knew that you loved me. I saw that in your eyes the day you left. But I didn't think you'd come back. I only hoped it."

"Tell me when you were sure. About yourself, I mean."

"You tell me first."

"I must have known without knowing, before ever I saw you, Naia. Can anything have been stranger than our meeting? Think of all the chances against our ever knowing each other!"

"No, no! *Don't* think of them!"

"I shan't, then. Naia, you're so unbelievably lovely! I didn't know it was possible to be so happy!"

They spoke as young lovers have spoken through the ages. The sun climbed the sky unnoticed, passed the zenith and sloped westward, and for those two the long hours had never been. It was midafternoon before they again became aware of the passage of time. The girl rose hastily.

"Alan, look at the sun!"

Hardie laughed. “There’s something wrong with it to-day. Why, I’ve only just come! I must see your mother. You want me to, don’t you?”

“It’s very late. There’s little more than time for you to reach Tautira before dark.”

“I can’t go until I know. Don’t you think she might ask me to stay the night?”

“Perhaps. If she doesn’t, you can sleep in my grandfather’s house.”

They put their canoes into the water, Naia leading the way across the lagoon.

“What boat is that?” Hardie asked as they were approaching the mouth of the river.

“It’s a cutter from the Low Islands. It belongs to a man from Hao, named Miti. He’s an old friend of my grandfather. He often comes here to load oranges.”

“It wasn’t there this morning.”

“Of course it was. Didn’t you see it?”

“I saw nothing except your canoe,” he laughed. “I don’t suppose I would have noticed a whole fleet of cutters.”

They passed close to the vessel, which was anchored at the mouth of the river. There was no one on board. Having made their canoes fast at the pier, they walked together to the house.

CHAPTER XII

Late the same evening, Mauri, having left her father's hut, crossed the point to her own house. All was in darkness there. She halted below the verandah; then, scarcely knowing what she did, she went to the beach at the end of the point and paced up and down in an agitation of mind so great as to make ordered thought impossible.

She realized now that she had known what would come. In her heart, she had known from the day of her return from Moorea, when Raitua had told her of Hardie's visit, when she had seen in Naia's eyes what she had tried so hard to conceal. For a moment she gave way, in bitterness of heart, to a feeling of anger, of deep indignation, toward the young man who had brought this to pass. He was a fool, an impulsive, headstrong young fool! He was scarcely more than a boy, attracted for a moment by Naia's beauty. He wanted her now —yes; but how long would the attachment last? They were too young, both of them, to know their own minds. And yet . . . Mauri was seized with a feeling of anguish as she thought of the events of the afternoon. They had come to her together. She remembered the deep earnestness of Hardie's pleading, the good sense of his replies to her questions. She remembered how Naia had pleaded with him and for him. No, she could not delude herself. This was no idle boy-and-girl attachment. It was love, deep and abiding. There was no mistaking the truth of that emotion when it came.

If she consented—what then? The young man had spoken fairly. He had told her of his plans. His home was in England; his work was there. If Naia became his wife he would take her with him and she would see her no more. At best, years would pass before they could meet again. It would be the end. Naia would be lost to her forever. Mauri was not able to face that thought. All the jealous, devoted love of her nature cried out against it. Then, as though a force stronger than herself had compelled it, she whispered: "But the child is not mine. What right have I to deprive her of happiness?" The burden of a secret carried so long became, of a sudden, an intolerable weight. But what relief could there be for her now? The time for speaking had passed long ago. Could she break her silence now? Could she bear the shame of confession after all these years? And what harm she might do in depriving Naia of the mother she believed was hers! And how had she harmed her? Or the true mother so long in her grave? She had fought with all her strength, with all her woman's skill, for Nina's life. Yet death had taken her. She had not even known that her child was born. It was willed. Surely it was meant that Naia should be hers.

She found no peace in that thought. Mauri was a true Polynesian, in mind

and character, in her ineradicable belief in occult powers, both good and evil, directing human affairs. Deep in her heart she was convinced that Naia's dead parents were now trying to claim for their child the rights which she had been denied.

It must be done. Whatever the cost, the truth must be told. If she were to speak at all, it must be now—at once. She would waken Hardie, then Naia, and before them confess the secret of Naia's parentage. She stood for some time longer in the darkness, despair in her heart, vainly trying to find some way for herself other than this. Then, returning slowly to the house, she went through the hallway to the back verandah and lit a lamp which was there. The dim light made the blackness of the night more profound. She went along the passageway to the kitchen and stood for some time in the middle of the floor, the lamp in her hand, thinking of nothing, looking about the room as though trying to recall what had brought her there. She returned along the passage and went through the house, halting at the door of the room where Hardie was sleeping. Turning the lamp wick low, she opened the door inch by inch until it stood well ajar.

Hardie was lying on his side, his face turned away from her, his head pillowed on his arm. She called his name softly, but he did not stir. Noiselessly she entered the room, set the lamp on the table, and stood before it, her arms clasped tightly across her breast. She called again, in a voice scarcely audible. A look of terror came into her eyes as he stirred in his sleep. He turned toward her, flinging out one arm as he did so. "If he wakens now I must tell him," she thought. "It will be a sign." She waited, her shadow, made huge by the lamp behind her, thrown across the bed and on the wall beyond. Hardie stirred again, but a moment later his quiet regular breathing was resumed. Moving softly, with infinite caution, Mauri then took the lamp, shielding the light with her hand, and returned as she had come.

Once safely outside, the door closed behind her, she went quickly along the passage to the kitchen. Her heart was pounding as though she had been running. She sank into a chair and sat leaning forward, her chin in her hands, staring blankly at the floor. "I called him," she thought. "Loudly enough, too. If it were willed, he would have heard me. . . . It is settled, then? I need not speak? I may keep Naia? Who desires it? Myself. For whose comfort? Mine. No, no; for hers! It is not of myself I am thinking. Am I to deprive her of the only mother she has known? Her home is here; her happiness is here. What would her life be among strangers, on the other side of the world? She would die of homesickness and never speak. I know her too well. It is my duty to save her from a decision she would repent bitterly when it was too late. To save her—for what? For Kaupia's son, at Amanu? Knowing her blood, could I consent to that? Can I keep her hidden from the sight of all young men because

of my need of her?"

She thought again of Taio Vahiné's words: "The time may not be far when you will need to know what I can tell you. Come to me then." She had gone again to Taio Vahiné immediately after she had seen George McLeod, but the old woman was absent, and Mauri had learned that she had gone to Tautira. Now, surely, she would be at home again. Taio Vahiné alone could help her. She must see her before the dawn of another day. She could face neither Naia nor Hardie until she knew what the old woman could tell her.

The journey seemed endless to Mauri, and the night was so dark that she was forced to walk slowly, guiding herself by the very ghost of light that came from the surface of the lagoon. In her eagerness she missed the entrance to the narrow valley where Taio Vahiné lived, and she did not discover her mistake until she was some distance beyond. She retraced her steps, and having reached the house at last she called the old woman as before. Her heart sank when there was no reply. The door was unlocked. Mauri entered and felt her way to the bed, which was smooth and empty. She seated herself there for a moment, trying to decide what she must do. She would wait here until dawn, try to get a little sleep, and then go on to Tautira. While groping about the room in search of matches, she saw through the bamboo walls the gleam of a light at a distance, coming from farther up the valley. It could be no one but Taio Vahiné, for this small valley had no other inhabitant. A moment later the old woman appeared in full view, coming down the steep path, a lantern in one hand and a basket in the other, her tiny figure casting a grotesque shadow on the wall of the ravine. Mauri went to meet her.

"They must be gathered on just such a night as this," Taio Vahiné was saying, a moment later; "when there is neither moon nor stars." Upon reaching the house she set down her basket of plants in the shallows of the small stream that flowed through her dooryard, with a heavy stone in the basket to hold it in place. "Now, Mauri," she said, "come in. I have been expecting you. You shall tell me your trouble."

Mauri spoke long and earnestly, the old woman sitting on the floor beside her. Her eyes were closed, her face impassive. She listened to the end, without comment, nodding her head now and then as some more direct appeal was made to her attention.

"Now you have heard all, Mama Taio," Mauri said at last. "The time has come, as you foresaw, when I need your help. What must I do?"

"Why is he here, this young man? What brought him? You have not told me that," Taio Vahiné replied.

Mauri was silent for a moment. "He knows no more who Naia is than she herself," she said. "And yet he has come from the other side of the world. He came with Naia's brother, as though it were meant that these two should find

and claim her. Do you ask what brought him here? Naia's dead parents."

"It may be so. It may well be so. But there is this to be remembered, Mauri: the dead are no wiser than the living."

"What would you tell me? I don't understand," Mauri replied.

"This: there is no doubt of the wrong you did in claiming Naia as your own. But that is past; it can never be undone. A greater wrong might now be done by telling Naia the truth. Her parents—if their *mana* is at work here—would not see this. Their love would blind them to the danger."

"I too have believed this," Mauri replied, eagerly. "Naia is their child in blood, but mine in all else. Am I . . ."

"Wait, Mauri. I said 'might be done,' but it is not certain that it would be so. Naia would go with him gladly?"

"Yes. She will leave her home if it comes to that."

"Under the law the mother's consent is necessary to such a marriage."

"I know. I have the power to prevent it. . . ." Mauri crossed her arms over her breast, clasping her shoulders tightly as she rocked to and fro. "What am I to do?" she asked, wretchedly. "If the truth were known, think how gladly the boy's father would take to his heart this daughter of his friend. His joy would be as great as his wonder that such a thing should come to pass."

"It would be well, perhaps, if you should speak and let what will come of it."

"I have tried, as I have told you," Mauri replied, in a trembling voice. "Put that aside for now. What I would know is this: If Naia's life is joined with his, what future is in store for them?"

"Be it so, then," the old woman replied. "You will wait here?"

"Yes. I would know to-night, if that is possible."

"It is possible, if I can tell you at all. Sit you there on my bed. The waiting may be long."

Mauri did as directed. They had no further speech. The old woman left the room for a moment and returned with the half shell of a coconut, polished and black with age. This she placed on a small pedestal, setting it evenly on the carved support made to receive it. She filled the shell with water, pouring it slowly, and at last drop by drop, until it brimmed to the edge. Placing the lamp beside it, she seated herself crosslegged on the floor, elbows on knees, gazing long into water that looked as black as ink. She moved the lamp to various positions beside the bowl, now to one side, now to the other, now closer, now farther away. At last she sighed and shook her head. She spoke to herself in a low voice; the words were inaudible to Mauri. Putting away the bowl, the old woman again seated herself by the wall, on the opposite side of the room, her eyes closed, her hands folded in her lap. The time seemed endless to Mauri. She peered in awe across the dimly lighted chamber. Taio Vahiné sat

motionless, not seeming to breathe.

At last she raised her hands, pressing the tips of her fingers over her eyes. Her eyes were open when she dropped her hands once more.

"Mauri . . ."

"Yes?"

"What will happen I do not know. The events themselves are hidden. But this I can tell you with certainty: sorrow and death will be the result if those two are joined."

"Death? For whom?"

"For both. Now you must go. I am very tired."

"I am content," Mauri replied, eagerly. "Now the way is clear. I see what I must do. My mind is at peace once more. Good night, Mama Taio. Never could I repay this service, but I shall find means of showing that I keep it in mind."

The old woman rose wearily. "Say no more of it. I have done what you asked; what I could. Go now, and good go with you."

It was a late hour when Mauri reached home. The lamp, turned low, was still burning on the kitchen table. She took it up to go to her room, but as she passed Naia's door she looked in. The girl was awake, lying wide-eyed, her hands behind her head.

"What is this, Naia? You have not slept?"

"Yes; I slept well until an hour ago. Where have you been, Mother?"

Mauri put down the lamp and seated herself on the edge of the bed.

"Naia . . ."

"What is it? What have you been doing at this time of night?"

Mauri took the girl's hand and held it tightly between her own. "Naia, I have come from Taio Vahiné's house. I went to see her, to ask her advice. About you two."

"Well—and what has she told you?"

"You must give him up—that is certain. . . . Wait! Let me speak! Taio Vahiné has the power to look into the future. You know it as well as I. There can be no doubt of this power; it has been tried and found certain too many times. Naia, it is your happiness I think of. You are all I have. Taio Vahiné says this: If you marry this young man, sorrow and death will be the end of it. Sorrow and death, for both of you."

Mauri waited, gazing into the girl's face. Naia withdrew her hand and raised herself to a sitting position, staring at the small flame of the lamp. "Taio Vahiné has said this? She has spoken in those words?"

"In those very words. She loves you, Naia. She could not speak amiss in any matter concerning your welfare. She searched your future in two ways,

both with the same result. This cannot be set aside."

"It can be set aside, and it must be," the girl replied. "Mother, I love him! Is that nothing? You speak of my happiness. It is there, with Alan. Would you have a coward for a daughter? Would you have me order my life by the advice of an old woman looking into a coconut shell filled with water?"

"Hush! You speak as the child you are. You are no coward, nor am I; but the bravest man or woman the island round would counsel you as I am doing. Taio Vahiné has never been wrong in so important a matter. If you love him you must give him up. For his own sake you must do it."

"And am I to tell him this?" Naia asked. "You would have me say that I fear to marry him, and for such a reason?"

"What is to be said must be decided upon; but he must be told."

"No . . . no! Mother, speak from your heart! Put yourself in my place, if you can. Would you do what you ask me to do?"

"I would," Mauri replied, earnestly. "Remember Taio Vahiné's words: sorrow and death for both of you. Would you go toward such a future, taking him with you?"

"Yes, willingly," the girl replied. "If it must be so, then let it be so."

Mauri's face flushed. "But it shall not be so," she replied, in a hard voice. "He shall be sent away. I myself will tell him, since you will not."

Naia seized her hand. "You shall not, Mother!" she said. "Promise that you will not!"

"Then you will tell him?"

"You must give me time to think. You come like this, in the night, and ask me such a question! For all that you say, I am no longer a child. If you believe me one, then you have forgotten what you were at my age."

Mauri took the girl in her arms and held her close, her cheek pressed against the dark head.

"Naia, it is because I love you so deeply, with all of me—every drop of my blood! It is true—I confess it: to me you are still a child—my baby. How could I let you go, after what Taio Vahiné has said? And you must think of me a little. What would my life be without you?"

"But there is nothing to be frightened of. Sorrow must come to all in life, and death is certain. Taio Vahiné has said no more than I myself could have told her. When are these great sorrows to be? And what are they? Did she tell you that? . . . Mother, look at me! There is something you have hidden."

"The truth you would learn soon enough if you were to marry him," Mauri replied. "I must think for you since you will not look into the future for yourself. Try to imagine what your life would be among strangers, so far from home."

"I am not afraid. A wife goes where her husband goes, and I shall be happy

where he is."

"Never! You think so, but it could never be. Your way of life and his are too far apart."

"You were happy with my father."

"That was different. He was an older man. His work was done; he loved the islands and wished to make his home here. Do you think I would have married him if he had wished to take me away?"

"You loved him. You would have gone if he had asked you to, no matter what Taio Vahiné might have said."

Mauri rose abruptly. "Enough," she said. "We will speak of this no more to-night."

"But . . . what will you say to Alan?"

Mauri hesitated in replying. "You are young, both of you—young and without experience of life . . ."

"Others have been young before us, yet they have known their minds as we know ours. Mother, I must know what you will do."

"I cannot decide so important a matter at once, without time for reflection."

"I know, but . . ."

"This I will say, Naia, and this you must do: tell the young man that he is to return to Tautira, or to Papeete, or where he likes, so long as it is not here. He is to go in the morning, as soon as he has had his coffee. I have nothing to say to him now, and he is to make no attempt to see you again until he has my permission."

"And when will that be?"

"He shall have my answer within ten days."

"I shall tell him to wait in Tautira."

"As you please. Now I must sleep. I am very tired."

CHAPTER XIII

Raitua, who had spent the night fishing off Vaihiva Passage, wound in his lines, blew out the light in his lantern, and with his canoe laden with fat reef fish paddled slowly homeward. Mauri's household was not yet stirring. He selected two fish for himself, left the others hanging by the kitchen, crossed the point to his own dwelling, and was preparing his breakfast when he saw his friend Miti, owner of the Tuamoto cutter, coming along the beach to share the meal with him. The two men greeted each other in their customary silent fashion. Raitua set out bowls and plates, two loaves of bread, a basin of sugar, a tin of New Zealand butter, and then brought the pot of steaming coffee and the two fish which he had grilled over a fire of coconut shells. He glanced at his friend as he brought in the fish, but Miti held up his hand in protest.

"You would not thrust fish upon me when I must eat little else for the next six months?" he said. "No; let me have my fill of these fine fruits."

He went to the small, open-sided cookhouse at the back and returned with half a dozen bananas, a melon, and several papaias and oranges which he stored away in his capacious stomach while his coffee was cooling. Half a pound of sugar went into the two large basins of coffee, and the butter was spread generously on their thick slabs of bread. They ate and drank with but little speech, and, when they had finished, lighted their pipes.

Miti sighed. "Ah, *é*," he said. "Our islands are poor places compared with Tahiti. A wise man you were, Raitua, to marry a High Island woman and choose her home for yours."

"I have been content," Raitua replied. "Good land it is here, and the belly yearns for nothing that the land cannot provide. For all that, a man longs, at times, for the home of his youth."

"He does," said Miti, "however poor that home may be."

"But you have small ground for complaint," said Raitua. "You have your fine coconut lands on Hao and Amanu, and your copra provides you with money to buy all those things which the Low Islands lack."

"I know. I return home with my cutter loaded with food—flour and rice and all the good things in tins; but you will remember how soon it goes, with us. For two months, perhaps, we live well; then it is coconuts and fish once more."

"What of the turtle?"

"They seem less plentiful in these days; still, we have them. . . . Your daughter is hard to deal with, Raitua."

"How so?"

“This year she is charging me four francs the hundred for oranges. When I was last here, the price was three francs fifty.”

“Were they mine, you should have them for nothing. We have enough and to spare. Thousands rot on the ground.”

“That I know.” Miti sighed and shook his head. “Women are grasping. Buying or selling, they show their natures. Ancient family friendship counts for nothing with them. . . . You live here as you please, Raitua?”

“In my own fashion. As you see, in my own house. Men of our time of life enjoy their independence. They have earned it.”

“*Parau mau.*”

“These latest years are the best, to my thinking. Our children are married and off our hands, with homes of their own. . . .”

“And our wives safely at rest,” said Miti.

“I would have added that had you not prevented me,” said Raitua.

“Grandchildren are a comfort,” said Miti. “We have the pleasure of them without the care.”

“How many have you now?”

“Let me see . . . four of my daughter, Faairé; but these are far from me, since Faairé would take a husband from Mangareva. My son Manea’s children —his wife has given him four boys and two girls, and since they live at Amanu I see them often. Then, my two sons on our family lands at Hao have between them ten children. Yes, twenty in all, and there will be more to come, I hope.”

“You are fortunate to have so many near you,” said Raitua. “As you know, my children are widely scattered. I have nine grandchildren that I have never seen: four at Rurutu and five at Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas. On Tahiti I have only Naia. But I am content. She is one among thousands.”

“You may well say it. It is strange: I see little of Mauri in her. She follows her father’s people, perhaps?”

“So her father thought. He saw a resemblance in Naia to a younger sister of his.”

“What is her age now?”

“Sixteen and some months. I am overfond, perhaps, being her grandfather, but tell me this: have you seen a more beautiful child?”

“Never. I may say it with truth,” said Miti. “Mauri keeps her well hidden. Does Naia not long for more companionship than may be had here?”

“I have not seen it. She is a very child of solitude. But when the time comes, she will shape her own life, and well shape it. I have no fears for her beyond the coming of those sorrows which none can escape.”

Miti smoked in silence for a moment. “Did I not see a young *popaa* with Naia a few days past?” he asked.

“Aye,” said Raitua. “The young man is a son of an old friend of the

Englishman who died here years ago."

"He is of worth?"

"Of excellent worth. I can judge of a man, though I do not speak his tongue."

Miti threw back his head, studying the smoke that curled from his pipe as it passed through a shaft of early sunlight.

"We are old friends, Raitua. Tell me if I speak amiss. Was there nothing but friendship between Naia and this young man?"

"Was? There *is*, and much more. A great love has come to them. He wishes to marry Naia and has asked her mother's permission. He is awaiting her reply."

"And what will that be?"

"It is hard for a mother to part with her only child, but she will consent; that I believe. She must, for Naia's sake."

"Your own feeling in the matter is plain," said Miti.

"Those two were born for each other," Raitua replied. He sighed. "Life here without Naia . . . for me it will be less than nothing. The young man will take her with him to his home in England. But her happiness comes first."

"Mauri is less sure, perhaps, where her happiness lies."

Raitua knocked the ashes from his pipe and laid it on the table. "Miti, you had some purpose in coming to see me; that I know. Bring it out, then, when it pleases you."

"Ah, *é*. . . . Yes, now that you remind me . . . Mauri wishes to sail with me to Hao. She will go to-morrow night and asks me to have my fruit loaded by that time."

Raitua stared at his friend. "To Hao? Taking Naia with her?"

"I understood so."

"How double-minded women are!" Raitua exclaimed, wonderingly. "She would have kept this a secret from me."

"That I can well believe, if her purpose is to separate Naia from this young man."

"Miti, you have done well to tell me of this."

"I saw, as I thought, some strangeness in the matter," said Miti. "Mauri can well disguise her purposes, but when she asked that I say nothing to you, I gave consent with my silence alone."

Raitua was silent for a moment. "If the need should arise, you could, perhaps, sail earlier—even to-night?"

"The fruit is picked and ready. The loading will take little time," Miti replied. "What is in your mind?"

There was a hint of grimness in Raitua's smile. "Naia," he said. "I am, perhaps, a foolish old man; but for Naia's sake I would gladly show Mauri the

wisdom that lies in foolishness."

Miti chuckled silently. "A great surprise it would be for Mauri to have her own plan taken from her. Where is the young man?"

"At Fara's house. . . . Miti, come this way again, after you have had your noonday sleep. And let your son, Kaua, know that the fruit is to be loaded by to-night."

Miti rose. "I will do as you ask," he said. "*Parahi*, Raitua."

"*Haeré oé*. I shall take my rest now and think a little."

Raitua slept until midday. Upon waking, he strolled across to Mauri's house, where Teina, the helper in the kitchen, was at work.

"You have seen Naia?" he asked.

"A moment ago. She is about, somewhere."

"And Mauri?"

"She is still in the valley. The men are picking the oranges for Miti. You had good fishing last night, Raitua."

"Aye. I could have filled my canoe three times over. You sent some up the valley?"

"For all three families. My mother will be pleased with the *oraré*. Of all fish she likes it best. . . . Here is Naia."

Raitua looked up as the girl appeared on the back verandah. "Ah, Naia. My new bonito lures are finished, but I need your small fingers to braid sinnet for the lashings. Could you come with me for a little?"

Upon reaching his house, Raitua brought forth a chair and seated himself on the sanded floor facing Naia, with his back to the doorpost.

"I am ready," she said. "You have the fibre here?"

The old man shook his head. "It is not of bonito lures I am thinking. . . . Your mother is avoiding me, Naia. What has she told you since yesterday?"

"Nothing. She must have more time to think, she says. But she has promised. Within ten days she will speak."

"Naia, it is a great matter, this. You are sure? You have no doubts?"

"Of myself? No more than I have of Alan. Do you know me so little?"

"I have not forgotten what it is to be young. If you have misjudged the depth of your feeling, either of you . . ."

"Why must older people think there is such a curse of ignorance upon the young?"

"Because of their own mistakes, my child—their many mistakes at your time of life. Can you wonder that I try to look ahead? You will be going so far, to so strange a life. . . . Would you promise to tell me if you were unhappy there? You could always come back, you know."

Quickly Naia stooped to press her cheek against his. "Have no fears, Papa

Ruau. But I promise. I will have no secrets from you."

The old man patted her hand. "Good. You will never break a promise; that I know. You must write to me often. In doing this you will not forget your own speech. This I will say, Naia: from the day I first saw this young man, knowing who he was, I hoped for what has happened. But it is a great shock to your mother. That can be understood. If she should refuse her consent . . ."

"Refuse? But she won't! She can't! She must not!"

"Aye, but if she did?"

Naia searched his face anxiously. "She has told you she would?"

"No, but . . . Naia, it is what she plans."

Briefly the old man related what he had learned from Miti. "So it is," he concluded. "She would take you with her and this would be her reply to Hardie. Perhaps she would leave a letter for him."

"And she thinks I would go? She thinks me a child, to be led by the hand or carried away by main force?"

"She will have some plan. Perhaps she would have you think that you were to go only to Tautira with Miti's cutter. Then, when well out at sea, she would change her mind and proceed direct to Hao."

"Never would I have believed my mother capable of such deceit," Naia said, hotly.

"You must not think hardly of her. It is love for you that makes her deceitful."

"The shame it would be!" Naia exclaimed. "Alan would think that I went willingly. What are we to do?" she added, miserably.

"Miti's cutter lies where it did. It was to-morrow night that your mother planned to go."

The girl gave him a quick glance. "What do you say? Miti would . . ."

"Aye; he would sail earlier, if necessary, without telling your mother of a changed plan. It is for you to say."

"*Aué*, it could be done!" she said, her eyes shining. "It shall be done! You will come too?"

Raitua nodded. "I would gladly see Hao again. When you are married, we could return to face your mother's anger. It would cool swiftly. In her heart, she wishes your happiness as much as I."

Naia sprang from her chair, and seizing the old man's hands pulled him to his feet.

"Tell Miti, then," she said. "Tell him at once!"

"There is time enough," said Raitua. "The moon rises late. We must be gone before it comes, but there is time enough. Now, my child, get you to the house and make your preparations quietly. Your mother will be tired this evening and will sleep early. To-morrow, when she wakes . . ." He smiled and

shrugged his shoulders. “But Hardie?” he added. “He will be in Tautira, you think? A sad thing it would be if he could not be found.”

“He will be there,” said Naia. “He is waiting for Mother’s reply, and will hardly stir from Fara’s house until it comes.”

“Good. The reply shall be all that he hoped for.”

The girl threw her arms around him and kissed him on both cheeks. “Grandfather, never could we repay you—never!”

He patted her shoulder. “And who has asked for payment? Go, now, and quietly. Beware of Teina! She must suspect nothing.”

At dawn the following morning, Miti’s cutter, the *Vahiné Katiu*, close-hauled, with Miti at the wheel, was slipping quietly along with the breeze at northeast. Tahiti lay fifteen miles astern, and, as the light increased, the two young people seated aft gazed at the receding land with hearts too full for speech.

CHAPTER XIV

Hao was sighted late of an afternoon: a barely perceptible irregularity on the southern horizon. Although he kept the fact to himself, Hardie could see nothing, however steadily he gazed ahead, and it was not until hours later, when the cutter was within a mile of the entrance to Hao lagoon, that he was able to make out a narrow ribbon of land stretching away on either side, and showing black against the starlit sky. They moved in with a breeze so light as to give the illusion that the cutter was motionless and the land approaching to enclose them; then they were caught by the current and carried swiftly through the passage, beyond two small islets on either side of it and on for half a mile before they lost momentum and drifted idly on the surface of water ablaze with the reflections of stars.

Naia was the first to break silence.

"We're here, Alan," she said. "I always have to say it to make sure, coming in like this, by starlight."

"Even so, I can scarcely believe it," Hardie replied. "I shall never forget this; never, as long as I live!"

"I've never been certain which I loved more, Hao or Vaihiva. But wait until daylight. The early morning is the best of all."

"It couldn't be better than this. Have you come here often?"

"I used to come nearly every year with my father. We would stay for two or three months."

"But where are all the people?"

"There aren't many on these Low Islands. Hao has two hundred and fifty. The village is down the lagoon, on that side."

While they were speaking they heard a clear exultant shout, sounding infinitely remote and lonely in the wide air. It was taken up and repeated yet farther away. Kaua cupped his hands at his lips and answered from the cutter.

"They will have been on the lookout for days," Naia said. "It's a great event when one of the cutters returns from the High Islands with all the good things on board. The village will be astir now and come down to meet us."

Half an hour later, from far down the lagoon, out of the profound stillness of the night came a sudden burst of music, men's and women's voices singing in chorus. Hardie felt a shiver of delight go through him.

"I hoped they would sing," said Naia; "they have splendid voices, the Hao people. Can you see them now? I told you—all the village is coming."

A moment later he could make out the shadowy outlines of canoes, dozens of them, filled with men, women, and children. The singing ceased abruptly.

Raitua hailed them and was answered from all sides. Some of the canoes carried torches: long slender bundles of dry palm fronds bound together. These were now set aflame and held high, lighting up the lagoon for half a mile around. Hardie thought he had never beheld a more beautiful sight than was now revealed. In the midst of the fleet of canoes was a long reef boat rowed by a dozen men. They approached the cutter and a line was thrown to them, whereupon they took the vessel in tow, the canoes spread out on all sides, their occupants shouting and laughing and exchanging talk with those on the cutter. Raitua brought up copra sacks filled with oranges and mangoes and, with Miti and Kaua to help, began throwing them out to eagerly upstretched hands. One large canoe, crowded with boys and girls, capsized as the youngsters scrambled for the fruit, but they were quite at home in the water and, being full of mischief, capsized other canoes until the lagoon seemed to be alive with hilarious children in eager races with one another for the oranges bobbing about on the surface.

A great fire had been lighted on the beach not far ahead, and as they approached Hardie could see a pier of coral slabs extending across the shallows to deep water. The cutter was made fast here, and the canoes were drawn up all along the beach. A moment later, when Hardie went ashore with Naia and Raitua, the village was assembled at the end of the pier to welcome them. The glow from the fire threw long shadows among the palms, lighted up the walls of small thatched houses, and flickered over faces, bare arms and legs and shoulders. All the older people came forward to shake hands with Hardie and to embrace Naia and her grandfather, while the children raced here and there in the background, filled with the excitement of this unusual event. When the last of the greetings were over, Naia touched Hardie's arm. "We can go now," she said. "The others will want to hear the news. Grandfather will tell them all he knows about you and a great deal more he doesn't know. It's just as well for us to be away while he's doing it."

The village extended along the lagoon beach for half a mile on either side of the landing place. They turned to the right along a roadway bordered with coconut palms, *kahaia* and *pukatea* trees that cast pools of deeper shadow around them. Hardie halted to look back at the scene they had left.

"This is a strange experience for me," he said. "What friendly people! They make me feel that I belong here."

"It is home to my grandfather, and they all know us," Naia replied. "He's already told them who you are and why we've come."

When they had reached the end of the village, Naia led the way across the narrow strip of land to the outer beach, which seemed to stretch away on either side for an immeasurable distance. A little way down the slope, the sand gave place to ramparts of broken corals, and below that was the fringing reef, with

scattered rock pools holding water so still that they were like fallen fragments of the starlit sky. They stood hand in hand, looking out over the vast shadowy floor of the sea, finding nothing to say in the presence of such lonely beauty.

"It's ours, Alan, all of this," Naia remarked, presently. "Yours and mine, for miles and miles. I used to wander along these outer beaches all day long and never meet anyone."

"How large is the island?"

"Thirty miles from one end of the lagoon to the other, and about half that across, in the widest part. There are seventy-five islands like this, some of them much larger than Hao. It's a thousand miles from one end of the Archipelago to the other."

"And I didn't know, until a month ago, that there were such islands."

Naia smiled. "There are a good many people on Hao who have never heard of England, either."

"And they live here always, without ever leaving the place?"

"Many do. But the young men often go away when they are ready to marry, in search of a wife. And others come here for the same purpose. They are very careful about intermarrying."

"I can't help thinking about your mother, Naia. I'm afraid we've played her a shabby trick, running off like this."

"It was the only thing we could have done if you wanted me."

"Will she be very angry?"

"Yes, at first. Grandfather's let all our relatives think we've come with Mother's consent. He can tell huge lies when he wants to, without seeming to tell them."

"We must not let them believe that."

"Oh yes, we must. We can't marry without Mother's consent; it's the French law. But once it's done it will be all right."

"You think so?"

"I know it. Grandfather knows it, too. If he had not, he would never have come with us. What will your father think?"

"He'll object, perhaps, when he first hears of it. But once he's seen you, Naia . . . He couldn't help loving you!"

"But suppose he shouldn't?"

