UNCERTAIN JOURNEY

JOSEPH J. GRIMM, M.D.

This one's for you, Dad.
Dreams really do come true.
Dedicated to your family.

A Note from the Author's Family

Dear Reader,

This is our father's novel, Uncertain Journey, written more than eighty years ago. For most of our lives, it existed as a stack of typed pages. We never really thought it would see the light of day.

And now, we are finally able to share it with you.

Our father, Joseph J. Grimm, M.D., began writing *Uncertain Journey* during World War II while serving as a physician and eye, ear, nose, and throat surgeon in the U.S. Naval Reserve. He was forty-two years old when he sailed from California for the South Pacific, not knowing where he was being sent or what awaited him.

He eventually arrived on Banika, a small island in the Russell Islands, where he served at U.S. Navy Mobile Hospital No. 10, a massive shore-based, 1,300-bed hospital complex of Quonset huts, later redesignated Fleet Hospital No. 110. The conditions were difficult—oppressive heat and humidity and demanding medical work. Young Marines arrived from the fighting with terrible wounds. Some had suffered devastating eye injuries and would never see again.

And somehow, amid all of this, our father wrote a novel.

Writing became more than a way to pass the time. It

gave him an outlet for feelings that were difficult for him to express. In one of his wartime letters, he wrote:

"Writing has been my salvation and a valuable escape mechanism for my pent up and unexpressed emotions."

He wrote whenever he could—after rounds, late at night, and in whatever spare moments he could find. Three young servicemen helped type the growing manuscript. They refused to accept payment, so our father compensated them with bottles of beer from his weekly allotment.

War correspondents Gerald A. Waindel and Hans R. Johansen spent hours reading and discussing the manuscript with him. Others who read the manuscript and offered suggestions included Marine Corps war correspondent and Washington Star journalist James F. Moser, photographer Norris G. McElroy, and our father's medical colleague, Dr. Hollis K. Russell.

He wrote nearly the entire original manuscript on Banika and worked intensively on the final chapters during his last month in the South Pacific, while stationed in Nouméa, New Caledonia.

The manuscript was enormous. In a résumé he later prepared, he recorded that it had once reached 876 pages. Over the years, he kept returning to it, revising and paring it down—first to 600 pages and eventually to about 400.

I remember him working on it.

As a little girl, I would see him in our living room late at night, hunched over his manuscript, writing and revising. Years later, when my siblings and I were old enough to help, we strapped copies into awkward cardboard boxes and mailed them off to publishers.

Our father did not live to see Uncertain Journey published, but I like to think he would be smiling now.

So here it is for you, Dad.

Dreams really do come true.

—Laurie A. Grimm

A Word from the Author

The writer knows whereof he speaks, for the tale of the "Uncertain Journey" is based on happenings he encountered and people and places he met, lived in, and fought for and with during the Second World War. There are scenes he actually witnessed and acted as a medical doctor in the United States Navy. The novel deals with the war and the people involved in it, their struggles to survive, and their lighter moments of pleasure and romance.

While the book is based on fact, all the names of characters and events that happened, outside of actual battles, are entirely fictitious, and any connection between persons, either living or dead, and actual happenings connected with them is entirely fictitious.

The author hopes his readers will derive at least some measure of enjoyment and enlightenment concerning the war; the hardships, eternal vigilance, and fight to keep alive and to outwit the enemy, and the thrills of love and romance in wartime, in the wonderful tropical island.

Sincerely yours,
Joseph J. Grimm, M.D.

CHAPTER ONE

Attack

Through the dense early morning mist, the LSM Eagle, one of 100 American ships converging on the Japanese-held island of Banika, moved methodically toward the mined beaches. The tense air was ready to explode into the flames of war.

Hollis Rochelle of the United States Marine Corps fidgeted nervously with his gas mask as he peered shoreward. Although his stomach churned and his powerful body was tense, his face was calm and set with determination and confidence.

"Why don't you relax, Hollis?" rasped a voice close by. "I always say, there's nothin' like gettin' all the shut-eye y'can b'fore a battle. You're wearing yourself out."

Rochelle turned to his buddy and gave a gesture of impatience. "Sleep. Just can't, Dick. We're getting close—" he broke off, looking ahead through the fog toward the invisible island.

Somewhere in the steaming murk of that Jungle Island lurked Japs, waiting grimly for the barges to close in where they could unleash their own brand of hell on the "American devils."

Hollis knew that he wasn't the only one tensely waiting, watching, and wondering. All around him were other men, dark figures, strangely silent as the agonizing minutes

dragged by. If only time would go more quickly so that they could get into battle and get what had to be over. At the same time, they cherished these last few moments of quietness. The mist began to break up, and the moon, low on the horizon, hung over the low silhouette of the island. In another minute, the moon was obscured, and in the blackness, bodies shifted restlessly once more.

Hollis relaxed slightly, and his mind wandered back to when Chaplain Lamb had spoken to the men the evening before. Again, he seemed to hear him praying:

> "Oh God of Battle, we will soon be faced by the enemies who seek to destroy us. In that terrible hour, give us strength and wisdom and courage to fight bravely for our homes, our families, and for Thee, O God. And if it be Thy will that we die, then let us die with the honor and triumph of free men. In the name of truth, justice, and that freedom we hold so dear, help us to lay the foundations of perfect peace. Amen."

Hollis also prayed that all would go well—that he and the rest of the camouflaged men would effect a successful landing and carry out their mission as planned, with as few casualties as possible. And he prayed that he would make it—come through all this. His fingers reached into his breast pocket and caressed the picture he always carried with him, inscribed affectionately to him as "Yours ALWAYS, Terry."

Would he ever see her again? How long is ALWAYS? How different it would be if he were with her, breathing the scent of her delicate perfume, than here amidst the hot, sweat-stinking, sticky, twitching bodies of fighting men. Would she really wait for him?

His blood boiled as he thought of her brother, Cecil, one of their hometown's most fashionable and expensive doctors. Again, he seemed to hear Cecil's simper, 'Terrible sorry, Hollis old man. Hate to see your degree held up over this, really I do. It's my fault, I suppose. I'm nothing but a weak-spined coward, I guess—not fit to walk the same ground with someone like you.'

Hollis had done what he did mainly for the sake of Terry. He shrugged and smiled, getting the grim humor of things. He jerked himself back to reality. War had changed a lot of things. What did it matter after all? Cecil had to live with his conscience—if he had one.

He thought of his mother—she had it rough if anyone did. Four boys, three of them in the service. There was only Jim left at home. Only Jim, sixteen years old, to cut the grass and shovel snow, to keep the furnace going, and maybe take Mom for a walk in the springtime. Mom always loved those walks in beautiful Grant Park in Wisconsin afternoons. If he, Hollis, were killed, it would be over with in a hurry for him, but not for her. Maybe it was easier to be a fighter than a mother.

Who was the lucky guy to take over the research work at State? he thought. Professor Einhardt was a great man and a great scientist. What a thrill it had been to work with him at the University.

Again, he forced himself back to the present. Each man

had a specific job he was supposed to do when the landing was made. The assignment had been firmly drilled into the men's minds—to take the coves at the mouth of Sunlight Channel. Preparations to secure the enemy positions had been rehearsed time and time again—until now, no doubt remained as to what this one combat team was to do. This was the DAY. The real thing was finally at hand. Everything they had been taught in the States, everything they had learned in the earlier campaigns, would now be put to use. No frivolity now—no sextet singing, "Over There," "Paper Doll," and other favorite songs. All were ready with combat packs strapped to their shoulders, waiting for the signal to board the small boats to make the run to the beach.

Hollis's thoughts were interrupted by the squeal of a loudspeaker. The captain always had a last-minute message: "Men, I've been mighty proud of you from the start, and I don't intend to change my mind now. There is no one nearer and dearer to me than you, 'Red Raiders.' You're the best-trained outfit in the islands. You've never failed because you have what it takes to make a great team. You're a fighting unit with a job to do—for your homes, for your country. There will be no turning back; there can be only VICTORY."

The loudspeaker squealed once more, then silence again. Once more, pressure began to mount. Hollis watched the moon dull to a pinkish glow as the first light of the new day streaked the shimmering black of the Pacific with new overtones. Then an awful moment as the brittle stillness was shattered by the "Ca-room . . . Boom! Boom!" of the big guns. Foghorns belched long and hard. There were frantic shouted orders, but no one seemed to notice. From deep uneasiness to outright anger, gunfire echoed across the channel.

Gone was the instant of peaceful dawn; gone, too, was the tense waiting. Now, only the anticipation of seasoned fighters filled the Eagle. Life temporarily grew full of little things—checking gas mask, ammo, and medical kit. Hollis touched Terry's picture in his pocket again. Nuts. Maybe Terry wouldn't wait for him after all. Maybe she'd give in to her mother's "common sense" counsel and marry Teasal Lynch, affluent and 4-F. You're thinking crazy. Snap out of it, he scolded himself.

Hollis was at his post at the bow, watching the water's depth. The Japs were retaliating, their dive bombers were roaring out toward the fleet under fighter protection. He knew this wasn't going to be a picnic. Each battle grew more costly as the American forces rushed closer and closer to the Japanese mainland. He thrilled as he saw the trim Navy Hellcats flash out to meet the enemy bombers. The Eagle was closing in now. They were carrying the fight to them.

As the battle raged in the skies almost overhead, and the U.S. fleet continued to lay a barrage of destruction across the island, the big LSM finally came to a stop and grounded. Hollis's eyes darted everywhere, not missing a thing. All around the Eagle, he saw other landing craft similarly engaged. The LST Victory, with its balloons overhead, dropped its stern anchors. The forward gates of the Eagle's giant hull swung out and dropped its clattering ramps and disgorged human cargo—eager, excited, terrible fighting men. One by one, the Higgins roared to life and scuddled like large water bugs for shore. Over the side fell the cargo nets, and down them streamed the men who worked and moved like one great machine.

"THIS IS IT, FELLAS," yelled Matus to Hollis and Morford. Matus passed the horseshoe plug of chewing tobacco to Morford and Hollis. The three squad leaders went over the side together.

"Let's really rack this job up!" Hollis shouted sharply to his unit as they crammed into the Higgins and darted off in a zigzag course toward the beach.

Almost all the men in Hollis's barge were veterans of other campaigns. They knew the value of relaxing until the last possible moment. Sergeant Sam Goldberg was busily digging in his pocket, and finally, with a triumphant grin, he waved a lady's pink handkerchief aloft, then drew it under his nose and sighed deeply.

"Relax, Man. Get a whiff a' dis, Freckles," he said to the redheaded Frankie Simcheck next to him, waving it in his face.

"Whew. Goin' somewhere, Buckets?" joshed the sharp-eyed gunner, pushing away Goldberg's brawny hand, and wrinkling his nose as though in disgust.

Before he could reply, a lone Jap plane broke through the U.S. Navy Hellcat defense and dove for the barges on the far end. The maneuverable small craft weren't the easiest targets in the world, and scarcely had the attacker opened fire when a screeching U.S. Navy 'Cat' swooped down upon it, spitting fire and death. With a shudder, the 'Jap' fluttered in its descent and then, in a brilliant flash, disappeared almost above the landing craft, sending down a rain of fire all around the half-huddled figures. The barrage from the Yank cruisers and destroyers was being intensified now as the invading troops closed in on the beach. Smoke flooded the whole sky, and sheets of terrible flame spread everywhere

as the Navy Hellcats took a heavy toll on the Nip planes, which tried, but with little success, to break through the cordon of American aircraft and reach the task force.

The growling motors of the LCIs were biting firmly into the shell-swept waters, speeding their cargo of warriors steadily on to the enemy stronghold. The heavy air cover had afforded the barges fine protection up until then and even threatened to prevail over the Japs at any moment, but the tricky, resourceful Japs were still holding a couple of powerful cards. One of them turned up suddenly in the shape of a block of twelve Zeroes. The gun crews on the barges, however, made ready for them.

Hollis felt stubbornly defiant as he watched: Floating targets. That was all they were, he told himself. Well, come on, Japs. You can't stop us anyway.

Aloud, he screamed, "GET EM." But his words were swallowed up in the louder roar of twin fifties and Jap engines. The battle was on. Hellcats faded to cover the barges, but with awful, horrible persistence, the Zeroes came on. One of them throttled in at water level for a strafing run. Hollis's barge was the bull's-eye in its target. But the crew knew it and swiftly turned the small craft away from the center of the stage and continued swerving in an effort to evade the swift, deadly pounce of the enemy bird.

A Hellcat was on the plane as its guns kicked up water and tore through steel and flesh. Immediately sensing the oncoming danger, the Jap maneuvered sharply to gain altitude again in a protective screen of haze and smoke.

But the Hellcat was stubborn and a little faster. It swung like a shotgun on a rising bird, and the Jap reeled and dove into its own smoke. The screaming plane headed straight

toward ship T20 and the Eagle, grounded only hundreds of yards apart. With a violent explosion, it struck full against the T20. Smoke belched from the wounded ship in seconds, and huge geysers of water spurted high into the air as its magazine blew up.

Matus swallowed hard. "God," he said, forgetting for a moment their own narrow escape from the enemy's marauder.

Hollis felt a catch in his own throat, but it was only for an instant. Self-preservation came first, and death was closing in upon them like a tightening noose.

Again, the invaders found themselves pinned to the deck of the barge as the howling enemy hurtled in and down upon them. Only the gunners could not seek the slight protection the sides of the barge offered, and in the second sweep of strafing, they were completely exposed. Hollis felt the nudge of a moving body as Freckles slumped to the deck beside him with a low moan.

Quickly, Hollis thrust his arm under the man's limp shoulders, supporting the rolling head on his chest. The individual struggle between time and eternity dwarfed the fighting of man with man for the moment. Hollis knew the gurgled breathing of pierced lungs and the coughing that brought bright, stringy blood to a man's lips.

"Take it easy, old man," he consoled hoarsely as Freckles strove to speak.

"Tell Bob—my brother—tell him to take care of—things—Letter—for Mom—my pock—" Freckles gasped.

Then his eyes rolled back, and his youthful cheek left a smear of red on Hollis's breast pocket.

The other men on the barge silently, deliberately, avoided

each other's eyes. For a moment, the war had halted for that huddled group. It was that way when the first one got it.

"All of a sudden, he passed away, and there was nothing more that I could do for him." Hollis felt numb and a pang of grief. Hollis reverently closed the dead man's eyes and then resumed the battle. Purple with fury, he leaped with panther-like movements to man the silent gun.

"Come on, Jap," he screamed in a fury, "just cross my path. Just once. That's all I ask you. I'll get you."

His handsome features were twisted into drunken determination as he watched the Jap dive for another water level strafing attack. With a grip six times harder than needed to fire the weapon, Hollis followed the enemy plane with a continuous stream of fire. He kept muttering over and over again between his clenched teeth, spitting tobacco juice about five feet away. "Not damn vengeance, Lord. Only justice."

The Nip raced by, throwing out smoke bombs to frustrate his dogged enemy. But Hollis managed to glimpse the pilot for an instant—a young, thin-lipped face, half-hidden by oversize goggles. The stream of tracers was finding its mark, finally. Bits of dull red flashes and a trail of black smoke suddenly shot from the Zero's fuselage. But Hollis still didn't let up firing until he lost range.

"You got 'im," yelled Smokey Joe joyously from his position behind the other gun.

"Good hunting," added Dick Fisher admiringly.

They all watched the plane try to regain altitude. It couldn't. A moment later, it exploded with a flash and spiraled into the oily sea and disappeared.

"Yah," grinned Skinny, "just like shooting ducks on Lake

Winnebago." Then Skinny gave a slap on Hollis's back, forcing him to swallow his cud of chewing tobacco. He started to feel some nausea and responded with an inner anger. The other fellows grinned, and Hollis worked up a smile, acting as if everything was all right. But Rouse thought, He sure looks green.

Then, just as suddenly as the air attack had begun, it came to an end, or at least dwindled and passed from the immediate scene. U.S. air power had proved overwhelming, and the remaining planes of the Emperor Hirohito stopped whining away eastward.

But other dangers were now at hand to occupy the attentions of the invaders.

Eyes stinging with smoke, they fastened themselves on the dark, ominous jungle. It rose almost straight out of the ocean, divided from it by a mere strip of coral beach.

Hollis waited tensely with the rest. "This is it," he murmured hoarsely, squeezing the arm of Wells.

Wells nodded, then said solemnly, "Say, look, Holly, if anything happens to me, see that Yvonne gets this locket—"

"Ah, cut it out," scoffed Hollis. "That's what you guys always say. You'll make it."

For a grim moment, they gazed earnestly into each other's eyes. Then Hollis's eyes returned to rest upon Freckles' stony face and closed eyes, and he felt himself break into a cold sweat. Just like the pickled bodies he dissected back at State, he told himself. But it wasn't the same.

Just then, too, unknown to Hollis and the men with him, the first wave was having trouble. The second wave broke and fanned out. A few more minutes, and Hollis, too, found

himself leaping out of his barge into the swirling surf as they beached. There was unnerving excitement and minor confusion in the first rush of it, but the opposition seemed long—too long, incoming.

"Why, dis is easy," chuckled Buckets Goldberg, straightening up and heading for the coral bank.

"Yeah, best job 'o softening up I ever saw," Morford started to add, when a loud whistle and a buzzing like a thousand bees ended in a crashing jolt and a shower of sand and water about them.

Hollis felt shrapnel hammer against his helmet as he was practically thrown into a shell hole on the shore's edge. Buckets, Fisher, and Rouse followed him like so many pool balls into a pocket. Regaining their equilibrium, they crouched there, knee-deep in the water, waiting tensely.

"How close can you come?" muttered Rouse, as Hollis sighed with relief in finding his helmet had only been dented. But he could still see stars.

At the same time, there was a big rumble in his stomach as he tried several times to throw up but couldn't. A moment later, he heaved up the chewing tobacco and began to feel better by the minute as his pale face now became flushed and his forehead sweaty.

These seasoned fighters all fell silent in the sheer terror of the shrieking annihilation going on all about them. Hollis felt his whole being crying out for delay, a moment of relief from the pressure of doom. But it was only the beginning, he knew. The waters behind them were filled with the face-down remains of great guys—better men than he was, he thought. Why them and not him? There must be

a reason. Why any of them at all? What had Chaplain Lamb said about laying the foundations of perfect peace? Did men really want peace? Hollis wondered.

Rouse lamented, "There's more Nips than we bargained for. Turning out to be one hell of a battle. The usual game of hide and seek."

"Ah-h, don't be so jittery, S-s-s-skin-nay," stuttered Buckets. "Be calm, l-l-l-like me."

"Who's jittery, ya big clown—'cept you, mebbe!"

Hollis broke in, "Be ready to move on signal. The worst is over—here. It'll be duck soup now!"

The thought of leaving their comparatively safe haven dampened the men into silence again.

"Wish I could take you with me, Holl," muttered Dick Fisher.

Dangerous moments were drawing near, and Hollis was preparing for a hasty farewell. He looked around his haven. He took out his picture of his loved ones, knowing too certainly that he looked upon his Terry for the last time. Even his conscience spoke against his idea in sullen whispers—stay—stay, don't leave this sandy, watery haven of a shell hole.

Then a whistle broke above the din, and the edge of the beach came alive as the raiders left cover suddenly and made a wild dash for the unknown. Each second could seem a lifetime for some—any second could end a lifetime for others.

They reached and penetrated into the jungle, a quagmire of sour, stinking mud—a death-trap of silent, lurking Japs. It was hard to breathe there in the warm dampness. Hollis had known the clammy agony of jungle fighting before, but

each experience seemed worse than the last. Soon his body was covered with sweat, mud, and water. He felt utterly miserable, but he knew there was only one thing to do—think of the battle and forget the drenched, crawling feeling that oozed humidly over him.

Once more, with sudden awfulness, bullets began to whine viciously overhead. Each man crouched with bated breath as volley after volley tore through the heavy foliage, spraying stinging mud around.

Sergeant Hollis Rochelle glanced quickly about at the men, noting each one's different reactions. Fisher squinting fearfully, Goldberg frowning in irritation at the delay, Rouse wide-eyed with excitement. Hollis tried to feel brave—he must set an example to keep the other men brave.

He led them on. Each step forward brought more danger and treacherous mud holes, and more bullets whistled over their heads and about them. They saw, a bit ahead and off to one side, a small line of men carrying heavy weapons begin to collapse like cards before an undiscovered sniper's deadly fire.

Hollis saw something like a shoe in a tree crotch a few feet away. He moved cautiously to the other side of the tree, and there he noticed a Jap just about ready to pounce on him, appearing as if dead. But Hollis knew by previous experience that he might be just feigning. Slowly, silently, and deliberately, Hollis grabbed one shoe and jerked it hard, causing the enemy to lose his balance, and like a flash of lightning, Hollis gave the Jap a rabbit punch to the nape of his neck with his .45 caliber. After a little struggle, Hollis got a good savage stronghold of the Nip's jugulars. A moment later, the air was snuffed out of him. His tongue was hanging

out, and his nose was bleeding, and his eyes bulged out like golf balls. Hollis watched his tongue turn a deep purple and hang out of his mouth. He gave an extra squeeze to make sure that he would no longer be able to shoot his buddies in the back. He let go of the Jap, and soon, he sank into the muddy quagmire.

Hollis swore and waved back all but his rifle-bearing companions. Deftly, they ferreted out the enemy snipers, who retaliated, taking a heavy toll. One by one, the dense treetops and twisted tropical growth yielded their concealed burdens. Even the sight of snipers hanging in apparent lifelessness from the bushy limbs was no guarantee to Hollis—only the realization that men like Goldberg and Rouse didn't miss gave him confidence that these snipers must be dead.

They pushed on deeper into the jungle. Every step seemed to be a new enemy, new fire from concealed Nips in different sections. Fire, which they promptly returned. Steadily, they eliminated the enemy and so moved onward.

Suddenly, Hollis was startled by a familiar sound only a few yards from where he plodded. He pushed toward it through knee-deep mud. He gasped, "Dear God, don't let it be!" But already he knew, as he looked in horror at Dick Fisher, his body almost totally immersed in the horrible clinging muck as he writhed helplessly and groaned, looking appealingly at Hollis.

"Goldberg! Over here! Help me get him!" Hollis cried, and Goldberg came splashing, wallowing, plodding to help him. They seized hold of the trapped man, gripping him under the armpits, firmly but as gently as possible. "That's

it! Easy on him, let's get him over to that side!" instructed Hollis.

They pulled slowly, steadily, powerfully. At first it seemed like a hopeless job—as though they would never manage to extricate their buddy, but finally Fisher's body came sucking slowly out of the mud. After that, it was only a matter of minutes before they had him entirely out, although he screamed in pain, especially at first.

Hollis talked soothingly to him all the while, assuring him that all would be all right. He hoped he wasn't going to be mistaken. But he was, for when they had the poor fellow out, he was still clutching his tiny crucifix desperately. Poor Fisher tried to speak, to thank them, but failed—it had been more than merely getting bogged down—he'd been injured—fatally. Red blood flowed freely from his head and mingled with the black ooze covering his chest. Suddenly, his dying eyes widened, and his final scream ended in a mad, delirious laugh that chilled the blood of his buddies. Then, with a sudden, painful gasp, his body sagged limp. There was no beat, no flicker of an eyelash. Fisher was dead.

"Damn Japs!" ejaculated Goldberg, hate seething within him, as he watched Hollis lay the still hand with its clutched crucifix over the still chest.

They rose after Hollis had spoken a few brief words as a sort of prayer for their dead buddy. Fisher's part was over, but the fighting continued. The two who still lived made their way back to the rest of their party, moving forward with them.

"Dead?" asked Wells soberly.

Hollis nodded. This fighting was a painfully slow process,

he thought, as he viewed the cautious fighters—one Jap at a time, an inch at a time forward. Wasn't there some better way? He kept his eyes darting constantly about him as he moved and thought the matter over. Finally, he pulled Wells close to himself and grated:

"We're wasting both time and men—there's a yellow-belly in that undergrowth somewhere, and he's holding us up."

"I'll get 'im, Sir," promised Wells, grimly.

But Hollis shook his head. "No, I'm moving ahead this time—you advance with the unit," he instructed. "When I get that damned monkey-wrench out of the works, we'll be able to move."

"Yes, Sir," agreed Wells sharply, and then, "Be careful, there's a river running through this swamp. We got to be past it before dark. But it's gonna be a helluva push, I want to do this as a personal favor for Dick Fisher—He got his from that direction. You understand. Be careful, Holly—that Jap may be three of 'em!"

Hollis winked and nodded to reassure him, then he crawled and slithered his torturous way forward through the gooey muck and jungle tangles.

"Never was any good at delegating," he muttered to himself. "Couldn't ask Wells to do a job I'm scared of myself. Gotta be damned careful now; no movement. Darn jungle grass is sharp! Just cut finger! Wait! Was that a movement just now? Gotta be careful, take it easy—can't shoot wildly! Damned Jap's in a better position than I am right now. Mustn't give away your position, Holly!"

But a split second later, Hollis knew the worst. The Jap had sensed his approach and circled to his left. He had

to shoot fast and sure—if his shot didn't find its mark, he wouldn't live to shoot another one. Digging in his elbow, he pivoted himself on his belly fast and fired with the instant accuracy that had resulted from long, careful training. But the Jap had sighted him and fired, too, at almost the same instant. A draw!

There came a sudden outcry from the direction of Hollis—"Oh! No! G—damn it"—as if it were torn out of his throat. He winced and recoiled as his head was jerked to one side by the bullet that struck his helmet and ricocheted into his head. He clenched his teeth and felt the warm blood draining down his face.

The impact felt like his head was being torn off his shoulders. The pain was gnawing, and his facial grimace was that of a knife that was twisting through his head. His face became flushed with exertion, and every line in his grimy face was taut.

With a terrific effort, he tried to lift himself up but couldn't.

His head and face fell into the stinking, gassy mud. In his bewildered state, he tried to groan and moan.

Seconds later, Wells and Rouse, pale as ghosts with fear, were at his side, and as they dragged Hollis out of the mud, Rouse said, "He'll be O.K. He's a tough guy."

Hollis did not seem to hear him. But moments later, his senses returned, but his wincing face showed that Hollis was suffering with excruciating pain.

From his position, Wells heard the two shots fired almost simultaneously but recognized that they were not from the same gun. Wells found Hollis where he lay, trying to roll over.

"Take it easy, Sergeant," Wells told him. "We'll have a stretcher under you in a second."

Buckets had followed Wells to where the wounded man lay. "Yeh, don't try to move none," he added, as he and Wells worked frantically, watching fearfully.

Hollis muttered triumphantly. "He got me, but I got him, too," and then he lost consciousness.

The blood continued to ooze down the side of his face. Fifteen yards to Hollis's left lay a Jap soldier. There was no sign of life in him. Hollis had fired first by an untimeable fraction of a second.

Hollis wouldn't know how feverishly these two men performed their labor of love. For a time, he was out, then in another world, a mixed-up world of memory and fantasy, at times back home—with mom and his brother, then with Terry—making love to her—their first kiss and then, later, saying farewell to her before he left—sad farewells to Terry, his mother—and others. He babbled hysterically in his sudden delirium, recalling Halloween time when he was knocking over outhouses with a gang, including his own outhouse. He saw his father lying on top of the chicken coop with a "gunny sack" filled with "crap" ready to unload on the boys. He came home stinking, which was followed by a good thrashing from his father.

Finally, he came out of it somewhat and heard a familiar voice tell him, "Boy!" Buckets.

"Wha—how in hell?" Hollis gasped, then sank back with a groan. Pain blinded him, and merciful unconsciousness again came to him. Sweat poured from his body, caked as it was with half-dry mud, congealed blood, and smeared again

and again with fresh red. His breathing became more and more labored.

His buddies had to work hard and fast. Wells got Hollis's medical kit that was strapped on his back and quickly cut through Hollis's shirt and injected a "hypo" to relieve him of pain. He mopped the wounded man's forehead free of mud, cobwebs, and blood, applied pressure, and packed the wound with sulfa powder. He finished the emergency job with a deft firm head dressing. Goldberg and Rouse raised the litter and started back to the beach. Wells returned to the unit. Their leader was gone, but they were fighting and slugging on their way all the harder for him now. Fighting was becoming more desperate and savage.

"Watch out for the booby traps. Get dem devils out of the holes wid the flame throwers," yelled Buckets, muttering a litany of curses against the Japanese Divine Emperor, the Japs, and the jungle, as the density of the growth and treachery of the earth made their passage painfully delicate.

"I'll never forget how he handled Freckles' gun," Rouse said finally.

"Ya, you sed id!" said Goldberg, whose knees were still quivering from the incident.

"We're gonna miss 'im, that's for sure," said Rouse.

They waded slowly through the lazy yard of stench and mud and reached the more friendly shore.

"You gonna be okay, Sarge," assured Buckets cheerfully as Hollis finally opened his eyes once more.

Hollis tried to smile. He couldn't feel anything.

"Over here!" came a shout from a barge. "Bring him over here, men."

The barge was already gunning its motors, ready to return for more supplies to its mothership.

"We might as well take him—he looks like he needs quick lookin' after—no use lettin' him be waitin'," muttered Moser, the crew's leader, sympathetically as Hollis was lowered gently into the Higgins barge by nurses Becker and Statts, and war correspondent Gerry Waindel, and Buckets.

"Rochelle! Rochelle!" yelled the excited Waindel, with a look of astonishment on his face. He read the name tag on Hollis's neck. With his burned fingertips, he took another glance at the name tag to see if he was "seeing things." It rang a bell. "Sure! Sure! Holy Smokes! I remember this fellow," he blurted out. "Is it actually Rochelle? Yes, that is Rochelle alright."

Hollis Rochelle perked up and tried to move his head and open his eyes in the direction of Waindel's voice.

"Yeah! Yeah! You came out of nowhere, thundering down the final stretch at the State-Marquette track meet," added Waindel.

"Hey! Hey!" Gerry Waindel grinned broadly as he patted Hollis on the shoulder. "You know me. I'm Waindel—from State."

Hollis made an attempt to open his unbandaged, swollen eye and tried to remember the event. His mind was befuddled by the "hypo," and he tried to speak, but the sounds and cries of battle, of whining bullets and savage shelling, drowned out Waindel's voice.

After a moment of hesitation, Hollis mustered a thin smile upon his muddy, blood-crusted face and tried to say, "Hi-a-h, Ya-a beat me by a—no-o-s-e."

"He'll make it. He's got the guts and stamina of a great finisher."

"S'long, fellas," whispered Hollis weakly. "Thanks, see yuh 'round, huh?"

"You bet. We see you quick, okay!" Buckets assured Hollis.

"Take it easy, Holly," added Rouse sympathetically as they watched the barge begin to move off the beach and out to the hospital ship.

Then, just as the Higgins' motors opened wide with a mighty roar, an even louder sound thundered to the right of the small ship. An adjacent barge, just coming in, had struck a shore mine. Simultaneously, a helicopter out of control landed alongside the barge, spewing uncontrollably and panicking the entire sea, land, and sky area with its fiery and watery death. So tremendous was the impact that the barge carrying the wounded Hollis was spun completely around, knocking out the coxswain, nurses, and the crew on the wheel deck into the sea and leaving Hollis alone in the crippled barge, again rendered unconscious. Its labored motors ran away in a crazy, helpless fashion, narrowly missing the Eagle's mate—a death trap which was heavily loaded with 2,000 pounds of bombs filled with gasoline and other ammunition—through perilous, whirling waters. Through oily ocean water ignited by shell bursts, the unguided craft pushed its blind way, each swell bringing splashing flames tossing in upon Hollis's helpless figure.

But an unerring Providence guided the madly charging barge as it channeled its way between treacherous reefs and floating debris. Through flaming pinnacles plumed with

burning oil, it finally plunged into the open sea, leaving behind it the noises of battle and carrying with it a single life. Tossed and rolled on monstrous swells, the ship became a speck on the horizon and finally vanished from view, far away from that island of death, suffering, and horror.

CHAPTER TWO

Battle with Death

High noon saw Hollis awake in the bottom of the barge. He lay dazedly for some time, gazing bewilderingly about him, trying to recall all that had happened. Why didn't he hear voices? Sounds of battle? The tropical sun beat hotly on his skin. He called out weakly, but no one answered. He raised himself just a trifle, trying to look about him. "God!" He was all alone in the barge, and the barge was apparently far out at sea. How did this ever happen? He asked himself. Gradually, he remembered some things—how some of his buddies had found him after he got the Jap sniper, who got him, too! They patched him up as best they could and carried him back to the beach, got him into the barge, and then returned to the attack, leaving the barge crew to carry on. He'd started out with them, back to the mothership—then there had been that awful explosion—yes, that must've been it. Knocked him out again, and it must have gotten the crew of the barge, too. And so—somehow, he had floated on and on, away—somewhere out to sea—away from the battle.

He lay limp, barely able to move, in the bottom of the barge—thinking, trying to think, trying to summon up strength enough to help himself, to do something—blacking out into merciful unconsciousness at times. The sea was

placid, and the rocking of the barge on its surface lulled Hollis into a natural sleep most of the time. There was a lull in the air most of that day. If he had been home, it was one of those days when he would always say, "It's a great day to be alive." Now Hollis thought how wonderful yet how unnatural it was to be so quiet and peaceful. The sea lay calm, deep blue to purple in color. Fleecy clouds drifted overhead. The barge drifted aimlessly, as it seemed, though perhaps the hand of God was guiding it, watching over the injured man in the boat. The motor wasn't running, having long before run out of fuel.

If only I could get up enough strength to move under some shelter, Hollis thought, striving hard to summon enough strength for the effort. His uncovered skin was as red as a boiled lobster, and whatever cracks were left in his skin were filled with caking white brine. He was helpless, hurting all over, his tortured body feeling like it had been trampled on by a herd of elephants and then put in an oven to roast for dinner. Feebly, he managed to rub both sides of his chest with his hands. It hurt terribly.

Hollis's swollen eyes would scarcely open. He couldn't hold his bandaged head up—the effort was too much for him. Everything whirled about him and turned it black.

"Look, Hollis, I know you saw me breaking into the Dean's office to get those tests, but nobody need know about it. Right, Hollis, old pal? You wouldn't want your future brother-in-law thrown out of school, would you?"

"Cecil, if you want to know the plain truth, I don't give a good damn what happens to you," said Hollis.

"Cecil, go upstairs. Let me talk to Holly alone," said Terry. Cecil left the room. "Holly, you know how important the family name is to me. If the school found out, why, Mother, Father, and I wouldn't be able to stick our necks out of the house. It would be terrible, Holly. We couldn't go anywhere or do anything. I'd be so upset, I'm sure I couldn't ever go out anymore."

She took his hand and led him over to the couch, where they sat down—she still holding his hand and now resting her head on his shoulder. "Oh! Holly, won't you do this as a special favor for me? Please promise you won't tell anyone what you saw."

"Okay, Terry, I give you my word."

The night deepened, Hollis lay in the bottom of the barge like a dead man, yet he knew he was alive—a sort of zombie, Hollis thought. The smell of death hung over him like the stench of a long-dead fish. But he, for a time, welcomed the cool of night—the absence of that torturing sun. But Hollis felt terribly alone except for the stars, the moon, and yes, of course, the Lord above, watching over him—knowing his torment. Surely, some succor would be sent to him. "Merciful Lord," he prayed silently. He could hardly move his blood-coated, parched lips. His arms felt as if they weighed tons when he tried to lift them. But with a superhuman effort, he managed slowly and painfully to make a clumsy sign of the cross.

Then he stared into the black night about him, wondering if he would ever again see daylight. As delirium came to torment him further, he thought he saw weird, ominous

shadows flitting about him, stealing up on him—devil-Japs coming to the flaming waves to torture him. He thought he heard strange voices taunting him. "Let me out! God, give me strength to be up and at 'em again," he prayed.

"Hollis Rochelle, several people said that they saw you near the Dean's office at the time it was entered, and the final examination papers stolen. Moreover, a search of your room revealed most of the missing tests. Can you explain how they got there?"

"No, sir."

"Were they brought there by your roommate, Cecil Perry?"

Hollis began to sweat. His palms were damp where he gripped the arm of his chair. "No, sir."

"Hollis, in view of the evidence, I'm afraid that despite your heretofore excellent record, this board must recommend your dismissal from the graduate school."

During the night, a new torture—hunger—came to gnaw at his empty stomach. He groaned and called weakly for food and water—but there was no one to bring him any. His tongue was swollen and felt stiff and dry as a piece of long-standing toast.

He wouldn't give up, though, fighting on in spirit, and finally the sun came up to comfort him a bit at first, warming his body chilled during the cold, clammy night hours, and then to torture him as it poured its blazing, merciless rays steadily down on him. His face and unclothed portions of his

body burned and reddened, becoming more swollen by the hour.

"Water, water! For Christ's sake!" he pleaded feebly in his semi-conscious state. He thought he saw snowflakes fluttering down from above him and, for a time, made a concentrated effort to catch some of them in his mouth. They seemed as big as silver dollars. He thought he felt the warmth of burning logs in a fireplace—he was back home again with the smiling faces of his mother and Terry looking at him.

"Mother, believe me, I didn't steal those exams. I had nothing at all to do with that."

"I trust you, Hollis. I only hope that the truth is as important to you as it always has been to me, and always for your father."

Hollis winced. It was like being transfixed with a javelin. "I'm going to join the Marines, Mother. I've been slack in my duty long enough."

The morning passed, although he knew little of time—sometime in the afternoon, he felt a wind overhead. It afforded some little blessed relief. The air became cooler as the breeze increased, and small swells rolled and pushed the barge faster and faster. The coolness was wonderfully refreshing. He managed to raise his hands to his eyes and felt the incredibly puffed lids—tried to move them but couldn't.

From the east, ominous dark clouds appeared, which

filled half of the sky overhead. He tried to lick his lips and move them but couldn't. They were swollen, dry, hot, and cracked. Then once more, a heavy, impenetrable fog came over him, and again he began to hear sounds—strange sounds and voices. His body twisted clumsily as he thought he saw his childhood neighbor chasing him angrily and scolding him for having stolen apples from his orchard.

Again, with a mighty effort, he tried to force his eyes open. He got them open only a narrow slit and saw only eerie lightning flashes zigzagging across the heavens. Then, a terrific clap of thunder followed. He thought he heard more voices, one more clearly and close to him than all the rest, saying comfortingly, "Darling, don't let this little episode ruin your life—why, it's so revolting. Your mother knows best, Terry, darling!" And then that voice wasn't so comforting to him—it was telling Terry not to moan and fret over having lost Hollis. He was gone now, and there was nothing that could be done to bring him back. She might as well resign herself to the fact and look about for new pleasures, making new plans for her future with one of the other 4-F lovers who were constantly trying to get dates with her back home, now that Hollis was gone—and would never be back with her to take up again where they had left off.

Angrily, Hollis tried to get up, but there was no support to cling to, to help him in his efforts. Each pitch and toss of the barge threw him against the hard bulkhead, stunning him into semi-consciousness. He seemed to hear more sounds—low, mumbling sounds, seeming as if they came through a long tunnel. "Where are you going?"

He said or thought he said pleadingly, "Terry—Terry! Help me! Do you hear me? Do something! Do something!"

He tried to relax, to listen as though Terry could reply. He thought he heard her say something. Only the wind howled about the tossing barge, growing stronger, the swells were now greater in size, twisting the angry water to a frothy white.

God! How thirsty and hungry he was. How his tortured stomach ached and called for food, and his dry lips, tongue, and throat for water. But he was all alone without anyone to bring him anything and powerless to help himself. No one to take pity on him—no one wanted him but DEATH, hovering gloatingly over him, waiting, waiting!

Then came a sudden, blessed downpour of rain. First in drops and a few moments later in sheets. He felt it and welcomed it at first, for the rain soothed his scorched skin and wet his lips, which he managed to open as much as possible so that the rain would enter and soothe his parched lips, tongue, mouth, and throat. He swallowed again, slowly at first; some measure of relief and new strength came to him. The cool, fresh air drove away much of his mental cloud. The air became more free. His breathing became easier. The rain cooled him, too, bathed and refreshed his hurt body—soothed his swollen, tortured eyelids and eyes, bathed his swollen, seemingly roasted face and hands.

Then, finally, he began to realize this new danger as he lay in an ever-rising pool of rainwater and ocean water that had splashed over the sides of the barge. The craft tossed more violently in the roaring, rushing, fierce gusts of wind, almost of hurricane force. He sensed the barge was bounding along with greater velocity. The mad sea churned in many places about the barge, and the sheets of salt water sprayed and spouted, throwing columns high into the air

and into the tossing barge, slowly filling it. His new danger became greater, more torturing—was he to be drowned like a helpless cat in a sack by the very elements that had at first seemed so mercifully comforting to him in his plight?

His vision became dimmer with each concussion that knocked his head up against the bulkhead. Each forceful splash of the water lessened the volume of his moans. Yet dimly conscious, he felt as though he was again bleeding from his head wound. And again, he seemed to hear sounds—strange sounds and voices.

His subconscious urged him to do something. He must or die! With a prodigious grunt, he tried to prop up his burned body out of the pool of water. He made a feeble attempt to stretch his swollen, aching arms in front of him as though to sweep something aside. His head was again cruelly bashed against the bulkhead by a large wave.

Again, he lay on the deck like a dead man. The Empire of Death raged and fumed around his floating prison. Death hovered over him and sat in state—waiting, gazing at him with a hungry look.

Hollis attempted to cling to the bulkhead and find a hole to help pull himself up. There just wasn't a thing to cling to. The bandage on his head was dripping blood again.

He didn't particularly like visiting the Perry mansion. He didn't see how Terry could be such a sweet kid with a bum like Cecil for a brother and a dominant, busybody mother. Her father wasn't too bad, he thought. Not as clannish as the mother, but even with all his money, he wasn't much of a man. Hollis was going overseas, leaving for the South Pacific. This might be the last time he would ever see Terry. They had a wonderful day riding horses across the Perry acres.

For a while, he felt very contented for the first time in over a year—since he had been expelled from State.

He and Terry were curled up before the fire. "I love you, Terry. I want you to wait for me."

"I'll be here, Holly. There's no one I'll ever love besides you."

He sank back weakly. There was danger all about him, although he no longer felt that death was waiting impatiently, ready to carry him off from this world of the living. The hurricane-like winds still blew and roared about the barge, and the sea fumed and pitched the barge sickeningly, in mad fury. Then suddenly, Hollis felt the craft come to a rasping, grinding, wrenching halt—he felt a tremendous impact against the bottom. Instinctively, he realized it had struck a snag, a reef—and he could no longer be far out at sea.

He saw over the edge, as seconds later, a wildly rushing breaker lashed the helpless barge again against the jagged reef, knocking a hole in its bottom. More water gushed in. But the barge had been cast up higher now—the waves now just rocked the barge to and fro until it became perched on top of the reef, driven there by one of the mountainous waves. Not much more water poured in now. Hollis sighed with relief and new hope.

But it wasn't over yet. The wind shifted suddenly, and the storm was broken, as if it realized it could do no more harm to the reprieved soldier. The rain ceased to pour down. The sea became calmer. Hollis, through swollen eyelids, peered through the thick mist until gradually it began to dissipate, and with it the many strange figures faded and blew away, and the dreadful, accusing voices ceased to denounce and torment him. His delirium left him, but with the return of

reason, he realized that he was still in a precarious position and in a bad physical state. He saw the fading storm passing toward the horizon. Then, his eyes were blessed with the cheering sight of a beautiful rainbow hanging in the East. The washed air was cool and invigorating to his wrecked body. He breathed deeply. He continued to feast his eyes on the beautiful scene about him.

From the tilted boat, he saw he had reached land! The gorgeous emerald landscape of this haven was a wonderful feast for his eyes and soul. The lagoon between the reef and the white beach began to reflect the tinted light of the sun now from the tropical foliage-covered hillside. And as he stared, almost in disbelief at his good luck, he saw a village of thatched huts grouped under the coconut trees. There must be people here.

Valiantly, Hollis struggled to rise to his feet by clinging to the side of the boat. He lost his hold as a wave jarred the barge, and he was precipitated headfirst upon the partially water-covered deck. With great pain and effort, he managed to keep his head above the water level as he fought to stay alive. He surveyed his exposed portions of his body and felt new alarm as he saw it had begun to turn from the former bright red to a shallow blue. The bleeding had started again, too, and he felt his blood trickling down his puffed face.

Finally, Hollis felt strong enough to make another attempt to get to his feet, but again, another wave jerked the barge, knocking him off balance so that his head was bashed up hard against an iron rod. Again, he slumped to the deck and into the water. Though the air had been knocked out of him, he struggled determinedly. Each painful breath

seemed as though it would be his last as air bubbles floated to the top. Still, forced on by his subconscious, Hollis fought to live, to keep his head above water, to fight to raise himself.

The last beams of day played over the barge; the lower part now wrapped in the obscurity of twilight.

Some Polynesian fishermen were returning from their work in a protected cove with their day's catch and chanced to see the barge. The natives signaled excitedly to those on the shore, and the noise of tom-toms soon filled the air, the sound registering faintly in Hollis's throbbing brain. This gave him new strength and determination, and he somehow managed to crawl to the shallow end of the barge. He forgot how his head and body ached. In the excitement of hope, his bruised, burned body and torn, bleeding fingers no longer pained him.

Hoping, praying, waiting impatiently, how he had waited as the fishermen came in their canoes to the barge to rescue him, and other natives flocked to the scene from the land. It seemed like ages, he thought, before they finally reached him. Even now, it seemed so near to coming through the jaws of death, a last desperate attempt was being made to seize his soul. He fought with all his strength to keep consciousness, though, and the tension and feeling of hovering death ready to pounce on him and carry him off, left him. But at last, he sank into a deep, sound sleep.

Strange sounds broke through to him. Voices spoke in a language he had never heard before. He tried vainly to speak. His face felt lifeless as he tried to open his eyes again and move his lips, but he was unable to move.

Still, he felt reassured and better. They sounded friend-

ly. Their actions were gently helpful, he realized as the mental clouds of fog lifted from his brain, and he became conscious of the natives working over him. They lifted him with as much care as possible so as not to cause him needless pain from where he lay half submerged, and laid him on a higher, drier spot and pumped a quantity of water from his lungs. He coughed and, after each violent wrenching spasm, expelled more water from his lungs. Gradually, he felt better and moaned and mumbled and tried instinctively to squirm out of the arms of the natives as they carried him from the waterlogged barge to their canoe. They paddled it fast across the placid waters of the lagoon, as a native runner summoned help from the large house on the hill.

"Hurry! Hurry! Get LaGuna to come as soon as possible, urgently," spoke Negu.

Bonai left the scene to get help.

LaGuna loved to sit at the feet of her grandfather and listen to him for long hours as he told of his days in London and Paris. Born in a small village in Kent, England, he had left his native land to pursue man's highest civilized pleasure—the arts. He had known Matisse and had even once been introduced to Gauguin before he had become famous and left civilization. In those mad years of his early 20s, he married a French girl and promptly changed his name and became French because he felt no one could be successful in the arts if he were thought to be English. He called himself Le Philippe. When his wife died soon after their marriage, he spent five years of concerted dissipation trying to forget her. Despite his lavish spending, he acquired a modest

fortune through his successful portrait painting and some commissioned statues of French generals. At the turn of the Century, he became disgusted with the stupidity of a civilization that wallowed in materialism and became a self-appointed minister of religion and left France to bring Christianity to the natives of Polynesia. His art and his personal magnetism endeared him to the natives. He established a successful mission, spent most of his time talking to LaGuna, now in French, now in English, or puttering around with his paintings in the house.

The morning after the storm, Le Philippe had told his granddaughter about how he had fallen in love with her grandmother and how she, nearing her 18th birthday, would someday soon also fall in love. "Your grandmother was the most beautiful girl on Banika," he said in familiar words, for he had told LaGuna this story many times. But a knock whose intensity told them that something important had happened interrupted their talk. It was a frantic knock on the door, and abruptly, Le Philippe stopped his musings.

"Who is it?" queried the white-haired old artist.

"It is Bonai," replied Le Philippe's excited chief aide.

Bonai is the traditional name of the fiercest fish in the tropical waters, and he was very proud of his name. Then, at the old man's bidding, he entered, out of breath and delivered his message quickly in pidgin English. "We find, sick man—white, in boat!"

"Sick bad, Bonai?" asked the old artist and sculptor, stroking his neatly trimmed, pointed beard.

"Yes, we need LaGuna. She help make him well," Bonai exclaimed with a vigorous nod of his head, which set the large gold rings dangling from the lobes of his ears to dancing.

"Quick, LaGuna, go with him. Go to the mouth of the lagoon, Bonai, and have the man taken to the other house. It is too far to carry him here. And have your wife prepare the house for immediate occupancy. 'Scoot!'"

Bonai scooted to perform his mission.

Also nodding a quick assent, LaGuna turned and hurried away to the lagoon where the friendly natives had already carried Hollis from their native outrigger and placed him upon a deep, soft, makeshift bed of leaves and branches. A crowd had gathered about watching the sick man.

LaGuna pushed her way quickly through the excited crowd and knelt down beside the injured man, gasping and crying out in pity at the blood-smeared face and blood caked with oil and mud. She had not expected to see anyone in such a gruesome condition. She felt over his tortured body and face tentatively to determine the extent of his injuries—his body was hot, yet it felt so cold to LaGuna's tender hands. She could barely feel his feeble pulse. His mouth had fallen open. He lay like one already beyond help. She watched his chest—it did not move for a short time, then, as he suddenly managed to take a deep breath, inhaling the freshness and fragrance of the air and tropical flowers about where he lay, he showed promising signs of life. The natives watched fascinated, some standing, others squatted upon their haunches.

LaGuna lifted him up a little and adjusted his blood-soaked bandage with great tenderness. He opened his eyes and gazed wonderingly at the beautiful girl bent so concernedly over him as though still hardly able to believe his eyes—that she wasn't just another figment of his delirious imagination. Then, as she spoke comfortingly to him, he

tried feebly to smile and mutter. “Thanks, Angel! Now I know I’ll get well—live! Or am I already dead and in heaven, and you—a—heavenly angel?”

She smiled bewitchingly at him and put a finger gently on his lips. “You are hurt badly! Rest, do not try to speak now,” she told him. “But now you are among friends, and I have helped heal many. I will help you get well and strong again, too.” But he had fainted again before he heard her words.

She turned from him to one of the natives hovering close by. “Tai, you get the iron hot. We must stop the bleeding. Negu! Bonai! Take his feet, and I will help hold his head,” she instructed others, too, and they raised Hollis gently. She held his head tenderly, caring not that blood still oozed from about and through the bandage onto her hands. “Be careful not to jar him. Take him to my hut.”

They carried him as carefully as they could to the girl’s hut with the other natives following excitedly through a well-kept garden plot of ferns, flowering bushes, and shading coconut palms. When they reached the small, thatched hut, LaGuna bade one of the natives run ahead to hold the door open for them to carry Hollis within. The other women who had been commissioned were already getting things in readiness.

“Here, take him in here,” LaGuna instructed, as Nana, Bonai’s wife, pushed a reed-type chair off to one side to make room for them to carry Hollis into the bedroom. “Be careful how you put him down.” And she helped the men carefully stretch out Hollis’s semi-conscious, dirty body upon the old oil cloth-covered bed.

This done to the girl’s satisfaction, she thanked the men

and shooed them out. “He must have room and fresh air,” she declared, watching each labored breath the injured man was taking.

She turned inquiringly to Nana, the housekeeper of her grandfather. “Is everything ready?”

“Yes,” replied Nana, busily engaged in passing in and out of the hut, bringing dishes and pans and filling them with hot water. Tai, LaGuna’s maid, had previously kindled a fire and now helped pour the hot water from an iron container that hung over the fire.

LaGuna took hold of the situation like a veteran. She removed Hollis’s battle-scarred, wet, and burned remnants of clothing carefully. Hollis woke up and saw her. He groaned with the pain of the activity on his sensitive, burned skin.

“Do not worry—I am just your nurse now and only interested in doing what must be done to help you get well,” she assured him and went on with the job. She called to Tai, “Hurry to Le Philippe and fetch me some sleeping medicine!”

As she dashed off to get it, LaGuna swiftly tore up some white, clean linen to be used for bandages. She carefully removed the blood and mud-soaked bandage from Hollis’s head and face, a face covered with a stubby, stiff beard black as ink. She thoroughly examined all his cuts, bruises, and injuries. The bleeding head injury was the worst, and she set out to stop the life-ebbing flow first of all.

“Where is that iron?” she asked impatiently.

“Coming!” Tai flew into the room.

As she applied the hot iron to the bleeding wound, Hollis winced, and his body writhed because of the great agony. But he realized it had to be even as he tried to draw away

and smelt his own seared flesh and blood. She got it over as quickly and efficiently as possible, speaking comfortingly to him the while, sympathizing with his suffering and telling him he was so brave. He felt no relief as she softened the blood and caked mud with warm coconut oil. Then, as some natives brought in large, freshly cut branches from which a clear, watery liquid exuded, LaGuna took them quickly and squeezed the irrigating fluid into the head injury carefully, and it immediately soothed and relaxed his suffering. Then, having cleansed the wound, she sponged off his entire body and covered his bruised and blistered body with more oil. Again, he opened his eyes, and staring pathetically at her, he moved his lips. She gave him a cool drink of coconut milk, being very careful to let him have it sip by sip. He muttered his gratitude. As she gently wiped the grime from his singed and swollen eyelids, eyebrows, and lips, she noticed that beneath the sun-scorched face, he was pale. He must have lost much blood, LaGuna realized. He should have something to bring back his strength promptly, and called to Tai, who had just returned with the sedative, to bring some very potent old wine. He could smell the alcoholic spirit of the wine. She gave him but a wee sip with some of the sedative and then poured more of the wine into a white cloth and proceeded to touch up all his bruises and open wounds. Under the sting of it, he gritted his teeth and groaned again, especially when at times she touched a very sensitive spot. His fever was mounting uncomfortably high.

But the bleeding had stopped, for the wound was well seared. He was breathing much better, and his condition was quite improved. But the girl continued to work, cleaning

his bleeding fingertips. Several of the fingernails had been torn or burned off. LaGuna gently massaged palm oil into them; then applied it soothingly over his entire seared body. This done, the girl turned her attention to trying to find any evidence of identification and discovered only his dog tag, which hung from his neck. She scrutinized it carefully.

Finally, she rebandaged his head wound, then stood up and surveyed him, having done all she could just then. "I hope he will live," she murmured softly.

"He will," assured Nana, standing beside her. "All he will need now will be food and drink and sleep—and—love."

Hollis heard vaguely, wondered at the incongruity of these islanders speaking English, and smiled up gratefully, adoringly, into the beautiful girl's tender eyes and then slept—a natural, calm, peaceful sleep.

Only then did LaGuna leave him to go report to her grandfather. He was eager to know all he could about the injured white man, and she told him all she knew.

"His name is Hollis Rochelle—from the United States of America. The U.S.M.C. identification tag didn't say more," LaGuna told her grandfather. "There are figures on it, but I don't know what they mean. He also had a keepsake with writing on it—a picture—probably—his mother," she added.

Her grandfather smiled and asked, "What did the writing say?"

"It said," LaGuna informed him, "Prepare yourself to do God's work. Trust in Him."

"H-m-m-m," mused the painter, raising and wrinkling his white eyebrows as the light crept into his failing eye. "I hope he makes it. Such a man, with such a mother and such

a message, deserves to." He smiled, and some of the wrinkles left his still handsome, benign face.

"I have neglected your supper," LaGuna apologized suddenly.

"Never mind me now. Return to your patient."

"Just as you say, grandfather. I'll make up for this tomorrow." She leaned over to kiss the aged artist on his forehead.

LaGuna, followed by Mugzy, her faithful dog, hastened with long strides back to the hut. She noiselessly entered the cabin and tiptoed to Hollis's bed. She observed his every breath and movement. "Do you feel better now?"

Hollis heard her faintly and tried to move his swollen lips. It was hard to think clearly, to speak, although he tried to. He was still so dazed, so worn out, that he soon lapsed into sleep again. This time, he tossed about and groaned and tried to sit up. LaGuna was always quickly at his bedside to restrain his efforts and to soothe him. She wondered who he meant when he mumbled incoherently a name—T-e-r-r-y, T-e-r-r-y!

"Here, drink this so you will feel better in the morning," she said tenderly. Hollis obeyed childlike as the refreshing liquid slipped past his bruised lips. LaGuna placed the cup on a nearby table with one hand and held his back with the other. Hollis tried to muster a faint smile. With extreme effort, he was able to hold only one slit-like eye open to gaze on his Angel. What a beauty she was! Her hair was jet black and luxuriant. Her eyes were dark brown and looked full of life and passion. Her smile was warm and tender, showing even, white teeth. She looked more European than Polynesian.

Sometimes he became very noisy and cried out in a period

of mental storm and confusion. LaGuna did not close an eye. Sleep was impossible. She hovered over him, caressing him, administering soothing medications, primitive but effective, when she felt they would help. She listened carefully to his breathing, fearing that he might suffer a relapse and die after all.

But his pulse was growing ever stronger, and his breathing grew more regular, less labored. But it hurt a girl to see her patient suffering so in such a helpless condition. She wondered how any man could be so sick, so sorely wounded and still remain alive.

She would fan him at times, moisten his lips, and apply more soothing oil to his body. By morning, she was completely worn out, and Nana took over the job, promising to call LaGuna the moment there was any sign of relapse or should Hollis awaken and call for her.

But Hollis slept on all that day, waking only briefly at times, when Nana would give him a few sips of coconut milk to satisfy his thirst and strengthen him.

At nightfall, LaGuna again returned to him, and Hollis, opening his eyes, smiled faintly at the nearness of her lovely young body bending over him in the dim light to treat his wounds. Off to one side of her, he saw flowers and a candle, burning with a small, flickering flame. It cast a reflection of a crucifix over her bosom. He knew then that all would be well and smiled up gratefully at her, then, with the faint smile still on his haggard face again, he fell back into a deep sleep. Outside in the hibiscus trees, the owls hooted mournfully, and night birds sang sweetly.

CHAPTER THREE

Island Life

It was another day and a night before Hollis finally began to feel really slept out and reasonably sure of being on the road to recovery. LaGuna centered her entire interest, attention, and prayers on her patient. He was washed clean now and anointed often with healing oils. She could see that he was a really handsome man, or would be—had once been, and would be again, once his swollen and torn body was healed and the lines of torture were gone from his face. She was tempted to shave Hollis, then decided to wait until he was further along the road to recovery.

She was well pleased that he'd gotten along so well thus far. "How do you feel?" she asked him when he opened his eyes and looked at her with a more normal, rational gaze than before.

He stretched not in pain, but naturally to limber himself. He felt better, but at best he still felt as though a tank had run over and crushed his body.

"I—feel plenty tough yet, but I know I could feel much worse, or—not feel anything at all! Where am I? Who are you? How is it you speak English? You don't look like a Polynesian. Are you?"

She laughed, "So many questions! You will likely be with me—with us, here on our island, a long time," she told him. "There will be much time still to talk—much time in which

you must rest, and I will continue to do all I can to make you well—make you like you were before. I prayed much for your recovery, and I believe the Lord has helped; has done His work."

And to himself, he thought, yes, and the Lord has quite an assistant.

She told him a little about herself, Le Philippe, and their life here on the island. As she did, she tested out his injuries. The worst one on the head—feeling it, changing the dressing—putting soothing oil and medicaments on other bruises and cuts—on the sunburned skin, soothing juice squeezed from a cut branch of a tree—into his eyes. It was marvelous how it soothed and healed them so that his eyes felt hardly any pain and became brighter, and he saw things much more clearly—the handsomely furnished room and especially the beautiful girl who had saved his life.

She couldn't help noticing that he was looking at her and was secretly pleased that Hollis should find her attractive. Perhaps he would stay here with her people on the island for a long time—perhaps, even, always. And—but she shook her head; foolish, romantic young girl—she mustn't think like this; at least, not so soon, she chided herself.

She made him rest; ordered him not to try to talk too much as yet. He would recover his old strength just that much sooner. She brought him some pineapple juice, which he drank with satisfaction, smacking his lips. By now, she felt she could also risk giving him other things to eat—not really solids as yet, but at least things a bit more substantial, such as boiled rice—and plenty of coconut milk. She helped Hollis eat and drink, in fact, practically fed him like a baby

with a spoon to help him conserve his strength. He loved it and so did she—they were drawn to one another irresistibly, although Hollis felt a bit guilty at times when he thought of Terry back home. Maybe she had long ago given up hearing from him. Perhaps that was a sensible thing for any girl to do anyway, with this terrible war's outcome so doubtful, with undoubtedly a long time to pass before he or any of the other men would have finished their job and be able to return to their wives and sweethearts.

But again—these women knew that they and the homes were what their men were away fighting for. Without that faith in them, how could the men continue to do their best in fighting on to win?

Yet, too, the women knew that many of their men, naturally, being only human, would be having little or big affairs with other girls they met where they were stationed—perhaps their hearts wouldn't always be in it but the sex urge is strong and driving; and under stress a man found relief in the delicacy of a woman, in the hope of love, lost for a moment far from the reality of combat, men, and death.

Hollis couldn't escape the realization that LaGuna was a very lovely young girl—with beauty, culture, refinement, somehow, even though she had evidently lived on this island all her life—and was part white, part native. No high society girl in the States could have been more kindly and self-sacrificing, tending a man in his position. In fact, many would never have even begun to do as much.

As he grew better slowly, she told him more and more things he wanted to know—where he was, for instance.

"You are on Banika," she informed him. "That is the name of our small island, giving it especially beautiful rocks,

sand, jungle, beautiful flowers, sweet singing birds, and even wonderful mountains."

"Very few white men come here. The last were before the war—some Dutch scientists who left when the Japanese started their conquests. But we are glad we are so small and unimportant to them, because the war has not touched us much."

He smiled, thinking that she sounded like the welcoming committee from the Chamber of Commerce. They were interrupted by the approach of a native boy in his early 20s.

"And," she continued, "this is Negu, son of Bonai and a great seaman. He is one of Le Philippe's most valuable men. Negu found you in your boat, washed up on the reef. You were badly injured and almost drowned from lashing around helplessly on the bottom of the boat. He and his fisherman companions brought you to shore in their canoe—and then, as you lay there—I came in and had the men bring you here to my hut."

He smiled at Negu, who grunted back at him.

"Here, drink some of this," she said, handing Hollis a glass of wine with some sedative.

How wonderful it felt to Hollis to be treated like this. But he felt guilty because he couldn't get back to his men and again do his part in the fight.

LaGuna left him then with a spring in her step and a song in her heart to return to her grandfather. On the way up the stairs, she heard Le Philippe thumping his cane, fretfully awaiting her arrival.

"It's about time you came, my young lady. I've begun to worry about you."

Because of his failing sight, Le Philippe told Hollis how his lovely granddaughter would read to him. He praised her highly, hinting that she would make a wonderful wife for the lucky man who got her. She was 17 now, and it was time she began to think of love and romance and settling down.

The girl blushed as she overheard her grandfather speak of her. Hollis squirmed a bit uneasily, too, although he found the girl very desirable and he knew he owed her a lot—his life in fact.

She read aloud to him often—sometimes to both him and her grandfather when Le Philippe came to visit—while they smoked Le Philippe's fine, hand-carved meerschaum pipes. In their talks, Hollis learned Le Philippe's strange story—his flight from civilization.

While Hollis slept, LaGuna often visited Le Philippe at his great house set higher up than LaGuna's on the hillside. It was perched upon a point with the sea providing a beautiful view on both sides and overlooking the gorgeous jungle growth of beautiful flowers and shrubs, and the fine, hard, and soft wood trees. It was a strongly built, comfortable house set in a large, beautifully kept lawn and garden.

Here, "Old Fulipe," as the artist was called by the natives, lived—and his granddaughter had been his favorite, almost constant companion for the past few years, since her father, Le Philippe's son, and a former chieftain, died, gored by a wild boar. Her mother, French, left Banika with sailors after his death, leaving her daughter as the only memory of her strange love for an island prince. Here, LaGuna had come to read aloud to her grandfather and helped keep house—do special cooking of meals at times for him. His only other much-loved companion was his faithful dog Mugzy, one of

a line of German shepherds brought by Le Philippe when he first came to Banika. Le Philippe had had great plans for a fine European schooling, an extensive education, for his granddaughter, as he had provided her father before her. But when war broke out, he thought better of the plan and dropped it and continued giving the girl as much education as he himself could manage.

The girl was intelligent—a great comfort and morale builder, genteel—and beautiful, with the figure of a young woman of 21 and the wisdom of a mature woman.

Yes, as the grandfather said, LaGuna would make some lucky man a fine wife. Hollis couldn't help keeping that thought in mind as the days passed and he grew stronger; his injuries continued to heal remarkably well. He found himself very happy and contented when she was with him and very lonely and miserable when she had to be away from him.

But Hollis wasn't the only man on the island to think this about the girl—young Negu, not much older than the girl, had long realized her fine charms—admired her and yearned for her—hoped he could someday win her when she was ready to be wooed and won and enter into marriage. Now, as the sick white man continued to stay at the girl's hut and she continued to nurse him and center all her interest in her patient, he felt he could read love in her eyes for this white man and became very jealous and miserable. Once, he happened to look through the doorway as she tended Hollis, hovering low over him, and he was sure she had kissed her patient and accused her angrily.

She protested indignantly. "Why should it concern you, Negu? We have always been only friends—never speaking

love, have we, Negu? But I do not admit I am in love with the white man—I tend to him because he is so sick—no one else could do for him as I have and must still do. I feel sorry for him."

Negu was in the habit of passing the hut's door as LaGuna tended the sick man. One day, he stopped her as she approached the outdoor fireplace. He seemed agitated; he eyed her. She had never seen Negu's eyes so blazing.

"Good morning, LaGuna," he said with a mocking sneer. He took hold of her hand and gave it a squeeze. LaGuna drew it away. She looked at it. It was white. She rubbed the pain out of it.

"Good morning, Negu," she said, eyeing and regarding him with much irritation.

"I saw you kiss him last night."

"So what! He was asleep when I did it," she confronted him with blazing eyes.

"I don't like it. You're seeing him too much," he said abruptly. There was vengeance in his voice.

"Why should it concern you, Negu?"

"Doesn't our long friendship mean anything to you?"

"Yes, we can always remain friends. You have Tai."

"Leave her out of this thing."

"But I don't like to have you meddling in my affairs."

"So you think his white skin is better than mine. I know that's what you think. I have been good enough for you before he came, and now you hardly ever speak to me. You can't throw me over like that. Remember the blood that runs through your veins. Ask your grand-père about it." He looked bitter and sullen as he walked away.

"You be quiet!" She stamped her foot on the ground with

a thump. “You can’t talk to me about him like that. I won’t have it. I will tell Le Philippe.” She ran into the house and threw herself upon the bed, sobbing until her tears ran dry.

CHAPTER FOUR

Convalescence and Romance

Hollis was badly injured and suffered from exposure, so his recovery would not be quick. Still, because of his fine health and LaGuna's unselfish nursing, he recovered more quickly than most men would have done.

Still, at times, there were setbacks. Sometimes, he got so bad again that LaGuna feared he might die after all.

After several months, all danger seemed passed and Hollis was able to walk a bit, with LaGuna's help—and then, alone. Then, he began to feel quite restless. He felt he was neglecting his duty, that he should try to find some way to return to his unit—but how? LaGuna told him that it was nonsense, as badly hurt as he had been. He would do best to rest and relax for a long time to be sure he had fully recovered and built up his strength again.

In a way, Hollis felt glad to remain on Banika, for it was peaceful on the island—life was so serene, and with a touch of romance coming into it slowly but surely. How could he not fall in love with this beautiful, desirable girl who was doing so much for him—especially in such a romantic place where the gorgeous birds sang such sweet love songs and the rich scent of the honeysuckle and other flowers all contributed to romantic thoughts.

One morning, he awakened very early. Since he felt very strong and wakeful, he thought it foolish to try to go back to sleep. He got out of bed, slipped on some garments, and walked out into the garden to enjoy the perfume and rich colors of the flowers—to watch the sun trying to pierce the clouds hanging from the neck of Mount Pelu in the distance. The top was radiantly golden as the sun came over it. The morning air was rather cool because there had been a light rain during the night. He decided to walk down to the beach to enjoy the wonderful view; he thrilled at his newfound strength. How good it was to be alive again; his terrible hurts were almost all gone now, except for spells.

At the beach, he stood a while watching the birds flitting about, listening to their songs, as they walked in the wet sand, leaving their tiny, cryptic imprints while they dug for their food. Hollis thought about how happy and busy they were as he took up a handful of sand and sifted it idly through his now pale, thin fingers. It felt slightly rough and dry, not yet warmed by the sun. Then he startled as he saw he wasn't alone there—LaGuna had awakened even before he had come down here to enjoy the beauties of nature. Le Philippe's faithful German shepherd, Mugzy, was with her and barked a greeting and came bounding from the girl to Hollis. LaGuna greeted him with her bright smile as he bent down and scratched the dog's head affectionately. He and Mugzy became good friends the first time they met.

"My, you must be feeling fine to be up and about so early, Hollis-Holly," she told him. "But you still mustn't do too much. It is lovely here, though, early in the morning, as well as at night, in the moonlight—isn't it?"

"It is lovely," he agreed. "And as for being lovely in the

moonlight—well, I don't really know; but perhaps some evening, moonlight and so lovely, you would come with me down here so we could enjoy it together," he suggested.

She blushed a bit but happily, and nodded, "And now, Hollis," she told him. "I think you had better go back—I'll go with you, and we'll have breakfast. Come."

She took his arm as though he still needed help. He was happy to have her so close to him as they walked back to her hut; and there, although he suggested he was perfectly able to assist her, she would not let him, ordering him to lie down and rest until she called. Then he came and ate with her at the table instead of lying in bed. How cozy it was, they thought, looking across at each other.

When they had finished the nourishing breakfast of fruit, he insisted on helping clear away the dishes. Suddenly, a plate fell from Hollis's still weak hands. They bent simultaneously to pick it up. Their faces drew closer—their lips almost touched; but the girl turned slightly, suddenly, so that only their cheeks met and touched for an instant. Then she drew away, pushing him from her gently. "I am all right, Hollis," she said. "I hope the bump didn't hurt you. And you didn't harm the dish." She held it up, and he marveled at its beauty.

"Why, the plate is a work of real art; that's a lovely pattern!" he exclaimed.

She explained it to him, "It is, isn't it? Yes, father and the natives gathered beautiful pearly shells to make the sets of plates—saucers—and so on—those knives, forks, and spoons were also made from various shells, bones of certain fish, and teeth from large sharks. Then they set them in ebony handles which were inlaid with a pearl setting." She added reverently, "My mother received these for her wedding

gift—that is why I hesitated at first about letting you handle the dishes."

"They're really a treasure!" Hollis admired them. "I'm sorry I was so clumsy—I'm glad it didn't break. You shouldn't use such a valuable, favorite set for me. I don't deserve it."

"Well, today is a special occasion," she said brightly. "It is my—birthday!"

"Well! Well! Congratulations! And how old are you now, about 50 or 60?" Hollis teased her. "No—I'm kidding—you are still young and beautiful, so beautiful—perhaps you are now 12, and will someday become a woman?" She saw the admiring twinkle in his eyes and smiled at the joke. He laughed again and then finally told her, "You are just right, couldn't be better—whatever age you are! I wish there was something I could do, some present I could give you in honor of the event—but, as you know, well, I didn't have much with me—and when your people found me, there wasn't even very much left of me. There is more, now, since you've taken care of me." He took her hand and held it and fought hard to resist taking her in his arms again.

But she was young—and even if she would trust herself to him, he must remember his civilized code of ethics—that code forgotten and broken far more often and maliciously among so-called civilized people in the big cities than among these simple primitive peoples and their thatched-hut villages on tropical islands. But he felt the moral code belonged everywhere. He mustn't do anything that might harm her or cause her any unhappiness later on.

He realized in a rush that they belonged to different worlds. After all, he was still in the United States Armed Forces and would have to rejoin his unit eventually and

carry on the fight. He couldn't shirk his duties and become a slacker, as had some of the deliberately arranged "4-F's" back home. He thought of Cecil. Also, there was Terry—whom he still loved—or did he? He had once, but now he wondered. Of course, Terry was wonderful in many ways. But here, thousands of miles away from her, he could view her objectively. Her mother, father, and brother were selfish, egotistical people. She herself had some rather peculiar traits that he now could see made her more like Cecil than he would have dared to think if he were with her.

Oh, hell, he thought, this is stupid. Terry is a wonderful kid. Didn't she cling to him like glue? But he wondered, Would Terry have done as much for him as LaGuna had done? It would be a shame to fall in love with this girl and then have to leave her, alone—broken-hearted, when the time came that he would have to go back to resume his duties. In some way, he must return to them when he was sure he was sufficiently recovered and able. Even as it was, he knew it was going to be very hard for both of them when that time of parting came. Despite what he'd already said and hinted, the girl seemed to have reached the conclusion that now that he was here on Banika with her, who saved his life, he would remain always.

Suddenly, she took her hand from his and turned from him with a mysterious smile, heading toward her special, private room. "Stay just where you are—I won't be long!" she told him, then disappeared beyond the curtains.

Hollis waited and wondered. She returned soon, but the change in her seemed so marvelous. It was really incredible. He rubbed his eyes and stared, mouth opening wide and

gasping with happy surprise, as she came toward him. "I—I see it, but I—can't believe it!" he cried finally.

She smiled happily. "Then, you like it? You think I am attractive? As much as, perhaps, some of your beauties back in the States?"

"You've got the best of 'em beat by a mile! They don't begin to compare!" Hollis exclaimed, carried away by the transformation. She had been beautiful in her native attire—but now, well, he could hardly name it—his eyes stared almost impolitely as they surveyed the beauty in her attractive Paris original dress. It was a black brocaded satin with a full skirt and with cap sleeves. It clung ladylike and in an elegantly tailored manner to her shapely figure. She had added just the right touch to set everything off, a rose, tucked in her belt. She was no longer a simple native beauty but a woman of confident culture, poise, and refinement.

As she posed thus before him, curtseying demurely, looking at him with smiling, teasing, pleading eyes, he told her, "You—you're out of this world! Positively stunning! Where in the world did you ever get that dress?"

"It was my mother's dress. She bought it in Paris," she informed him. "I thought, like with bringing out the very special dishes for the special day—it would be nice for me, now that I'm finally turned 18 and become a woman, to wear this dress of hers—a woman's dress. Does it really look nice?" she asked, eager for more of his enthusiastic praise.

"You're beautiful; it's beautiful. Too beautiful," he added to himself. "I like the way you have your hair," he said.

"It is like my mother used to wear her hair—I am not as beautiful as she was, but I try to make myself look as much like my mother as I can. It pleases Grand-père too," she added,

looking at the masterfully painted portrait of her mother which hung on the wall of the room. Hollis remarked that the artist must have been a great master; and she beamed with delight and then teased him a bit before finally informing him that it had been her grandfather who had painted the portrait. Le Philippe had always declared that when she was 18 years of age, she would look just like the painted likeness. Or even more beautiful! His words of prophecy had come true—she was even more beautiful.

Her father, too, had painted. LaGuna now told him much of her family history. Yes, her father, too, had been a great artist. Le Philippe had sent him to Europe in 1924, and he studied in Paris and Naples. He had learned a great deal from LaGuna's grandparents and her mother, who was also an artist.

"Father first met Mother when they were studying art at the same school," she told Hollis. "He fell in love with her and married her there and then, persuaded her to come back to this island—she did, but could not seem to be content staying here. She left soon after Father died. Father was killed, and she lost her will to live and became very sick. She died less than a year after Father. I have lived with my grandfather ever since."

There were other fine paintings she showed him—done by her grandfather and by her father. Her grandfather had been very fond of her father and worked with him and taught him much. He had taught LaGuna much too, although she said she did not think she would ever become a great artist or sculptor.

And as she brought forth various paintings and carved and sculptured articles to show Hollis, they drew nearer to

one another again so that their heads bent over the objects in their hands, and their cheeks touched, and again, a great desire to hold each other tight and kiss each other came over them. Hollis gave up; it was no use trying to resist any longer, and he knew by the look in her eyes and the way she responded that she wanted him to hold her and kiss her. She knew she must try to restrain herself and be ladylike. But now that she was in his arms, she forgot her scruples. They clung to each other tightly, exchanging the warm, hungry kisses of new love.

Then, in that dizzy, rapturous moment, there came a rap on the door which was, luckily, closed. They ignored it for a moment, but the pounding came again, loudly and insistently.

"LaGuna." There was a rap on the opposite door.

"Did you hear anything?" She looked frightened.

"No, LaGuna, only the thumping of my heart."

"But I'm sure I did."

"You're just a bit excited," he said as he tried to hold her closer.

The rap grew louder. He felt her hands slip away as she turned around. Negu and Tai stood at the door.

"Fulippe wants you," Negu said curtly.

LaGuna straightened her dress and hair, then opened the door.

Then, glaring jealously at the two, Negu turned and stalked away with haughty, angry steps, not looking back or saying a word.

"I wonder—if he happened to see anything? I wouldn't want to have caused any trouble," Hollis said with a bit of guilt. He felt ridiculous like a teenager caught necking on

the living room couch. Negu looked angry. “I think he’s kind of jealous.”

“Nonsense. I have never given him any encouragement,” LaGuna declared. She was much more composed than Hollis. “Shall we go to Grandfather now? I imagine it is something connected with my birthday—some surprise he had planned that is why he wishes us to come to him at his house now.”

“Do you feel—strong enough?”

She blushed a bit at the question, for he had certainly displayed surprising strength when he had held her in his arms and kissed her only a few moments before.

He grinned and squeezed her hand. “You’ve given me wonderful strength—and so much more, LaGuna,” he told her. “Let’s go see Grand-père. I’m anxious to see that house of his.”

They started for the larger house of Le Philippe set higher up on the slope on a point where the old man had a wonderful view to delight his eyes, which had such an unusual appreciation of the beauty. Mugzy joined them and bounded along beside them, barking happily. It was a perfect day—warm, dry, with a cool breeze from the east. They walked slowly up the hill, LaGuna ever mindful that Hollis had been a very sick man and it would not do to risk his overdoing it in the uphill walk. The winding coral-pressed footpath was edged on either side by beautiful wildflowers and luxuriant shrubbery. They followed it to a rustic log bridge spanning a rippling freshwater stream; then they crossed it and continued once more on the tightly packed coral path.

LaGuna pointed out the main village of thatched huts

surrounding the area of the lagoon. The huts thinned out as they went further inland.

As they came within view of the house, Hollis marveled at its beauty. It was set on the highest point with the sea on both sides, overlooking the peaceful, beautiful island, which was surrounded by a myriad of intriguing islets, reefs, and lagoon.

Le Philippe was waiting for them impatiently and stood in the doorway to welcome them, a smile on his face. This was a fine, worthy young man—handsome, too. He could see, now that the swellings had gone down and the roasted red flesh and bruises began to heal nicely. Even the bad head wound inflicted by the Japanese bullet, too, was coming along splendidly.

LaGuna had trimmed Hollis's black beard with a scissors, and this made him look much more presentable. His emaciated, tortured face had begun to fill out more normally, too. Before long, he could stand a decent shave, but thus far it would have been murder on his tortured skin to submit it to a razor's edge.

"Welcome! Happy birthday, LaGuna, my granddaughter; you are truly grand, now—Today you have become a WOMAN!" the old man said as he beamed at the well-dressed girl. He wondered as the two blushed—if he but knew, LaGuna, the child, had truly become a woman—not merely in years this day or days, but in having fallen in love. "Come in! We will talk and celebrate!" He shook Hollis's hand cordially, "I am glad to see you looking so much better; your recovery appears to have been very fast and satisfactory." Ah! This would be a fine man for his granddaughter to marry, he thought wistfully.

He led them inside, the dog leaping joyously about and trying to get more attention from the old man, too. Hollis was impressed by the grandeur of the old master's room—the aristocratic air of culture about him. At least a dozen generations of lives were written on the walls. In the center of the high ceiling hung an old, oval-clustered, prismatic crystal chandelier. Beautiful oil portraits, lovely pastels, and abstract watercolor paintings hung on the light green panel walls. Emphasis was on the mythological and Southsea scenes.

"I have a real surprise for you today, Grandfather," exclaimed LaGuna, and Hollis feared that she would tell him of their love—perhaps consider that now they were the same as engaged and announce such to be the same, but she didn't. "Our castaway is quite recovered; almost as good as new now," she said proudly, smiling from Hollis to her grandfather and back. Hollis breathed more easily again.

"Yes, your granddaughter did wonders in making me well again," he declared as Le Philippe ushered them into the spacious drawing room. Hollis was awestruck as he looked at the Louis XV-style setting of solid, well-designed mahogany. They passed before a large, beautifully decorated mirror that hung on the wall. His eyes rested interestedly upon a 17th-century "Coat of Arms," hanging on both sides of an oil portrait. Le Philippe's grandfather, who had been an Earl under Queen Victoria, had hammered inlaid crossed swords that hung about it. Crimson and turquoise blue silk draped them on either side. A 17th-century tapestry hung over the mantelpiece.

As old Philippe took his granddaughter in his arms and again gave her happy birthday wishes and kissed her, and she

kissed him, Hollis smiled wistfully, and Mugzy also barked as though to say, "Happy Birthday." Le Philippe then held his granddaughter at arm's length and studied her, smiling proudly. "My, what a fine woman you have grown into—what a wife you will make some lucky man!" he said. "You little Rascal! It seems as though it was only yesterday that I rocked you in this very chair here." He nodded to a comfortable old rocker. "Sit down, you two—and I will sit too. For I cannot be up and about as much as I used to," he added, seating himself in his favorite rocking chair. The girl and Hollis seated themselves in comfortable mahogany easy chairs a few feet opposite him and waited for the old man to speak further. Old Philippe had taken up his old meerschaum pipe, and filling it with a rare, aromatic mixture of island-grown tobacco, tapping it down, then finally getting it lit, he drew in deeply before he spoke, "Won't you have a smoke, Hollis Rochelle? I have many fine pipes to spare and much good tobacco." He motioned toward an exquisitely carved mahogany pipe rack.

LaGuna spoke up and shook her head then. "I have let him smoke very little, Grand-père," she said, "but I do not think he should smoke much for a while yet—until he is more fully recovered." Old Philippe chuckled and winked at Hollis. "Just like a woman, eh? Saying what you should and should not do—and you are not even married to her, yet," he teased.

Hollis flushed, then grinned and replied, "The man who gets LaGuna for a wife will be very lucky. I suppose she knows best, although I wish she wouldn't treat me quite like such an invalid. I feel almost as good as new, for which I can thank

your granddaughter. I am so well, I feel I must soon get back to my Marine unit. There is still the war."

"There will always be war, Mr. Rochelle, civilization thrives on it. That is one reason I left. We were far from the First World War out here. But this one has come much closer to us. I presume only in death's uncertain journey will we find peace at last."

Hollis thought a moment, "Don't ships ever stop here?"

"Yes, at times before the war—maybe one in a couple of years. I had a boat myself in which we could sail to the larger islands to the west, where the liners would often stop. But the Japanese took it three years ago when they landed here. You would wait a long time for a ship now, with this war. A small boat such as ours, if you are very fortunate, might make the main islands from here in one week or so. But you would probably find them held by the Japanese."

"No, I don't think so. Those are probably the islands we were taking when I was wounded!"

"Life is too precious to risk it—besides, it would take a long time to make the trip, and by yourself it would be a dangerous trip."

"How about some of the island men going with me?"

"Ha," laughed Le Philippe. "These men love their island. It would take a lot to make them undergo the dangers of the open sea."

They talked for a while, and a servant brought in some refreshments—delicious fruit drinks and a very special birthday cake in honor of LaGuna! They all had a generous helping.

Finally, it was time for them to return to LaGuna's hut,

but before they left, her grandfather brought out a treasured, valuable old gift for her—a trunk of beautiful women's clothes—a whole wedding outfit, lovely dresses and dainty under things—which had belonged to the grandmother and to the girl's mother. He had saved them through the years until the time would come that she was just grown right to begin wearing them and would appreciate them most as a birthday present.

She did, too. Nothing could have pleased and thrilled her more, especially now with a very special man in her life whom she wanted to impress very much. These lovely garments would help greatly.

"Oh, Grand-père! You're wonderful! Oh! How grand! How lovely!" the girl exclaimed over and over again as she went through the trunk, taking out, holding up, admiring, stroking the lovely garments. "This is the most wonderful present! Ah! Now I can dress up so fine—make myself so attractive to the eyes of my poor patient and so help him to get well and strong ever so much faster. I can never thank you enough!" And she put the things back and ran to throw her arms about her grandfather's neck and hug and kiss him.

"I will have the boys bring the trunk over to you soon," her grandfather told her. "It is heavy to carry. But I wanted to show it to you here so that I could watch how happy all this made you, and that is my greatest reward—seeing you made me so happy my dear."

LaGuna and Hollis walked back slowly along the coral path, hand in hand, talking little but thinking much. How wonderful everything was—this beautiful, peaceful island,

far from civilization, and this unspoiled young woman. For all anyone knew, he had been lost at sea—had died. Why shouldn't he make the most of it, this wonderful opportunity to live such a happy, untroubled life with her in this wonderful spot? He had already done his bit in the war—had suffered almost indescribable horrors and agony. "Hadn't he done his share?" thought Hollis.

LaGuna, too, was thinking romantic happy thoughts of him, Hollis realized as he looked slyly at her while they walked along. He could read her thoughts, her heart in the glow of her eyes, the transported expression on her beautiful face, and it troubled him, for, after all she had done for him—saving his life, how could he ever bring himself to do that which would have to inflict pain on her?

When they got back to LaGuna's hut, they had barely gotten inside when Negu and another native came with the trunk of beautiful clothing from the old grandfather and brought it inside and set it down where LaGuna had them. Negu said little, but his jealous, angry expression spoke much and bitterly.

Clearly, Negu had always looked on LaGuna with desire and had waited eagerly for this day when the girl would have become a woman and marriageable, Hollis realized. And now that it had come—also had come Hollis, this cast-up-from-the-sea white interloper to separate them. Even though LaGuna had never really encouraged Negu to think that she loved him or could ever love and marry him, perhaps it would have come to that between them, if only he, Hollis, hadn't been washed ashore on this specific island. True, he had another native girl, who thought much of him and with whom he romanced considerably—Pretty little Tai. But as

so often happens, what one can have easily, one does not properly appreciate and desire.

They were to have another birthday party here at LaGuna's hut—LaGuna, Hollis, Nana, and Tai. Negu could have remained to partake in it, too, but refused and stalked away in a huff.

"I can't understand what is the matter with Negu?" sighed Tai, shaking her lovely head. "He used to be so gay and pleasant, and now, suddenly, he is so grouchy, so changed. Not at all like he used to be."

Nana and Tai set the table with beautiful plates and utensils taken from a mahogany cabinet. After they sang a cheery birthday greeting song, they served generous portions of fine, tasty foods—tropical fruits and delicious vegetable dishes and tender roasted meats.

Hollis was amused to see how the dainty Tai tried to imitate LaGuna in dress and in manner. Tai had the lightest skin of all the women with the exception of LaGuna, and was very proud of it. She, too, had long, straight black hair which hung down far over her shapely shoulders, adorned with a set of beads around her neck.

A delicious, potent old wine was poured into crystal goblets, and Hollis proposed they drink a toast to the occasion—to LaGuna.

They drank and the wine warmed and exhilarated their bodies and spirits so that they entered into the celebration with more gusto.

From time to time, either Tai or Nana would rise and go to crank an old Victrola which played gay, lilting Strauss waltzes by a famous old Austrian orchestra.

"What a wonderful wine! How it went to the head! And what fine foods!" At first, LaGuna deliberated as to whether Hollis should gorge himself too much, then decided that by this time, it should not hurt him but do him good since he needed to eat much now to regain his old strength and energy as quickly as possible, and so did not remonstrate when Tai heaped Hollis's plate again and again with broiled fish steak from a hand-hammered meat platter. Then came boiled lobsters, steaming and tasty, well-decorated with red paprika and spiced leaves, topped by a delicious cream sauce!

Hollis smacked his lips as he tasted it, "Fit for the gods! This isn't merely a sauce; this is a creation!" he complimented.

"It is Grandfather's and my favorite," said LaGuna. "Made from a recipe long in the family—used and perhaps even created by Grandmother—and then by my mother, too, and now by me."

Next came crab meat salad with banana trimming, and finally a great pineapple coconut cake with wine sauce and pudding.

Again, Hollis was thrilled so that he couldn't keep from expressing his appreciation of it and said, licking his lips with gusto, "Mmm, paradise pudding!"

Le Philippe came to join them for the last part of the feast and party and partook of the pudding too and then sat back in an easy chair to smoke his after-dinner pipe and doze a bit. Yet Hollis saw the sly fine old man watch him and his granddaughter out of the corner of his eye at times and nod with approval, especially when the Victrola played "Tales of

Vienna Woods" and Hollis rose and walked over to LaGuna, who was sitting next to her grandfather and suggested, "Shall we have this dance my lady of the tender hands and generous and noble heart? Most beautiful lady in the whole world?" He bowed like a gallant cavalier sweepingly before her.

LaGuna flushed and hesitated. "I—I was taught many things, but—never how to dance," she replied falteringly, and then, as her grandfather nudged her urgently, "But, maybe you can teach me? I would love to learn, and I know I could."

Hollis smiled and took her hand as she rose, then slipped an arm around her slim waist. "Of course—it's easy to waltz and so much fun. Just follow me, like this," he said.

She rested her head on his shoulder lightly and followed. A moment later, Hollis exclaimed in surprise and delight, "Why! You're a wonderful dancer, LaGuna! I should teach you? How did you learn? You must have—or it just comes naturally to you!"

She laughed happily. "With you guiding me—it just comes naturally," she said.

They danced several more times before LaGuna insisted that Hollis must not overexert himself, and they sat down again near old Philippe, who had sat smoking his pipe, half dozing and half watching them dance with a happy gleam in his old, dimming eyes and nodding his approval.

"Ah! It was good, watching you two young folks, so well matched, dancing so beautifully together!" the old man said. "It brings back memories of when I was young and danced like that with beautiful women!"

Nana and Tai watched for a time and then set to clearing the table, washing and drying the dishes and utensils, and

putting them safely away again, not to be used again until the next very special occasion. Then they, too, left, and Grand-père Le Philippe rose and said he, too, must be on his way back to his home and wished them a good night and started on his way back along the coral path.

CHAPTER FIVE

Le Philippe's Advice

The next morning when he awoke, Hollis found himself alone in LaGuna's large hut. He lay stretching comfortably and thinking for a long time about the wonderful life here and the adorable girl, all of which could be his if he would but forsake his old life and the call of duty. Finally, he shook himself and decided that as it would still have to be quite some time before he would be physically fit enough to leave, if he could make arrangements, to do so. He knew he must go even though it would mean leaving this Eden and LaGuna. He finally decided there was no use in torturing himself by brooding over it now so far ahead. Time enough for that later on when it had to come.

Finally, LaGuna came in, fresh and glowing from her early morning dip in the waters of the lagoon. She came to him, and he had to fight hard to keep from taking her in his arms and kissing her. He knew that he never should have kissed her, even that other time—that he mustn't allow himself to fall irrevocably in love with her and must try to let her know as gently as possible that she, too, must not fall in love with him, because it could only end in separation and heartbreak.

"I'll come and enjoy morning swims with you soon, now, too," he said, sitting up in bed. "Or at least just lie in the water and soak my bruised and battered old body a lot. It'll do me a world of good, I know."

"It is wonderful! So refreshing—wakes one up so good!" she enthused. "Yes, Hollis, it would do you much good, too. Now, I will make breakfast for us, and then I must go to spend some time with dear Grand-père. I used to read aloud to him regularly each day from the wonderful old classics we both love and have learned so much from. I have been neglecting him shamefully of late. But then he knows I could not neglect taking care of you, when you were so sick and needed someone. But now, now that you are so much recovered, now that there is no longer any danger, he will be expecting me to come to him again each day as I used to do. You must get a lot of rest then, although there are many good books here which you may like to read, too, to help pass time. At times you will want to come up to Grandfather's house, too, and hear the books I read aloud to him, and you may even like to read aloud to him and me, too, sometimes, eh?"

Hollis nodded and then, while she prepared their breakfast, he got up and dressed and tried to improve his appearance as best he could. He stroked his still sore and emaciated face gently with his fingers and mused, "I believe I'll risk trying to shave today, after she goes to her grandfather. I look pretty awful with those whiskers. Just clipping them with the shears isn't enough to help my appearance much. I'll look and feel a lot better if I can get them off, I hope, without scraping too much of my face along with them."

He went out to where she had the table set with breakfast, then and they sat down opposite one another to eat and again Hollis thought how perfect a life it would be if only they could always be together like this—if only that other call needn't be heard and heeded.

A short while later, he stood in the doorway and watched

her slim form as she walked along the coral path and up the mountainside to where her grandfather's imposing house stood. He sighed and turned back finally when the girl was at last out of sight and rubbed the black stubble on his face and got the razor, which he had borrowed from Le Philippe, and made preparations to try to shave as neatly as the condition of his skin would permit. As he lathered up and surveyed himself in the mirror, he grinned ruefully and muttered, "Maybe it would be better, after all, if I just didn't shave—the worse I let myself keep looking, the easier it might be on the girl. How in the world could any girl as pretty as LaGuna, or even almost the ugliest girl in the world, for that matter, ever feel romantic about a guy with the hideous-looking mug I've got now, with these whiskers?"

But the long habit of liking to be neat and clean-shaven was too much for his temptation to keep the whiskers as a "romance-killer," and finally, he set to shaving. It proved long and tedious and rather painful at times. But finally, he had shaved all his whiskers off quite neatly and to his satisfaction, and felt much cleaner and more comfortable in addition to presenting an entirely new and much more pleasing appearance. He finished the shave, which had taken many repeated good latherings, with patting on a goodly amount of a native lotion, which burned and smarted quite a bit at first but then actually felt good. Then he shook some powder taken from Mount Pelu into the palm of his hand and patted and spread it over his face, too, to help soothe the tender skin and help cover the discolored places. This final touch made him feel quite his old, fastidious self once again.

Then, the effort having taxed his strength more than he'd

expected and feeling rather weak, he went back to bed and lay down and slept.

Meanwhile, LaGuna was with her grandfather again, almost like old times, although intuitively, both knew now that things could never be quite the same again now that this white man had been cast up on their island's shore and come into their lives—and LaGuna had become a woman, ready for love and marriage.

She tried to act as she used to, though, filling her grandfather's pipe like an old-master smoker, pressing the tobacco into the bowl with a practiced thumb and then placing the pipe in the old man's mouth and lighting it for him, holding the burning splint close over the tobacco filled bowl as Le Philippe puffed vigorously until it was burning well. Then she sat back and watched him, waiting for him to get the pipe drawing well when he would tell her which of the books he wished her to bring and read aloud to him.

But this day he wanted to talk instead. There was so much to talk about. He blew perfect smoke rings into the air, and they watched them rise and drift away, and then he began talking—of the past. He told her of his noble parentage and how he had turned out rather worthless, pursuing pleasure and fame, grinning a bit ruefully as he spoke.

"Why, Grand-père!" LaGuna reproached, astonished. "How can you say such a thing? You are wonderful and you know it!"

He shook his head. "No, my dear," he insisted, "when I look back on my life, I have much to regret. In my younger years, I wasted much time. What did I ever really add to the good of others? Oh, I did some fine painting and sculptured work—but mainly, all I did was take for myself. My first

marriage was the culmination of my search for happiness in pleasure and diversion. I loved Suzanne, but when she died, I tried to drown myself in alcohol to forget the loss. But Suzanne must have prayed for me because I gradually came to see that self-love, fame, and pleasure really do not satisfy. I became repulsed by civilization, greed, and selfishness, and I came out here."

LaGuna stared at him unbelievingly. He had never spoken to her like this before. She started to protest but he hushed her.

"Now that you are a woman, ready to be loved—and this man has come into your life, I can put off no longer telling you things you should know, giving you advice for your own sake. I have studied this young man you have nursed back from the brink of death, and I believe he will prove to be a good and worthwhile man. I have seen that you look at him with what could be love in your eyes—and I have studied the way he has looked at you, and I believe that he is a good man and would never wish to bring harm or unhappiness to you. Still—you must be very careful and not permit your heart and physical desires to run away with your head—your better judgment. For love and marriage is a serious matter—one should love and marry and give oneself in love to the right one for the rest of one's life."

"Always remember that when you are tempted—when you think you are in love. Do nothing rashly in the passion of the moment, but try to restrain any giving way to emotions which perhaps might ruin your entire life afterwards. That is why I have always guarded you so jealously, LaGuna. I want you to be sure it is the one real love, the one right lover in your life, before you give yourself in marriage. Remember

my words of advice and warning when you are with this white man, or any other. Too many have loved to their ruin, have mistaken sympathy and infatuation for love, and have been sorry later on. I have made my mistakes—other men and women all over the world are constantly making mistakes and suffering in consequence, often having all the rest of their lives ruined because of one mistake that took but a few minutes. I do not want you to make a mistake and suffer as others have suffered. That is why I have spoken to you like this, child, who has now become a beautiful woman—once my little granddaughter—now, a woman. Remember most of all that love is the important thing—sacrifice of self to your lover—this is the only true satisfaction in life."

"When one is young, one does not always like to listen to and heed the advice of older persons. But believe me, I have been through much, making far too many mistakes, and all I say is said because of my great love for you and the wish to keep you from making any mistake which might ruin your future chances of enjoying real love and lasting happiness. I know you are as sensible as you are beautiful, LaGuna—and you will keep in mind what I have told you. And believe me, you will not regret it."

He drew her to him and caressed her tenderly with tears in his eyes.

"I let him kiss me last night, and—." She paused expectantly.

"Yes," he interrupted, puffing at his pipe.

"I liked it," she said warmly, gently clapping her hands and standing on her toes. She bent over gracefully and planted a kiss upon her grandfather's forehead.

"Uh, huh," he added, puffing and deliberating.

"He kissed me," she repeated. "He kissed me. Did you hear me?"

"Uh, huh." Le Philippe forgot to smoke. He listened. He heard every word, somewhat stunned.

"Aren't you going to say something?" she said, lifting up his chin. "I simply had to tell somebody." She burst in pleasure again.

"Be careful," he answered and nodded briefly. He began to frown. He puffed on his pipe. The tobacco in it had burned out. She took it away from him.

"I will do it again," she said as she curved the tip of her tongue around the rose petal. She still felt Hollis's kiss.

LaGuna had listened carefully and knew that all he said made sense, young and inexperienced as she was.

"This white man—I think he is a good man; since he came into my life, I have felt so different. I think he cares for me—but he had others in his past—perhaps a sweetheart—to whom he owes much. And he has duties to his country also. He may feel he must return to those duties, even though he would rather remain here—while I might want him here with me, always; still, if he has obligations elsewhere and would shirk them for me, then it is true that in years to come he might also forget his love for me and his obligations to me. If that is so, then I could never be really sure of him. So, you see, Grand-père, I am sensible and, while I thrill to being with him, still I am intent on keeping my head and always bearing in mind what you have told me for my own good."

"Would you like me to read to you now?" she then asked.

But old Philippe shook his head. "No, we are both tired," he said. "Thank you, child, but I think I will have another

pipe and then nap a bit. You may stay or perhaps you would rather go back to your hut and also rest—you need it, too."

Realizing her grandfather would like to be alone with his memories just then, LaGuna kissed him tenderly and left him, but did not return directly to her hut. Instead, she wandered aimlessly for a time in the jungle, listening to the songs of the birds and gathering beautiful flowers. Banika was an island of flowers. LaGuna took a deep breath of the balmy fresh clean air that was continuously scented with the fragrance of gardenias.

CHAPTER SIX

Love & Laboratory

When LaGuna finally returned to her hut and Hollis met her at the door, she started in surprise, really not recognizing him at first. He teased her, pretending he was a friend of the man she had nursed and had just come ashore—and almost had her fooled before she caught on. Then, how they both laughed.

She studied him admiringly, drew close to him, and felt his quite smooth, de-whiskered face tenderly. "My, oh my! Now at last, I see the real you, for the first time! And you are such a handsome man! Even more handsome than I pictured you to be in my imagination!"

What an effort it was to keep from throwing her arms about him and snuggling her smooth young cheek against his now smoothly shaven one. But she knew what that would lead to—she remembered her grandfather's words of wisdom and warning. It would be taking a risk—but, why not? As this man seemed so wonderful—she just knew he loved her and she knew she loved him; wanted him, always. Still—she had better try to control herself—help him to control his emotions, too, instead of deliberately tempting him. She would wait until she learned more, much more about him—his ties back home and in the Marine Corps that drew him so that he would need to return to those other people

in other places. She wouldn't want to have him do wrong by loving and staying with her. No—they must try to keep better control of their emotions, no matter how hard it might be. Think of other things to do to keep them occupied until the right, sure time comes.

She knew Hollis wanted to make love to her as much as she wanted him to. But she saw also that he felt he should not—despite the fact that it hurt to have to keep control of his emotions, to refrain from the thrill of holding her tightly against his own pulsating body.

So they talked of other things to keep temptation checked: of good books and art and she showed him her library—taking out special, treasured books, much read, much loved—and paintings and sketches and carved and sculptured figures. They discussed them and commented on their beauty.

They talked of the life on the island—and of Hollis's state of health, his remarkable improvement. Hollis told her of his research work at State that he loved so much, but he failed to tell her of Cecil and the scandal.

Hollis continued to improve through the next month—and to help guard against temptation of getting too involved in romance and risky love-making with LaGuna, now that he was able, he would often walk up the hillside to old Philippe's house and visit long hours with the talented, entertaining, amusing old man whose mind was as keenly alert and capable as ever; only his eyesight was failing and his hands no longer steady and strong and able to paint or sculpture as he had formerly done so well.

At times Le Philippe would hint around slyly to see if he could determine the extent of Hollis's relations and

affections in connection with his lovely granddaughter, and Hollis, not caught off-guard and realizing the natural concern over his granddaughter on the part of the old man, spoke quite plainly so as to set his mind at ease that, although he was very fond of the beautiful LaGuna, he was a man of honor first, foremost and always; and would never do anything that might cause the girl any unhappiness and her grandparent any concern. He mentioned, too, at times, that he felt he still had a duty to perform, a job left unfinished, that he was honor-bound to return to when he had recovered fully enough to return to it and the opportunity presented itself for him to leave the island and rejoin his ship and men. And—also, he said that he had loved ones back home in the States to whom he owed much—a mother and brothers back there—yes, and that there was also a girl, one who might be considered a sweetheart, although they were not actually engaged, who might still be waiting for him. But the more he thought of it, the less sure he was that she would really still be waiting for him.

So, really, he could say without straining the truth, that he was free and unattached as far as any actual love-ties were concerned to this or any other girl back home.

He spoke of Terry's brother who was, in his estimation, a cad and a slacker—far from being a real man. His lips curled in something of a sneer as he spoke of Cecil. No, he could never respect or really like Terry's brother. Yet it had been because of Cecil, really, that he had come to where he was.

Old Philippe seemed to understand and was well satisfied.

Hollis's keen medical mind was intrigued by the old man's case and his ailings—his waning eyesight and other

troubles and he was eager and willing to try to do what he could to help old Philippe overcome them as much as possible, and so be able to be more like his old self and find more enjoyment in the years of life still left to him. But without all the fine, expensive, elaborate equipment needed, which he would have had at his disposal back at the laboratory and office, he could not do too much. If only he could have all the equipment and various latest wonderful discoveries in drugs and medicines and so on here at his disposal on this island—how much more he could do to help old Philippe, yes, and the many others—the natives, living on this island, who suffered with a wide variety of ailments and deformities. His heart ached when he observed many cases considered hopeless, which could easily be cured in a hospital in civilization. He prayed that someday he would be able to get all these things, have them brought here to his island for his use so that he could help the many sufferers recover. Of course, most of these natives, leading simple, unspoiled lives, had grown up strong and healthy; but still, even here in such a supposedly perfect environment, there were many cases needing the help he, a highly trained medical man, could give them if only he had the needed drugs and laboratory equipment. He owed them his life, and it hurt him to think that even though he could do much, there was still so much that had to be left undone which he could otherwise do. They were a fine, gentle, kindly, trusting, wonderful people, these natives on this island who were Le Philippe's and LaGuna's people.

LaGuna had ever been their great friend and nurse and also a doctor, in a way, although they also had their so-called "Medicine Men" to tend them in sickness and when injured.

LaGuna had learned much from her grandfather's books on medicine. When he was younger, he had gone among these people and done all he could to heal their wounds and doctor them when some sickness had afflicted them. When she was old enough to help, LaGuna had gone about with him on these rounds and learned to help and then had taken over. They had learned to make good use of the healing powers of the sap or juices that were in certain branches, leaves, flowers, shrubs, grasses, and even in certain weeds.

Hollis was glad to go the rounds of the sick and injured with LaGuna and add his knowledge and skill to her abilities. He expressed his admiration for her ability and knowledge and became greatly interested in the powers of the various primitive, natural remedies. "Why, some of these are so wonderful, so efficient that they would even be an improvement on a lot of the remedies sold in the drugstores back home at exorbitant prices," he told the girl one day. "I must give credit where credit is due, and if—or when, I ever get back, I must take samples—roots, herbs and so on—and try to see that they are grown back home so that they could be made available there, too, for the sick and hurt."

It was a wonderful new interest in his life now, this going about with LaGuna to tend the sick and injured. It was good for both of them, as, while they were still together, it kept their minds off becoming too romantically inclined and being tempted to make serious love, which he knew would complicate matters more than he wanted them to become.

LaGuna, too, realized this, but in her young, romantic mind and with her lovely young body, there burned the desire for more intimate love and affection of the man so closely associated with her day after day. But she always

tried to keep in mind her grandfather's words of wisdom and his advice. She must be absolutely sure that this love was for ALWAYS! That he would always stay with her, loyal and loving. She knew he was often nagged by his sense of duty to his old way of life—that he felt he must return to it sometime and go on with the work he could do.

Almost always, Hollis felt in fine shape, completely recovered from his harrowing experience. But he had suffered a bad head wound and at times, when least expected, he would suffer headaches of a greater or lesser degree of intensity and would be assailed by torturing dizzy spells, when he would have to lie down wherever he happened to be and fight hard to keep his senses. It troubled him and it troubled LaGuna, too, when she noticed his suffering.

Along with the pain, there was the unspoken dread that there was perhaps something still seriously wrong with him, internally, perhaps in his brain, causing these attacks. There must be a pressure somewhere, a result of his head wound. If he were back home, he could have gone to one of the large hospitals and had X-rays taken and gotten to the base of the trouble, whatever it was, without much trouble, and have an operation to remove whatever was wrong and causing his attacks. But here—there was nothing that could be done in such a mysterious, troubling case. He could just wait and pray that it wasn't serious and would go away with the healing power of time and rest.