"I'll not suppose anything of the sort. It wouldn't matter, anyway. Not in the least."

"You've got a stubborn streak in you, Alan. So have I."

"It's not stubbornness at all. It's simply knowing my own mind better than anyone else could know it."

"Call it what you please; I like you for it. . . . There's something I must tell you, Alan. I've wanted to before, and then . . . well, I didn't."

"What is it?"

"After you'd spoken to my mother, she went to see an old woman who lives three miles down the lagoon from our place. It was on that same night. Taio Vahiné is the woman's name. She can see into the future, and Mother wanted to ask her about us."

"Well—what then?"

"Taio Vahiné told Mother that we shouldn't marry. If we did, she said that sorrow and death would be the end of it—for both of us."

"You don't believe such nonsense, do you?"

"Yes; it frightened me."

"Do you mean it? The rigamarole of an old witch doctor? Take my word for it: she can see into the future no better than ourselves. Not half so well."

"Even if it were so, it wouldn't make any difference. Not to me. But I wanted you to know."

"Don't ever let that trouble your little head again. Promise that you won't."

"Mother believes it."

"Because she wanted to. She can't bear the thought of parting with you. And the old woman said what she thought would please her."

"You believe that?"

"I'm certain of it."

"Then I will, too."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"Naia, stand just as you are for a moment. I want this picture of you to keep in my mind forever."

She laughed softly. "There—have you got it? It will be very dim. Wouldn't you like a closer one?"

"Yes, that too. That most of all."

It was late when they returned to the village. Far down the beach they could see the crowd, as large as ever, still gathered around the fire.

"They are listening to the *parau-api*—the news," Naia explained. "They will keep Miti and my grandfather talking until morning. Are you sleepy?"

"Yes, a little. Aren't you?"

"More than a little. You're to be at Miti's house. Your room is all ready. I'll show you the place."

"Where shall you be?"

"With Tepoa's family. She's my grandfather's sister."

They turned in at a gateway before a low frame dwelling with a spacious verandah running the width of it and hidden from the roadway by a hedge. Naia led the way up the steps.

"I wasn't expecting anything like this on Hao," Hardie remarked. "It's Miti's house, you say?"

"My father built it," Naia replied. "After his death, my mother sold it to Miti. He is more than proud to have a *popaa* kind of dwelling."

A lamp was burning in a room at the end of the verandah. "You're to sleep there," Naia said. "It was my father's old room. I shan't be far away."

"Naia, are you as happy as I am?"

"More."

"You couldn't be. That little heart couldn't hold so much happiness."

"You think so? It can hold you. That's as big as I want it."

"We shan't have to wait long, shall we? For the wedding, I mean? Can't we have it straight off?"

"Within two or three days, if you want it so. Grandfather will see to that."

"And a quiet wedding—just ourselves."

"Quiet? There'll be no one but us and everyone else on the island."

"Oh, Lord! How long will it last?"

"The celebration? Not more than a week."

"A week!"

Naia laughed. "For them, not for us. Don't worry, Alan. It will have to be so. All the people here are old friends or relatives of the family. They would think it lacking in respect to us to have no wedding feast, and it would be more than impolite for us to object. You see that, don't you?"

"Of course. If it had to be, I'd go through a feast at every one of the seventy-five islands."

"We shan't have to sit through even this one. Now I will go. Good night. Sleep well, Alan."

For the next three days preparations for the feast went steadily forward, and Hardie realized that Naia had not overstated the importance of the event for the people of Hao. A special house was built for the celebration of the feast. The site selected was on the lagoon beach not far from the church. All the settlement was engaged in the task, the women plaiting the fronds for the roof and the men erecting the framework. The house was sixty feet long and twenty wide, open at the sides and supported on posts cut from the trunks of coconut palms.

When the house was finished, attention was turned to the food for the feast. Sailing canoes were constantly going and coming, bringing fowls, pigs, and turtle from distant islets that bordered the great lagoon, until the supplies assembled on the village island seemed to Hardie more than enough to feed five hundred guests.

"They can't possibly eat all this," he remarked one afternoon when they

were standing by the place where the supplies were being collected.

"You don't know the Low Island people," Naia replied. "They save up for occasions like this. What you see here is only the beginning; there's all the fish and other sea food to come."

"When?"

"This afternoon, so that it will be fresh for to-morrow. The young men will soon be off spearing outside the reefs, and to-night they will get the shellfish. . . . There's Makino calling us."

Makino, the chief of Hao, was at the head of the committee of elders in charge of the preparations. He was a huge jolly man, with a powerful frame well able to support his three hundred pounds. He was to be found at all hours of the day sitting at his ease in the shade near the feasting house, giving orders and directions, and keeping the village humming with activity. Makino had led an adventurous roving sea life in his younger days, and still remembered some of the English he had acquired during those years. He motioned Hardie to a place on the mat.

"Hardie *tané*," he exclaimed, approvingly, as the Englishman took his seat beside him; then, turning to the girl: "Naia, you two have fine children. *Parau mau!* That's sure. You two just right. Big husband, little wife: good. Little husband, big wife: *aita maitai*." He chuckled heartily. "You like?" he added, with a motion of his hand toward the feasting house.

"It's splendid," Hardie replied. "I would never have believed you could put it up so quickly."

The chief smiled with a flash of his strong white teeth. "Work hard, eat hard, sleep hard," he said. "Plenty time on Hao for all that."

"Where's my grandfather, Makino?" Naia asked.

"You wait. By and by you see. *É*, Hardie *tané*: fine place, Hao. We make house easy. Two three days, all finish. Not like *fenua popaa*. You know that word, *fenua popaa*?"

"It means all the other countries, doesn't it?"

The chief nodded. "All the white men countries. *Aita maitai.* Too much people. Too much *péapéa*. Too much cold. . . . Br-r-r!"

"You've been in England?" Hardie asked.

"Twice," said Makino, holding up two fingers so that there could be no mistake about it. "Liverpool. You take Naia there?"

"To Liverpool? No; I live in the south."

"Good. I'm glad you not go to Liverpool. Bad people. Bad everything. Naia never be happy in that country. Why you not live here?"

Hardie found it difficult to reply to that question without going into a long account of his own circumstances. While attempting it, he was aware of an ache in the heart at thought of leaving so soon, and perhaps forever, this little

island world, almost sufficient to itself, where happiness was the rule, not the exception of life. Man's inhumanity to man was unknown here; there were neither rich nor poor, and what he had seen of their community life convinced him that, if ever there had been a golden age in human society, then among these scattered islands in the midmost Pacific were the last lost remnants of it, surviving by reason of their remoteness from mankind in the aggregate. Misgiving seized him as a picture flashed into mind of himself and Naia arriving in England, on a bleak autumn day, perhaps, with an east wind lashing the rain in their faces. He could imagine Naia's dismay and bewilderment as they walked through the dingy streets of some port town and she caught her first glimpses of poverty and squalor such as England alone can show. The first contact with her new homeland would be more than disillusioning.

"What are you thinking about, Alan?" Naia asked, as they were walking back to Tepoa's house.

"Of England. Naia, you won't like it there, at first. You'll be terribly homesick."

"Of course. I'm prepared for that."

"Have you tried to imagine what it will be?"

"A little. My father used to tell me about his home in Boston. I suppose England is like that?"

"Something like, perhaps."

"Don't worry. I shall be happy where you are."

"Will you promise to tell me if you're not?"

"And make you unhappy too? Never!"

"But you must, Naia! I wouldn't . . ."

"*Mamu*," she interrupted. "How foolish you are to think of such things. I may love England. You're not to speak of that any more!"

They found Raitua awaiting them at his sister's house. He had been away from the settlement for the past two days, and replied vaguely when Naia questioned him as to where he had been. "It's something to do with us," she said, turning to Hardie, "but I don't know just what. He wants us to go with him down the lagoon when we've had our lunch."

They set out by canoe early in the afternoon. There was not a breath of wind, and the glare of the sunlight reflected from the beaches of white sand and the surface of the water was all but blinding to Hardie. He drew in his paddle for a moment while he took his dark glasses from their case and put them on.

"You don't mind my wearing these things, Naia?" he asked.

She glanced back. "No; why should I? The people here often wear them in the middle of the day. They make you look so old and wise."

"I hate the cursed things, but I'm supposed to keep them on in the glare of

the sun."

"You are? Then why don't you, oftener?"

"I forget."

"Your sight isn't very good, is it? I've noticed that you can't see things well at a distance."

"As good as most people's, ordinarily. But I've strained my eyes the past year or two. Read too much. Where are we going?"

"I don't know, exactly. This is some secret of my grandfather's. But I can guess what he's been up to."

They left the village island behind them and were skirting a great stretch of reef where the seas rose to fall on the coral in polished glassy curves and flashes of blinding splendor. After another hour of paddling, they saw before them an islet, thickly wooded, a green oasis for the eyes in the midst of the empty sea. On the lagoon side, scattered coconut palms leaned far out over their mirrored reflections, and *kahaia* and pandanus trees made pools of deep shade along the slope of the beach. The islet was not more than a quarter of a mile long and three or four hundred paces across. To Hardie it seemed a place that might well have been dreamed into being by some lonely spirit of mid-ocean. When they were halfway along it, Raitua turned the canoe ashore. They pulled it out of the water and he led the way inland for twenty or thirty yards and stopped before a small thatched dwelling, newly built of green fronds. The eaves descended low beyond the walls, which were arranged to prop open, giving views in all directions.

"*Teié*," said Raitua. "*No orua.*"

"It's for us," Naia explained. "He wanted us to see it first, to be sure that he'd forgotten nothing we might need."

The old man smiled with pleasure at Hardie's warm handclasp and proceeded to show them their home. It had been built in the shade of a wide-branching *pukatea* tree, and the floor was of sifted coral sand covered with mats. The little furniture made the room look spacious and cool. There was a bed on the floor, after the native fashion, with pillows with hand-embroidered cases on them and covered with a *tifaifai*, a coverlet like a patchwork quilt, made of tiny pieces of colored silk set in intricate and harmonious designs. A table and two chairs completed the furnishings, with a bench under the eaves on the seaward side of the dwelling. Carefully tacked to one wall were two colored pictures cut from the pages of some illustrated magazine: one of the English Houses of Parliament, with the face on Big Ben showing the hour of twelve, and the second, an old photograph of King George and Queen Mary, with their children grouped around them. Hardie was touched at this mark of thoughtfulness on the old man's part. He had forgotten nothing which he thought might add to their comfort and pleasure, and had brought supplies

sufficient to make them independent of the settlement for a fortnight, at least. A one-hundred-gallon cask of water had been sunk in the sand, in the shade of a pandanus thicket where it would keep cool and fresh, and near by was a small cookhouse, with its native oven ready for use, and provided with pots, pans, and other utensils. Here also were flour, rice, sweet potatoes, taro, tinned foods—everything needed for their housekeeping, including a pen of fowls to provide them with eggs and fresh meat.

Late on the following afternoon, they returned to their islet, the two of them alone, slipping quietly away from the village where the great feast was in progress. There was a light breeze, and while Hardie stepped the little mast for their canoe and put up the sail, Naia went behind a screen of bushes to change from her wedding frock to a flowered *pareu*.

"There, that's better," she said, as she appeared again, barefooted and barelegged.

"Keep the wreath, Naia. You don't know how pretty you look in it."

"I will, then." She removed it for a moment while she let down her hair and shook it out; then she replaced it, pressing it lightly down over her head. "Like that?"

"Mrs. Alan Hardie . . ."

She waded across the shallows with her wedding gown under her arm. "Doesn't it sound strange? You know, Alan, I used to say to myself, 'Miss Naia Thayer,' and I could never quite believe it. It didn't seem to be me at all. Mrs. Alan Hardie. . . . It's hard to believe that, too, but I love it. Say it again."

"Mrs. Alan Hardie."

She laughed softly. "Now I'll say it in native, to make sure: Hardie Vahiné. . . . Yes, I like it both ways."

She took her place in the bow, facing him; he let out the sheet and leaned back with an arm on the tiller. The small canoe gathered way, like a detail in a picture, gifted of a sudden with the power of movement. No one had followed them to the beach; all the village was gathered at the feasting house. The sound of singing came clearly from across the water, but the music grew fainter and fainter until they heard it no more.

The sun had set by the time they had reached their islet; the breeze died away, and the vast lagoon was a sea of golden light; but to the eastward the splendor was fading slowly to deepening shades of mauve and blue. As they were standing before their little house, Naia glanced overhead and caught her husband's arm. "Look, Alan!" Through the foliage of the *pukatea* tree, framed in a small clear space, the new moon appeared, the shadowed ball glowing faintly against the thin curve of silvery glory at the rim.

CHAPTER XV

It was a bright morning, with an easterly breeze that set the palms to swaying and ruffled the lagoon, over the shoal patches, in tints of pale blue and emerald. The cutter footed it out through the Hao Passage and slacked away for the seventy-mile run to Ravaheré, the first landfall on the long voyage to Tahiti. Raitua was at the wheel, Hardie and Naia sat side by side on the hatch, gazing back at the receding land, the scattered islets dwindling and blurring under the cloudless sky until they were lost to view below the horizon.

Naia sighed and tossed her head to shake back her hair, disordered by the wind.

"It's gone, Alan," she said. "Shall we ever see it again?"

"What a little time we've had there," Hardie replied. "Only a fortnight! Is the place real? Now that we've left it, I'll never be quite sure that there is such an island."

"Then we must come back, some day, to see if it's still there," Naia replied. "We can, surely?" ' she added, wistfully.

"I promise it, Naia. It may be some years, but we'll come. It will be something to look forward to. And we'll be as happy the next time as we have this."

Naia slipped her hand into his. "That's enough for me," she said. "I shan't mind the waiting. Take the wheel now. I want Grandfather to help me prepare the food."

Raitua went forward to kindle a fire in the tin-lined box filled with sand that served as a galley. Hardie glanced at the compass: the course was west-by-south. The wind blew warm and fair and the cutter raced westward with no sound but the crisp rush of water under her counter and the straining and the faint creak of blocks. Hardie felt a thrill of pleasure at having her under his hand and at seeing how readily she answered to the slightest touch of the wheel; but he glanced disapprovingly at her mast and rigging: it seemed to him something in the nature of a crime that such a splendid little vessel should have been so badly neglected. She had evidently been lying up untouched for months in Hao lagoon. Natives were careless folk, he thought. They loved their boats and were masters at designing and building them, but their carelessness in the matter of upkeep was appalling, from an Englishman's point of view.

All through the afternoon they ran on at eight knots or more. The sun was low when the breeze died away, but the palms of Ravaheré were in sight on the starboard bow, only a few miles distant. They lost steerageway and the cutter rolled gently to the light swell, the reef points pattering against the canvas with

a mellow crusty sound. Raitua lighted his pipe. Presently he spoke to Naia with a shake of his head.

"He doesn't like the look of the sky," the girl explained. "He thinks we are in for several days of calm." After a time she rose to light a hurricane lantern and make it fast to the boom. The sea had flattened with the dying of the wind and the cutter now lay all but motionless on the glassy water. When they had eaten their supper, Raitua smoked a final pipe and turned in on the bags of copra under the open hatch. Hardie and Naia sat long on the afterdeck, speaking in low voices, hushed in tune with the sleeping sea, as if awed by the immense friendly silence that encircled them. Presently Naia began to sing, in a voice so soft that it was barely audible, a strange, plaintive little song.

"What's that?" Hardie asked, when she had ended.

"A song about a Tuamotu girl."

"What do the words mean?"

"Shall I tell you? Perhaps not . . . but yes, I will try."

Naia thought for some time before she began, and then recited hesitatingly:—

"A *tefano* blossom am I,
Brought hither from the east.
Playing with my companions in the breakers,
Like a sea god riding a combing wave,
I first saw you.

"As dawn brightens to day
Has my love for you grown.
Alas, were you lost to me!

That isn't very well done, but it's close to the meaning," she added. "Do you see that star, the bright one?"

"We call it Sirius."

"It's Takuparé, an old god of these islands. And the other star yonder?"

"Canopus—the Star of Egypt."

"Canopus? It's really Autahi, Takuparé's wife. They used to be together, loving one another dearly. Then, once upon a time, the husband went away to visit the world of men. It was the first time he had left his wife alone. She was afraid of what might happen, so she followed and found him with a woman named Merehau. In her anger and grief, Autahi fled away. Takuparé was deeply ashamed of what he had done and followed her, and the woman, Merehau, left the mortal world to follow him. Look—there she is, the red star."

"Betelgeuse," Hardie said.

"What queer names you have for our stars," Naia remarked. "Then

Takuparé called after his wife: ‘Guiding star, turn your face to me,’ but she would not turn. And he called again: ‘Never will I let you go, though you fly to the domed heaven of Atéa!’ At last she turned her head and called back: ‘I flee away. Never shall you gain my side!’ And . . . you see? He never did.”

Hardie patted her hand and smiled to himself, suspecting that this tale of the stars might be intended to convey a message.

“I wish I knew your speech, Naia,” he said.

“I’d be glad to teach you if we were going to stay in the islands,” she replied. “It’s much more beautiful than English or French.”

“Why not teach me anyway? Languages have never been hard for me. I can already understand a good deal that people say in Tahitian. If I were to make a real effort I could soon learn. Then we could speak it at home, sometimes.”

“Will you, Alan? I’d love to teach you! When would you like to begin?”

“Any time. To-morrow, if you please. But I warn you, Naia, that if we start, you’ll have to give me a lesson every day. I’ll never be satisfied until I know it well.”

“I shouldn’t want you to be.”

They spoke, then, of other things: of their journey to England; of the life that lay ahead; of a return to the islands for a long sojourn in years to come, when Hardie’s work would permit. At last Naia brought up their mat and pillows from below, and they fell asleep.

The eastern sky was brightening when Raitua emerged from his retreat in the hold. Dressed in a scarlet waistcloth, his powerful shoulders and torso bare, he walked aft and looked down at the two sleepers on deck. Naia’s dark head lay on her husband’s shoulder; they slept like children, scarcely seeming to breathe. The old man smiled as he looked at them. A fine pair they were, he thought. They couldn’t have been better suited to one another. He wondered again that his daughter could have opposed such a match. How foolish mothers were, and how selfish. But he had no doubt that Mauri would thank him soon enough for having brought those two together. Walking softly, he went forward for his morning bath, casting aside his waistcloth and drawing water from alongside, in a canvas bucket. He sluiced himself well and, after a vigorous toweling, again hitched on his waistcloth. Having kindled a fire in the galley, he went below for water to fill the coffeepot.

The cutter’s water supply was contained in several five-gallon demijohns ranged along the bulkhead at the after end of the hold. He filled his pot from one that had been broached the day before. Then, as an afterthought, he hefted the next one in line. It was empty. Quickly he examined the remaining demijohns. All were empty. There were less than four gallons of water on board. Raitua returned on deck muttering angrily to himself. He had supervised in person the provisioning of the cutter, but had trusted his sister’s son to see

that the demijohns were filled from the cistern behind the church. This he had promised to do, and in the hurry of departure Raitua had forgotten to make sure that it had been done. He glanced around the circle of the horizon, breathing a sigh of relief at seeing how the current had set them in closer to Ravaheré. The land was now plainly visible in the increasing light; he could make out the line of surf along the reef. Lucky for them, he thought. The carelessness of that worthless nephew might have cost them their lives had they been far from land.

There was a perfume of coffee in the air when Hardie stirred and sat up, rubbing his eyes. He stepped onto the rail and dived overboard, deep into clear blue water. A moment later Naia followed him. Breakfast was ready by the time they had finished their bath, and they sat down with keen appetite to a meal of ship's biscuit, sardines, and coffee.

When the heat of the sun began to be disagreeable, they rigged an awning with the spare forestaysail. Not a sign of wind was visible. Feeling thirsty, Hardie went below for a bowl of water, offering it to Naia. She took a sip.

"We must be careful of water," she remarked, seriously. "Grandfather discovered this morning that they forgot to fill our demijohns at Hao. We've only three and a half gallons left."

"I'm glad you told me! But there's plenty if we ration ourselves. A good thing we're close to land. Is there a pass into the lagoon here?"

"Yes. The village is on the north side. But we're not there yet. If only the wind would come!"

All that day no breath of air ruffled the sea. It was the same throughout the night. There was no explaining the current; they seemed to have lost it, or to be moving so slowly that no progress toward land was perceptible; but the next morning, to their great relief, they found that they were scarcely a mile from the reef. There was no land along that part of the atoll, but they could see the palms of the village islet far in the distance. After a period of anxious watching, they discovered that the current was setting them to seaward once more. As soon as he was certain of this, Raitua spoke earnestly to his granddaughter. She turned to Hardie.

"He's going to swim ashore," she explained. "He can make his way along the reef to the village, for help."

"Tell him I'll go," Hardie said, rising.

"No, Alan, we spoke of that. He wants you to stay with me. A stranger could never make his way along the reefs. It is seven or eight miles to the village. You'd be all day at it, and you wouldn't be able to talk to the people when you got there."

Hardie realized the need for haste and was forced to admit his unfitness for the task. Raitua lowered himself over the side and swam easily toward the

land. They watched him anxiously. The sea was so calm that they could follow him all the way. At last Naia saw him gain the reef and turn seaward with a wave of his hand.

The reef was awash, full of crevices and slippery with marine growths which forced the old man to pick his way slowly. At the end of an hour, when he had traveled about a mile, he halted to rest and noted with satisfaction that the current was definitely setting the cutter offshore again. The heat was intense, shimmering on the calm lagoon and lending to the distant village islet the appearance of an unattainable mirage. He stooped to dash water over his head, replaced his hat, and trudged on. Almost automatically he avoided the dangers of the place: the sharp tubular *ungakó* which would cut the unwary foot to the bone; the sea urchins with their poisoned spines; the ugly stonefish lurking in the shallow pools. Presently the reef lowered so that the waves swept across it waist-deep, and he was forced to take to the lagoon, half wading, half swimming among the coral mushrooms for nearly a mile. Twice during this time sharks of considerable size passed near him, but they were of the harmless kind, gray, with black-tipped dorsal fins. But as he was again making for the reef, now rising to the surface and beginning to appear in places as a black sun-baked causeway, he perceived a small dark-colored shark quartering the lagoon in his direction. Raitua quickened his progress and scrambled onto the reef with undignified haste. The shark approached the coral fearlessly, swimming along parallel to his course and turning from time to time to stare up with a cold green eye. The old man was relieved when it turned and disappeared in the depths of the lagoon.

As the hot still morning advanced, masses of dark cloud appeared on the northern horizon, mounting and widening until the sun was obscured. The overcast sky brought little relief to Raitua, for the air was laden with the salt spray of the reef and his thirst was becoming intolerable. It was noon when he at last reached the south end of the islet. His approach had been unnoticed, for the village was still more than a mile distant.

The old man sighed with relief as he stepped onto the white coral sand. He went quickly to a young palm whose clusters of nuts hung within easy reach, twisted off three or four, and sank down in the shade, fumbling at his clasp knife with fingers that trembled as he cut away the green husk. He drank long and eagerly, the cool liquid spilling from his chin and over his bare chest.

A quarter of an hour later he came to the first house of the village and halted outside to give the call of a visitor announcing his presence. The people were at their noonday meal at the rear of the dwelling. He heard an answering call, "*Haéré mai!*" and went round the house, where the head of the family, a man of his own age, rose to meet him with an expression of wonder in his eyes.

"*O Raitua!*" he exclaimed, incredulously. "*Nofea mai oé?*"

"From Hao. We were becalmed off yonder, with no water on board. I came for help. I need a boat and some of the young men."

"Your daughter is here," the other replied.

"Mauri?"

"Aye. Look! It is her cutter that lies there before the chief's house."

A pair of boys who had been listening with bright-eyed interest now dashed away with the news, shouting as they passed each house. By the time Raitua had reached the chief's dwelling, he and his old friend were leading a procession which included nearly every able-bodied inhabitant of the place. Mauri met her father on the road. He stopped short at sight of her. Concealing her anxiety as best she could before so many curious eyes, she managed to smile as she kissed him on both cheeks. He shook hands ceremoniously with the chief and explained the situation briefly.

"Make ready a boat, with six young men to pull," he concluded. "Take water with you; no food is needed. If they make haste, they can tow the cutter in before nightfall."

"It shall be done at once," the chief replied. He glanced up at the sky, now of a widespread and ominous darkness. "There is wind to come," he added; "but the calm may last for some hours yet."

Mauri took her father's arm. "You must eat and drink," she said. "There is time for that."

The others remained outside, discussing every aspect of this break in the monotony of their lives. When they were alone together and food had been set on the table, Mauri asked: "Where have you been?"

"At Hao."

"Are they married?"

"Yes. . . . Mauri, you are angry still, perhaps?"

"What you have done is a small matter, you think? One easy to forgive?"

"Your anger can be understood, but if you wish for Naia's happiness you may well forgive me. . . . How came you here? You were following us?"

Mauri rose abruptly. "They are bringing the boat," she said. "I am going with them. You are weary; stay here and rest."

Her father crammed the last morsel of a tin of beef into his mouth and got to his feet with an effort. "Stop here? *É haéré taua teienei!*" She gave him a glance of pity, shrugged her shoulders, and led the way to the beach, where the captain of her chartered cutter stood in the midst of the crowd by the boat. The oarsmen were already in their places, waiting. Mauri touched the captain's arm.

"Stand by here," she ordered. "The moment there is a breath of wind, up anchor and follow us."

The man nodded. “It will be more than a breath when it comes,” he replied. “My men are reefing now. Take care, you in the boat! There is a storm on the way!”

Followed by Raitua, Mauri waded across the shallows to the boat. Mauri sat on the stern thwart and Raitua took the long steering sweep, and with the men bending to their oars they made for the narrow crooked passage, half a mile distant. Aided by a strong current, the boat was carried swiftly through the pass and was soon riding the swell outside. Great glassy seas, forerunners of the storm, were rolling southward, lifting the boat high and passing smoothly on. The heat was intense. The half-naked bodies of the oarsmen streamed with sweat. Raitua turned to examine the sky behind them. “*A hoé, a hoé*,” he urged. The men pulled strongly, aware of the need for haste. As they rounded the northeastern end of the islet, the last patch of sunlight, miles away to the south, was blotted out and the light faded quickly from sea and sky. Mauri turned to her father.

“Can Hardie sail a cutter?” she asked.

“Aye, like a Tuamotu man.”

She touched a tin of water with her bare foot. “There will be small need for this. First will come rain, then wind. Does he know enough to reef?”

“Surely. And Naia knows the weather as I do. . . . One thing I fear: the standing rigging. The lanyards are old; it was in my mind to change them.”

“You are late, thinking of it now,” Mauri replied, shortly.

She fell silent while the Ravaheré men strained at the oars, and the boat moved steadily southward in a silence that seemed to deepen with the darkening sky. She made a conscious effort to nurse her anger, despising herself for doing it. What she had dreaded for so many years, what she had tried so hard to avoid, had come. She had known in her heart that it was useless to struggle against the dead. Naia’s parents had triumphed at last. But it was in her power to annul the marriage. Could she do this? Could she destroy Naia’s happiness for her own selfish ends? If not, could she summon the courage to confess the truth? It would be a blow to her pride from which she would never recover. She would be pointed at, whispered about, mentioned in conversation wherever people met. . . . She raised her head quickly as her father exclaimed, “*Te poti!*”

So far to the south that she was hull-down, the cutter’s mast and the peak of her mainsail broke the dull lines of the horizon. The sea was still rolling like glass, but the current, setting southward along the reefs, had moved the vessel a long way offshore.

“What did I tell you?” the old man remarked. “You see, Mauri: the mast stands high above the gaff. They have reefed and are waiting for the wind.”

The oarsmen ceased to row for a moment and turned on the thwarts to stare

ahead. “It is well done,” one man remarked. He spit on his hands and grasped his oar more firmly. “*A hio na!* The rain!”

A gray curtain which extended as far as the eye could reach was advancing upon them from the north. The village islet, now far astern, was blotted out. Presently they heard a faint murmuring which deepened to a roar; then the rain seemed to leap upon them, engulfing the boat and its occupants in a downpour that choked and blinded them. They pulled on doggedly while Mauri took up a bailing scoop and began to throw out water. A second downpour followed, even heavier than the first. Then came the wind, darkening the seas before it turned them white.

Raitua turned his head as Mauri shouted to him and braced himself at the steering sweep. The squall seemed to attain its full force almost at the first blast. The rain flew in horizontal sheets, from crest to crest of the seas, striking the naked backs of the oarsmen with a force like that of hail. Raitua put the boat dead before the wind, in the direction where the cutter had last been seen. His face, streaming with water, was set in stern and anxious lines. They were still sheltered to some extent by Ravaheré, but he knew that another mile would see them well out of the lee, in a situation that might prove highly dangerous. Mauri’s cutter would be on the way to them by now, well beyond the pass, but how was it to find them? . . . His thoughts went ahead to Naia and Hardie, alone on the little vessel, somewhere in the increasing storm ahead.

The sea was making up fast, breaking with an ugly irregularity that required all of Raitua’s skill at the steering sweep. As the wind increased and the weight of the rain diminished, the circle of the horizon spread outward until the old man could see a mile or more. All at once he stared ahead fixedly. “*O raua!*” he exclaimed.

Mauri stood up, holding to Raitua for support. Far ahead, seen dimly as it emerged from a squall of rain, the cutter was plunging and bucking into the sea as it worked up, close-hauled, toward the land. Now she was coming about, the reefed mainsail slatting wildly. Of a sudden Mauri gave a cry of anguish, heard above the tumult of the wind. Forgetting their own predicament, the oarsmen swung about on their thwarts to follow her glance, just in time to see the cutter’s mast go over the side. She rose high on the crest of a wave, seemed to balance there for a second or two, and then was lost to sight. Raitua gave a warning shout to the oarsmen; the boat lost steerageway and broached-to; the following sea burst over the gunwale, half filling her. Raitua heaved with all his strength on the steering oar, but it was too late. The others attempted in desperate haste to fling out the water, but the next sea caught them broadside-on, filled the boat, and left them struggling in the water.

Their situation was a desperate one. The rowers clung to the gunwales while Mauri and her father remained within the boat, battered and half

drowned by the waves. Night was falling, but each time they rose sluggishly to the summit of a wave, Raitua peered ahead, hoping for a glimpse of the dismasted cutter, for some reassurance that she was still afloat. She was heavily ballasted, and he knew that if she filled she would go down at once. At length the two vessels rose simultaneously to the crests of seas scarcely half a mile apart. He had a clear glimpse of the cutter in the fading light: she was tossed up, broadside-on, rolling so terribly that half her keel was exposed; then she seemed to turn over as she disappeared from view. In the momentary lull, as the boat sank into the deep trough, the man beside him spit out a mouthful of water and said in a strangled voice:—

"You saw? She's gone . . . capsized!"

While the others dashed the water from their eyes and stared northward at every opportunity, hoping for a glimpse of Mauri's cutter, she and her father peered in the opposite direction, forgetting their own plight in the fear, increasing to certainty, that Naia and Hardie were lost. The last pale light was fading to darkness when the cutter from Ravaheré appeared suddenly, close at hand, driving down on them out of a squall of rain. Keen eyes had long been on the lookout, and the little vessel, tearing downwind with a double-reefed mainsail, was manned by a crew such as only the Tuamotu could produce. She passed them and bore up, her sharp bows plunging into the waves amid sheets of spray. A line was cast and a dozen powerful arms drew the waterlogged boat into the lee. Mauri was first on board, aided by many friendly hands. Raitua was next, and the others followed one by one, seizing their chances precariously. The cutter bore off, half buried in the breaking seas. Her captain, at the wheel, shouted, "*Faarué!*" and a sailor clinging to the rail with a clasp knife ready opened in his hand slashed the rope through. In the stormy night, illuminated by the pale phosphorescence of breaking seas, the boat was lost to view at once.

CHAPTER XVI

When Raitua clambered onto the coral, after his long swim, Alan and Naia followed the progress of the small human figure moving slowly northward along the reef until it could be seen no more.

"He'll be all right," Naia said. "He's a very strong old man, and he's used to making such journeys. Now we've nothing to do but wait."