Although they continued together in an entirely irreproachable relationship, Negu, who kept seeing them daily, trailed them slyly at times and spied on them. He was usually surly and rather unfriendly, for in his own mind, he felt quite

certain that matters between the girl and the white man, so constantly with her, were far, far more serious and intimate than they actually were. Because he could not have LaGuna for himself, he now also no longer seemed to care to even dally with the adorable and very desirable little Tai, who loved him deeply.

Tai was as good friends as ever with LaGuna and often went the sick rounds with LaGuna and Hollis. No matter what Negu suspected, she felt sure that LaGuna and Hollis were not actual lovers—LaGuna had told her so. She knew that one day, Hollis, when quite recovered from his brush with death, would have to leave the island and return to his own kind and resume the work he had been doing among them.

It seemed a pity to the vivacious Tai, too, that all this time and the opportunities, which would never come again, should be wasted. How strange and unnatural she considered it that LaGuna should not have fallen deeply in love with such a handsome, fine man as this Hollis. Or with the virile and handsome Negu, who she suspected was in love with LaGuna. It was a pity LaGuna wasn't interested in love with either of these attractive men who could thrill a girl so wonderfully, and it was an even greater pity that neither of them realized how very attractive and desirable she, Tai, was.

Oh, there were other fine and attractive young men and even some older ones on the island who looked longingly at Tai's sweet face and even with more yearning emotion in their eyes at her alluring figure, but she just couldn't seem to feel any interest in them.

One day, as they were walking along the stream that flowed near Le Philippe's, Hollis and LaGuna went further into the interior of the island than Hollis had ever been. Suddenly, Hollis saw something that made him stare in disbelief. About twenty-five feet through the thick foliage he saw a shack, built of corrugated iron and completely unlike any of the native constructions. "What's that?"

"It belonged to the Dutch scientists who worked here before the war," said LaGuna.

Hollis moved hurriedly to it. Through a window, he could see some shelves laden with an array of bottles.

The door was locked with an old, much-rusted padlock which they broke open with little trouble so that they could enter.

Inside, everything was interwoven with a maze of cobwebs in which were long dead and dried flies and other insects. Chameleons, spiders, bugs, and various small animals had made their way into this long-neglected haven. Bottles, glasses, lamps, chemicals, charts, books, papers, and even a dust-covered microscope stood about on tables and shelves. The dust and debris covering tables, desks, chairs, and the floor looked like a sodden, grey blanket.

Hollis was elated as he looked about him, taking up books and papers and bottles and chemistry apparatus. "This is a wonderful find!" he said enthusiastically. "They certainly built this place and everything in it to last. Where did they go, and why?" he asked.

"When the war broke out, they left as soon as possible, leaving things as we have found them," LaGuna informed him. "One of the scientists, though, was also sick with fever and blindness. Many of our people have the same eye trouble

as he and Grandfather. They need help. I have often wished I could do something besides just trying to cheer them up."

Hollis's eyes gleamed with enthusiasm as he walked about, fingering the various papers and notebooks. "Maybe we can, now!" he encouraged. "Strange that they left these notebooks here."

"When they left, I know that they took some papers with them, and they said they would be back when the Japanese trouble would be over," LaGuna said. "But of course they never did come back."

Hollis glanced over the various scopes and the improvised sterilizer with a fascinated eye. "Yes, we can make good use of most of these things—they can be salvaged and put to good use—and we may be able to help your people suffering from blind-sickness," he said. "At any rate, we'll try our best. We'll take—or have all these things taken over to our laboratory and clean them up, and then, we'll see!"

Hollis, in the next few weeks, moved the apparatus to a hut near LaGuna's house. There, he set up his own laboratory, getting every piece of material he could possibly turn into lab equipment.

What exciting fun they had then, stocking it with all the things old Philippe turned over to them, and many more things that the village doctors and old Philippe and LaGuna, too, knew could be used to make medicines, poultices, and salves. There were many shelves built in the proper, handiest arrangement on which to stock the raw materials; the herbs, roots, leaves, juices from trees that had proved helpful and effective. Hollis made a rude apparatus to grind them up, pulp them, extract the healing juices and tonics, and then more shelves on which to store in air-tight glass jars these

medicinal remedies so that they would always have a good stock on hand for any emergency that came up.

They worked tirelessly, fitting it all up, manufacturing the remedies, stocking up their supply. Hollis forgot all else for the time being in the thrill of conducting many experiments in his new lab, a far cry from the expensively, much more elaborately and efficiently equipped laboratories he had worked in back at the university, but still in many ways much more exciting and gratifying, for this was such a challenging new experience.

He took a survey of the village, too, and saw many things indicating unsanitary conditions, which he then eradicated or altered in the interests of better health for the islanders.

Finally, adjoining the laboratory, he built a small twelve-bed hospital.

One evening, as LaGuna and he sat in comfortable rocking chairs on the front veranda of her home, resting and talking, his eyes turned to the interior of the island, and he said to her, "Over there is the jungle. It is a horrible place—damp, dark and stinking. Lice, ticks, and leeches breed by the millions there, and poisonous reptiles and other dangerous living creatures. There is so much evil there that should be stamped out, if only we could. And yet, there is also so much beauty. I wish I could do something about making the evil less and increase the beautiful and healthful. There must be much we can do, and together, we will do all we can—as long as I can still remain here," he added with a twinge of conscience, looking a bit guiltily at the beautiful girl so near him—and yet also so far. He saw her start nervously, too.

He turned his thoughts momentarily back home to

the city life and people there—a small industrial suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin—its beautiful Grant Park spread along the green banks of Lake Michigan. His people were plain and modest people—there was no mystery about them. Most everyone knew him and his family. It had been up to his mother to hold the house together with the rearing of eight children, which had given him great physical and mental energy. Beside these, she had given him a strong sense of sympathy, curiosity, and ingenuity. And his drive of genius and strong courage was also an inborn trait, which he had inherited from his father, who had died while he was still a very young man.

He thought of the fun they used to have at picnics at the old Oak Creek dam site, where he had fished, swam, and played ball. And in the wintertime, he and his pals had run their chain bobsleds at neck-breaking speeds down the dam hill. Yes, for the moment, he was homesick and actually longed to be back there.

LaGuna's voice replying to his comment on the jungle and the evils there aroused him from his nostalgic reverie, and he jerked back to reality. He thought of the wonderful life here—their swims in the refreshing waters of the lagoon together. LaGuna was an excellent swimmer, but he could now keep up with her since his strength had come back. He thought of her attractive body, so alluringly displayed in her swimming outfit—her shapely, slender ankles, strong yet beautifully curved legs, the seductive, tempting rounding of her olive thighs. The provocative dimples on her knees. Her slender waistline, her tantalizing, forward-thrust breasts. It was all he could do when he saw her thus, so close to him, to resist taking her in his arms. If he could only be sure that he

could take her without qualms, live his life out here with her, how wonderful everything would be.

He was tempted to throw discretion to the winds and take her then and there and he knew she would be only too willing and contented for him to do so, but just then Negu and Tai walked by and LaGuna called to them and they came and sat with them on the porch for a while, and the chance was gone and Hollis's moment of desire passed.

It wasn't long before everything in the laboratory was cleaned and arranged. Hollis studied everything, and great satisfaction filled his heart. Microscope, test tubes, slides, drugs, chemicals and charts! He studied the charts and sheets translating as best he could from his knowledge of German. Added to what he had already picked up at State, the working material at hand elated him and gave him great confidence that now he could actually accomplish something beneficial to mankind.

He and LaGuna were alone together in the lab then, as he studied over the treasures, and suddenly, so elated was he that he had to let off steam somehow and turned and took LaGuna into his arms and lifted her off her feet, almost squeezing her to death. "Hooray! Just think! Now we've really got something to work with!"

She flushed and looked a bit embarrassed but loved his embrace. "I am sure you will discover something—and what a blessing it will be to dear old Grand-père and the natives, and you will become a great man!" she said.

He relaxed a moment but still held her close, looking deep into her eyes. This was a great moment—some inner

voice seemed to tell him that, after all, his greatest chance to do good here and for the entire world of those afflicted with blindness lay here—this was where he should stay and work, together with this wonderful girl. Co-workers—and, as their fates were to be the same, to continue working together, why should they any longer deny admitting and showing openly their great love for each other? He drew her tightly to him once more and this time his lips sought and possessed hers and they kissed long and passionately in all the satisfying expression of their love and desire for one another—to share their work, their thoughts, their bodies completely—for their entire future lives, both knew then, were bound together by not only their great love but the work to which they were dedicated.

They were so happy. Hollis put his hand on her chin and lifted her face to his. "I'll love you forever. Would you be my love—my wife?" pleaded Hollis. "After all, you saved my life. I will forever be indebted to you."

She said nothing but kissed him again ever more ardently and then took his hand and motioned him toward the door to the empty hospital.

Outside, Negu had watched from a distance and saw them leave the laboratory in an embrace, to enter the hospital. Jealousy flashed in his eyes as he knew what was happening.

"I'll go to her Grand-père, Fulippe, about this!" Negu vowed angrily.

Just then Tai appeared.

"Where are you going in such a rush?" Tai stepped into his path.

"Tai, you stay out of this." He feared her intervention. He knew of her devoted friendship with LaGuna.

"Now you listen to me a minute. I've had enough of your guff lately." And with this, she pressed her hot, shapely body hard against Negu's and held him and sought his lips with her own. She kissed him hard and passionately.

Startled, Negu silently cursed himself for being blind for the moment; the desire of revenge gave way to other desires.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Help for the Blind

What a wonderful new, exciting life on the Island of Banika for Hollis and LaGuna now. Their efforts in the new laboratory now stemmed from a closer relationship.

Hollis and LaGuna worked with new enthusiasm, new energy of body and more keenly working minds. They had talked with old Philippe and told him about the wonderful findings and how they hoped to get to the cause of the blindness affliction and then effect a cure which would help him and the natives. So now the old man was re-energized with new hope and faith. Hollis and LaGuna, too, had told him finally of their love, which they felt was right now that it was apparent Hollis's greatest and life's work would be done here on this very island. Le Philippe, realizing the truth of this, now approved and no longer feared that his granddaughter would be wooed and won and then finally be left broken-hearted.

Hollis and LaGuna realized the many things that needed to be done here for the better health of all. When old Philippe had come to the island many years before in his much younger and more active and able times, he had found Banika an unhealthy village and had immediately set about doing much to improve its standards of living. Then things had lapsed back considerably as he grew older and less

active and more ailing. Now, once more, Hollis set about improving conditions, more than Le Philippe ever had.

There was formerly a steady series of deaths due to the unhealthy habits of the natives. Now Hollis worked, experimented, saw things to be done which would help improve their health. He organized intelligently and energetically, talking earnestly to the natives, encouraging them to take their living habits more seriously—become more careful and sanitary, more cleanly. He set up committees to begin digging irrigation ditches which would help their crops to grow larger and more bountifully; to dig drainage ditches that would carry off the excess rainfall and sewage more efficiently so no harmful germs would breed and be carried back to infect the people; to drain stagnant pools that bred insect-carriers of germs to help eradicate breeding places of troublesome insects and other germ-carrying creatures, vermin. He and LaGuna taught the natives the vital importance of good personal hygiene in the interests of preserving their own good health. They had quite a time of it at first, and old Philippe joined in helping them convince the older natives who were set in their often slovenly, unsanitary ways and found it hard to drop their habitual way of living and change to the new and better way.

They tried to show the natives that it was folly to be as superstitious as so many of them were, to worry and get excited and upset because of their fear of bad spirits.

Little by little, more and more of the natives changed over to a new and better way of life, and conditions improved greatly. Le Philippe, LaGuna, and Hollis were all greatly pleased.

But they knew there was still much to be accomplished.

One morning, when Hollis and LaGuna came to the hospital and laboratory, Hollis got a new thrill—the girl's grandfather had had an impressive sign painted and hung over the entrance—it read, "ROCHELLE INSTITUTE." LaGuna looked at it, then at her lover and co-worker and smiled proudly. "Grand-père said he was going to do something like this, said that the place should have a fitting name—and what could be more fitting?" she asked.

"I guess you and he are right. He's a grand old man, and you—" he hugged her affectionately, "there never was a more wonderful and beautiful, more loyal and hard-working girl in the whole world! I'm a lucky man! I pray to God that Grand-père will be my first successful patient. He shall see more clearly day by day. I'm praying for that miracle to happen now. Now!"

They went in and started the day's work. The place had become ever more like what it should be—they had a patient now and then; some bad or early-stage threatening eye cases which they especially wished to study and try to help as they did research. The afflicted were told that, thus far, things were still in an experimental stage, and they were taking a chance, but they willingly took that chance for their own chances of getting cured and helping others likewise afflicted.

Tai and Negu, and sometimes some of the other women who were inclined toward nursing, helped in the hospital and with keeping things clean in the lab, and this saved considerable time, which Hollis and the girl could use to better advantage in experimenting to find the cause of the blinding affliction and its cure.

Bottles and jars glistened in orderly rows. They had had a teak-topped table and mahogany desk, built by a village

craftsman, brought over to use in the laboratory. All was strategically arranged and tidy.

Hollis, with LaGuna hovering ever near to help where and as she could, worked tirelessly, glad that he had previously studied the effects the loss of vitamins had on animals and humans and made special emphasis on the eye complications. His brilliant brain had never worked more efficiently. He conducted one experiment after another.

Word of his efforts spread from hill to vale. To most of the people the news sounded good—only a few jealous, avaricious witch doctors grumbled angrily. He took blood from the natives' veins and injected serum into their thick, tough skins. Some showed patient faith and co-operation, while others showed silent, suspicious distrust. He had to be very diplomatic to convince many of them that this was all for their best—to gain and hold their trust and co-operation. When he looked into their eyes in his kindly, reassuring way and smiled at them it generally won them over. They no longer feared or doubted but absorbed much of his faith.

As time passed and he continued to work among these child-like natives, he learned to understand and speak their language quite well, too. This helped tremendously to advance the chances of his successful completion of his work. He even adopted many of the native customs to seem more like one of them and so gain their trust and love more completely. They admired and trusted and loved him the more they got to know him.

Hollis was happy and content working here, thus—being with the woman he loved and no longer feeling a nagging conscience telling him that he must leave here to return to

other work. He felt as though the good Lord Himself had assigned him to his work here.

Hollis had some of the most capable natives capture all possible types of winged insects that would be apt to carry germs; vermin, rodents, reptiles, and animals that would be suitable for study to further his goal's successful attainment.

All sorts of apparatus and enclosures were built for housing and testing each acquired specimen.

LaGuna brought all types and stages of ill and blind natives to him for observation, for study, for tests. Blood smear after blood smear was made. Thousands—yes, many thousands of them. At times, his efforts appeared hopeless as he checked and rechecked his test. Then, when about ready to admit defeat, there would come some encouragement in a test or case. The statistics left behind by the Dutch scientists were of great help to him now, too.

He worked unstintingly day after day, making and recording his many tests with infinite care and sweating over his inspired work. He allowed himself but two short pauses a day—one to smoke his pipe and the other to eat his light lunch.

If it had not been for LaGuna's help, her inspiring love and sympathy, and the thrill of being in each other's loving arms each night, he would have become discouraged and given up, admitting defeat after the first few weeks of futile efforts.

One evening, an excited boy came running to the hospital and dashed in and up to LaGuna, crying, "LaGuna, come," and motioned in great distress with a wave of his hand for her to follow him with great urgency.

LaGuna and Hollis looked at one another. "Better go," Hollis advised. "If I'm needed, send for me. I'll keep on with this test in the meantime."

LaGuna ran with the boy who tugged hard at her hand as he led her to a hut in the village where an excited crowd swarmed about a screaming child lying on the ground. LaGuna had gathered from what the runner had told her by then that the boy had fallen and broken a leg or ankle but could not be sure.

The lad was clearly in great pain and clenching his small leg with both hands in an effort to take away the agony. Several dogs barked wildly while the child's father held a pair of screaming twins, adding to the deafening turmoil.

In the midst of all the commotion, several old shriveled-up tribesmen with painted faces sat motionless in squatting positions. They were resorting to some of the ancient original tribal customs of praying to the Sun God and other sorcery.

One of them, Moa, whose father before him had fought unsuccessfully against Le Philippe for control of the spiritual and bodily well-being of the islanders, sneered at LaGuna. "My medicine is strong. Go, weak woman, leave him to me."

But LaGuna pushed her way to the boy's side. She knelt beside him and gently examined his leg and looked up and informed the father and others, "Don't worry. It is a broken leg to be sure, but he'll be well in no time." And she ran her finger gently over the break and then patted the boy's hand comfortingly and smiled down into his worried eyes. He was soothed immediately.

She ordered some of the men to quickly make a litter

and splinted the leg herself. Moa was furious and threw his vile powders into the air cursing LaGuna and Hollis. He left, stalking into the jungle.

The boy was carried to the hospital where he was laid gently on the table designed to serve for operations. LaGuna quickly explained the boy's trouble to Hollis, who took over while LaGuna mixed juices of certain roots with hot water in a large iron vessel, then stirred all together until the contents became gummy in nature and then allowed it to cool and hurried to aid Hollis.

She bent over to wipe the injured boy's drying tears away; the frightened countenance of the lad softened, and his leg began to relax. The alcoholic sedative that followed soon began to take effect and they were ready to do the work required.

LaGuna stood in back of the boy and held him firmly across the chest with her arms under his armpits. With the strong wine Hollis had given the boy to drink now acting also as an anesthetic and calming the frightened child, Hollis then grasped the boy's leg with deftness and dexterity, and, without haste, using manual traction, began gently tugging and forcing, until the boy finally cried out in pain.

But thank God, it was done and over with. "There, you have it!" exclaimed LaGuna cheerfully to the boy. "I heard it click back into its proper place." And she relaxed her hold on the boy who, seeing the satisfied smile on LaGuna's and Hollis's face, understood the worst was over and managed a weak smile—and a great sigh of relief went through the natives who had followed to the hospital and stood looking on. Even Mugzy, who had come to watch tensely, seemed to relax and padded pantingly about the room.

"Now, let's have the gum paste, LaGuna, before it cools and cakes too fast," Hollis said, smiling and patting the boy comfortingly on the back of the head. "Nothing to worry about now, my boy," he told him. "I'm proud of you, too; you took it all like a very brave warrior."

LaGuna quickly wrapped a crude, basket-woven, fire bark-like cloth around the boy's body and leg and applied the adhesive material smoothly over it. Then the boy was ready to be carried back home and LaGuna gave his parents instructions regarding his care. "He should not walk at all for some time. He should be given plenty of good, nourishing food." Either she or Hollis would drop in every day or so to see how he was coming along, but there was nothing for them to worry about.

LaGuna even went along back with the stretcher-bearers to see that they carried the boy gently and that he was stowed away snugly and comfortably in his bed and to give a bit of last-minute advice.

When she was about to leave, the mother went to one of her shelves and brought forth a small, beautiful seashell bottle of perfume and offered it to LaGuna, who accepted it with great pride, exclaiming delightedly over the delicate aroma of the gardenia which emanated from the crude though beautiful flask. She also accepted a string of mother-of-pearl for Hollis, knowing that the natives do not like to be refused when they give something.

Le Philippe had taught them that true happiness can be had only by giving it.

For the most part, Hollis and LaGuna worked tirelessly, but they had their lighter moments—took time out for some fun and recreation now and then, knowing that that was

vitally important to their well-being and their doing their best work.

At Christmas time, they put on a Yuletide party with some of the favored natives, having it in Le Philippe's big house, which they decorated gaily—and had a great feast, played games, and sang Christmas songs that all knew—English and French carols. And there was a happy and pleasing exchange of Christmas gifts for all.

Also, on many moonlit evenings, LaGuna and Hollis, after finishing a fatiguing day's work, would walk hand in hand to their favorite romantic rendezvous near the lagoon and have a moonlight swim in the refreshing waters and lie on the sand and watch the gorgeous gleaming moon ride high above the waveless azure waters of the lagoon and listen to the soft lapping waves and the rustling of the palm fronds and the chirping of crickets in the foliage and the sweet, drowsy night songs of birds in the tree branches.

And they would put their arms lovingly about each other and cling closely to one another and thrill to the wonderful, exotic warmth of each other's body and kiss hungrily and caress each other tenderly and murmur sweet, adoring words to one another.

"I loved you from the very first moment I saw you, but for so long, I didn't dare tell you," Hollis told her, and she flushed as thrilled as she had been the first time he had told her that. She told him again how she, too, had known real love for the first time in her life in being with him. Each tender word of love brought tears into her happy eyes.

That night, a slight wind brought the murmur of the sea to mingle with her weeping as the lovers kissed, the moon bent over them.

She closed her eyes as she felt Hollis's hands upon her nude body beneath her sarong. There was a bed of moonlight and stars covering the two lovers as they moaned the sighs of lovemaking.

After that they slept soundly and contentedly, lulled by the soft wash of the wavelets on the coral sands, happily locked in each other's arms.

CHAPTER EIGHT

More Experiments—And More

Although there were many disheartening failures in his experiments, Hollis refused to give up, for there had always been some measures of success resulting now and then. He stuck tenaciously to his self-imposed job, feeling that it was his work in life and the Lord's will that he succeed in what he wanted to accomplish. Discover a cure for the blinding sickness. With each test, he was hopeful that it might prove to be the last—the one that would result in ultimate victory over the blinding sickness.

"It seems endless and fruitless," he confided one day to the sympathetic, ever-helpful LaGuna. "But I know now I can never give up trying, no matter how long it takes. I was never one to give up easily and there is something challenging in the failures that keep driving me on from test to test."

The natives' health barometer had taken a decided upward trend, too. More and more favorable results were beginning to be manifest. There were fewer deaths as fewer sick people succumbed to the ravages of the tropical islands.

"If only I had some of the apparatus and highly trained assistants that I had at State University; then I would be able to accomplish so much more with less effort and time," Hollis said unthinkingly one day, and then quickly added as he saw the hurt look in LaGuna's expressive eyes, "I didn't

mean it the way it sounded, dearest. I wouldn't trade you and your help and inspiration for all the highly skilled, trained assistants in all the Universities in the States. It's only that, well—back there, I'd have so much more equipment to help me. You have learned so very much and are about as competent now as I am."

The torturing headaches had begun again now, too, and interfered greatly with his work on certain days, but he never mentioned them to LaGuna, not wishing to alarm and worry her. But he mentioned them casually to old Philippe sometimes. Le Philippe listened and sympathized with him as he asked him to describe them. He did, telling him that some days the headaches were of the constant, severe, thumping order and on other days they were blinding as he visualized the clouds and mist that came over his eyes. And at times he felt as though his head were placed in a vise which was being slowly, cruelly, steadily tightened, and he felt as though he were losing his mind.

"I can't understand why they come, and there are no medicines here for me to take to help relieve them," he told old Philippe. "The wound in my head is fully healed, and there is only a scar to remind me of it. Visually, that is. Perhaps, some time, if a ship stops here, I should leave on it for a time so that I can go to the States and have a competent examination to find out what's the matter and then have the trouble treated once and for all."

"Perhaps," agreed Le Philippe. "But you would return, of course, for you know now that yours and LaGuna's lives are bound together, and it would be a terrible shock for her to have you go out of her life. Perhaps, you could take her with you, for you would need her—she could learn much more,

too, with you in a big hospital. And you could bring back, then, the many newest medical discoveries, surgical and other laboratory equipment that you need to help in your experiments—of which you have often remarked.

"And," he went on thoughtfully, "your headaches, your symptoms, as you have described them; they resemble somewhat those I have had at times and still have—which have caused my eyesight to grow so poor. They are such as many of the natives who have had the blinding sickness also reported before it came fully upon them. I hope that that terrible affliction is not coming upon you, too."

Hollis certainly agreed in that hope. He tried to think whether anything he ate or drank might be causing him his distress. The tea LaGuna steeped for them each day was practically the same as the natives drank daily. LaGuna had told him how she made it—mixing a quinine bark preparation with fermented berry and fruit juices. It occurred to him that it might become habit-forming, and for a time, he indulged in it only sparingly. But he drank greater quantities of it when he felt the torturing headaches coming on, or when he wished to release some of his pent-up emotions.

Often, now, he would work late and sleep at the laboratory and hospital but insisted that LaGuna return to her hut to get a more complete rest. She would come again in the mornings, bringing a wicker basket of lunch and something to drink, and would look rather worried because he worked so hard for such long hours, but he would always force a smile and ridicule her worrying, insisting that he was feeling fine and well able and eager to carry on his work, thus for . . . it shouldn't be much longer before victory was achieved—and then they could both take it much easier.

LaGuna was hard to convince, however, and continued to worry and fret and watch over him, making sure that he ate enough strengthening foods. She was really upset one day when, despite his bravest attempts to appear as though nothing was the matter with him, he had to give in to one of his excruciating headaches, stop work, lie down, and finally admit to her how the awful headaches came to torture him at times—yes, more and more often and more cruelly.

For some time, his appetite had been poor, and he had barely picked at the food LaGuna brought and set before him, no matter how appetizing.

She sat beside him holding a cloth wrung out in cold water to his forehead and studying him, trying frantically to think of a reason for his painful attacks. She had become keenly interested in vitamins and had begun seeing that he got plenty of greens and juices. She brought him a tall glass of pineapple juice and held it to his lips, lifting him up a bit. Hollis drank it gratefully and exclaimed appreciatively, "It's fine stuff! I feel better already."

Then LaGuna propped him up, as she saw he was beginning to feel better, and set a tray of food on his lap and saw that he ate everything, in fact, actually feeding him with a spoon at times—a fresh pineapple-coconut pudding, sliced banana, a half-dozen breadfruit biscuits with jelly and jam—and finishing up by washing it down with a glass of coconut milk. She felt better about him then, thinking that perhaps he was just weak from not eating enough and chided him gently. "See, you were just almost starved—that was what was wrong with you," she told him. "After this, I think I will always see that you eat enough by sitting beside you and stuffing it down you, if need be."

They had a visitor just then—a woman came screaming into the hospital, bleeding from a bad cut in her hand and needing attention. Hollis rose immediately, and with LaGuna's help, they cleansed the wound, stopped the bleeding, and sewed up the cut. Then LaGuna asked how it had happened. The woman, a bit ashamedly and yet angrily, told them that her husband had been drinking a whisky brewed by Moa in the hills. It had brought out the evil in him. Finally, he had suddenly drawn his knife and slashed at her viciously. She had thrown up her hand to protect her face and so, only her hand had been injured. Then she had fainted. She then ran to the hospital for treatment.

LaGuna's eyes flashed. "I will go along back with you," she said, "and see that he is dealt with. That Moa is bent on trouble."

When they left, Hollis returned to his work and kept at it through the night until dawn was breaking. By then he had finished working out his latest experiment and his eyes gleamed with satisfaction. He felt that he had finally made a very important discovery—he made a notation in his record book, observing that the tiny young worms, the microfilariae, could travel to the eyes of the victim after their original entry into the body. Yes, at last, he felt he had accomplished a successful phase of a most important test. But there was still more to do—that phase over, next he must find a place to break the life cycle of the parasite that produced blindness. What next?

Hollis accumulated hundreds of skin nodules from various parts of the body in which the opalescent, hairlike worms lived. Knowing how to destroy them outside the body did not mean that he could destroy them when they

were within the body. If only his equipment here were adequate.

He also learned in his experiments that the blackfly had something to do with the disease. He had made hundreds of tests in connection with it. Both the fly and the mosquito were rapidly disappearing from around the village. Consequently, he had noticed less oncoming blindness and fewer patients coming in with skin nodules.

That was all very fine, cutting down the number of new cases, but he must still discover how to halt oncoming blindness, and finally to discover how to restore sight lost because of the attack of this parasite.

As that perplexing problem tortured him, he suddenly began to feel one of his awful headaches coming upon him once more and clapped his hands to his head and groaned and staggered to his feet, intent on heading for his bed to lie down. He saw his face, haggard and drawn, his eyes staring and glassy, in a mirror—a wild, horrible twisting of his muscles, because of the intensity of his pain.

Hollis would have fallen prone to the floor in another moment had not LaGuna returned. She had seen him through the window and been shocked by his appearance, and dashed quickly in and to his side to put her arms about him and support him just in time, and almost carried him to his bed, then gently lowered him down on it, tucking a pillow underneath his head, loosening his collar and his belt, and then removing his shoes and lifting his feet onto the bed, and stretching him out as comfortably as possible.

LaGuna put her hand to his forehead—it was wet with cold sweat. He was gasping for breath and shook all over.

His teeth suddenly began to chatter, and his hands were cold as ice.

"Oh, God! What has happened to you, my darling?" gasped LaGuna, shocked and now trembling like a leaf herself. "I knew you shouldn't have worked so hard and long. It is all my fault! I should have been more firm—shouldn't have left you! Stick out your tongue!" she then commanded sternly.

Hollis forced a wan grin and tried to joke, to ease her concern over him. "What for? I'm not mad at you," he managed to reply.

But she was in no joking mood, realizing fully now that her dear one was in a very sad plight—perhaps even at death's door once again. "Never you mind!" she rebuked him, sternly but with tears in her eyes. "Where do you hurt and how? Maybe it is a fever and chills. I'll have Nana and Bonai gather some fresh herbs and bark, and we'll make some strong tea and pour it into you. That most always makes my people feel better."

She rose and ran to the open doorway and called urgently to Nana and Bonai, who were standing not far away, telling them to gather the medicinal herbs and bark and lose no time in doing it, because Hollis had come down seriously ill. Then she returned quickly to his side just as he was trying to stand up.

"I'll be all right. Just felt sort of weak—eyes hazy, bit dizzy—had headache. Worked all night—until just now. Got another last test or so to make—almost got it solved," he muttered jerkily, trying to head back to the lab. "A certain little devilish parasitical worm—lives beneath the skin—and produces microfilariae—tiny young worms that can get to

the eyes—and then, blackness! Blindness! Know how—to destroy the parasites—outside the body—but not—inside. Gotta figure out yet—how to kill them within the body. Then, got it all licked—success! And—no more tests—success and—rest!"

She took him forcibly in hand, though, and firmly pushed him back down into the bed, where they had first made love.

"You'll rest right now—and I'll stay here to see that you do," she told him. "You're all worn out from so much work and not enough sleep. I'm not going to let you do even a little experiment—don't you even dare to think about the work—for quite a while—until you've rested for quite some time, and I've checked you over good and am completely satisfied that you've had enough rest, and that you've fully recovered your strength. If you don't, you'll only kill yourself and then never be able to finish up your big, important job. I'm going to have you carried, yes, carried over to the hut—no walking even; and I'm going to put you to bed and then lock up the hospital and laboratory—so you can't get into it. I'll even hide the key—and I'll stay right with you and watch over you and nurse you again, to see that you mind and get well again. You were silly to overexert yourself like this. Promise me, Hollis, you'll mind me in this?"

Hollis grumbled. "So close to the end—practically finished. Wanted to surprise you—just one or two more experiments, check-ups—just a little figuring to do," he protested.

"Yes, just enough to finish killing you and a lot of good you'll be to me or anyone else then," she reproached him. "No! You're going to listen to me and mind me! And I'm going to see that you do!"

She ran to the village and called a couple of native men and had them put Hollis, who was still protesting indignantly, though rather feebly, still being so weak, onto a stretcher and carry him over to her hut.

She had the men help Hollis out of his clothes and into a pair of pajamas, and then tucked him in and thanked the men and told them they could now go. Nana and Tai hurried in with the roots and bark she had asked them to gather and were greatly concerned over Hollis's having become so ill, for both had come to think a great deal of him. They stayed for a short while to do a number of things which would help ease the burden on LaGuna and then left, with the girl calling after them to remind them to drop around every now and then to see how Hollis's condition was—and to help watch him at night lest he think himself strong enough to try to get up and go back to the laboratory and try to finish up his experiments—which would surely also finish him up. Also, she asked that Bonai let her grandfather know that the white doctor-man had taken very sick, and she would have to watch over him day and night for a while until he got better once more.

Nana had prepared the tea while LaGuna had watched over Hollis and given orders and had handed it, all ready, to LaGuna to give to Hollis before leaving. Alone together again, LaGuna sat down beside Hollis, who lay weak yet grumbling on his bed and lifted his head up a trifle and held the cup of freshly steeped tea to his lips and tilted it, ordering him to drink it all down. He did so, gulping it as rapidly as he could manage and making a wry face.

"Lordy! That stuff is bitter as gall!" he observed. "It should either kill or cure—right now I'm in doubt as to which!"

LaGuna smiled at his apparent start on the road to recovery so soon and followed the tea with pouring and putting to his lips to drink one of her very special private herb remedies, and a sweet-tasting berry cordial, which took away the first, unpleasant taste from his mouth.

"Ah! Thanks, honey, that's much better," he said gratefully. "I'll be all right now in no time!"

"Maybe—but you're still going to stay right here and rest for some time—until I tell you you can get up and around, and finally back to work again," LaGuna replied. "That last experiment can wait as long as it has waited this long."

Despite the remedies and Hollis's prediction that he was becoming much better and would soon be entirely out of danger and recovered, he became worse that night instead of better and ached and tossed and groaned and sweated so that it kept LaGuna busy sponging off his wet face and body and changing his sheets and coverings. He slept hardly at all that night, only a few short catnaps, and LaGuna, of course, did not sleep whatsoever, but hovered over him in a frenzy of fear lest he die, doing everything she could think of to keep him as comfortable as possible and to ease his suffering. He even became delirious for a while.

She could see that the moonlight coming through the window bothered his eyes and closed the shutters. Her alarm increased as she saw his condition grow more critical despite everything she could think of to do to help him. Towards morning, she noticed his eyes rolling up and his skin becoming clammy and his breathing quick, labored, and hot. Then, a distant look entered his eyes, and he appeared quite dazed. His head rolled grotesquely from side to side, and he muttered that he heard strange voices. LaGuna grew

frantic, positive he would soon die despite all her efforts and those of Nana and Tai who had come to help her.

When he finally seemed to pass the critical stage, for a time at least, they gave him more of the strong, bitter tea—making it stronger than ever, and continued to force him to drink more of it from time to time.

Sometimes he was in a coma, then again was delirious and tried to leap out of bed and dash from the hut as though his subconscious was telling him he must return to the lab to finish his last experiment, last test. It took the combined strength of LaGuna, Nana and Tai to subdue poor Hollis and force him back into bed.

Le Philippe came that day, very worried about Hollis's condition, to see the sick man and to try to do what he could and to try to console LaGuna.

Le Philippe shuffled into the quarters and surveyed Hollis's condition. He rubbed his eyes and took a good look at Hollis. "This is the first time that things don't look so murky as they have. The pain has left my eyes, and Hollis doesn't look too bad. With a little tea and that special berry juice, he'll be up and about in no time."

LaGuna's eyes brightened as she wiped her tears away and said excitedly as she patted Hollis's cheeks, "Did you hear that, Hollis? Grand-père says that he can see better."

Hollis perked up and he mustered a thin smile and said, "I'm very happy for you. Maybe I look better to you because my beard is off."

LaGuna planted a kiss on Hollis's cheek and on Grand-père's forehead. "The vaccine is doing what Hollis expected. Several natives thought that they were seeing better also."

"I'll spread the good news," added LaGuna with glee.

"Maybe we better wait, LaGuna. The excitement might be too much for Hollis," replied Grand-père. "Now I won't have to bump into things and knock them down when reaching for them. Yesterday I could only listen to the birds chirp, and today I thought that I saw them flit from tree to tree."

The prayers worked. "It took a long time and so did that vaccine," added her Grand-père.

"The power of God is available at all times. One thing is certain: God always answers your prayers. Don't think of defeat or failure. He never promises an easy life free of problems."

"Right, right," answered Hollis. "Keep on praying for the miracle to happen now."

The natives gathered outside the hut soberly and knelt and prayed for Hollis's recovery, for he had come to mean much to them because of his kindnesses to them and his unstinting efforts to help them when they were sick or injured, and because they knew he meant so much to their beloved LaGuna.

LaGuna finally decided to prepare an extra-strong concentration of the herb, bark, and berry juice, praying that it would finally help her man. Having done so, she brought it to him, and although he seemed very far gone and hardly recognized her, she lifted his head gently and put the cup to his lips and urged him to drink, for her sake if not for his own. Just a sip at a time—and he did. One little sip, then gradually another and another as she persisted and waited for him to get each sip safely swallowed until finally the cup was emptied.

He lay back with a gasp and a strange rattle in his throat, which she feared might be the "death rattle" and LaGuna

prayed as she had never prayed before, and stroked Hollis's clammy forehead and looked at him with swimming eyes. LaGuna knelt before him, her head upon his. She kissed his forehead, his eyes, and fever parched lips. She let the tears stream down her cheeks and let them bathe his feverish hands.

The tears felt cool and soothing, and he tried hard to muster a thin smile of gratitude. He made an effort to place his shaky hand through her long, straight, and luxurious black hair.

In the silence of the room, LaGuna was opening and closing her hands upon her bosom as though to stifle the beating of her heart. Then she began to feel the presence and the might of God, as though He was with her and Hollis, watching over them, in that very room.

"Please, God! He has a great work still unfinished. He must not die!" LaGuna pleaded, kneeling humbly beside the bed.

Suddenly, she seemed to sense in her heart and soul that God had heard her plea and answered it. She looked at Hollis and saw that he lay calm and suddenly peaceful—for a moment she feared his appearance was because death had come to end his suffering but then, as she leaned closer over him and looked at him and listened, she could tell that the lines in his face had relaxed peacefully and his breathing came easily now. He was only sleeping, his fever broken, a natural sleep to heal and speed him towards recovery now.

She looked about her and upward then. "Thank you, God," she said simply from the bottom of her heart.

CHAPTER NINE

The Plane Wreck

Back in the civilized world, where the war ended almost a year before, things were returning to normal. Only the weather, it seemed, menaced the transoceanic air traveler. A strange group was gathered in the Hong Kong airport all talking at once to two sun-tanned men in pilot uniforms.

"Now, look if it's money you are interested in, boys, I'm sure there's no problem. We can take care of you very well," said Terrence Cornelius Van Dyke, squeezing the hand of his newlywed wife. "We must get back to the States at once. I have a very big deal coming off on Tuesday that means millions."

"Mr. Van Dyke, we'll do almost anything for money, we both fought as Flying Tigers during the war, but those impending storms are going to be good ones," said Jim Keese, the pilot. "What do you think, Jerry?"

"I don't know yet," said Jerry Lemont, his co-pilot.

"Look you guys, let's stop haggling," said a swarthy, flashily dressed man in the small group. "I want to leave Hong Kong. If it's OK with you, Mr. Van Dyke and your wife, let's double our offer and take it or leave it."

The two airmen looked at each other. "That's a lot of dough, Jim. I'm for going."

"OK," said Lemont, "we leave at once."

Lemont went to the weather station to get the latest maps. "It looks pretty bad between here and Guam for the next twenty-four hours—unusual turbulence along a thousand-mile front. I wouldn't recommend going out," said the man there. "You know all the regular lines are holding their flights until tomorrow."

"Thanks, friend," Jim said and left.

In less than thirty minutes, the two-motored plane was ready to take off with its pilot, co-pilot and stewardess, carrying three passengers: Mr. and Mrs. Van Dyke and the ebullient Roger Shane. However, just as they were about to leave, a fourth passenger joined them after a brief conference with the owner-pilots. He was a neatly attired man in his early thirties.

He took his seat and introduced himself to the group as Gerald Waindel, former war correspondent and now with Army intelligence. Gerry Waindel sat listlessly in his buckled seat, trailing his fingers over the crease of a pillow. Only his eyes were alert, darting restlessly from the windows to the doors and over to Roger Shane.

The plane left Hong Kong very soon afterwards. Once it was airborne, Roger Shane came over to Waindel and sat down next to him.

"You look familiar to me, pal," said Roger Shane.

"Could be," said Waindel. "I get around the Orient a lot."

"No, I mean I really know you from someplace. I'll remember, though, never forget a face. I'm in insurance, you see, got to remember a lot of faces and names," said Roger. "They call me Blackie."

The stewardess, named Grace, came over to them and asked if there was anything she could do for them.

"No thanks, Miss," said Waindel.

Blackie eyed her with a leer, "There sure is, but not just here and now."

The girl failed to smile. "Not funny."

"Broads are too sensitive to a little kidding," said Blackie, reaching into his suit coat pocket and bringing out a flask. "Drink, pal?"

"No, thanks," said Waindel.

The Van Dykes were seated next to each other near the rear of the plane. "Yes, Dot," Cornelius was saying, "This has really been a honeymoon," putting his hand on her thigh.

"Stop," said his wife with a giggle. "We're not in the hotel."

"I wasn't getting fresh, dear, just a gesture of emphasis. This has been a wonderful trip—London, Paris, Cairo, Bombay, Hong Kong, and now home."

"I really wish, though, that we could have waited a day."

"Now, dear, who's afraid of a little storm? And if I'm not there to vote that stock, you know that Wilson might get a controlling interest in General Industries—that would mean millions of lost dollars."

"I suppose you're right."

In a few hours, they started to hit the turbulent weather. The Van Dykes were quiet. Waindel sat watching Blackie guzzle the contents of his bottle.

"Storms make me sick—airsick," said Blackie, taking a hefty snort. "This helps my stomach relax."

"I'm sure," said Waindel.

Heavy rains fell and lightning flashed. They knew the

pilot and co-pilot were having a hard time navigating the plane. Things got worse instead of better as they lost radio contact.

"Worst storm I ever got stuck in!" Jim told his co-pilot. "Can't seem to find an opening in this darn rain and thick clouds! Can you, Jerry?"

"None."

They kept sending their condition and position to the Guam base in hope that perhaps only their receiver was not working. Things grew steadily worse as a violent gust of air severely damaged one wing and motor. They tried to make the plane lighter by tossing out some of the baggage, but it didn't help much. They'd have to try for a landing soon. But where? They scanned the clouds to find an opening. Jim decided to duck beneath the clouds and fly low, only a few hundred feet above the wild ocean below. A severe downdraft would smash them into the sea, but if they stayed above the clouds, they were doomed anyway.

Suddenly, they glimpsed an island—a bit of open stretch on it where they could possibly land safely. At any rate, they would have to try it. "Tell the passengers to get ready for a crash landing," said Jim to Grace, "strap them in good. No telling what'll happen when we make the try, but one thing's for sure—no chance or use trying to put off—gotta make the try pretty darned quick!"

The Van Dykes were shocked and scared, but Waindel and Blackie Shane were calm—Blackie because he had bolstered his courage with quite a few drinks and realized very little of what was going on.

The women were frightened most of all. Even Grace

was pale, although she tried hard to instill confidence in the passengers.

"Even if we land safely, we'll probably find cannibals down there. We'll end up in one of their soup kettles!"

Grace shivered and then rallied, "Oh, don't be silly. Everything will be fine."

The pilot was trying to make for a landing place now as the plane dropped altitude. His co-pilot stood by watchfully, ready to do anything needed. The passengers sat tense, staring down with bulging eyes, tense, waiting, praying.

The pilot spotted a beach and a lagoon ahead to his left on the small island. That would appear to be the best place to try for a landing. No hangars or runways, no beacon lights or crash ambulance, only a tangle of thick tropical vegetation. It would be tricky, perilous—close, if they made it without mishap. He tried to maneuver the plane so that he could land and stop on the flat portion of the island. The sea and the land, and jungle growth seemed to rush up to meet the plane. He muttered a low, quick, but fervent prayer.

All on board could feel the quick drop, as though their stomachs were coming right up through their chests and would pop out through their mouths, except perhaps Blackie.

Then the plane crashed down—the right wing sheared off the top of a coconut palm. The wounded giant spun partly about, its momentum somewhat slowed, then landed with a rending, rasping, shrieking crash and bumped along for a short distance.

There were screams, and Blackie, fully awake, swore considerably. The plane had come to an abrupt, smashing stop—but things could have been much worse. All on board

began trying to collect their senses, clear their minds, and feel with their hands over their bodies—trying to determine if they had suffered any injuries, broken bones, or bad bruises.

Jim and his co-pilot set about helping the women first; Waindel helped. They were partly in the waters of the beautiful lagoon. The Major crawled out of the wreckage where a large hole had been torn in the side and stretched and looked about him and called back cheerfully, "Well, we made it!" he said, looking out into the thrashing storm.

He helped the women out as the pilot helped them step out and down to him and land.

"Made it! Safely!" Waindel repeated. "Everyone, lay down and keep cool, and I'll see about getting some help. Anybody think they're hurt?" He rubbed his chin tentatively, wiping blood from his cut mouth. His own jaw felt so out of joint he could hardly talk. He felt his arm and saw a bloody gash in it. His neck felt as though it had almost twisted off his shoulders.

Mrs. Van Dyke spat out a loose tooth and was holding her hands to her stomach. Grace was panting, and her eyes appeared glassy. All were pretty much shaken up, but none seemed to have suffered seriously. The women broke down and wept. Cornelius Van Dyke was wanting to crawl back into the plane to look for something and was holding a hand over his mouth—he mumbled rather incoherently and finally admitted he'd lost his "upper plate."

Blackie was moaning that his bottle, which still had quite a bit of "good stuff" in it, had been broken. "Knew I should've invested in one of those rubber, unbreakable bottles," he lamented.

Then they smelled smoke and saw eddies of the grey mist,

and some flames began shooting upward from the plane. Somehow, it had caught fire.

If only they could get to the emergency rations—medical supplies, radio—but the way the plane lay, they couldn't reach them without great danger.

All realized this, except perhaps Blackie—suddenly, Jerry Lemont slipped away from the group and back to the plane. "Got to try it," he called back over his shoulder. "Might mean the difference between life and death for some or even all of us!" He had moved so suddenly that there was no chance to stop him. He disappeared back through the hole in the plane—he was gone for some moments. Finally, they heard him call, and as the pilot, Jim Keese, started for the wrecked plane, he saw Jerry for a moment at a window as he began tossing out a number of packages—food supplies and medical kits. Then he handed Jim the main components of a small auxiliary radio sender-receiver.

"I'll be right back with the generator," he said.

"Hurry up, Jerry! Smoke and flames are shooting higher!" Jim called in an urgent warning, as he and Waindel dived for their lives into the water. Suddenly, there was a terrific explosion that surpassed the storm in fury for an instant. Flames shot through the plane. Waindel and Jim tried to get to and into the plane as the flames died down, finally, but it was no use.

Jim shook his head sadly. "Damn, didn't think that he would die. Poor Jerry. He was out and safe. What a stupid thing," said Jim despondently. "God, I never should have taken that ship up. I should have known better. Goddamn money."

Jim and the Major gathered up the things Jerry had man-

aged to get to and toss out. Then they carried everything farther up on the shore where the trees offered a little security from the storm. Then they shared some of the rations and tended their wounds and stood forlornly surveying the still smoldering wreckage of the big plane.

They speculated on just where they might be, but none could know or be certain. Jim and the Major thought they must be somewhere in the vicinity of Guam, but that was as close as they could figure.

Van Dyke still bemoaned the loss of his upper plate and complained that he should have known better than to try to fly through such a storm. "I got us into this mess, Dotty. I'm partly to blame for that man's death." He was visibly shaken.

His wife tried in vain to calm and comfort him.

The storm subsided at last, and the dawn brought a clear, calm sky. They were all up at the first light.

"Well, no use in just standing around here, might as well look around, check our surroundings, and try to find out where we are—see if there are any living beings on this island," Waindel suggested finally. "No telling how long we'll be here—see if there's anything to keep us alive growing—most likely there'll be fruits and berries growing and we can fish and maybe bag some game, if we have to."

Just then, they found that there were human beings living on the island. For, before their startled eyes appeared a group of natives, lean, curly-haired, with strong, lithe bodies, who had crept to the edge of the jungle and were looking out at them. Some of the men carried long bows and had long, sharp arrows fitted to the strings, quivers full of arrows slung over their backs; others held long, wicked-looking spears. They were observing the wrecked plane and the occupants

that had come out of it for some time in perplexity, awe, and apprehension. Now they emerged from the jungle and came slowly toward the group. The men wore bark cloth, worn kilt-like, which hung from their waists to their knees. There were many of them, quite a number of the curious native women followed the men, and they too, for the most part, wore only from the waist down, and Blackie giggled lewdly as his eyes, sparkling, observed the odd display of bare breasts of the women; some short and stubby and some long and sloppy, and a few quite tempting and shapely.

"Good Heavens! Savages!" screamed Mrs. Van Dyke. "They're coming to attack us! Cannibals!" She trembled with fear.

"I'm not scared! I'm too tough to eat!" Blackie chortled.

The pilot and Waindel tried to act as though undisturbed and even walked to meet the approaching natives, who, while carrying their primitive arms and ammunition, showed no signs of actually intending to attack and harm the group.

The leader of the approaching natives was a tall, well-formed, strongly muscled, good-looking man, and did not look at all unfriendly, but rather more amazed and curious, and even showed signs of sympathy for the group from the wrecked plane. As he came up to Waindel and Jim, to their amazement, he hailed them in English, held out his hand, and greeted them with a cultured, pleasant-sounding, "How do you do? Your plane had trouble in the storm and crashed, I see. You are in trouble. Have no fear—welcome to our island."

"By golly! Friendly, praise the Lord!" gasped Waindel softly and aloud he said, "Glad to meet you!" as he took and shook the proffered hand.

And when it came Jim's turn, the pilot said, "Yes, as you see, we had motor trouble in the storm—had to make a crash landing. No more plane, but we all escaped serious injury, except my co-pilot, who got out safely but insisted on going back in to try to get to the supplies and medicines and managed to toss out quite a bit, but lost his life in doing so. We're in a mess, and I'm glad that we've fallen among friendly folks, for we sure need help."

"And what help we can give you we shall, be sure of that," Bonai told the pilot. "You have crashed on the island of Banika," he added. He turned then and called back to the other natives in their own tongue that all was well—these were friendly American folks, not enemies.

There was a brief exchange of introductions—the native leader, Bonai, introduced himself and his son, Negu, and asked the group to follow them back to the village. He explained that he knew the language, having learned it from the great man who was also really the leader of them all—Le Philippe, pronouncing the name "Fullipe," as usual.

The womenfolk, Grace Cramer and Dotty Van Dyke, were much relieved and favorably impressed by the good-looking Bonai and his handsome son, Negu. "We're in luck after all," whispered Grace. "Thank God!"

Blackie was heard mumbling to himself as they walked along with the natives to their village. He hoped they knew how to brew some good native beer or strong wine at least and would have some for him because he could use it, for he was dying of "thirst." Water never did the trick for him when he was really thirsty. Also, he had a time of it keeping his lascivious gaze off the especially shapely bare breasts

and well-turned legs of the native women. He told himself that he might have a bit of fun here after all—if he had the chance and could get away with one of them for a bit.

Bonai walked with Waindel and Jim and assured them that, later, he would have some of his men return to the plane with them and effect an entrance to remove the remains of co-pilot, Jerry Lemont, and also bring anything that was still undamaged and worth salvaging to the village.

The group exclaimed at times over the tropical beauty of their surroundings as they traversed the coral path to the village.

The acrid odors from the native cooking pots filled the air as they entered the village. "Wonder what kind of stuff they eat," muttered Van Dyke. "Hope it's something soft—could go for a big bowl of soup right now to settle my nerves and give me strength."

Blackie grinned and put in, "A steak for me! And just so they don't eat humans."

They saw many more native men and women and naked little children standing before their thatched huts viewing them with friendly curiosity. The huts were strongly built and raised on stilts about ten feet from the ground on corner posts for the most part, so as to be high and dry in the rainy season. The huts of the village were arranged in two long rows facing each other.

Bonai told them much about life on the island while they ate and listened with great interest. No telling how long they would have to stay here—for ships did not stop here often. The plane-wrecked group mopped their faces as they walked, for this unusual heat was hard on them. It was now about the

middle of the morning, and the sun still beat down bright and intense through the tall palm, camphor, and ebony trees.

"Oh, my! Such airlessness!" complained Cornelius Van Dyke as he mopped his brow. "I'm not used to this."

The women felt the most beat-up, however, from the shock of the crash landing, then the shock of fearing hostile natives were going to attack them—perhaps butcher them for their stewpots, and then the long, hot walk to the village. Only the thoughts of how they were now safe helped keep their strength and courage up.

The party was all much relieved that things had turned out as well as they had. Things could have been very much worse by far. Only thoughts of poor Jerry, who had given his life to help save theirs, bothered them, except, perhaps, Blackie. Jim Keese felt the saddest, the most upset over poor Jerry's tragic death. He reproached himself, time and time again, for not having stayed in Hong Kong. He wished he'd gone into the plane instead, or at least followed Jerry inside to help him get the things and toss them. At times he even told himself that he wished he had been there to die with Jerry at his side.

He felt like he'd been a coward and slacker—he let his co-pilot down, somehow, in the emergency.

Bonai explained to them now, here, the way of native life was such that the men went out to sea in their outrigger canoes and fished, or hunted at times in the jungle, and the women were left to do the really hard work at home; planting, tending, and harvesting the crops and so on.

Bonai told them they were not the only white persons on the island—they would soon meet others of their own

kind. Two white men and a white girl, well, practically white—though she was "crossed with native blood"—and he told them of old "Fullipe" who had come to the island some forty years before to live and married a chieftain's daughter. In time, their son had been born, grew up, and had gone to Paris and other great cities to study art and other things. Then he fell in love and brought his wife back with him to Banika. They had a child, who had grown to womanhood, and LaGuna was her name, married now to an American. He told them the wonderful things they had done for the health of his people.