Although the sun was only a few degrees above the horizon, there was none of the usual morning freshness in the air, and they were already sensible of the heat. As the light increased it was reflected blindingly from the glassy sea. Hardie put on his dark glasses once more and rigged an awning over the boom. Naia went forward to examine three small pigs which they had in a crate there. She called to her husband. "We must give them some water, Alan. We can spare them a little, surely?" Hardie filled a small basin for them and the tiny animals drank it with piteous eagerness. Naia gave him an appealing glance, but he shook his head. "Not a drop more, Naia. I'll not have you suffer for the sake of your pigs. Have you noticed? The current is setting us offshore again."

The sun climbed slowly, the heat becoming more and more oppressive as the day advanced. The palm tops of the inhabited islet toward which Raitua was making his way became a blur on the horizon, but far beyond the land, spreading in a wide arc from northwest to northeast, a wall of black cloud was beginning to mount the sky.

"It looks as though we'd have water and to spare before night," Hardie remarked.

"And wind, too," said Naia.

"You think so?"

"I'm certain, but it won't come for some hours. . . . Go on, Alan. Tell me now what we'll do when we get there."

They had been speaking of the voyage to England. Hardie proceeded.

"But I left off with our arrival in New York. We've still the Atlantic to cross."

"And how long will that take?"

"Five days, in a ship bigger than any you've ever seen. We'll land at a place called Liverpool, or it may be Portsmouth. Then . . ."

"Will your father be there to meet us?"

"I don't think so. You remember, I told you that he's about to retire from the Army? He expects to travel then. More than likely he'll be gone by the time we arrive in England."

"But he'll come back?"

"Of course; but I'm afraid we'll see very little of him. Our place is in Devon, quite a long way from London; and it's to London we'll have to go, for a time, at least."

"I know: until your studies are finished. How long will that be?"

"Two years, if I work hard; and then we're going to South Africa."

"Where's that?"

"I'll show you on a map, sometime. It's a long way from England. But before we go there, I'll arrange to have a full six months of free time, and we'll come back to Tahiti to see your mother and grandfather."

They talked on, forgetting time and place, moving a little now and then to keep within the meagre shade of their awning. But thirst became more than an inconvenience, and at last Hardie went below to fetch up what water remained in the demijohn.

"There's the last of it," he said. "Shall we finish it?"

Naia glanced northward at the slowly mounting bank of black cloud which now covered the sky almost to the zenith.

"We can, safely," she replied. "We'll soon have all the water we want, even though they are late in reaching us from shore."

"And they will be," Hardie said. "Can you still see the land?"

"Just barely. It's there," she added, pointing.

"It will be a long row for them. It may be dark before they sight us."

"We'll hang out the lantern. They'll find us. Trust my grandfather for that."

They drank half the water and felt greatly refreshed. Naia opened a tin of salmon and emptied the contents onto a plate. "We'd better eat now while we have the chance," she said. "It will blow hard before the day is done."

"It looks like nothing but rain to me."

"No, there's wind behind it."

With their thirst partially quenched, at least, they made a hearty meal of salmon, but neither could eat the ship's biscuits Naia had brought up. When they had finished, they removed their awning, for the sun was now hidden. At Naia's urging they took two reefs in the mainsail. Then the throat and peak halliards were swayed up taut, and Hardie bent a small spare jib in place of the forestaysail which he thought might prove too much to have set. It was still dead calm, but a heavy swell was beginning to roll down from the north.

The hours passed slowly while the clouds spread and the light dimmed. The cutter rolled broadside over the glassy seas. Hardie brought their empty demijohns on deck and rigged a bit of canvas from which they could be filled, but the rain was long in coming. At last a wall of gray, lighter than the clouds, advanced upon them deliberately, darkening the sea. A few moments later they were in the midst of a vertical downpour that blinded them. Hardie went

forward to attend to the pigs, which drank greedily, as if they could never have enough. He then returned to help Naia with the demijohns. Little time was needed for this. They stood bareheaded in the rain, their bodies streaming, absorbing the cool fresh water with delight.

It was late afternoon when a lull came, followed by a second downpour as heavy as the first. When it had slackened, Hardie turned to the girl.

"You're mistaken, for once, Naia," he said. "There's nothing but rain in these clouds."

She shook her head. "Wait. You'll see."

The waiting was not long. Both turned their heads to northward at the same moment. The wind was coming. They saw it far off in the dull evening light, blackening the seas as it leaped from crest to crest. Naia took the wheel. Hardie knew her skill, and that his greater strength would be needed to trim and handle the jib sheets. The sea was white in an instant; the cutter heeled and staggered as the first gust filled her sails. Then she seemed to gather herself and leapt forward, burying her bows in the oncoming swells now whipped with flying spray.

Hardie was amazed at the sudden violence of the wind, and profoundly glad that Naia had insisted upon a double-reefed mainsail. He glanced apprehensively at the standing rigging on the weather side. The chain plates, made fast with bolts half rusted through, moved a little under the strain. The roar of the wind deepened and the rain began to fly in horizontal sheets, stinging their bodies like pellets of hail. Crouched at the wheel, her wet hair whipping back over her shoulders, Naia peered ahead with eyes half closed. She bore up a spoke or two and made a sign to her husband to trim the mainsail. They were on the starboard tack, attempting to work up into the lee of the land, but there was no land in sight.

Though the sail she carried was little more than enough for heaving-to, the cutter's forefoot, her heavy load of ballast and long straight keel, enabled her to edge up little by little to windward. Pitching and bucking into the seas, she made good weather of it, taking little solid water on board, though Naia and Hardie were drenched and half blinded by the flying spray. To the eastward it was now deep dusk, but a dull light still illuminated the western sky. Naia gave the signal to come about. She spun the wheel to starboard. Alan loosed the jib sheet and sprang across the deck while the small headsail slatted as if it would tear itself away from the boltropes. Next moment, with a sharp sound clearly audible above the roaring wind, the forestay parted. The mast began to whip crazily this way and that. As the mainsail filled on the other tack, Hardie jumped to let go the halliards, but he was too late. The weather chain plates gave way; the mast snapped a few feet above the wedges and plunged into the sea, its broken butt striking the cutter a heavy blow as she rolled to starboard.

He tore a clasp knife from his pocket and slashed at the remaining lanyards, the topping lift and the forestaysail downhaul. Naia cast off the mainsheet and they drifted clear of the floating raffle alongside.

Rolling her scuppers under and pitching wildly, with solid water sweeping her decks, it seemed to Hardie that the cutter would capsize and go down at any moment. He managed to make his way aft, seized Naia's hand, and crept forward with her to the stump of the mast. He made fast a bit of rope here and they crouched side by side, as helpless as the vessel herself, but secure at least from being swept overboard. A moment later the cutter was tossed to the crest of a breaking sea, and rolled so wildly that half the deck was submerged. For an instant she stood on her beam ends, while Hardie felt a terrible certainty that her last moment had come. Then, as she fell away into the trough beyond, the staunch little vessel righted herself sluggishly.

The glimmer of light in the west faded to darkness as the force of the wind increased. They were drifting fast to the south; the seas grew longer and more regular as they drew away from the land, and though the dismasted cutter lay beam-on in the trough, her rolling became less violent. As the moments passed they began to feel a faint thrill of hope.

Hardie put his lips close to Naia's ear. "I'm going below, Naia," he shouted. "If we could set a little sail . . ."

"We must! Go, Alan. I'm all right here."

"Hold fast!"

"I will. Be careful!"

Little by little he worked his way aft in the darkness, clinging to the handrail. He slid the companionway hatch forward, wriggled through quickly, and closed it behind him. He groped for the flashlight on the hanging locker at the right of the companionway. Luckily, it was still there, but everything else movable in the small cabin was underfoot, rolling and smashing from side to side. Hardie felt a crunch of glass under his boot and flashing his light down he discovered his only pair of dark glasses lying there. He gave them scarcely a thought, but made his way to a locker where the spare canvas was kept. He was soon on deck once more with a coil of line and a spare jib, old and patched but still seaworthy. Naia took the folded sail and put an arm around him as he stood up cautiously, bracing himself as well as he could, to fasten one end of the line to the stump of the mast which had snapped about seven feet above the deck. Then he crawled to the bowsprit, pulled the line taut, and made it fast. He was compelled to work slowly, but at last the scrap of sail was bent and sheeted home.

The bit of canvas worked a miracle. The cutter bore off and gathered steerageway as he put her dead before the wind, the only possible course for them. She began to make good weather of it, rising so buoyantly to the

following seas that no more than an occasional dash of spray came over the stern.

Forty-eight hours passed before the storm blew itself out. Running before it, on a course roughly south-southeast, Hardie and Naia had been able to get some snatches of sleep, to eat what they needed, and even to keep life in the half-drowned pigs in their crate. It was past midnight of the second day. The weather was changing, the wind dying fast, in rain as it had begun; and the night had been one of alternate calms and puffs from the north, heralding windless downpours. Hardie relieved Naia at the wheel.

"It's over, Naia," he said. "Go below now and have a good sleep. You must be worn out."

"I shall in a moment. How far do you think we have come?"

"Two hundred miles at least."

"Or more, perhaps. We've been very lucky."

"Don't I know it! Those Low Islanders can build cutters."

"Yes. It's a pity they don't take better care of them. I think we'll have the trade winds to-morrow. If we do, we can make Ravaheré in three or four days, or some other island close by. . . . I'm worried about my grandfather."

"They'd never have come out in that sea; not in a small boat."

"But there was time for them to have been well on the way to us before the wind came. And Grandfather would have come, wind or no wind. You remember when we nearly capsized? It was very dark, but I thought I saw something to the east of us. It looked like a boat."

"You imagined it, surely."

"I hope so. Shall I get you something to eat?"

"No, thanks. It won't be long till morning. Sleep, now. You more than deserve a rest."

The wind had fallen so light that the cutter had little more than steerageway; the lantern in the binnacle made the darkness of the night seem the more profound. Sitting on the wheel box, Hardie reviewed their situation. Though bad, it was far from hopeless. They now had water enough to last them for a long time, and a considerable supply of tinned food. There were three mats of rice and two large tins of ship's biscuits, and if these supplies gave out, they could eat their pigs. Once the trade wind came, and they were able to turn back, he would rig a kind of jury mast with one of the long oars they carried, and set more sail. The Tuamotu would lie to leeward, and it would be bad luck indeed were they to sail through that widely scattered archipelago without sighting land.

An unruffled swell rolled down from the north, swinging the cutter high and leaving her to fall back into the trough without a sound. Hardie felt a moist

breath of air on his cheek; another rain squall was bearing down upon them. Presently he could hear it, approaching slowly, with a deep murmur, over the face of the sea. Then the light wind fell away, and the clouds seemed to hang stationary above the cutter, unburdening themselves of seemingly inexhaustible reservoirs of rain. When it had slackened a little, Hardie glanced overhead, but the night was as black as ever. A moment later he felt a hand on his arm. Naia was beside him.

"Alan, do you hear anything?"

"Only the rain," he said.

"There's something more," she said. "Listen well!"

They sat side by side at the useless wheel, staring into the darkness. Naia seized his arm again. "There! Now do you hear?"

Above the murmur and plash of the rain came a deeper sound: the long-drawn roar of breakers close at hand. There was no need of speech. Naia took the wheel while Hardie ran out one of the long sweeps used on Low Island cutters for manœuvring in calm weather. He pulled with all his strength, but with no oar opposite he could do little. The roar of the surf grew louder and they knew that they were in the grip of a current setting toward the reef. The seas grew steeper and began to sweep on fast and smoothly, feathering a little at the crests.

Naia shouted to him. Hardie flung his oar on the deck and sprang back to grasp the girl by the hand. The next moment both were clinging to the stump of the mast. A great sea, and another, passed beneath them, flinging the cutter's stern high above her bows. The next wave snatched her up on its crest and hurled her, bow first, onto a steep wall of rock. She struck with a crash and rending of timbers and hung on the outer ledge of the reef as the waters poured back. A moment later she was lifted violently, carried over the coral barrier and into the shallows beyond.

Hardie lay face down, one arm around the stump of the mast, and with the other holding fast to Naia. Wave after wave swept over the reef, canting the cutter violently this way and that, showering them with broken water but seeming to wedge the little vessel ever more firmly among the rocks. The man and the girl peered into the night, their hearts sickened by the fear that daylight would reveal no land.

CHAPTER XVII

Not daring to hope, at first, they awaited the shock of some heavier sea that would destroy them, but at last they realized that the cutter had been carried far enough beyond the outer ledge of the reef to save them from the full impact of the breakers. There was no wind now, but it was raining hard. The roar of the surf mingled with the steady hiss of the rain and the slap and swirl of spent water foaming past them. Stare as he would, straining his eyes as if the very effort might create what he longed to see, Alan could make out nothing in the blackness of the night. He had his arm around Naia and could feel her body trembling against his own. He put his lips to her ear.

"We're all right," he said. "She's holding well. The sea is going down. I'm sure of it."

"Yes, we're safe, I think. Till morning, at least."

"There'll be land here."

"Perhaps. We must hope, Alan."

"Are you cold?"

"A little. It doesn't matter. It can't be long till day."

"Naia, we can hold better if we move up to the rail."

"Yes. I'll go first."

She put her foot on his shoulder, crept up the steeply sloping deck, and seized the rail. He followed and they lay facing in the direction of the sea. They soon became convinced that the swells were subsiding. The cutter received no more heavy blows; only an occasional lighter shock drenched them with spray which felt grateful to their bodies numbed with the colder rain. After what seemed an endless time the rain slackened to a drizzle and at length ceased altogether.

"Alan!"

"What is it?"

"Turn your head! Close yonder . . . blacker than the sky! Do you see?"

"Nothing. Are you sure?"

"Yes: it's land! There! Look well! We're safe. There's no doubt of it."

"Thank God!" he said grimly.

A few stars appeared, gleaming mistily through thinning masses of vapor, and half an hour later they beheld the first ghostly light of approaching day. Across the shallows, not fifty yards from where the cutter lay, Alan could now make out the low wooded land, dark against the slowly brightening dawn. Neither of them could find words to express their relief and joy after the horror and uncertainty of the night. Naia hid her face against her husband's breast.

Black turned to gray and gray to the verdure of palm fronds and pandanus above a long rampart of broken corals with a steep beach of snowy sand beyond, curving away for half a mile or more to the east and west. The cutter lay beam-on to the sea and was firmly wedged between two great coral mushrooms whose rough edges gripped her battered sides. Alan shivered when he saw by what miracle of chance their lives had been spared. They had been carried over jagged masses of coral, like solidified lava, and now plainly showing above the water; it seemed incredible that the cutter could have reached, without capsizing, the spot where she lay. The floor of the reef was honeycombed with holes and deep crevices in which the water rose and fell as the waves swept in, but there were ledges between by means of which they could gain the shore. When the sea went down, that part of the reef where the cutter lay would be all but dry.

As the light increased they sat with their arms around each other, their bare feet braced on the sloping deck, gazing at the green land before them. Presently Alan made his way below, and, after a long search in the water sloshing about in the tiny cabin, managed to find their shoes. They put them on to protect their feet from the knifelike edges of coral. Then, having scanned the shallows carefully, they let themselves over the side of the cutter and, half swimming, half wading, made their way to the beach, which seemed to heave beneath their feet. Hand in hand, walking with uncertain steps, they proceeded until they had reached a spot well beyond view of the sea. Here they stretched out on the damp sand, too weary for speech, too weary even to mind the chill of the morning air on their wet bodies. They lay with their arms around each other and soon fell asleep.

The atoll of Tematangi, sometimes called Bligh's Lagoon Island, lies on the southern fringes of the Tuamotu, far out of the track of the schooners which ply through the maze of islands to the north. Until the middle years of the last century, it was the home of a small number of peculiarly primitive and savage folk, who were removed by the French authorities to be civilized elsewhere, and never returned. They left as traces of their occupation only the ancient sunken taro beds and the rude paving of temples, shaded by *pukatea* and *tobonu* trees. Their traditions recorded thirty generations of men on Tematangi,—but never more than a score or two at any one time,—descended from the survivors of a canoe shipwrecked a thousand years before.

The island had been uninhabited for three quarters of a century and unvisited during that time, save at intervals of four or five years by the people of some cutter, blown far off their course and landing in search of fish or sea birds' eggs. But history, as it has done many times in the past among the small scattered islands of this sea, was repeating itself, as if nature—after a lapse of

seventy-five years—had decided that these green islets must no longer be left to the tenancy of the sea fowl and the parrakeets that flitted whistling through the groves. Tematangi was inhabited once more. The man and the girl asleep in the slowly decreasing shadow of the *tianina* tree, young, already mated, and bearing within them all the mysterious potentialities of human life, were unconscious actors in a drama that had been played many times before.

It was nearly noon when they awoke, refreshed in body, but still dazed in mind—half incredulous of their good fortune. The sky was cloudless, the swell had gone down, and the palms were swaying to a fresh easterly breeze. Naia was the first to open her eyes. For a moment she stared wonderingly into the branches of the tree above her. Then she sat up, shaking back her hair, already dried in the warm shade. Her husband moved a little, in the state between sleeping and waking, and she turned to gaze down at him with a sudden possessive tenderness, forgetting everything save that he was there at her side, unhurt. At that moment he awoke.

"So it wasn't a dream," he said, drowsily, pulling her down to him and kissing her. "I was almost afraid to open my eyes."

"We're safe, Alan. It's hard to believe, isn't it?"

He rose to his feet, stretching his arms and legs tentatively. "We've slept half the day through! I'm fit for anything now. Are you all right?"

She nodded. "Alan, my pigs! We must go out at once and get them. But wait a little. Give me your knife."

His only garment was a pair of denim trousers cut off at the knee. He drew a clasp knife from his pocket and opened it. Naia's quick glance had already perceived a young coconut palm, growing near high-water mark and bearing heavy clusters of nuts within easy reach. She twisted off two green nuts, slashed off their tops, and handed one to her husband. They drank the cool liquor gratefully and scooped out and ate the nourishing jelly inside.

"We shan't go thirsty here, that's plain," he remarked.

"We can't be certain," Naia replied. "There may be only a few coconut palms; but we can dig a well. You can nearly always get fresh water on the atolls. It floats on top of the sea water and we skim it off. Now, Alan, if you're ready?"

A feeble grunting from the crate welcomed them when they reached the wrecked cutter's deck. The box had been made fast in the bow and although the lashings were loose it had managed to stay in place. The reef now permitted an easy passage ashore and Alan carried the three small pigs, one by one, to the beach. Naia went with him, and, having fed the animals with broken coconut, turned them loose and they scampered into the bush.

"We can't lose them," she said. "We'll have lots of pigs, in time."

"Good heavens, Naia! How long do you expect us to stay here?"

“I was joking, of course. But we don’t know. We don’t even know where we are.”

“But we have a notion, at least,” Alan replied. “We must have another look at your grandfather’s chart.”

They returned to the cutter and Alan found the chart still safe in the hanging locker. It was an old English chart of the Tuamotu Group, creased, frayed at the edges, and yellow with age, but the names of the islands were still legible to sharp eyes. They spread it on deck and bent their heads over it, studying the southern portion of the group.

“It must be Tematangi,” Naia said.

“I think so,” Alan replied. “There’s a chance, of course, that it’s one of these others to the eastward. Can you make out the names?”

“Maururoa and Fangataufa.” Naia shook her head. “It’s neither of those. Maururoa is a much larger island than this, and both Maururoa and Fangataufa are inhabited.”

“Perhaps this one is, too,” Alan said.

“No, it’s Tematangi. It can’t be any other. Aren’t you hungry? Shall we open a tin of beef?”

“It’s what I was going to suggest,” Alan replied. “And then we must set to work. If the sea makes up again, the cutter will soon go to pieces. We must get everything out of her while we can.”

Fumbling in the flooded locker beneath one of the berths, Alan produced the beef and a can opener, and both ate heartily. Then began a long afternoon of toil. They made many journeys back and forth across the reef, where the water was now scarcely knee-deep. The work went slowly, for they were determined to leave nothing that could be of use, and they were forced to grope with fingers and toes in two feet of muddy water. Presently Naia stopped short and looked at her husband.

“Your glasses, Alan!”

“There’s no need to look for them,” he said. “They’re smashed to bits. They fell on the floor and I stepped on them in the darkness.”

“And they were your only pair!”

“I know; but it can’t be helped. It won’t matter so much. I can manage without them well enough.”

Alan made light of the loss, but secretly he already knew how serious it was.

“I’ll make you some eye shades like the Tuamotu men wear sometimes,” Naia said. “They are called *taumata*, and we plait them of green frond leaflets.”

“That will be splendid, Naia—all that I need. Hello! Here’s another plate.”

The shadows were growing long when they made their last trip ashore and

paused to take an inventory of their wealth. For tools they were well off, with an axe, an adze, a hand saw, and Raitua's bush knife in its leather sheath. There were half a dozen cups, tin plates, some battered table knives and forks, a tea kettle, and a large iron pot. The Chinese joiner in Papeete who had built Naia's camphorwood chest had done his work well. It had come through the wreck intact and was as tight and dry as a newly calked boat. Here Naia had all her own clothing, a sewing box well stocked with thread, needles, and other accessories, and three or four *tifaifai*, beautifully designed patchwork coverlets made by her relatives on Hao and which had been given her as wedding presents. There was also Raitua's fishing tackle: three balls of strong 100-fathom line, a box of assorted hooks, and two fishing spears. Among the most valuable possessions was a case of soap, and a large square tin with a friction top filled with boxes of safety matches. Two of their demijohns were broken, but two others, enclosed in wicker casings, were still intact. Of their food supply, the rice had been spoiled as well as one opened tin of ship's biscuits. One sealed ten-pound tin of biscuits remained, eighteen tins of beef, four of salmon, and half a case of sardines.

Alan returned to the cutter once more to bring ashore the canvas they had used for an awning and an old mainsail he had found in a locker. He stretched a few fathoms of line between two pandanus trees and with Naia's help spread the sail over it in the form of a rude tent, making the corners fast to pegs driven into the sand. They stowed their belongings under this shelter, and made a couch of fragrant *aretu* grass in the corner where they were to sleep. When they had finished, an hour remained until sunset, and they set out to make a brief exploration of the island.

They made their way slowly through the thickets, counting the coconut palms as they proceeded. These were widely scattered and it was soon clear that on this islet, at least, their numbers were few, scarcely more than enough for their needs as food. They would not dare pluck many of the green nuts, as they had to-day, for drinking purposes. They had walked for ten minutes, perhaps, when they emerged suddenly from a dense patch of wild hibiscus onto the evening peace and brightness of the lagoon beach. The wind had died with the descending sun. Tematangi lagoon stretched away like a vast, faintly shimmering mirror to reflect the rosy clouds piled high in the east. About two miles distant they saw another wooded *motu* like that on which they stood, but no more than half as large, and far beyond, Naia could make out three other islets, with long stretches of reef between. No footprints save their own marked the smooth white sand, no smoke rose far or near. The hush of evening was so profound, so virginal, so removed from the world of humankind, that Alan found it hard to believe that men had ever dwelt here.

"Could anything be more beautiful, Naia? You were right: this must be

Tematangi."

"I'm sure of it, now," she replied. "I can see all the islets around the lagoon. There's none large enough for a village islet except this, and we're alone here; that's certain. We've found the place for our house, Alan—where we stand, under this old tree."

As they returned to the outer beach, a flight of blue parrakeets swept by overhead, with shrill whistling cries, and a little farther on they halted to listen to the evening song of a small gray bird. It flew to another tree and sang again, the clear joyous notes seeming to give voice to their own sense of happiness.

"What is it?" Hardie asked.

"A *komako*. There are a few left in Vaihiva, above the pool in the upper valley where we bathed when you first came. I used to go there often to listen."

"Are they always alone?"

"Except at nesting time. What does the song make you think of?"

"Evening, in just such a still lonely place as this. You'll hear nightingales when we go to England, but this little fellow sings even more beautifully."

Naia smiled. "When we go," she repeated. "It may be a long time."

"I don't think I care a great deal how long it may be," Alan said.

"If only our families could know that we're safe. It's the one sad thing, Alan."

"Yes; but there's nothing we can do about that. They'll know, some day."

At the tent, when they had eaten a hearty supper, they built a fire and sat for a time watching the play of the flames. Both were weary and both reluctant to put an end to this day of deep contentment, of shared experience. The stars were bright above them, and the black wall of the bush leaped forward and retreated at the will of the flames.

"I was thinking of our little island at Hao," Naia said, after a long silence. "We thought we could never be as happy again as we were there. But happiness, for us, will be something that grows and grows. We'll never come to the end of it."

"Never, dear, as long as we have each other."

"And that will be for all our lives."

"It must be," Alan said quietly. "When we were on the cutter, Naia, and it was your turn to rest, I used to look into the cabin every now and then to make sure that you were still there."

Naia laughed. "You needn't worry ever again. I'll always be close by, wherever you are. We must work hard to-morrow," she went on, lightly. "We'd be miserable in this tent if a storm came up."

"Yes; we'll build our house at once. I'll set up the framework while you plait the coconut fronds for thatch. And we'll have to have some sort of a canoe."

“Do you think you could make one?” Naia asked.

“I know I can. I’ve watched your grandfather working on his new one. I know exactly how it’s done.”

“If we can find a straight enough tree,” Naia said. “They’re not common on the Low Islands.”

“We’ll find one,” Alan replied drowsily. He stifled a prodigious yawn. “Bedtime, Naia,” he announced.

A fortnight had passed. The three young pigs, sleek and round once more, were luxuriously munching the meat of ripe coconuts split open for their use. A shallow well where they could drink had been excavated near by. The water was brackish beneath the surface, but Low Island pigs acquire the knack of sipping the fresh water that lies on top. A small neat dwelling stood at the spot where Alan and Naia had first set foot on the lagoon beach. It was thatched and sided with green fronds, not yet dried by the sun. There was a single room, not more than ten feet by twelve, and the roof extended out, on the lagoon side, to shelter a little verandah, open on all sides but one. The floor was covered with coral sand, and in one corner was a couch of soft *aretu* grass covered with matting plaited by Naia’s hands. Several articles of clothing, freshly laundered, were suspended from nails. The room, lighted with the shimmering reflections of sunlit water, was charmingly clean and orderly. The verandah gave a prospect down the entire length of Tematangi’s calm, reef-protected lagoon to another islet at the farther end. The reef on the western side was broken by the green line of a neighboring *motu*, distant two miles or more. Alan and Naia had gone there the day before, in search of a tree suitable for making a canoe.

Alan stood by the trunk of a tall straight *purau* tree, swinging his axe with newly acquired skill. He wore a native waistcloth, and his eyes were protected from the sun by an eyeshade of plaited leaflets that Naia had made for him. His skin was ruddy and browned, and his muscles swelled as he plied his axe. Naia sat in the shade close by, plaiting sinnet for the outrigger lashings for the future canoe. Suddenly Alan shouted warningly and she sprang to her feet. The tree crackled and came down with a great rending of branches and a thump that shook the coral underfoot. Alan wiped the sweat from his forehead and glanced with satisfaction at the fallen trunk.

“There’s the hardest part of the job done,” he said. “In a fortnight’s time, you’ll see a fine canoe in this place.”

“You think you can finish it as soon as that?” Naia asked.

“If I can work at it steadily. Let’s make a camp here; then we won’t have the long journey back and forth. We can fetch whatever we need.”

He was interrupted by the shrill crowing of a jungle cock, not a quarter of a mile distant. “Wait!” Naia exclaimed, in a low voice.

They had discovered the day before that the islet was inhabited by a few jungle fowl, or domestic fowl gone wild, and she was eager to capture some young chicks. The ancestors of the birds, in all probability, had been brought across the Pacific from the East Indies, a thousand years before, but no traces of former domestication remained. They were as wild as grouse, and could fly as fast and as far. The cock crowed once more.

Naia led the way, stepping softly through the bush. Presently they heard the rapid, high-pitched "tuk-tuk-tuk-tuk" of the rooster, who had found some delicacy and was summoning the brood to share in it. They crept on toward a little open place and came to a halt, screened by the foliage of a *tohonu* tree. Not twenty yards distant they saw a wild hen surrounded by a dozen scurrying chicks. The cock, who had scratched open a nest of ant eggs, stood on the alert, a fine red bird with plumage that glittered in the sun. His eye caught some slight movement behind the tree and he sounded a quick note of alarm. As Naia came into view he rose with a whir of wings and sped off, cackling, high above the tree tops. The hen stood her ground, ruffling her feathers in alarm and anger, while her offspring vanished into the concealment of the coarse grass. Moving slowly as she scanned the ground, the girl thrust her hand quickly into a clump of grass, drew forth a chick, and dropped it into her raised skirt. The little creature began to cheep disconsolately, and its mother, made desperate by the sound, flew at Naia, who snatched with her free hand and caught the hen by the leg. Hardie gave a shout of triumph.

"Hold her!" Naia exclaimed. "I'll soon have the rest."

One by one she found them and placed them gently in her skirt. Alan tied the hen's legs together, and guarded the chicks while Naia made a little basket in which to carry them safely. Half an hour later they set out along the reef for their home islet.

Alan went first, walking slowly and halting from time to time when a wave rushed over the coral waist-deep. His eyes had been troubling him a good deal, and at moments when the sun was high, vision blurred so that he could see nothing in clear outline. But a strong breeze ruffled the lagoon to-day, bringing him relief from the customary glare on the water. They had gone about a mile when Naia shouted to him. She was a short distance behind and came running to where he stood.

"A sail, Alan! It's a cutter!"

She sprang to his side and pointed over his shoulder to the northwest. Presently he was able to make out what she saw: the sails of a cutter emerging from behind the land.

"They've been coasting the *motu* looking for us," she said. "Now they're going away! Hurry! We must build a fire before they're out of sight!"

More than a mile of reef stretched ahead of them and they made what

speed they could, slipping and stumbling over the wet, weed-covered rock, with many a bruise and more than one nasty fall. But half an hour had passed when they reached the land and began their breathless run for the outer beach, dropping their belongings as they passed the house. Working with desperate haste, they gathered dry fronds in a heap, but by that time the cutter was hull-down, only the peak of her mainsail showing above the whitecaps on the horizon. The fire blazed brightly while they heaped on green fronds and damp bunchgrass to make a mighty smudge, but the breeze carried the smoke away horizontally. They could do no more.

They stood in silence, Alan’s arm around Naia’s waist, gazing intently at the gray triangle of sail dropping from view beyond the slope of tossing waters. A moment later it was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

Time had ceased to have significance for the two inhabitants of Tematangi. They had kept no record of its passage during the voyage to Hao and the sojourn there, and it was not until after the cutter had been cast up on the reef that Alan tried vainly to recall how many days had elapsed during this interval. Naia was not interested and laughed at her husband's painful efforts to remember. Since he had found this impossible, he came to regard time from Naia's point of view, as something of no consequence,—fluid, inexhaustible, like the air they breathed,—and the weeks and months passed unheeded.

He had not supposed there was an island in all the Pacific as lonely as this. No sail had been sighted since the one seen shortly after their arrival. That vessel, Naia still believed, had been sent in search of them, for there would have been little reason, otherwise, for its near approach. Those aboard had not bothered to land, believing, evidently, that, had there been anyone on shore, he would have made his presence known. Naia was certain that her grandfather was not among them. He would have been content with no such cursory search as that.

They had little time for thoughts of rescue, for their days were spent in a never-ending search for food. Tematangi was a barren place, judged even by Low Island standards, and they had to make use of everything the land provided. Their little stock of provisions, salvaged from the wreck of the cutter, was carefully hoarded against emergencies. For the most part, they lived upon what the island itself could furnish. Thanks to Naia, nothing that would serve them was missed. Sea food they had in abundance; vegetable food was the chief lack, but Naia had discovered taro plants growing wild in ancient pits made by the former inhabitants of the island. By careful replanting and tending they soon had a flourishing taro bed, the roots of the plants providing a serviceable substitute for bread and the tops for salad. Other edible greens were found and pandanus nuts were plentiful. Their pigs were now full-grown, one of the sows had littered, and the fowls throve well under Naia's care.

Life grew easier for them as time went on. The canoe was long since finished and together they visited the other widely separated islands threaded along the Tematangi reef, but they still loved best the land on which they had been cast ashore. One circumstance alone gave Hardie concern: his sight. It seemed to be becoming increasingly blurred and dim. He had said nothing of this to Naia, but he felt that she knew.

Returning early one morning from his customary brief lookout on the ocean side of the islet, Alan found Naia broiling fish for their breakfast over a

fire of coconut shells. She glanced up inquiringly.

"Nothing, as usual," he said.

"You say that so cheerfully, Alan. I believe you'd be truly sorry if we were to see another vessel."

"Of course. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes. Isn't it strange? I feel ashamed when I think of Mother, and my grandfather."

"They've believed us dead long since. It would be foolish to make ourselves miserable on that account. And we're certain to be found, some day."

"I'm beginning to wonder. There's not an island in all the Tuamotu so far off the track the island vessels follow. My grandfather's been everywhere, but I've never heard him speak of Tematangi."

Alan put an arm around her shoulders and drew her close.

"Are you homesick? This is the first time I've heard that sad little note in your voice."

"I dreamed of Mother last night. That's why, perhaps. It's so hard for them, Alan, believing us lost. And here we are, well and happy." She sighed. "But I'll not think of it any more. Do you know that this is a special day?"

"Every day is a special day," Alan said. "Every time I look at you is a special occasion."

"But this is something wonderful. How long have we been here, do you think?"

"I can't even guess. It might be seven or eight months."

"The time must seem longer to you than it does to me. Whatever it is, this is the first day when I can think of nothing that we have to do."

"You're sure of it? That *is* an occasion. We ought to celebrate."

"But there's one thing. . ."

"I knew it! You'll not let us be lazy even for a day."

"It's something for me."

"Then it's done, or it will be as soon as I know."

"I'm hungry for *kavekas'* eggs. I woke up in the night thinking how good they would taste."

"You shall have them, on one condition: you must promise to rest the whole day. You're not to do a thing."

"I promise. But it's a long way, Alan. There's no wind. You'll have to paddle."

"I'll be there and back in no time."

"I hate asking you to go for such a silly reason."

"Because you want them? I don't call that a silly reason. And now that you've spoken of them, I'm famished for *kavekas'* eggs. Where's the basket?

I'll be off before the sun rises."

She prepared him some food and walked with him to the beach. He looked anxiously into her face as he kissed her. "You'll be all right, Naia?" She smiled and nodded reassuringly. "I always hate leaving you even for a few hours," he added. "But there's one good thing about going: the coming home."

"Don't hurry," she said. "You must be careful of your eyes. Start back in the late afternoon. The glare will be off the water by that time."

She stood looking after him until the canoe could scarcely be seen; then, after a final wave of the hand, she returned to the house and seated herself on a bench by the door. She was trembling slightly and there was a look of terror in her eyes. The event she both longed for and dreaded was at hand—her baby was coming. During the night she had felt the pangs there was no mistaking. Afraid that she would be forced to cry out, she had left the house quickly, pacing the lagoon beach under the stars until the spasms gradually subsided and she felt them no more. But the pain would return, and soon: her baby might well come before the day was ended. She longed for the comfort, the assurance, of Alan's presence, but more than this she had wanted to spare him the misery of seeing her suffer when there would be so little he could do to help. Nevertheless, it had required all her resolution to send him away. Now that she had, a feeling of great loneliness came over her. There was no one, now, to turn to. She must rely on her own strength, and she prayed that the ordeal might be over before Alan could come. But what if she should die? That was possible. Many women died in childbirth. The baby would die too, and Alan would find them . . .

She clasped her hands tightly in the anguish of that fear. How foolish she had been! How foolish! And now it was too late.

She rose and walked up and down before the house, calming herself as well as she could. "I will not be frightened," she thought. "My mother was alone when I was born." Her mother had never been willing to speak of that time, but she had heard the story from her grandfather's lips: how the English girl, Nina McLeod, had died and her baby with her during the great storm; how, on the following day, when the storm was at its height, she herself had come into the world when her mother was alone with the dead woman whose life she had tried so hard to save. Naia found strength, thinking of her mother's courage under conditions so much worse than those in store for her. She put her hand to her heart and felt the strong steady pulsing of her blood. There was no danger. She had youth, health, everything in her favor.

She felt no pain now, and set to work making her preparations. Alan had filled their two kettles and the iron pot. She made up the fire and set the vessels over it. Not far from their dwelling house, at a spot sheltered from the trade wind by trees and a thicket of low bush, they had built a small pavilion,

looking out on the lagoon, where they often sat of an evening. Naia brought a mat, pillows, coverlets, and fresh clothing to this place, and made up a bed on the floor. She placed beside it such supplies as their scanty possessions afforded. Before an hour had passed, everything was in readiness.

Alan had suspected nothing; nor had she herself known that her time was so near at hand. Despite her terror, she felt a thrill of happiness at thought of the event now swiftly approaching. How many times had she and Alan talked of this day! Now it was here. The waiting would not be long. Surely, before sunset there would be three of them in this lonely place.

Her heart misgave her as she thought of the pain that had driven her from her bed during the night. Never before had she known anything like it and what was yet to come would be far worse. She had heard from other women of the agony of childbirth. But she must not think of it! She could find strength to bear it when it came.

She walked slowly along the beach, comforted by a strange sense of her mother's nearness. They were thinking of her, speaking of her, at home. It must be so. Unknown to themselves, something of their *mana* was flowing into her heart, giving her courage and confidence. She closed her eyes for a moment, and Vaihiva rose before her with the vividness of reality. She heard Teina calling the fowls, her voice ringing high and clear in the still morning air. She heard the chattering of the *maina* birds in the mango trees behind the house, and saw her mother standing at the pier by the riverbank, speaking with her grandfather, just returned from a night of fishing outside the reef. If only they could know! If they could see her as clearly as she saw them!

She entered the house once more and seated herself on the floor beside the camphorwood chest in which their clothing was kept. For a time she was lost in reverie. Presently she raised the lid of the chest and brought forth a neat pile of garments she had made for her baby from a flowered coverlet and the frock of pale blue silk that had been her wedding gown. She examined the little wardrobe piece by piece, folding each garment carefully again and replacing all in the chest. Of a sudden her heart overflowed with tenderness. "My little darling!" she said, softly. "Come quickly! Come before your father is here again!" Closing the lid of the chest, she leaned upon it, her head in her arms, weeping quietly, the warm tears flowing unchecked.

It was a three hours' journey to the islet at the end of the Tematangi lagoon. Alan urged his canoe on with steady strokes, taking pleasure in the quick response of the little craft to the lightest turn of his paddle, and letting his mind lie fallow to the peace and beauty of the early morning. As the sun rose, three small islets along the eastern reefs were revealed clearly against the background of golden light, and the spray of the surf, shot through with this

light, hung motionless in the still air. *Kivi* birds passed overhead, in swift erratic flight, their faint whistling calls giving voice to the measureless silence of mid-ocean.

Alan was filled with a deep content and hummed snatches of song as he paddled, enamored with the sound of his voice in that stillness. A glorious place, Tematangi. Never would he regret the chance that had brought them here. Whatever might be in store for them in the future, Naia and he could never be deprived of the memory of the happiness shared here. There had been nothing to mar it, nothing save the annoyance caused by his wretched eyes. As that could not be wished away, it was not worth thinking about or worrying over. Their love for this lonely changeless life had grown with their knowledge of it. As for himself, he had discovered a side to his nature whose existence he had not suspected before. He had learned what deep and lasting satisfaction is to be found in life on its simplest terms. They had proved themselves, he and Naia. Cast ashore with so little, they had made this barren place yield them food and shelter. They were past all danger of real want and could look forward to whatever length of exile with hearts untroubled by any fears on that score. And when the baby came, what a world of added happiness it would bring to them both!

He felt a chill of apprehension go through him. There was the only point of danger they had yet to pass. But Naia was in the perfection of youth and health. She herself had no misgivings, and she knew about these matters; all island women were skilled in them. It was a part of the training they received from their mothers, from girlhood on. Nevertheless, owing to his foolishness in keeping no record of time, neither of them knew when the baby would come. It could not be a great while, now. He must not leave her alone again—not even for a few hours. Unconsciously, he pushed the canoe on faster, but his thoughts became tranquil once more. Naia would know well beforehand; she had reassured him on that point. Her own belief was that there was a month at least to wait.

It was Naia who had named the islet to which he was bound, at the extreme end of Tematangi lagoon. Mearoa,—Far Away,—she had called it. As he approached, Alan thought that no other name could have suited it so perfectly. He had visited it twice before, and now as he stepped ashore and drew his canoe up on the beach he was conscious of a feeling that had come to him on the earlier visits—a feeling akin to awe, as though he were at the threshold of an innermost sanctuary, the home of the very spirit of mid-ocean solitude.

The islet, a mile and more in length, followed the configuration of the reef, and toward one end was a cove furnishing a mirror without flaw for the sea fowl soaring aimlessly about in the sunny air. Farther to the right, a narrow bar, little more than barren reef, led to what was really another islet with

clumps of *miki-miki* trees scattered over it, and carpeted with coarse bunchgrass. It was a natural nesting place for sea fowl. The *kavekas* had full possession of it now. From ocean beach to lagoon beach there was scarcely a yard of ground not covered with their eggs. As he approached they arose in clouds, darkening the air above his head, though many of the birds remained on the ground, so little disturbed by his presence that they permitted him to take them up in his hands. Their eggs were strewn thickly over the ground and he had to walk carefully to avoid crushing them. His basket was filled in a moment; then, finding a clear space, he lay on his back, watching the shifting pattern of thousands of wings against the blue sky.

Raitua had once told him that a sea bird never fails to recognize its own eggs and can easily find them again in the midst of no matter how many thousands of others. Alan decided to prove this matter for himself.

Lifting a bird from her nest, he attached a streamer of grass to one of her legs for identification. Then he tossed her into the air and she was lost to view amongst the thousands soaring overhead. Taking the single egg he found beneath her, he marked it well with a fragment of sea-urchin spine, carried it a distance of fifty yards or more, and placed it on the sand in the midst of innumerable others of the same kind. He went to a little distance to await the result. Slowly the birds settled again, until only a few score remained in flight. Returning to the egg he had marked, he found the bird he had marked covering it once more. Twice he repeated the experiment, with the same result. Even so, he was all but incredulous of the amazing instinct which led the mother bird unerringly back to her own egg.

It was midday before he returned to have his lunch. The afternoon he spent in exploring the larger wooded island, as happy as a boy of ten whose dreams of adventure had been miraculously fulfilled. This undying love of uninhabited islands was something native to the hearts of all mankind, he thought. In his own case, the reality far surpassed his boyhood dreams. Where, in all the seven oceans, could there be found an island to be compared with Tematangi?

There were many coconut palms here. He collected a canoe load of green drinking nuts as a special treat for Naia, for there were few palms on their home *motu*. This task finished, he mounted to the top of an ancient palm which rose high above the others. He climbed native fashion, with a strip of tough bark attached to his bare feet to give him purchase on the smooth trunk, and at last he drew himself up into the nest of green fronds. Here, well shaded from the sun, he passed the happiest hour of a happy day, rocked by the wind and looking out over the empty sea.

The sun was just disappearing below the horizon as he neared home. He called out as he approached the beach, but there was no response. Taking up his basket of eggs, he ran quickly to the house. Naia was not there. The orderly

little room had, somehow, a forlorn, deserted appearance. Alan looked about him, wondering at the strange forsaken feeling it gave him. “It’s because she’s not here,” he thought. “This has never happened before.”

He called again, but heard only the lonely sound of his own voice. A frigate bird they had tamed sat on its perch in the dooryard, turning its head to regard him sharply, and sidling from one end of the perch to the other, in expectation of a meal. Alan took some small fish from his basket and tossed them to the bird, which caught them neatly, gobbled them down, and waited for more. “You’ve not been fed to-day, Tihoti, that’s plain,” he said, scratching the bird’s head. “Where’s your mistress? Did she forget you?” He glanced about him, puzzled and disappointed, scarcely able to realize that he could return and Naia not be there to greet him. She would have been on the lookout, certainly, and must have seen the canoe long since. He went round the house to their small kitchen, where the fire was still smouldering on the earthen floor. His face brightened as he noticed that the kettles were missing. That explained it—she had gone for water.

There was a path their feet had worn across the land to the outer beach, where, in a segment of ancient reef, well above the fringing lagoon, a pool of fresh water collected after the rains. Alan set out at a fast walk, certain of finding Naia at this pool. Emerging from the thickets of bush that fringed the outer beach, he halted and scanned the waste of broken corals that fell away before him. The place was deserted, but there were fresh footprints in the sand at the upper slope of the beach. Naia had been here, certainly, at some time during the day.

He was deeply anxious now, and returned to the house at a run. Something was wrong. Naia would never have failed to meet him. After a day’s absence, she would be as eager to see him as he was to see her.

Near the house, the prints of her small bare feet were everywhere. He could not even guess in what direction she might last have gone. As he scanned them hastily for some clue, he stopped short. There, at the right of the doorway, he saw his name traced in the sand in large clear letters, with an arrow beneath it, pointing in the direction of their little beach house, fifty yards away.

Naia heard him coming. She turned her head on the pillow as he entered and knelt beside her.

“Naia . . .”

“It’s all right, Alan. He’s here, our little son.”

As she lifted the coverlet and turned from her husband to the tiny infant nestling in her arm, the light in her eyes was that of heaven itself.

CHAPTER XIX

Mr. Tyson was cycling back from the market place, breathing the fresh morning air with pleasure, admiring the blossoms of the poinciana trees, and glancing across the lagoon at the distant outlines of Moorea, showing pale blue against the sky. Like most men who have lived long in the tropics, he was an early riser, and each morning, unless the weather was bad, he attended the opening of the market. From five-thirty to seven-thirty the place was crowded and a lively hum of conversation filled the air. Housewives and servants moved slowly along the stalls, selecting the day's supplies of fresh provisions. Merchants, planters, seamen, and pearl buyers gathered in the various coffee shops around the square to discuss the island news over their *petits déjeuners*, while occasional tourists, stop-over passengers from the monthly steamer, looked on at the scene with the air of bored satiety or wistful interest common to such birds of passage.

The consul, as a usual thing, had his morning coffee at home, but he enjoyed his early stroll through the market. After glancing over the displays of fruit and fish, with many halts to exchange greetings with old friends, he would then cycle slowly back to the consulate along the street that bordered the lagoon. His heavy old-fashioned English cycle had served him for many years, and was as familiar a sight along the waterfront as the trees that shaded it.

Passing the post office, he glanced ahead where a little crowd had collected by the sea wall. A twenty-ton cutter was approaching, moving almost imperceptibly while four Tuamotu men worked at the sweeps. Her sails were furled; she was so laden with copra that she had scarcely a foot of freeboard, and her decks were cluttered with the belongings of her native passengers. The anchor went down with a light splash and the rowers began to back water, turning her stern to the sea wall. The arrival of any vessel from the outlying islands was an event of never-failing interest to the residents of Papeete, a little break in a life of dreamy and agreeable monotony. Tyson came to a halt.

He recognized the cutter. She came from Mangareva, in the Gambier Islands, a thousand miles away. She carried a dozen or more passengers, most of them women and children. There was a white man, or a half-caste, perhaps, roughly dressed and burned almost black by the sun, who wore dark glasses and held a small boy on his knee. The baby seemed about two years old, a dark-eyed little chap with curly hair, who stared wonderingly at the people and buildings on shore. A girl stood by the white man with a hand on his shoulder. The brim of her pandanus hat concealed her features from Tyson, but her

unusual grace was apparent despite a shapeless frock of print such as the Tuamotu women wore. “Some beachcomber from the Gambiers,” Tyson thought, “bringing his girl up for a look at civilization. They’ve a pretty baby, that’s sure.” Just then she turned her head and he gave a gasp of astonishment. The girl caught sight of him at the same moment. She was Naia, and the man beside her was Alan Hardie.

Tyson’s bicycle, which he had been holding by the handlebar, fell with a crash and remained unnoticed on the ground. For a moment he was powerless to speak or to move. A line had been flung ashore and the cutter’s stern was now close to the steps of the landing. Tyson stepped forward.

“Naia!” he exclaimed. “Alan . . .!”

The girl spoke to her husband, who turned his head quickly. “Tyson?” he called.

“My dear lad . . .”

The consul could say no more, but stood waiting while the vessel was brought close to the steps. Two sailors held her there while a third took Hardie’s arm and helped him ashore. Tyson noted that Alan felt for the rail with his foot and stepped hesitatingly onto the landing. Naia came after him with the child in her arms. The consul clasped them both in a great hug, impatient at the blurring of his sight which made their figures indistinct. He seized Alan’s hand as if he would never let it go.

Hardie was as deeply moved, and it was with an effort that he found his voice. When he spoke, it was with an attempt at casualness.

“My eyes have been bothering me as usual,” he said. “A cursed nuisance! How are you, sir?”

“Alan, this passes all belief!” the consul exclaimed. “Where in the world . . . This small boy is yours?”

Hardie smiled. “Rather! He’s a Low Islander, born and bred. See here, sir, can you come with us to the hotel? We can talk quietly there.”

“Hotel be damned! You’re coming straight to the consulate! Wait—I’ll get a car.”

He pushed his way through the crowd of idlers who were looking on curiously, and beckoned to the driver of a taxi that was halted on the other side of the road. His heart misgave him as he watched Hardie feel his way to the rear seat. The lad moved as though he were blind, stone blind! Naia followed with their boy; the scant luggage, done up in a *pareu* cloth, was handed in, and they set out for the consulate, only a few blocks distant.

Tyson guided Hardie up the steps and to a chair on the verandah. Tua, who had never dreamed that houses could be so enormous or have floors of anything but coral sand, stared about him, then ran to his father and climbed to the safety of his knee.

"We're a family of beachcombers," Hardie was saying, "We've little clothing but what we stand in."

"What does it matter?" Tyson replied. "We'll have the three of you outfitted before the day is over. Alan . . . Naia, I will ask only one question now. The rest can wait. Where in heaven's name do you come from?"

"Tematangi. We've been marooned there."

"On Tematangi! That desolate place?"

"We didn't find it so," Naia said. "My mother and grandfather are well, Mr. Tyson?"

"They are, Naia. Your mother was in town not a fortnight ago, on her way home from Moorea. What news this will be!"

"They believe us dead?"

"Of course. What else could they believe?"

"Have you had recent word from my father?" Hardie asked.

"By the last steamer," Tyson replied. "He's out of the Army at last, and on your old place in Devon. George is with him there. Now let me show you to your room and we'll have breakfast. You must be famished."

"Go first, Naia," Hardie said. "I'll wait here with Tua."

When the consul was alone with the girl he took her hands in his.

"My dear child, I may as well know the truth at once," he said. "Alan is . . ."

She nodded. "He has been blind for many months."

"Good God! Is he . . . is he bitter about it? Will he resent my speaking of it?"

"No. It was hard for him at first. He couldn't believe it would last. But now . . . he's been very brave, Mr. Tyson."

The consul patted her shoulder. "And what of yourself, my dear? But we'll not speak of that. There's a doctor here, a *taoté mata* from France. We'll not give up hope, Naia. He can cure Alan if any man can. Was it a gradual thing, this blindness?"

"Yes. That is, he found his sight growing more and more dim. He wouldn't speak of it, but I knew, of course. You know what the Low Islands are, with the glare of the sun from the lagoons and beaches . . ."

Tyson nodded.

"He went suddenly blind at the last. He awoke one morning half an hour after Tua and I and asked me what we were doing at that time of night. I thought he was joking, for the sun was already up. It was some time before either of us realized the truth."

"When did this happen?"

"About six months ago."

"Good heaven!"

“We managed very well,” Naia replied. “Alan knew every foot of the land, of course. He would want to go everywhere by himself, as he had before, but Tua and I kept watch over him. It wasn’t nearly as bad as you might think.”

“A fine lad you’ve got. He resembles the pair of you.”

“He’s going to be tall and broad in the shoulders, like his father.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. Naia, shall I send word to your mother?”

“There won’t be time. I want to go on to Vaihiva to-morrow.”

“Of course. I’ll take you out in the launch.”

“Alan doesn’t want to go. He will because I’ve begged him to, but he thinks my mother will still be angry.”

“Angry? I can set his mind at rest about that! She’ll be out of her senses with joy to see you both! As for your grandfather! But I mustn’t keep you talking here. Come down when you’re ready, Naia; then we’ll give Alan a chance to freshen up a bit.”

A few moments later they took their places at table. Naia sat at her husband’s side, caring for his needs quietly and skillfully, and feeding their little son at the same time. The consul talked briskly, giving them all the news they most wanted to hear. He was reassured by Alan’s cheerful manner. Tyson observed a great change in him over the young traveler who had called at the consulate three years before. His face showed new lines of maturity and strength; his hands were roughened by toil, his shoulders had broadened, and he had the look of an athlete. Naia was in the bloom of early womanhood, with all the beauty which her youth had promised. He made a hasty calculation of her age. She had been ten when her father died; that would make her nineteen or twenty now. A pity that her father could not have lived to see his daughter as she was to-day. Native blood be damned! Alan had made no mistake in choosing his wife. The consul realized that now. They seemed to have been born for each other, these two; and their happiness together was revealed in every word they spoke.

They listened while he told them of the search that had been made for them after their cutter was blown off the land at Ravaheré.

“How strange it would have been,” Naia remarked, “if we had been able to sail into Ravaheré lagoon to find my mother there.”

“It’s as well, perhaps, that we couldn’t,” Hardie replied. “My reception, at least, would have been a chilly one.”

“No, Alan,” the consul put in. “Mauri had already forgiven you both, in her heart. She told me that later. I’m certain that her only objection to your marriage was that she thought Naia too young to know her own mind.”

“And my mother was in the reef boat that was coming out to us when the storm broke?” Naia asked.

“Both she and your grandfather.”

"You remember, Alan, my telling you that I thought I saw a boat coming off from shore? But in the darkness and rain I couldn't be certain."

"It was a near thing that they weren't all drowned," Tyson said. "The boat broached-to and filled; they were picked up in the nick of time by the cutter your mother had chartered. And then they went in search of you."

"Not that same night, surely?"

"Yes. It was a forlorn hope; even your mother believed that they had seen your cutter capsize. But she and your grandfather were bound to search for you, despite the protests of the Ravaheré men, and so they did. They were three days in getting back to Ravaheré and they stopped there only long enough to take on food and water for a longer search. Two cutters went out then; they touched at every island to the south and west. One went as far as Tematangi, that I know, for your mother told me; but she was not in that one. How they could have missed finding you . . ."

"We saw it, undoubtedly," Hardie said, and related the circumstances of the sail sighted shortly after they were wrecked. "And we saw no other," he added, "until the Mangareva cutter came."

"What a remarkable experience you've had," Tyson said, musingly. "Tell me how you were picked up, at last. A happy day that must have been."

"It was, but . . ."

"But? You don't tell me, Naia, that you had any regrets at leaving Tematangi?"

"Yes. Alan and I were very happy there."

"It's true," Hardie said. "If my eyes hadn't given out . . . We'd have come away in any case, of course, but I feel as Naia does about Tematangi."

"Well, I'm damned!" Tyson exclaimed. "I didn't know that you had so much of the primitive man in you, Alan."

"I'd have been lost without Naia. I'd have starved within a fortnight."

"Don't believe him, Mr. Tyson. While he could see, Alan did all the fishing, and I wish I could show you the canoe he built. No Low Islander could have made a better one."

"But what of the cutter that rescued you? As I see it now, you must have stood on the beach wringing your hands with grief as she drew in."

Hardie smiled. "That would be putting it a bit strong, perhaps. But our feelings were mixed. I'll never forget that morning. Naia saw the sail at dawn. There was a light easterly breeze; the cutter was a good two miles off and had no intention of passing closer to the land. In fact, she had already passed. Naia soon had a signal fire lighted. The cutter kept on her course for some time; then the smoke was seen and she turned and headed for us. Two hours later we were aboard and on our way, and—well, here we are."

Shortly after breakfast, Hardie and the consul were seated in the library at

the back of the house. Naia had gone, with Tua, into the town to buy clothing and other necessaries for the family.

"Tell me something more of my father, sir," Hardie said. "Did he come to Tahiti as he had planned?"

"No. I had a wireless message—as I remember it, it was only a few days after you and Naia had cleared out for Hao—saying that his retirement from the Army had been postponed for six months. George decided to stay on here and wait for word of you. Two months later, Mauri and her father returned with the news that you were both lost."

"My father knew I was married?"

Tyson shook his head. "George and I talked the matter over, when word came that you were lost, and, knowing your father, we decided that there was no reason why he should ever be told! George took the next steamer home."

"I see."

"But I'm certain that you need have no misgivings, Alan. You made no mistake. I see that now."

"I knew it from the first."

"Of course. . . . Now, my lad, we must speak of your eyes."

"Frankly, sir, I'm afraid there's not much hope."

"You can see nothing at all?"

"Not even my hand held before my face."

"That need not mean that you have lost your sight permanently. It may well be that your eyes will respond to treatment. You remember Dr. Brocard?"

"Very well."

"He's still here, and I doubt if a better man could be found on Harley Street."

"I'm anxious, naturally," Hardie said. "But there's one thing . . . I want to know the truth. I'll not be encouraged with false hopes if there is no hope."

"You shan't be. We can depend upon Brocard; he will tell us precisely what he thinks. He took a great liking to you, Alan, on that one occasion when you consulted him. He was as grieved when I told him you'd been drowned at sea as though he had known you for years. But remember this: his opinion will be only one man's opinion. The best of doctors are not infallible."

"I know . . . I've been an awful fool, sir. I'm afraid I've no one but myself to blame for all this. Brocard warned me that I should never be without dark glasses. Sometimes I wore them and sometimes not; and instead of having half a dozen pairs to provide for emergencies, I had only one. They were smashed the night the cutter was wrecked on Tematangi."

"And you had no protection in all the time after?"

"Naia made me eye shades of pandanus leaf. They helped, but they couldn't take the place of glasses. I managed to borrow a pair from a native on

the cutter for the passage here; but it was too late, then."

"See here, Alan: you'd like to consult Brocard as soon as possible, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. It's been hard waiting to know if . . ."

"Then I'll phone him at once. He's always at home in the morning."

The consul returned a moment later. "He asks us to come straight over," he said. "Do you mind?"

Hardie smiled. "Not if you don't object to being seen with me. I'd expected to make myself presentable, first."

"Nonsense! We'll get you shaved and prettified afterward."

A quarter of an hour later, Tyson and Hardie walked up the path to Dr. Brocard's house, which stood on the outskirts of the town. It was a spacious bungalow shaded by old trees and set well back from the road. Brocard was a stout little man of sixty, with a broad, pink, smooth-shaven face. He shared with the consul a love of fishing and gardening, and had introduced from the West Indies and the Orient many beautiful and useful plants. Although he did not practise, his skill as an oculist was always at the disposal of the *médecin-chef* of the colony, or of any friend needing advice.

They found him on his verandah and his interest in Hardie was so great that the consul was forced to relate briefly his adventures. The doctor listened with deep attention. At length he rose and took Hardie's arm. "You must forgive me for being so inquisitive," he said. "My interest was not mere idle curiosity, Mr. Hardie. Now we'll have a look at your eyes. Tyson, we may be some time at this examination. If you've anything to do meanwhile?"

"I haven't. I'll wait."

"Very well. You'll find cigars in that box on the table."

For an hour the consul paced the paths of Dr. Brocard's garden, stopping here and there to examine, absently, flowers or shrubs that took his eye. He went on to the beach and seated himself in a small, open-sided pavilion overlooking the lagoon. If Brocard should say there was no hope . . . what could the lad do? What would he want to do? Return to England? Remain on Tahiti? And he was only twenty-four, with all his life before him! The tragedy, for Naia, would be almost as great as for Alan himself. Tyson thought of the letter he had received from Alan's father after George McLeod's return to England. In that letter the General had laid his heart bare to his old friend. Now, if he were to have his son restored to him, blind . . .

The consul looked up. Dr. Brocard was calling him from the house. Whiskey and soda were on the table, and for a few minutes the three men sipped their drinks while Brocard talked in the lively manner of physicians the world over when they have bitter news to impart. Presently he fell silent. Hardie turned toward him.

"Well, doctor?" he said.

Brocard hesitated, and replied with a question of his own. "What are your plans, Mr. Hardie?"

"I've made none, so far. I'll go home, of course, if there's a chance that anything can be done there. It depends upon you."

"Suppose that, after a careful study of your case, I were forced to tell you it would be useless to go?"

Alan's face paled slightly. "I'm prepared for that," he said. "I think I'd stop here."

Dr. Brocard studied him gravely, noting the firm jaw, the strong lines of the mouth. It would be best to tell this young man the truth.

"You must not blame yourself too much for carelessness about the glasses, Mr. Hardie. Lack of them may have aggravated the trouble, but the real cause of it lies elsewhere: in a scattered destructive process of the delicate membranes lining your eyes. These membranes are known as the choroid and retina. They have been attacked, I should say, as the result of some previous illness or infection."

"And that means . . . ?"

"A final complete destruction of these tissues. It gives me great pain to make such an announcement, but it is best that you should know the truth."

Alan drew a long breath and raised his head. "There's no hope, then?"

"Of regaining your sight, none, I fear. Of making a new life for yourself with your lovely wife and little son, of sharpening other senses to take the place of the one that is lost, all the hope in the world."

"It is what I feared. . . . You're quite sure it would be useless to go home?"

"Certain. But if you should plan to go in any case, then I urge you to do so. It is best that you should not be satisfied with my opinion alone. But you must be prepared to have that opinion confirmed."

A moment later the two men rose to go. The consul guided Hardie down the steps to the car waiting at the end of the garden.

"That's not the last word, Alan," the consul remarked, anxiously, as they were driving back to the consulate. "Dr. Brocard may well be mistaken."

"Don't worry about me, sir. I was fully prepared; one has a sort of instinct in these matters. I'll be all right. It's Naia I'm sorry for."

"You'll let me send a wireless to your father?"

Hardie's face darkened slightly. "It will have to be done, I suppose. Send it to George," he added.

"And you'll let me speak of Naia?"

"Yes. George can decide how much my father should know."

It was midmorning at Vaihiva. Mauri had gone into the valley earlier in the

day and was returning along the path that bordered the river. She had grown thinner; there were new lines in her face, and her hair was now lightly streaked with gray. Coming to the spot where she had left her canoe, she placed in it a basket of fresh-water shrimps; then, pushing off from shore, she let the canoe drift with the current, guiding it clear of the shoal places, and sending it with a few slight strokes of the paddle across the still pools that marked the bends of the stream. It was a clear sunny day and the water was dappled with the shade of the *mapé* trees whose branches made a high canopy above it. Mauri loved this last mile of the river, where it flowed with scarcely a ripple through a winding green tunnel thirty or forty yards wide. Rounding the last bend, she could see the lagoon bright with the reflection of trade-wind clouds and the white line of breakers along the reef, far offshore. A canoe was coming in from the islet by the passage. Mauri recognized her father at the paddle and wondered a little at the haste with which he approached. They met at the pier by the river mouth.

"I was coming to search for you, Mauri," he said. "Tyson's launch is off yonder, headed for the pass."

"Wait then to meet him, Father. He will spend the night, surely. I will make his room ready."

The consul was always a welcome guest on his fishing expeditions around the coast, and Mauri felt her heart lighten at the prospect of this pleasant break in the sadness and monotony of life at Vaihiva. She hurried on to the kitchen to give instructions to Teina about luncheon, and having glanced round a room, already immaculate, where Tyson would sleep, she went to her own room for a shower and to change. She came out on the verandah as the launch was entering the pass. It was lost to view behind the islet; then it reappeared a quarter of a mile distant, headed for the mouth of the river. Mauri looked more narrowly. There were others aboard beside Tyson and his two native boys. She saw three figures in the cockpit, but could not make out who they were. English people, she thought: tourists, no doubt, whom the consul was taking for a voyage around the island. Teina was an excellent cook who could be counted on to provide for extra guests. Mauri went to the kitchen once more to give some additional instructions, and returned as the launch was approaching the pier. It was hidden from view by trees and shrubbery. Mauri stood for a moment, looking out in that direction, then descended the steps to meet the consul and his guests. She halted. Her father was approaching at a run.

"Mauri!" he cried, brokenly.

"What is it, Father?"

"*O raua!* They've come home! They are . . ."

The old man could say no more, but stood looking from his daughter to the little group approaching from the riverbank. A moment later Naia was in her

mother’s arms.