"LaGuna and white-medicine man, Holly, they set up a hospital and laboratory near where they live," Bonai further explained to the white castaways from the plane. "Much sickness still here, terrible blinding sickness, LaGuna and Holly, they keep experimenting, trying to find cause and cure for the blinding sickness, and think they will succeed soon. We all hope so. But now, day ago or so, this fine medicine man, Holly, he work so hard and long hours, he get very sick from that and, we suspect, him still have trouble from his old, bad head wound, and almost die again. Maybe still die—almost die last night, but then seem to get better. Hope he get all better and stay better. They say he almost find the cure for bad blinding sickness which come to many of us here on Banika. You will meet these great white people soon, Old Philippe and LaGuna, anyhow. And Holly, too, if or when he better." As a rule, he spoke a sort of broken English, though at times quite well, almost flawlessly, for he had studied much under old Philippe's and LaGuna's tutelage. He was very proud of the way he had mastered the foreign language.

A runner was sent to tell old Philippe about the new-

comers to the island and see what arrangements he might wish to make for their welcome and accommodations, and so on, and to meet them; unless they should be brought to his large house. More likely, though, Bonai felt that it would be left up to LaGuna to welcome them and arrange things for them. "Le Philippe" was leaving more and more things up to his capable granddaughter as he grew older.

But LaGuna was quite worn out now, having just been through a very trying, tiring ordeal again with Hollis and the awful storm. Still, he knew she would want to know about these people coming and welcome them and arrange things for them as much as possible—see to their comfort, accommodations and so forth—be the "Perfect Hostess" as much as she possibly could, despite the late harrowing experience.

So he led the visitors through the village and to where LaGuna's hut stood, with the hospital and laboratory building just a short distance behind it in the beautifully landscaped, neatly kept grounds.

LaGuna had heard something about the crash from the excited chattering among the natives. Mugzy, too, the only German Shepherd on the island, had seen and heard them coming, scented the new, unusual smell of these new people and set up quite a rumpus, barking and darting about wildly, showing powerful, muscular legs. Her yellow-brown fur looked like wildfire as the morning sun shone over her shiny fur of twelve moons.

LaGuna came out of her home and onto the front veranda as Bonai and Negu led the party of whites to her place. There were exclamations of surprise and admiration, especially from the men of the party, particularly Blackie.

LaGuna showed signs of the strain she had been through and still was under as she came down the steps and across her lawn to meet and greet them. Bonai performed the introductions and explained how the whites had come there.

With some difficulty, LaGuna made the excited Mugzy become quiet and then greeted the newcomers, shaking hands with them in turn and assuring them that all that could be done to welcome them, make them comfortable would be done. Few ships ever stopped here at the island, however, so it was doubtful as to when they could leave and resume their interrupted journey again.

LaGuna was favorably impressed by Waindel and the pilot, Jim Keese, especially, and the women seemed nice. Cornelius Van Dyke seemed a little odd. But she took an instant dislike to Blackie Shane, sizing him up by his appearance, actions, the way he talked, and the way he looked at her—the sensual, wolf-on-the-prowl gleam in his eyes. Mugzy, too, most certainly didn't approve of him and showed her disapproval of Blackie most vehemently—giving him particular attention as she stood before Blackie barking at the top of her voice as though giving the man a good scolding.

But LaGuna gave Blackie the benefit of the doubt and scolded Mugzy. When Blackie tried to approach close to LaGuna to shake hands and ingratiate himself with her, Mugzy almost went into a tantrum of rage, the fur bristling up straight, and it seemed for a moment she would throw herself savagely on him. Blackie introduced himself as dignifiedly as he could, "I'm Roger Shane, of New York—big insurance man." His gleaming eyes feasted on LaGuna's well-proportioned, alluring figure with a hungry carnal gleam.

LaGuna tried not to pay any more attention to Shane than she could help, turning back to exchange a few pleasant, reassuring words with the disheveled, still quite upset women. Then she talked with Gerry Waindel and Pilot Jim Keese, whom she found to be apparently very nice. "It was a terrible storm last night, wasn't it?"

The storm, as all could tell, had done some damage here about the village, too—uprooting trees, damaging some of the homes, tearing off entirely or partially some of the thatched roofs. In places, the ground was covered with coconuts that had been whisked from where they had hung on the branches of the trees.

She did not make any mention then of how she had paid little attention to the fury of the storm without, having her own terrible storm within as she prayed and sought to save Holly's life and seemed to have succeeded, although he was still quite ill.

But the visitors had heard something of Hollis and Waindel sympathetically asked their hostess about the man's condition. LaGuna told him that Hollis Rochelle had been very ill, until that very morning—when it seemed he had finally taken a turn for the better, that the crisis had passed and he would pull through.

Waindel mused, pondering over the name. Of course, there were a lot of Rochelles in the world—but, a Hollis Rochelle?

To himself he said, "Hollis Rochelle? Ummm. No, absurd! It couldn't be the Hollis Rochelle from State!" But he resolved to delve further into this white man's identity later—when he was more recovered. He and the others of the party expressed their sympathy to LaGuna. LaGuna, however,

couldn't help but notice Hollis's name seemed familiar to Waindel and looked at him inquiringly so that Waindel decided to ask her more concerning Hollis—his appearance and so on. She told him, "Tall, dark, and handsome—young—" which of course would fit thousands of other young men. But then she did add a few more specific characteristics, and asked, "Why, do you know someone like that? Do you think, perhaps, he is someone you have known?"

"Well, I can't say for sure right now," replied the Major hesitantly, "but I certainly went to school with someone who could answer that description. It would be remarkable if it should turn out to be the same man."

"It would indeed and would help him a great deal to improve," enthused LaGuna. "Although the danger of his dying seems to be past, his memory seems harmed. At times, he doesn't seem to remember things properly. If only I could do more—or could get him to the States and to a specialist in a hospital who could examine him thoroughly and operate, if that would help!"

She took them to her grandfather's house and introduced them, and they talked for a time; and, just as LaGuna had, old Philippe made the unfortunates who had crash-landed on his island welcome. He, too, seemed to think well of Waindel, Jim Keese, and Grace Cramer, and rather indifferently of the Van Dykes. But instinctively, he saw through Blackie. He was a sort to be watched—he would make trouble if he had half a chance. Yes, especially with the women, thought Le Philippe. He could read the carnal lust in Blackie's glittering eyes. He hoped that some ship would come before long to take this group away before anything disagreeable happened.

After the visit and serving them a bountiful, nourishing meal, LaGuna tending any cuts and bruises they had, Bonai escorted them to several huts on the edge of the village assigned for their use while they remained on the island.

Jim and the rest returned to the plane that afternoon to salvage what they could and take care of the remains of Jerry. His body was given a funeral preached by Le Philippe, and he was interred in the village cemetery on the hillside near the church.

From the wreck of the plane, little remained. Jim found an auxiliary generator that had been spared the worst of the fire because Jerry's body had protected it. If they could get it working, it just might run the radio transmitter that Jerry had saved. This little radio had a very limited range, but he felt it was worth trying to fix it along with the generator.

The newcomers adapted themselves to their new homes and new style of living quite well, since there was nothing else to do. Blackie seemed very happy and contented. Waindel, who seemed to stick pretty close to Blackie, did not appear overly anxious to leave. Grace and Jim had still not recovered from Jerry's death, but they were resigned to their fate. Even Dotty Van Dyke seemed happy, although Cornelius, who felt the loss of millions in General Industries, was not particularly enjoying his stay on Banika.

Blackie lost no time in getting to know some of the natives as quickly and familiarly as possible so as to get around them and find a supply of something good to drink—as strong as possible. Thus, did he meet Moa. Although they did not trust or care for each other, they found mutual ground in their

love of liquor. Blackie was able to trade the contents of a waterproof packet for great quantities of Moa's brew.

Waindel's big interest was in learning more about the other white—the medicine man, whom he thought he might have known back in the States. So daily, he asked LaGuna how the man's condition was and finally, one day, when Hollis seemed in quite strong shape and well out of danger, it was decided that LaGuna bring Waindel to him. Something had already been mentioned to Hollis about the white people who were living on the island.

Waindel was quite excited when LaGuna took him to her hut, then told him to wait while she went in to speak to Hollis alone at first, to sort of prepare him. She had already led up to the intended meeting with Gerry Waindel—and had shaved Hollis neatly and brushed his hair. Hollis again looked rather drawn and haggard with a rather wild, haunted expression in his eyes. He looked neat enough, sitting up in his bed with pillows propped behind his back, when LaGuna brought Waindel in to him.

The two men stared at each other in astonishment. There had been a great change in each man. Waindel had lost some hair, and Hollis looked older and changed by the lines of the terrible experiences he had gone through. But they knew each other quickly just the same.

"Holly! It sure is you! You're a sight for sore eyes!" cried Waindel, crossing the room quickly, hand outstretched to shake that of his old friend. "Just like the beachhead landing, and off you went out to sea, away! Now this miracle. Another miracle." Waindel wiped his brow.

Hollis grinned. "The same old Gerry—except more 'light-headed'—on the outside at least, than ever!" He chuckled

in greeting, referring to Gerry's balding dome. "A sight to cheer sore eyes, indeed!" he added as they gripped hands firmly and shook. The Major sat down beside his bed, and LaGuna discreetly left them alone, two old college chums. It did her own heart good, too, to see the happy reunion. Also, she thought, maybe a lot of good for Hollis would come from this.

The two talked for some time. Waindel explained about the atomic bomb and the end of the war. He told how he was now a Major in the intelligence service of the Army. He was now working with other agencies to crack an international dope ring, centered in Hong Kong. His suspect was about to leave on the ill-fated plane without him, but he had caught it just in time. "We were hoping to catch Shane with the stuff on him when we landed but here, we are instead. Don't let him know who I am. He will be hard enough to nail as it is, Hollis."

Finally, LaGuna came back to them to remind them that too much talking, too much excitement, and exertion might not be good for Hollis after his having been so very sick so recently. But they all knew that this much joyful reunion and talking over old times, at least, would do Hollis a world of good.

Still, it was best he rest now for a while. The next day, he could meet the others in the party—the Major would bring them to meet him. And so they parted.

The next day the Major came again, early in the afternoon, with the others—and Hollis was introduced to them and rather liked them all, especially Jim Keese. He saw already that "Blackie" Shane was everything Waindel said. Hollis disliked and distrusted him at once, especially when

he saw plainly the lustful way Blackie's eyes constantly fastened on LaGuna.

The group talked and kidded. Waindel accused Hollis teasingly of having stolen his old girlfriend, Terry, away from him.

Hollis flushed a trifle. He had quite forgotten all about Terry by now, having fallen so deeply in love with LaGuna. Hollis was amazed that he had forgotten all about Terry, the girl for whom he had made such a great sacrifice, taking the blame for Cecil.

"Well, don't you worry anymore about that jackass," he comforted him. "When you get back—if you are still carrying a torch for her, you can have Terry back! She's all yours!"

"Anyway, I guess I only thought I was in love with her and that she was the girl for me. You wouldn't know that she was the girl you left behind. I don't want her, and I doubt that you would either."

"She is a changed girl. The war has changed many things. I'll tell you later," Gerry said.

"I know better, much better now—I've found the one and only real sweetheart I ever want, now, right here on this island of Banika—do you blame me? What do you think of my choice? Not bad, eh?" And Hollis looked with loving eyes at LaGuna, who smiled and blushed with pleasure and banished any thoughts of jealousy over Hollis's past romance with this girl, Terry.

"Not bad at all. Can't say I blame you, Holly! She's a beauty and a wonder—much more your type. Golly! You know, I actually envy you. Sure, you don't want to just go back to Terry after all, when you're well enough, and a ship comes along—and let me stay with your sweetheart and try

to take your place? I'm sure she'd much rather have me—I'm ever so much better looking, with my nice long, wavy hair, you know!" LaGuna and Hollis both laughed good-naturedly.

"You've a fine man, in Hollis, LaGuna," the Major went on to tell the girl, praising Hollis so that Hollis finally began to squirm in embarrassment. "Best man in the world! Always the most decent of men; didn't have things easy, either, had to work and fight hard for whatever he got. Had to look out for himself at a very early age. Worked his way through school, shoveling snow, taking care of furnaces, mowing lawns, washing automobiles for whatever he could earn; doing any job he could get that was decent and honest."

"And when he got to college, finally, a certain Professor Einhardt, one of his special instructors, took a special fancy to him, and with good reason. That meant a lot, you see, for Professor Einhardt is a very learned man, a bacteriologist of world renown. Took Hollis under his wing, so to speak, recognizing the boy's talent, was determined to help bring it all out, make the most of what he had. Did, too!"

"Hollis was always a hard worker. Worked hard, studied hard to make the most of his opportunities—appreciated them, all that was done to help him get ahead. Oh, he liked to have fun as much as the rest of us, but only when it wouldn't interfere with his work to get ahead. Always had a world of patience, which most of the rest of us lacked—a trait that made him so adept in his studies, his research work at State."

Hollis then told LaGuna what a great football and track star Waindel had been back in 1938. "If it hadn't been for you, we wouldn't have won all the games we did! Seems almost

like yesterday as I think back to those times now—but it's all of eight years, isn't it?"

"Yes," Gerry agreed. "And a lot has happened since then. Good things and," he shuddered, "very many terrible things! The war! All the cruel, needless horrors of war!"

After a lull in their conversation, the thoughts of Terry's lifestyle annoyed him immensely. Then Hollis made a sudden decision and said to Gerry Waindel, "If what you say about Terry is true, Gerry, I might just as well forget about her and concentrate on my one and only love."

"LaGuna to be sure!" Gerry replied. "Yes, by all means."

"That does it," said Hollis.

"Does what?" quizzed Gerry.

"Getting married." Hollis tapped his thigh with gusto, flashed a big smile, waved his hand high up in the air, and cried out loudly, "LaGuna, LaGuna," his voice raised in a crescendo.

"Yes, yes, Hollis dear," she answered from the veranda. "What is it? What is it?"

"Hurry, hurry, get ready."

"For what?"

"Wedding!"

"Wedding? What wedding, when?" Her eyes brightened.

"Full moon!"

"It's almost that now. What's the big rush, Hollis?" She rushed to Hollis's side and ruffled his hair. She then gave him a big hug and kiss.

"Let me be the first to congratulate you," exclaimed Gerry Waindel, shaking her hand and extending a vigorous handshake with Hollis.

"She's a jewel! A dandy, Hollis!" smiled Gerry.

"Thanks, Gerry."

Hollis grinned from ear to ear. LaGuna's face turned red with excitement, and her eyes brightened. She scampered out of the hut to break the news to Grand-père. Soon, the word of the wedding spread like fire.

LaGuna had been very busy and frantic to be sure that the wedding would go well. After all, there wasn't even time for a rehearsal. Hopefully, all would be performed according to tradition.

CHAPTER TEN

Blackie's Attempt at Romance

The group of whites missed all the civilized conveniences but adapted themselves quite well to their new environment and accommodations. As long as they were safe and housed, had no worries about food and drink, and were well-treated, they were reasonably happy. The awful heat made them suffer at times, but they finally got used to it as they "seasoned." At least the nights were grand, being cool from ocean breezes, and they slept comfortably. They enjoyed refreshing bathing in the lovely waters of the picturesque lagoon. They enjoyed the beautiful scenery of the tropical isle. The men tried going fishing at times with some of the natives and had quite a lot of sport out of it, although Jim Keese spent all his time trying to make parts for the generator and patch up the transmitter.

The women lounged around for the most part, settling their nerves, getting a big kick out of fitting themselves out with native-type wardrobe—although they couldn't quite bring themselves to go as far as to expose as much as most native women who wore only a sort of skirt that covered their bodies from the waist down to about knee-length, leaving their bosoms exposed.

Most of their baggage was lost in the crash, so they had very little left except perhaps what they had on at the time

of the crash, to wear—and that, they had wisely decided, they should try to save for when the time came, as it must surely, sooner or later, that a ship would come to the island and they could take passage on it and return home.

LaGuna and Hollis, who were back at work once again, dropped in to visit with the new boarders now and then. LaGuna visited with the two women. And Hollis visited with the men and had to keep an eye on Blackie, who had disappeared several times back into the hills with Moa.

Major Waindel and Jim remarked to Hollis, "We're gonna have trouble with that lecherous, alcoholic devil yet! He's no good—all the way! Gotta keep an eye on him—always prowling around, associating with that witch doctor, who's got some strong wine."

Hollis and LaGuna, too, realized the truth of this only too well and were on guard. They tipped Bonai off to be on guard, too—to have some trusted men of the village keep tab on Blackie's carryings on—be on hand should he ever try to start something; perhaps, force his attentions on one of the native women. They knew that Blackie had a strong yen for LaGuna but also realized he didn't have a chance. But other women were more often alone and were not safe with Blackie loose.

Negu, too, noticed Blackie's looks—could read the man's character and desires, and decided that it would be well to keep an eye on him and on his Tai, who was so naive and helpless while he was hunting or fishing. If Blackie ever tried anything with Tai there would be plenty of trouble.

Blackie should have known better, been on his guard, and used more restraint, but he was the type who, when he wanted fun with some female, cast discretion to the winds. He thought only of how he could inveigle a way to have that

fun with that woman—never stopping to think about any trouble that might come as a result later on.

Meanwhile, the others felt they had been in wonderful luck to have landed on an island peopled by such friendly and helpful natives. The natives, in turn, except for Moa and a few of his kind, returned the respect and the liking. The Major and the pilot, who knew many types of natives, realized that they were truly much above the average Polynesian in intelligence and industry. This was doubtless due, in great degree, to the cultural influence of the artistic Le Philippe, having lived among them and helped them for so many years.

While enjoying the stay on the island, naturally, the party from the wrecked plane was anxious to find a way to get back to their own people. The Major and Jim asked Hollis, LaGuna and Le Philippe one time about when any ship was coming that they might be expected. But that was very uncertain—none came on any scheduled stops that way, ever.

"Couldn't we stand a chance of making it to some larger island, not too far away, where ships do stop at times?" suggested the Major. "Maybe in one of the larger outrigger boats?"

Le Philippe pondered the idea, then shook his head. "It would be very well for the purposes they are constructed for, going out fishing and even to nearby islands at times, they wouldn't be apt to stand up on the open sea, far from land, especially in the event of any fairly big storm that might chance to come up. You might lose your lives. In fact, I'm pretty sure you would, should you try such an attempt. All you can do is wait and hope and pray."

Jim, however, had been able to get the generator work-

ing. He had to turn it by hand, but it did generate enough power to broadcast. With some wire from the wreckage, he rigged a large aerial on a hill that wasn't too far from the village. Mount Pelu would have been better, but where he was, he could use the power of the stream to turn the generator by a pulley system. Each day, he spent several hours sending an S.O.S.

The group felt better then, realizing that everything possible was being done to help their chances to get away from the island, lovely as it and its people were—after all, they agreed, "There's no place like home."

Blackie, however, hoped they wouldn't be found before he'd had his chance at the lovely little Tai, and LaGuna, too—if only he could get her alone. But there didn't seem any ghost of a chance there.

So Blackie continued to watch and wait for his chance to get Tai alone someday—then—ah, then he would have his way with her.

Tai didn't seem to realize this, to fear him or anyone. Maybe she was too self-confident or didn't care—or never dreamed that any man would force his attentions on a girl who didn't want them, having never been anywhere else all her seventeen years. Oh, she knew about love, alright, with her intermittent affair with Negu. But, with any other man, no, she wouldn't be apt to be willing or in the least interested. She enjoyed the lovemaking with Negu because it held them together.

Blackie seemed to have found a friend in Moa, who liked an occasional bit of opium in exchange for his alcohol. But Moa still eyed Blackie carefully, waiting for his chance to avenge himself on all the white men.

Moa also found him some women who were willing to give themselves for some of the dope. Blackie felt fairly confident, but he was still not satisfied. He wanted Tai and LaGuna. Some of the other natives were not happy with Blackie's activities, but none of them realized he was buying his favors with dope. Neither did Major Waindel, although he was rapidly reaching the point of a showdown.

One day, while the Major and Jim were busy with the radio, Cornelius was sleeping, and Blackie was out "scouting," looking for a chance to get alone with Tai. Dotty and Grace strolled about the village to pass the time. They came to the "Community House" and decided to look in. They found LaGuna there with a group of the native children to whom she was teaching geography. She greeted the two white women cordially, inviting them in and explaining how she taught school at times to help the children learn as much as possible about various things—how to live best here; learn to sew and mend and about the best methods of personal hygiene and other sanitary matters—and even about the rest of the world—teaching them some bits of history, geography, arithmetic, French and English. The children, for the most part, loved it. They were eager to learn and proud of what they learned.

Dotty and Grace, glad of the chance to do something useful to help repay their debt in some small way, promptly offered to help teach the children. This helped LaGuna to be free so that she could be with Hollis more, helping him as he worked a little in the laboratory on his experiments again. She had to watch him to see that he did not strain himself again. He was very impatient to get back to work and try to finish finding the cure for the blinding sickness—

an accomplishment which would mean so much to those afflicted by it. Old Philippe was very anxious, very impatient, too, for his eyesight was still weak but getting a little better. But of course, he realized that his granddaughter was right in insisting that Hollis not try to get back to the nerve-wracking pace that had laid him low.

Dotty and Grace enjoyed their new job. There were many things they could teach the children that LaGuna couldn't, and which they welcomed and might find useful. Also, there were many things which she could not teach them—part of their education in things that would be useful to them in their future lives was—how to make fishhooks and boats, and how to tell the time by the position of the sun, moon, and stars.

"It is really wonderful!" Dotty enthused. "I feel for the first time in my life that I'm contributing something to someone."

Besides what they taught the children, they in turn learned from them. They saw the small girls learning how to make shell earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. Others sat on straw-matting, decorating and carving other articles for household uses.

Off to one side sat three young boys polishing various woods and seashells. Some older boys were making fishing lines from braided bark that had been smoothed, and cordage from coconut husk fibers—others were making barbed fishhooks from knots of hard teak wood.

LaGuna explained to them that these were made for the use of the villagers; the men who went fishing—some of the articles were used for trading purposes. Sooner or later, always, some ship would come to the island, and then, what

a time was had by all—they would have much in readiness to make trades for things those on the ship had that they could use and wanted.

But Dotty and Grace confided to LaGuna that despite their happiness on Banika, they still wanted to return home. "How often do boats stop here?" asked Grace.

"They used to come about once a year, but the war stopped that. Maybe, now that the war's over, they will come again. We hardly ever have visitors here. Happenings like Hollis being washed ashore here in his disabled barge—and your plane crashing and marooning you here with us, are rare indeed. Perhaps, though, Jim Keese's radio will help soon," LaGuna told them.

She didn't add that both her grandfather and she, and the natives, too, felt that the less they had connections with the rest of the world, the better off they would be. Although they had benefited from civilization, they feared some of its poisonous aspects—those that brought crime and hatred and war.

When they got back to their huts, they met Negu stalking away in great anger, dragging the lovely Tai along after him and jabbering furiously at her in the native tongue and looking as though he might turn and strike the girl any minute. Tai looked scared and embarrassed and flushed and was trying to get a word of protest in edgeways all the while. Neither one even looked at or seemed to notice the two women, except that Negu finally turned and glared at them. They wondered what had happened to upset him, but had a hint of what it might be.

They hurried inside their hut and found Blackie there, cursing and nursing some livid, swelling bruises on his face.

"What in the world happened?" Grace cried in alarm.

"Oh, nothing to talk of—that damned, tempting native wench—happened in while you were gone. Had come to visit you girls—didn't know you were out. We'd just begun to say a few words—she'd asked me where you were and I was starting to answer her, when in rushed that crazy native fellow and started to cuss me out for no reason and came at me and hit me before I knew what to expect and then grabbed the girl; cussing her out, too, and jerked her out along with him. Damned jealous heathen! And that damned, attractive wench of his—troublemaker! I wouldn't be surprised if she hadn't had her eye on me for some time, being as attractive as I am, and was just waiting for a good chance to get alone with me—thought this was it! As if I'd ever have wanted to have anything to do with an ignorant, dumb, uncivilized stinking native girl!"

"I just hope this happening doesn't set the rest of the natives against us all and cause trouble," sighed Dotty. "Negu is the son of the Chief, you know." She could well imagine the true way the happening had been—that Blackie had, on some pretext, lured the attractive girl into the hut, thinking that this would be his chance—had tried to make love to her. Her sweetheart, Negu, had come in at just the right time—or wrong time for Blackie and the rest had happened as Blackie said.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Fight with Negu

Working in the laboratory, Hollis heard a cry outside. There was agony in its tone. It was the cry and the voice of Tai and the harsh tone of Negu.

The frantic voice yelled, "Negu is hurting me. Please stop him."

At some distance away, Hollis saw Tai get up from the ground to crawl and plead on her knees, towards Negu. She clung to his thigh to ward off the blows.

Hollis tore out of the room and closed the door with a loud bang in hot pursuit to intercept Negu.

"Get out of my way," Hollis said sternly to a guard who was standing in the doorway.

"Negu is mad about something," said the guard.

"I'll go and help you break up the feud."

"Never mind. I can handle him myself," he echoed furiously in a tone of rage, thrusting and setting his jaw.

Hollis tried to keep a calm face, but things were boiling inside of him as he heard and saw Negu slap Tai. Hollis's pent-up feelings were like flood waters about to break and leap over their banks. He was blind with rage and sick at heart with this and other problems the group were having with Moa and Blackie, and now with Negu.

Hollis watched Tai press her hands to her bleeding lips. She yelled pleadingly as he wrenched her wrist. Negu drew away as if to hit her again.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Hollis yelled with a vibrant voice. Hollis swore bitterly within himself.

"What in Hell is the matter with you?" His eyes were sharp as flint.

Tai's blood drained from her face as she clenched her trembling hands, grabbed Negu's arm, and looked at him with a piteous expression on her face.

There was hatred and mad jealousy in Negu's heart as he bitterly said, thrusting her back, attempting to give her another swat in the face, "What a fool Negu has been to allow Blackie to make love to you. You wretched creature, you belong to me rightly."

Tai moaned, and her face flinched as she was about to receive another blow, but Hollis dashed as fast as he could to come to her aid. Negu saw him coming and showed his teeth as his fingers dug deeply into Tai's wrist.

Hollis stepped up forward, eyeing him closely. "What are you beating Tai for? Why not pick somebody your own size? You coward! Why, I could tear you to 'bits.'"

"That's just what I am to do to you, you white infidel. You try and stop me." Negu rifled back with vengeance.

Hollis approached Negu closer with a snarl. His anger became more deep-seated as he watched Negu defy Hollis and twist her arm all the more.

"I said stop it, Negu!" Hollis tried to break Negu's grip on Tai.

"She belongs to me," he snapped back. A snarling grin was on his face, which was taut and tinged with bitterness.

Cautiously, Hollis watched him as Negu released the tight grip on Tai's wrists. She rubbed her bruised hands and wiped the tears from her face, and then he threw her into the dirt face-first. All of Hollis's suppressed feelings gushed out like some tornado of fury as he watched her hit the ground.

"You're next." Negu smiled back. His cold, watchful eyes were bloodshot as he looked at Hollis like some viper darting venom from its eyes. "After you, come the others. We are sick and tired of being treated as inferiors long enough."

Some of Moa's followers were on his side, giving Negu encouragement. Psychologically, now was Negu's time. For he had harbored all the hate in his heart that he could stand. He knew that sooner or later he would have to come to blows, for Hollis felt an icy draft every time Negu looked at him.

Quick as a panther, Negu leaped at Hollis, hurling him to the ground beside Tai.

Convulsively, Hollis sprang up to his feet. Before Hollis could get his balance, Negu hit Hollis in the midsection, knocking him down again. With savage-like strength, Negu pounded upon Hollis and squeezed his throat with one hand and struck and bashed away at Hollis's head with the other. Each blow to his head felt like a hot branding iron was applied to it.

Hollis heard Tai scream, "Negu! Negu!" He also heard a jumble of noises from the sidelines. Their bodies twisted and turned as they rolled on the sharp, hard coral ground, trying to get a stranglehold on one another.

Hearing Tai scream apprehensively, LaGuna ran up and yelled, "Hollis! Hollis! Be careful."

He didn't answer. He didn't want help from anyone. If

there were any differences, Hollis wanted to iron them out his own way. There was no use getting others involved.

The fight was in full swing with Negu having an upper hand thus far. Hollis couldn't quit now. He never quit before. Defeat only hurts you more when you quit, he said to himself.

Intermingled with Tai's voice, Hollis could hear words of encouragement from his side. These words gave Hollis added moral and physical stamina. Hollis struggled for his life as he felt blood and sweat pour from his forehead and face, trickling down his neck. Soon, Hollis could feel Negu's tightening, claw-like grip slip bit by bit.

Suddenly, with a terrific, concerted effort, Hollis wrenched his hold away and jumped to his feet. Hollis felt his "Adam's apple" move up and down, and also the great veins pounding and throbbing in his head as that terrific pressure was released from his neck.

By this time, Hollis knew that he had to fight Negu in both white and native island fashion. Hollis clenched his teeth and fists and crouched cagily in a circle, trying to restore his breath and at the same time draw Negu into a favorable position.

But Negu didn't want Hollis to get away or any strength back, so he tried to close in again. Hollis watched Negu cautiously, as he knew that he was dealing with a savage man.

The atmosphere grew more tense by the minute, and the natives stared at Hollis in utter bewilderment at the strength he showed, because he was fighting the fiercest native on the island.

Hollis kept spitting blood from the corners of his mouth and gradually felt his strength coming back.

"He's out to get you," yelled Tai. "Be careful. Let us help you," LaGuna cried as she paced nervously about, not knowing what the next moment would bring.

Hollis shook his head, and neither one took their swollen, black, and blue eyes from the other. Hollis could tell Tai's yelling only infuriated Negu all the more and motioned for her to be quiet. All through the fight, the men kept pounding one another. Negu kept hammering at Hollis's head and Hollis at Negu's solar plexus until both were so exhausted that panting became difficult and extremely painful to sustain.

Neither one wanted to quit, as their prestige was at stake. Both of the men's senses were numbed, and each blow felt less painful, and their arms felt heavier by the minute. It was pure instinct that each man was able to stand on his own feet. Blood flowed into Hollis's eyes, and his vision became blurred temporarily.

Negu thought that now he had an opening, but Hollis feigned the attack. Hollis noticed the wild swinging arms of Negu's punch had no more power in them. Hollis noticed Negu becoming droopy and the neck muscles not so taut. Hollis watched Negu's nostrils quiver, and his knees began to tremble, and his feet spread on the ground. Hollis sensed that Negu had very little strength to stand on his feet. It was a telltale sign that Negu was about to collapse. Hollis felt his entire body musculature turn into steel bands. He had no idea where his added strength came from.

Hollis threw his shoulders back and glared fiercely at his opponent. Hollis set his jaw and muttered through clenched teeth, "I got you now. Damn it."

Hollis stiffened his back, tightened his lips, and took a

deep breath, and with his last ounce of strength, he lashed fiercely with a left stiff sledge-hammer uppercut hook to Negu's jaw. It caused a loud snap, and Negu fell flat on his face, spitting out a few teeth. The Major stopped the fracas. He patted Hollis on the back and mumbled, "Don't kill him. He's had enough."

Hollis stepped on Negu's back. He threw his shoulders backward and his very tired arms fell heavily to his sides. Hollis turned Negu's listless body over and stared at his weary, glassy, and battered face and reddened eyes. Breathlessly, Hollis asked, "Had enough, Negu?"

He nodded his head feebly. Hollis and the Major helped to get him up on his wobbly feet and aided him to his hut.

"Aren't you going to have him burned at the stake for his offense?" screamed some of the natives.

"No, no. He saved my life, and this is one way I can repay him."

"Good thinking, Hollis," added the Major.

A moment later, LaGuna ran towards Hollis and cried, "Hollis! Oh, Hollis! You must be hurt badly." Her expression was anxious and loving as she eyed and wiped away the blood from Hollis's head, face, nose, and mouth.

Following the shouting matches during the fight, now it turned out that Moa's drugged and alcoholic dissidents wound up being a free-for-all melee.

Moa kept the crowd incensed, yelling, "White lover, white lover."

"The tribunal will have a say, you white heathens."

"You've broken the native law of the land," added others.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Church Services, Blackie Tries for LaGuna

The survivors of the plane crash decided to attend church the next morning, as it was Sunday and LaGuna and Hollis had told them about their church and Le Philippe's missionary work. Blackie didn't want to go at first, but finally realized he'd already gotten into enough trouble. He was lucky Negu hadn't killed him.

The church was a fairly large building, on stilts like all the rest, but better built—stronger and more attractive, though still of about the same materials as the other buildings. There was a thatched belfry above the front wherein an old ship's bell was hung to summon the worshippers. There were quite a few rows of benches made from hewn tree-logs, with hard backs to them—as an aisle led up between the rows in the middle to the little platform whereon was the pulpit from which the services were preached.

Le Philippe generally acted as the minister and preached the services, although he had trained a few of the natives to help him in his work. LaGuna played the music for the singing of hymns—Le Philippe had brought an old reed organ to the island, not much larger than an accordion, with a piano-style keyboard. It was old and worn now and not too rich in tone or accurate in tune, but still played lovely music under

LaGuna's loving touch. Her mother had been a talented musician and had taken many pains in teaching her daughter how to play. LaGuna had great talent. Her grandfather and Hollis had often thought what a pity it was that she could not be sent to study under a great teacher abroad. But then, out in the other world, she would be subject to other, strange, worldly, alien influences—might become so changed that she would never be the same when she returned. No—it had been thought best that she remain here—not perhaps as cultured and highly trained, but still the same lovable, unspoiled, contented, happy LaGuna. This would be best, would mean the most to them, they knew.

It was an inspiring scene, there in that rude but lovingly constructed little native church on the island of Banika—the lovely girl, part native—part white—playing the rather makeshift little organ and bringing forth pleasing music from it. The native children knelt before the organ and congregation upon matted straw and sang hymns in their native tongue, putting their hearts and souls into their singing.

Above the altar stood a large cross hewn from mahogany wood and inlaid with rich, beautiful mother-of-pearl. Above, in the arched heavy panel was also inset in mother-of-pearl, the inscription, "SUGANA TAREIE," which, translated, means, "HOUSE OF CHRIST."

The masterful hand of Le Philippe was in great evidence here. He had done almost all this artistic work, sculpting in mahogany here for a change. In front of the kneeling rail made from giant logs drawn from the jungle stood a four-foot baptismal font. Le Philippe had carved it also years ago, when he had first come here. A masterful carving of a native

boy holding the half of a huge killer clam shell containing water, balanced carefully upon his head. Carved birds and flowers were in evidence in appropriate places about the inside of the church; also, saint-like figures—all, of course, the work of Le Philippe.

After the hymns, Le Philippe mounted the pulpit. "My good friends. Today, we have with us others from the faraway lands of the civilized world. They are only here as visitors and will leave us soon. I hope that when they leave, they will remember the peace and happiness that we have all found here. In the Spirit of Our Lord, we have found that love for each other, cooperation, and individual hard work have gained for us all a fine life here. With the help of our knowledge and that of Dr. Hollis, you have found some of the benefits of civilization, while not losing the gentle simplicity of your life here. Indeed, my friends, here on Banika, we have combined some of the best elements of civilization and simple human goodness. With the help of God, we do our daily work cheerfully, and our reward has been great.

"Let us never forget the Author of our benefits—God, who smiles down on us and watches over us. Though without His help we are nothing, yet we must still work hard ourselves to improve and get the best out of what the Lord has given us. Do not shun the help civilization gives, but accept what you must from it very carefully. Avoid the disrupting, grasping love of power and money, which has caused so much destruction, pain, and death. Amen."

Everyone felt better after having attended the House of Christ and listened to the sermon and sung many fine hymns. Even Blackie seemed touched and sobered for a bit.

Hollis and the Major strolled about together to have a

talk about old times and to discuss the future. The way the Major looked at it, Hollis shouldn't stay on Banika any longer than could be helped but get back to the States as soon as possible to have a thorough check-up and try to find what was causing Hollis's terrible headaches and other troubles. Things could get much more serious, and he might lose his life by putting it off too long. And the Major also felt that he should be with Hollis when he returned, to help explain things. Also, then, once Hollis's trouble had been found and taken care of, he could continue his experiments to a successful conclusion with better equipment and help at one of the big hospitals and pass the blessing on to the entire world instead of just here to those on the island.

Hollis realized that this was the right and sensible thing to do. But he hated to leave LaGuna and did not think he should risk taking her along to so-called civilization. She was so fine and unspoiled here—he hated to think what seeing and living among those others of his kind might do to this girl. LaGuna, while she wanted what was best for Hollis, also dreaded the thought of his ever leaving, fearing that he might never return to her, and then her life would be ended. If she left the island, she would also be leaving her grandfather, whose health was waning.

Meanwhile, LaGuna felt in a mood to go off by herself—to a cozy, picturesque glade in the jungle where there was a bubbling, clear little pool she sometimes bathed in. Only Mugzy was permitted to come along with her there—and there, to refresh her mind and body, the girl slipped out of her clothes, dropping them on the ground beside her and stood for a moment surveying her lovely reflection in clear water, before diving in.

She was not the only one to appraise that wonderful form. Blackie had happened to notice her strolling off into the jungle by herself, seeming troubled, and he had thought, why not follow her? Perhaps, if he found her all alone with no one about, feeling blue, by talking in his slick, persuasive manner, which had won over quite a few none-too-bright women, he might get around her and find her ready to partake in a little lovemaking. As his evil eyes feasted on LaGuna's nude figure, unholy fires of lust and desire flashed and flamed in them: God! What a figure! To send a man mad with desire! Beautiful, curved, cone-shaped, uplifting breasts and her hard belly with sculptured buttocks and trim legs! No matter what happened afterward—if he died for it, he must possess her—enjoy the thrills that that wonderful body could afford him! Silently, he crossed the glade to the girl's side, reaching out his arms to take her.

Mugzy had wandered a short distance into the jungle after some small game just then; otherwise, she would have been aware of Blackie's presence and warned the girl. But now she was taken entirely off guard. She whirled just in time, though, as he sought to encircle her in his arms, that horrible, maniacal gleam of desire in his eyes. The girl's ears were keen for the natives knew that in the jungle, there is danger always lurking, and one must never be off-guard for even a moment.

LaGuna had read of men like this Blackie in books, but had never met any in real life, so she hardly knew what to do or say or think—but his horrible intentions were completely obvious. She gave a wild cry as he lunged toward her, muttering something about "Don't be afraid, LaGuna—I'm a nice guy. You and I could have a bit of fun now, alone, here!"

She wanted none of Blackie's type of lovemaking, though. He lunged again, caught hold of her arm, and jerked her about and drew her tight to him, facing him, though she struggled.

"Listen, Baby! You needn't act so high and mighty and innocent! Think I don't know, couldn't tell—how you and that Hollis feller have been 'shacking up' together—and never regularly married, either! Come, now! Stop fighting and playing 'hard to get'—might as well give in to old Blackie, as he's going to have his fun with you anyway! Nobody around now to hear you holler and come to help you! You might as well relax, come across peaceably—I'm gonna have my fun, and then, I'm a real artist at this game—you can have a good time at the same time, too. Bet that Hollis don't know the first thing about how to see you have a good time, too, when you make love. But now—take old Blackie—." He broke off, increasing his efforts to hold the girl, and tried to trip her. LaGuna fought madly. And Blackie fought to hold and subdue her, too, for his terrible passion for the girl had gripped him fast, turning him into a ruthless man, possessed with but one idea—that he must have this girl, come what might afterward. Nothing else mattered at the moment. He was out of his mind in his sensual frenzy. Blackie felt a terrible strength now, driven as he was by that awful desire to possess the girl, the feel and warmth of her curvaceous nude body pressing so tightly, squirming, writhing, fighting against his own, thrilled him, drove his passion still higher, made him do everything he could to make sure he would be able to subdue the girl. She struck him and scratched his face and buried her strong white teeth in the flesh of his hands and arms—even his cheeks, ears—trying to fight him off,

panting, crying out for help at times, although she feared that no one would be anywhere near enough to hear her and come to her rescue. It would be all up to her to save herself.

But she had momentarily reckoned without taking Mugzy into consideration. The faithful German Shepherd, large and powerful and ferocious when aroused, heard her beloved mistress's calls and knew she was in trouble and dashed madly back to the glade, taking in what was happening at a glance. Mugzy had instinctively distrusted and hated Blackie the very first time she'd seen the man—but she had been restrained before when she'd made a fuss and showed her dislike. But now—there was no one to restrain her, no need. Rather, there was an urgent need for Mugzy to attack the man to save LaGuna, who the dog could see was cruelly mistreated by the white man.

Mugzy didn't need any further calls or urging from LaGuna to tell her what to do. It was what she'd felt she wanted to do anyway the first time she'd set eyes on Blackie.

It looked at that instant as though the fellow would successfully have his way with the girl, but Mugzy closed in noisily, making false attacks. Blackie tried to kick her away in retaliation. He made a false and careless move. With her tail taking the shape of a flickering flame, she launched into a charge and sprang at him with a snarl and a growl that made a lower guttural sound. Her sharp eye teeth and awful fangs bared, and the salty metallic taste of blood was in her mouth as her jaws clamped down on his leg and her claws tore into his flesh.

Blackie screamed bloody murder with red-hating eyes. A moment before, the only important thing in his life was to have the girl. But now, a moment later, he had forgotten

all about her; his desire to have her was nothing anymore compared to the new need—to save his life from the ferocious wolf-like animal that appeared intent on fastening its teeth in his throat.

Blackie struggled to fend off the dog and save his own life. The girl was released and sprang away and seized up her garments and quickly slipped into them, crying in anger all the while, and indignation, "That's the girl, Mugzy! Give it to him! Don't let him up so he can try to get at me again!" She sounded more bloodthirsty than she really was or meant to be just then in her excitement—and dashed away, back towards the village, feeling that Mugzy could handle the situation very satisfactorily on her own from there on. She did not think Mugzy would kill the man—only punish him somewhat, as he deserved—so she paid no heed to the man's now pitiful pleas for help: "Call the wolfhound off, for God's sake!" As if Blackie would have shown any mercy on the girl when his passion was roused and he was attacking her, fighting to have his way with her, and she had pleaded with him.

LaGuna dashed madly back through the jungle toward the village—her mind was in a turmoil, too, as she ran. What should she do? Tell of what had happened? But it was too shameful. She flushed deeply crimson as she thought of how that awful man had seen her completely nude and had held her in his arms and kissed her and tried to do more as she fought him off. No, she wouldn't tell anyone about this shameful happening. It was enough that she'd gotten free without being harmed. Mugzy would punish the man, and yet not kill him, she hoped. Then the fear came to her that perhaps the loathsome man was armed. What if he had

a knife and should use it on Mugzy and wound or kill the loyal animal? She was about to turn back when she met the handsome young Negu coming along the path fast, a worried and ominous look on his face. Negu had been looking in the village for Tai and could not find her and then had seen the odious Blackie slinking off into the jungle and immediately suspected that perhaps Tai had decided to take a walk alone into the jungle to the lovely little pool where she and LaGuna sometimes bathed alone and Blackie, having seen her go had still not learned his lesson thoroughly enough and had decided to follow her and make another try to have her for a bit of his own style of fun.

But here was LaGuna returning and looking flushed, rather disheveled and out of breath, and upset. He confronted her, studying her and asked, "Is everything all right? Did bad white man try to harm you?"

LaGuna knew she might as well tell Negu something of what had happened, so she quickly told him that Blackie had come upon her at the pool—she did not tell him all, of course; how the man had found her in the nude, ready to swim, and had tried to seduce her. But the fear that the loyal loving Mugzy might be hurt by the evil white man prompted her to urge Negu to hurry on—that Mugzy had set upon the man, and she feared, now that Mugzy might kill the white man, although she didn't really want that to happen, either, but that the man might be armed and injure or kill the dog.

Negu nodded, his eyes glinting, for he didn't need to be told the entire story of what happened. Knowing Blackie's nature as he did, he could easily guess all that had happened. He nodded quickly and hurried on to the jungle glade, and LaGuna went on back to the village feeling reassured that

Negu would take a hand to see that the dog did not kill the man or the man kill the animal. And if Negu decided to add a bit of a beating on his own, it would be no more than Blackie had coming.

Negu soon reached the scene of the trouble, and his heart beat joyfully as he saw Mugzy still at work on the man lying on the ground, trying his best to beat the persistent animal off. Mugzy had already done a good job of inflicting deserved punishment on the man and was apparently resolved to finish the job so that Blackie would never forget what his crazy passions had gotten him into. The man wasn't armed, and Negu saw that Mugzy was in no danger as she was having a lot of satisfaction in giving Blackie a bad time of it. Negu just stood at the edge of the glade for a time and watched, and chuckled in fiendish delight as he watched the devil-man getting his deserved "going over" from Mugzy. If it looked as though Mugzy might actually kill the man, then it would be time enough, Negu told himself, to take a hand. Mugzy was apparently well satisfied just to snap viciously at the man and inflict painful bites on his person here and there, wherever she could manage to get in a nip, often bringing blood, then dodging back again as the man's arms flailed wildly about trying to beat her off. For the most part, the man was just rolling about, using his arms to try to protect himself from the dog's unwelcome attentions.

Finally, though, Blackie managed to seize the animal by the throat with his two hands, and in desperation, believing the dog meant to kill him, clung with a grip of death, tightening his fingers cruelly about the animal's throat, pressing in like hands of steel, never relaxing. Mugzy's tongue rolled

out. She gasped for air as her eyes turned glassy. Struggling as she would—jerking her head and scratching at the man with the sharp claws of her paws—she could not break away from that grip of death. Slowly, her struggles began to weaken; she was no longer a menace, but Blackie was now possessed with a fiendish urge to continue the pressure and see the animal die before his crazed eyes.

Negu went into action then, darting forward and coming to Mugzy's rescue. He flung himself on the two, seizing Blackie's hands and exerting great effort, and managed to tear them from the glassy-eyed, almost dead dog's throat. Mugzy fell back weak and gasping to get her strength back. She would have dashed in again to resume the attack on Blackie, but Negu called a sharp command to her to "lay off," and Mugzy contented herself with sitting back on her haunches and watching the new battle.

Not that there was any real contest now. Blackie didn't have the strength to fight back as Negu gave him a very thorough beating, spurred on to punish the wretch unmercifully by thoughts of how scheming and merciless he had been in trying to impose his attentions on Tai and LaGuna. Negu jerked Blackie to his feet and then whammed him hard on the jaw with his fist, knocking him down. Then he seized Blackie and jerked upward again and again struck him hard, sending the cowering, whimpering sot sprawling. Then he grabbed Blackie once more and jerked him upright and pinned him firmly with his back against a tree and, holding him thus with his left hand, delivered a shower of hard, crashing blows to Blackie's face and head and punched him elsewhere about the body. It was cruel and awful, the way the enraged Negu beat the man who was so far gone he could no

longer even try to lift a hand to guard his face. He only sagged there against the trunk of the tree, which supported him so he could not fall to the ground, and whimpered.

His face was a puffy mass of bites and bruises, swollen and bloody, scarcely recognizable as a human face anymore. His clothes were torn almost to shreds and blood saturated in many places, and his body felt as though all the bones in it were broken, splintered, almost pulverized—he had suffered so much damage from the dog and now Negu's pounding that he was now practically numbed so that he could scarcely feel the cruel beating being administered to him.

Only when he was tired out and could barely swing a fist did Negu finally stop. Then he gave Blackie a last scornful shove that sent the wretch toppling to the ground, where he lay prone, quivering, moaning.

"There, that was for what you tried to do to my little Tai and to LaGuna! I don't think you'll want to try anything again, ever! And you won't be able to try anything anyway, for a long time!" Negu told Blackie, although he spoke in his native dialect so that Blackie couldn't have understood him anyway, even if he was still conscious enough to have heard what was said. Negu surveyed the battered, lacerated figure for a time, then decided that perhaps he'd done too much to him, and he might die in consequence, and he didn't wish that to result. So, he went to the pool and brought water in his cupped palms and threw it over Blackie's head and then rolled him over on his back with his foot, so as to deluge his face with more water. Finally, as Blackie still seemed to be "out," he took hold of him by the shoulders and dragged him to the edge of the pool and doused his head in the water, and finally even lifted him and plunged his entire body into the

water to revive him. Finally, Blackie recovered and gasped and groaned and began to protest, thinking that now Negu would drown him and make sure that never again could he try any mischief with the women of the village.

Negu grinned with satisfaction and relief then and left him, feeling sure that he would recover his strength enough finally to crawl back to the hut assigned to him in the village. He called to Mugzy, and the dog, quite recovered by then, bounded joyfully after Negu as they returned to the village, barking excitedly now and then as she looked up at Negu as though exclaiming, "Well, we took care of that fellow and gave him a lesson he'll never forget!"

They most assuredly had.

Neither Negu nor LaGuna made any mention of what had happened, both realizing that it was best. The law of the village meant slow torture for any man who was guilty of rape. He had been punished enough and taught a lesson that should last him the rest of his life or certainly for the duration of his stay on Banika, at least. They knew, too, that Blackie would not mention anything about the shameful attempt he'd made to ravish LaGuna, knowing that it was a serious offense. He would find some excuse to account for his condition other than the real thing that had happened to him. He was wise enough to do so and adept at lying. He would be praying that neither LaGuna nor Negu would report what had happened.

So things turned out, too. When the battered, bruised, lacerated, bloody wreck of inhumanity finally managed to crawl and stagger back to the village, he was seen by Grace and Dotty, who followed him into his hut, realizing he was hurt.

"What happened?" asked Grace.

Blackie groaned and protested, then told the story he'd thought out as he dragged himself back to the village. "Took a walk in the jungle, never figuring anything would happen, even though I'd heard that some savage animals are living in it. A—er, a lion or a bear or a gorilla—something, I don't rightly know what sort of ferocious beast it was, leaped out of the jungle undergrowth on me suddenly and attacked me. Must've been wanting to have a sample of white meat for a change—almost killed me. I fought like mad—it almost finished me, clawing me with awful, big, long claws—and snapping at me with its terrible fangs, bit me all over, and whopped me with its gigantic paws to knock me out so I'd stop fighting and it could make its meal of me without so much trouble. I tell you, it was awful! If I hadn't finally managed to grab hold of a big broken-off tree branch to use as a club and defend myself better then and clobber it so that it finally decided it had enough and slunk back off into the jungle, I'd have been a goner."

Neither of the two women, or the Major or Jim Keese or Cornelius Van Dyke put much stock in Blackie's story, but they all knew it wouldn't do any good to dispute it. They realized Blackie had suffered greatly for whatever it was he'd tried to do that wasn't right and had gotten some native down on him. They said nothing and just grinned. It was suggested that LaGuna or Hollis be brought to take care of his injuries, but Blackie protested that he didn't want to bother them since Hollis was still not too well recovered from his collapse, and LaGuna had still much to do tending him. So, Blackie spent the next few days by himself recovering.

Meanwhile, Moa, who had been looking for a chance to discredit the white man, began to stir up the villagers.

"That white devil has been after one of our women, I do not know which one, but she will soon accuse him. Then I say it is time we drive all these evil men from the island." A few of the men grunted assent, but most of them were skeptical.

Bonai said, "When the white man is duly accused by one who saw his rotten deed, then we should punish him. But to punish all the white men is not good sense. We will never be able to repay Le Philippe and Hollis for what they have done for us."

Moa interrupted, "They have come to enslave us. The white man would make our simple island a corrupt place. Mark my word—there will be trouble."

Most of the men laughed at old Moa, but there were now silent ones, more so than before. Bonai was worried because more and more of the villagers were coming under the influence of Moa's alcohol, or perhaps was there something else?

Moa took this opportunity to remind some of the native men of the activities of Blackie. He whispered it around that the other white men were planning to leave the island, only to bring back more white men. These, he said, would come to exploit them, to take their women and turn the men into slaves. More men were listening to him now than before. But the majority still considered Moa a crank and paid no attention to his insidious remarks.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Hollis's Success

The time had finally come when Hollis's health was improved enough that LaGuna felt he might risk going back to his work in the laboratory. But she reminded him that he must never work such long and hard hours. She'd keep an eye on him and stop him in a hurry.

She worked with him in the laboratory on the experiments, for he claimed that he felt he was almost at the end—success practically in his grasp. Le Philippe was overjoyed and waiting impatiently, hoping and praying that when Hollis finally won out in his efforts, he, old as he was, could still be helped to see better once more.

Finally, the experiments in the lab seemed to indicate that Hollis had at long last hit on just the right combination of drugs and discovered the long-sought remedy which would destroy the microfilariae inside the body before they damaged the victim's eyesight, without harming the patient, too. Yes—after a few more experiments, Hollis felt that it could even reach and destroy the microfilariae already in the eyes and halt the inflammation they caused.

It was very risky, a delicate job, but with success and relief for the afflicted meaning so much, all felt it was well worth the risk that had to be taken to have a chance of being cured.

All were eager to be the first to try the remedy, even though they were plainly told the risks they would be taking. They had complete faith in Hollis and LaGuna and were ready now to put themselves entirely in their hands. They were willing to take the risk that it would not turn out well, and they got worse or even died in consequence. Someone had to be the first, and by so doing, win or lose themselves, they would be helping to find the cure so that the others who came after might again know the joy of seeing.

Old Grandfather Le Philippe insisted that the remedy be tried on him first—knowing the risks and insisting not because he was greedy to be ahead of the others in getting his sight back, but because he felt it only right and proper that he, who had watched over the villagers and always tried to do all he could to advance their living and other standards, should take the first risk instead of one of the natives.

So, although LaGuna and Hollis demurred at first, Le Philippe insisted it was to be done. His sight was getting so bad that he was unable to see the beauty and reality about him. Yet he knew what it was about him. Things became darker, although he knew that the beautiful sunshine existed. Then, as Hollis began to give him the vaccine injection, Le Philippe started to notice that the banyan tree was appearing more green. There was a definite background of the lagoon and its shimmering waters' reflections.