CHAPTER XX

Tyson waited anxiously for a reply to his radiogram to George McLeod. He had composed the message with great care, giving the facts concerning Alan's marriage and his blindness. George could be depended upon and would know what to tell General Hardie. The consul's own opinion was that the full truth should be disclosed to him at once, but there might be reasons why a delay would be advisable. He was relieved when, a fortnight later, he received a message from General Hardie himself. He and George were on the way; they had just arrived in New York and were flying across the continent to catch the next monthly steamer from San Francisco.

The consul's first impulse was to send word to Alan, but upon second thought he decided against this. He would wait until the General came; until he could know, certainly, how much of the truth he had been told. In any case, it would be better that father and son should meet in the quiet of Vaihiva, when both had been prepared for the meeting.

In all his thirty-odd years on Tahiti, Tyson could remember no steamer day to which he had looked forward with such misgivings. On the morning of the *Makura's* arrival, he was up an hour before his usual time. Having shaved and dressed, he drank his coffee hastily, and paced his verandah by lamplight while waiting for dawn. He knew his old friend too well to hope that he would take the news of Alan's marriage easily. On the contrary, he was certain to be appalled by it—shocked to the depths of his being; the fact that Naia had Tahitian blood in her veins would outweigh everything that might, otherwise, count in her favor. But Hardie loved his son, and now that Alan was blind . . . Yes, that might make all the difference. Tyson clung to that hope.

It was a cloudless morning, cool and fresh. The town was already astir, and, as the light increased, the streets leading to the waterfront filled with people moving toward the wharf where the *Makura* docked. The steamer had been signaled, half an hour before, and was now close in, approaching the passage through the reef. She anchored in mid-harbor to wait for the port doctor's launch. When he saw the launch return, Tyson set out for the wharf. He was making his way through the crowd there when he felt a hand on his arm. Dr. Brocard was beside him.

"Isn't this rather unusual, Tyson?" Brocard asked, when they had exchanged greetings. "Meeting the steamer is my great diversion of the month, but I supposed it had ceased to be one for you, long since."

"I'm expecting friends from England; Alan Hardie's father, in fact," Tyson replied.

"You don't tell me!" Brocard replied, gravely. "He's come to take him home?"

"I don't know. Perhaps, if the lad will go. General Hardie's certain to want to see you while he's here."

"No doubt. I shall be at his service at any time." Brocard sighed and shook his head. "A tragic affair, Tyson. My heart goes out to them both. The son is in town?"

"No—at Vaihiva. I've not told him his father is coming."

Brocard nodded. "Well, there's one comfort, at least, for the lad's father: he has a daughter-in-law to be proud of. A lovely girl, Tyson."

The consul made no reply. The steamer was turning slowly to approach the wharf, her passengers lining the rail, looking down with interest on the throng of upturned faces below. Tyson scanned them hastily until he caught sight of George McLeod waving to him from the boat deck. General Hardie was standing beside him, erect, broad-shouldered, immaculately dressed in white, with a wide-brimmed panama hat set back on his head.

"That's General Hardie," the consul remarked.

"I'm relieved to know it," Brocard replied.

"Relieved? Why do you say that?"

"I rather fancy myself as a judge of character, even at a distance. He has the look of a man not easily downed. I would say that he could survive any disaster. Who's the young fellow with him?"

"George McLeod—a foster son of the General's. He came here with Alan Hardie, three years ago."

"Of course! I remember him now. . . . I mustn't keep you, Tyson. Call on me at any time." Brocard was turning away, but paused for a word more. "If you'll allow me to say so, I wouldn't encourage him to hope. There's not the ghost of a chance for the poor young man."

The consul went aboard the moment the gangway was lowered. General Hardie seized his hand in a warm clasp. "We've found you at last, Tyson," he said, heartily. "I was beginning to doubt that there was such a place as Tahiti."

Tyson smiled. "It *is* a longish way. You've had a good voyage?"

"Splendid!" He took the consul by the shoulders. "Twenty years!" he said. "Do you realize that? You've seasoned well, old friend!"

"I can pay you the same compliment."

General Hardie held out a strong brown hand. "No look of age in it yet, eh? And there's where it shows: in the hands. Where's Alan?" he added, carelessly.

"In the country, on the other side of the island. As a matter of fact, I've not told him you're coming."

"Good! I'm glad you didn't. George, we'll surprise him, eh? . . . Now,

Tyson, if you'll excuse me for half a minute? There are some people here I must say good-bye to. They're going through to Australia."

As soon as the General was out of hearing, the consul turned to McLeod. "It's good to see you, George," he said. "You got my letter?"

"Yes, at the steamship office."

"What have you told him?"

"The whole story, sir. I saw no reason to conceal anything."

"That was best. How has he taken it?"

"Pretty hard, I'm afraid. He's not mentioned Alan's marriage since I told him of it. How does Alan himself feel about it now?"

"He's more in love than ever."

McLeod gave him a rueful glance. "I was hoping he'd be good and sick of it by this time," he said.

"You'll not when you know his wife," Tyson replied. "We were wrong, George, both of us. Alan made no mistake."

"I don't know whether to be glad or sorry about that. On his father's account, I mean."

"He's coming," Tyson said. The General was making his way toward them once more. "Now, Tyson, I'm ready. Where's this consulate of yours?"

"It's not far. We'll walk, if you like."

"I'll see us through the customs, sir," McLeod said.

"Good. We'll push on, then. I'll be damned glad to stretch my legs. Can't say much for this *Makura*, Tyson. There's hardly room to move on her."

As they went down the gangway, General Hardie glanced over the crowd of Europeans, Chinese, natives, and half-castes on the wharf.

"What a mixture!" he said, shortly. "What are they, Tyson? Do they call themselves Tahitians?"

"You must remember that the island wasn't discovered yesterday," Tyson replied.

"I know. I suppose seamen from every nation on earth have left brats here from the days of Captain Cook. Are there any real natives left?"

"Oh yes. You can't judge the island by what you see in Papeete."

"I should hope not." General Hardie looked aside at his friend. "Damned if I can understand what's kept you here, all these years."

Tyson laughed. "Duty, stern duty," he said. "Best offshore fishing in the Pacific."

"You rogue! You haven't changed. Well, it's a pretty little place, I'll say that. And the other island across the way there. What do you call it?"

"Moorea. It's twelve miles from Tahiti."

"We had a splendid view of them both, coming in. Why the devil we ever let France have this Group is more than I know."

They chatted as they walked, and five minutes later turned in at the consulate. General Hardie halted at the top of the steps and looked about him. “You’ve done jolly well for yourself here, Tyson.”

“I’m still fond of comfort,” Tyson replied. “What about a whiskey?”

“With pleasure! It’s a bit early, but away with that! This occasion needs celebrating.”

Tyson rang for his house boy, and when the drinks were brought the two old friends raised their glasses. Seating themselves, they spoke of England, of old friends there, of the war, and of the changes that had taken place since. Then they fell silent. The consul glanced at his friend, waiting for him to open his mind. Presently the General set down his glass.

“Now, Tyson, I want the whole story. First, tell me about his sight. In your wire to George, you seemed to leave a little room for hope.”

“I did. I was not entirely convinced then, myself,” Tyson replied. “But now . . .”

“There *is* no hope?”

“I’m afraid not. You may as well know it at once.”

“Who says it? You haven’t a real oculist here, surely?”

“By chance, Hardie, we have—a Dr. Brocard, one of the best in Paris. I had a long talk with him after he examined Alan. He says that the membranes lining the eyes are destroyed.”

“There’s nothing that can be done?”

“Brocard says not. The sight is permanently lost.”

“Good God! You’re sure he knows his business?”

“I’m not a medical man, but I’ve every reason to believe it.”

General Hardie put his hands over his eyes as though trying to realize the full extent of the disaster which had overtaken his son.

“Well, it’s come,” he said, bleakly. “Poor lad! There goes all his promise. . . . And he’s only twenty-four!”

“It’s tragic enough, God knows,” Tyson replied.

“How has he taken it?”

“As you would expect him to. How he really feels is another matter.”

“He wants to go home, of course.”

“I can’t say what his plans are. I rather doubt if he’s made any so far.”

Hardie was silent. He drained his glass and held it in his hands, regarding the consul grimly.

“I may as well know the whole truth,” he said, after a long pause. “He’s . . . he’s really married?”

“Yes.”

“To a native girl?”

“Her father was an American named Thayer, a former mining engineer,

who died some years ago. A very good friend of mine."

"Then she's a half-caste, eh? . . . How in the name of God could he do it! . . . My son!"

"These people are not Indians, Hardie," Tyson replied, quietly. "The girl comes of excellent blood on both sides. Her mother's people are one of the oldest families in Polynesia. They have been important people for centuries."

"Important—on these crumbs of land? What does that matter?" Hardie said bitterly. "I don't understand you, Tyson. One would say that you approved of Alan's marriage."

"So I do. And when you see his wife and come to know her, you'll understand why."

Hardie stared at him. "See her! Never!"

"You can't mean that."

"Every word of it! I'm surprised that you should suggest it. In any case, there'll be no need, now. That's one thing to be thankful for. We can arrange the business at once."

"I don't know that I follow you," Tyson said.

"Now that Alan's blind, she'll be only too glad to release him, of course."

Tyson shook his head. "You don't understand, Hardie. She loves him."

"Nonsense! I've no doubt she's fond of Alan; she couldn't help being. But love? A little Kanaka wench? Don't tell me you believe it! You'll be saying next that Alan's in love with her."

"He is, deeply, and she's worthy of it."

"I know better!" Hardie paused. "I'm sorry, Tyson. I didn't mean to be so blunt. But . . . it's impossible! He can't be! I could take my oath that he's eating his heart out at thought of what he's done. He's proud; he wouldn't show it, of course. But there's the truth, if I know my son. He's not color-blind, at least."

"Hardie, you have a greatly mistaken conception of the kind of wife Alan has chosen," the consul replied. "As for color, she's as white as yourself."

"Not under the skin. I've seen Eurasians of that sort, too. . . . I'll have another whiskey, if you don't mind," he added. "This thing has rather knocked me, Tyson."

"Of course. I'm sorry."

The consul poured him a stiff drink and siphoned in the soda. Hardie gulped it thirstily. "Thanks. That's better." He set down his glass. Neither spoke for some time.

Hardie brought his fist down on the arm of his chair. "Tyson, there's only one way out: I must buy her off. How can it be managed?"

"It's useless even to think of it," Tyson replied.

"That's absurd! I know them. I've lived in India. I'll pay through the nose,

if I must. Every half-caste woman has her price."

"This one hasn't. Her mother's a damned sight better off than you are, as far as that goes."

"You mean that? Then why the devil did the girl marry him?"

"I've tried to tell you," Tyson said, patiently. "She loves him."

General Hardie looked at him, helplessly. "Then what can we do?"

"Take my advice," the consul said, earnestly. "Accept her as your daughter-in-law. You must, Hardie—don't you realize that? Alan loves her; there's no question about it. For his sake . . ."

"Never!"

"Then see her, at least. You owe her that. You'd not find a lovelier girl in the whole of England. Alan wouldn't be alive if it weren't for Naia. He was six months blind on the island before they were taken off. She cared for him. . . ."

"Tyson, I can't. . . . That's final."

There was a longish pause. "Very well," Tyson said. "There's no use discussing it any further."

"No." General Hardie rose from his chair and stood with his back to his friend, his gaze following an island schooner, under way for the open sea. He turned to face the consul.

"There's one other thing," he said. "I dread to ask, but I must. Are there any brats?"

"Brats? No."

"Thank God!"

"But you've a fine little grandson—almost a two-year-old."

Hardie hid his face in his clenched hands. "Tyson, for God's sake . . .!" He broke off. "He's not mine!" he added, harshly. "I'll have no coffee-colored grandsons. Don't call him mine!"

The consul was silent. The expression on the General's face altered of a sudden to one of such desolation that Tyson was touched in spite of himself.

"But he is," Hardie added, wretchedly. "My grandson . . . Alan's blood, my blood in his veins. Say what I will, nothing can alter that." He roused himself with an effort and threw back his shoulders. "Well, so be it . . . I must see Alan, of course. How can it be done?"

"Alone, you mean?"

"That goes without saying."

Tyson paused to reflect. "There's a village about eight miles from where they live. Tautira, it's called. We could arrange for a meeting there."

"Right. When could we push off? The sooner the better for me."

"You'd like to go at once? To-day?"

"Could we? Would it be putting you out too much?"

"Not at all." Tyson glanced at his watch. "It's nine o'clock," he said. "We

can go in my launch, if you like; that would be the quickest way. It's a five hours' journey by sea."

"It's damned kind of you, Tyson. I *must* see Alan! In spite of what you've said, I can't believe . . ." He left the sentence unfinished. "We'll have to spend the night, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid so. It will take some time to fetch Alan."

Tyson excused himself to make preparations for the journey. McLeod came, meanwhile, with the luggage. The launch was then awaiting them by the landing near the consulate. It was a broad-beamed forty-foot vessel with two fishing chairs in the cockpit and a compact two-berth cabin in the bow. Tyson's launch hands, native boys, held it off the sea wall while General Hardie, McLeod, and Tyson stepped aboard, and a few moments later they were steaming out through the pass.

They proceeded eastward around the coast. Point Venus was passed; they crossed the submerged reefs of Papenoo and Tiareí, the lonely lagoons of Hitiaa backed by mountains with their morning cloud caps piled high above them in silvery splendor, gleaming like snow in the sunlight against the blue of the sky. The three men gazed shoreward in silence as the valleys opened out, one after one; and far in the distance they could see the mountains of the Tiarapu Peninsula, like the ghost of an island in the morning haze, sweeping up from the plain of the sea.

"That's where we're bound," Tyson remarked. "Would you care to put out a line, Hardie? There's good sport to be had along here."

The General shook his head. "I'm no fisherman," he said. "If you don't mind, I think I'll take this chance for a rest. I got precious little sleep last night. Captain's dinner, you know, and a fancy-dress ball afterward. People were up till all hours."

"Of course. You've time for a decent forty winks and then some before we reach Tautira."

The consul returned a moment later and seated himself beside George McLeod.

"You had a chance for a talk with him, sir?" McLeod asked.

"Yes. . . . You were right. He's taken it hard, more than hard. He won't see Naia; there's no persuading him. . . . You'd best go on with the launch to Vaihiva."

"It's what I'd hoped to do."

"Good. We'll wait for you in Tautira, at Fara's house. Bring Alan up tomorrow morning, if possible."

"Supposing Naia wants to come with him?"

"She won't. Naia's an intelligent girl. She'll know that Alan should see his father alone, first. In any case, she mustn't come. You must see that she

doesn't."

"And what about later?"

"God knows! I'm more than worried. All we can do is to hope."

"You're really glad he's married, Tyson?"

"On Alan's account, profoundly glad. You'll understand when you come to know his wife. I wish *I* were his father! How proud I'd be to claim Naia!"

"I've seen her photograph, at Mauri's. I must say she's a stunning-looking girl."

"That's not the word, George. She's beautiful; not in person alone—all the way through."

"What's the youngster like?"

"He's Alan over again, though he has his mother's eyes. If you can, bring him along to-morrow. My hope is in Tua. Once the General sees him, he'll give in. I don't see how he can help it." Tyson's face brightened. "Let's forget it for now," he added. . . . "Oh, Tavi!" The native boy seated on the deck, forward, turned his head. "Bring up the rods. . . . What about it, George? We've a good hour to go. With any luck, that's time enough for catching half a dozen fine tuna."

Late in the afternoon, McLeod, alone now in the cockpit of the launch, was proceeding toward Vaihiva. They were not far offshore, and the panorama of plateaus, gorges, steep-walled mountains, and belts of coastal land that he remembered so well unfolded itself once more as the launch followed the winding channels of blue water within the lagoon. Nothing had changed here. The same deep silence rested upon land and sea. The same unbroken forests swept up from the lowlands, with a tiny thatched hut showing here and there to make solitude the more impressive. The very clouds deepening the gloom of the valleys seemed to be those he had seen on the afternoon when he had returned from Vaihiva, after his strange welcome from Naia's mother. And the same feeling of loneliness filled his heart, as though it were an influence pervading the air itself.

His blood quickened as they approached Vaihiva and he gazed ahead with an all but painful eagerness. There was the islet by the passage that he had first seen with Alan. A lump rose in his throat. Good old Alan! Was it possible that he was to see him again? He had mourned him as dead for so long, it was hard to convince himself that, within the next ten minutes, perhaps, he would clasp his hand, hear his voice. They were abreast of the islet now and crossing the lagoon to enter the river. On the farther side, he saw the flowering tree his father had planted so long ago. A shaft of sunlight, striking down through a cleft in the hills, fell full upon it, adding to the splendor of the great mass of crimson blossom. That tree, Mauri had told him, was set out by his father in

his own honor, on his fourth birthday. It was a memorial to his parents, now, and what finer one could there be? It seemed to blossom the more splendidly for their sake.

There was no one in sight; evidently the launch had not been seen. McLeod sprang out at the pier and walked rapidly to the house, his heart beating high. He ran up the steps and halted at the entrance to the verandah. Before he had time to knock, Naia appeared from a doorway at the right, a pile of freshly laundered garments on her arm. On her face was the look of peace, of quiet repose, common to those, tranquil in heart, who, believing themselves alone, are not thinking—only dreaming.

"Oh . . ." With a swift movement she placed her burden on a chair and came forward. Tears sprang into her eyes. "I know you . . . you're George!"

"You've guessed it, Naia." McLeod felt a mist in his own eyes as he took her hands in his. "How could you be sure, so quickly?"

She shook her head, scarcely able to find her voice again. "I don't know. It was . . . it just had to be. Oh, what a happy day for Alan! We were speaking of you this morning. I don't believe that a day passes when he doesn't speak of you. Not one."

"Where is he?"

"Up the river, with Tua. Do you know about our little son?"

"Indeed I do!"

"My grandfather's with them. They're having a swim. We'll go now; it isn't far. I can hardly wait till he knows!"

When they had gone a little distance, Naia halted. "You haven't told me," she said. "Did his father come?"

"Yes. He stopped at Tautira, with Mr. Tyson. I couldn't wait."

"It was thoughtful of them to do that. Alan will want to see his father alone for this first time. He can go with you to-morrow."

"That's what Tyson suggested," McLeod replied. "Your mother is here?"

"No; she's at Teahupoo, a village down the coast; but she'll be back to-morrow. You'll stay with us this time?" she added. "You'll not hurry away as you did before? You remember? I didn't have a chance even to see you!"

"I know," McLeod said, lamely.

"Alan told me why. He said you didn't like this part of the island. But now that he's here . . ."

"It wasn't that, Naia; not really. I didn't want to impose on your mother. I came barging in, a stranger, without a word of notice . . ."

"You, a stranger? I've known about you ever since I was a tiny girl. . . . But we mustn't stand here!"

She went on at a fast walk, McLeod following on the narrow path that wound through the great forest trees. A short way beyond, McLeod saw before

them an open glade where the river flowed without a sound, the channel shelving gently from a sandy beach on the nearer side to a wall of rock beyond. The light of the hidden sun, streaming over the mountain walls, illumined the place with a magical effect, so that rocks, trees, and quiet water seemed to be powdered with a dust of gold. They halted at the edge of this glade and looked on for a moment, unseen. Raitua was seated near the riverbank, watching Alan, waist-deep in the water, with his little son in his arms. The boy laughed with joy as his father tossed him high and splashed him into the stream. "More, Daddy! More, Daddy!" he was shouting. Alan lifted him again. "You little mischief! You like it? Shall I do it again?"

"More, Daddy, more!"

Raitua turned his head quickly as Naia and McLeod stepped out into the open. Naia put her hand to her lips and beckoned to him. The old man understood. His face lighted up as he recognized McLeod. He clasped his hand with a firm grip.

"*Makla, tané!*" he exclaimed, in a low voice. "*Ua tai mai oé?*"

"You see, he's not forgotten you," Naia said. "You remember meeting him, don't you, when you were here before?"

"Yes; we tried to speak together, but I couldn't understand what he was trying to tell me."

"He wanted you to stay. He used to take you bathing in this same place, when you were a baby. And me after you; and now he has Tua. Grandfather's never happy unless he has a child on his shoulder. . . . Now then!"

A happy light danced in her eyes as she walked to the water's edge.

"Alan!" she called.

Hardie looked up quickly. "There she is, Tua," he said. "There's your little mother come to take us home. Have you had enough?"

"More, Daddy!"

Hardie laughed. "He'd like to do this all day, Naia," he said. "I'll have him swimming before he's six months older. Now then, little son! Show your mother how well you can paddle."

He held the lad firmly with one hand, and placing the other under his middle he walked slowly to shore, while the baby kicked and splashed. Raitua waded into the shallows and took the lad from his father's arms, guiding Alan to where Naia stood.

"We've had a glorious time, Naia. Tua's a perfect little water rat."

"I know, dear. It's such fun watching you together. Here's your towel."

She gave McLeod a warning glance. Alan rubbed his head and shoulders vigorously while Naia dried the baby and slipped on his clothes. Alan was wearing swimming trunks. "I undressed at the house," he said.

"If I'd known I'd have brought your bathrobe."

"I'm glad you didn't. I like the air on my hide. Well, are we ready?"

"In a moment. We have a visitor, Alan."

"A visitor? Who?"

"He's here," Naia said. "See if you can guess. Put out your hands."

Alan turned toward her with a questioning look; then he let the towel drop from his fingers and stretched out his arms, gropingly. His hands went to McLeod's shoulders, then lightly over his face and neck.

"George," he said.

"Alan, old boy!"

Hardie put an arm around his shoulders and held him close. "You scamp," he said, trying hard to control his voice. "I . . . I never hoped for such luck as this. Do you know how I guessed, Naia? By a little mole on the back of his neck, under his collar."

It was a memorable evening at Vaihiva. Having put Tua to bed, Naia rejoined the men on the verandah. Of their experiences since he had said good-bye to Alan so long before, McLeod knew only what Tyson had related by letter, and the story was now told him from the beginning. Alan was like his old self once more, and Naia's heart was filled with gratitude toward George McLeod, whose coming had worked this happy change.

The clock was striking ten when she rose to bid them good-night.

"Don't talk too late," she said as she took McLeod's hand. "You'll want to get an early start for Tautira."

"I'm not going," McLeod said. "Alan's entitled to one day alone with his father. Don't you think I should allow him that?"

"But you'll come, Naia?" Hardie asked.

"To-morrow? No, Alan. George is right. I want you to have that day to yourselves."

When she had gone, the two men were silent for some little time, each engaged in his own reflections.

"What an experience, Alan," McLeod remarked, presently. "But there's one thing you've left out: Tua's birth."

"There's little I can tell you about that," Hardie replied. "I was miles away when it happened—at the far end of the Tematangi lagoon."

McLeod stared at him. "You don't tell me that Naia was alone!"

"Yes. She'd sent me off for some sea birds' eggs she said she was hungry for. I'd completely lost track of the days; I didn't realize that Naia was anywhere near her time. But she knew. That's why she made this excuse to get me away. She brought Tua into the world herself."

"Imagine a girl at home in that situation," McLeod said.

"It's hard even to imagine, isn't it?" Alan replied. "She has her mother's

courage—you recall what Mauri went through? Mac, the most fortunate day in my life was the one when I met Naia," he added, quietly. "She's more to me than life itself would be without her."

"I can well understand that, old chap. She's won my heart completely."

"And you've won hers. It's curious," Hardie went on. "She feels that there's a kind of bond between you two. She can't explain it, exactly, but it's very real to her. Naia is very Polynesian on one side of her nature; I love her the more for it. You know, she's always helped her grandfather care for your parents' graves. She believes that, somehow, she was meant to take the place of the sister you lost at your mother's death."

"That *is* odd," McLeod replied. "She doesn't seem in the least Polynesian to me."

"You'll have to know her better to see that side."

"She'll fit into life at home as though she were born there."

"I know she will. I hope Father can be made to see that. How does he feel, Mac? No beating about the bush—I want the truth."

"So far, he's said very little. He's waiting to see you. But he's as fond of you as ever; there's no question about that."

"That's faintly encouraging, at least," Alan said. "I expect him to be shocked; but he knows me well enough to be certain that I've not married some little bush native. It was decent of the old boy to wait in Tautira."

"Did you expect us?"

"I knew that Tyson had wirelessed you . . . by the way, he didn't ask you to come?"

"No, no. The message was sent to me; I can tell you exactly what he said: 'Alan and Naia found. Marooned on uninhabited island. Both well but Alan's sight gravely impaired. May be blind. The marriage a great success.' "

"Good old Tyson. I can imagine how he must have sweated over the wording of the message."

"And perhaps you can imagine how we felt, at home. Nothing mattered except that you were safe. Remember, we'd believed you drowned for nearly three years."

Hardie's face darkened. "There were times when I wished I had been. I'm past them now, thank God!" He winced. "I made one horrible mistake, Mac. Naturally, I felt pretty low when Dr. Brocard told me that I'd never see again. The thought of Naia being saddled for life with a blind husband . . . I wanted to release her, and all but broke her heart in telling her so. I learned, then, if I hadn't known before, the kind of wife I'd chosen."

"That was an awful blunder. What a mean conception of her love she'd think you had!"

"Don't rub it in. I realize, now, but I did it with the best of intentions."

Hardie groped for his stick. “Well, what about bed? You must be damned tired.”

“I’m ready to turn in if you are.”

“We’ll talk the clock round later,” Hardie said. “Your room is all ready. It’s the one at the end of the verandah.”

“I’ve got a suggestion about to-morrow, Alan.”

“What is it?”

“Take Tua with you.”

Hardie paused to reflect. “That *is* an idea. You think . . .”

“I’m sure of it. Your father will love him on sight.”

“I’ll do it. I’m glad you spoke of it. Sleep well, old boy.”

“Need any help?”

“Hell, no! I know this house better than the man who built it.”

McLeod looked after his foster brother as he made his way, without hesitation, along the verandah to the door at the far end of it. Then, turning the lamp low, he blew out the flame and went softly down the steps and onto the pier by the riverbank. A canoe lay there. Getting into it, McLeod cast off the line, paddled across the river, and followed the path he had gone with Mauri, three years before, to the lonely burial ground where his parents were sleeping. He entered the little plot, so beautifully cared for, with its high walls of growing, blossoming things, making a sanctuary within a sanctuary. The moon, nearly at the full, shone with a brilliance unknown in Northern latitudes, and the coral sand strewn upon the three graves was checkered with the shadows of leaf and fern and frond. As he stood there, he became aware of a deeper coolness flowing over and around him from the inner recesses of the valley, as though some lonely and dreaming spirit, in the farthermost recesses of the mountains, after a pause in breathing were quietly breathing again.

CHAPTER XXI

Returning to Fara's house from an early walk through the village, the consul found General Hardie just completing his morning toilet.

"I've had a splendid night," Hardie said. "I don't know when I've slept more soundly."

"I'm relieved to hear it," Tyson replied. "I was afraid you might find old Fara's bed of honor rather uncomfortable. It's a kapok mattress. I find them a bit on the warm side."

"Mine was cool as Greenland compared with beds I've slept on in India. You've a damned fine climate here. And there's no malaria, you say?"

"No. That's one reason why I've never left the place."

"What a godsend for the tropics!" Hardie gave his friend an affectionate glance. "I'm beginning to wonder if you're the idiot I've always believed you, Tyson. You've thrown your life away, of course; but after all, that's your business. You chose a pleasant spot for doing it."

"Precisely. And I've trained no young men for the next Armageddon."

General Hardie smiled. "A bull's-eye," he said. "But, by God, it's been necessary, Tyson! What else could England do with mad dogs next door to her in Italy and Germany? But away with all that! One reason I'm here is to forget it for a month or two. How soon can Alan come?"

They had their coffee on the verandah, served by Mrs. Fara, a huge jolly woman who treated the consul with the ease of long-standing friendship. A lively conversation was kept up between them while she was setting the food on the table. General Hardie listened to the unfamiliar speech with a kind of disapproving interest.

"You speak the lingo like one of them," he remarked, after Fara Vahiné had gone.

"I *am* one of them, in a manner of speaking. Excellent people, the Faras. They're very fond of Alan. He and George stopped here when they first came."

They hurried through their breakfast, for the sun was two hours high and the launch was expected momentarily. But time dragged on to midmorning, and still it had not arrived. General Hardie made an effort to maintain his usual brusque offhand manner, but the consul could see that, inwardly, he was becoming more and more concerned and anxious.

"What the devil can be keeping them?" he asked as they returned from another walk to the beach. "Alan's there, surely?"

"I can guess—engine trouble," Tyson replied. "I've a new Diesel ordered; the old gas engine has more than served its time. It would have to balk on this

particular morning!”

Preparations for lunch were under way before the boat was at last sighted heading in for the Vaionifa Passage. General Hardie was pacing the verandah. “Will you meet him, Tyson?” he asked. “Now that he’s here . . . Damn it all, I’m a bit upset.” He drew out his handkerchief and blew his nose loudly. “Poor lad! The thought of his being blind . . . I’ll have to pull myself together.”

The lagoon was shallow in front of Fara’s house and the launch anchored fifty yards offshore. One of Fara’s sons was waiting in a canoe. Tyson breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that Naia was not on board. Raitua was there, but Alan alone came ashore.

“Hello, Alan!”

“Oh, you’re there, Tyson.” The consul stepped forward and took his arm. “What kept you?” he asked. “Engine trouble, I suppose?”

“Yes. Something went wrong with the magneto. I thought we’d never get off. Where’s Father?”

“At the house. You didn’t bring Tua?”

Alan shook his head. “George suggested it,” he said. “I thought at first I would, but this morning I decided not to. How is my father?”

“He’s the picture of health, Alan, and keen as knives to see you. We’ve walked the beach for the past three hours.”

General Hardie had himself well in hand when the consul led Alan up the steps. Father and son greeted each other with the affectionate casualness which English birth and breeding demand upon such occasions, but Alan felt his father’s hand tremble as it clasped his own.

“You’re looking wonderfully fit, my boy,” he said.

“I never felt better. How are you, sir?”

“Splendid! Gad, Tyson, how he’s broadened out!”

“What do you weigh now, Alan?” Tyson asked.

“Thirteen stone.”

“And all solid muscle, too,” the General remarked as he felt of his arms, holding him off for a better view. “Uninhabited islands agree with you, that’s plain. Tyson’s told me where you’ve been. What’s the name of the place, again?”

“Tematangi.”

“Where’s that from here?”

“Seven hundred miles southeast of Tahiti.”

General Hardie smiled. “Well, the next time you decide to go voyaging, please take a broadcasting set along. It’s a bit nerve-racking to your family and friends to be mourning you as dead. Once is enough!”

“I promise, Father. George tells me you’re out of the Army.”

"Yes."

"Are you glad?"

"I'm damned if I know, Alan. I've looked forward to freedom for years, and now that I have it . . ."

"You'll be driven to take lessons from me in the art of loafing," Tyson put it.

"So I shall, you rogue! I couldn't have a better instructor, that's sure."

"Thirty-odd years of experience. I ought to know something about it. There's nothing like fishing, Hardie, to keep a man contented."

"You're not the first who's told me so, but I'll take that on trust. Fishing would bore me stiff."

"What have you been doing, Father?" Alan asked.

"Nothing, and that bores me still worse. Going back and forth between London and Devon, shooting a little at home, and taking a hand at bridge, at the club, when I'm in town. What a life! I'm damned if I'll settle down to it!"

Mrs. Fara came to announce lunch. The table had been set out of doors, under a mango tree that cast a pool of deep shade around them. There was excellent wine, brought by the consul and chilled to the temperature of the mountain stream that flowed near by. Mrs. Fara had excelled herself in preparing the meal and the three men ate with hearty appetite, from the small, well-flavored oysters at the beginning of the meal to the pineapple *poi* at the end.

The afternoon was well advanced by the time they had finished. Tyson rose. "I'll leave you now," he said. "I'm afraid I've rather spoiled the day for you, Hardie. That cursed engine . . ."

"Spoiled it? Nothing of the sort! The meeting's been all the happier for the delay. You'll be back shortly?"

"In an hour or so, if you like. I've some old fishing cronies here that I want to see."

General Hardie let his gaze follow the consul as he crossed the lawn and trudged down the grass-grown village street.

"There's the best friend I've had in the world, Alan, since George's father died. If he were alive, what a reunion this would be!"

"Tyson's just as fond of you, Father."

"I hope so. You like him, don't you?"

"Like him? Rather!"

General Hardie was silent for a moment, regarding his son with an expression of deep concern. He cleared his throat. "Tyson's told me what the doctor has said about your eyes."

"I supposed he had."

"We mustn't take it as final, lad. I've damned little faith in these French

doctors."

"This one seems to know his business, sir. He was very definite."

"A Frenchman is always definite, with or without reason. It's part of the national character. Wait till we get home. We've the best oculists in the world in London."

"I'd be ready to see them all if there was any hope."

"That's the right spirit! We'll take the next boat, eh?"

Alan's face brightened. "You mean it, Father? You're . . . you're sure you want me to come?"

"Want you! Good God, Alan! Could you doubt it? I'll be the happiest man in England when I have you at home again."

"That's cheering news, sir, I don't mind saying." He paused. "I didn't wireless you because I wasn't sure what I ought to do."

"No matter. Tyson did it for you. A happy day that was, my boy! Imagine it, after all those months! We'd not a shred of hope left. George and I were at home when the message came. You should have seen the servants! Old Billings wept on my shoulder. Shouldn't wonder if I shed a tear or two myself. The whole house went to pot for a week. The first thing I did was to wire Professor Grayson—he's still at Cambridge, of course."

"Good old Grayson!"

"You're the very apple of his eye, it seems. He came down the next day, with a pocket full of obituary notices that had appeared months before, after your supposed death. He'd clipped them out of scientific journals with names I'd never heard of till then. He thought I ought to read 'em to give me a proper notion of your importance. I did, of course. By the time I'd finished, I began to suspect that you amounted to something."

"Grayson's a sentimental old bloke."

"He's damned fond of you. He believes in you, too.

"He knows about my eyes?"

"Yes; and let me tell you what he said. These are his exact words: 'Hardie, bring him straight home. We can hire eyes for him by the dozen pair. It's his brains we need.' "

"Damned flattering, I must say."

"Flattering? No. He meant every word of it."

"What does he propose?"

"That you take up your work again, of course; that special line of research you were engaged in during your last year at Cambridge. Grayson says it was made for you; that you're the only man who can carry it on. He tried to explain it, but damned if I could understand a word."

"I know what he means," Alan replied. "Nothing would please me more. I've had time to do a lot of thinking the past year; Tematangi was a perfect

place for that. I believe I really have got some ideas that may be worth something."

"Of course you have. Grayson's keen to see you. I believe he'd have come with me if he could have gotten leave."

"Would he want me at Cambridge?"

"No; that's the best part of it. He says you can work at home if you like. He's already selected an assistant for you—a mathematician."

"Do you remember his name?"

"Wait . . . I'll have it in a minute. Matson . . . Maxon . . ."

"It wasn't Matthewson?"

"That's it!"

"He's the very man I've been thinking of, but I'd never have dared suggest him. He's as old as you are, Father."

"What of it?" General Hardie replied. "Grayson said: 'You tell Alan that Matthewson will be proud to come.' Encouraging enough, isn't it?"

"We've already worked together," Alan said, musingly. "But I could never afford a man like that."

"Alan, that's just where I come in," his father replied, proudly. "Leave all that to me. Grayson tells me you'll need a vanload of books, for reference. You shall have them, and whatever else you require."

"You're more than generous, Father," Alan said. "You've bucked me up no end. It's odd, sir. This very plan occurred to me a week ago. I wrote you a long letter, asking if you thought you could make it possible. It must be still in the Papeete post office."

"You've shown the spirit I knew you would, my lad."

"When does the steamer sail?"

"On the sixteenth. That'll give you plenty of time."

"Yes . . . This seems almost too good to be true. You know, I was thinking that, if ever we did go, we'd have to live in Cambridge, or London. It will be any amount better, stopping at home. Naia will love it there."

"Naia?"

"My wife. I'm sorry. I thought you knew her name."

"But . . . good God, Alan! You're not thinking of taking her to England?"

"Would you expect me to leave her here?"

"Naturally. You must. Don't you see?"

"No. Why?"

General Hardie's hands were trembling on the arms of his chair. He paused to choose his words.

"A girl born and brought up as she has been? A native of the tropics? Our climate would kill her."

"People from the tropics thrive at home. England's full of them. What

about your friends from India?”

“They were English to start with. Even so, there’s not one in fifty that isn’t a semi-invalid.”

“Is that your only objection to Naia’s going?”

“No,” General Hardie replied, after a long pause. “I’m going to be frank with you, Alan. I must, for your sake; for both your sakes. She’d be miserably unhappy in any case. She’d never fit in. You must see that for yourself.”

“I don’t—not for a moment!” Alan replied. “Naia would fit in anywhere.”

“Never. Not in England.”

Alan’s face flushed. “How can you say that?” he asked. “You’ve not seen her. You know nothing about her.”

“Consider her situation at home,” his father replied, with an effort at calmness. “There’s no need for me to see her to know that she would be wretchedly out of place. Try to picture her there, with English girls, the kind you’ve been brought up with. You can’t be truly fond of her, or you’d never want to expose her to such humiliation.”

“Father, what kind of a girl do you think I’ve married?” Alan asked quietly.

“I don’t know. I don’t want to know. But I can guess she’s not the kind you would wish to present to your mother if she were living.”

“You never were more mistaken,” Alan replied, hotly. “I would be as proud to present Naia to Mother as she would be to claim her.”

General Hardie controlled himself with difficulty. “We’ll leave your mother’s name out of this,” he said, in a trembling voice.

“You were the first to mention it, sir. If Mother were here, she would never condemn her son’s wife as you have done.”

“I’m not condemning her . . .”

“Then what do you call it? Could anything be more damning than what you have just said?”

“Alan, will you allow me to speak? Your whole future is concerned here. I’ll grant that your wife is pretty, charming, all that you believe her to be. I’ve no doubt that she does very well here, in her own environment, in the midst of her own people. But to burden yourself . . .”

“I’ve heard enough, Father! You’ve made yourself perfectly understood. What you propose is that I desert my wife and little son. Clear out—leave them . . .”

“You’ve no right to put it in those words,” General Hardie replied, harshly. “You’ve made a mistake, a ghastly mistake. In your heart, you know it! That must be paid for. I propose that you care for them here, where they belong. I propose that you don’t wreck your career at the outset; that you don’t ruin your own life and what remains of mine for the sake of a Kanaka wench who will

have forgotten your very existence in three months' time. I'll have no . . ."

General Hardie checked himself. Alan had risen and was groping for his stick at the side of his chair. When he had found it he stood with his back to his father. "Fara!" he called. He paused, and called again.

"*É, Hardie tané*; coming," the old native replied as he approached from the house.

CHAPTER XXII

Naia was busy throughout the day, making preparations for the arrival of General Hardie. She never doubted that he would return with Alan, and Mr. Tyson would be with him, of course. In her mother's absence there was much to be done, and with Teina and one of the latter's nieces to help she had spared no pains to make sure that everything should be in readiness for the expected guests. It was late afternoon when, having changed into her prettiest frock, she came out on the verandah where George McLeod was awaiting her.

"You will forgive me, George, for leaving you so much to yourself?" she asked. "I've had to take Mother's place to-day."

"Of course, Naia. It's quite all right. I've had a glorious walk."

"Where did you go?"

"Into the valley, to the foot of the first waterfall."

"Some day soon I want to show you the upper valley. I'll be free when Mother comes home . . ."

"What a pretty frock."

She smiled with pleasure. "Do you like it? That's for Alan's father."

"I wish Alan could see you in it."

Naia's face clouded. "George, there's something I want you to do for me. It's about Alan." She hesitated. "You may think it foolish, but you wouldn't if you knew about our native remedies. There is one for blindness that has been in use on Tahiti for hundreds of years, my grandfather says. Not for complete blindness, of course, but I don't believe Alan has really lost his sight. No matter what the doctor in Papeete says. My grandfather knows all about our ancient remedies. He believes that this one will help Alan. I want him to try it."

"Have you spoken to him about it?"

"Yes, but he has no faith in it. If you could help me persuade him . . ."

"I'll do my best, Naia. Do you have it here, this remedy?"

"It's made from a flower called *mamatai*. The plant is a rare one, but I know where to find it; there's a little patch of it growing in a ravine up our valley. You crush the petals and the bark of the young shoots and squeeze the juice from them into a basin of water. It turns the water a milky color; then the one to be cured places his face in the water with the eyes open. This is done several times a day. My grandfather knows of people nearly blind who have been cured by it. If it could cure Alan . . ."

"It's worth trying, certainly, but you mustn't be too hopeful."

"I'm not, but I want him to have every chance. . . . For his sake," she added. "Not to see . . . it's been terrible for him, George. He's very brave. He

even jokes about his blindness. But I know how he feels, in his heart."

"I believe that he minds it most on your account," McLeod replied.

"I know. I try to make him realize that it doesn't matter to me. And it's true: I grieve only for him. I love him more than ever, now, if it's possible to love him more."

"God be thanked that he has you, Naia!"

"That we have each other, and Tua," she said. "We can be so happy if only Alan will stop thinking that his blindness makes him a burden."

"He will. It was bound to be hard for him at first. Have you talked about plans? Do you know what he wants to do?"

"A little. I don't think he's decided anything, so far. A great deal depends on his father, he says."

"What of yourself, Naia?"

"I want to do whatever will make Alan happy," she replied. "Mother hopes we'll stay here; she's been trying hard to persuade him. I'd like that best, of course, but only if Alan truly wants to stay. But I've not told him, so you mustn't speak of it."

Naia broke off as a small boy came running across the lawn.

"*Te poti, te poti!*" he called, excitedly.

The girl rose hastily. "They're coming! I've had Tomi on the lookout all the afternoon. Let's go to the beach."

The point on the north side of the river gave them a clear view down the lagoon, where they saw Tyson's launch approaching, scarcely half a mile away.

Naia tried to smile. "I'm very nervous," she said. "I've thought so much about Alan's father. If he shouldn't like me . . ."

"Nonsense! You needn't worry about that," McLeod replied, heartily.

"Is he a kind-hearted man?"

"Yes; but don't be alarmed if he's a bit stiff, at first. He's been a soldier all his life; that's given him a rather short, gruff way of speaking. It means nothing. You'll like him when you come to know him."

Naia gazed steadily toward the approaching boat, shading her eyes with her hand.

"There's Alan . . . and Grandfather . . . Why . . . I don't see anyone else!"

"General Hardie's probably in the cabin, with Tyson."

"Of course; they must be. I didn't think of that."

She led the way quickly along the beach to the pier by the riverbank. A moment later the launch rounded the point and, with her engine in reverse, came alongside. One of the boat hands helped Alan ashore and Raitua followed. There was no one else. Naia took her husband's arm, searching his face anxiously.

"My father thought he'd best stay in Tautira," he remarked, carelessly. "He was afraid it would put your mother out, having so many guests at once. Tyson stayed with him, of course."

"Oh . . . But it wouldn't have! I have everything prepared for them. Didn't you tell him so?"

"He's very set in his ways, Naia; that comes from his Army life. Once he decides a thing it's hard to change him. And he's so afraid of giving people trouble."

"Mother will be terribly disappointed," Naia said. "I hate to think of his being at Fara's house. We could make him so comfortable here."

Alan put his arm around her shoulders as they started toward the house. "I know, dear."

"But he's coming to-morrow?"

"I think so, or it might be a day or two later. I'm afraid the long voyage from England has rather tired him."

"Alan, he's not . . . he's not angry, is he? About . . . ?"

Hardie smiled reassuringly. "Of course not! Do you think he'd have come all the way from England to see us if he had been? Don't worry. Everything's all right. I'm famished, Naia. Is dinner ready?"

Naia concealed her disappointment as well as she could. Little was said at dinner concerning the meeting in Tautira, but Alan chatted in so cheerful and casual a manner that Naia was completely reassured. Tua fell asleep in his high-chair and his mother, excusing herself, carried him off to bed. When they had finished their coffee, the two men went for a stroll along the beach. Alan put his hand on his foster brother's arm. "Let's go to the point," he said. "How is the moon to-night?"

"Just at the full, and about an hour high. There's not a cloud in the sky."

They walked on in silence and seated themselves on a bench that stood on the edge of the lawn, overlooking the lagoon and the small green islet by Vaihiva Passage. Hardie stared vacantly before him.

"It's nights like this when I miss my sight the most," he said. "There's no more beautiful spot in the world than Vaihiva on a night of full moon. I've one thing to be thankful for: I remember it so well. . . . It's going to be home to me, Mac, from now on," he added, quietly. "I decided that to-day."

"No it's not! You and Naia are coming to England."

"Never! Never again, as long as I live!"

McLeod put his hand on Hardie's arm. "Listen, Alan. I can guess what's happened to-day. I more than half expected it to happen. But you know your father . . ."

"Shall I tell you what he proposed?" Hardie interrupted, bitterly. "That I go home with him and leave Naia and Tua here! Leave them, for good!"

"He doesn't mean it."

"He was never more serious in his life," Hardie replied. "And he fully expected that I would accept. God in heaven! What kind of a man does he think he has for a son!"

"Tell me just what he said."

"I have, the brutal fact of it. I will say this, Mac. I'd decided to go home, once I was sure Father wanted me to come. With a good secretary, I believe I could carry on my work almost as well as though I had my sight. Father made me the most generous offers about all that. I was touched, I don't mind saying. It never occurred to me that he was proposing I should come alone. But the moment I spoke of Naia . . ."

"He's not seen her. Remember that."

"And he doesn't want to."

"He didn't tell you so?"

"Not in so many words, but he made his attitude perfectly clear. I suppose he'll come down here before returning to Papeete. He knows that common decency requires that much of him. But . . . I don't want Naia or her mother to know the truth," he added. "I must lie to them, Mac, and you must help me. Even so, I'm afraid that Naia will see at once how my father feels."

"And that feeling will change, Alan; I'm convinced of it," McLeod replied, earnestly. "That's how it has been with me. I'll confess, now, that I was reluctant to meet Naia. I was afraid you'd been carried off your feet when you married her, and that you'd been regretting it ever since."

"You should have known me better."

"I admit it, but such a thing might happen to anyone. Your father has a picture of Naia in his mind; it will be the surprise of his life when he finds how mistaken it was. She'll win his deepest admiration, and his heart with it. And he'll be the first to tell you so."

Alan shook his head. "The wish is father to that hope," he said. "I'd like to hope, too, but . . . No, he'll never change. He could never forget Naia's native blood. I'm not blaming him for that. It's not his fault, really. But to expect me to cast her off, and Tua with her . . ."

Hardie leaned forward, his chin in his hands. The night was profoundly still and the lagoon so calm that no faintest ripple of water could be heard along the sand a few feet beyond.

"So be it," he added. "I can be happy here—as happy as a blind man could hope to be anywhere. I have my own small income that Mother left me; it's more than enough for our needs and Mauri is eager for me to stay; not a day passes that she doesn't speak of it. I have Naia and Tua. What more could I want?"

"I know," McLeod replied, absently.

"Mauri is one of the best," Hardie went on. "What do you think she has proposed? She wants to deed Vaihiva to Naia and me! It will come to Naia, in any event, she says, but she wants to make the transfer now, in case we stay. The only condition is that she's to be permitted to live with us. I'd never accept, of course, but could anything be more generous? There'll be no doubt of *my* welcome when I tell her we're going to stay."

"See here, Alan: I've got a plan. As you know, our old place at home has been let for years. Well, just before we left England I received notice from the present tenants that they expect to give up the lease when it expires, next year. Now then . . ."

Hardie interrupted him. "You needn't go on. I know what you'd say, and I wouldn't think of it. You'll be getting married, yourself, one of these days, and you'll want a home of your own."

"What if I should?" McLeod replied. "The place is big enough for half a dozen families."

"The future Mrs. McLeod would have a different opinion about that. No, Mac, it would never do. It would be splendid for us, but womenfolk would never put up with that kind of an arrangement."

"They jolly well could if we wanted them to! And damn it all, Alan! Can't you think of me a little? I'll be completely lost without you."

"And I'll miss you like the devil. But Tahiti will always be here, whenever you can come. There's no use urging me, old chap. I've made my decision and it can't be shaken. . . . Let's forget it. What kind of a day have you had?"

"A very pleasant one. I went up the valley with one of Teina's boys."

"By the way, Mac: there's a chest here, filled with things, books mostly, that belonged to your father and mother."

"I know. Naia spoke of it this afternoon."

"Did she tell you about the journal?"

"The journal? No. Whose?"

"I suppose she wanted me to speak of that. It's your mother's. One afternoon when I first came to Vaihiva we were glancing through some of the books laid on top of the things in the chest, and I came on the journal by chance. Naia didn't know it was there. I took the liberty of glancing into it. I was thinking of you."

"I'm glad you did."

"It's sad reading, but it will give you a picture of your mother that you ought to have; and of your father through her eyes. A brave pair they were!"

"I'll read it, then. Does Naia know where to find it?"

"Yes; and there may be other things in the chest you'll want to see."

"I feel guilty to think how little my parents mean to me."

"Why should you? It's not your fault."

McLeod brought out his cigarette case. “Smoke, Alan?”

“No, thanks. It’s curious—I haven’t the slightest desire to smoke now. I’ve learned that seeing is more than half the pleasure of it.”

McLeod lighted a cigarette and puffed in silence for a moment or two. “There’s something that Naia happened to speak of this afternoon,” he said, presently. “She’s anxious for you to try some native remedy her grandfather knows about.”

Hardie smiled faintly. “In some ways Naia’s as Polynesian as old Raitua himself,” he replied.

“Why shouldn’t she be? And who knows . . .”

“You can’t possibly believe it would do any good?”

“It can’t do any harm, certainly. I don’t think you realize how much it will mean to Naia to have you try it.”

“She’s spoken of it a time or two in a by-the-way fashion,” Hardie replied. “I didn’t know that she set any great store by it.”

“She does, though.”

“Well, I’ll try it. I’ll tell her so. The age of miracles is past, but there’s nothing I wouldn’t do to please Naia.” Alan got to his feet. “I’m weary, Mac. Take me to the house, will you? I’m going to turn in early.”

At Teahupoo, the village ten miles down the coast from which she was now returning, Mauri had heard nothing concerning the arrivals at Vaihiva. Her mind was at peace, more so than it had been in many years past. Alan had not spoken definitely of future plans, but from various remarks he had let drop she became more and more certain that he had no fixed intention of returning to England. If only she could strengthen him in a resolve never to return! She must, somehow, and his blindness gave her excellent reason to hope for success. Her affection for Alan had increased steadily; he was all that she could have hoped for in Naia’s husband, and now that there was a chance of keeping him . . .

As her two paddlers sent her canoe smoothly homeward, Mauri gave herself up to dreams of a future in which she would have Naia always at her side; in which they two would make Alan’s life so happy that he would forget all he had lost through his blindness. She would see their children growing up around her, and her fears would be at rest forever. Naia need never be told the secret of her parentage, for what end could be served by it? Her happiness was the important thing, and where could she be happier than in Vaihiva with her husband and little Tua to love and cherish, and the sons and daughters yet to come?

“Sorrow and death will be the result if those two are joined.” Mauri felt a sudden chill of doubt as she recalled Taio Vahiné’s prediction. The first part of

it had been fulfilled, certainly, but it was sorrow bringing ample recompense in its train. First she had believed Naia lost. Naia had been restored to her—her husband blind, to be sure, but the blindness itself might well prove to have been a blessing in disguise. What reason had she to fear that the rest of the prophecy would come to pass? Death? Might it not be, as Naia herself had said, merely the death that comes to all alike, as the fulfillment of life? Mauri comforted herself. Taio Vahiné might well agree that that was meant, and that alone.

She aroused herself from these reflections. The canoe was now within the lagoon and approaching the mouth of the river. She was surprised to see Tyson's launch at anchor there. A word to her paddlers, and the canoe was brought alongside. Mauri grasped the handrail. A native boy was stretched out, asleep, on the forward deck. She wakened him with difficulty; the boy sat up, at last, rubbing his eyes.

"Mr. Tyson's not here," he said, when he had been made to understand what was wanted. "He's in Tautira with the other one."

"The other one? What other one?"

"The old man with the white hair."

"What old man are you speaking of?"

"The tall one with the white hair and the red face. He's with Mr. Tyson, in Tautira, at Fara's house."

"Rouse yourself, Tavi," Mauri demanded, impatiently. "You're still half asleep. What is the launch doing here?"

"It was too late to go back to-night. I brought your son-in-law home. He went this morning to see his father, the man with Mr. Tyson. But his foster brother is here. You know—Toti, you called him. The one who came before."

Mauri waited to hear no more. She was set ashore at the pier, and stood for a moment, looking after the canoe until it had vanished in the moonlight-dappled shade of the river. At last she walked slowly toward the house, and, as though drawn by a force stronger than her will, she mounted the steps and approached the shaft of yellow light that streamed through the doorway at one end of the verandah. Looking in, she saw Naia and George McLeod seated on the floor with a lamp beside them, their heads together as they bent over some book they were reading. They looked up at the same moment.

"Mother, you've come!" Naia exclaimed. "Look! Did you know?"

McLeod got quickly to his feet. "You see, Mauri? I had to come back. I didn't think I ever would, again, but here I am!"

Her hands trembled as she took his. "I'm glad," she said. "You must give me time to . . . to find my thoughts. It is such a . . . such a surprise . . ."

"Didn't I tell you, Mother?" Naia interrupted eagerly. "You remember, when George came before you told me he wouldn't come back, but I was sure

he would, some day."

"And . . . Alan's father is here?" Mauri asked.

"He's in Tautira, with Tyson," McLeod replied. "He'll be coming soon, but he's very tired, after the long voyage from England. We've only just arrived, you know."

"Then you've not seen him, Naia?"

"No. Alan went, of course, but I wouldn't. I thought he should see his father alone, this first time. We were coming out to meet you, Mother," she added; "but I didn't expect you for another hour, at least." She turned to McLeod. "I'm sorry, George; it's such a beautiful night. You'd have loved it on the lagoon."

"It doesn't matter," McLeod replied. "Perhaps we can go another time."

"Indeed we shall!" Naia said. "We'll not let him run away from us this time, as he did before, shall we, Mother?"

"No; you must stay with us, as long as you can," Mauri replied.

Safe at last within the privacy of her own room, Mauri lighted the lamp and gazed long at her reflection in the wardrobe mirror. The eyes looking back at her revealed no sign of the terror in her heart. She was astonished to find it so —astonished at her own strength, at her presence of mind in a situation she had believed she never could meet. What ordeal could have been worse than this through which she had just passed? And the meeting had taken her by surprise. She had had no time to prepare herself.

But to-morrow, and the day after, and the day after that? Had she the strength for all the meetings to come? Could she see Naia and her brother together, day after day, and guard her every word and act so that no one should suspect? The hours of the night dragged slowly on, but Mauri had no thought of sleep. She sat by the open window, in darkness once more, gazing out through the groves where the palms made intricate patterns, showing black against the moonlit lagoon. She could not deceive herself. She had no doubt as to why Alan's father had come. He would wish to see his son, of course, but he had not made a journey halfway around the world for that purpose alone. No. He had come to persuade Alan to return with him—to take his family to England. And they would go. Mauri saw all her hopes and dreams for the future vanish.

She rose and paced the room in an anguish of mind beyond anything she had suffered before. What wrong heaped upon wrong would she now be guilty of if she refused Naia the birthright of her English blood! No further excuse for silence remained, for Naia was lost to her in any case. She would go with her husband. If she refused this last opportunity for confession it would be for her own selfish ends: to spare herself, at Naia's infinite cost, the shame of

acknowledging the wrong she had done her.

Perhaps if she were to speak, it would not be so . . . so terrible as she feared? Surely, she could make them understand? She would make them see, make them feel, the greatness of the temptation she had yielded to; how, after the loss of her own baby, the need for the child of the dead mother had been beyond her strength to conquer. And Naia herself—well she knew that warm and loving heart. It might be that, if she knew the truth, she would be drawn even closer to her.

Only those four would need to be told: Naia and George, Alan and his father. And after the first shock of knowing had passed, what happiness would be theirs! She thought of the joy with which General Hardie would welcome the daughter of Alan and Nina McLeod. And Naia would have her brother. As for herself—Mauri looked down the vista of lonely years that would stretch before her, with Naia gone. But it must be. What other way was possible now?

There was a light knock at the door. Mauri halted in the middle of the room and turned to face in that direction. The rapping was repeated.

"Mauri . . . Mauri, are you there?"

It was Alan's voice. She remembered the late hour of the night, long before, when she had gone to Alan's room, resolved to waken him, to tell him about Naia. Now, as though directed, he had come to her. She hid her face in her hands; then, rousing herself, she went to the door and opened it. Alan was standing at the threshold, in dressing gown and slippers, looking before him with the vacant gaze of the blind.

"I thought I heard you stirring, Mauri," he said. "You see how well I'm beginning to find my way about? I went for my swim alone this morning."

"Why . . . it's not daylight yet, Alan."

"It's not? What time is it?"

"Not more than three."

"Oh . . . I heard the cocks crowing and thought it was dawn. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"You haven't. Come in. It's very strange—I was thinking of you just now. I . . . I wanted to see you."

She led him to the chair by the window.

"What is it, Mauri? Why are you awake at this hour? You've not just come?"

"No; I returned from Teahupoo about ten."

"Then you know that George is here?"

"Yes."

"How strangely you said that! Weren't you glad to see him?"

"I know why they have come, your father and George. How could I be glad?"

“I saw my father to-day,” Hardie said. “Did Naia tell you?”

“Yes. . . . Alan, you must say when you will go. As soon as you know you must tell me.”

“I know now,” Hardie replied. “It will be never.”

“Alan! . . . You mean you will stay here, at Vaihiva?”

“Do you want us to stay?”

“More than anything in the world I want it!”

“Then we will. It’s all right, Mauri. I’ve talked with my father. He understands. He hoped, of course, that we’d go back with him, but he knows how I love it here. Vaihiva seems like home to me now.”

Mauri knelt beside his chair, taking his hand in hers and pressing it to her cheek. “It *is* home, Alan,” she said, brokenly. “Yours and Naia’s, for all your lives, and for your children after you.”

CHAPTER XXIII

During twenty-four hours rain had fallen steadily at Vaihiva, but on the following morning the sun rose in a sky of dazzling purity, showing depth beyond depth of blue as the light increased. Mauri's household had been in a bustle of activity since dawn, for word had been received from Tyson, in Tautira, announcing his arrival with General Hardie. The launch was expected during the afternoon, and under Mauri's watchful eye a meal was being prepared to meet the highest requirements of old-fashioned Polynesian hospitality.

Alan had been able to conceal his anxiety at the prospect of his father's coming. It would be a difficult meeting, after what had passed between them, but he was resolved not to betray by any word or sign the bitterness he felt. He was less sure of his father. Army life had put its stamp upon him, and had increased a natural tendency toward a blunt, tactless manner of speech which he himself often deplored, in retrospect. Nevertheless, he was a man of the world and could be counted upon to make a sincere effort to conceal his feelings toward his son's wife and her mother. He and Tyson would stop the night, undoubtedly, but to-morrow would come the separation. It would be the last meeting with his father. Their paths would not cross again.

For all the sadness in the thought, the realization that it had to be, that uncertainties were now behind him and his decision made, brought him a kind of peace. He had been building castles in the air concerning a life in England. His love for Naia had blinded him to the fact that nine people in ten, at home, both men and women, had his father's deep, ineradicable prejudice against such marriages as his. All Naia's beauty and charm and intelligence would not suffice to conquer that prejudice. His father had condemned her unseen. His father's friends, all of their old family friends and acquaintances, would have been kinder, perhaps, but kinder with that touch of coolness and condescension in their manner which is worse than downright cruelty. Naia would have been compelled to suffer in silence for his sake. She was to be spared it now. His father could be thanked for that.

As for the wished-for career, despite what old Grayson had said, blindness would have made a formidable obstacle to any real success. At the end of life it would be no great tragedy. But in the beginning, with all his work ahead . . . No, it could never be; the way was blocked. He had been foolish even to hope. More than likely, the plan his father had outlined had been one that he and Grayson had conceived together, to encourage and hearten him, and for that purpose alone.

For a moment he ceased thinking, enjoying the coolness of the sea breeze, imagining, in a mood of half-bitter sadness, the beauty of Vaihiva on such a day as this. The small green islet where he had first met Naia was there before him, a quarter of a mile distant across the lagoon, with the reef stretching away on either side, the smoke of the surf, shot through with golden light, drifting slowly toward the land. It was at about this same hour, those many months ago, that he and Naia had crossed from the islet to see her mother. It was on this bench where he was now seated, at the point beyond the house, that they had told her of their love and had asked her consent to their marriage. Had Mauri given it, how different the course of their lives would have been. They would have gone to England long since. He would have taken up his work at London University. He might never have lost his sight . . . but no—that was not true. If Dr. Brocard was right, blindness was inevitable in any case. The best he could have hoped for would have been a brief postponement of complete blindness. Since it had to be, how much better that events had shaped themselves in this way. There seemed to have been a kind of fate at work here, directing their lives better than they could have done it for themselves.

Naia's voice aroused him from these reflections. She ran across the lawn from the house, took his face in her hands, and kissed him.

"You look so grave, Alan," she said as she took a seat beside him. "Have you missed me?"

"Terribly. You've spoiled me. I hate to let you go even for half an hour."

"There's been so much to do to-day," she went on. "Everyone's down from the valley, even Mama Tu, helping in the kitchen. We're to have dinner on the lawn, in the old native fashion. Will your father like it?"

"He's sure to, Naia. It's a splendid idea, and there'll be a fine moon."

"That's what Mother thought. She's almost too happy to-day. Even now she can't quite believe that we're going to stay, for always. She's afraid that when your father comes he'll persuade you to change your mind."

"She needn't worry. Father's sorry, of course, that we're not going; but he understands. It was all settled at Tautira."

Naia searched his face anxiously. "Alan, you haven't decided on my account?"

"Of course not. The truth is, I rather hated to tell you. I thought what you wanted most was to go to England."

Naia smiled. "I wished you to think it," she said. "I've dreaded the thought of going from the very first, but I wanted to do what would make you happy."

"And so you have, always," Alan said. "And now that everything is settled, we're going to be happier than ever."

Naia looked into his face again. "You don't say that as though you truly believed it," she said.

"But I do! I'm as happy as you are about staying. It's not that. . . . You must give me a little more time to . . . to get used to this darkness. Think of it, Naia—having you here beside me and not being able to see you. Shut your eyes and try to imagine what it would be if you were never to see me again, or Tua, or your mother, or the coconut palms on a moonlight night, or dawn, or sunset. To see nothing any more, forever."

He felt her tears on his hand as she took it and pressed it against her cheek.

"Darling, I'm sorry! I'll never speak of it again. Never!"

"Don't promise. I want you to speak of it when you feel so. It's better that you should."

"No—that's my farewell speech to bitterness." He let his fingers move lightly over her face. "I'll learn to see like this, as others have done. I can even now: you're lovelier than ever."

"But why be so sure, Alan, that it's for always? *I'm* not."

"Are you still thinking about your native remedy? It won't do the least good."

"But it might. There's always the chance. Won't you try it, for my sake?"

"It's because of you that I hate to try it. You'll be so bitterly disappointed when you find that it's useless."

"No, Alan! I promise not to be. I'll not even hope. I only want to make sure."

"We will, then, whenever you say," Alan replied.

Naia seized his hand. "You mean it? You'll try it now?"

"If you like. Do you have the stuff ready?"

"No, I'll have to get the flowers, but I know where to find them. I want to pick them with my own hands, and prepare them, too."

Alan smiled. "You're as superstitious as your mother," he said. "If you'd let yourself go, Naia, you'd be a better witch doctor than old Taio Vahiné."

"All such things have to be done in certain ways," Naia said, gravely. "It isn't foolish. People come all the way from the Low Islands for this remedy."

Alan rose to his feet. "All right, dear, I'm ready. Where's George? He might like to go with us."

"I think we'll meet him on the way. He went *nato* fishing just after lunch. Grandfather's on the lookout for the launch. He's over on the islet, with Tua."

"I doubt if they come before sunset," Alan said.

"I know; but Mother wanted someone to keep watch."