Every day in every way, as LaGuna's Grandfather was seeing better, LaGuna mustered a smile and said, "We're all happy for you. Every day in every way, we prayed to the Lord to give it all power for you."

"Thank you, dears. I'm beginning to see the Light more each day. The source of Power is from above—and that goes

for Hollis's success, too. The light of the world will come upon all those afflicted with this dreadful eye disease."

"The darkness of the past has been defeated, Grand-père," spoke LaGuna.

"The victim is now the victor," he added.

A new age was beginning for all concerned. The sun had risen on a new life for Le Philippe and the afflicted natives.

He announced that he could now seem to see things more plainly. In the days that followed, his eyesight improved still more. The floating black spots and sparks were receding slowly in size. Through the murk constantly in front of him, he began to see more and more light, the forms, and some colors of the foliage. Above all, he could see the affectionate smile on LaGuna's face. Finally, he declared it was so good he felt he would try getting back to doing a little painting and sculpting once more.

It had been a grand success. Now, if it would only turn out as well with the natives with their different types of blood.

There were quite a number waiting eagerly for their chance to be treated next.

LaGuna was very confident, overjoyed, as she noticed her grandfather become less depressed. In the days to follow, she noticed that his self-esteem became stronger. He was not so dependent on her as before. He could fill his cup without spilling all over the table and his lap. She was very delighted with the progress he had made thus far.

But Hollis still did not permit himself to become too confident, too joyful, for, as he told her, "There are still some wrinkles that I think need ironing out. But—the worst is over—the serum works! If it'll work in every case, though, various stages—we have still to find out."

So they took the next worst cases in order and treated them—and waited. Again and again, success resulted, far beyond their fondest expectations. It seemed almost a miracle. How thrilled and happy they were as they hugged and kissed each other and danced about their hospital and laboratory.

Waindel was elated at Hollis's success. "What a boon to mankind," he declared. "Now, Hollis, although I know your heart is here, you must think of how much this will mean to the rest of the world and see about trying to get back to the States, too, so that you can make it possible for other doctors all over the world to know of this."

Hollis and even LaGuna reluctantly agreed. The Major declared, "Why shouldn't LaGuna go along to the States and sample civilization?"—then they could return, most likely before very long, their mission accomplished. Hollis could have a complete, thorough examination by specialists to find out the cause of his headaches, and if anything was found still wrong, it could then be treated.

Now that success in discovering and administering a cure for the terrible blinding sickness had come, they all decided that it called for a celebration. So, all of the group of whites, except Blackie, who had disappeared into the jungle, went to old Philippe's house. Bonai, Negu, Tai, Nana, and some other special natives who were most interested and closer than the rest to LaGuna, Hollis, and old Philippe, also went along to help celebrate the event.

Le Philippe was in fine shape and showing off every chance he got how clear and strong his old eyes were again. He sent his housekeeper to fetch a number of bottles of delicious, strong wine and also prepare a feast—and they ate

and drank and talked and even danced some to music played on "Fillupe's" old record player.

"Just like being at a party back home—almost," Dotty declared.

"I just love Strauss waltzes," said Grace to Jim.

The girls enjoyed making the most of it—dancing time and time again with the Major and Jim. Cornelius didn't much care to dance, he said, still bemoaning the loss of his upper plate. He had asked Hollis if he didn't think he could try to play dentist to make him some new teeth. But Hollis had to admit sadly that this was too far out of his line, and he was afraid he couldn't help. It would be a sorry affair at best, whatever he tried to make, he declared.

But then old Philippe overheard the request and, feeling sorry for the fellow who had lost his "uppers," offered to help him out.

"Van Dyke," he said, "we have all heard the story that George Washington had wooden pegs for false teeth. Must've been pretty bad at best, but at least they were some help. Maybe we could try something on that order again, now, for your case. It'd be better than nothing, since you never could find any trace of your old teeth in the wrecked plane. Now that I've got my eyesight back and am able and eager to start doing things again, I think I'll take your measurements as close as I can get them and try sculpting you a new set of uppers. Yes, complete with some sort of makeshift gum-fittings—which can be lined with some gummy or fibrous substance. I'll start on the job tomorrow. And we'll hope they turn out all right and will fit and work reasonably well at least to tide you over."

Cornelius was happy and relieved at the thought that the

noted sculptor, whom he knew did wonderfully beautiful and exact work, thought he could create some satisfactory "uppers" for him. He talked of little else during the rest of that party and even insisted that old Philippe take his measurements and make a rough sketch right then and there to get things started, instead of waiting until the next day to do so. So, old Philippe, pleased that he could try doing something new and different in the line of his sculpturing and eager to be creating again, chuckled and agreed and set right to work examining Cornelius's mouth interior, jaw structure, shape of the gums, and so on. He took the needed measurements, jotting them down, and made a rough sketch to guide him in his attempt at becoming the world's first "Sculptor-Dentist."

They became so engrossed that they had their own little celebration party and paid no attention to the rest present for a time—Cornelius wasn't in the least observant or perturbed at his wife dancing so much with the Major and Jim Keese.

Jim and Grace danced together most of the evening. With each dance, they drew a little closer. Major Waindel enjoyed talking to Dotty and Bonai, and Nana as the younger people danced.

Tai and Negu tried to learn the kind of dance steps the Americans used in dancing and found it a lot of fun.

That night the moon shone brightly, and the next day the birds sang more sweetly. The sun never shone so brightly, so cheerfully.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Hollis and the Major Talk of Old Times and War

Old Philippe, with the aid of his regained eyesight, managed to carve Cornelius a very good-looking and workable set of upper teeth, which Cornelius slipped in and tried promptly on a steak. He declared elatedly that they felt and worked fine.

He took them out every now and then, though, to gaze admiringly at them, which caused the others to go into fits of laughter. But Cornelius didn't mind, since he had such nice new "uppers." He was lavish in his praise of old Philippe's ability and would thank him again and again every time they met, grinning broadly to display his teeth. It was a rather odd sight to see Cornelius smile like that, displaying the contrasting hues of his teeth; the bottom ones white, natural, and the top, dark, rich mahogany in color. He did look much better now and took a keener interest in life, and his wife found him a much more pleasant companion.

The major liked to visit with Hollis, and they would talk over old times. Especially the time when they had a double date at a San Francisco restaurant. Hollis's dame stood him up when she crawled out of the women's washroom window and left Hollis holding the bag with the bill, ruining a possible

adventurous evening of anticipation. Both laughed at the event. "You'll never live that one down, Hollis." His face flushed as he spoke.

"What about you?"

"Oh, I had a very pleasant evening. She took me to the alley around the corner, where she and the other girl rented a cab for the evening. Waiting there was a line-up of six or so sailors—just standing in line!" he said as if amused. "The last sailor in line walked over to the one next in line for her and offered him ten bucks for his spot. He said to the guy that his ship was leaving the harbor in one hour. So, the other sailor says, 'Twenty.'

'Hell, no!'

'Fifteen. Take it or leave it,' the first sailor says. I guess he took it. I left my date right there and left."

Waindel and Hollis were roaring with laughter after they finished telling the story. After the chuckling subsided, Gerry went on to say, "Is it any wonder that one was unable to get a taxi in San Francisco during the war? The girls rented the taxi for fifty bucks a night in which the tricks were served to the service men."

They went on to reminisce about the days of studying and romancing at State and back home, their adventures in the war, before they had been cast upon this lovely, romantic island.

They enjoyed working together in Hollis's laboratory. Hollis was proud to show him what equipment he had and the tests he had made, and his collection of insects with which he conducted his experiments. He boasted of how he had organized a campaign to clean up the village; to clean up many of the breeding places of the germ-carrying insects

and so bring about much less sickness among the islanders. He explained the habits of the insects. "When an infected blackfly gets hungry, it chooses a warm blood meal. When it bites a person, it leaves tiny larvae that get in through the bite. These grow into worms beneath the skin, where nodules form around them. The female worms produce tiny young worms called microfilariae. These travel through the skin and may reach the eyes."

"These firm nodules form around the worms beneath the skin—a sort of fortress around these parasites."

"Very interesting, tell on," the Major urged.

Hollis, enjoying being able to discuss all this with someone like Gerry, resumed, "A worm develops in this nodule of scar tissue. When I cut this tumor out and bisect it, a living worm can be seen. They are white, opalescent and threadlike. The male is about one inch in length, and the female gets to be sometimes as long as fifteen inches."

"Wow! That's really something!" shivered the Major. "Such ugly things! Do you mean to tell me that they get into a person's eyes? I can't see how that is possible," he said, bewildered.

Hollis explained further. "Yes, Gerry, the microfilariae produced by the worms travel all over the body, setting up inflammatory reactions. When they finally reach and travel in the eye, the individual becomes very sensitive to light. Soon the eye gets very swollen and red, as you see here in this chart," and he pointed to ascending lines on a chart.

"Yes, I get it. Very unusual," observed the Major.

"Well, the microfilariae get into the eye and cause inflammation. That can interfere with the way fluid drains out of the eye."

"My, does the eye have sewer pipes, too?" mused the Major.

"Sure," grinned Hollis. "Fluid is always moving through the eye. If inflammation interferes with its drainage, pressure can build up. And the inflammation can damage the delicate eye tissues until the person can no longer see."

"What happens after things are really blocked, as you say?" inquired the Major.

"Sight can be lost when the inflammation has badly damaged the eye. The strangest thing is that the dead microfilariae cause greater irritation than the living ones. I performed over two thousand tests to study this point. Some worms can be removed by cutting out the nodules in which they live. But the tiny young worms are another matter. That's what I've been working on so long and hard. Not everyone infected with this disease develops eye complications. Some people may live to a ripe old age, even though they carry these nodules for many years," Hollis continued.

"So it isn't so deadly after all?" commented the Major with raised eyebrows.

"Blindness is its gravest complication, but the disease can also cause severe itching and damage to the skin. Well, here are my charts showing how I puncture a skin tumor and draw out fluid if some is present." And Hollis indicated this procedure on his charts for the Major.

"And what if there isn't any fluid?" Gerry inquired.

"Then, I cut the entire skin tumor out. I grind it up and then extract whatever fluid I get from it. I add this liquid to it, diluting the extract, and I inject a certain quantity of this mixture into the patient."

"Aren't you re-injecting the micro-organism into the body?" asked the major in surprise.

Hollis shook his head. "No, for they have been killed."

"And just what does the injected stuff do then?"

"I hope to stop the worms from producing more young worms. If we can do that, we may be able to bring this disease under control."

"That's good! Gosh, it's wonderful!" smiled the Major.

"I think so," agreed Hollis proudly. "I might add, also, that when I once cut out a solitary skin nodule, I have not encountered a single case of blindness. Which suggests," he went on with his explanation, noticing the look of wonder in the Major's eyes, "that removing a nodule containing adult worms may help reduce the number of microfilariae they produce. But removing one nodule cannot guarantee that blindness will be prevented."

"Fine! It certainly was a great job, Holly!" the Major praised his friend enthusiastically. "I'll bet you had plenty of work and excitement gathering all these bugs and making tests and treating the natives. Why, Holly, this is amazing! Positively astounding! You have something great! This should be a marvelous help to civilization. Washington will go for this! A medical triumph, Holly!"

For a time, they talked of old times—the fun they had at State—of old friends and what had happened to them as much as they knew since the old days. Most of all, they talked about the war.

"Yes, they say that we will have peace for a thousand years!" said Waindel with a cynical grin.

"Ummm, where have I heard that before?" Hollis replied skeptically. "The war before was a war to end all wars. Wars

are a terrible thing—but a biological necessity of civilization, I suppose."

The Major nodded. "I don't know about that; if we spent as much time, energy, and money on hospitals and land reclamation as we do on wars, the world would be a fairly decent place for all people. It's a pity that there must always be some men who rise to power with personal ambitions—who have the ability to arouse their peoples, find occasion to instigate wars. Everywhere in nature, on land or sea, there is a constant fight for life and power. It looks like as long as there are men, there will be wars."

"But here I found peace and contentment," Hollis demurred.

"Remember how history talks about all our earlier empires which were born, grew, and waned," the Major reminded him. "Don't you think they dreamt of perpetual peace? And see what happened to them—a powerful nation through easy living chokes off its own progress and decays. You can see what peace does here. Look at everything—there is no life, no spirit here. Even LaGuna realizes this—we have talked it over and she feels that wonderful as is your life here together—she feels as I do, that you should return to civilization. You have done your masterful research here. Remaining here now, you may rot mentally."

He paused to relight his pipe, and Hollis, too, who was ready to speak angrily to his friend about the war, lit up to calm himself.

Jim Keese, meanwhile, was still sending daily messages over the small radio. Although the generator was holding up well, Jim could tell that the tubes in the radio itself were getting weak. In a few weeks, even with minimal operation,

the radio would be finished. Waindel, Jim, and Cornelius then approached Hollis about getting a boat made as a last measure. Bonai's workmen agreed to do the job.

In the hills, Moa was giving Blackie as much as he could drink. He hated Blackie and Blackie hated him, but each had what the other wanted, although Blackie's supply of dope was dwindling. Moa was getting ready to play his trumps, to destroy Blackie and the other white men.

Back in the village, the white women helped the natives in every way they could, with gardening, weaving, and teaching in the village school. Waindel, Jim, and Cornelius enjoyed going out fishing, helping catch fish, and doing other jobs around the village. This way, they felt they were doing something to help pay their way and not imposing so much on the kindly, generous natives.

Still, a watch was kept for any ship or plane that might chance to pass that way, and signal fires were ready to be lighted quickly to summon them, if the radio failed.

LaGuna felt very sad at times, realizing that then, her Hollis would likely leave, too—so that he could be carefully examined by some famous doctors in a big hospital back in the States, and perhaps he would have to be operated on. It was an awful thought. But the dread that this injury, which still caused those awful headaches, might sometime kill Holly, worried LaGuna greatly, so that she realized Holly should go back. Then—if only he would return to her once he'd finally been checked and completely cured! If only she could be sure. He had become such a big, vital part of her life—with him gone, life would never be the same for her again. While not actually married in the usual legal way, they still had pledged themselves to one another before God—

given themselves, all, one to the other. There, everything—work, loving—all were bound together by a strong tie.

But, of course, whatever was best for Hollis was what LaGuna wanted. She had always been greatly worried about his headaches. She knew that he should go as soon as possible to where he could have a thorough check-up to find out the cause and then operate, if need be, to cure him.

Jim and Grace were ready to make a big plunge in life's uncertain journey—they announced they would be getting married. Le Philippe performed the ceremony, and the whole village enjoyed a holiday for the wedding. A great feast and dancing, according to the native customs, were held. The brilliant pageant was resplendent with color as the native maidens and young men did the symbolic wedding dance. Le Philippe didn't particularly care for this dance, since it seemed to him to be a return to the paganism that formerly held the island. It was the paganism brought by Blackie from civilization that would cause suffering in the future, however.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Blackie Goes for LaGuna

Blackie, red-eyed and thinner from his last binge on Moa's alcoholic brew, had returned from his hideout in the hills for the wedding. His maladjusted mind was prompted by the tongue of Moa, who suggested, "White man, your friends are building a boat. LaGuna often alone."

Yes, he'd like to get LaGuna; he never could forget that tantalizing sight of her nude figure as he'd seen her by the pool that day, nor the feel of her warm, curvaceous form held tightly against his own. At times, he felt he was going mad with his seething, torturing desire to possess her.

"Damn her! Thinks she's too good for me! Hold out on me, but gave herself to that other guy, without them ever being legally married! Like to kill him, too, along with Negu and that damn dog. Grab her off, that LaGuna—maybe I'll do it sometime. Sneak food and water supplies and store 'em in the boat—get LaGuna to it, dump her in, shove off, and set sail away from this island: I can sail a boat—we'd get somewhere. And even if I didn't, well—nothing could be worse than staying on here! And I'd have LaGuna—beat her if she didn't give in to me and let me have all the fun I wanted anytime I wanted it with her! What a time I'd have! I'd want to have a good supply of native wine and strong beer aboard to help pep me up, to keep my strength up! Water is no good

to drink unless you can't get anything else—then it's still a damned poor substitute for a man's drink!"

So he planned. He'd "tank up" good to give him strength and nerve before he would set about putting the plan into effect. There were quite a number of things he'd like to tend to then, before he checked out with LaGuna, first choice, Tai second. He thought of taking them both if he could manage it—have two women so he'd have a change-off. They could do the hard work of preparing the foods and sailing the boat while he'd lie on a soft bed of canvas matting and take it easy. But he reflected that it would be too hard keeping watch on two women—they'd both be out to harm him in revenge, maybe kill him and dump him overboard so they could return to their lovers. One would be all he could keep good watch over. When he had to sleep, he would keep her tied up so she couldn't try anything on him. Of course, he also considered the fact that, after either or both women had had a sample of his superb style of lovemaking, they'd like it so well that they'd be nuts over him and carry on willingly after that. He'd like to bump off Negu, first—and the dog, and Hollis and Jim, too, before he left.

So, life went on the island of Banika—with schemes and counter-schemes. With the group from the plane waiting and watching for a ship or plane to happen by close enough to be signaled to land and take them off.

They kept putting off trying to make it in the boat built for them, realizing, the more they considered the risks involved, that it was folly to sail alone in a small craft in an uncharted sea.

Only Blackie considered going seriously—and he was resolved to kill people here on the island before he left. And

then, when he left, he would kidnap and take LaGuna along with him, first choice—Tai, second.

He tried again to ingratiate himself with Tai, but she was on to him by now and would have nothing to do with him. Negu was ever watchful so that even if he had been tempted to try to have anything to do with her, there just wouldn't have been any chance.

Still Blackie bided his time, watching and waiting. He and Moa smuggled food that would keep, stashing it in a safe place near where the huge, specially constructed outrigger lay, with its canvas sails, spars, oars, and other equipment. Blackie, before long, had an ample supply of food that would keep for a reasonably long time—and also tins and jugs with drinking water; although he figured, if the time ever came ripe and he knew he could make the break, he would refill them with fresh water before shoving the large boat down the beach, out of the jungle, into the water and setting sail. He'd have to be careful, for if he slipped up this time, it could very well be the end. He'd have to be sure.

He also laid in a goodly supply of liquor in jugs, along with enough food and water to last several weeks of cruising. He intended to transport it all in the boat for himself and the girl he had taken until they reached some port where he could safely risk going ashore and look for passage back to the States. There, he could once again take up peddling narcotics. What he had left of the dope in his waterproof pouch would bring him enough money to get himself started again.

If whichever girl he managed to take along with him for entertainment chose to become attached to him, agreeably, why then, he would only too gladly pay her passage, too, and

take her along back to the States. Either one should certainly prove very alluring and draw plenty of business in his second line of work.

If the girl wouldn't come over to his side and be tractable and sensible, why then, when he knew his voyage was about over and he had no further use for her, he would dump her overboard for the sharks. Blackie would have no qualms about doing something like that. After all, he told himself, in an emergency, that would be just the most sensible thing to do.

He considered all angles of the chance he would be taking. The natives would be aroused when they found him gone in the boat, and also one of their women gone too; they would realize he had stolen her, knowing none would ever go with a man like him willingly. They would set out promptly, armed, to try to overtake him and bring the girl back. If they brought him back alive, he knew he would suffer torture before they were through with him.

Yes, he would have to make very sure before he acted. There would be no second chance if he failed. But as he drank himself into confidence, he became imbued with almost hilarious joy at the thought of the pleasure he would have with one of these girls when he captured her and took her away in the boat; he felt sure he would manage to make it. It would be worth the risk.

Anyway, he was shrewd, clever—he would have all his plans well laid. There should be no slip-ups.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Blackie Makes His Try

Finally, Blackie felt that the right time had come for him to make his attempt to escape, taking with him LaGuna or Tai. That day, he was gone from the village most of the time, carrying foodstuffs to the boat and storing them in it, along with water in many jugs and still more jugs of strong wine and native beer. He had everything in readiness, including several heavy tree limbs to use as rollers and another as a pry bar, so that he could work the boat down into the water, where it could be shoved the rest of the way until it floated free once he had the girl.

It was quite late, and Hollis was asleep after a hard day at work and splitting headaches. Moa and Blackie were hidden in the bush near the beach where LaGuna usually took a walk before finally retiring. Moa held two small game animals that he was ready to throw into the path of Mugzy, LaGuna's constant companion during her quiet walks.

As LaGuna passed the spot where they were hiding, Moa released one of the animals, throwing it out far enough to catch the eye of Mugzy. It worked. Mugzy took after it, and it leaped for cover away from both the dog and his recent captors. LaGuna was startled at first, but then laughed as she watched the dog romp off after the rabbit-like animal.

Then Blackie leaped out of the bushes and rushed at her with a sack to throw over her head. LaGuna was stunned.

Her mind did not react fast enough to the danger, and Blackie soon had her trussed up, ready to throw her into the boat. Moa, meanwhile, rushed back to the village. On his way, Moa met Tai and Negu strolling in the moonlight. "Go quickly to the ship. That white man is stealing LaGuna."

"Blackie," growled Negu. He and Tai raced toward the beach.

Mugzy had also given up on her hunt and was returning to find LaGuna when she saw Blackie carrying her, wrapped helplessly over his shoulder.

Negu and Tai came on fast, then, too. "Stop," called Negu. "I'll kill you, white man. Go get him, Mugzy!" he cried to the dog.

But Mugzy didn't need any orders. She had sized up the situation clearly enough herself. She let out a terrible howl as she dashed in a frenzy of rage across the coral beach and snapped at Blackie's heels as he kicked at her to try to keep her off while he shoved like a madman at the boat into which he had just dumped LaGuna. He got it to slide into the water. Now it was floating. He tried to scramble aboard, but Mugzy had leaped upon him and fastened her sharp, strong teeth into the flesh and muscles of his shoulder and hung on despite Blackie's efforts to shake her off.

So Negu and Tai saw things going as they, too, dashed fast across the beach to help Mugzy in her valiant fight to stop Blackie and rescue LaGuna from being stolen away from them, the island—far away—to suffer a terrible fate worse than death at the hands of the sex-crazed Blackie.

Blackie almost made it. He managed to draw his knife from its sheath and slashed murderously at Mugzy, clinging to him with her teeth deeply fastened in his shoulder. He

slashed the dog across the head and face and jabbed her in the side hard with the sharp blade, hoping to pierce the animal's heart. Blood spurted and Mugzy gave a pitiful yelp and, despite her best intentions to cling to the man and get him down, lost her hold and fell, gasping, bleeding from a dozen places.

Blackie gave her a vicious kick with his foot, then turned his attentions once more to the boat, giving it one last shove which sent it floating clear out on the water. He grabbed hold of the edge, then on one side, and began to hoist himself into it. But although Mugzy was now out of the fight, Negu was at hand now, eyes blazing, ready and eager to take over. Down at the end of the beach, others aroused by Moa were racing toward the boat.

Blackie seized the long pole he had to help shove the boat and flailed wildly about him in circles to strike Negu down. He finally ducked under his pole and closed in relentlessly, tackled him, brought him down, and soon held him powerless to fight any longer. Other villagers arrived soon after to help out. But Negu was in control.

The battle was over. Blackie was trussed up securely; his feet left free so that he could be marched back a prisoner to the village for trial and punishment.

Blackie struggled in vain and glared at those about him and cursed them foully. His game was up—he'd played for tempting stakes and lost. Moa grinned as he shouted at the men that this was another proof of the white man's plot to undermine their island.

LaGuna had recovered consciousness and had managed to free herself from the restricting sack wrapped so tightly about her. Tai and Grace, who had just come up with Jim

and Major Waindel, rushed to her side to see if they could help her in any way, but LaGuna assured them that she was unharmed. Then, seeing poor Mugzy lying writhing, her lifeblood ebbing away, and moaning piteously, she rushed to the dog, concerned only with Mugzy's condition now, and knelt beside the noble animal to stroke her head and examine her wounds.

Mugzy had been stabbed terribly—though LaGuna did all she could, she couldn't seem to stop the flow of blood, and then she and Tai gathered the large dog up in their arms as tenderly as they could and urged the others to follow, fast as they could, bringing the prisoner, who tried to hang back as no one had any pity for him.

Blackie had suffered injuries where Mugzy had fastened her teeth into his shoulder and clung on to keep him from shoving the boat out and escaping with LaGuna. He had a sore jaw, too, where Negu had socked him—and a few more bruises from Negu's blows and a few that others had managed to send home. But these, all knew, would be nothing compared to what would be done to Blackie later—after he'd been taken before the Tribunal, tried and sentenced and "Sentence Carried Out!" That was—if the enraged villagers didn't take it into their minds to mob him and tear him limb from limb then.

Even Hollis, though a civilized man, on learning of what Blackie had done, almost forgot his standards. But he swore in his heart that Blackie would be brought to justice, tried, and sentenced. There would be no mob violence if he could help it. There wasn't any doubt as to what Blackie had done, and what should happen to him. Also—some knew what he'd tried before—to Tai and LaGuna.

Now it looked like he'd played his last card.

The villagers poured out excitedly, chattering angrily, scowling blackly, making ominous gestures of violence toward Blackie as he was marched through the village's short street—back to LaGuna's hut. A terrible expression was spread over Hollis's face. Negu excitedly urged him to give Blackie a good beating then and there. Stirred up by Moa and his friends, the villagers were in an ugly mood. Why wait for a trial? Blackie was guilty without doubt.

Bonai explained to Hollis the punishment for this type of crime according to native law and justice. Blackie would be taken into the jungle to a lonely spot—or to some deserted place along the beach—and a hole dug into which he would be placed standing. The hole would then be filled and packed firmly about him, imprisoning him helplessly up to the neck, with only his head left exposed. Honey or some other sweet, tempting substance would be poured over his head, face, and neck, with trails of honey leading away in several directions to lure large, vicious ants that would swarm over the imprisoned man and eat him alive. Death would be his only mercy.

Hollis and LaGuna, however—and even the others of Blackie's party, when they learned of the cruel manner of punishment intended for Blackie, protested that they could not allow such a fate. Hollis pleaded with them to release Blackie into his custody for white man's justice, since LaGuna was the wife of a white man.

Hollis told them, "It is only right that we try him and punish him."

"No," cried Moa, who was now supported by a clear majority of the village men. "All white men bring trouble. We

will not give him to you so you can protect him. You whites always stick together—I say he is ours. I say all white men should leave us in peace on this island."

Blackie was stunned now, even more. His old crony Moa was turning against him.

"Hey, you guys, it was Moa that put me up to this. It was Moa's idea to put me up to this. It was his idea!"

But the natives and whites did not believe Blackie, whose lying was common knowledge. The natives grabbed Blackie and were ready to carry him off when Bonai shouted out. "Wait, my brothers, until the sun rises. Then, when our minds are clear, we can decide what to do." Bonai's influence was great, and the rest of the natives gave in.

So, Moa and the natives contented themselves with locking Blackie up safely in one of the huts until dawn—as long as he was locked up and couldn't escape, they would be content to bide their time. They knew he would get what was coming to him.

The crowd dispersed, and Hollis and LaGuna turned their attention to Mugzy, who had been carried from the beach by some of the village men. Hollis had Mugzy brought into the hospital and placed on the table he used for performing operations. The dog had lost a great deal of blood, and LaGuna gave the animal a drink of strong wine, which would, to some degree, help deaden the pain and also help compensate for the loss of blood, restoring some measure of her strength. Then, as the poor animal looked at them with misery, love, and trust in her sad eyes and tried weakly to lick LaGuna's and Hollis's hands as they began working over her, they set to work.

Hollis had his kit of crude surgical instruments handy.

LaGuna hovered near to help hold the injured animal, trying to soothe her pain. Tai was ready to hand Hollis the instruments he needed as he called for them in turn.

The most serious jabs and cuts were tended to first—cleansed, treated with healing medicines and salves. Some that were quite long and open, Hollis set to sewing up to close the wounds and then treated them with disinfectants, which would help heal them. The flow of blood was stopped; the wounds were finally cleansed, treated, and bandaged over. All that could be done to try to save Mugzy's life was done.

Then they placed her in a basket in which she could stretch out fully, and which was well padded with many soft cloths spread over leaves and pulp. They gave Mugzy some more wine and some other medicines to drink, some of which they had to pour down Mugzy's throat, holding her mouth open. Mugzy cooperated very well, seeming to realize that everything being done was meant to help her get well and strong again.

Then all they could do was to wait and pray that Mugzy would recover.

"She certainly was badly stabbed, but luckily, none of the jabs pierced any vital organs or cut any arteries, so she should get well again in time, if we can keep her quiet for a time so she won't try to get out and around and strain and open up the stitches," Hollis told those about him. "What a wonderful friend Mugzy is! Ready to give her life to save you, LaGuna—why, if it hadn't been for Mugzy, that devil might have managed to get away with you in the boat."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Blackie's Fate

For the time being, Hollis and LaGuna were so concerned over Mugzy's injuries and in fixing the brave animal up, that they had forgotten all about Blackie and what was to happen to him because of the terrible things he had done and tried to do.

Worn out, they slept deeply until dawn, although LaGuna instinctively awoke whenever she heard Mugzy change her position slightly or whimper.

The next morning, Hollis hurried through the village to the temporary prison and found it open; Blackie had been removed. Hollis, alarmed, immediately hurried about the village seeking out Negu, Bonai, or some other high official to learn what had been done to Blackie. He met some of the villagers and inquired of them, but they were strangely silent, unresponsive—either did not know or didn't want to tell him what punishment Blackie had been taken to endure before death would finally come to relieve him of the tortures.

Most of the villagers were gone, too—the village was strangely silent and deserted. Where could they have gone? Hollis was bound to find out—he strongly suspected that they had gone with the party that had taken Blackie from the jail to wherever he was to be given his punishment for his

crimes according to native custom and rule. They would be gathered about in morbid curiosity to watch the carrying out of the penalty.

He had heard of the cruel things done to other natives in the past, who had been found guilty of very atrocious crimes. His blood chilled, and he shivered as he thought of them now, as he hurried about, going this way and that—trying to think where they would have taken Blackie, where his sentence could be executed without any disturbance of its completion. They knew that both Hollis and LaGuna, and old Philippe, too, would interfere if they knew what they intended.

Finally, the Major joined Hollis in the search—the rest of the whites kept to their huts, feeling that they could do nothing for Blackie against the superior numbers and power of the natives, even though their blood chilled, too, at the thought of what terrible fate might be intended for Blackie. Jim, too, finally came to join the Major and Hollis, even though Grace and Dotty tried to dissuade him, warning that he'd only get the natives against him as well and might give up his own life to no avail in trying to help Blackie, who was only getting what he deserved.

It was Tai who finally came hurrying back from the group that had taken Blackie to his punishment, who informed Hollis, Gerry, and Jim where Blackie had been taken and what the natives were doing to him. She was shocked and looked actually ill because of what she had seen done already to Blackie and exclaimed, "Holly, even though Blackie is a very bad man—I couldn't watch! I said to myself I should come to find and tell you—maybe you can save that bad

man some way—see that he die quick instead. They take him down to near the lagoon and there—oh, hurry—you will see!"

Hollis and his two companions hurried. The natives owed much to Hollis, and he felt they should, because of the many things he had done for so many of them, listen to him.

They soon reached the lagoon—the place of punishment and execution. There they saw a group of the natives gathered about, some standing, some squatting on their haunches, watching, eyes fixed, staring in almost mesmerized fascination at the gruesome sight before them. The natives who were the executioners had done their preliminary work already, and well. Moa was directing the operation with a smile.

Blackie's decreed fate was—"The living burial!" Instead of being put into a deep hole with only his head above ground, Blackie had been tied tightly to a tree so that he could not lift a hand to help himself. They had smeared his nude body with honey to attract voracious ants and other hungry insects to come to light on him, crawl all over his body to feed on the honey, and then, on Blackie's exposed flesh. They were crawling into his nose, and about his eyes and down into his ears, finally bringing his death.

Hollis, followed by the other two white men, shoved his way quickly through the morbidly watching crowd of embittered natives, right up to where Blackie was fastened to the tree. The group of native executioners placed themselves in front of him and then faced Hollis, the Major, and Jim with resolute, implacable faces.

Blackie's eyes rolled wildly, and he groaned and pleaded

pitifully, "For God's sake, Hollis, Jim, Major—you're civilized white men! No matter what I did, you can't let these heathen devils do this to me!"

Though Hollis hated the man for what he had done to his lovely LaGuna, he knew that he couldn't let the natives do this, even to a man as loathsome and deserving of no pity as Blackie was.

"Stand aside, you men!" he snapped. "Negu, Bonai! Hear me! You can't do this! I know Blackie deserves much punishment, death, perhaps, but—not in such a horrible, uncivilized manner! Free him or I shall!"

They wouldn't budge but kept their places between him, the Major, and Jim, gripping their spears and knives firmly, as though ready to fight—even against Hollis and his two white companions if need be—to keep them from thwarting the cruel punishment they felt Blackie's crimes deserved.

"No! This is our native custom; the punishment decreed for such crimes by our laws," Moa asserted, strongly. "You and your friends will soon join him if you do not leave the island."

"Quiet," said Bonai. "Hollis, we know what you have done for us, but native justice must be carried out! Go away and leave this to us. He brought this punishment on himself."

Negu, glaring as he thought of how Blackie had tried to force himself on the two women he cared so much for, added, "Do not make us have to fight and perhaps harm you, Hollis, by trying to save this worthless one's life! He must die and die as the law has said, such must die! Go away—do not try to stop us from carrying out the sentence!"

Hollis thought fast and hard. He saw that the natives were

firm in their resolve that Blackie should die this horrible death. No plea for mercy for Blackie would avail.

"Listen to me, you men," he declared. "You know that I have no love for the prisoner—that I have more reason to hate him and to see him punished than any of you, for he committed his atrocious crime against my beloved wife, LaGuna. But even LaGuna and her grandfather, old Philippe, who has done so much for you and your people here, would not approve of what you intend to do, and would be shocked, horrified, disgusted, and angry with you when they learned what you had done. So, for their sakes—so they will not feel against you—you must not do this, and for your own sakes as well."

"I agree that this man deserves great punishment, but there is another way in which he should and will be punished, which will serve even better. You know that I've made many experiments to help you—to cure your crippling and blinding sicknesses. Kaui, were you not almost blind once? Kahamu, your old mother was near death when we saved her. You all know the many we have helped. Now I ask one favor of you—help yourselves."

"As is often done back in my country, far over the sea, we have here a condemned criminal whose crime merits the death penalty. Killing him, as you intended to do, would only punish him and end his life—without doing any good for anyone beyond merely satisfying justice. Now, back in the States, certain criminals who are sentenced to die are, at times, given a choice—instead of the usual hanging, or death in the electric chair or gas chamber, they may choose to allow learned doctors and scientists to have them, while still

alive, so that experiments may be made with the use of their still-living bodies. There are a number of vitally important experiments I need to make on a living person—a white man would be best for these experiments rather than risking one of you. Even if any of you were willing to face the pain and agony, and the terrible, torturing effects that might result if, as can well happen, things went wrong, a white man's body would be best for showing reactions, allowing me to experiment and learn the things I need to know so as to help you and the others.

"So, I believe you should turn this condemned man over to me—not as an act of mercy, but so that by my being able to experiment on him, study his reactions, and observe the causes and effects of drugs, medicines, and so forth which I inject into his living body, some good will come of it. It may be that, in conducting some of these experiments, I will need to cut open his living body and remove parts, perhaps, to study reactions. My experiments would bring about much good in learning how to cure sicknesses and deformities which have crippled many of you—while your manner of killing this man would only serve your desire for revenge and justice."

Hollis left the choice up to them then. He had spoken plainly and deliberately, painting a picture of the fate Blackie would be certain to suffer. This appealed far more to the sadistic nature of these stern natives. They realized that, while they still wouldn't be cheated out of Blackie receiving all the punishment he deserved, Hollis would be able to keep him alive for experiments until he died from one of them, and a great deal of good might come of it for them and their people. They also seemed to feel that Hollis truly hated

Blackie and would show him no mercy for what he had done. Yes, this was the best thing to do after all.

Only Moa dissented. The others looked at one another inquiringly, then grunted and nodded assent.

"He is yours, white medicine-man, Hollis, for your experiments; take him!" Bonai told Hollis finally. He then turned to the others and jabbered something to them in their native tongue. He stalked away without looking back, and the rest of the executioners and the natives quickly followed.

Hollis and his two companions drew deep breaths of relief and satisfaction.

"Good thing you thought of that idea, Holly," the Major said.

"Yes," added Jim, "it was touch and go there a bit."

Hollis nodded. "Come on, let's get this guy loose now," he said. "Get him loose and clean him up in the lagoon's waters and then get his clothes back on him so we can march him back."

While Blackie seemed relieved, now that the immediate threat of danger was over, he began to bluster a bit.

"That was a good gag—pretending you wanted me to experiment with, Doc Hollis," he said with new confidence. "Of course, you didn't really intend to try any experiments on me, or did you?" he finished, as he saw the stern, resolute expression on Hollis's face. "Good God, man! You wouldn't really do anything like that on me, would you?"

Hollis grunted as he cut the bonds tying the man to the tree, freeing him. Then, holding him lest he try to escape, he marched him to the water's edge. "Wash up, now!" he commanded, and added, "About the experiments—what do you think?"

Blackie washed up and felt somewhat better as he got his clothes back on again. Then he was marched back to and through the village, with quite a number of the natives standing outside their huts, watching him with glowering, unfriendly expressions on their faces. When he was again left alone, locked in the prison, he sat brooding and worrying. He hadn't liked the look on Hollis's face as he had studied him—"Just like I was a guinea pig," Blackie thought. "Me, a white man—him, a white man! Civilized! He couldn't really figure on using me for experiments! God! What if he's a fiend after all—figures on strapping me down on that operating table of his and trying some vivisecting experiments on me! Gawd 'mighty! That damn Moa. I'll get the dirty savage if it's the last thing I do. I've got to get out of here."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Moa Killed by Blackie

That night, after the village was asleep and only the natives' guard was awake outside the hut in which he was imprisoned, Blackie put his plan for escape into operation. He began to moan and call for help. "Oh, my stomach—help me!"

The guard came to the door but did not open it. Blackie let out a pitiful moan. "Oh God, please someone, help me."

The guard opened the door carefully, his short spear ready for action; he knew Blackie's reputation for lying. Blackie lay on the floor, holding his stomach and rolling from side to side in acted pain. The guard approached him cautiously. Then Blackie rolled quickly under the spear and delivered a smashing blow to the native's groin. He crumpled in agony, dropping the spear. Blackie grabbed the weapon and cracked the guard across the head with the handle end. The guard was knocked cold. Blackie ran quickly toward the jungle. He knew where he would find Moa.

It was about an hour's walk to their old rendezvous. He found Moa, who, without his pinch of dope, had resorted to alcohol to get away from reality. Blackie nudged him with the spear. Moa looked up, and fear spread across his ugly face. "No."

"Well, Moa, you filthy savage, now I'm going to give you a little of your own poison."

Moa grabbed his knife and tried to get to his feet to attack Blackie, but Blackie threw his weight behind the spear and stabbed it deep into Moa's belly.

"Damn savage, that'll take care of you. Now I'm going to fix my friends one by one."

When the news got out that Blackie had escaped, the village was in an uproar. A delegation marched to Hollis's hut and pounded on the door. Hollis was up and answered the knock, LaGuna soon joining him. He saw Bonai, his good friend, standing in the doorway, spear in hand, with fury on his face.

"That evil one has hurt my guard and has gone into the jungle. We should have finished him yesterday."

Hollis was stunned and angry. "This is my fault, Bonai. Give me a spear. I'll take care of him personally."

"No, Hollis. You are still sick, nor are you familiar enough with the jungle."

"Bonai, it's my responsibility to get him. I have my pledge; I must redeem it."

He took a spear and left the dumbfounded natives as he headed toward the jungle. Hollis figured that Blackie would head for the radio shack or Moa's still. Negu joined him as a guide despite Hollis's protestations that he must go alone. Negu, who was a good hunter, soon picked up the trail Blackie had left in his rapid flight. They were tired from the awful heat and humidity when they reached Moa's hideout by tracking Blackie's path.

"It looks like Blackie finally did it—murder."

"Moa no good, but still murder," said Negu.

"Let's go, Negu. There's a lot of scores to settle."

After killing Moa, Blackie had made his way to the radio

shack, located in the Dutch scientists' old building. There he had slept for a few hours, being utterly exhausted. He awoke about two hours after sunrise and began to fool with the radio.

"This is Rog Shane," he said when he finally got it going. "I am marooned—the only white man—with hostile savages on the island of Banika. Please send help; the natives are after me. They want to kill me. They're cannibals. Please, someone from civilization, hear me. This is Rog Shane. I'm on Banika. Our plane was forced down on a trip from Hong Kong to the States. I need help. I was the only survivor. The savages have killed all the rest who were on the plane. Please rescue me."

Blackie listened for an answer. There was none.

Just then, Blackie heard a noise outside. He leaped up, grabbing his spear. The door opened and revealed Hollis standing in the doorway, his spear leveled. Blackie, holding his weapon tightly in his right hand, sent the radio crashing to the floor with his left.

"Come on, take me if you're man enough, Rochelle."

"Blackie, you've done about everything to disgrace the white race and civilized society. I'm here to bring you back and turn you over to Bonai once and for all."

"Yeah? Just try it."

Hollis advanced into the room and ducked Blackie's first thrust. Blackie swore viciously and lunged a second time. Hollis tried to get a thrust in at Blackie to knock him off balance and capture him alive. Then he saw Blackie reach inside his shirt and pull out the knife he had taken from Moa after murdering him.

They eyed each other for a second. Hollis knew he would

have to strike in a hurry. Blackie shifted the spear to his left hand and readied his right to throw the knife at Hollis. Hollis feinted a movement to Blackie's left. Blackie moved his spear out of position toward the feint.

Hollis let go a powerful underhand throw with the blunt end of the spear that caught Blackie high in the abdomen. The poised knife dropped from his hand. The wind was knocked out of him, and he fainted. Blackie pitched forward and collapsed on the floor of the shack.

By the time Negu entered the hut, only seconds later, the fight was completely over. Negu and the others carried Blackie back to jail. Then Hollis went in to examine the radio. It was completely out of commission—almost every tube was broken.

When they got back to the village about two hours later, Hollis went straight to his and LaGuna's hut. He was exhausted and quite overwrought.

"LaGuna, I've recaptured Blackie. I must think and rest. Please, darling, don't let anyone disturb us."

LaGuna, who had worried every second of that morning, was so happy to see Hollis safe and sound that she hardly heard what he was saying. They held each other close. Then she felt Hollis relax and slump toward the floor. She dragged him to the bed and made him comfortable, but he felt nothing—he was utterly beaten and had fainted.

The villagers were rejoicing at the news. Blackie was now in custody again. Negu had gone straight to Bonai, who proclaimed Hollis a village hero. Jim, Major Waindel, Cornelius, and the girls rushed to LaGuna's hut, but she kept them out, explaining what had happened.

Negu then sought out Jim and told him how Blackie had destroyed the radio.

"Well," said Jim, "don't tell the others yet. I want to talk to Hollis and Waindel before the girls find out."

The radio had always been their symbol of hope. Now it was gone.

Jim walked dejectedly toward Major Waindel's hut.

"Gerry," he said upon entering, "Negu just gave me some more bad news." Outside, they heard the drums and the happy singing of the natives. "Blackie destroyed the radio."

Waindel's face dropped. "What next?"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Farewell Celebration and Dance

The party from the plane wreck, determined to reach a larger spot by boat, planned to take passage on a ship or plane back to the States. They grew impatient daily to make the start; finally, they decided to set out on a certain day if weather conditions were favorable. How excited they all were—the natives, too. They felt they would be relieved, too, to once again have the island to themselves.

Blackie, hidden away from them in jail like a caged animal, wasn't even considered anymore. He was just "an experiment" and forgotten by all but Hollis and LaGuna—and Nana, who brought him his food and non-alcoholic drinks, shoving them into him through a swinging small section in the door large enough to pass things into Blackie. She would not venture inside lest he take it into his lustful, crazed mind to try to attack her. A couple of times, indeed, he did try to dart his hand and grasp her wrist, but she was on the alert and managed to evade him. Once, when he managed to seize hold of her wrist as she shoved his tray of food and drink into him, she, being a resourceful woman, quickly drew the sharp fish-cleaning knife she had thrust in the cord that held her skirt about her waist and slashed Blackie's hand deeply, bringing blood, so that he quickly released her.

But when the Major heard about Blackie's latest action, it caused him great concern. Blackie just couldn't be trusted. He located Hollis at once and prevailed upon him to take Blackie Stateside and hand him over to the federal authorities. This was the mission he was supposed to carry out originally. After a brief meeting with the native tribunal, consent was given to let Blackie go—to undergo American justice!

Preparations were made for a big farewell celebration to be held the night before the party would set sail from the island. Huge supplies of tasty foods were prepared, and many jugs of good, exhilarating wines were brought—what a party it would be. Old Philippe had been failing of late, having heart attacks. Hollis, too, had been suffering from his terrible headaches again, and all realized that he had best go with the others to try to get back to the States, where he could get proper medical treatment. Then he could pass on his discoveries so that others could also find relief from blindness. He could also obtain surgical supplies of medicines and complete laboratory and surgical equipment—yes, and in particular, too, medicines and stimulants, which could help relieve old Philippe's heart attacks. Hollis was intent on saving and prolonging Grandfather's life, at least for quite a few more years.

But LaGuna insisted Hollis should go Stateside. She insisted that she would be safe. She would wait for Hollis's return, and then life would be perfect for them. But if he refused to go, she would always feel that he would be guilty of having committed an unforgivable crime against mankind. He must not shirk his duty!

Hollis finally agreed that he would go, although he was

still arguing the great problem inside his mind—to go or not to go to the States and leave his great love behind.

The next day had arrived for the celebration of Hollis's departure.

The big, grand farewell party was held in the open air in a lovely, romantic, cleared spot. Even Le Philippe attended, having several of the native men carry him to the spot in a makeshift litter. At his arrival, all the natives and whites stood at attention honoring the grand old man. When he was set in a comfortable position, they all seated themselves on the grass with their legs crossed. The air was filled with the tempting smells of the various cooked and roasted foods—the foods and drinks were served, and all ate heartily and drank quite a bit—and some chanted native tunes and beat rhythmically on tom-toms—a special ritual handed down from generation to generation when someone near and dear to the natives was about to leave them.

The feast began with short speeches by Bonai and a few of the lesser tribal leaders. They were all profuse in their praise of Hollis and his great services to them. Le Philippe gave a speech, but having been feeling quite poor, he only said a few words.

"My friends," he said, "tonight is our last time together. I am an old man, and I have seen much of the world. But here on Banika, I have made my home far from the civilization that gave me birth. I will never leave this island again as you are doing tomorrow, to return to that other world. Remember what you have found here—men and women much like yourselves. They, in their simple way, have found a degree of peace and happiness that many in more civilized places have never seen. At the same time, we of Banika have

benefited from your stay here. Hollis, you most of all have left your good mark on the island. Let us hope your spirit of love and sacrifice will remain with us. These are even more important than the other things you have done for the health and physical good of the people. You all go with the love of us all."

There was wild cheering from the natives. Everyone was smiling as they prepared to enjoy the feast. When most of the guests were finished eating, the natives began their program of entertainment.

In the golden moonlight and in the bright glow of the big fire about which they were gathered, some formed a circle and danced and sang native songs. The maidens carried torches for the festival and the children dropped flowers at the feet of those who were to go away from the island.

Darkness gathered, and the stars began to peep from their swinging orbits. The moon was up full and bright, and the palm trees laced against the moonlighted sky. Birds and flowers tried to sleep, but the bats flittered about. Amidst burning flares and fires, the natives sat in a large semi-circle at the mouth of the lagoon. There, they watched several teams of dancers attired in their old costumes in full splendor, circling hand-in-hand.

The women wore varied flowered wreaths and charms about their necks, wrists, and ankles. Some only had gardenias in their hair. The girls' skirts of grass shone gaily as they switched in stately rhythm to the music that had no distinct melody to it. The dancers also held an artistically carved wooden staff with varied colored feathers tied to the top. Others twisted and turned different small flares while they danced masked-like, their eyes staring and snapping.

The warriors of the tribe danced impressively, too, making quite a spectacle with their metal and shell ornaments whirling and jangling about their bodies as they themselves whirled in their weird tribal dance. Ornaments such as heavy metal bands encircled their ankles and wrists, and each wore necklaces of dyed sharks' teeth swinging and swaying about their dusky throats. Their foreheads and faces were painted with bright, gaudy stripes and cryptic figures as were also their chests and backs.

Hollis and LaGuna sat with legs crossed in the center of the semi-circle, watching the dancers go through their farewell religious ritual. The younger girls in vegetable-dyed skirts now danced before them in circles, shaking the flames of their resinous torches despite the beautiful moonlight.

Some chanted to the weird beat of the tom-toms and other mysterious music derived from seashells.

LaGuna rose from beside Hollis and danced a very special dance of farewell, especially to him. How adorable she looked in her silky, white-plumed skirt and shell bracelets and anklets. From her breast to her hips, her body was tightly bound with a purple-like cloth bandana. Her glassy hair had a red camellia in it. Then she placed a wreath around Hollis's neck.

Hollis grasped LaGuna's hands. The palms of them were rather moist, and he could feel the trembling in the fingers as he took her to their position in the semi-circle. LaGuna looked most charming in the moonlight. That could not be denied. All gazed upon the couple as they were about to be blessed.

When the music started, LaGuna and Hollis stood side by side in typical native custom. The music started slowly

and softly and LaGuna, too, clicked slowly and softly a set of castanets made from shells. She stepped and leaped like a fawn in the moonlight as she danced slowly at first. It was almost a snail's pace. Then it became faster. She danced with nimble-footed pace, beating the ground with rapid steps and shaking her long locks in the breeze.

Her toes pointed out, while her hands wove fantastic patterns. He had never seen such shapely, slender arms and legs. Her movements were most graceful, and one couldn't help noticing her softness and flexibility.

Even Hollis felt a bit tantalized by her charms as he watched the curve of LaGuna's body twist and sway in lightning whirls and twirls. The music died down a bit, and he asked, "Please sing our song, LaGuna. I would like to hear it just once more. You do it so beautifully."

His whole countenance changed. It was gay, too.

"You're kidding, Hollis," said LaGuna as she clung to him momentarily, then tapped her hips and belly. Her eyes looked brilliant.

"No, I'm not. Please do sing, dear," he begged.

LaGuna's rich low voice thrilled him as he listened and watched her song and dance before him in typical native rhumba.

When she was through singing her song, Hollis said, "Sing it again." He felt a great delight as he listened to her tender song and watched her pliant body sway, so peculiarly her own way.

The chanting blended in slowly and softly. Gradually it became louder and louder. Tai carried the traditional gift to them, the two lovers. She handed it to Hollis, bowing gracefully before him. LaGuna's eyes widened, and her heart

raced as she gazed upon a beautiful string of pearls. These the natives gave to them in appreciation for what they had done for them.

His heart raced. He also felt a pounding in his head. He felt a catch in his throat. He tried to think of something to say. Momentarily, his mind went blank. Nervously, he took the pearls and bowed low, saying, "Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts and souls."

A sudden loud roar rang out, signaling Hollis to join in the dance with LaGuna. He did the best he could, and the rhythm helped him a lot.

While the maidens poured jugs of wine, the old men and women spectators, too, danced with their legs crossed. They clapped their hands, chanted and swayed their bodies to animate their dance. The movements were first slow, then faster and faster, until they were more or less hypnotized by their own movement.

They felt a certain mellowness and a fairy-like atmosphere about them, which was permeated by burning green leaves, emitting a fragrant odor.

"May you and LaGuna have everlasting happiness," spoke Tai.

"Thank you all again."

After the dance had risen to a high pitch, it died down suddenly. A soft, weird humming of the younger girls continued. This was the cue for Hollis to place the necklace over LaGuna's head. After he did that, she gazed into his eyes and took the red flower from her raven black hair.

"This good luck omen signified the taking away of all dangers of the sea," LaGuna replied.

They stood side by side motionless in the firelight with

the moonlight looking down and shedding her radiance upon the scene.

Then LaGuna gave Hollis a curl of her hair and tied it to the stem of the flower. He looked at her starlit eyes. They looked a bit saddened. She did not look so overjoyed as she did a few moments ago. Her lover pulled her head close to his bosom, caressing her. He felt her cheeks get hot. Then he spoke tenderly, "I'll take all the curls one by one or none." He kissed the back of her neck, then her lips ardently and possessively saying, "This is for keeps, LaGuna."

Gaiety suddenly ebbed from his heart, too, as the music died away. Again, life was real. Only a faint smile lingered as he took her trembling hand and held it in his. He put his other hand around her waist and drew her closer to him. All watched with eager eyes in the limelight as Hollis pressed his lips to hers. Even Jim and Grace, who had just returned from their own little interlude, watched. LaGuna's face flushed as their eyes met. She regarded Hollis with a wistful smile. Her lips quivered. Tears welled in her eyes and slid like pearls down her moon-kissed cheek, and she murmured, "Hollis, please hold me tenderly. Hold me tightly."

The tom-toms again took their last hypnotic beat—faster—faster, while the maidens moved and swayed as if enchanted. He held LaGuna more closely as they swept on the wings of music and floated in fond embrace. Their eyes soon met. He bent to kiss first her neck and then her lips, saying, "I have been the happiest man in the world with you."

Her voice was barely audible when she answered, "I wish you were coming back instead of going. I'll be dreaming and thinking of you always."