They went along the beach to where the canoes were drawn up. Naia slid one of them into the water, guided Alan to a thwart, forward, and handed him a paddle. She took a seat in the stern and they pushed out into the channel. There was a strong current on this lower reach of the river, but farther up it flowed more gently between fern-covered banks. Only the murmur of the stream itself

broke the hush of afternoon. Alan found a kind of melancholy pleasure in this movement, so smooth and soundless, where he could detect their progress only by the waves of coolness that flowed over them as they passed beneath the great trees overarching the river. Vaihiva—the Dark River. Dark enough it was for him now. He wondered what significance the name had for the ancient inhabitants of the valley. Several adjectives in the Polynesian dialects meant "dark," but *hiva* conveyed a deeper meaning: a sense of overshadowing gloom that could scarcely be expressed in words. He remembered the first time he had entered Vaihiva, when he and Naia had climbed the great wall of rock to the upper valley. No place that he had ever seen had left upon his mind so deep an impression of sombre and savage loneliness. He heard again the far-off echo of his voice coming back to him when he had shouted "Good-bye!" and he recalled Naia's words as they listened to the ghostly echo dying away in the deep recesses of the mountains: "You heard? It was like another voice mocking you."

Naia spoke. "What are you thinking about, Alan?"

"Of my first day here, when we climbed to the upper valley."

"Were you? So was I."

"What was the old saying about the echo?"

" 'Who calls here will stay here.' You see? It's come true. I believed it would."

"Nonsense! You couldn't have."

"But I did!"

"Naia, you're a complete little heathen. You're full of superstition."

"Only part; but it's nothing to be ashamed of."

"Of course it's not. Most women are the same, in their hearts."

"In England too?"

"Yes, any amount, only they don't admit it."

"Why shouldn't they? It only means that you believe in many things without knowing why. This is the place," she added, as the canoe grated gently on the sand. "Do you know where we are?"

"I can guess: at the pool where Tua and I were bathing the day George came."

"It's right, Alan! How did you know?"

He smiled. "I'm beginning to see through the pores of my skin. No, I'll tell you—I could smell the air coming out of those small ravines on the east side of the valley. There's a sort of cool fragrance in it."

"You'll soon be able to find your way anywhere. It's to the middle canyon that I'm going for my flowers. You remember? Where the old burial caves are." She guided him to a grassy spot near the riverbank. "I'll go now," she said, as she kissed him. "It's not far. I can be back in half an hour."

He held her hand. “Wait a little. There’s plenty of time. I love this place; especially when you’re here to enjoy it with me.”

“I will then. It isn’t late.”

She took his head in her lap, stroking his hair. “Tell me something about your father,” she asked, presently.

“Well, he’s tall, and broad-shouldered, and very erect; and he has thick white hair . . .”

“I know all that. I want something more.”

“About his character, you mean?”

“Yes. It’s strange: I’m frightened to think of meeting him. I’ve always felt, deep down, that he wouldn’t like me.”

“Like you? He’ll love you on sight, Naia. But he won’t show it. You’ll think, at first, that he disapproves of you. He’s always like that toward people he’s fond of.”

“He won’t kiss me, then?”

“Good Lord, no! I don’t believe he’s ever kissed anyone except my mother.”

“Not even you, when you were little?”

“Never once that I remember.”

“What a strange man! I’m glad you’re not like that. Do you love him, Alan?”

“I’ve never had a real chance to know. He was always in the Army and I was always at school. But I have a deep affection for him. A kinder-hearted man never lived, but he doesn’t like it to be known. It’s his Army training, perhaps. He hasn’t many friends, but those he has are like Tyson. They stick to him.”

“Do you know what I’ve thought?” Naia asked, after a little silence. “We should have given Tua your father’s name.”

“Why? Think how pleased your grandfather was to have him named Raitua. And being born in the islands, he should have a native name, don’t you think?”

“We could have called him ‘Tihoti.’ That’s Tahitian for ‘George.’ Then he would have had two namesakes: George and your father.”

“I like Tua best.”

“But won’t your father be hurt—his only grandson not being named for him?”

They were interrupted by a hail from close by. McLeod was coming along the path from up the valley, a string of fish in one hand and his rod in the other. He hung his fish on the branch of a tree and sat down beside them.

“Good luck, George?” Alan asked.

“Splendid! I caught eighteen. They’re full of fight, these little fellows.

What is it you call them?"

"*Nato.* They're good eating, too."

"I fished all the way down from the waterfall," McLeod went on, enthusiastically. "It's a complete paradise, this valley. I've never seen anything to equal it."

"Then you'd better stay, George," Naia said. "You really belong here, you know."

"Don't I wish I could!"

"What happy times we could have together, the three of us . . ." Naia broke off and laid her hand on her husband's arm. "Listen!" she added. "It's a *komako*. It's the first time I've heard one this far down the valley."

The small hidden bird filled the sunny silence with its song, which seemed to come from far away. There was a brief pause; then a fresh outpouring of music died away to silence once more.

"I've heard nothing to excel that—not even in England," McLeod said.

"That's what I've told Naia," Alan replied. "You remember, dear, the evening at Tematangi?"

"It was our first day there, George," Naia explained. "We'd crossed the land to the inner lagoon, and a *komako* sang for us just at sunset. It made me homesick for Vaihiva." She smiled. "And now this one makes me homesick for Tematangi."

"Some day, Naia, we're going back for a visit," Alan said.

"I'd love to, and we'll show Tua where he was born."

"Weren't you terribly frightened on that day?" George asked. "Alan's told me about your being alone when Tua came."

"Yes, at first, but afterward it was all right."

"I was the frightened one," Alan said. He shivered. "I'll never forget my coming back from the bird islet, Naia, and not finding you."

"And I'll never forget how happy we were when you did find me."

"Weren't you ever bored at Tematangi?" George asked.

"Never once, were we, Naia? We didn't have time to be. I'll give you a sketch of a typical day, George, to show you all that we had to do. We were always up before dawn . . ."

They chatted light-heartedly, forgetting time and place until Naia, remembering her errand, got quickly to her feet.

"I must hurry," she said. "We've been talking for an hour, at least. What if the launch has come!"

"It won't have, this early."

"I hope not. Alan, go down with George, will you? Take the canoe. I'll walk back."

"But how long do you expect to be, getting your flowers?"

"I can't tell. You two go on. I'll come soon."

"All right, dear, perhaps we will," Alan said.

"No 'perhaps.' Please go, Alan! I'd feel terribly if none of us were there to meet your father."

She hurried away and disappeared in the thickets that bordered the river.

"I'm going to try the native remedy," Alan explained. "I hate to; Naia has so much faith in it. She more than half believes it will make me see within the week. Bless her heart! I wish it would, for her sake."

"I'm glad you're going to try it, anyway," George said. "Your father's coming is a good sign, Alan," he remarked, presently. "Now that you've had time to reflect, how do you feel? You don't really mean to stay here?"

"Yes. That's definite."

"But you can't! See here . . ."

"George, there's no use going into all that again. My father's coming doesn't mean that he's changed his mind about Naia. He won't change it because he can't. You know that. I'd ruin his life by taking my family home. He told me so plainly. He was angry when he spoke, but he meant every word of it."

"But when he sees them, Alan! When he sees Naia and Tua . . ."

"You know what he'll be saying in his heart: 'God! God! If only they were white!' Their blood will be chocolate-colored ink to him. No, my decision is made."

McLeod sighed and shook his head. "Well, shall we move?" he asked.

"You go on, Mac. It's just possible that they may come early. What time is it now?"

"Around three."

"I'll wait for Naia. She won't be long."

"You want me to take the canoe?"

"Yes. It's shorter by the path. We'll be down not long after you are."

When McLeod had gone, Alan stretched out on his back with his hands beneath his head. It was warm and sunny by the river, but presently he could detect the slight coolness in the air that told him the sun had disappeared behind the western ridge. There were no sounds except the murmur of the stream and the faint roar of the waterfall far up the valley. His thoughts had grown astonishingly cheerful to-day. Mac was right: Vaihiva was a little paradise on a fine day. And it was home to him now; it always would be home. He thought of Mauri and old Raitua. What good friends they had proved themselves; and now that he was able to converse with them fluently, in their own speech, he was able to appreciate them at their true worth. He knew them all, now, everyone in the valley: old Manu, and Mama Tu, their sons and daughters and grandchildren. There could not be a happier little community in

all the world than this at Vaihiva. And when he and Naia were really settled, he would take up his work once more. He would need a secretary, but he had means enough to afford one. He would have George consult Grayson when he went home; Grayson could find some young fellow, the kind of man he needed, who would jump at the chance to settle in the islands. He would then put his mind to work; make his blindness serve him. And in this lonely place, free from the distractions of the outside world, he might yet accomplish something worth while. Most creative work that mattered was done by men leading solitary lives, thrown in upon themselves either by design or by force of circumstances. Vaihiva might well prove to be the perfect environment for him.

He roused himself from his musings. Naia was long in returning. Perhaps she'd had trouble in finding the flowers she wanted. He knew the place where she had gone—the middle one of three narrow ravines that descended from the high eastern ridge. It opened into the main valley directly opposite the place where he waited. He wondered if he could make his way there alone. A small brook flowed down the ravine; once he found that he had only to follow it. He took up his stick and stood with his back to the river, facing in the direction he should go. Should he try it? Naia would be surprised to see him coming to meet her. He would like to prove to her how fast he was learning to find his way about.

He set out, walking very slowly, feeling his way with his stick past trees, boulders, and clumps of bush. He took every step with care, determined not to lose his sense of direction, pausing to listen for the sound of the brook he was seeking. Presently he heard it, off to the right. He soon reached the bank of the little stream and felt of the water to be certain of its direction. The easiest path followed the watercourse so he could hardly fail to meet Naia as she came down.

Nevertheless, when he had gone some distance farther he halted and called her name. There was no answer, but he could tell by the sound of his voice that he was not yet within the canyon. He proceeded cautiously, pushing through thickets whose branches seemed to be barring his way with a kind of malicious intent. It was an aggravation to know that there was certainly much easier going within a few yards of him, if only he knew which way to turn. He went on, stooping at times to feel the ground before him, grateful for the cleared places he came upon by chance.

At last he halted, leaning against a rock covered with damp moss. He was within the ravine, but how far within he had no way of knowing except by the slope of the land, which was now much steeper. He called, again and again, but only the silence replied. He was irritated at thought of his helplessness. What a mess he'd gotten himself into! More than likely he had missed the ravine

where Naia was and had entered one of the others. She would have come down long before this. She would think he had gone on with George; now they would have to come all the way back in search of him, and Naia would be more than anxious. What a fool he had been! Well, he must wait now until they found him.

As he came down the last reach of the river, McLeod saw the consul's launch crossing the lagoon toward the small cove north of the point. Mauri was standing at the end of the pier.

"They're coming," she said, anxiously. "Have you seen Naia?"

"Yes. She and Alan will be down any minute now."

"But I wanted her here when Alan's father came. Will you meet them, Toti? I've no one else to send."

"I'll go right out."

He paddled on and reached the launch just as it was coming to anchor off the point. General Hardie waved to him. "Here we are, George. Come aboard."

McLeod made his canoe fast alongside and climbed into the cockpit. General Hardie turned to regard the near-by land, golden now in the light of late afternoon. "A decent-looking place, Tyson," he said. "Well kept, too."

Tyson smiled. "What were you expecting, a grass hut on stilts, over the lagoon?"

"Something of the sort, I admit, after the wilderness we've passed on the way along."

"Mauri's a civilized person; many Tahitians are," Tyson remarked dryly. "George's parents were very fond of her."

"And this valley is hers, you say?"

"Yes, the whole of it. It runs back for miles. You see little of it from here. Where's Alan, George?"

"He'll be along shortly."

General Hardie gave him a worried glance. "I'm glad you came first," he said. "He's told you about our meeting?"

"Yes."

"Is he . . . is he still angry?"

"He feels rather bitter, sir. He'll not go home with us, he says."

"Nonsense! Of course he'll go. I was a fool, George, I lost my temper. Before I could get it in hand again Alan picked up and left. But he's got to come home. He must see that for himself."

"He's made his plans. Now that he knows how you feel . . ."

"What does it matter how I feel?" the General interrupted, impatiently. "It's Alan's future that's important. I'll make any sacrifice to see him go on with his career. This is what I propose, George. The wife and son must come

with him. I see that now. I'll turn over the place in Devon and live in town. Fair enough, isn't it?"

"It's no good talking of it, sir. He'll never accept."

"But he must! I'll not allow him to throw his life away through sheer stubbornness! You've got to persuade him, George. He'll listen to you."

McLeod was silent for a moment. "I've thought of a plan," he said. "I'm not sure it will succeed, but it's worth trying. Alan will never go home without his family, that's certain. And the way he feels now, he won't consent to go with them. I've decided to stay on here for a time. In six months or so I might be able to win him over. Our old place will be vacant soon. I want Alan to bring his family there and live with me."

General Hardie's face brightened. "There *is* an idea!" he said. "I'd never thought of that! . . . But you realize what it would involve? If they come, it will be a difficult situation for you."

"I don't feel as you do about Tahitians, sir. As for Alan's wife, she can take her place anywhere."

"God! What wouldn't I give to undo Alan's folly. I'd be willing to lose all I have—home, rank, independence, everything, to wipe his slate clean."

"We'd better be going ashore," Tyson said. "Mauri will be waiting for us."

The consul felt more than uneasy as they walked up from the pier. General Hardie marched at his side, his lips set in grim lines. Mauri met them at the top of the steps. Tyson thought he had never seen her to better advantage. There was the unmistakable look of race about her: the dark intelligent eyes, the well-shaped nose and mouth, the fine oval of her face, marked her as a woman of the old *ariki* class. She greeted them with the graciousness and dignity that come as second nature to the Polynesian. Of the four of them, she was the one wholly at ease. Tyson could see that General Hardie was studying her with keen interest, puzzled by this charming middle-aged woman, so different from what he had expected her to be. He took little part in the conversation, but replied with a kind of grim courtesy whenever Mauri addressed a remark to him. Presently, when whiskey and soda had been brought for her guests, she excused herself, leaving the three men to their refreshment. Tyson waited for Hardie to speak, but the General gave no hint as to what he was thinking. He tasted his drink and set down his glass.

"That's a decent whiskey to find at the end of the world," he said. "Where'd you get it, George?"

"It's not mine," McLeod said. "Mauri told me it's what's left of a stock her husband laid in years ago. She keeps it for special occasions. Alan and I have invented several during the past three days."

"Don't blame you." General Hardie glanced at his watch. "What's keeping him?" he asked.

"He's up the valley with his wife. They can't be long now. We weren't expecting you till sunset."

"We might stroll down to the beach," Tyson suggested.

"By all means," Hardie said, rising. "A beautiful place, Tyson, I'm bound to say. But it must be damnably lonely."

"Yes, it's secluded enough. That's one of its chief attractions, for me. There are very few people along this coast."

They walked slowly across the lawn to the bench at the point and seated themselves there, enjoying the tranquil beauty of the half hour that announces the approach of evening.

"Alan will never be content to stay here," General Hardie remarked. "I'm not worried about that. We'll have him in England before the year's out. Where's his boy, George? I'd like to see him before his father comes."

"He was having his bath just now," McLeod said. "Shall I fetch him?"

"If you don't mind."

Going along the passageway to the back verandah, McLeod met Mauri coming from her room, leading Tua by the hand.

"Oh, there you are, Tua! Come along, young fellow. Your grandfather wants to see you."

"I can't understand what's keeping Alan and Naia," Mauri said, anxiously. "They should have been here to meet Alan's father. He was disappointed. I could tell by the way he spoke. Where did you leave them, Toti?"

"By the pool where we go to bathe. Naia went to gather some flowers. Didn't she tell you? For the native remedy she wants Alan to try."

"*Aué!*" Mauri exclaimed. "Not alone?"

"Yes. Alan's waiting for her by the river. What is it, Mauri?"

"Those flowers grow in a very dangerous place, high up on the cliff! Why didn't you tell me?"

"But I didn't know. Naia wanted to get the flowers herself. She said nothing about its being dangerous."

Mauri took the baby from his arms. "Go quickly!" she said. "Find my father! He knows the place. Wait!" She went to her room and returned with a flashlight. "Take this," she said. "It will be dark by the time you get there."

At this moment Raitua himself appeared from behind the kitchen. Mauri spoke to him rapidly. A look of deep concern came into the old man's face as he listened. With a nod to McLeod he set off at a rapid walk up the valley.

Twilight deepened as they proceeded, until McLeod could scarcely make out the path before him. He had difficulty in keeping pace with Raitua, who strode on at a gait between a fast walk and a trot, seeming to have forgotten that he was not alone. McLeod was anxious. Mauri was not a woman to be alarmed without cause, and the look of terror that came into her eyes when he

had told her where Naia had gone convinced him of the danger of the situation. He stumbled on, using his flashlight under the great forest trees, trying to persuade himself that at any moment now they would hear voices ahead of them on the path. Raitua had vanished in the darkness ahead, but he was waiting at the open glade by the river where the smooth water still reflected a pale light from the sky. The old native was on his knees, quickly tying together several bundles of dry palm fronds to be used as torches. He turned his head as McLeod came up. "Alan, where?" he asked.

"He was here, Raitua," McLeod replied, in a puzzled voice. "*Teié.*" He pointed to the place where they had been seated. They called several times, listening intently for some response. The old native shook his head as he took up his torches. "*Haeré mai,*" he said.

They pushed their way through the thickets toward the high eastern wall of the valley whose ridge was still dimly outlined against the sky. They were forced to go more slowly now. Having crossed the level ground, they saw before them the pit of darkness that marked the entrance to the ravine. Raitua lit one of his torches, holding it above his head as he led the way along the small stream that flowed down the centre of the canyon. By the flickering light, McLeod caught glimpses of steep walls covered with fern and moss and dripping with moisture. *Mapés* with their great flanged trunks and twisted roots rose on either side of the brook, but in a place so shut in from the light of the sun, there was little undergrowth.

When they had gone a short distance, Raitua halted and called out: *He-é-hé-hé-hé*—a high, eerie-sounding call used by the native fishermen. It echoed and reechoed from the rocky walls, and as it was dying away an answering hail came back. It was Alan's voice, but sounding so faint that McLeod believed he must be at least half a mile farther up the ravine. "*O raua!*" Raitua exclaimed. They hastened on, and McLeod soon understood the reason for the faintness of Alan's reply. There was a sharp turn in the canyon, and the intervening wall had deadened the sound of it. Once they had passed this bend they heard him plainly, and the light-hearted quality of a second hail relieved their fears at once. They could not yet see him, but they were convinced that nothing was wrong.

"This way!" he called.

"Coming, Alan! Are you all right?"

"Of course! But I've gotten myself in a jolly fine mess here. Are you alone?"

Before McLeod could reply, Raitua, who was just ahead, turned and gripped his arm, gazing at him sternly, not daring to speak, so close were they to where Alan stood. He thrust his torch into George's hand and knelt down, putting aside some low fern at the base of the cliff. Within twenty paces of her

husband, Naia's body lay face down, one arm outstretched, the fingers still clasping a small cluster of flowers. There was a look of awful desolation upon Raitua's face as he turned his head. The full horror of the situation came to them both in the same instant. Alan didn't know.

With another stern glance of warning, the old man stooped once more, lifted Naia's body in his arms, and without making a sound vanished in the darkness below.

"Mac! Where the devil are you?"

"Coming, Alan. It's hard going, this last bit."

"I'm damned sorry to have put you to all this trouble, old boy."

"It's all right." Scarcely daring to trust his voice, he put his hand on his foster brother's shoulder. "Here I am," he said.

"What a fool I've been, Mac! Where have I gotten myself to?"

"I don't know, exactly."

"I was tired, waiting; so, like an idiot, I decided to follow Naia. Is she worried?"

"Yes, rather!"

"This is the wrong canyon, evidently. Who's with you?"

"No one. . . . That is, Raitua, but he's hurried down to tell the others. They're anxious about you."

"It's dark, isn't it?"

"Yes. I have a flashlight. Take my hand, Alan."

"What a relief to have a guide! I'll wait a bit before I go exploring again, on my own."

"Stoop here. There's a low branch."

"Did Naia find her flowers?"

"Yes."

"Bless her credulous heart! I almost wish she hadn't. She'll be let down terribly when she finds it's all useless."

They went on slowly, the tiny circle of light from the flash lamp leading them on like a will-o'-the-wisp in the blackness of the canyon. In his anguish of mind McLeod sought for some way to approach the truth that Alan must be told so soon. To conceal it was a cruel kindness, for by no possible means could he be kept in ignorance longer than the next hour. But how begin? Having lacked the courage to speak at once, it seemed to McLeod that he was being led farther and farther away from any hope of telling.

"The launch has come, of course?" Alan was saying.

"Yes."

"Were you there in time to meet it?"

"Yes."

"Yes—what? You're not exactly talkative this evening. What's gotten into

you?”

“Sorry. I have to watch the going. It’s a bit tricky.”

“Don’t I know it! It’s a wonder I ever got up here. I’m scratched and bruised all over. Serves me jolly well right, too. Has Father seen Naia?”

“No—not yet.”

Alan stopped. “Mac, what’s happened? Something’s wrong. I can feel it. What are you hiding from me?”

McLeod was silent. Wanting to speak, he could not make his numbed will respond. Alan seized his arm. “Tell me,” he exclaimed.

“It’s true,” McLeod said, in a voice his best efforts could not hold steady. “There’s been an accident . . .”

“To Naia?”

“Yes. We came up to hunt for her. Raitua seemed to know where she’d gone. She’s had a fall . . .”

Alan drew in his breath sharply. “I want the whole truth,” he said harshly, in a shaking voice. “Is she . . .”

There was no way to soften that blow. “Alan, old boy! You’ll have to know. Yes . . . she’s dead.”

CHAPTER XXIV

The last light had faded from the mountain peaks above Vaihiva when the consul and General Hardie were ferried out to the anchored launch. The upper valley was already in deep shadow which seemed to flow down ravines and steep-walled gorges like an impalpable dust of darkness, spreading slowly over the lagoon and the sea beyond. The two men boarded the launch, and Tyson turned to speak to the native boy waiting in the canoe.

"We'll not be wanting you again to-night, Tavi," he said. "Go ashore if you like."

The boy nodded and the canoe moved silently away in the gathering dusk. The consul seated himself beside his friend. Cigars were lit, and they smoked in silence for some time, their gaze attracted and held by two shaded lamps that stood on a long table set on the lawn near Mauri's house. The pools of yellow light held the night at bay in that one spot, and, by an illusion caused by the deepening gloom, they seemed to be receding farther and farther into the depths of the land. General Hardie was the first to speak.

"They're not going home?" he asked.

The consul turned his head. "I'm sorry; my thoughts were woolgathering," he said.

"These natives who came for the funeral. Will they stop the night here? I've seen no canoes setting off."

"Oh . . . Yes, many of them will. It's customary when they come from so far. And there will be a *himiné* presently."

"A *himiné*? What's that?"

"Singing, out of respect for the family. That's customary, too. Poor Mauri! How she must dread it!"

"Then why does she permit it?"

"Tahitians are bound by tradition just as we are. Her friends and relatives would be more than shocked if there were to be no *himiné*."

"There must be close to a hundred of them here," Hardie remarked. "Where have they come from? And how did they get word?"

"News spreads in a mysterious way amongst these islands," Tyson replied. "I doubt if the natives themselves can explain it. There are people here from villages far down either side of the peninsula. Did you notice? Canoes began arriving shortly after daybreak."

"Yes; I was astonished. They brought their own food, of course."

"No. It's all been provided by Mauri's household."

"Poor creature! What a burden to have put upon her at a time like this!"

"These customs are much the same everywhere; guests at funerals have to be fed. It's really been a godsend to Mauri and her father. They've had no time to think."

"She's an extraordinary woman, Tyson. I admired her courage this afternoon. Not a tear did she shed."

"She's stunned by the shock. I know her well. She can't yet believe that Naia is dead."

"Her only daughter, wasn't she?"

"And her only child."

General Hardie flicked the ash from his cigar and stared gloomily at the glowing coal. "I wish that Alan would show something of her stoicism," he said. "Shutting himself up in his room that way . . . it's not what I would have expected of him."

"He's been terribly hit, old friend."

"So was I when his mother died, but I didn't crawl into a hole to brood over it. That's not the Hardie way of meeting misfortune."

"Misfortune? Forgive me for saying so, but you don't know your son if you call Naia's death no more than that to him."

"Call it what you like, he should face and conquer it. His not appearing at the funeral services . . . what will the girl's mother think of that?"

"She quite understands," Tyson replied. "And so does Mauri's father. Put yourself in Alan's place—would you have gone?"

"Of course. *They* went, Tyson. I'd hate to think that the natives could show more fortitude in sorrow than myself."

The consul made no reply. He felt that he knew Alan better than the man beside him. As for courage, there was no lack of that in Alan's nature, but how differently the same quality could express itself in different men.

"I'm going to shock you, Tyson," Hardie remarked, presently. "You'll think me hard, perhaps. God knows, I pity the poor mother, and the old grandfather—what's his name, again?"

"Raitua."

"I pity them both from my heart. But since this thing had to be . . . I'm glad that it came when it did. If I'm a monster of selfishness for thinking so, it can't be helped. My boy's welfare comes first."

"If you had known his wife . . ." Tyson broke off. "It's strange," he added. "She reminded me, at times, of Nina McLeod. Her voice, and the way she laughed . . ."

"A lovely girl Nina was," Hardie said, musingly. "There's what I'd dreamed of for Alan: just such a wife when it came time for him to marry. And he'd have found her, if he'd never left England. There's bitterness enough in that thought. I was the one who urged his going. How little we know what our

actions may lead to!”

Tyson was silent, thinking of his own innocent responsibility for the tragic events that had taken place here. He recalled the many times he had visited this lonely place, first as a young man, when, making a voyage across the Pacific, he had decided upon impulse to remain at Tahiti for several months. Little he realized then that Chance had chosen him as an instrument for carrying out her blind purposes. That decision, so lightly made, had changed the course of half a dozen lives beside his own. Save for him, George’s parents would never have come to Tahiti. Nina McLeod might never have died in childbirth. All the chain of events that followed, including Naia’s death, would not have happened. With an involuntary gesture he put his hands over his face. Such matters would not bear thinking about.

Down the lagoon to the right, a dim light marked the position of Raitua’s house. The people were now assembled there and the singing had begun. General Hardie moved uneasily in his chair.

“Good God, Tyson!” he exclaimed. “I’ve heard weird music before now, but never anything like this.”

“It’s strange enough when you first hear it,” the consul replied.

“How long will it last?”

“Most of the night, I fancy.”

“It’s damnably melancholy. Think I’ll retire, if you don’t mind.”

“Not at all. I’m coming myself, shortly. What about to-morrow? Shall we stay here another day?”

“I’d rather not, if it can be avoided. I’ve made a new plan—I mean to speak to George in the morning. He can wait a few days and then approach Alan about it. We must get him away from here, somehow. What I propose, instead of returning home by way of America, is to go south, to New Zealand. If I can get him that far . . .”

“It’s worth trying, certainly. What about his son?”

“We can leave that question aside for the present. In any case, the boy could not come with us now. It would be unfair to the grandmother to leave her without comfort.”

“She’s very fond of Tua,” Tyson said. “She’d be only too happy to keep him.”

“I can well believe it. A fine little fellow he is . . . I . . . I feel strongly drawn to him, Tyson.”

“It’s a feeling that does you honor. I wish he were *my* grandson.”

“Of course,” Hardie went on, hurriedly. “But you’ll agree that he should be left in Madame Mauri’s hands at this time. It’s the only course open to us. I’ve every hope that Alan can be made to see that. Well, good night to you.”

“Good night.”

When his friend had gone below, Tyson went forward for a moment to make sure that the launch was holding well. They had moved from the anchorage in the cove, by Raitua's house, to the other side of the point, off the river mouth, so as to be at a greater distance from the singing on shore. The launch lay with her stern to the east, motionless in the full soundless current that flowed perpetually across the lagoon from the river to the Vaihiva Passage. Satisfied with her position, Tyson returned to the cockpit, and, leaning back in his fishing chair, let his glance travel up the massive shadow of the land before him. As though at command of some spirit of the night, the few clouds that had clung to the higher slopes of the mountains had now vanished, no wisp of vapor remaining to blur the outline of peaks and ridges blocked out in dark relief against the starlit sky; and to the east, the islet by the passage, with its scattered palms and pandanus thickets, stood revealed against the glory of the coming moon.

Despite his efforts to prevent it, the consul's thoughts returned with a kind of relentless persistence to the events of the evening before. He heard again the sudden wild outburst of grief that had come from Mauri's people when Raitua had appeared with Naia's body in his arms. It was the first intimation he had had that anything was amiss, for Mauri had said nothing of her fears for Naia. He shuddered, inwardly, remembering the hour that followed. And when George had come, leading Alan across the lawn and up the step to the verandah, no word had been spoken save by Alan himself: "Thanks, Mac, I can manage now." Tyson felt anew the anguish of spirit he had felt then, knowing there was nothing he could do to help. He could not forget the desolate voice that had spoken, or the look on Alan's face as he passed before them to his room, not knowing they were there, and closed the door behind him.

He rose and stood facing the dark land, listening against his will to the singing at Raitua's house. The sound of it, though softened by distance, came clearly across the water. What was the quality that marked it most strongly? Melancholy? No, something deeper than that. There were both dignity and beauty in this music. The ancient grief of an ancient race made itself felt here, but not in resignation. It was a stern acceptance of the pitiless decrees of fate. "It must be"—that was the spirit of it. Little consolation would Alan find in that thought. Poor lad! Poor lad! His father was right—they must get him away, now. George was the one. He could bring it about if any of them could. Thank God that Alan had such a friend to stand by him. Tyson shook his head anxiously as he went down the companionway to his berth.

McLeod paced the verandah at Mauri's house, his rubber-soled shoes making no sound on the polished floor. He found himself counting his steps

mechanically, eighteen to the west, eighteen to the eastern end. He paused again to listen outside Alan's door. Only a few feet separated him from his foster brother, but the distance seemed immeasurable. What could one do, what could one say, at such a time? What help could he give? But Alan would know that he was there, ready to be called upon when he was wanted.

One of Teina's daughters appeared with a lighted lamp. As she placed it on the table, she gave McLeod a half-frightened, questioning glance, then left him as silently as she had come. Groups of natives, their forms shadowy in the starlight, moved across the lawn in the direction of Raitua's house. McLeod resumed his noiseless pacing, still groping toward the realization that Naia was dead. And if it was hard for him, what must it be for Alan, for Mauri and her father? It seemed that at any moment he must hear her voice, see her coming along the passageway with her husband. On the table by the lamp lay a volume of Wordsworth's poems which Alan loved. She had been reading to him only the day before. McLeod took up the volume, and as he was turning through the pages he came upon a small white flower, a *tiaré Tahiti*, that Naia had placed there for a mark, the petals still fresh and damp.

He glanced up, closing his fingers over the blossom and concealing it beneath the book as he placed it on the table. Mauri was standing there. He had not heard her approach.

"You've not eaten," she said. "Your supper has been ready for a long time."

"I know. I've been waiting."

She glanced toward Alan's door. "Toti, what can we do?" she asked in a low voice. "Have you knocked?"

He shook his head.

"But try," she said, pleadingly. "Perhaps he will come now. He has had no food since yesterday."

"I must wait," he said. "He will let me know. Rest a little, Mauri."

"For a moment," she said. He seated himself beside her, trying vainly to find some words of comfort. "Tua is sleeping so well," she went on. "Teina will stay with him. Our guests are at my father's house for the singing."

"Will it be long?" he asked.

She nodded, as though too weary to speak.

"But you needn't go, surely? You look so desperately tired."

"Yes, I must, for our family's sake. My father, too. It is all right. It is better to be tired."

As he looked at the worn tragic face of this courageous woman, there welled up in McLeod's heart a feeling of pity, of compassion, that made him feel, in a deeper sense, the closeness of the bond that united them—that had united them, unknown to him, since his babyhood when Mauri had taken the

place of his own dead mother. Longing to speak, he put his arm around her shoulders and drew her close. She hid her face against his breast.

"Toti . . . have I lost her? . . . Is it true? . . . Is it true?"

The words, so unspeakably forlorn as she uttered them, touched him to the depths of his being. He laid his cheek against her head.

"Mauri, I've belonged to you too . . . to both of you . . . all these years. And I always shall."

Her tears came then. Overwhelmed by grief and despair, she laid her head in her arms. McLeod felt his helplessness in the presence of sorrow such as this. Mauri was beyond the reach of any comfort that he could give.

McLeod felt his own weariness as the hours passed. There had been no sleep for any of them during the previous night. He walked aimlessly through the house and around it and back to the verandah once more. Lights were burning in the kitchen and in Mauri's room, but all of her people were at Raitua's house except Teina, who lay asleep on a mat by the side of Tua's bed. He looked at his watch. It was past midnight, but the singing went on interminably, with brief intervals between the songs. He thought of Alan, so near to him, lying on his bed, perhaps, his hands over his ears, longing as he was for the *himiné* to come to an end. Should he go to him now? He paused by the door, raised his hand to rap on the panel, and then refrained. No, he might be sleeping at last. Nothing could be so precious to him as a few hours of unconsciousness. He turned the knob, very softly, meaning to look in, but the door was locked.

The moon was now well above the tall palms on the islet. McLeod turned the lamp low and stretched out on the straw sofa to watch the play of light and shadow over the broad leaves of the banana plants growing just beyond the railing. He had a blessed release from thinking. The sound of the singing grew fainter and fainter to his ears and at last he heard it no more.

The door of Alan's room opened slowly. He was fully dressed, as when he had last entered the room, in a gray shirt, flannel trousers, and tennis shoes, showing the rents and stains of the day before when he had groped his way into the canyon in search of Naia. He walked out three paces from the door and stood listening.

"Mac . . ."

He called in a low voice and listened again. As he waited the distant singing ceased for a moment in the long-drawn-out dying note that marks the ending of all Tahitian songs. The clear chirping of a cricket in the shrubbery near by made silence seem the deeper. Alan turned to his right and walked forward until he stood by the sofa where McLeod lay, his head pillowed on his

arm. He heard the quiet breathing and, bending over, touched the sleeping man's shoulder with his hand. He let his fingers move lightly along his arm. Knowing then who it was, he reëntered his room, leaving the door slightly ajar behind him.

Five minutes later he reappeared, dressed only in a native waistcloth drawn up between his bare thighs in the semblance of a pair of swimming trunks. He had a towel over his shoulder and carried his walking stick with its rubber-shod tip. He halted again to listen when opposite the sofa where his foster brother lay, then moved noiselessly on, descended the steps, and followed the graveled path toward the pier; but before reaching it he turned to the left along the bank of the river to the place where it joined the lagoon. He thrust his stick firmly into the sand and hung his towel over it.

"Is there anyone here?" he asked.

He heard only the slight rustling and rippling of the water as it flowed smoothly out on its way to the sea. Assured that he was alone, he waded into the stream until he stood shoulder-deep. With a light spring from his toes, he swam for a stroke or two, then turned on his back and let the current take him.

McLeod awoke with a start. Mauri was standing beside him, her hand on his shoulder. He sat up, rubbing his eyes, looking at her vacantly for a few seconds.

"Toti, where's Alan?"

"Alan . . . ?"

"He's not in his room. The door is open. How long have you been sleeping?"

"Why . . . I don't know. What time is it?"

"Nearly morning. You've not been with him?"

He shook his head.

"*Aué*, Toti . . ."

"You mustn't be worried. He's gone for a walk, perhaps. We'll soon find him. . . . I know—he'll be at the point."

"Go, then. My father's at the river."

McLeod crossed the lawn at a fast walk. It was still bright moonlight, but there was a feeling of dawn in the air. Knowing Alan's love for the beach at the point, he was certain of finding him there. He was more anxious than he would have cared to admit when, passing around the screen of shrubbery that concealed it, he found the place deserted. He continued along the beach to the right in the direction of the river mouth. As he came within view of it, he stopped short. A canoe, paddled with desperate haste, was approaching. He recognized Raitua and called to him. Raitua turned his head. "*Haeré mai*," he shouted hoarsely. It was about fifty yards to the spot where the other canoes

lay. McLeod ran forward. He saw Mauri beckoning to him frantically. She was standing beside Alan's cane, which was stuck upright in the sand, his towel draped over it, close to the fringe of bushes at the water's edge.

"Go quickly!" she cried. "He's there in the lagoon! He must be! He can't find his way! Hurry, Toti! Go after my father!"

As he pushed a canoe into the water, McLeod glanced to the eastward. Raitua was far out, abreast of the islet and making toward the open sea.

CHAPTER XXV

Through the following day canoes were moving far and wide, over lagoon and sea, on either side of Vaihiva. By late afternoon all but Mauri's canoe had returned. With Manu, her father's brother, and his son, Tavaé, she had searched northward along the reefs; now, having reëntered the lagoon at the Vaionifa Passage, they were making their way slowly homeward once more. The sun had disappeared, long since, behind the mountains and the freshness of early evening was in the air. Presently Manu ceased paddling and turned to Mauri.

"We have done what we could," he said. "It is useless to search from this point on."

Mauri looked up dully. All the day she had scarcely opened her lips, and then only to direct the movements of the canoe. "We must, nevertheless," she said.

"To what end?" Tavaé asked. "My father is right; we are now in the current that flows southward to the Vaihiva Pass. Could a dead body swim against it? We will do well to go home."

"Go, then," she replied in the same lifeless voice. "Wait . . . first set me ashore yonder. I will walk home along the beach."

The men did as directed and she stood looking after the canoe until it was far down the lagoon. She was a little beyond the valley where Taio Vahiné, the old soothsayer, lived. She proceeded in that direction, looking neither to right nor to left, so weary in mind and body that she was scarcely aware of her movements. When she had reached the path leading to the old woman's hut, she halted, leaning against a great rock that was there. She was about to turn inland when she heard her name called. Taio Vahiné was seated on the beach near by. The old woman glanced up as Mauri approached and motioned her to a place beside her. Neither spoke for some time.

"You know, perhaps, what has now happened?" Mauri said.

Taio Vahiné nodded. "Some of the Tautira people have passed. If the young man was swimming where I was told, his body will not be found. He would have been caught by the current that flows past your islet and carried into the open sea."

"It is what I believe," said Mauri.

"He knew of this current?"

"Yes."

"Then he may have wished for death."

"Who can say?"

The old woman took Mauri's hand and held it between her own. "Little can be said to soften grief as heavy as yours. But there is bitterness in your heart as well."

"I remember your words, Mama Taio, when I came to ask your help those many months ago: 'It might be well, perhaps, if you should speak and let what will come of this.' Had I then spoken, would . . . would what has happened have come to pass?"

"You ask what no one could tell you. You are a woman of strong will, Mauri. It is only bitter comfort that I can give, but you are one able to accept and profit by it. The lives of many have been broken; through patience and courage they have been mended once more."

"So it could be with mine, you think, with Naia dead?"

"Time will heal you; that I believe. If not . . ."

"Aye, leave the rest unsaid."

The old woman glanced at her compassionately. "You must not think too harshly of yourself. What must be will be. Small choice has anyone in the direction of his life, and even less in the lives of others."

Mauri was silent.

"What of Naia's child? The grandfather loves him?"

"I have reason to believe it."

"Then you see what you can do, what you must do, to bring you peace."

"Peace? Say nothing of that," Mauri replied. "But I know what you have in mind."

"It is the counsel of your own heart that I give you. Let the grandfather have the child. And you must tell him the truth."

"Now . . . when it is too late?" Mauri exclaimed. "No! That I will never do!"

"You must, for the sake of Naia's son," Taio Vahiné replied. "It will be hard, Mauri, but you are not lacking in courage."

A look of fear came into Mauri's eyes. "You gave me your promise, Mama Taio. You would not betray me?"

"No. Save that you tell it, the truth shall never be known. But think well what you do! The lives of children yet unborn are concerned here."

The old woman spoke on, and Mauri listened, her head bowed, saying nothing more. Dusk deepened, and the just waning moon rose from the sea, dimming the light of the early stars.

When she had taken her leave, Mauri followed the path along the beach where she had gone, how many times, with Naia. She could see her, hear her voice, smell the fragrance of her presence, and she wondered vaguely at the dullness of the pain these memories caused her. Some words of Taio Vahiné's kept repeating themselves: "You have many years before you . . ." Aye, she

came of a long-lived family. Time and to spare, for suffering, remained to her. But if she were to keep Tua . . . She saw the lad as he would be at twenty, his father in stature but with Naia herself looking through the dark eyes. The mother still lived in him. Could she not build up her life once more around this boy? Her many lands would be his: Vaihiva, the large plantation on Moorea, the two islets, more than three hundred hectares in all, on the Hao lagoon. Reared on Tahiti, with all the advantages she could well afford to give him,—she could send him to France for his later education,—he would step into a life he had known from babyhood, for which he would be splendidly equipped. When the time came for him to marry, he could choose whom he would for a wife. It might well be that she would live to see her great-grandchildren around her. . . . Yes, hers, for Naia had been hers in everything but blood. And hers forever, now. Taio Vahiné was wrong: the truth need never be told. If she were to speak, what needless misery she would thus bring upon Naia's brother, upon Alan's father! And what shame and disgrace upon herself! They would loathe and despise her forever, first for concealing the truth, then for speaking when it was too late—when bitter sorrow alone could be the result of speaking. But she could . . . she could, perhaps, give up Tua without disclosing the truth. Which grandparent had the clearer right to him, herself or Alan's father? If he wanted the child; if he asked for him . . .

She put this aside. In her great weariness she could think no more, and when she reached Vaihiva she was still uncertain what she would do, what she would say, when the moment came. The consul's launch had returned from the search and was again at anchor, two hundred yards offshore, showing black against the moonlit water. She crossed the point and entered the house by way of the kitchen. Teina was seated there, holding Tua, asleep, in her arms.

"They have all come back?" Mauri asked.

The woman bowed her head.

"My father is here?"

"They found nothing, Mauri. There was no more they could do. We gave them food and your father sent them home."

"When did the launch return?"

"An hour ago." Of a sudden, Teina, clasping the slumbering child close to her bosom, burst into a passion of weeping. Mauri stood looking at her helplessly, envious of the easy tears. She put her hand on the woman's shoulder.

"Go now, Teina," she said, quietly. "Go to your own."

"And you, Mauri, alone here . . . you and little Tua! *Aué, Tua iti é!* . . . To lose both, Mauri—both!"

Mauri took the child gently from her arms and carried him to her room. Teina had gone when she returned. A light was burning in the room where

George McLeod slept. She went slowly along the passageway, stopped by the open door, and looked in for a moment, unseen. McLeod was seated on the floor by the chest that had belonged to his parents. The lid was raised and he was examining the books which the chest contained. Mauri felt no emotion as she watched him there. At the moment he was nothing to her—only a young man seated on the floor, reading a book.

"Toti . . ."

He glanced up quickly and got to his feet. "I didn't know you had come, Mauri."

"You have had your supper?"

"Yes, on the launch. General Hardie is coming ashore presently. He wishes to see you. Tyson will come too. . . . I've been looking at these books of my father's."

"They are yours, Toti. All that is in the chest is yours. You must take it with you when you go."

Naia's photograph—the one he had seen at the time of his first visit—still hung in its frame over the table. Mauri went to the wall and took it down. "And this, too, if you wish it," she added.

"No, Mauri, I couldn't. . ."

"I have another, the same, in my own room. This is yours. Naia would have wanted you to have it." She placed it in his hands, and a moment later, with a hasty word of apology, left the room.

She walked slowly down the steps and on toward her father's house, not knowing why she went. What had happened to her? She was powerless either to think or to feel. If only she could remain so, drained of all emotion, for as long as life should last! She halted, leaning against a palm bole, watching the moonlight glinting along the polished fronds and their motionless shadows on the grass. Hearing the murmur of voices, she turned her head in that direction. Roused, then, she stepped quickly behind a clump of shrubbery. The consul and General Hardie were approaching, and she remembered that Toti had spoken of their coming ashore. She felt a welcome flush of anger. Why should they come on this night? Could they not know that she would want to be alone? And the man himself, Alan's father, his son just dead . . .

She pressed more deeply into the shrubbery. She could see the path and the two men slowly approaching, their voices growing more and more distinct. When nearly opposite the place where she stood, they halted and she heard Tyson speak:—

"But if Mauri would consent to give him up, how would you feel then?"

"It is a hard question to answer," General Hardie replied, after a pause. "I love the little chap, Tyson. He wound himself into my heart from the moment I first saw him."

“His eyes are his mother’s,” Tyson went on; “but have you noticed how much, even now, he’s beginning to resemble Alan? You’d never know that he had a drop of native blood.”

“But it’s there, and that’s the hell of it! . . . God! What would I not give if he were white!”

“Hardie, you do all your thinking in terms of India. Polynesian blood is no stigma. I’d be proud to have a dash of it myself.”

“You’ve lived here too long.”

“And you’ve not lived here at all. If you’ll allow me to say so, your feeling about Tahitians is as unreasonable as it is unjust. What do you know of them?”

“All I need to know: they’re not white.”

“You’ll regret it if you can’t surmount that prejudice,” Tyson replied, earnestly. “Tua is your only grandson. When you are dead, he alone will remain of your family. You say that you love him and I know you do. Think, then, what it will mean to have him with you. Think of the loneliness you will avoid in years to come. He’s a lad any man might well be proud of. And now is the time for him to go: now, in his babyhood.”

General Hardie shook his head slowly. “Do you imagine that I have *not* thought of all this?” he said.

“I’m sorry,” Tyson replied. “I haven’t meant to be officious. I was thinking of you, old friend.”

“You needn’t apologize. I quite understand.”

“There’s a part of your nature, Hardie, that you try to suppress—God knows why! I’ve been speaking for that. I only wanted you to be sure. You are? Even if Mauri is willing to give up Tua, you are certain you could not take him home?”

Mauri waited, her hands clasped over her breast. The two men stood not half a dozen paces from where she stood. She could not see the consul, but she caught a glimpse in the moonlight of General Hardie’s face turned in profile, with the shadow of a frond falling across it.

“I can’t do it, Tyson! I cannot! I know myself too well. The very fact that I love him would make it all the worse. . . . No . . . no, by God! I’ll have no black blood in the Hardie family!”

Mauri heard no more. The two men walked on, and she waited until they were lost to view in the groves. Deep anger burned in her heart, like coals beneath a bed of ashes. When certain that she could proceed unobserved, she went on quickly to her father’s house. She found him at his favorite place on the beach, with his back to the trunk of the great *tamanu* tree. They had not met since the evening before and spoke in few words of the events of that day. Mauri well knew the grief which her father concealed. With Naia dead his life was broken forever. But he gave no sign. She respected his reticence and

honored the austerity of his pride. His deeper feelings were not to be displayed even before his daughter.

"You have come from the house?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Tyson passed near by a moment ago, with Alan's father. They wish to see you, perhaps."

"I saw and avoided them as I was coming here. I will return, presently."

"The grandfather has not spoken to you of Tua?"

Mauri shook her head.

"What is in your mind about the child?"

"Would you have me keep him, Father?"

"You ask me that? It would be the wish of my heart; but his claim is stronger than ours. We must give him up."

"But if he should not want him?"

"Not want him! His only grandchild? There is no hope of that."

"So it is, nevertheless."

Raitua turned to peer at his daughter through the shadows. "What are you saying, Mauri? I have seen him with Tua when he did not know that I saw. He loves him as I do. If ever . . ."

"He does not want him. Listen, Father. I passed them as I have said, not five minutes ago. My heart was heavy and I had no wish to speak with them, so I stepped behind the shrubbery to wait till they had passed. They were speaking of Tua. Shall I tell you what I heard Alan's father say? . . . Though we were to beg him to take him, he would not have his grandson. It is because of our blood."

"*Éahahoia!* What better is there in all these islands?"

"You do not understand," Mauri replied. "Were we kings of Tahiti it would be the same. It is the native blood."

"You heard him say that?"

"As clearly as I hear you."

Raitua got to his feet and walked to the water's edge. He returned and stood facing Mauri.

"Who is this man?" he asked. "What has he done? What is his lineage? Can he trace his blood back, as we can, through thirty generations?"

"His skin is white," Mauri replied. "That alone matters to him."

The old man walked up and down for some little time while Mauri sat regarding him in silence, her hands clasped around her knees.

"It is well, Mauri," he said, at length. "Think of it no more. That ever a man could be so great a fool! His skin is white, you say? So is Tua's. If it comes to that, who would guess there is a drop of our blood in his veins? And the lad his dead son's son! Well, he is ours, and God be thanked for him!"

Mauri rose. “Father, I am going now to offer him Tua.”

Raitua stopped short. “You would? After what he has said?”

“He shall tell *me* that,” Mauri replied, in a cold voice. “I will hear it from his own lips.”

“No, Mauri. . . . No, you must not. He is Alan’s father, and your guest, in your house.”

“Have no fear. I shall be as courteous as himself. And from his words it is clear that he has come to tell me, in some manner, what I heard him say to Tyson.”

“Remember, he loves Tua. That is certain. What if he should change his mind?”

“He will not.”

“But if he should, Mauri?” the old man repeated, anxiously. “You will do well to let him speak first, in his own way; in what way he will. What does it matter what he thinks or feels? It is Tua we want. Lonely our lives would be now, without him.”

“You may leave this to me,” Mauri replied. “I shall know what to say.”

“Go, then,” said her father. “They have been waiting long.”

Mauri did not, herself, know what she would do. She made no attempt to examine her feelings, but welcomed anger as though it had been the most precious of gifts. Tua had been wronged, and herself, her father, all her race, with him. This sense of deep injury she held fast to, repeating in thought the words she had overheard: “I’ll have no black blood in the Hardie family!” The desire to escape from her own bitter, self-accusing thoughts made this easy for her, yet, unconsciously, she hurried lest the mood should change. From a distance she saw that a light was now burning on the front verandah. She could see General Hardie slowly pacing up and down, his tall figure clearly outlined as he passed before the lamp. She turned off the path and made her way, in the shadows, to the rear of the house. Her bedchamber was on the east side, with a door opening on the back verandah, and she entered by that way. Moonlight flooded the room and lay across the bed where Tua was asleep. Mauri knelt beside him. A feeling of deep tenderness welled up in her heart, and for a moment she gave way to it, caressing Tua’s hair and pressing his chubby hand against her cheek. Not want this child? The grandfather would live to regret it! The time would come when he would want him, and he should want him in vain! He should never have him now!

She turned her head to listen. They were saying little, on the verandah. The sound of General Hardie’s heavy pacing ceased for a moment as he spoke to Tyson, and was then resumed. Mauri rose from beside the bed, slipped off her dress, and took from the wardrobe her black gown, her widow’s dress, which was used only for special occasions. When ready she examined her reflection

carefully, in the mirror. A moment later she closed the door softly behind her and went along the passageway to the front verandah. As she appeared, George McLeod and Tyson rose. General Hardie turned. She came forward and he bowed in silence over her hand. Mauri could see no change in him. It could never have been guessed that he had lost his only son but twenty-four hours earlier. His manner was polite and formal, as though he had merely come to pay a somewhat tedious call. Mauri was inwardly shocked when he spoke of the search for Alan's body. In so far as any display of emotion was concerned, it might have been a matter that he had heard of by chance, in which he was in no way involved. He waited for her to be seated; then took a chair by the lamp, facing her. Tyson was on the opposite side of the table and George McLeod sat by her, on the sofa.

Mauri glanced at the consul, who leaned forward in his chair with his eyes fixed on the floor. He raised his head.

"We are leaving for Tautira to-morrow," he said. "We will stop there for a day or two. If there is any news, Mauri . . ."

She nodded.

General Hardie cleared his throat. "I wish to thank you for your great kindness to my son," he said. "You will understand that I . . . that I appreciate it deeply."

"Alan was very dear to me," Mauri replied.

"And you to him, I am sure. I believe that he left some papers here—some work that he was engaged upon before he lost his sight."

"All of his things are in his room."

The General turned to McLeod. "George, I will ask you to attend to them."

"You will be leaving by the next steamer?" Mauri asked.

"Yes."

"It is time, then, for me to speak of what is in my mind," Mauri said. "We both love our grandson. It will be hard for me to give him up, but your claim is stronger than mine."

General Hardie sat very erect, his hands clasped firmly on the arms of his chair. His face was impassive.

"I cannot allow you to make such a sacrifice, Madame Mauri," he said. "I have given this matter my deep consideration. The decision costs me dear, but I feel that Tua's place is here, under your care."

"If I bring him up, he will be rich in lands, it is true," Mauri replied. "At my death he would be heir to all that I possess. He will be in any case. But he would lack, here, the advantages his father had."

"I realize that, but you overemphasize their importance, perhaps."

"I am putting my own feelings aside," Mauri said. "I would keep him gladly, but it was Alan's wish that his son should have an English education."

A slight frown crossed General Hardie's face. "If my son had lived he would have changed his mind about that."

"You think so? Why?"

"Alan was young and inexperienced. Later he would have realized that the child's place is here, where he was born."

"That we cannot know, now," Mauri replied. "Do you not think that we should respect his wishes?"

"I am convinced, as I have said, that he would have altered them," General Hardie replied, firmly.

"You love your grandson?"

"Indeed I do!"

"Then I don't understand. What does it matter where the child was born?"

General Hardie made no reply. With an unconscious gesture he put his hand to his throat as though the band of his collar were choking him.

"Answer me, General," Mauri went on, in a low voice. "Is it because of his native blood? . . . Had Naia been English, would you feel the same?"

She waited, leaning slightly forward in her chair. Tyson gave his friend a glance of quick appeal, but General Hardie was staring straight before him, his lips set in a thin line.

"You force me to speak out, Madame Mauri. I would not."

McLeod opened his lips to speak, but no words would come. And what was there to say now? Mauri could never forgive that insult; it was past the reach of pardon. McLeod felt a burning resentment toward his foster father and pity for the woman he had so needlessly hurt.

Mauri's face flushed. "So I believed," she replied, in a cold voice. Silence followed, a silence that seemed to extend itself unbearably. Tyson could find nothing to say; the situation was one past his skill to mend. He could only look at Mauri, longing in vain to soften so cruel a blow to her pride.

Presently Mauri raised her head. "You may set your mind at rest," she said. "The child has no drop of our blood."

General Hardie stared at Mauri, unable for a moment to find his voice.

"What do you say, Madame Mauri? You tell me that he is not your daughter's son?"

"He is Naia's son, but Naia was not my daughter."

"Mauri . . . !"

"It is true, Tyson."

"Then . . . then whose daughter was she?"

"Nina McLeod's."

Mauri did not recognize the sound of her own voice. Was it she who had spoken? What had she said? She turned her head slowly until her glance fell on Toti McLeod. She had forgotten he was there. In her cold anger she had

forgotten all save the presence of the man seated by the lamp—the man who had spoken of Tua's black blood. She had wanted to shame him if she could. She had wished to hurt him, but not in this way! No . . . no! And Toti . . . she had not meant that he should ever know. She was lost! What could she do now? A feeling of measureless sorrow filled her heart, and of infinite pity for those she had wronged so deeply; of pity even for herself.

She waited in despair, her head bowed, turning her wedding ring round and round on her finger. Would none of them break this silence? But they were waiting for her. She herself must speak. Was it Naia who demanded this—who, for Tua's sake, had forced the truth from her lips? She must go on, now. There could be no turning back. She must tell all, from the beginning, so that there could be no doubt in anyone's mind.

"Roparti . . ."

Mauri met the consul's glance for an instant. She called him by his native name, the name of affection by which he was known throughout the islands.

"Roparti, you remember the great storm, nearly twenty years ago, when Nina McLeod and I were alone here, without help, and none could reach us until the storm had passed?"

In her great need, the words came. She spoke rapidly, in a low distinct voice, looking at none of them. Here in this same house where she and Nina McLeod had suffered together, she told the story of their growing friendship; of Alan McLeod's death; of her pity for the young widow in her loneliness and sorrow; of the weeks that followed when, together, they made preparations for their coming babies; of the night of wind and rain when her own baby had been born dead. She told of the burial of her child, and of Naia's birth, at the cost of her mother's life, on the day that followed. She told, then, how she had nursed the motherless child; of the return of her father; of the temptation, beyond her power to conquer, to claim Naia as her own. Weariness again descended upon her, but she spoke on, like one telling the story of some bereaved and desperate mother who had lived and died long ago.

"So it was, Roparti," she concluded. "I believed, then, that it was willed I should have Naia; that the dead parents themselves would have it so. And who could have loved her more than I? She was mine in all but blood. I have done a great wrong, but . . . I could not help it. . . . And now it is forever."

She waited, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, as though hoping that some word of comfort might be given her. At last she rose and turned toward the young man at her side. He sat with his head bowed in his hands.

"Toti . . ."

He gave no sign that he heard her. General Hardie stared vacantly before him. The expression on his face had altered of a sudden: the firm lines of the mouth sagged, the lips were slightly parted. His shoulders dropped, and his

hands lay loosely on the arms of his chair. The figure was that of an old man. Mauri gave him one startled glance before she turned away. She then crossed the verandah as though walking in sleep, went slowly down the steps, and was lost to view among the shadows of the palms.

EPILOGUE

The *S. S. Makura*, northbound for San Francisco, moved away from the dock and turned in a wide arc across the lower harbor. She had been an hour late in getting away, and night had fallen by the time the crowd of steamer-day spectators began to disperse. The lamps along the waterfront sent wavering tracks of light across the lagoon and the electric torches of cyclists winked like fireflies in the darkness of inland streets. The steamer was just abreast of the consulate, scarcely half a cable's length offshore, as Robert Tyson halted at his gate. He stood for a moment, as he had done numberless times in the past, watching the vessel, one engine in reverse, as she turned toward the passage through the reef, half a mile distant. Then she moved slowly out, gathering speed as she proceeded, the backwash from her propellers swirling and slapping along the sea wall.

Tyson wheeled his bicycle down the drive and entered the consulate by the back way. He stopped at the kitchen to give some directions to his cook, then went along the passage to the front verandah.

"Is it you, Tyson?" a voice inquired.

"Oh—hello, Brocard. I didn't know you'd come. Shall I light up?"

"Not on my account."

The consul crossed the verandah, drew up an easy chair beside his friend, and seated himself facing the lagoon with his feet on the low railing.

The steamer was now well outside the pass, her lights beginning to rise and fall as she breasted the northerly swell. Then, turning until she was headed north-by-east, she drew rapidly away from the land.

Tyson sighed deeply. "Well, there's the last of her," he said. "She'll hold that course now for nearly four thousand miles."

"And thank God I'm not aboard," Brocard remarked.

"I've said that, once a month, for thirty years past."

"You got them off all right?" Brocard asked.

"Yes. It was rather a rush at the end. I wasn't certain until yesterday that I could get Madame Simonet as nurse for the youngster. She's an excellent woman. It's an odd thing, Brocard: it was she who took George McLeod back to England in 1919, after his parents' death. Now she's performing the same service for little Tua Hardie."

"Was General Hardie given the cabin he wanted?"

"Yes. It was rather awkward, but I managed to arrange it. And George McLeod has the adjoining one. . . . God go with them!" He paused and added: "It's the only time in my life that I've been glad to see the last of an old

friend."

Dr. Brocard turned to peer at him through the dusk. "Are you really fond of him, Tyson?"

"Yes . . . but I can understand your question."

"I'm deeply sorry for him, of course, but . . . *mon Dieu!* What a type!"

"General Hardie is the kind your countrymen could never understand," Tyson replied; "to your loss, perhaps."

"No doubt, Tyson, no doubt." Brocard lighted a cigarette and smoked in silence for a moment. "I must say that I admire his courage . . . or is it callousness?"

"Callousness? Good God, no!"

"You say that with conviction."

"I've known him for forty years. We went to school together."

"He's a puzzle to me; I'm bound to say that," Brocard replied. "You'd never dream, from his manner, that he'd lost his only son not a fortnight ago. And then all that fuss about what cabin he was to have!"

"It was sheer pretense. Englishmen of his sort know how to meet whatever comes—even the worst that may come. And they're bound no one shall suspect they suffer."

"You think, then, that it's really come home to him? Has he imagination enough to . . ."

"Make no mistake," Tyson interrupted.

"I want you to know that I appreciate your confidence in this matter," Brocard said, after a brief silence. "I've never heard a stranger tale, or a more fantastic one."

"I wouldn't have felt free to tell you, except that we needed your signature as a witness."

"I'm glad you did. Will the consular affidavit be enough?"

"It establishes the child's identity and his right of succession to the McLeod estate, in England. George McLeod insisted upon it."

"The boy will be well looked after, that's plain. . . . I was amazed, Tyson. It is, truly, an all but incredible affair."

"Once you knew who the child was, I was bound to tell you the rest."

"You can count on my absolute discretion."

"I know that. Not another soul on the island knows the truth—not even Mauri's father. And they never shall."

"My heart goes out to that young man," Brocard said. "There's the depth of the tragedy, Tyson: not to have known that the girl was his sister until she was dead and buried. . . ."

"You may think it strange, but I believe I sympathize more with Mauri than with young McLeod, or Alan Hardie's father."

"You give her credit for a depth of feeling I doubt if she possesses."

"No. . . . No, you're mistaken."

"I've yet to see the native, man or woman, capable of suffering as we understand it."

"In general I agree, but you don't know Mauri," Tyson replied.

"She looks a remarkable woman, I admit. But what motive could she have had for confessing? So late, I mean?"

"I've asked myself the same question more than once."

Dr. Brocard shifted to a more comfortable position in his chair. "This is pure speculation, of course," he remarked; "but since you told me the story I've been thinking of little else. My belief is that she obeyed a sudden uncontrollable impulse, stirred by anger. General Hardie's manner, and what he said about native blood, so wounded her that she was willing to sacrifice herself in order to injure him still more deeply."

"It's not so simple as all that," Tyson replied; "but I agree that it was an act of impulse. I'm certain that, on the evening after young Hardie's death, when she found us awaiting her on the verandah at Vaihiva, she had no intention of confessing. If General Hardie had been able to disguise his feelings about his grandson, we'd never have known the truth."

"Poor wretched creature! What will she do now? You saw her later, didn't you?"

"Yes. She passed through town a week ago, on her way to Moorea. She's left Vaihiva; I doubt if she ever returns, though her father will remain there. In the future, she means to live on her Moorea lands."

"How much more did she tell you?" Brocard asked.

"Enough to let me guess the rest. There's no doubt that her central motive was love of Naia."

"That's understandable."

"After all, she reared the child from the day of her birth, and came to regard her as her own flesh and blood. But that's not the whole of it."

"Pride, you mean?"

"Yes. For a native woman of her position the shame of such an admission would be terrible."

"More so than to a white woman?"

"Ten times more, as you'd understand if you'd lived here longer. Public opinion plays a part in their lives scarcely conceivable to us. Mauri confessed to me that, three years ago, when Alan Hardie asked for Naia, she was on the point of telling him."

"Good God! Why didn't she? She could have sworn him to secrecy."

"I know. Fear, perhaps, of the truth leaking out, somehow. . . . But stronger than that was her love of Naia. She couldn't face life without her."

“I can’t help thinking of McLeod,” Brocard remarked, after a long silence. “I don’t know when I’ve met a young man I was more taken with. How does he really feel, Tyson?”

“Put yourself in his place, knowing as little as he does. Could you forgive Mauri?”

“Never!”

“Nor will he. And to lose his dearest friend as well, through her fault. . . . Alan and George were closer than brothers.”

Brocard hesitated. “I’ve no right to ask you this, Tyson. You needn’t reply if you’d rather not. . . . Do you . . . do you think young Hardie meant to die?”

“Could you blame him if he did?”

“Not in the least.”

The two friends had no further speech for some time. It was now deep night. The avenue bordering the waterfront was deserted save for a lone Chinese fruit vendor wheeling his little glassed-in wagon through the pools of light made by the street lamps.

Brocard sighed. “What can one say?” he remarked. “Some tragedies seem beyond the reach of comment.”

“I was thinking of that,” Tyson replied. “I know of nothing adequate to this one. One must fall back on *aué*! as the natives say it in the depths of grief; or *ay de mi*, or ‘alas,’ or some word stronger than any of these.”

“Or no word at all. Silence, perhaps, is best.”

“It is, undoubtedly.”

The consul rose and switched on his reading lamp. He touched a bell and waited till his house boy appeared in the doorway.

“We’ve time for a glass of sherry before dinner,” he said.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Dark River* by Charles Bernard Nordhoff & James Norman Hall]