She sang softly to him—a song of love, promise, and

farewell. And then Hollis put his lips close to her lovely ear as they danced and sang softly to her the words of a song which had formed in his mind as he thought of having to leave her. "This is my love song, especially for you, LaGuna, my one and only love!" he whispered to her. He saw tears in her eyes. "It is our song—it will always be our song—I sing it to you now in farewell—but we shall sing it again, together, other times, for I shall come back to you if I live and can come back; and I know the good Lord, who has watched over us and guarded and helped us in our lives thus far; Who brought us together, will continue to guide our destinies so that we may be happy together again and till the end of our lives."

She whispered eagerly, lovingly to him—and listened, then, enraptured, while he sang the words of his love song to her—of his love and his great perplexity as to deciding about leaving her—of his decision and his resolution never to stop loving her, to remain faithful, and to return to her.

He sang softly, tenderly, lips close to her shell-like ear, holding her lovely body close to his own as they continued to dance—"What Am I To Do?" He began to sing the song in a soft voice.

"What am I to do, darling? Loving you so, sweetheart —
What am I to do, dear one, must we really, really part?
We met and loved—now, underneath the gleaming, golden moon—
We dance—our dance of parting, hearts aching—for so soon—
We will be apart—alone, lonely, dreaming only, you and I—
Alone, waiting patiently—ever in love, and sigh—
Beneath this same, gleaming, golden lovers' moon.

Darling, What am I to do? Underneath this friendly moon,
Our wonderful, heavenly, lasting love began to bloom.
Soft, scented winds caressed us, blessed us, sighing—
As I sighed, wondering—What Was I To Do?
What else could we do—but love, yes, I, yes, YOU—
But now, alas, comes time of parting—What Am I To Do?
Soft, sweet scented winds caressed us, blessed us, sighing—
As I sighed, wondering—WHAT WAS I TO DO? What else could we do—but love, yes, I, yes, YOU—
But now, alas, comes time of parting—What Am I To Do?
I should have kept from loving you—but when I hold you, oh!
How could I stop? How tell my heart? WHAT AM I TO DO?

My loved one, loving you is like a breath of spring—
Holding you close, loving you, being with you—only you,
I know now and for always, is the only, only thing!
You have become a part of me—a part, I'll be ever true!

When we, sweetheart, are soon so far apart—
Remember, I'll have left with you—my heart.
I'll dream of you and long for you—where're I go,
Waiting only for that time, when I will come back to you—
Waiting, yearning—always true—knowing that you, too—
Are waiting, loving, ever true—until again, loving you—
You loving me—we will be together, enjoying love so true.
But—until then, sweetheart—WHAT AM I TO DO?

I should have kept from loving you—but when I hold you, oh!

How could I stop? How tell my heart? What Am I To Do?
The way your lovely eyes look at me and thrill me thru and thru—
I know, sweetheart, no other love for me will do—and now,
Comes time for parting—Oh, What Am I To Do?
My loved one, loving you is like a breath of spring—
Holding you close, loving you, being with you—only you,
I know now and for always, is the only, only thing!
You have become a part of me—a part, I'll be ever true!
When we, sweetheart, are soon so far apart—
Remember, I'll have left with you—my heart.
I'll dream of you and long for you—where're I go,
Waiting only for that time, when I will come back to you—
Waiting, yearning—always true—knowing that you, too—
Are waiting, loving, ever true—until again, loving you—
You loving me—we will be together, enjoying love so true.
But—until then, sweetheart—What Am I To Do?"

There were tears in Hollis's eyes as he sang—and tears sparkled in LaGuna's lovely eyes as he finished the love song. Their eyes met, and they clung to each other and kissed tenderly.

"You know what you must do," she told him earnestly, "Go to fulfill your destiny and then—"

Hollis interrupted, "And in the meantime, I'll hitch our love for safekeeping to that sentinel star in the Southern Cross until I come back."

"I'll be rooting for you, Hollis."

"You know, dear, I'm not leaving you because I want to. I am commanded to go. Yes, and even by you."

"Now, don't take it in that tone, Hollis. I didn't mean it that way. I asked you to go because I love you," she said earnestly. "You must get medical help."

"That sure was a funny way of expressing yourself." Hollis paused and pondered for a moment, then he said, "I'm frightened at this moment, LaGuna. I can't begin to tell you how much I owe you and how little I did for you. You gave me a new start in life, and I want to do things for you. Yes, LaGuna," he said feebly, "only one thing kept me going while I was here."

"What was that, Hollis?"

"You, of course," he added with gratitude. "Whenever I looked into your face, you picked me up tremendously. I was always glad to see your smiling face."

Chanting died down, and the pulsating rhythm ebbed.

He nodded and held her close. He no longer urged her to come with him, realizing she must remain on the island, having her duty to her ailing grandfather and the islanders to consider. And remaining there, she also remained the same wonderful, unspoiled LaGuna—as he had found her, as he wished her always to remain.

The fires were red and now reached a dim yellow. The night became silent with only the sweet notes of some night-birds singing softly, with the rustling of palm fronds providing a rhythmic tropical background beat for the lovely music of nature. The golden moon was a bit solemn and full. It hung low overhead as though smiling down on the lovers embraced in each other's arms. LaGuna and Hollis left the few remaining revelers to drift alone once more on the coral sands beside the gently rippling, clear waters of the lagoon and make love in the sultry darkness.

Old Grand-père Le Philippe had enjoyed the party and said farewells and had several of the natives, whom he felt weren't too tipsy and wouldn't be apt to stumble and drop him, carry him back to his house on the crest of the hill. Dotty and Cornelius Van Dyke had retired some time ago—Cornelius had enjoyed going about among the natives and taking out and displaying proudly his beautifully sculptured mahogany uppers and praising old Philippe's exquisite artistry. He thanked Le Philippe again and again, most enthusiastically stimulated by quite a few good drinks of the powerful native wine.

Amidst faint moonbeams of the magic tropical night casting its beams upon them, Hollis gazed at LaGuna and her sparkling eyes, which became a fantasy.

Hollis felt his heart pound and beat fast as he drew her more closely to him and said, "My princess, let me tuck you closer."

She cuddled up, putting her head upon his shoulder, and said softly, "Why?"

"Because I love you."

"I love you, too," she sighed contentedly, looking up into his eyes. Her loving eyes glistened with joy as her lips were seeking to be kissed.

"See that evening star over your left shoulder, Hollis?" pointed LaGuna.

"Yes, it's brilliant, beautiful."

LaGuna sighed. "That means something . . ."

"What, lover?"

"It means that someday we shall meet again."

LaGuna's head fell on his breast and she added, "And it will be as if it were the first time."

There were so many things that he wanted to tell her—how good she had been to him, how much he loved her, and how he would think of her every moment until they would meet again. But what he said would sound so lame in words.

She looked up and read his eyes and understood. When he started to speak again, she put her finger softly to his lips and nodded imperceptibly.

"I'll love you, dear, forever and ever."

She closed her eyes. He leaned over and lifted her chin and kissed her wet eyelids, then her soft red lips.

"Write to me," he said after pressing his lips to hers again and again.

"What about?"

"How I fell in love with you. Isn't that enough?"

"Oh sure," replied LaGuna with a dreamy look melting to his caresses and tenderness.

Her eyes filled him with a mad desire to make ardent love to her. Her kisses were more luscious and sweet. He pressed her closer to him. Her curving bosom rose and fell. She edged still closer to him. Their breathing became faster. They could feel and hear each other's hearts hammering against each other. He put his hands beneath her sarong and stroked the shapely, firm breast and curved thighs.

He pressed his lips to her full-blooded lips and kissed her passionately, possessively, again and again.

There was joy amidst magical tropical beauty and fantasy.

"I must have you. My heart and soul demand you," he said passionately. "Precious, you understand what it is?"

"How can I deny you anything!" she answered, surrendering.

"Whatever may happen to me, I wouldn't miss this moment for anything in the world. I hope this moment never ends, LaGuna."

"Never, never, Hollis," she said, cuddling up to him. "We just weren't meant to lose each other. Our love will live forever. It will be eternal in my heart."

"Yes, my love. I, too, will love you all my life. You will be my living soul."

He kissed her again and again and felt her fingers dig into his sides deeper and deeper. He could tell by the way she kissed him and by the way her body felt limp that nothing more was necessary to talk or think about.

She rested her head against his bosom and gazed into the black magic of the heavenly night. He could tell that she felt the soft sleep spreading over her eyelids.

After an hour or two of sleeping, he dropped his head on her bosom, awakening her. For a moment, she became startled, arousing him. After she recovered from her limpness, he saw her face shine with self-satisfaction and a certain triumph.

"What's the matter, LaGuna darling?"

"Don't wake me up, let me dream forever. It was heavenly," sighed LaGuna with dreamy eyes.

"Tell me about it, my love, my sweetheart." He fondled her. He fondled her ears and stroked her hair. "What was it, my love?"

She had heard him say those words before, but she just wanted to hear them over and over again.

"Tell me more, Hollis. Don't stop, dear."

She felt a slight dew on her throat and the faint stream of breeze in her hair.

"I dreamt I was kissed, and kissed, and kissed. That is all I can remember of my dream. Never have I been awakened so happily," she said, pushing her hair back. "It was just wonderful," she added, taking a deep breath.

The night was now silent. The blessed moon kissed the treetops under which LaGuna and Hollis were sitting and gazing across the lazy current, watching their dreams flow by. The lagoon was still and silhouetted the trees, and as they sat on the large bare branch, leaning against the trunk, the lagoon presented a glassy shine on the surface which reflected the chaste white brilliance of the stars as they twinkled and danced upon a jewel which hung to the magic carpet of the heavens. All was calm and peaceful except for the faint lap of the waves against the white coral beach.

"It must be late, Hollis," she said, taking a deep breath again and gazing into his eyes.

"There's no hurry, LaGuna. We have so little time together."

Before she finished, he kissed her and whispered, "Tonight is ours. This is a memorable evening. It is heavenly, and you are heaven to me. If only we could live this night forever, for as never before, my heart tells me that I love you more than all the diamonds in tonight's sky. I want to love you and be with you always."

There was a dim montage of departing figures as the stars began to wane. Tiny embers of the fire were still left. Two figures still embraced, merged in shadowy reverie. The whole world was silent, save for a stifled sob from LaGuna.

What thrilling, yet also sweetly sad, moments the two lovers spent there on the coral sand beside the waters of the lovely lagoon, bathed in the golden rays of the tropical-splendored moon, locked tightly in one another's arms, their bodies tingling with love, merged as one—clinging as though they dreaded ever having to separate. But all too soon, those last wonderful, happy, yet also in a way sad, moments and their parting lovers' embrace had to come to an end. Reluctantly, they finally arose and, arms still about one another's waist, walked slowly, somberly, back to their island home.

How hard it was for them to face the sorrow when they would have to part—for but a little while, they both told each other. Yet both knew, deep in their loving, aching hearts, that despite all best intentions, fate sometimes plays cruel tricks, and the sweet, sad parting that was to be only for a little while might turn into a tragic, heartbreaking forever.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Departure from the Island

Hollis went to bed but did nothing but toss and turn. He forgot to swing the window shade, and the glorious gaze of the rising sun aroused him. He opened his eyes and saw the natives begin to mill about the lagoon, awaiting Hollis's departure.

Nana was busily preparing the breakfast while LaGuna and Hollis got ready. Few words were spoken at the table, but there were lots of thoughts of what was to come. If either of them had only the power to see ahead! Both of them had an abundance of faith. LaGuna and Hollis ate in silence. Only commonplace things were said.

Hollis rose to his feet and tried to pierce the gloom by raising her chin. Her face was pale. He looked into her eyes and spoke softly and tenderly, "LaGuna."

She trembled a little. She looked around a second and went to him. He put his arm about her. He said softly, "LaGuna, don't forget to write to me. Take care of Le Philippe. Don't worry while I am away. I can take care of myself."

And she said about the same things to Hollis.

He could feel her heart hammer against his chest as she clung to him and she said, "Oh, Hollis."

Outside, LaGuna saw several natives carry Le Philippe to the boat. He insisted on seeing Hollis off despite vigorous

protests. Apparently, the old man sent Mugzy to fetch LaGuna and Hollis, for she came tearing down the pathway to get them. The lagoon was all astir with gossip about the sailing.

Mugzy gave a big bark and pawed the side of the door. LaGuna let her in, and even Mugzy sensed that Hollis was leaving, for she rubbed his legs and whined as if to say, "Don't go, master."

"Well, Hollis, I guess they are waiting for us," said LaGuna with a break in her voice, standing in the open doorway waiting for Mugzy and her man to leave. "Don't forget your papers, dear," she reminded.

"I almost forgot," Hollis said nervously, looking about for his experiments. He found them lying on the chair.

"I don't know what I will do without you," Hollis said as he checked to see if they were all in order. He carefully wrapped them in a water-tight bag, which he tied around his waist.

He knew that he would miss LaGuna's infectious laughter and scoldings. He pondered all these things he loved—the birds in the trees outside. He felt a feeling of sadness come over him. LaGuna watched the expression on his face. She watched him close the door. Her throat became dry. Her gentle eyes were slightly wet, despite her fight against the tears. Bravely, she said, "Hold me once more, Hollis."

"LaGuna," Hollis said, "don't worry about a thing while I am away. I'll be back before you know it. I can hardly wait for the time to see you again. No plane, train, or ship can bring me back to you fast enough. When I come back, the air will be fresher and more fragrant, and the stars and the moon will shine brighter. The birds will sing sweeter, and the trees,

grass, and flowers will be greener and more beautiful. Our love will go on and on, living, loving, and laughing."

One by one Hollis and the Major shook hands with Le Philippe and LaGuna. When the Major came to LaGuna, he thanked her very much on behalf of all his friends, and LaGuna pulled the Major aside with an anxious look and asked, "Major, do you think Hollis has a chance to come back? I hope nothing will happen to him, or I will never forgive myself. Whatever he has to go through, I want to share it and know whatever he decides is the right answer." She spoke with fear that someone else would snare Hollis back in the States.

A large, polished surface taken from the plane was secured to attract planes and ships should they pass.

All the natives stared in the dazzling light of the early morning, watching the crew get everything ready for the departure. The scene was fantastic, with the crew, the trees, the still, glassy lagoon, and the sailboat silhouetted against the ball of fire. It was a surging, beautiful setting, absorbing and enthralling.

Mugzy, with her sad brown eyes, sensed Hollis's leaving. She wagged her tail excitedly and rubbed her nose against his leg. He patted her gently. Mugzy sat on her haunches and looked forlornly at him, panting and making sounds as if to say, "Don't leave us. We will miss you terribly. There will be no one at the laboratory for me to fetch. It will seem strange not to find you there."

"Well, Hollis, I guess we can't keep you any longer," said the artist, after some patient natives with tears streaming down some of their faces had delivered a going-away present. It was a black-handled, carved ebony cane inlaid with

mother of pearl. Hollis was very pleased and highly honored to receive such a beautiful gift.

He bowed low to all and, surveying them in a long last glance, said, "I wish to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for the gift you have presented to me. It will keep the thoughts of you and Banika constantly before me. I wish to thank you all for the wonderful, untiring work to help my friends and me whose stay here was made so pleasant."

After a slight pause, Hollis asked, "Will you send a little prayer to Our Lord, Le Philippe, for a successful voyage?"

"Yes, Hollis. I will be glad to do so," spoke the kindly Le Philippe. With his head bowed and his palsied hands clasped, he began his prayer amidst the low chanting of the natives. Hollis stood side by side with LaGuna, his head bent and heart low.

"The heavens are the work of Thy hands. You can rule the winds, quiet the raging seas and make storms obey. Please keep, guide, and protect them all the way from strong winds, sudden storms, and death, may they have a safe and peaceful journey."

"Amen."

"Thank you so much, Le Philippe," Hollis said as he extended his hand for what he knew would be their last handshake. Le Philippe raised his deeply wrinkled forehead and tried to straighten his aged frame that was shrunk to the size of a skeleton. With an uplifted chin and eyes set towards his, he said in a quivering voice like a father to his son, "My son, never let your ideals and your dreams be taken from you. Keep them unspotted from this world. You know what right is. Stick to it through thick and thin. Let not the mists of the world or its gay diversions draw you from your glory."

"Thank you, Le Philippe. I'm sure your words will do us much good," Hollis replied. "You make me feel as if we are going away for good," he said, mustering a smile. "I'm not saying goodbye to you at all. I'll be seeing you all very soon."

"Banika will miss you, Hollis," said Le Philippe, peering out at him with his little beady eyes.

"You mean I'll miss Banika," Hollis said as he bowed to signify respect and gratitude. Then he pulled LaGuna closer to his side and added, smiling amiably at her, "I will be sort of an exile in the States. My body will be there, but my heart will be in Banika."

"Have no fear in your love for us or anyone else in the world. In my young days, in every hello, there is always a fear of goodbye. I loved the best of them and also left the best of them. Because sooner or later, there will be separations, as it is with you, Hollis. Live with it and not despite it. Don't think of your fears of loneliness or rejection—everyone has part of it. The important thing is to trust in yourself."

"Don't worry about me. I'll be back in nothing flat."

Looking at Nana, Hollis said, "Take good care of her, won't you?"

"Yes, I will, Mr. Hollis." There were tears in Nana's eyes.

"So long, Nana," he said, shaking her hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Hollis." Her face assumed a melancholic expression.

He began to taste the bitter thoughts of leaving his precious LaGuna, the girl who had saved his life.

Hollis bent over to press his lips to LaGuna's. The tom-toms and onlooking natives began to chant a farewell prayer slowly again. Native children were casting flowers into the boat and water as one by one they entered their outrigger.

"Well, so long, my sweet. They are loosening the rope from the boat's mooring," Hollis said. Bonai set up the mast. A favorable breeze blew. Oars were raised in readiness. The rudder was let down astern and fastened securely.

"Wish me luck, LaGuna," Hollis cried as he got ready to jump into the outrigger.

"You won't need it, dear."

"Oh, I almost forgot. Here's the medal my mother gave me. Keep it always," Hollis said as he kissed her hand again before he left.

Her eyes brightened, and she paused for a while; she went on with a wistful smile. "Thank you, Hollis. I will keep it forever close to my heart, for your heart will always be in mine, and the touch of your lips will always be on mine. Always, I will live for you."

A quiver ran through Hollis. He knew what she meant, and she could tell how he felt. Still holding her limp hand in his and gazing into her eyes, he tried to comfort her by saying, "I'll be seeing you soon. I want the same sweet girl waiting for me that I left, and don't forget to have my sugar in my coffee ready when I come back. Remember?"

"Yes, Hollis, I'll remember. I'll have it ready and at body temperature, too. I'll never forget that," she said as she looked up at him with dimmed eyes.

"Hollis, do be careful, very careful," warned LaGuna. Her beautiful eyes were full of love and sadness as she clung to him once more. He could hear her whisper, "Hollis, Hollis," over and over again. He stopped to press his lips to hers. It was a long lingering kiss—one that might finish their love, or an uncertainty as to where their life's paths would lead;

although they had the greatest of hopes in their hearts that their love would remain forever.

"Again, I thank you a thousand times from the bottom of my heart for the fine and lovely moments we enjoyed together. You are the greatest lady in the whole world. When I get back, everyone will be jealous with envy. You will be dressed in the most beautiful sheer golden gown. A headdress studded with jewels, a diamond bracelet, and a diamond ring will adorn your fingers."

LaGuna flung her arms tightly around Hollis's neck and, with tearful eyes and quivering lip, she cupped her face in her hands.

She steadied her voice and looked at his downcast eyes and uttered, "It will be enough just to see you, Hollis dear." She looked up and read his eyes and understood. When he started to speak again, she put her finger to his lips and nodded imperceptibly. "It is time for you to go. They are waiting for you."

Hollis wiped a tear that ran down her cheek and stroked her hair, and lifting up her chin, gave her a long, lingering, possessive kiss, then said, "I don't want you to be sad but completely happy." Hollis turned around with chin and head erect and headed for the banca.

Hollis again jumped into the boat as the anchor was raised and the towline secured. A little breeze came up to fill the sail of the twin-hulled sailing boat.

A score of paddlers with bulging muscles dug deeply into the waters to help gain the outrigger's momentum. Hollis was at the stern, and Bonai took charge of the paddlers. All eyes were set on the group embarking. The plane survivors

joined in shouting and waving goodbye. The adieus were sad amidst the chanting and the drumming of the tom-toms and were slowly fading as the outrigger passed a bar and was steered safely through the reefs, where the sea was a beautiful turquoise.

Hollis returned the natives' and LaGuna's waves. As he kept looking back involuntarily, LaGuna remained at the spot of the farewell without moving, still looking with the same forlorn look, leaving behind the big Banika sky, the whisper of voices in the wind-bent coconut trees could be heard.

Mugzy barked incessantly while LaGuna watched with a granite countenance until Hollis was out of sight. Her dark eyes were still wide, and her soft rose-petal lips now quivered, forming the words, "Good-bye, Hollis, dear." But no sound came from them. Sinking to her knees at Le Philippe's side and clasping his wrinkled hand, she clung to her aged grandfather like a child seeking protection.

With a leaden heart and widened eyes, trying to smile as she watched her lover slowly fading off, until only a speck could be seen at the distant horizon. She suddenly broke down into passionate weeping, and her pent-up tears flowed in rivulets down her cheeks.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

At Sea / Rescue

It was a still, humid day, frightfully hot. By noon, the wind had receded to a mere lull. The sea, too, remained quietly resplendent in its deep purple depths. Hollis Rochelle watched flying fish skip along, flitting in and out of the wave crests. Dolphins rolled leisurely, rising and sinking into the water in perfect unison, causing a hiss of the long swell passing beneath the outrigger. Gulls circled and glided along on wings of flight, then departed shoreward. White clouds drifted lazily by.

The group was moving along in a slow current. All seemed cheerful and hopeful. But memories of the island still dwelt. They entered a faster current. It was a bit hazardous as they were adjacent to a sunken reef. Bonai became intently alert when he encountered the situation. He knew when reefs were near and avoided them.

Soon they were out where the sea was a beautiful turquoise blue, and it wasn't long before they got into the deep purple waters of the Pacific. The still air shimmered with heat waves, distorting the hazy blue silhouette of the mountain of Pelu and Banika.

Hollis knitted his brow and shaded his far-visioned dark eyes with his hand and gazed back at the lovely green island where he had been so happy. As he sailed farther away

from the island, it appeared to grow smaller and smaller until it diminished into a tiny dot. Soon, that faded into the endless horizon until nothing could be seen except the open sea.

That noon, the sun was directly overhead as Major Waindel rationed out the first meal upon the ocean. It was comprised of baked fish and a combination of rice and potato biscuits. Grace dealt out pieces of coconuts and bananas for dessert. Dot poured the papaya juice. The food was welcomed and relished by everyone as they ate hungrily. Hollis watched the Major fill his coconut dish sparingly, as he tried to set an example before the others not to over-indulge early; for many days might elapse before they would be picked up or might reach the next inhabited island.

That afternoon, as the blazing sun slipped slowly in the west, Bonai studied cloud formations and kept a watchful eye for ships and planes. Suddenly, his eyes caught sight of a plane flying at considerable altitude. Pointing out the direction of the oncoming plane, he shouted excitedly, ripping the silence of the hot afternoon.

"Oh, Mr. Rochelle. See? Over there!"

"Where? Where?" shouted all in a frenzied excitement with rapid fire.

"Signal him! Signal!" shouted Van Dyke in over-anxiety.

"Quick," Hollis added. "Hand that piece of aluminum to Jim. See what he can do with it."

"Isn't this exciting, Dear?" spoke Dot to her husband, who stood gaping at the distant plane with open mouth. The polished sheet was handed to Jim. Desperately, he strove to contact his beam of reflected sunlight at a source which would cross the plane's path.

"Do you think that plane has been out searching for us?" asked Grace eagerly.

"It's possible! Then again, it may be a scouting plane," said the Major, watching closely. The plane was gaining altitude.

"I hope so. This is what we have been waiting and praying for," said Dotty, panting with impatience.

"Yes," said Grace, waving at the plane.

The plane was now directly overhead, and its course remained unaltered.

"Why doesn't he come down? Doesn't he see us? Keep flashing, Jim, don't stop. Gosh, I hope he sees us."

"Maybe he does," spoke Grace excitedly, adjusting her hair.

"He doesn't seem to be paying any attention to us," interposed Blackie, shielding his eyes from the sun and sighing unhappily.

"He probably thinks this is just a fishing craft," added Jim, trying to reach his mark with the mirror.

"What would a fishing boat be doing here? Can you see an island anywhere around us? No," Gerry Waindel said.

"They're looking for us. For Blackie," he suddenly yelled with glee.

"This could be a craft making some journey to a nearby island. It's plausible that this might resemble a fishing boat from such an island; couldn't it?" Hollis queried, trying to keep his eyes on the plane.

The plane had passed the outrigger without seeming to notice it. Jim's signaling had proved to no avail.

"Maybe the plane didn't have enough gas to fly around with," said Jim reassuringly as he laid down his sheet of aluminum with a look of utter despair.

"Yea," said Blackie, "probably he didn't see us at all." He looked at Jim with disgust. "Next time, I'm taking control of the signaling. Blackie always gets what he's looking for."

"Don't be so pessimistic, Blackie," said Mrs. Van Dyke. "He may bring us help."

Gradually, the puffs of air lost their strength, and the outrigger missed the steady power of its winds and soon began to roll gently in troughs. The air became very quiet and still. The sails fluttered, trembled, and collapsed. There were only thin shadows of clouds in the sky.

Several hours passed in stillness when the clouds began building and the wind increased. The clouds loomed ominously high over the water's edge. The sea swells pitched the craft moderately. The skies were blistering hot and sultry; so hot that it would make an old-fashioned Indian cigar-store figure perspire!

Now, with the oncoming breeze, everyone began to feel more comfortable, and the boat occupants began to relax, except Bonai and the Major. Bonai gazed at the cloud formations upon the endless horizon. He caught Hollis's eye and beckoned him to come over.

"Weather looks bad," prophesied Bonai. He was anticipating something.

"Maybe," replied Hollis, screwing up his eyes and face at an unusual cloud formation on the horizon. It looked like a cloud that was in a great hurry.

"Sure," nodded Bonai as the waves rolled higher and a gusty wind sprang up. Brilliant purple colors were weaving in and out as if on the top of some boiling liquid. Yellow splotches appeared seconds later.

Hollis, too, had sensed an approaching storm. Bonai

assured his conviction. At a height, there were rolling clouds that moved forward with greater turbulence than other newly forming clouds, which denoted a dreaded line squall. Hollis watched uneasily as the thunderheads massed on the horizon.

Negu looked nervously behind, again and again. He watched the sea become rougher. A feeling of suspense, of waiting, seemed to permeate the atmosphere.

"Let's go back," shouted Blackie.

"No, we seem to be reaching some land," replied the Major.

"It's there," pointed Blackie.

"Where?" Jim asked.

"That's no land. It's a cloud. Then again, it looks more like a mirage," added Hollis.

Blackie talked to a paddler; he in turn relayed a message to the others. They cast their eyes to the distance. Hollis followed their movements.

The object of their glance seemed to be some atoll. A moment later one paddler leaped overboard and Negu and the rest of his native men followed.

"Hey, Negu, come back, Negu," Hollis shouted. "You'll never make it."

"Hey, we can't go without them. They know the lands," panicked Dot.

"Hollis will take care of us. Don't worry, Dot."

"I can't swim. Not even a stroke. God help us."

"He will," added Hollis. "Negu is one of the best."

Negu turned his body sideways and swam with great strokes, and looking back, yelled, "You won't make it."

"Negu's right," yelled Blackie. "I'm going too."

"No, you won't," interposed the Major with a stern voice.

"Says you," answered Blackie blazingly. "Come along, Grace," he said, trying to pull her to his side.

"Go away from me," she said, drawing away from him. "Your lies! Your evil! That's the way I feel about you!"

The Major reached over to give Blackie a stiff jerk and held him firmly by the wrists.

"Leave me alone, Waindel. I will do as I please."

"There are a few things that I want to tell you!" The Major looked him straight in the eye.

"Tell them to Sweeney. I heard enough of your foolish ideas!" he shouted, trying to break the Major's grip.

"Blackie!" shouted the Major. There was something in his voice that made Blackie hesitate to jump overboard. There was a thoughtful look in his face.

"Go on," said Blackie. "What you got up your sleeve?"

"In the name of the law of the U.S.A., you're arrested." The Major laid his hand on the shoulder of Blackie. Blackie gasped and retrenched. His eyes roved to the Major's, then to Hollis's.

Bonai had to replace the Major doing shark watch at the bowsprit so that he could watch Blackie more closely.

Soon, the big waves and the distance hid Negu and his men from the sight of those on the boat. There was no resemblance of an island for them to swim to.

"I sure wish that I had some binoculars to scan the horizon. With our paddlers gone, you'll have to take Negu's place," Hollis shouted to Jim.

Nearly two hours passed, and another plane was spotted approaching. Bonai's searching eyes had spied it first.

By now, the horizon was becoming more dense. The

voyagers concluded that it was just dusk descending. Bonai knew differently. There was menace in the gathering murk.

"There . . . there, Mr. Rochelle," shouted the excited Bonai, pointing in the direction of the oncoming plane. "Machine bird."

Minds became alert, and the drifters focused their attention on the oncoming airplane. Low spirits again reached the pinnacle of hope.

"Yes, yes! Help is coming at last," cried out Grace with her spirits highly buoyed.

A blast of wind whistled across the sails.

"Hooray . . . Hooray!" they shouted in unison.

"The other plane must have relayed a message, don't you think, Jim?" said Grace, beaming from ear to ear.

"Yea," said Blackie, quickly reaching for the sheet of aluminum.

Jim quickly drew it away and tried to signal the plane.

The plane approached from the same direction as the first aircraft did. It was flying lower than the other; however, it was forced to a lower altitude because of the dark clouds. Bonai and Jim did not like that. Jim desperately tried to send an SOS, but the darkening sky retarded his effort. Through some miracle, the plane spotted the voyagers, for its blinkers flashed. Jim was carefully deciphering the message. The boat passengers stood motionless, their eyes glued to Jim's moving lips as he spelled:

"S – T – A – N – D – B – Y – W – I – L – L – C – O – M – E – B – A – C – K"

Excitedly, the voyagers glued their eyes on the plane as it roared by and watched it go out of sight. It was now but

a question of time before rescue would come, or would the research plane be only a maddening, disheartening, and frustrating memory?

"Why can't they pick us up, Jim?" inquired Mrs. Van Dyke foolishly.

"Where are they going to land?" uttered the Major sharply. "It's too stormy. They will never risk getting us."

"All we can do is hope—hope—hope!" muttered Mrs. Van Dyke.

"Yes, Dotty, dear. We will have to wait a little longer. In a little while, a seaplane should pick us up," said Van Dyke as he put his arm around his wife and drew her a little closer while trying to comfort her dampened spirits.

"What if the plane doesn't come back, Hollis?" asked Grace.

"How in hell do I know? We'll have to formulate some other plan."

"We'll never see our families and friends again," she added.

"We'll come out of it okay, girls, just as long as you don't panic."

"You are such a great man," added Grace as she embraced Hollis.

"Oh, look!" said Grace as she pointed to the looming black clouds. "A storm is coming."

A frightening look passed through the drifters as the clouds descended with the speed of a racehorse.

"Yea—maybe, what else could it be?"

"I hope we miss it," Grace thought.

"Me, too," said Blackie with an involuntary shudder on

the verge of seasickness. The waves were growing deeper and longer.

Hollis staggered over to Bonai and asked, "What do you think about those clouds, Bonai?"

"It's a storm coming, Mr. Rochelle. Looks very bad."

The outriggers rolled more, and the wind whistled louder.

"Gosh, I'm worried," said Dot nervously. "I'm getting to feel a little dizzy."

"You're worried—how do you think the rest of us feel?" said Grace, rubbing the pit of her stomach full of nausea, watching the sharks following in leisurely fashion.

At first the water surface only dimpled, but now a clear white foam began to form in small sheets. The swells were much heavier, and the boat rolled up to about thirty degrees.

The wind whistled with greater velocity, whipping the hot and cold air with water, from creamy fluffy cotton clouds into great ugly, uncontrollable bags of wind forming huge thunderheads. Rolling dark clouds soon covered one half of the sky's dome. The rolling waves lifted the craft higher and higher. The horizon became indiscernible; small, brilliant streaks of lightning were now visible along the southern front. Darkness was fast falling; the banca, which had been so unbearably hot all day, now began to cool quickly. The wind increased until it wisped the hair on everyone's head like tangled rats' nests, excepting the baldheaded Major and Bonai, whose closely cropped hair presented a major problem even to the disturbing winds.

Tiny droplets of rain began to fall. The water from the coconuts had long ago been consumed, and the rain brought precious relief to parched tongues. Some drops were soft

and tender to the touch, then again, they were hard as they were driven down by the swiftly moving clouds. The waves grew in size and volume, and the white caps came in endless procession. The lightning increased in intensity while the thunder rumbling across the spaces became louder and terrifying. The raindrops had grown larger and larger until they turned into drenching sheets.

The wind drove and lashed the sheets against everyone's weathered skin, forcing them to turn their backs to each spray as it whirled and whipped by. The wind made great bellows in the sails, which were almost to the point of bursting. The waters around the boat swelled in broad foaming surface circles, which suddenly upheaved like a giant fountain. This would be accompanied by a rumbling sound or a subterranean hum.

Night fell, and with the darkness, Hollis was mournful and filled with weariness without a LaGuna with whom to stay and caress. His memories were vivid with what he had left behind.

The storm became more furious. The outrigger was struck flat but quickly righted. The wind and rain blew on the faces of the weary shipload, only to be quieted when the liquid wall of the sea shut it off for a moment. The spray and waves were so high that they acted like a mad, rushing, mountainous curtain before the craft.

"God help us! This is no shower!" Waindel cried, trying to stabilize the outrigger that hummed in the wind. As the sea gained great power, human power was lessened.

"It's a typhoon!" shouted Jim, who was beginning to feel cramps in his legs.

Blackie, Van Dyke, and the women huddled on the

bottom of the craft. Each wave formed a liquid wall that shut off the wind for a moment but then drenched the drifters with its black water. The outrigger at one moment would be perched at the crest of the wave, and at the next it would be cascading into a black chasm. It was just like a toboggan hurtling uncontrolled down an icy slope.

As night wore on, gusts of wind snarled like a mad dog as they beat against the reefed sails, threatening to tear them from their moorings. Bonai and Hollis had to shout to each other to be heard above the crashing of the immense waves and hurtling water. The occupants huddled together to obtain as much protection as possible from the others' bodies.

"My stomach is beginning to turn inside of me," said Dot, clinging to the boom and bending over in misery.

Cornelius was holding tight to her arm while he, too, was bent over to gag and heave.

"Feel better, now?" shouted Jim, swaying back and forth, trying to show a smile of sympathy.

"Yes," replied Cornelius, throwing up bits of green mucus as he watched the sharks appear in great numbers, sizes, and activity.

"But I don't," cried Grace with sick lips as she nodded, feeling weaker and more miserable by the minute. She yelled to make herself heard over the rising wind and storm.

Great tongues of lightning licked the sky while its great white crooked sticks tried to jab the lonely outrigger.

As Hollis watched the others retch, he, too, began to get that sick, stomach-achy feeling. Bonai had taught him to hang on and—Hollis tried to brace himself against the roll of the craft. With each break of the wave, he tried to

shift his weight from leg to leg. It was very hard to keep his footing. He tried to tell the others, but things looked so futile and hopeless as he watched the creaking boom with alarm.

Despite reefing the sails to slow the outrigger, it continued to move faster and faster, borne along on enormous waves that were waiting patiently to engulf the craft when the chance was presented. As the white lightning illuminated the ocean with the brilliance of midday, Hollis caught Grace looking at him. She was terrified and white. The thunder increased to a crescendo; it was frightening and deafening as the giant storm came wildly, hurling its restless winds before it.

Hollis felt the trembling of Grace's grip on his side. A moment later, he could tell that she had felt a sense of relief hanging onto him. The once peaceful ocean was now a raging, whirling, and foaming maelstrom, piling sledgehammer blows against the boat. Hollis watched Bonai fight desperately with his sculling oars to keep the craft on course, and the Major helped by using his arms as paddles.

With dogged determination, they tried to reef the sails in the inky darkness. The waters constantly rolled in tons of water and tossed, splashed, and battered on the thirty-foot outrigger. Hissing waves crushed against the frail craft, which leaped high in the air only to come crashing down to drench the already sodden occupants. There wasn't much for them to do but hang on while the storm that owned them spent itself.

Dodging sprays, Hollis screwed his salt and wind-swept eyes and kept a lookout for reefs. He ordered everyone to sit with their knees tightly pressed against their chests or

to lie down. The Major's muscles were strained, and his face portrayed grimness and anxiety. Van Dyke kept putting his hands across his face to prevent the water from whipping and stinging his sunburned countenance.

"Don't stand there," Hollis yelled impatiently at the Van Dykes and Blackie as a large wave came over the boat. "Help, bail out this water! Bail! Bail!"

After Hollis had said that he realized how he sounded after making such a ridiculous statement. How could they bail! They had no pumps or buckets. They had enough trouble hanging on to the boom with both hands.

The last two-reefed sails were being wildly beaten. The ten-foot mast bent like a fly-rod in a fisherman's hands. All their eyes were fixed on the mast, expecting it to break at any moment. Then, dangerously, but slowly, the outrigger began to break up from the incessant poundings it was receiving. One end of the craft had splintered, and the entire structure was in imminent danger of collapsing. Bonai and Hollis knew it would be only a question of time before it would happen, before it would be damaged extensively.

There was another silence crowded with fears as the outrigger rose high up and tilted, swirling from side to side. Then it righted itself again. Hollis's stomach and head whirled and churned more and more as they rose high at the crest of the wave to be sent seconds later to the bottomless trough, only to be bounced high up again.

Hollis crouched in front of the group and hung fiercely to the side of the bulkhead and shouted with a curled lip, "We will remain tied together. In case we land in the water, we must try to form a circle and hang onto whatever we can. It will protect us from sharks."

Luckily, Bonai and Jim were strapped at their waists, and all was in uproar as every muscle and nerve was exerted to carry out the orders for the oncoming storm.

Dot Van Dyke's trembling knees and hands clutched her husband's tightly, while Grace was held fast by Jim's powerful arms and cuddled close to him to keep warm. Blackie held on weakly, but he was still under the influence of some native alcoholic drink which he had smuggled aboard.

"Do you think the outrigger will last?" asked Mr. Van Dyke with a helpless look of terror. "It certainly looks as if it's going to pieces."

He had his doubts about making it in this banca of worsted coconut husk cordage. The ocean was restless and deep without instruments, and the stars were stepping stones to the journey's end.

Hollis tried to act calm, although he, too, felt his heart pounding against his chest, and his teeth chattered.

"Yes, all will be alright. Pull yourself together, folks," he told the mortified group. "Keep a stiff upper lip and everyone do their best job for the lives of all of us will be lost if one shirks his duty."

His hand froze at his side. It was as if he were a fiend with a spell of terror, unable to break his grip. Of the numerous narrow escapes from danger, he had never grown calloused to potential harm. Each person is a prisoner of himself.

"Out with the anchor," Hollis shouted to Bonai with a throaty call. Bonai's face was gnarled and brown, and he handled the banca with great skill. The heavy sea was rolling wildly, and a lot of spray kept coming over the craft. It was

seconds before the outrigger appeared to recover itself. Despite losing their food and other unsecured items from the craft, Hollis had a silent faith; although things looked hopeless and futile, they would carry on.

Bonai threw out the sea anchor in an attempt to retard the violent directional drift of the buffeted craft. Hollis expected the worst to happen at any moment as the craft was crying against the oncoming waves. The mighty midget banca hopped and jumped higher and higher as the great sea leaped and smashed against their haven.

They had no means of judging how long they had clung tenaciously to their perilous craft. Hollis staggered back to the tied-up group with great effort, trying to resist the driving, rolling, angry gust of wind and rain.

"Don't get excited when and if sharks swim about us. Man is not their natural prey. Don't worry; they won't jump out of the water to snatch you. Keep calm if they come around," Hollis's voice raised with a powerful warning.

The wind rumbled and growled until everyone trembled, and even the sharks were no danger compared to those towering waves, which in their swirling anger made swimming an impossibility.

Suddenly, an enveloping gust of wind occurred, and a blanket of water descended in a charging wave against the craft, breaking the mast. It fell like some dry, rotted tree. It broke like a piece of thread. Instantaneously, the Van Dykes and Blackie lost their grip while Hollis managed to keep a tight hold of the broken mast, but seconds later, he was thrown into the angry seas. The remainder of the group clung tenaciously to the lower broken-off portion of

the mast. They were struck with panic as they watched the others practically fly through the air into the ocean's furious lap and the hungry shark's den.

Hollis Rochelle's life had started anew. As soon as he landed in the raging ocean, he felt something dull strike his sides. He gasped. Terror licked across his face. He couldn't imagine what it could be.

Suddenly, lightning flashed by. Death again knocked at his door as he saw nothing but a pool of sharks about him. Momentarily, he blacked out. His mind became paralyzed with fear.

"Finally, my luck has run out," he thought.

From previous experiences, he knew enough to keep extremely quiet. Covetously, he clutched the mast with stiffened wrists. He knew that it would be perilous to move even an eyelash. He remained wide-eyed, motionless, and tensely alert. His skin felt like gooseflesh creeping up his legs, arms, and neck. He thought his heart would fly out of his throat.

"Well, this is it, Hollis," he thought to himself as he felt the sharks' noses poke him from side to side. A cold, inner terror struck sledgehammer blows against his aching head. His body felt as though it couldn't move. It was as if it were frozen—glued to the mast.

He felt a shark sniff and snort near his face like some hungry bull or bulldog. A cold sweat came over him. Hollis remained motionless and never moved an eyelash. After each breath, he thought it would be his last.

The feeling of insecurity mounted every second as the unrelenting sheets of rain poured over his sore face and swollen body. He heard the hammering of his heart into

his aching brain and the growling, howling noise of the rampaging, uninviting sea, the great killer.

A battle for life was at hand as he felt his grip was loosening. Things looked more hopeless by the second. He kept saying to himself, "I'm trapped. What chance have I against such a treacherous enemy as this storm and these sharks? Yeah, this same water is now so repulsive and yet, so friendly when I left Banika."

The sky suddenly became illuminated by lightning. During that split second, he noticed the sharks swim under the water. He thought that he had heard one agonizing scream after another somewhere close by him. He wondered whose panicky moans were heard and whether the tossing, crippled, helpless craft was still upright. He wondered what happened to everyone else. Hollis knew that he was facing death with expectancy.

After an interval of silence, he said to himself, "I wish I had a gun, knife or a life belt." The thought of being swallowed up terrified him. He didn't mind losing his life, but losing his experiments was worse. But, as long as he knew they were still strapped around him, he tried to make himself believe that there was some thread of hope.

"Too bad if I have to lose those tests," he said to himself. "I had so many plans to help people. So many things are left unfinished. The curtain of life will drop any moment, and all my ambitions will go down with it. How can I ever hope to get out of this predicament? Never. I can't push the sharks or the ocean back. I've been through many tight spots before, but never like this one."

The sharks edged closer to Hollis. Maybe they were

enjoying the terror he was in. He was their prisoner and the ocean's, too. He lived from moment to moment, and he couldn't do a thing about it. If he could only do something in the next second, but what? Everything looked so hopeless about him. He wished he could scare the sharks away, but they had him cornered like some animal. There wasn't a thing that he could do. He couldn't make a deal with them, the ocean, or the Maker.

Again, he felt so hopeless in this darkness. He knew there was no use yelling as no one would be able to hear him anyway.

Time passed with extreme slowness. Floating with the sharks was like going to the gallows. He knew that it would be just a matter of time.

The sharks rubbed and poked his body harder and harder. He felt his blood turn to ice. "Go ahead and gobble me up. Tear me limb from limb," he uttered to himself.

His insides felt like they were full of crawling worms.

During those moments of utter helplessness, expecting help from no one, he prayed like he never prayed before. He thought of his experiments again; they were his primary concern.

"No, I must not die. As long as I can breathe, I must force myself to stay alive."

Lightning flashed again. Down went the sharks. He felt encouraged. Another reprieve was granted.

"Oh, please God, please, help me," he begged over and over again, looking towards the heavens. Soon, he felt as though some power was hovering over him.

Lightning zigzagged overhead and lit up the waters. On the crest of the wave ahead of him, he thought he saw figures

in a craft. His hopes were renewed. His strength built up. Frantically, he glued his eyes in that direction.

He prayed for more and longer lightning so he could jump while the sharks dove under the water. Seconds seemed like eternity. He could feel the throbbing veins stand out in his neck, and the temple vessels felt like steel rods. Some invisible hand forced him to hold the slippery mast.

His courage and strength suddenly became insurmountable. As long as he was still alive, there must be a way out, but it would take a little scheming and conniving.

Suddenly, his mind began to work like greased lightning.

This new crisis had to be faced. He set his jaw, clenched his teeth, his lips wanted to move, but he didn't dare to even move an eyelash. Things churned inside of him. His pent-up feelings gushed up like these mad waters. His thoughts were now to leap over the adjacent wave crests. He was anxiously awaiting a good opening to leap at any second. He didn't hear a thing. He was all wrapped up in breaking away from the den of sharks. His face flinched as he received blow after blow of the hurling water, which was forcing him to loosen his claw-like grip. But, with renewed vigor, he kept hanging on to his haven. Cautiously, he watched the sharks. He felt his wrists stiffen like steel bands as he was getting ready to leap.

If he could only get to that wave ahead of him, things might be better, he thought. When the boat was up, he was down, and vice versa. Lightning struck again. He was inching closer to the craft. He did not dare yell or move his body as the sharks surely would snatch him. His heart started to sink. He wondered what the next moment would bring.

"Help! Help me, Grace!" was heard in the darkness.

It was a cry that the startled crew too well understood. Every muscle and nerve was taut and ready to execute further orders of impending danger. Nobody spoke.

"We've got to get them," shouted the Major in a voice that rang like some iron bell.

"How?" answered Jim, with a nod clinging fiercely to the mast.

Grace let out a sudden, wild shriek, barely audible above the lashing storm. "What's happened?" as she looked at Jim and clung to him convulsively. They peered into the darkness of that livid and fearful-looking mist that had driven down upon them with the speed of a racehorse to see if anyone else had had the misfortune to have gone.

"Are you alright?" shouted Grace with excitement in her voice. Then she blacked out for a moment. "I can't. I can't. I'm so helpless," she cried pitifully. Although she hated Blackie, he did mean a lot to her at one time. The Major knit his brow and filled his lungs with air, and expelled it in a trembling, prolonged howl.

"Swim to the outrigger," he staggered and yelled again, with a voice that lifted up like a foghorn. "You others keep your feet in the craft before the sharks bite them off." In desperation, Blackie tried to ward off a shark that was toying with him.

"Make them stop. I can't go on," begged Blackie in a voice that was squeezed out of his lungs partially filled with water. He puffed and gasped for air like a swimmer who has remained underwater too long.

"Hollis, Dot, Van!" shrieked Grace hysterically in the pitch blackness.

"Swim! Here we are!" shouted Jim frantically.

"Where are you?" yelled the Major.

Horror swept every face. A frenzied feeling enveloped all of them. Their immovable bodies were slapped by the wind and salt water. Their eyes looked terrified, with a helpless, death-like face meeting one another's. Bonai's head bent forward; he shrugged his shoulders and murmured in a dubious voice, "Too bad." They had gone through this before when the plane had crashed. The natural thought of all was spent on who would be the next to depart. The bitter thought of that moment when they, too, would go through the agony of being swallowed by this mad, hungry sea was shared by all.

A flash of lightning lit the sky, but the boaters could see no one. No voices were heard except that of Blackie's as a huge wave brought Blackie nearer to the survivors.

"I can't swim," they heard him groan as the shark first broke Blackie's skin surface with its huge teeth. Then its studded jaws closed with a crash and tore off a leg as he was trying to get a hold of the outrigger. His face was flushed with exertion; every line in it was taut. With terrific effort, he tried to pull himself up with his tense, tendinous, and clutching fingers.

"Swim!" shouted Grace in the darkness, hysterically shrinking further back in terror. He tried but failed to reach for the side of the craft. His face had been flushed the moment before; it now turned instantly white. His eyes assumed a blank look of terror as Grace clung to Jim's arm.

"He's got me," whined Blackie like it was being torn out of his chest. "My God, he got my leg," he laughed in terror like some psychopathic murderer.

"Me, too!" groaned Van Dyke, nearby.

"Help . . . please . . . stop," cried Blackie savagely. He made each word sound like a wild beast's, full of unspeakable suffering and terror.

There was a churn in the water and a cry of horror as they heard someone draw in one delirious breath. In mad desperation, Blackie struggled fiercely to get a hold of a portion of the outrigger. The Major was nearest, and he made a gallant attempt to reach Blackie, who was trying with a terrific effort and struggle to hold on and climb onto the craft, but a giant swirling wave, like a high wall of water, hit Blackie from the side, slashed and wrenched his trembling, gripping fingers away.

"Please . . . please," pleaded Blackie, whose voice faded away. They tried to see where he went, but all they saw was the foamy sea. His grip was broken like a powerless infant—like a straw in the wind. Blackie was swept into the mouth of the ocean, which was closed only by the next oncoming wave. Bonai blew his whistle; neither Hollis, Blackie, nor the Van Dykes answered. What life there was left in them went out in a few short seconds as the hungry sea sucked them beneath the surface as if it were a great vacuum. Once, Hollis saw Blackie's agonizing face up far off the starboard and beyond any chance of rescue by anyone in the craft. Blackie was doomed to a watery grave, he thought. There was no other glimpse of him.

"Do something! Do something! What do you do now, Hollis?" sobbed the cringing Grace as she looked at the outrigger, which was half filled with water. She shuddered as she and Jim exchanged perhaps a farewell kiss.

Hollis yelled with clenched fists. "Bail! Bail! Bail!" Hollis hated yelling at them. He knew it was a case of futility.

Jim tore away from her and murmured in tender, beseeching tones, "Can't. Sharks are following us. Can't jump in for them." The terrible reality arose before Grace's eyes as she smothered Jim with kisses in an outburst of passion.

They could do nothing but wait for the end to come. If they capsized, they undoubtedly would never be able to save their own lives. Righting the craft would be out of the question, and what kept them up was a miracle.

No one spoke. Grace's knees began to buckle. Her emotion was strangling her. Jim tried to raise her up. They were all determined to remain rigid and silent. Major Waindel was rigid and unbending as ever, without a suspicion of fear on his face.

A terror of darkness lay over them as they tried to listen for moans. Each wave became like some hideous monster rushing madly towards them. Everyone feared that he might be next as he clung to his frail support. Now, after the unfortunate demises, the rest had been lashed to the broken boom at great risk to their lives by the agile Bonai. He and Jim then tied the wracked end of the outrigger with rope so that it might be maintained seaworthy. It was a Herculean task to steady the outrigger before the sweep of the ocean's power.

Hollis tightened his teeth and gathered up more strength, waiting for that opening to get near the banca. When Hollis was perched high on a wave, the skies suddenly lit up again, and then he was in a deep, dark canyon of water.

Quick as an eye wink, Hollis flung himself against the shark's body to get traction. Acting like a springboard, he suddenly dove into the area of the pitching banca, which was

half-filled with water. He leaped downward with a bellyflop in the middle of it.

"It's me . . . me, Hollis." He looked around and yelled with a cracked voice. Grace, Gerry, and Jim looked about with sudden terror as they heard the thud. Excitement ran high.

"Miracle, saved by a miracle, Hollis saved. You came as if from nowhere," Grace cried in a quick, breathless whisper.

"We're so glad to see you alive, thank God," exclaimed Gerry and Jim, helping to raise Hollis's head above the water.

"Good to see you," added Bonai, pulling Hollis to the broken mast.

"Glad to be alive," he uttered with a befogged mind. He felt to see if the experiments were still with him. "Yes, thank God, I've got them."

"The sea and the sharks just didn't want me, that's all," Hollis said in a jerky fashion as he staggered to his feet and rubbed his hands that were stiff from the frozen grip.

"Only Hollis with his nerves of steel could have conquered that giant sea," added Grace.

Hollis hung on to the broken mast and looked around to see who was left. There was no answer. Their heads drooped, and their bodies squirmed and prayed and prayed. Gradually, he recovered his strength as another reprieve was granted to them by the Maker.

A moment later, a gigantic wave descended upon them. As if from nowhere, Hollis felt a body snag him. With a lightning stroke, he momentarily grabbed it with one hand. He didn't know what he was grabbing or whether something was grabbing him. The weight was dead.

His muscles quivered and tightened involuntarily.

They couldn't respond. He tried to shake it loose, but his muscles froze stiff as if they were glued to his body. He couldn't let go. He thought that his lips would burst, but he couldn't say a thing. His heart pounded like a trip hammer. Hollis felt his legs grow weak as he thought he felt a slimy octopus about to crush him. He was blinded with fear. Just then, another bolt of lightning flashed by. He took a quick glance. It was Blackie! Hollis's hand was caught in Blackie's armpit.

"Blackie!" Hollis yelled through gritting teeth. "Blackie, I've got him!" Hollis felt the blood rush through his face.

"Alive?" shrieked Grace in terror at the top of her voice and above the storm.

"Hard to tell," Hollis yelled back. It surely was a relief to find out that it wasn't an octopus. His insides felt as though they were all tied up into knots.

"Hang on," added the Major with a nervous and shaky voice. Great anxiety spread over them.

"He's barely alive," Hollis echoed nervously as Blackie feebly groaned inwardly, crying for help.

Hollis tried to loosen his collar, but he had no shirt on to loosen.

"Grab him by the feet, Jim, tie him to the broken boom," Hollis shouted with distorted lips.

"Leg's off," gasped the Major with a tragic tone of fear in his voice as he frantically came to Hollis's assistance.

Lightning illuminated the area again, and Hollis saw a hideous gnawing expression on Blackie's wincing face. It looked like he was bitten by a dozen rattlesnakes.

"Rip off a piece of rope and make a tourniquet," Hollis yelled. The Major handed the rope to him.

"Okay," he said as he felt his Adam's apple work up and down.

In mad haste, the Major applied a tourniquet to the bleeding stump and tied him to the rest of the group. Bonai tried to keep Blackie's head above water. The incident had its effect on Blackie. Rochelle slapped Blackie several times in the face and head to keep him revived. He figured the sensation of life would drive out the thought of death.

Grace gripped Jim closer. Her face looked colorless in the lightning. It was white and rigid. At the same time, Hollis watched Blackie's lips move. He couldn't hear him say a thing, but he could tell by his eyes that Blackie prayed like never before.

"Saved," said Grace, stunned at the horror of what had happened, and stared into the inky blackness. Nervously, she fidgeted with the goose pimples on her arms.

"Hope he pulls through," added the Major, swishing away the stringy blood from the stump of his chewed-off leg.

"Too bad we lost the Van Dykes," said Grace, bewildered.

"Yeah," Hollis said gloomily as he heard that labored flow of air go through Blackie's lungs while he gave him artificial respiration. He lay on his back with an open mouth, snoring loudly and long. With the next stroke of lightning, he saw through his half-closed eyelids a whitefish, flat, dead eye without a pupil.

Seconds later, more breakers smashed the helpless craft toward a quieter lagoon and more shallow water near a coral reef. As the storm began, it left, and they drifted with the wind and the current. Somehow, Hollis couldn't help but feel that they were about to ram into the many jutting coral rocks in the sea. The rain and sea still sprayed gallons of

water onto the boat. Bonai, Grace, and Jim bailed as fast as they could, but the water continued to pour in with each roll and swell of the waves. Only the rugged construction of the bamboo outrigger prolonged the craft's life and kept it from capsizing.

They drifted in that dark night. It was long and dark. It was like an endless tunnel, so confined and big, Hollis thought that it would never come to an end. It was ever so long. They tossed like a cork on water. Would morning ever come? No one spoke. Each person worked hard to save himself. There were no bells, no whistles, lights, or motors to guide them through the pitch blackness. Not even a compass or a moon to see by. They drifted helplessly with no method of dodging danger.

Toward morning, the wind shifted suddenly, though by a miracle. The clouds scudded by. The roll and swell of the waves became less violent. The sea was a choppy, beaten mass of dark water. At last, the full moon burst through the scattered clouds.

The great pains the natives had taken in building the craft had paid dividends. It was a good thing that this tropical typhoon had hit them at the outer edge and not at the center; otherwise, all of them would have been gobbled up by the angry sea. With God's help, they had survived.

The storm had buffeted them about for at least eight hours, though it seemed like a century. Hollis looked at Grace, Jim, and Gerry in the moonlight. There was no longer terror, horror, and anguish. There was relief written on their faces, but lines still revealed the terror and anguish that

they had experienced. The trembling of their bodies was slowly subsiding, but their clinging clothing remained as a reminder of their nearness to death. Hollis wished that he could go back to LaGuna. He had it so good back there.

"Why did it have to be this way?" Hollis sighed, looking about.

"King Neptune wanted us," said the Major.

"Gosh! Hope none of us ever have to experience anything such as that again!" Hollis exclaimed above the hollow shomp, whomp noise under them.

"The sea is eternal, and all of us that ride over or above it are mortal. The sea is no place for fools or cowards or incompetence," said the Major.

"Yes, how true," said Jim, who also showed great signs of weakness and restlessness. He leaned over to Grace to say something to her. She stared at Blackie without looking up, still clinging to Jim's arm with one hand. With the other hand, she wrung out the water from her hair.

Blackie was still and alive. He was frowning. He did not move. He was rolling his eyes back and forth between Grace and Hollis.

"Holy smokes! Is this night ever going to end?" asked Jim painfully, looking at the ebony black sky above.

"Yeah," Hollis said, "it will be great to see daylight again."

"If ever," intervened Grace, exhausted and impatient.

"Maybe if you heard Sinatra or Crosby, you wouldn't mind the moonlight," added Hollis.

Minutes . . . hours . . . years of that torture seemed to pass before the eastern sky became streaked with red light and the waves subsided. Hollis watched the storm march briskly over the limitless sea through the valleys of the sky.

The winds lost their violence. Hollis wished that they could travel under full sails, but the storm of fortune had blown them away.

"It's great to be and feel alive again," said the Major. Relief was written on his drawn face. He took in a deep breath, and with a sigh of relief, he slumped in utter exhaustion.

"Yes, I feel like I arose from the dead again," said Hollis with an open mouth. "It's getting to be a habit of mine."

"Whoever thought we should see the sight of the stars and the moon again. Seems like we're a step ahead of the undertaker all the time," said Jim, putting his arm around the small waist of trembling Grace. She was still stunned physically and too exhausted to realize what she had gone through.

"Yes," said the starry-eyed Major, "things have turned out exactly as the crystal gazer predicted. We would see much water, foaming and churning. In the palms of King Neptune's hand, the fortuneteller told of how he could see him clutching and playing with his new victims and then tantalizing them. The fortuneteller has seen someone in Neptune's watery clutches gobbled up in one gulp."

"I wish I had a smoke," spoke Jim.

"My tobacco got wet," answered the exhausted Major, who was trying to keep his head above the water level in the craft.

"Too bad," Hollis said with a raspy voice. "Leave it," added the Major.

"It would quiet our nerves, I'll admit that," added Hollis.

"You said it, Hollis. I am too exhausted to eat or drink," said Grace.

"And I'm so hungry I could go for one of those sizzling

steaks at Charley's," said the Major, trying to crack a thin smile.

"Yeah, smothered with onions and mushrooms," Hollis added.

"Uh, hm-m-m, Major."

Hollis tried swallowing his saliva as he thought of sliced bread and a juicy steak, but his lips and tongue remained parched and cracked. In a way, it was a night of splendor, and he tried to sing lilting songs of the island. Even the Major made an effort to chime in, trying to bolster Bonai's morale. Riding in the warm wind, there was an air of sadness among the group.

The storm had really spent itself out by morning, and the waves were at last back to normal. Blackie, Bonai, and the Major were forced to give in and succumb to an exhausted sleep. Blackie and Bonai had a distant look in their eyes. Hollis did not like to see that Grace cried all day and into the night with hunger pains. The next night passed with indomitable slowness. Hollis tried to shake off sleep as they anxiously awaited the brilliant morning sun to break the monotony. The sentinel stars set their watch throughout the night. There were no means of knowing exactly how far they had drifted during the storm, and they hoped it had not been too far from the course they had been pursuing before the storm.

The fourth morning, the sun began its journey by brightening the eastern sky. Rising in all its colorful splendor like a magnificent ball of fire, it cast its rays upon the expansive waters of the now placid Pacific. With it, their spirits rose. All morning, they drifted aimlessly, hungrier and thirstier. A sickly chill passed through Hollis as he gazed at the

exsanguinated, starry-eyed Blackie. Constantly, Hollis was on the lookout for some kind of life. It was a hot, silent day. They conserved their strength. Now and then, they were able to catch a flying fish and squeeze its water to give them a little energy.

The drifting under the burning sun became boring, and all of them became more restless. They had no protection, and Hollis felt the heat and salt burn on his cracked skin. They were caked from the salt spray and looked like ghosts drifting at a snail's pace. Hollis could tell that the Major felt worse than he, but the Major did not complain. He and Bonai had lain on their sides and stomachs for the past four days without food or water and were unable to get up.

Evening closed upon the craft and survivors again. Darkness tarried. The eleventh day dawned. They sat and buried themselves in meditation and prayed most of the time. They needed water . . . badly. Hollis felt as if they were drifting in a black mammoth cave. On the sea of the Unknown at the Mercy of the Lord.

There came fleeting moments when Hollis thought of killing himself rather than continuing to live in Uncertainty. He wondered how it would feel to be dead. Would he like it? Would he suffer? Maybe the other world would be a better place to live.

Hollis tried hard to swallow but couldn't. His tongue clung to the roof of his mouth. It felt hard and stiff as he tried to move it across his raw lips. There was no one to give them a drink or lessen the pangs of hunger that gnawed in their empty stomachs. Yes, his empty stomach churned so hard that it ached and pained as if it were filled with a barrel of pins.

Each day passed to the next, and Blackie's condition remained unchanged except that his moans were less strong. Their patience was growing more and more thin and difficult as they drifted aimlessly on. He watched the sharks rub sandpaper faces and backs against their outrigger.

"They are trying to turn us over," said Grace fearfully. It was a question of who would outlast the will and morale—sharks or the drifters. It was a question of who was to conquer whom—the sea sharks or human life.

"No, they have sea lice, that's why they act like that," Hollis added, trying to comfort her fears.

"I can't understand why the sharks didn't gobble you up when you were thrown overboard with the rest. They surrounded you and practically nudged you back in the boat."

"A miracle—it was a miracle, Grace," Hollis said gratefully, looking towards Heaven.

He tried to act undaunted and unbowed. But just the same, there stirred an inner terror within him. His heart beat joyfully, and he felt his body tremble, and the sweat broke out around his neck and arms. He didn't dare to give up now. He forced himself to carry and plod on. He tried to keep sitting up so as to offer some wind resistance. His bones ached with weariness, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth as he said, "I'm so d-dry and I could spit cotton."

"Yeah, could go for a good ice-cold bottle of Schlitz or Pabst beer," uttered Blackie, wiping the sweat of utter exhaustion from his brow with his bloated hands.

"Shut up, Blackie," said Jim as he was about to grab a fish that got away. Blackie eyed him hatefully. Jim returned his answer vengefully with grinding teeth.

"Feel sorry for yourself, don't you?" he muttered to Jim and Grace.

"You're alive, aren't you? Keep quiet."

"Yeah, sucker," murmured Blackie with disdain.

"Yeah, that was the first fish we would have had in days," griped the Major as he lost his line.

Hollis bit off another piece of wood and split it in such a fashion with his teeth as to make a hook. He waited quite some time before he snatched some seaweed. He first sucked it to get the juice out and then made a lure from its remains.

From the stranded, torn bits of sail that hung and got caught to the edge of the rigger, he made a line.

That day was blistering hot with nary a bit more sight of fish except the hungry sharks. They were still following the banca. Blackie's leg became more swollen, and it was stinking badly. All they could do was sprinkle seawater on the wound.

Just as the blazing sun slowly slipped its ball of fire into the waters of the western horizon, Jim yelled with a burst of excitement, "Got one!"

"There's food," added Grace, arising from a semi-stupor.

"Food . . . food," murmured Blackie in a whisper, trying to get up from his mental stupor whose brain was inundated with clotting blood.

Just as the fish was within Hollis's grasp, the fish bit off the line. Quickly, he made another line and hook. He tied the broken bits of sail more firmly. About an hour later, he caught a flying fish as it whisked by. Hungrily, he drank its blood and intestines. It tasted even better than a Maine lobster with all the trimmings. The way he drank it, one would think it was to be his last. Each drop seemed like a geyser to him. Later, he caught a snail fish. He chewed the juice from it. Hollis spat

the pulp away. In spite of feeling nauseated, Grace relished the fabulous diet, too. There had been no water for six days, and if it hadn't been for the fish, they would have perished by now. They caught more fish and feasted royally that day.

The twelfth day passed, and another long, hot night followed. The sky was full of blazing stars. It was a lovely tropical evening. Bonai had another noisy and violent day. His strength was waning steadily. It took a lot of pep out of Hollis, holding him down when he got his convulsive seizures. Blackie's leg stunk more and more. They could hardly stand its smell. They watched him die a thousand agonizing deaths. Occasionally, at night, a flying fish would hit one of them and fall into the boat. Eating them kept the drifters alive and eased the gnawing stomach pains. They drifted northerly and could barely see the true Southern Cross. Over to the right was the false cross with its five stars. As time dragged on, they continued in the same direction. The weather was in their favor. There wasn't a cloud in the sky for days.

The thirteenth morning dawned fair and fresh. It was going to be another scorcher. The sea lay calm. Hollis's skin was sunburned and red like a boiled lobster. Grace and Gerry's skin was a mass of sores. Hollis could hardly open his eyes. His lids were swollen and stiff, as were the others. Bonai and Blackie were still asleep and breathing rather heavily and irregularly. Both heard voices the previous night, and Hollis didn't like the way Bonai was acting. Hollis staggered to his side. He touched Bonai gently, and he squealed. Hollis couldn't force water down Bonai's throat. He cried deliriously, "Don't kill me. No! No! I no want to die!"

Hollis tried to give him a few drops of the water he had

squeezed out of a fish. Blackie's eyes denoted jealousy as they rolled down Bonai's face. Hollis shook Bonai a bit, but he could not be aroused. "It's too late . . . it's too late!" Hollis murmured. Slowly and painfully, he tried to give him artificial respiration, but he was too weak to continue after several minutes. Hollis's mouth was as dry as a desiccated desert. His arms were swollen and stiff. His skin cracked, watered, and bled. Hollis tried to suck his own sweat and oozing serum from his cracked skin. The salty brine burned. There was no shade, nothing to cover up with. Suddenly, Bonai swung his arms about. Hollis tried to quiet him down as he yelled, "He chase me. He die . . . I die." Suddenly, his eyes opened widely and became fixed and glassy. He gasped for life-giving oxygen. He made one last gasp, and his mouth remained open. Seconds later, a frothing appeared from it. Death was standing there with outstretched arms.

"He's gone. He's dead." Hollis placed his hands across Bonai's breast.

"Gone," uttered the Major without opening his mouth.

"Gone," Hollis answered solemnly with a nod. Human skill and efforts could not save him.

Bonai saved Hollis's life more than once. How could he ever repay him for what he had done?

"One in a million," he uttered. "He gave us everything in him." Hollis placed his hands over his face.

A cold chill ran down his back. Fear was shown on their faces, wondering who would be the next.

There was no funeral. There was no music. There was no period of mourning or flowers, except that they prayed. It was a noble, brave death, Hollis said as he rolled Bonai toward Davey's locker.

They looked at one another in shocked surprise. Conversation halted abruptly as if a shot had been fired into them.

"Why don't you say something?" cried out Grace hysterically.

"What is there to say?" Hollis said, with his head bent low.

"You shouldn't let Bonai go. There is plenty of meat on his body for us," uttered Blackie.

They stared at one another. "We're too young to die," Hollis mumbled to himself. Maybe he's right? They were prisoners of the sea that was endless and of one that showed no mercy. Blackie tried to get up and move toward the corpse. He envisioned a feast.

No, that was the last thing that Hollis would ever do, and reluctantly, he sent Bonai to his watery grave. Blackie staggered and fell. Frantically, he crawled on his fleshy, swollen hands and knee for a foot or two only to plunge headlong on his face. He rose again with fear etched on his face.

"What did you do that for?" he queried.

"You're out of your mind," Hollis answered in disgust. "We're no cannibals."

"No chance to live now," Blackie muttered as he watched that drop of fish evaporate on the hot floor of the outrigger.

"We, either," added Jim. "This sea is like a Devil."

"Have courage, boys, don't be afraid," Hollis responded quickly.

"We're sunk," said Waindel, dropping his head. "What is the use of living? We might as well go overboard and get it over with."

"No, no," Hollis said hopefully. "This isn't the first time that we've been in jams. Our lives have just begun."

"No need to kid us," said Jim feebly, gazing at Grace.

"It's all my fault," said the Major, who sounded as if he had sand in his gullet.

"No, mine," Hollis interrupted.

"Yeah, we had it so nice on Banika. He had a big stake in things there. We'll all die," moaned Blackie, thinking of beer. He felt for his leg and forgot that it was gone. He thought of the way he jitterbugged, and now he had no leg.

The air became silent. Hollis stood up for a moment. He looked at Blackie, then one by one at the others. He didn't know what kept any of them alive. His mind was paralyzed. Nothing soaked in.

His head felt like a hot branding iron was applied to it, and his throat felt like gravel that had been stuck in his gizzard for a thousand years.

Hollis didn't know how hot it could be, but they wagered it must have been around 140 degrees or more. The heat of the sun seemed progressively fierier. The meridian rays of the sun reflecting from the water were blinding. The burning light pierced and tortured his brain into numbness. He knew that the others felt the same. There wasn't a peep out of anyone.

"Yes," he said to the Major with a sigh and a frown, "a time will come when we all will be gone." Hollis looked into his sunken eyes. They were fixed, dull with a stricken expression, as were the others. As Hollis looked around,

the sight was unbearable and hopeless. Yes, just as if all the skyscrapers of Manhattan were falling on their heads. The Major tried to whisper through his parched lips but couldn't. He nodded his head and just stared at Hollis in cold terror.

There were moments when Hollis thought that he saw snow falling. He stumbled and tried to grab and feel it. He shook his head. There was no snow. His body swayed and tottered.

Nothing but pure animal instinct kept him hanging on. His head felt as if it belonged to someone else. It wouldn't take much to get to the stage of a madman.

The air was extremely quiet, but great anxiety and gloom spread over them as they glued their eyes with mental torment on the now semi-conscious prostrate form of Blackie. The pains in his leg were excruciating, and pangs of hunger gnawed constantly at his sides. Through tightened teeth, Hollis watched Blackie gasp for life-giving oxygen and beg for help.

"F-o-o-d! F-o-o-d! Help me," he murmured in an unearthly cry and with open begging hands. He stared at Hollis gravely with senseless, death-bandaged eyes and a wide-open grinning mouth.

Hollis's mind was befogged, too, but clumsily he crawled to Blackie's side. His face looked aged and taut. There was a glassy look in his eyes that Hollis did not like. Those lusterless eyes stared but saw nothing. Hollis felt his body. It was extremely hot and blistered from the scorching sun. It had a yellow tinge of death to it. Painfully, Hollis had to turn his head away as he couldn't stand the smell and stench of Blackie's rotting leg.

Blackie tried to raise his head. It fell down in an instant. "W-a-t-e-r . . . "

"Now get some rest, ole boy," Hollis said, trying to console him.

But he was helpless as he watched Blackie try to clench his swollen fist and cry out with pain again, "H-e-l-p m-e."

Hollis's sides felt like a tangled ball of thread as he continued to watch Blackie squirm and cry. His breath came in gasps and rasped like sandpaper in his raw lungs.

"We can talk about those things later," Hollis added as he knelt before him. Blackie tried to move and uttered, "Y-e-a-h."

Blackie was shunned like a traitorous, thieving leper by the others. "I'd see you in Hell before I'd ever give you a drink or a morsel of food to eat," said Grace to herself. She seemed to enjoy seeing him squirm.

Blackie's life seemed to bubble out of him as the gurgle in his throat became louder and longer. Each breath through Blackie's swollen nostrils grew deeper, irregular, and more labored.

The fingers of his twisted and tortured hands began to become listless and droopy.

The air was silent again, and the sun felt like it was pouring hot lead upon their burned bodies. They looked like lobsters, and the caked salt ate into their whitened, cracked and busted skin crevices. Hollis looked about and could tell that hope was not lost. Hollis had not given up faith even though they were millions of miles away from home.

Hollis gazed at Blackie's eyes again. His pupils were very dilated. He knew it was a sign of impending death. He

wanted to run away, but he couldn't. There was nothing that he could do, so Hollis took in the sea anchor and continued navigation on an uncharted course in utter helplessness and expecting no immediate help from anyone. Hollis retained a vigil and looked for planes that would furnish an indication of nearby land. That morning was as quiet as the one before. Suddenly, he heard the hum of a drone. He thought that he, too, was hearing things.

"Listen," Hollis said to Jim and Waindel. He looked in all directions and saw nothing but the empty sky.

"You're imagining things, Hollis. Take it easy, boy," said Jim looking around.

The killing heat, fear, thirst, hunger, and despair left him immediately. Even his mind cleared, as did the others.

"Listen, quiet! It's getting louder," Hollis said excitedly.

"Yea, keep listening, even he can hear something," mumbled Blackie in a feeble voice.

Suddenly, he noticed a distant black speck above the horizon. It became larger and larger. Hollis shaded his eyes with his hand and searched diligently for recognition of that little speck. The blinding glare of the sun retarded his efforts.

"Gerry! I think I see something coming over there!" Hollis yelled excitedly.

"Where?" he feebly followed Hollis's pointing finger, awakening from a mild delirium. They had renewed hopes. Their reflector, as well as everything they had brought with them, had gotten lost in the storm. Everything except the documents, which Hollis had carefully strapped about his waist. They had been well protected against the elements by the waterproofed fish stomach sac casing.

"There again! Again!" cried Jim in a long, drawn, weakened voice.

"I hope they will stop this time," spoke the seasick and exhausted Jim, who now showed renewed life. His mouth remained open, and his sunken eyes were fixed on the delirious Grace. He smiled and said weakly, "Grace, thank God you're saved."

"Keep your courage," Hollis spoke as he looked up to God and mumbled a prayer while all bowed their heads.

Grace's eyes opened slit-like. The sun that seemed to reach out millions of miles further away grew dim all of a sudden. She barely recognized Jim. Tears came into their eyes, and they cried like lost children as they watched the plane coming their way.

The plane seemed to fly by, not noticing them. They waved their hands and yelled frantically for help.

Blackie tried to fight off the fears of the plane not stopping from his vicious, troubled mind. Neither he nor any of the others was afraid of death.

"Hear me," hollered Blackie, pounding his chest. "I'm here. Stop! Stop! This is me!" he said as if he were electrified.

"Look! Look! The plane is really going to rescue us," cried Grace, stroking her hair and then clapping her hands.

"Yea, he sees me. He sees Blackie," yelled Blackie with a delirious laugh—louder and louder as his gnawing pains kept his shouting louder and louder. That laughter wasn't one of joy—of love. His fiendish voice raved. It was the twisted lunatic laughter of Satan—of the devil. A moment later, he was scarcely breathing but struggling madly for life. Suddenly, he gathered up enough strength to move on his

hands and the one leg. Then he tried to mumble, "If I could only get on that plane. Boy, what a set-up. How can I miss? I'll dump these people in the ocean one by one. Yeah, I'll make it look like an accident. The world lies before me. Blackie will be back to dig up that gold out of those hills. It'll be mine. I'll make millions . . . millions. Ha! Ha!"

"That Blackie must be like a cat with nine lives," Hollis thought to himself. Although death was written all over his face, Hollis could tell by his looks that Blackie still couldn't be trusted. Hollis had been wary of Blackie ever since he set eyes upon him. Blackie always had a certain granite killer look in his eyes. Lately, Hollis remained constantly on his guard in spite of Blackie's condition. Some nights, Hollis felt his heart beat with apprehension, and he felt his knees tremble for fear of Blackie. For the past week, Hollis felt as though Blackie was looking at him or touching him at night. Hollis anticipated being strangled by Blackie if he had the chance to do so.

"Make them see me, Hollis. Help. Don't let them pass me by. Answer me!" yelled Blackie to the plane in a high and nervous cracked voice. He looked about feebly and said to himself, "Got to get rid of them. There won't be room for all of us on that plane. The sea is a handy disposal for the unwanted." Blackie was silent for a moment. Here comes Jim. "I'll get him first. He's sick anyhow."

Hollis watched Blackie's eyes. They were sunken, restless, and greedy. He noticed Blackie's skin had become very dry, red, and parched.

Awkwardly, Jim edged toward Hollis to help signal the plane. As he was about to pass Blackie, a shadow of a hand

rose slowly. "Watch out for Blackie," cried Hollis. Blackie clumsily flung himself against Jim, knocking him off balance. Hollis grabbed Jim to prevent him from falling overboard into the awaiting sharks. Jim and Hollis knew it had been no accident, and Jim tried to spit angrily, but he couldn't—his mouth was too dry. Jim grabbed angrily for Blackie's throat. Blackie tried to bite Jim's hand, and Jim practically squeezed the life out of him. Blackie saw little green dragons dancing before his eyes.

Grace partially covered her eyes, and her feet moved backward in recoil.

Anger choked Hollis, too, but in silent terror, he shook his head and pulled Jim off Blackie. They looked at Blackie as though he were the bubonic plague or some poisonous snake. His breath odor was one of stale urine.

Blackie now felt like some criminal waiting for his execution. Had it not been for the Major's request to keep Blackie, Jim would have snuffed the life out of him then and there. One couldn't blame him much for doing so. Blackie was loathed by them like some poisonous, monstrous scorpion.

Grace cupped her fingers on her mouth as she watched the clawlike hands of Blackie reach for the air.

"Quiet . . . quiet, please!" Hollis shouted with all his might as he frantically tried to draw the plane's attention. The rest were breathless with excitement and hope.

"Yes . . . yes," cried Grace, trying to leap and bounce hysterically with joy as she cracked her sore fingers unconsciously.

Suddenly, Blackie clutched the air with his twitching hands and waved as he watched the plane slow up. Like a

lunatic, Blackie laughed loudly as he called on his last ounce of strength and then cried like a starving infant, "I'm saved . . . saved."

To him, they were a thunder of high-pitched, hopeless words that were his verdict that dashed him into deepest despair. A second later, he tried to get up; he wanted to say something, but couldn't. Then Blackie suddenly slumped face forward to the floor with a thud. He writhed in agony and emitted a gurgle of extreme distress. Quickly, Hollis staggered to his side, lifted his head, and gazed horrified at his countenance. His mouth remained open. His sunken eyes rolled and became fixed on him. They had that wild expression full of hate and greed. His grimacing face became granite-like. It had a cast like some knife that was twisted in his heart. The arrogant, belligerent derelict looked like a spectacle of misery with his one hand fluttering in the air.

"Gone, too?" asked the Major as they watched Blackie's leg twitch as if it danced to some weird dance.

"Too." Hollis nodded. "He died as he lived—recklessly. Blackie lived his own life and paid his own price for living it."

"Yes, he was good at cheating—all except Death," added Grace.

Jim stood by soundlessly, moving his lips and fingertips.

As the plane approached, Hollis removed his shredded shirt and frantically signaled out the fast-moving craft. In wild gesticulations, he flagged the garment.

"It's an amphibious plane all right," Jim yelled jubilantly, slapping his hips. Excitement grew by the minute. It was razor sharp.

"It looks like he's going to stop for us," cried Grace,

hysterically trying to fix her hair a bit. “It’s a miracle. We’re saved . . . saved. Thank God.”

Jim and Grace caressed one another as she touched his protective hands, and he stroked her hair.

They talked and moved in a queer and jerky fashion. Their cheeks and ears were burning.

“Stand by . . . stand by” flickered the plane as it tipped its wings. The group braced up and waved. Hollis opened and closed his swollen fists in excitement while Jim patted his hair and then beat the air with his fists. The plane circled the remains of the outrigger twice, making certain of what was below. As it lost altitude, it became apparent to them that the boat’s occupants were really in trouble. It made a run over the boat heading downwind; a flare splashed into the water several yards away.

The survivors got on their knees to pray and thank the Lord . . . Grace looked at her bitten nails. They had no polish. They looked terrible, she thought as she wrung and interlocked her hands. She let herself go and started to sob, concealing her profile. Gerry looked at Hollis, and he at him. Hollis turned toward Jim, who had his hand over his forehead. Tears ran through his fingers as they were being rescued from this wilderness of water.

The plane continued downwind, making a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn and then heading into the wind towards the boat, preparing to land. Slowly, the giant craft slid along the waves closer and closer, and with a scattering spray, it settled deeply into the trough and taxied majestically towards the battered outrigger.

A crewman climbed out onto the wing and threw a life-buoyed rope ladder to the exhausted boat occupants. Hollis

wound the ladder around Blackie and signaled to take him up.

The pilot yelled, "Looks like he's dead."

"He is," answered Hollis.

"Sorry, throw him overboard. We're overloaded," yelled the pilot back.

"I'm from the F.B.I. Headquarters insist they have him back dead or alive," hollered Major Waindel with persistence.

"Either he goes or one of you stays."

"How about getting rid of some of your cargo?"

"Sorry, I'm the pilot of this ship," commanded the pilot.

"Alright," said the Major meekly.

There was no other alternative but to obey the pilot's wishes. Hollis watched the veins stand out on Gerry's face and neck as he and Jim dumped Blackie into the sea like a sack of potatoes.

Jim took a last look at Blackie's corpse. It had an elongated neck. His eyes bulged now, and his blue tongue protruded from his mouth. Blackie brought an inner jeer and laughter from Jim, who said as he helped the Major, "Well, that's that. Now Blackie won't be pulling off any more fly wings."

First, heavily bearded Gerry, then Hollis, were lifted from the outrigger to the security of the amphibian. At last, they were all aboard. Impatiently, the huge motors roared. The monster groaned, and the wheels revolved gently; the lumbering plane swept across the tops of the waves. One engine stalled momentarily. Jim, the Major, and Hollis stared at one another. No one spoke. The Major's face turned red; he tried hard to swallow but couldn't. The rest of the marooned were oblivious to the incident. With balking

engines, the great sky giant bounced a couple of times as the waves clutched against the hull. As it tore on, it left a furrow in the ocean like a large stone skimming on the surface of the water. Then, gracefully, the faithful Dumbo rose above the racing water and turned into the wind. A little prayer reached Hollis's lips; a thanksgiving that they were spared. Everyone glanced back and down to the watery grave that concealed the impetuous Blackie whose fiendish and grubby hands reached out to cripple anything good. Foolhardy, he played to lose, trespassing against God's rights as he fell to the last step to the bottom of Hell. He has come and gone. He cheated his way through life and finally was forced to pay for his death by his past suffering agony, because he made so many people suffer so much.

The pilot looked starry-eyed at them helplessly and said to Hollis, "We won't bother to talk to you now. Here are some rations and water for you folks. We'll get some clothes for you people at the next stop."

Hollis was as dry as the heart of a sandstorm at high noon in hell, and he thought that he could drink a lake full of ice water. But when the water was given to him, he could barely drink but a small mouthful.

The pilot asked the radio man, "How do you think they got into this area? They're a long way from the regular sea lanes. When they come to, later, we'll see what they have to say for themselves. They may be crooks."

Several hours later, the Major and Hollis had recuperated enough to go to the pilot's compartment.

"We wish to thank you for your efforts, gentlemen," said the Major.

"You people are a long way from home. Who are you?" The Major twisted his belt buckle outward, and the pilot recognized the FBI badge at once.

"It sure will be great to see those long, wide roads and green trees and grass," Hollis said with a grin on his face.

"You can say that again," replied the Major.

At sundown, their plane arrived safely at its home base. Following a brief stopover of six days, the drifters had gained enough strength to go on. Then another giant clipper secured passage to the States for them. It was their last contact with the little islands of the Pacific. To Hollis, it was the last time for many months he would be able to even write to LaGuna. He took this time to write a brief note to her, and he poured out his heart's feelings.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Home At Last

The next day, the clipper, carrying Hollis and the Major, rose into the cloudless sky—States bound. After flying over the azure waves of the barren seas for an interval of several hours, the passengers spent the time in excited conversation, discussing a new life before them. Suddenly, Hollis sighted a distant shadow hanging low in the water. As they drew closer, it proved to be the Island of Oahu. Each minute brought them closer to home. After a hasty refueling check-up, they again took to the sky. One stop was now left—their destination in the United States.

When Rochelle first sighted the coastline of his native land, he was full of glee. He looked below and saw attractive houses with red, blue, and green tops. He could even smell the hay that a machine below had freshly cut. He looked out of his window and watched the towns and cities become more frequent and larger. The distance between towns was first long and now was beginning to get shorter, while in the distance he watched the sprawling city with towering skyscrapers become larger and larger. The ships in the harbor sent clouds of smoke spiraling in the sky—casting a smudge on the horizon. They flew over a network of super-highways and expansive bridges, and waterways.

Soon the giant plane circled the airport once and it

gradually descended and majestically taxied down the Lincoln Field main runway. Hollis stretched and gave a long, deep sigh and said, "Thank heaven we're home again. It will feel great to get back into my bed again, heat and clean sheets."

The snowy, icy cold day flashed back freshly when they left the States. Things meant a great deal more to him now than they did when he left.

"It feels good to stand on the old U.S. again," said Jim.

"Yes, home after three and a half years." He had told Mother that he would be home in a couple of months. "The war wouldn't last long," he had told her, and to have supper ready when he got home.

Behind Hollis was the war in the Pacific. He was a fairly good-looking husky fellow before—but look at him now. He felt his face. There were lines in it now.

The loudspeaker system blared the arrival of their mammoth clipper plane. Photographers flashed bulbs while interrogative news reporters fired questions at them.

They had quite a time of it breaking away from the news photographers, reporters and others—even many who were "autograph hounds"—but they finally did so and were whisked in a taxicab to the largest local hotel and got rooms there for the time being. Even there, crowds followed, and the manager had trouble keeping them out–finally, a bulletin was put up informing those who tried to get to see and interview or to see the rescued, returned ones on any pretext, that they must have rest and quiet, being tired from the events of the last few days. So, the newshounds and curious public had to remain frustrated, fretting and fuming to no avail.

Everything seemed so perfect, so exciting and wonderful—all so happy. Hollis decided to call his home and try to talk to his mother by long-distance telephone.

He finally got the number and waited—his brother, the younger one, answered, and told Hollis how wonderful it was to hear his voice and how happy he was when he had heard about the rescue in the news. But his brother's voice sounded strange. Hollis had asked how his mother was—asked to have her put on so he could talk to her personally and give her the good news. He wanted to tell her that he would be coming on to see her at the old home and spend some time there.

But then his brother told him the news sadly. "Holly, I'm sorry—after you've gotten safely through so many awful ordeals, I'd thought to wait until you got home, so we could break the news to you more gently—with you among all of us, your own folks. Mother died yesterday. You know, mother's heart wasn't so strong when you left to join up. Her doctor advised her to move to California for her health, but she wouldn't leave Wisconsin. She would say sadly that when you uproot an old tree that's been in one place so long, all its life—It would not grow right and be happy anywhere else. Her roots were too deep. She was failing for some time, but she lived long enough to hear the good news about your being alive after all. I guess all the excitement was too much for her."

Hollis was dumbfounded.

"I'm sorry, Holly. She really wanted to see you again. We're holding up the burial until you get here."

Hollis told his brother that he would be there the next day. After they had hung up, Hollis thought: What wonderful

times we used to have—how she looked after us, took care of us when we were sick as kids—the plans we made. And now, gone. How I looked forward to being with her again—and I, by appearing alive, caused her death. But she was a good woman, and God will reward her for a long life of sacrifice, Hollis reassured himself.

The Major tried his best to console his old friend when he heard. It was tough, tough, and hard. Nothing would ever make the world just right and the same again for Holly now that he'd lost his mother. No parents left at all now.

Other things could wait, Hollis decided then. He reproached himself bitterly for not having tried to return sooner by outrigger. He made reservations on the first plane he could find from San Francisco.

Meanwhile, Jim and Grace soon filed for a California marriage license. They were settled on staying on the West Coast, where Jim could continue his airline business.

While they waited for the plane that evening, Hollis and the Major shared a room, making plans for what Hollis would do next. They especially discussed his getting in touch with the medical society to publish his research and to find a manufacturer for his serum. They also planned for Hollis to get his thorough physical checkup and find out what was wrong with him that caused his agonizing headaches.

How good it felt to be back—to have all the fine civilized comforts once more! And yet Hollis felt sad and lonely and yearned for LaGuna and their quiet cottage. For a time, the excitement of being back, seeing the old familiar sights again with the crowds besieging them, and the tragedy of his mother's death, kept Hollis from thinking too much about missing LaGuna, but he could not help but think of

her off and on. “I sure hope that they find my trouble and that it isn’t too serious! That I can be fixed up in top shape again without too much trouble, Gerry,” he told his friend. “Because—although I’ll want to have a good visit back home in the old hometown—well, my heart is still back on that island with LaGuna. She’s the only girl for me, ever! I know it now.”

During the day, they enjoyed getting good barbershop haircuts and shaves, even manicures and shampoos. They bought some well-tailored clothes and shoes, and other things they lacked. The Major insisted on standing the bill, drawing on his checking account back home, although Hollis had a modest one too. His affairs were in better order as he hadn’t been gone so long and he insisted he and the others owed much to Hollis and LaGuna and her people, and this way he could help repay the debt in some degree at least. So Hollis agreed, and they got outfitted together.

The Major also got a new uniform, for he had to report the conclusion of the Blackie Shane case in person.

Hollis checked with the Marine Corps too and found that he would be getting his honorable discharge shortly, now that he was reported back alive and safe after his adventures and mishaps.

“I feel like a new man, as well as look like one,” Hollis told his old friend. “Seems funny to be wearing shoes again. My size has jumped from a ten to an eleven. And those tweeds feel great—over some real silk underwear again. LaGuna should see me now, in this double-breasted English-weave suit—genuine Harris tweeds, eh, Major?” he added a bit wistfully.

“She wouldn’t recognize you, Holly-Boy,” the Major

kidded him. “But you look much handsomer this way—why, she’d fall in love all over again with you if she’d see you now.”

They laughed together, a deep, hearty laugh that came from mutual understanding and relief. There was something wholesome about it—something that told of their long comradeship, their shared dangers, and the quiet joy of survival.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Home in Wisconsin

It was a sad homecoming for Hollis. When he got off the plane at the field, he found his brother had come to meet and bring him home in his car. They embraced, and on the drive back, his brother told him all the details of his mother's illness—how she had taken a definite downward trend after the message had come reporting Hollis missing and considered dead. If only she could have, somehow, been given hope that he still lived and would return someday, she might have lived longer with a happier anticipatory heart. Hollis reproached himself. All he'd thought of was his working so hard to bring about a cure for the blinding sickness—and his happiness in being with LaGuna. He now felt he should have tried to return sooner. And now it was too late.

When the news that he was alive and was returning finally came to his mother, it had come too late, and the shock had even been the final blow to her weak heart. But his reproaching himself did his poor mother no good now, nor did it ease the aching in his heart in the least degree.

Still, when he came in sight of the old homestead again—and when he was once again in the old home among the well-remembered, loved old furnishings, with the rest of the family, it did give him quite a thrill after all and a degree of happiness—a nostalgic sort of happiness.

There was another there, too, to greet him—Terry, who threw her arms about him and kissed him lovingly and whispered in his ear how she had missed him, longed for him, waited for him—and now they would take up again where they had left off, wouldn't they? He thought for a moment that the welcome was too warm—possibly a bit put on. He brushed his doubts aside, however, and for a moment or so he forgot some of his heartbreak as the warm arms of Terry about him, her eager lips glued so tightly against his own. As he responded to her loving welcome home and the promises in her words—as he looked at her beautiful face and thought of the grand times they used to have together, he forgot the sadness of losing his mother; and he forgot his love for the beautiful and great-hearted LaGuna and her promises to him and his promises to her, for a few moments. But then all came back very suddenly to him, strongly, and he relaxed his arms from about Terry. His eyes wandered to the rocking chair in which his mother had always loved to sit.

He wanted then to tell Terry about LaGuna—but he didn't know just how to do so. He didn't want to hurt her. He would have to find a way to break the news of his love and promises to return to this other girl—some gentler, more subtle way, a bit later. He tried to keep her from talking of love and making plans for their future now that he was safely home "to stay."

The funeral was held that same day. His mother was laid to rest next to her husband. A large group of friends and relatives was present. When the sad business was over, friends and neighbors came home with the family to welcome Hollis back, changing to a happier mood. Terry, as well as his own family, had saved the newspaper clippings—and read them to him:

"LEGENDARY WAR HERO AND SCIENTIST RESCUED BY NATIVES IN JUNGLE ON TROPICAL ISLAND. RETURNS AFTER THREE YEARS!"

Another headline read:

"MISSING SOLDIER, SCIENTIST AND ADVENTURER RETURNS TO CIVILIZATION."

Hollis had to tell them all about his adventures—he told much, but he also refrained from telling too much.

Was he cowardly in not telling her about LaGuna and their love now? He wondered. But he just couldn't bring himself to do so yet. He would find a suitable time to break the news to Terry soon, he kept telling himself, putting off and only making matters worse thereby.

He spoke of his illness—something he feared might be very serious still troubling him, and of how he would have to go to a big hospital shortly for a thorough checking-over to see if some of the best doctors could find out what was wrong with him and fix him up all in A-1 shape again. They could tell he had suffered much and was quite worried over his trouble and sympathized with him.

Since his agonizing headaches were plaguing him badly again, Hollis did not delay going to a good hospital—the best he knew of. He went there two days after returning home. Terry and Major Waindel, who had decided to come back with him for a while, along with Hollis's brother, drove him to the hospital. After saying all they could to encourage him, assuring him they felt certain that, with the best medical attention, everything would turn out well, they left him there.

He hadn't had the thorough checking-over at the island hospital that he got here, now. For two weeks, one doctor after another, specialists, the best, came to see him and check his condition, making various tests—examining his eyes, his skull injury, checking his blood, urine, and spinal fluid. They x-rayed his heart, lungs, skull, and other parts. Every imaginable kind of test was made on him to get at the cause of his trouble, and finally, the verdict came. A brain specialist, Dr. Herron, gave it to him. "We'll have to operate, and there's no use putting it off any longer. You won't get over your trouble naturally—it'll only continue to get worse, and in time, it would most likely kill you. So, now that you've recovered your strength and are otherwise in as good a shape as you'll ever be, there is no use delaying longer."

"Operate!" gasped Hollis, dismayed. "When?"

"Tomorrow morning. As long as it has to be to fix you up properly, and delaying further would only make you worse and continue your risk, might as well get it done. It will be a ticklish operation, to be sure, but it has to be. I'd say it is imperative. You might as well know the truth. You're a medical man yourself and know how such things are. I may as well explain to you now that you might as well be carrying a live bomb, apt to go off and kill you any moment, in that head of yours—if you delay the operation."

Hollis nodded. "Yes, as long as you put it that way. As long as it's that serious, might as well get it done with—one way or another."

He was glad that, since he'd always suspected things might end up this way, he had already seen to turning over to the University his experiments, his records, serums—

formulas for the blinding cure and other tropical diseases, if anything should go wrong.

At least others who were capable would be able to carry on the work he'd begun. Many would be given blessed relief from illness; those who suffered from poor sight because of the tropical blinding sickness, and even many who were blind and could not see at all could be given the blessing of their sight once again.

His wonderful discoveries would continue to do good in the world—be carried on as a tribute to his memory long after he was gone.

That night, he wrote several letters—one to his brother and the others left in his family. One to Terry, explaining as best he could about LaGuna and him and their love—although he was tempted never to let her know; in case he should not survive the operation, she would not need to know then. And—his longest and most loving letter, of course, was to his beloved LaGuna. A letter pouring out his love—and a sad farewell, in case he didn't come through the operation and could never return to her after all.

He should have gone to sleep much before he did, but he had to get those letters written. It might be the last he would ever write. He even had to agree with the nurse who came several times, reminding him that he had, simply had to get to sleep to be as strong and rested as possible for the ordeal he would go through early the next morning.

After the letters were finished, sealed, and addressed and left to be delivered "In Case of My Death," he turned out his bedside lamp and tried to go to sleep, but it was a long time even then before he finally slept.

His family and friends had been notified, and the next

morning, his brother, Major Waindel, and Terry were on hand to say a few words to him, trying to cheer him up. They told him they felt very sure all would be well with him, but he could tell that they didn't feel as confident as they tried to sound.

It was Hollis, in fact, who was the one who had to try to cheer them up—which helped him to keep up his faith in his time of trial. Jane and Chuck, two of his old friends at college who had since married each other, came too—said a few words to tell him how proud they were of him. Chuck said he knew a fellow who'd gone through all the terrible ordeals he had, wasn't going to be allowed to come back home safely just so he could die on an operating table. That argument did more than any of the others to give Hollis new confidence and courage.

"Sure thing! Don't you worry, any of you; I'll make it all right!" he told them just before he was wheeled into the operating room by the attendants.

Hollis had been given a sedative to make him rather drowsy, so that he would not worry so much. Still, he seemed to be trying to fight to be aware of all going on about him as long as possible.

How meticulously clean and spotless everything was—the operating room, the table, floor, cabinets, trays of so many ingenious, delicately wrought operating instruments—The white gowns and caps and masks of all those about Hollis. Dr. Herron was joined by Dr. Foresteen, an anesthesiologist who smiled broadly at Hollis before he slipped on his mask, telling Hollis he saw no reason why anything should go wrong and praised him for his wonderful contributions to the advancement of medical science.

Then Dr. Foresteen placed the anesthesia mask on Hollis; clasped it over Hollis's mouth and nose. Next, he placed wet cotton over Hollis's eyes. Then Hollis heard him say, "Count from one to fifty, Mr. Rochelle." He did everything smoothly and spoke to soothe and reassure the patient. Still, suddenly, despite the sedatives that had been given to Hollis, terror seized him, and he tried vainly to fight off the unpleasant ether that was so necessarily forced upon him. At first he tried to resist the anesthetic by blowing a little of it away, but it came faster and faster.

A moment later, he felt a strong white light penetrate the mask and cotton. He felt the nurse's nimble fingers wash the area about his injury. He heard and felt the click of shears and the scraping of the razor over his head and eyebrows. He tried in vain to twist and turn. He felt a chill pass through him—a sensation as though his heart was congealing by a non-melting cake of ice. This was followed by more tucking of sheets under his head, shoulders, arms, and feet. That old, terrific, agonizing head pain pounded harder and harder. With it, he uttered in a childlike moan, more and more inaudible, indistinctly.

He felt his breathing become heavy and mumbled thickly, "Give me more of that stuff. It's sweet. More, more!"

The gas became sweet-like, and a moment later, it came in great gushes. When he had counted to about fifty, he began to feel numb all over, even his heart. The light seemed to fade. It was now difficult for him to hear anything—he could distinguish only a rumble of mixed noises. "How's the blood pressure? Pulse? Respiration? Okay. Fine! That's good!"

Again, he tried to twist and turn and listen but couldn't move. It was too late to get away anyhow. He felt so helpless.

He wanted to run somewhere. He felt like a hunted animal, trembling and terrified, cornered.

"Something's holding me! For God's sake, let me go! I can't move!" he tried to cry out. All to no avail.

Gradually, it began to appear that he was not alone. People seemed to be about him in the darkness. He felt someone touching him gently. He felt as though someone with an icy breath was breathing over him and, coaxingly, "Breathe more—more ether." God! How hard it was for him to take it and go under so that the doctors could finally operate.

Finally, things began to turn, to whirl dizzily about him, it seemed. More ether was administered. Drowsiness finally overcame him, but still, he could feel that old excruciating head pain nagging him. Then a quiet in the darkness frightened him. Everything was dark, silent, motionless. He couldn't even seem to get a breath of air. It seemed to last for years and years. He couldn't see a thing through the heavy bank of cloud that weighed him down.

Against that thick wall of darkness, he began to hear disjointed noises like the sharp hammering of iron on various metal and other objects. There were sounds of W-O-O-M-P, and sounds that resembled the rumbling of an earthquake in his ears. The strange and awful alleyway of war came back once more to haunt him. Intermingled, he seemed to hear the sound of trumpets blowing, alarms, and martial music that played before an elastic mass of vast movement of treading and marching Marines.

He thought he saw terrible, red-glared meteors. Thought he heard the crackle of flames that roared furiously and saw flaming splinters of fire. Many skyrocketing flares and bombs burst in the air and water about him. He seemed

to see yelling bodies leap like flies off the top deck into the water so as to avoid being hit, while others were floating on their backs to prevent underwater concussion.

He heard the sound of a wide variety of people's noises—sounds and groans of pain. The sounds of men's voices, as if in a long tunnel, shouting, screaming, most of which were drowned out by the mauling and grinding explosions. He saw men spin, wheeling and leaping into the flaming, smoking water from the ship, feet first, helmets in hand. Their faces were marked with fear and pain. Some grew to be unrecognizable corpses, some toothless, and some scalpless, and bobbed up and down like corks in the water. Men were swimming under burning waters, coming to the surface now and then for gasps of air and pushing the flaming oil aside. He seemed to feel water splashing on his own body. His knees were shivering. He thought he felt the cold fingers of a sailor trying to grip his neck. His face was smashed. One remaining eye burned flame-like. A moment later, he tottered and fell as Hollis freed himself from that icy grasp.

Again, he twisted and turned, vainly trying to make himself comfortable. He saw yellow, green, and purple figures dance before him. They, too, made sounds that grew more hideous and weird. Some figures laughed, others screamed and moaned and cursed horribly as they were being crushed and twisted by the weight of battle. There were others who were terrorized by fighting off snakes and crocodiles in the moist, hot darkness of the smelly jungle swamp.

The doctors and nurses were completing final preparations for the operation. Dr. Herron recited a short history and diagnosis of Hollis's case before the others—there were many more doctors now, seated or standing about in the sort

of amphitheater—watching to study this delicate, unusual operation and so learn much that would help them in their future work.

Finally, Dr. Herron spoke about the pre-operative diagnosis to his colleagues who were working on the case:

"Opaque foreign body, size two by four millimeters embedded near the region of the right frontal lobe of the brain."

Hollis knew no more; heard nothing; saw nothing finally. At last, the anesthetic had completely done its job.

"He's prepared, Doctor Herron," spoke Dr. Foresteen, who had given the anesthetic.

The operation was about to begin.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Hollis's Operation

At last, the operation on Hollis could begin. Dr. Herron was ready at his post. Before he made his incision, he consulted the x-ray in front of him once more to make sure. The frontal type of operation procedure to be employed had been previously determined.

The removal of a foreign body from the brain has always been a challenge to the skill of any surgeon. A special X-ray locating apparatus was employed to determine the precise position of the foreign body. In this case, the foreign body was found to be magnetic, a hopeful sign. The X-ray pictures were taken in two planes and carefully studied with the stereoscope. Consultations were held with X-ray doctors, specialists, brain surgeon Schumacher, psycho-neurologist Joseph Owen, and internist William Fritz. A thorough appraisal of Hollis's local and general condition was also taken into consideration.

Then, finally, according to the conclusions drawn from the consultation, the metal fragment was stopped before hitting Hollis's brain. The fragment had gone through his right frontal sinus obliquely. This was proven by the close scrutiny of the tattooed scar and the healed, grooved skin, which determined the direction of penetration.

Ready to begin at last, the scalpel was handed to Doctor

Herron by the nurse. All was tense and quiet except for the deep breathing of Hollis into the mask and two clocks ticking in unison on opposite walls. One could almost have heard a pin drop. The scalp incision was made with a firm, deliberate and accurate stroke. There were other doctors handy now—Doctors Wesson and Murphy stood by and helped control and sponge away the precious, oozing blood of Hollis. Blood transfusion and blood plasma facilities were available, and all other necessary precautions had been taken into consideration for any emergency that might arise. Dr. Herron's efficient staff hadn't omitted a thing. He could not do things blindly. Far too much—a man's life—was at stake.

Those in the seats in the amphitheater leaned forward tensely to watch, to observe, and to learn. No one, especially a doctor, ever reaches the stage when he or she has no more to learn. Whenever anyone thinks that he has reached the stage where he knows so much that he is so good, he can't learn anything more, he is truly the one who is lacking in knowledge and good judgment. He, most of all, needs to realize that he must learn more—much more.

Doctors and nurses worked and passed the instruments and sponges with deftness, dexterity, and supersensitive skill almost in pantomime. It was a ballet of hands and fingers. All realized they had a very important job to do. All knew that Hollis was a mighty important, much-loved personage because of what he'd gone through and what he had done in medical science—the world wanted to see Hollis recover so that he might continue his experiments to even greater successes, do so much more wondrous service for humanity.

Doctor Foresteen watched Hollis's breathing with the

closest scrutiny—he reported periodically to Doctor Herron. The oxygen tank and other medicines were handy on a tray, ready for instant use if an emergency should arise.

The amphitheater was thronged with motionless, tense, absorbed medical authorities. Their keen eyes did not miss a move by the eminent Dr. Herron and his aides.

After a careful dissection, the fragment was found encapsulated by a firm tissue lying directly upon the surface of the brain. No wonder poor Hollis had suffered such great torture at times. It was a wonder he had lived, had been able to perform his wonderful work at all. With good exposure, the use of the magnet was now decided upon, so that additional trauma and brain damage would be avoided.

The Major had been allowed to join those who sat in the amphitheater to watch tensely. It was a great mental strain on him for Hollis was a dear old school chum and buddy of his of many years' standing. He prayed constantly as he watched the progress of the operation.

There was an extra tense, deeper silence fallen over all as an attendant wheeled in the large bullet-like magnet apparatus, which was attached to a steel stand on rollers. The rest of the operating room staff were busily engaged in removing all instruments and trays from Hollis's side. It seemed the watchers hardly dared to breathe in that moment and the ones that followed. It seemed, too, that Hollis was in dire straits—that each breath he took would be his last.

The attendant wheeled the magnet affair up to Hollis's head. The Major stifled a groan—how this hurt him to have to watch idly, to be unable to do anything to help his wonderful friend. He felt he almost hated the other watchers—watching without personal feeling—to learn; an interesting, unusual,

very delicate operation. He wanted to leave but was afraid to rise and try tiptoeing out. Any slightest sound might distract the doctors—cause a mishap at a critical moment and bring about Hollis's death.

There was a moment of tense waiting as the magnet was placed in just the right position—it was lowered slowly and finally all breathed a gigantic sigh of relief in that operating room when the shrapnel fragment clicked against the magnet. "Got it!" Dr. Herron exclaimed with satisfaction and relief. A nurse quickly wiped the perspiring surgeon's brow.

Carefully, the magnet was raised again, drawing out with it the bit of metal which had caused Hollis so much agony, mental and physical. Then Dr. Herron carefully inspected the cavity to make sure there were no non-magnetic foreign bodies there. He muttered his satisfaction when his keen eyes and delicate probing revealed nothing.

Then the wound was filled with antibiotics, and deftly the severed skin edges were brought together, joined with carefully placed sutures and finally a dressing was applied over the spot. Then Hollis's head was wrapped very thoroughly with a great deal of bandaging. Only one eye was left open—or rather, so that it could be opened for the patient to be able to see when he came "out of it" later on. The nurse then put a stockinette head-covering over everything else to reinforce the dressing.

During all this time, a careful check had of course been kept on Hollis's condition—his breathing, heart-action, pulse, and so on. If any sign of weakness had shown, it would have been immediately tended. He had been given one blood

transfusion during the operation to replace lost blood. Now they gave him still another. All possible for the good of the patient had been and was being done. The worst was now over—the delicate, dangerous, marvelous operation had been completely successful.

The "operative chart" was signed, noting operative procedure, pathology, and other findings—all of which would help guide these and other surgeons in future operations on this same order. Dr. Herron ordered Hollis's head to be elevated somewhat to combat brain edema and engorgement. Then, at long last, after what had seemed an eternity, Hollis, still apparently doing well, was wheeled carefully back to his hospital room. Because of his naturally strong constitution, Hollis had stood the strain of the operation very nicely.

Then a volley of questions concerning the operation was fired at Dr. Herron as he removed his glasses, gloves, and gown, put on his robe, and headed for his dressing room. The various medics who had watched the whole proceeding were curious to learn more about various phases of the operation and the doctor happily answered all their questions as best he could. He also quietly, but with appreciation, accepted the lavish praise bestowed upon him. They declared that under his skilled mastery of surgery and faultless judgement, the outcome of the operation, as dangerous as it was, was never uncertain.

The Major, when it was all over, sighed with profound relief and came back to life. He left the observer's section and went out to where Jane, Chuck, and Terry were waiting tensely in the waiting room. He sank down weakly in an easy

chair and mopped his brow. They looked at him breathlessly, afraid almost to inquire. He managed to smile and nod weakly.

"It—it's all over but the shouting! They did a wonderful job. That Dr. Herron is a genius! Hollis came through it fine—the worst is over," he finally told them. "They're taking him back to his room now. He'll be all right. No reason why he shouldn't. Gosh! Hollis came through it fine—the worst is over," he repeated in a joyous voice, almost singing. "You should have seen how they did it—they opened up poor Hollis's skull and found a piece of metal, supposedly a fragment of that sniper's bullet. Then they wheeled in a powerful magnet and lowered it right down over, and almost into, Hollis's head, it seemed, and it jerked the metal right out. It looked so easy the way they did it. Then they looked around and probed to see if there might be anything else doing damage that shouldn't be there. But there wasn't. Then they closed Hollis's wound again and dressed it neatly—yards and yards of bandages. Yes, it went fine. Now all we can do is wait until he comes to so we can see him and talk to him. It might take some time—Hollis will have to have a lot of rest and quiet for a while. But then he'll be better than ever—nothing will be wrong with him that rest and quiet won't take care of!"

How quietly and aptly they sat and listened to the Major's report. Then they, too, sighed with joy and relief. Terry looked at the clock. "My, oh my! Look—Hollis was in that operating room for over four hours!" she exclaimed.

"It was the longest four hours I ever spent in my life—like Eternity!" the Major declared, and the rest echoed his statement.

They saw Hollis rolled back to his room, looking somewhat like a mummy about his head. They asked Dr. Herron about what could be expected next when they found an opportunity, and he assured them, "Hollis should rally as soon as his blood pressure rises to normal limits. He stood the operation splendidly. I don't believe any complications will arise. With his fine constitution, Hollis should convalesce nicely and soon be his old self again. All science could do has been done for him—now the rest is up to Hollis, himself. And the Lord. We must never forget the Lord, who makes all things possible that should be!"

They could see Hollis but it would be quite a while before he would be awake though, so his friends finally left, happy and content to know that the operation was over at least and had proved to be a success and that barring any complications, which were very unlikely to set in, Hollis would soon be nicely recovered, up and around with them again, better than ever.

It was a good thing that Terry did not remain by Hollis's bedside as he finally recovered, for he went through a series of rather disturbing nightmares coming out of the anesthetic. He struggled to rise up and get out of his bed and cried out horribly as though menaced by some awful dangers—the nurses had to fight hard to control him, keep him still and lying in his bed, and to calm him. Hollis also thought he was back on the island with LaGuna and called to her and talked lovingly to her—talked of their great love and their work and the plans they had made. He saw Moa and Blackie try to steal her away. But he drove them away. Terry would have learned

everything and in a rather cruel, abrupt manner. But perhaps it would have been best in the long run rather than to keep on allowing her to believe and hope that she and Hollis had their old love as secure as ever.

Hollis wanted to play fair with the girl, but also let her know the truth, finally, as painlessly as possible.

So, he had continued putting off until just the right time should come for him to tell. In so doing, of course, he gave her longer false encouragement, false hope—only made the matter worse.

Finally, Hollis came out of his dream, and he awoke from the anesthetic. But for some time, he had given his nurses quite a time of it.

Many phone calls came, inquiring about Hollis, and the word went out that he'd stood the operation very well, and it had been a successful operation. Now, after he'd rested, built up his strength again, he should soon be in better shape than he'd been in for many a moon.

Terry, the Major, Chuck and Jane—many others, too— all called. It was thought best that Hollis not be bothered with any company that day. But the next day he seemed to be in pretty good shape, rested up—having dozed most of the day before and through the night. They had given him sedatives to help him sleep, to make certain he wouldn't have any bad effects to cause a relapse.

When he awoke the following morning, he smiled at his nurse and sniffed, then grinned as he looked about him. There were many lovely bouquets in his room.

"All those flowers—all set for a wonderful funeral for me, eh? But I fooled 'em, or did I, nurse?" he chuckled. "I'm alive, am I not?"

"You are! But another nurse and I almost weren't—what a time you gave us when you were coming out of the ether and trying to fight out of your bed and calling us funny native names. Yes, you were and are very much alive and it'll be only a question of time and how well you behave now, before you're up and around again," the nurse told him.

A strengthening breakfast was brought him—mostly good, nourishing soup and other liquids—to start him off. But he would shift over to more solid things very quickly for his type of operation didn't call for his having to stick to liquids long.

Terry and his brother and Major and some others dropped in for just a bit that morning—to say "howdy" and "congratulations." In the afternoon, when he was still stronger, he had more visitors. Terry came and managed to be alone with him for a time. It cheered Hollis up to have her; she was so lovely—and still so much in love with him, apparently. But it bothered him, too, as he thought of how he would sooner or later have to tell her that he had given his heart to another—would have to return to the island of Banika and his sweetheart there—to settle down with her there for the rest of their lives. How could he tell Terry all this that had to be? He wished that the Major, who had always had a big crush on her, would, somehow, manage to make headway—win Terry over to him so that it would be easier, more completely satisfactory all around. He felt sick of himself for a moment, calling himself a coward.

"How are you feeling now, dear?" Terry asked him.

Hollis sighed, tried to sit up a bit, but couldn't. "My head feels better than it has for a long time," he told her, searching her face. "But it—my brain, and my body—still feel dizzy and

weak. What a dream! A nightmare, I went through!" He winked at her with the one eye that had been left to him to look out of.

"Yes, I can just imagine how horrible it all was! What an ordeal you went through," Terry told him.

Hollis winked his one eye again as he couldn't even nod very well. His head felt so heavy and was bandaged so thoroughly. "Dr. Herron has been in many times to see me and talked it all over—told me all about it," Hollis informed his old sweetheart. "Dr. Herron is a wonderful surgeon; he is quite proud of the operation, and with good reason to be, I am sure."

"It won't be long, now, before you'll be up and around again, and we'll be able to play some golf—and even tennis again. Once your head wound has healed and they can take the bandages off and let you gradually be up more and more—and finally out and back among us entirely," Terry said cheerfully, and made plans for the wonderful times they would then have again together. They would go out on picnics to the old, familiar, well-loved places they used to go to in the old days.

Although she spoke so reassuringly—still, at times, Hollis felt that she was troubled over something. He wondered what it could be. Neither she nor any of the others had ever made any mention of her brother. He had never liked the cad and slacker. He wondered if Terry, too, had anything she felt she must tell him but just didn't know how to get on the subject and tell him, and was waiting until he was stronger and just the right time came.

He enjoyed having company, but also, somehow, he got to brooding at times and wanted, often, to be entirely alone to

think. He had so much to think over—he thought of LaGuna and the others on the island, and he thought of his love for LaGuna and knew that he should get back to her before too much longer. And still, he found it wonderful being back here among old friends and relatives and looked forward to getting well enough to be out again and go to see and have fun in the old, familiar, well-loved places that were so fond in his memory. Also, he was troubled by the decision he knew he must make—at times he was almost tempted to put LaGuna and their love out of his mind, heart, and life. For on the island, though he had done such wonderful work, he was so restricted that he could never do all the wonderful things in medical science he could do here. In a great hospital and laboratory, he would have much more vitally needed equipment handy and many well-trained assistants. And then—he would be married to one of his own kind—Terry, which might be best after all. For in time there would be children. It would be better to have children by Terry, all white—not part native, he supposed, as would be the case were he to return to live out his life with LaGuna. She had acted strangely that last month on the island. Maybe he shouldn't have left her until he knew for sure about her condition. Still, Terry had meant very much to him before he met LaGuna—had been his inspiration while he was in the Marine Corps. He had always planned on the wonderful time when he finally returned home to the States, and he and Terry would be married.

"Hell!" he thought to himself—I'm just making myself miserable to no good. I can't seem to decide now. And yet, back there on that island, I was so sure it would always be LaGuna. Really owe my life to her.

Still, the longer he remained back in civilization, the more it seemed to become apparent to him, more firmly, that this was the place for him—and Terry, the girl. At times, though, especially when he was alone, he knew he was not happy here and hoped to return to Banika.

Day by day, Hollis improved. The color in his cheeks came back. His blood grew richer in his veins. He felt ever more alive—more observant, became impatient to get up and out and back to work. He felt like the trees in the springtime—the sap rising and the blossoms coming forth again. And he admitted guiltily to himself—he looked forward eagerly to Terry's visits with him. She was an inspiration.

Even though he had the operation, he had feared he would again experience those dreadful, torturing headaches, because they had been a part of his life for so long. But they did not come to plague him. He was jubilant, although he hardly dared believe for a time that the operation would have cured him so completely. Yes, he now had plenty of bounce and comeback. His memory and eyes were becoming very clear again. He no longer saw the sparks and mists and floating black spots before his eyes, which had bothered him so much since his injury by the Jap's sniper bullet and his close brush with death. He wanted to be up and around, and the doctors and nurses had to caution him repeatedly and watch him, lest he disobey and run the risk of hurting himself by trying to do too much too soon.

The operation had been successful. There didn't seem to be any chance that anything could still go wrong; still, it was best to take it easy and play it safe.

Finally, the day came for taking off the large head bandage. Hollis was thrilled to know that he'd have this much

more relief at last. He still had a slight bit of apprehension that the bit of metal which had become embedded in his head so close to his brain might have set up another type of tumor—one which might have become cancerous. But Dr. Herron assured him he had checked most carefully and there was no slightest sign of any growth.

Still, Hollis had taken to worrying a lot—too much—which didn't help his condition any. He worried about his future and all its readjustments. He was tortured by the constant battle within himself as to which environment—and which woman—he should choose. His old environment in which he had grown up and truly belonged, he supposed—where he would have the best and most facilities to carry on his kind of work and do the most good for the world, appealed very strongly as the easy answer. The other was more limited by far, yet it was where he had also done wonderful work, inspired by the beautiful and loving LaGuna. Those discoveries had made him famous. He owed her even a greater debt—his life as well as his love.

Terry was thrilled the day she came to visit Hollis, and he told her, "The bandage is coming off today!"

It was the great day both had been waiting for impatiently. How would Hollis look? Would there be any signs or scars or any other disfigurement?

Terry wanted to remain when the great moment arrived, but although she asked if she could stay and even Hollis put in a word in her favor of staying, the doctor decided it might be best that he and the nurse be alone with Hollis at the time of the removal of the bandages—just in case anything might have developed which would cause apprehension.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but—it's best to play it safe. Not

that I think there will be anything wrong. But—this was such a delicate operation, Hollis, that even the taking off the bandages and checking final results on the exterior now seems to me to be rather a sacred, very special ritual. So, I'm sure you both understand. You won't mind stepping out to the waiting room, Miss Terry—and the nurse or I will come to let you know as soon as we're ready—as Hollis is ready. It shouldn't be more than a few moments."

So poor, rather disgruntled Terry, after giving Hollis a "so-long" and "good luck" kiss, withdrew from the room and went to the waiting room, there to try to occupy herself with looking through the pages of various women's magazines, studying the fashions. Terry happened across an article in The Journal about no other than her very own, as she had always thought—Hollis. It told of his very wonderful medical discoveries—his new miracle medicines or drugs—to cure blindness in many cases where it was still possible and to halt developing blindness in other cases. The author had managed, somehow, to learn much about Hollis's life on that romantic, tropical South Seas island. And since he knew the women readers of the magazine always read with more, much more interest and avidity anything that had along with the usual, best-known points of interest—something romantic, he had managed to learn much concerning Hollis's private, more intimate life. He had played that part up greatly—making the most of it. In fact, using his imagination quite a bit, too—and hitting facts as they had really been, quite accurately.

The article hinted clearly, too, how Hollis had fallen deeply in love—been betrothed and perhaps married to a

girl of the island. The writer did not confirm any of these intimations, but merely said none of them had been denied by those who had come back.

He suggested that it would have been unnatural had they not fallen in love, working together day after day for several years in such picturesque and romantic surroundings.

The article summed up the present status and intimated that Hollis would make an attempt to return to Banika. "But," the author said, "we believe Hollis Rochelle belongs to civilization and will remain with it to enjoy its comforts and to help make it an even better place by his own work in medical research."

Terry read every word of the article and then re-read it in parts—especially the ones pertaining to Hollis and the possible girl of the island. She was furious with anger and jealousy, but from long practice she knew how to control herself and hide her emotions. She had always considered Hollis all her own. Had never thought that he might have strayed; had fallen in love with another girl elsewhere. But how natural this must have been. How logical. Of course, she could not blame him. Still, why hadn't he told her? Why had he let her go on thinking he was entirely free to resume their former alliance? Now she began to understand why he had seemed so reticent at times. It was because his heart no longer beat for her alone but belonged to another. Undoubtedly, they had lived like man and wife. It would be pretty far-fetched not to realize that they must have come to live in such a manner.

The author was clever in following up on all the leads that could get him information about Hollis and his life on that

island. He had interviewed all those in the party that had been rescued from the boat they left the island in—Grace, Jim, and Major Gerry Waindel. Jim hadn't said much—he and Grace had their own affairs to think about and were too busy setting up house to give much time to the press. The Major had been even less talkative. He had seen how Hollis and Terry had apparently resumed their old love affair and realized that Hollis hadn't told Terry about LaGuna. Perhaps Hollis had felt it would be the best thing to do, to try to break away from the restricting ties on that island and return fully to his old way of life and his old love, since he could do so much more in his research here in civilization. The Major had, of course, in a way, hoped that Hollis might still cling to his love of the island, and then he would be free to try again to win Terry for himself. But if Hollis didn't and was going to stay on back here and be sweethearts with Terry once more and finally settle down and marry her, then of course, being an honorable man, he would most certainly not interfere.

Terry had had some love affairs of course while Hollis was gone—one that was serious, after word had come that Hollis was reported missing and believed dead. But she had considered them over now—had felt that since Hollis had returned safely from the dead, so to speak, and was now so famous and would become very rich and influential, he would be her best match after all. So—things that she had many a time felt she should tell him, concerning what had happened while he was gone, about her love affairs then, she had kept bottled up within her. Why hadn't he told her? she asked herself over and over again. Hadn't he told her because he didn't want to hurt her feelings? Had he just

been waiting for the right time and chance to tell her in a way that wouldn't hurt her so much? Hoping that something might turn up so that he wouldn't have to hurt her at all, perhaps? Or had he been fighting to make a decision—a new one as to his, perhaps, giving up the native girl and the more restricted life there to return for good to his old and normal way of life—marry her, Terry, and settle down to live and work here in the States after all? If only she could know for certain. Should she ask him, now? Tell him she knew about this other love of his—ask him his decision, assuring him that she could "take it," whatever it might be. She was sorely tempted but finally decided against it—not for a time at least.

She thought of Major Gerry, who, she knew, had always been in love with her, and still wanted her. Why hadn't he told her anything? But then her common sense told her that Gerry would never do anything like that, even to further his own cause, for he was ever the soul of honor.

She fidgeted nervously, fighting to regain her calm, her composure. She knew she must appear undisturbed—not let Hollis suspect that she had learned anything to upset her. She had to play very carefully—she needed Hollis.

Would the nurse never come to tell her that she could come back to Hollis's room to see him with the bandages removed? Had something gone wrong after all?

Then the nurse finally came to Terry and told her with a reassuring smile that she could go in to see Hollis now. Terry, her heart pounding, went to Hollis's room—fighting hard to keep control of her emotions. If Hollis noticed she was upset, she would simply tell him it was natural emotions, considering her worry about him now—her excitement at seeing how he had come out of the operation.

As she entered the room, Terry's eyes went directly to Hollis, lying on his bed, blinking at the sunlight with his other, now disclosed eye, which was still unused to light, having been closed so long. He turned his head and grinned happily at her. His head and eye were still reddish-looking and rather swollen. She could see where the opening had been made; it was plainly visible as the hair had been shaved all over and about that area—but it appeared well-healed and that no scar would remain, once it was all completely healed over and new skin grown and new hair growth comes out. He would be as handsome looking as ever before.

"My, but it's good to see you with both eyes again, Terry," he exclaimed. "I feel so light-headed now, too—that was quite a load of bandages they had on me for so long! How do I look to you?"

"Wonderful, Hollis! Oh, just wonderful!" she told him, stooping over him and kissing him affectionately on the cheek on the side that had always been exposed and taking his hand and pressing it, then sitting down, dropping her eyes so that he would not see the strained, unusual expression in them and wonder at it. "Is—is everything all right, as it should be, Doctor Herron?" she asked, turning to the beaming doctor.

He nodded. "Everything is just fine, as I knew it would be," Dr. Herron told her. "It won't be long now before he can leave the hospital and live as he wants to again, and without any fears of that trouble returning to him, ever!"

What a relief that was—both Terry and Hollis smiled joyfully at each other—anticipating many wonderful times they would have together. But—then a shadow came over the face of each—Terry was remembering what she had read

in the article about Hollis. And Hollis was remembering LaGuna, too, and his promises to her, and again debating in his mind just what would be the best and right thing for him to do.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

After Hollis's Operation

It was still some time before Hollis could leave the hospital after the bandages had been removed, for his doctors wanted to be absolutely sure about his condition; they wanted to study him for some time before letting him out of their jurisdiction—just in case anything unforeseen might still turn up. For this had been a very delicate operation; any brain operation could have unpredictable aftereffects. But all that could be done to assure complete recovery had been done and it hardly seemed possible anything would still go wrong at this late date.

Meanwhile, Hollis's good friend, the Major, and others of the old friends settled back into a more normal, contented life. There were a number of parties and get-togethers welcoming the Major back, for he, too, had been gone for quite a long time and had a lot of adventures and close calls.

Once when the Major was visiting at Chuck and Jane's folks' house, he had quite a long, intimate talk with the girl's father, Mr. Stevens.

Mr. Stevens had heard about the article on Hollis's love affair on the island and tried to worm as much information as he could out of Gerry. Gerry tried not to tell much, but Stevens assured him he might as well, it wouldn't do any harm, and to get him to talk more, told him considerable about Terry that even Gerry didn't know.

In the old days, Terry had been rather a wild sort of girl; had had many romances—flirted around with one fellow after another—almost married quite a number of them; that is, until Hollis had come into her life. Then she had fallen hard for him—but her mother hadn't approved because Hollis wasn't rich and in top society. Perhaps Hollis might have tried to win them over by showing them what a wonderful success he would become, but then he never did care about high society. In fact, he rather looked down on ones who put on such airs and had such snobbish ways. He always felt a man was best judged at his face value—no matter what he had been or what sort of family he'd come from—but by what he made of himself by hard work, study, honesty, living right, doing unto others as he would have them do to him.

Stevens said he had to give Terry's uncle Nick credit, though. He had always stood up staunchly for Hollis—declaring him a regular fellow, worth a heap more than all the wealthy fops, sons of the rich, high society folks, who had everything they wanted without ever working for it. He had always declared he knew that Hollis had the makings in him to become a great and famous doctor and would one day be not only famous and respected, but wealthy, too. No other fellow would make Terry a better, if as good, a husband. He remarked sneeringly about Terry's brother, Cecil, too, prophesying that Cecil would come to no good end. And this had turned out to be only too true.

He also hinted that he thought Hollis would be making a doggone big mistake if he threw over that fine islander girl, who had done so much for him—saved his life more than

once and had worked with him constantly to help discover wonderful cures in medicines.

"I wouldn't have a very good opinion of Hollis's judgement and sense of honor," Mr. Stevens declared, "if he were to forget what he owes to that native girl, and turn to Terry now, even though Terry was his old girlfriend. After all, I might say that while Hollis was gone—even before she heard that he was considered lost in action, she went out quite a bit with a lot of fellows—her mother, of course, kept nagging at her, urging her to go out; telling her it was foolish to stay true to a guy who was so far away from her and who might never come back anyway. And even if he did, Hollis wasn't the type she'd want her daughter to marry—yes, even though Hollis did a noble thing—that time, about Cecil, when Cecil's number was up—noble, maybe—I suppose for Terry's sake, but also, I'd say, darned downright silly. And then came the news that Hollis was missing. Well, Terry went hog-wild then, going out like mad with lots of fellows—not very nice and respectable ones either, I'd say. Sure, sons of rich folks—but that doesn't make them any better; in fact, made them worse. Heavy drinkers and wild—out for only one thing whenever they took any girl out—and they didn't take a girl out a second time if they didn't get what they were after. Terry went out with such guys, a lot of them, many times—had some pretty wild, intimate affairs with some of them, too, as I remember. Made me so disgusted—her mother approving of her going out, carrying on like she did, with such worthless slackers, 4F because their rich dads had plenty of money to buy them off—pay doctors to report them having some physical handicap which would keep them out

of the service—which they didn't even have. Whenever they figured anyone from the draft board was around, they'd limp like mad and grunt and groan like they hurt terribly. But at night, out at some club, they'd dance and carry on and make love to girls they took out with the strength and agility of a Tarzan! Nuts! If Terry was any kind of girl worth having, she'd never have wanted to lower herself by going out with such unpatriotic, worthless trash!"

Major Waindel was rather surprised. He'd never dreamed that Terry would or had carried on that way. The old love he'd always had for her got a great shock and wasn't as firm in his heart anymore after having learned what he did. "I've felt the same way, Mr. Stevens," he told the man.

Having not heard a word from Hollis during the war years, it was understood via the grapevine that Hollis was gone, as the war department was unable to get a string of evidence that he was dead or alive. The assumption was that his Marine Corps was supposed to be expendable and thus Terry became despondent and resorted to drink and those poor friends to forget her troubled mind. Wars cause horrible and tragic events.

"I guess you're right," Waindel responded.

"Yeah, people just throw caution to the winds. And Terry was no different than most of the others."

"This girl on the island is a wonderful person. Decent, intelligent, beautiful—in every way far, far superior to Terry, I have to admit. I've been wondering about Hollis seeming to be so taken up by Terry again now that he's back. But now—if this is all true and I suppose it must be, well—Terry certainly doesn't deserve anyone as fine as Holly. I wouldn't want him to be stuck with her, just because he might think he owed

her something from the way they used to go together in the past and having had some kind of agreement about when he came back. After all, he has much more serious obligations to LaGuna. Maybe Holly thinks he would be able to do the most good in his profession by staying back here—and then, of course, marrying Terry—forgetting all about LaGuna. But I've been thinking it over, and I believe the best thing after all would be for Holly to return to the island and that wonderful girl. He can get and have sent out there all the laboratory and other equipment he needs, and he'll be able to do all the good work he wants to in medicine there, with her . . . she'll be the best inspiration for him again, just as she was before. They'll all be happiest that way. Terry, if she's really been like you say, doesn't deserve Holly—and will soon enough get over him and find someone else."

Mr. Stevens nodded. "Now that Hollis is back and so famous and a wonderful future assured for him—in which he'll become very wealthy now, of course—Terry's mother is all for Terry having Hollis; in fact, she has been urging her to keep at Hollis, as I know. Just goes to show the way the wind blows—and why."

"By the way, you know I have large lumber interests—and furniture factories. You've told me something of the various woods on the island—how Hollis has made quite a study of the woods out there. Sure wish I could get him in with me—By Golly! He'd come in handy to help me, too—in my type of business. He could advise me on some of the woods out there. But I don't suppose that I could ever manage that, huh? And of course, he should do the right thing and head back to that island and that fine woman there, soon as he's able."

Major Waindel nodded. "That's the very same way I feel

about what he should do, sir," he agreed. And, although he didn't say it in so many words—about Terry, he no longer felt the same. And he hoped and prayed that Hollis wouldn't have fallen so hard for her again that he forsook honor and foremost duty in being taken in by Terry and married her and stayed with her now.

It was almost a month after his operation before Hollis was finally released from the hospital. A dressing was no longer necessary and only a fine, white scar remained on his forehead. His eyes were both very clear, though still rather sensitive to light. How eagerly he had looked forward to the day of his release from the hospital where he had stayed so long.

As he waited for Terry and some of the others, including his brother, who were to come and pick him up—he rested on the bed in his hospital room—his thoughts happy, anticipatory, thinking of how soon he would be able to meander along the old stream or park paths with Terry. Then came his conscience, and he lay as if between two worlds, almost as if in a strange delirium—it seemed as though he were passing out of this world into that of the other—LaGuna! And he seemed to even see his mother again and hear her voice—reminding him that he must choose to do the right thing. He saw the lovely LaGuna, looking toward him, holding out her arms to him, and saying, "Hollis—oh, my darling Hollis! It's getting late, Holly! I love you so! When are you coming back to me? Mugzy and I are lonesome, so lonesome for you. And—there is another now, too, growing within me—"

Then his musings were broken off as Terry and Chuck

and Jane and his brother came in to pick him up and take him home at last. Back to that other, freer, happier life—to start that anew; go to see all the old, familiar places again and have some real fun, for now he was an entirely well man once more and could really plan things and enjoy life again.

But as he went with them out to the waiting car, with Terry clinging possessively to his arm, he wondered—just what should he plan to do? What about his promise to LaGuna? Would he ever be able to feel right, contented, happy—living on here, marrying Terry—as long as he knew how he had broken his solemn word to LaGuna, the girl really worth many times what Terry was worth. The girl who had nursed him back to health out of the gates of death more than once. Who had given him all her love—worked with him, inspiring him, so that the cure for the blinding sickness could be found.

Of course, he made his choice when he had promised to return to LaGuna on the island. There should be no doubt about what he would do. What he should do—only the right and honorable thing. He couldn't try to kid himself that he owed Terry anywhere near as much as he did to LaGuna. Even if Terry had waited patiently for his return—and there was considerable doubt about that—still, he didn't owe her anything compared to LaGuna. If only he could have known all that Major Waindel had learned from Stevens and others. The Major was tempted to tell him—for Hollis's own sake, to keep him from making a serious mistake. But then he didn't want to seem underhanded—just maliciously slandering Terry, for whom he no longer had any real esteem. No decent man could want such a girl—how could he?

Hollis wondered why the Major hadn't been along with

the welcoming committee. Gerry felt he couldn't trust himself being alone with Terry there. Knowing what he did about the girl, he was afraid he might blurt out something he shouldn't. Terry had made a few tries for him while Hollis was in the hospital, and she was lonesome—hungry for a bit of loving, but the Major was finally on to her—and wouldn't give her any encouragement. And this time it wasn't because he was loyal to his buddy, Hollis, either—he was just plumb disgusted with the girl. He wasn't like so many fellows who are willing to go out with any girl just for the sake of having some fun. The Major had to like and respect a girl before he'd even want to go out with her.

Hollis was really thrilled to be out of the hospital finally and enjoyed the drive back home—very much, very much indeed. Terry tried to snuggle as close to him as she could in the back seat—gushing, gushing—talking of their wonderful love, making plans—testing him out—and he hardly knew what to do or say. If he had only known that she had read that article about him which tipped her off about the other girl. He would then have known her affection sprang more from jealousy than love. She had had many love affairs, of course; men had had their way with her, but only when she wanted them to. She, more aptly putting it—always had her way with men. They didn't turn her down, dally with her, turn their affections to some other girls—and get by with it.

She'd had a very serious affair with one fellow, a slacker who spent most of his time following the horses and, in the bars—Teasal Lynch. He had been Terry's biggest, most special romance while Holly had been away. She'd been quite infatuated with the guy—had tried every way she could think of to win him. He'd promised to marry her—then stalled

quite some time. But Terry was so demanding, so bound and determined to land him, that she had cast all morals and discretion to the winds and even gone to live with him for quite some time as man and wife in a rented apartment in another city—and finally they had actually gotten married. They were still married but separated now. Terry had tired of Teasal as she tired of most all of her men after the newness wore off—after the conquest was over. She had become interested in another new fellow, too—Larry Wright, who was something of a big-shot New York producer—tempted her with exciting stories of the wonderful, glamorous life they would lead together if she'd come to him—get a divorce—marry him. Perhaps he never intended to marry her—but in the meantime, they would have a lot of fun. Of course, Terry's parents didn't know about all these escapades—not all about them, that is. They knew she had some rather tempestuous romances—she had let them think that she had just gone to live in another big industrial city for a time during the war so that she could do her bit to help win the war—working in an aircraft factory. Her father felt very proud of her, but her mother was indignant that her daughter had "lowered herself to manual labor."

Then Terry had become interested in Larry Wright—still was, somewhat—but with Hollis having returned—a famous hero assured of great success and earning a fortune in his profession in quick order. Knowing that he had already received several high-paying offers from some of the largest hospitals, scientific research laboratories, and colleges in the country, she, being no fool, knew that Hollis was her best bet by far and large. No other fellow she could hope to land could begin to hold a candle to him.

From the time of Hollis's return, Terry made the most of her chances with him, pretending that she had just remained innocently, honestly waiting for him while he was gone, never having stopped loving him while he was gone, never having been untrue in any way to him. She kept reminding him of the wonderful plans that had been made while so in love, he at least, before he took the blame for Cecil and joined the armed forces. By letting him know that she depended on him, that she knew he would keep his word, she hoped to put Hollis where he could do nothing but marry her. Hollis consequently didn't know how to break the news to her that he'd fallen in love with another girl; added to this was his own indecision. And of course—now that he was back, old memories surged over him—being again in the old, well-loved places, among old, favorite friends—living the old life. He was flattered that the beautiful, loving Terry still wanted him.

Terry had a hard time getting rid of Teasal, who, though a wild fellow, was tremendously infatuated with her. When she had begun to turn him aside, slyly, subtly, at first, on one good or flimsy excuse after another—he had hung on tenaciously. He hounded her—trailed her when she tried to go out with some other new attractive male, breaking in sometimes on her and the new love, when they were alone, as they thought, somewhere and in the most embarrassingly intimate embrace. He would usually be a bit "tanked-up," having drunk too much because he was so jealous and angry and would curse them. And when he thought he was big enough and man enough to manage it, he tried to beat up the other guy. Sometimes he succeeded and sometimes he got quite a thorough beating himself.

Terry, on such occasions, too, would curse her jealous, troublesome husband whom she was two-timing and trying to get rid of, just as vehemently, foully, completely as he cursed her and her new lover.

"I've had enough of you! I don't want to ever see you or have anything to do with you, EVER AGAIN!" she would inform Teasal clearly and very firmly—adding a good many choice words of strong invective that would have done credit to the most far-gone streetwalker and woman-drunk. "You've got grounds, good and plenty of 'em—why don't you use them and get a divorce as long as you know that we're through and it's no use you trying to ever get around me thinking you'll win me back! If you don't, I'll fix you! I'll get a divorce myself!"

But somehow, she'd never managed to get around to getting a divorce as yet. She knew that there'd have to be quite a bit of unpleasant publicity. Teasal would make certain that all the disgraceful, loathsome, unpleasant facts concerning her and him—how they lived together as man and wife before they'd been married and about her affairs with other men—came out fully. Her parents would learn of her escapades. She dreaded the thought of such a mess of unwholesome publicity getting out. It would ruin her chances of ever landing Hollis, who was the best chance she'd ever had as a husband.

But she knew she'd have to get a divorce sooner or later—she hoped she could manage it in a way so that Teasal would be pacified, even if she had to manage to raise a chunk of money some way to pay him to keep quiet.

Yes, Hollis was the one she had set her heart and mind on marrying now. She still played around a bit with that

other new flame, Larry Wright. But Hollis was so nice; he respected her so greatly; he would never dream of trying to take her entirely—before they were married.

Another reason why she was so bound and determined to land Hollis now, too, was because of jealousy. The thought that he had another sweetheart—a native wife, on that island where he'd been cast up from the sea. That thought was enough to make her resolve to win him back to prove her own attractiveness and worthiness. The joy of winning out, showing she had more fascination for this man than the other girl had, was compelling her to desperate measures. She just couldn't bear to think that any other woman could ever win any man away from her and hold him for keeps.

The car rolled on. Hollis's brother was at the wheel, and he drove along old, familiar roads so that Hollis, all agog, elated at being out of confinement for so long, could enjoy the sights of places where he'd had such good times in the sweet, bygone days.

And Terry continued to talk intimately to Hollis and dwell on the wonderful times they would have together. She even hinted that they could be married any time now that he was well again and such a famous and successful man. Their future was assured. Of course, he would want to accept the best-paying position, and there was no sense in putting off their marriage any longer. He would need a good wife to help him, comfort and inspire him, and give him a proper home and social position. Of course, he had forgotten all about that silly, unhealthy tropical island and the crude, uncivilized natives who lived there and would never dream of wanting

to go back—ever. His proper place was here, where he could enjoy a fine social life, hold the best-paying position, do his best work in his chosen profession, and where they could have children and raise them properly. Her parents now most definitely approved of him, especially her mother. Shouldn't they set the date now—for very soon?

So, she talked, while still married to another man—while planning slyly how she would manage to get her divorce from that other man without news of her ever having been married to him leaking out—so that she would be safely, legally married to Hollis.

But Hollis, though happy to be out again and enjoying the grand, refreshing scenery and Terry's company, was strangely silent and unresponsive and uncommunicative. Now was the time, he knew, he should finally tell this lovely girl about the wonderful sweetheart and native wife he had left on that island—to whom he had given his solemn word of honor to return; to whom he knew he must return.

He squirmed in agony and tried to speak, to tell Terry all this, but something still held him back, and he cursed himself for being such a coward as to keep putting it off. "I should have told Terry right away at the start instead of letting her go on thinking she still had me, darn it!" he berated himself. "Why did I always keep putting off and putting off? It has done no good; only made things ever so much harder now. If only something would turn up to make it easier for me to tell her!"

So, finally—the drive over—he safely back at the old homestead, and Terry driving back to her own home, a magnificent, palatial mansion where she lived now with her folks, and Chuck and Jane also having driven off in their

car—Hollis still hadn't told Terry the real score and was still tortured by the knowledge that that tough ordeal would have to be gone through with, at some later date, and that time couldn't be put off much longer, either, he knew. He hoped Terry would take it without being too upset or trying to make trouble for him for having let her go on dreaming dreams that could never be. After all, he'd never given her an engagement ring. He hadn't really mentioned marriage to her, either, after he'd come back, although she had harped on it many a time. She'd been the one always making plans for their future, taking it for granted that he was still "all hers."

"I'll have to tell her, no matter what comes of it, for now that I'm well again, I can't put off much longer getting the supplies and equipment I need to carry on my work there on the island of Banika, and heading back to LaGuna—the girl to whom I gave my love, all of myself—to whom I owe my very life—LaGuna, the one I promised to return to as soon as possible! She'll be there, faithful, loving me as much as ever—waiting for me and what a thrill it will be when we get back together again."

Yes, although he had been tempted at times to try to forget his promise and desire to return to the island and LaGuna and his work there, to the life he'd been brought up in—yes, and marry Terry, he finally knew that this was not for him. It wasn't just his honor, it was what his heart told him, what he knew most surely, he wanted to do more than anything else.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Hollis Makes His Decision

Hollis had made his decision to return to Banika. There was much now to do. He must break the news to his brother, relatives, and friends, and, of course, to Terry. That would be the hardest of all. If only he could have known the shameful truth about her, that would have fixed things up very nicely and easily for him.

Until he returned, Hollis decided to make the most of going around to revisit the well-loved places that had such happy, thrilling memories for him. He was feeling fine—growing stronger day by day. He went with his brother and with Chuck and Jane, often with the Major, at times, and often with Terry, just the two of them alone. Terry would continue to harp on marriage, and he racked his brain as to just how he could tell her. He tried to hint gently that he had obligations back there on the island—a duty to perform, letting her think that perhaps it was to his profession. He intimated that he had further experiments to conduct that couldn't be carried out as well in the States, for down there in the tropics, the conditions were best suited to such research. Right there in the midst of the jungle were the fevers, diseases, and various other raw materials he would need to work with.

Terry took him to visit her folks many times. They

fawned on him now that he was famous. With the big drug and chemical companies, he could make a fortune. He could have received a fortune for his formula to help cure the blinding sickness, but Hollis turned over his formula without asking a cent, stipulating that in his doing so, the drug companies manufacturing the serums, cures, etc., and the doctors using them must also be fair and generous as much as possible—passing on a break to those afflicted and those being treated.

There was only one offer that Hollis regretted he could not accept, and that was to go to work at State with his old professor, who had always felt affection for Hollis. It would have been wonderful to work alongside him, thought Hollis regretfully.

When he visited with Terry and her folks and discussed such matters, and they learned of what he had done—throwing away a fortune due him which he could easily have had, they were amazed and disgusted and told him that they couldn't believe their ears. But Hollis just smiled and assured them that they had heard right. When they tried to argue with him—remind him of his duty to himself and their daughter, who would soon be his wife—he told them finally, flatly, feeling quite disgusted with their greedy attitude, "I know what I want to do. It seems this is up to me and nobody else. After all, money is only money—and you can't take it with you when your time finally comes. The Lord isn't going to ask you how much money you made and saved up while you were living down here when He judges you to see if you should be allowed to enter Heaven. He judges you by how much good you were able to do while living down here—it has always seemed to me that that's the best way to make

sure you get your pass into heaven and not have to be sent downstairs to live your hereafter. I'm satisfied with what I've done. So, if I'm satisfied, I don't see, really, what concern it is of anyone else," he ended rather smartly.

The more he associated with Terry and her wealthy, money-grasping parents, to whom there was only one God—MONEY, the more disgusted with them he became. He hinted, too, that he doubted he would marry Terry and settle down back here; his work to help suffering humanity came first with him. Again, they were shocked and disgusted and told him so. They were so used to always having their way in anything they wanted, because of their wealth and social position, that they didn't know how to cope with Hollis. Now they had finally come up against a person who had his own and greatly different ideas, and their money and social position and even the lure of their wonderful daughter didn't serve to budge him in the least degree from what he felt was right.

Only one person seemed to agree with Hollis, and that was Terry's uncle.

"Hollis, I'm proud of you!" he told Terry's "intended." "You'll never go wrong, and you'll get your own reward, a far greater one, in time, by always following the dictates of your own conscience. Keep it up, my lad! Don't let anyone ever turn you from what you know is right!"

He knew many things concerning Terry's private life—her secret life not known to the girl's parents and others and tried subtly to let Hollis know a few of these things, for Hollis's own good. Hollis was glad to know them—it helped ease his own conscience about letting Terry down. He let Hollis know that if he turned Terry down—as he knew he

would and should sooner or later, if Terry and her folks tried to create a fuss and make things unpleasant for him, he would be on his side, would help him.

Hollis wondered just what tricks old Uncle Nick had up his sleeve. If only he could find out the things that Terry was apparently keeping secret—then he wouldn't need to put off the showdown any longer. But Uncle Nick wouldn't be explicit as yet—not until there was an absolute need for it, he said.

Hollis felt certain that his old buddy, Major Waindel, also knew a few things about Terry's behavior while he'd been away in the service and on that island in the tropics. For he could see that the Major didn't have a very favorable opinion of Terry any longer. If Hollis and Terry broke up now, it wouldn't matter to Waindel one way or the other.

Hollis enjoyed visiting with Chuck and Jane and talking with Mr. Stevens, who usually tried to get him to talk of the various woods on the island—and of how he would like to acquire interests down there, obtain big supplies of various special woods that his factories needed. He suggested that Chuck and Jane might go back to the island with Hollis when he went—and Hollis be retained at a fine salary to advise them on locations, native help, and public relations. Hollis smiled at this, and while he agreed that there were some very fine, wonderful woods there, he didn't think the natives who were simple-minded, happy and contented with their life and ways would appreciate any such change—although their lives could be bettered, perhaps, in some ways.

"I'll have all I can do when I go back there to work on my health programs," Hollis discouraged the man's mercenary

suggestions.

Neither Chuck nor Jane said or did much in the way of trying to urge Hollis to accept Mr. Stevens' offer and suggestions, although both agreed it would be fun and so romantic to be able to take a trip to that exotic tropical island and stay for a time there, enjoying a sort of second honeymoon.

"As long as you're going anyway, I just thought it would be nice and profitable for you, too, Hollis, to kill two birds with the same stone," Mr. Stevens said with a rueful grin when Hollis, smiling but firm, turned down his offer.

One Sunday, Hollis and Terry went out for a picnic to a cozy spot, Rawson's Ravine, as it was called. He'd been invited to spend the weekend at Terry's place and accepted, although still bound and determined not to be "taken with it" too much and break away finally. Still, it felt good to be with Terry for old times' sake, even though he wasn't in love with her anymore and didn't intend ever to marry her. He had tried in many ways to let her know this—kindly, gently, but she just wouldn't seem to believe him, telling him she knew he must be "just kidding." This was the place for him, she would say, back here among his own kind! She was the woman who would make him the best wife and mother for his children. They mounted their fine Kentucky-bred riding horses and rode to the romantic spot, with baskets of picnic lunch and drinks fastened to the saddles.

Hollis was thrilled to be at this old place again and feasted his eyes on the rolling countryside, looked down into the lovely ravine through which a clear, winding stream emptied

into one end of a small lake. Fine horses and cattle grazed contentedly in green pastures.

They fastened their mounts with long ropes so that the horses could graze while they spread out their picnic lunch and ate and enjoyed themselves. They sat beneath a great elm tree—the same one they had used to sit under so many years before. It brought back many wonderful memories. Hollis found it hard not to succumb to Terry's romantic advances and make violent love to her. And she was so aroused herself that she longed for him to take her in his arms, demandingly—desiring and taking all of her, even if it meant that he would find out how experienced she was. But she would have some clever, resourceful excuse ready to explain why it had happened—why she no longer "seemed" a virgin, but actually still was. She'd had an accident; yes, that was what she would tell him. She would give him any explanation to make him believe that he was her very first man. For if only Hollis would "come across completely," she felt she would surely have him "cinched." She could also tell him that she was going to have his baby—there would be no getting out of marrying her then.

She brought all her little, feminine, subtle, alluring, tricky wiles into play. Snuggling up close to him so that the inspiring warmth of her lovely body went into his own body with the promise of wonderful pleasures. She kissed him where she knew her kisses and the pressures of her body and her caressing hands, roaming as though accidentally would stimulate his lovemaking desires the most. She had worn a very brief sports outfit that displayed her alluring body most tantalizingly—her firm, ample breasts were thrust forward

and tilted upward at just the right, prominent, alluring angle—her lovely, long, slim legs and thighs were displayed with tantalizing abandon.

"We're all alone, Hollis, darling. No one anywhere to see or bother us. And love is here so thick between us—about to join us in marriage—just about the same as man and wife," she assured him, "and I know you want me, just as I want you to have me, and I you. More than anything I have ever wanted before. I don't think there would be any harm in our having each other now, fulfilling our desires. I'm yours, Holly, all yours. Do as you want to—let us not torture ourselves any longer. Oh, Holly—I want you so! Take me now!" she urged, continuing to caress and tantalize him. But Hollis remained relatively calm and offered her a cigarette, taking one himself instead of his usual pipe.

"No, Terry, it wouldn't be right, now—or—or—ever," he told her, standing there looking sadly down at the girl who lay there on her back on the blanket, looking up at him, waiting for his hand to help her rise.

In that moment, Terry finally realized that Hollis was one man whom she couldn't seduce and capture by offering the usual carnal pleasures. And so angry and frustrated did she feel because he could hold out against her allure, leaving her own seething passions unsatisfied, too, that for the moment she forgot to be diplomatic. She struck his hand away with a vicious gesture of indignation and disgust and leaped to her feet and began jerking her brassiere back in place, brought her shirt together and rebuttoned it, and then drew her short riding skirt that was slipped up far, together, and fastened it. She was crimson with embarrassment—and with frustrated

rage. How could he resist her the way she had deliberately played herself to him, inviting him to take all of her to do with as he pleased?

"I can't get up by myself! Damn you, Hollis!" she screamed. Then, in revenge, she attacked him, "You aren't human! You aren't a man! It's a good thing I found it out now, before I was fool enough to ever marry you and be stuck with a eunuch! What a life a normal, loving woman would have had with you! The remains of what once might have been a man—that is, if you ever even were! Nuts to you! And to think that I ever thought I loved you and wanted to marry you!" She looked at him sneeringly. But Hollis remained calm and put together their picnic basket while she ran to her horse and rode away. He followed at an easy pace, greatly relieved.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Hollis Returns to the Island

Hollis left the mansion and headed back to his home to make plans for his return to Banika. Before he left, he decided to spend a few weeks with Professor Einhardt.

He attended a seminar at the old U State. It was grand to get back and see the old place again and have a good visit or two with his old Professor, who was greatly interested in Hollis and all he had done. He urged Hollis to think it over and decide to work with him at State after all. But when Hollis had explained everything to him, the Professor realized that Hollis's decision was the right one. "Hollis, I wish in a way that I could go down there to see that island and work side by side with you there, too. Maybe I will come down sometime and work with you there. There's a lot down there that I would want to study; research that I could make ever so much better there, right on the spot, where the jungle and all the jungle animals and reptiles and tropical insects live and breed."

"I wish you would, Sir," Hollis told him earnestly. "It is just as you say—you would be able to accomplish a lot of worthwhile research there that you couldn't do elsewhere. I'd like you to meet LaGuna, too. I've told her so much about you. She would be so anxious and happy to meet you. I'll expect you to come down the first chance you get—why not

during the summer months when you have off from State for vacation?" he suggested.

The Professor nodded. "I believe I will, Hollis. Don't be surprised if you see me popping up down there someday. Because of all you've accomplished there, the Government of the United States had become keenly interested in that island of yours—and as I've been talking with some top State and Government officials, they say arrangements are being made for ships to route that way and stop now and then. In fact, I have been authorized to inform you that a special grant has been made for you to continue your work there, if you'll accept it."

Hollis was speechless for a moment. "Accept it? Professor, this is everything I ever dreamed of."

"A special flight will take you there, and the rest of your equipment is to be sent by ship. You won't have any difficulty getting your required lab things there. And in future then, other planes and ships will route that way so that whenever you need more things, supplies and such, there won't be any more trouble getting them."

All this encouraged and cheered Hollis up greatly. At first, he had thought he would have to "go it alone," mainly, having to figure out how to raise the needed funds on his own. But now this took a great load off his mind. The actions that were being taken were only the proper ones, too, he realized, so he certainly did not demur.

Chuck and Jane told him that Mr. Stevens and his big company were still greatly interested in lumber research down in the tropics, too—and both of them were going to return to the island with him for a time. Chuck was going to do research there—Hollis helping him as much as he

could. The lumber taken to serve needs elsewhere would not be missed in the least—it would help tidy up the jungle so that living conditions on the island would be better, more healthful. Also, the money derived could be put to good use in helping the islanders to a better kind of life.

Hollis and the Major, who had come to the annual homecoming, enjoyed the big football game that was played there that afternoon. It reminded them of the days they played in the same field. His old professor, Doctor Einhardt, also went to see it with them and greatly enjoyed it. The doctor was still hale and hearty, although now white-haired. How he enjoyed introducing Hollis to the other, newer faculty members and to his class one day—as his prime student. He didn't need to tell them much about Hollis's accomplishments for some time, and they, the present students, were all anxious and proud to be able to finally meet Hollis in person. Hollis eventually even had to make a sort of speech and give a lecture talking about his research on the tropical island and how he had made so many experiments and finally discovered the cause of the blinding affliction and then worked out a serum to effect its cure. He was happy and proud to do so, especially when he looked over to where his old instructor, the white-haired Doctor Einhardt, was sitting, listening raptly and his face glowing with infinite pride in the tale of wonderful accomplishments by his old student-protege. That, alone, Hollis felt, was reward enough for him if there had been no other rewards.

But there was also another reward. With all the faculty, students, and alumni gathered in the great auditorium of the State University, he was called up to the platform the next day by the president of the college.

As the head of State University shook hands with Hollis, he said proudly so that all might hear: "On behalf of our great university and this distinguished body, we hereby award you a Doctor of Science degree for your outstanding scientific achievement, Dr. Hollis Rochelle. In doing what you have, and without thought of financial reward—as you so plainly showed in refusing monetary compensations, you have shown yourself all the more unusual and meritorious in having worked so unstintingly to accomplish what you have for the alleviation of the ravages of certain tropical eye diseases. Several years ago, we refused you this degree, but now with the emergence of the whole truth, we hope that this special citation will in some way compensate for the years of injustice."

He went on trying hard to keep the tremor out of his voice, "We hereby further award you this medal for your outstanding achievement in the cure and prevention of eye disease. May your leadership in this field be an inspiration to all those who follow you. With close collaboration between our government and this, our great university, a scientific research laboratory for further eradication of tropical diseases is to be instituted—here—and also on your island, where you will be working so nobly.

"We all realize that, much as you have already accomplished, and others have done in making discoveries in the field of science, only the surface, so to say, has been thus far scratched. There is a call for vision matching those of the past. We hope and know that you and other men like you will carry on that vision. You are the symbol of the American Spirit, which typifies freedom, individual effort, and dedication to duty—the hope of the world. Today, America and the world

turn in gratitude to you. We pray that God keep you strong in body and in spirit so that you may carry on your unfinished work."

Hollis, flushing, knew he had to say a few words and managed to do so, insisting that he must give the main credit due to his discoveries to the teaching and inspiration of his old professor, Doctor Einhardt—and of course, he also gave reference and credit to his wife, LaGuna, who had inspired him and worked with him so long and tirelessly there on the island. Then, with a gleam in his eye, Hollis managed to put his old instructor in the spotlight and on the spot—turning further speech-making over to him. Dr. Einhardt took over proudly, gratefully, humbly, beaming at him with tears in his eyes.

A great deal of handshaking and congratulations followed then. The various faculty members and many of the students, and of course Hollis's own bunch of friends—the Major, Chuck and Jane, and Hollis's brother, all of whom had been notified that something very special in connection with Hollis was to happen that afternoon. While Hollis went through all this, happy and proud, still he couldn't help but feel a twinge of regret and sadness as he thought of how proud and happy his mother and his dad would have been if they could have been present for this great ceremony. And LaGuna, most of all, too—she rightly deserved to have been there and also received recognition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The Return

It had been wonderful to be back at the old State for a time. Hollis was thrilled as he thought of all the honors bestowed upon him, of all the wonderful arrangements being made to help him in his future research work. Everything was working out fine; his path to carrying on his work was made smooth, better than he'd ever dared to dream it would be.

For the next few weeks, he was very busy, making lists of things needed for his laboratory, his experiments, research, treating cases requiring special medicines and surgical and laboratory equipment on the island. He sent orders to various laboratories, chemical and drug companies, surgical supply houses, and so on. Finally, all he needed was selected and ordered. The shipments would go out without delay on a special boat to the island. He would leave soon by plane, along with a few capable lab and hospital assistants; Chuck and Jane would go along too, and some other men interested in lumber research from Mr. Stevens' company. The radio and weather equipment, and the man to operate it, were going by boat.

Hollis didn't forget to purchase quite a number of gifts he knew would please and come in handy for LaGuna and her grandfather, old Philippe, and many of the natives, especially Negu, Nana, and Tai, and others most near and

dear to LaGuna and himself—he bought and took with him some very special presents for LaGuna. He also bought some special toys and children's books in case his hunch was correct.

Almost six months after he had left Banika, the great airliner rose above the city carrying Hollis and his crew back across the Pacific. The take-off roar settled down to a steady drone, and Hollis, Chuck, and their assistants began to check over their equipment lists and their plans for beginning work. The plane would take them to Guam. From there, Hollis, Chuck, and Jane would proceed by seaplane to Banika while the rest came by ship. The bulk of their equipment would arrive later by ship, when the advance party had things ready to receive the main part of their supplies. They landed in San Francisco for refueling and then headed toward Hawaii. They were retracing Hollis's earlier path. Finally, Hollis, impatient, exhausted by work and excitement, saw the lights of Guam. He and Chuck made a final check, and then with Jane, they boarded a Navy seaplane and headed toward Banika, now only a few hours away.

Although Hollis was emotionally upset, he was so exhausted that he slouched down in his seat to try to get a few minutes' sleep before they landed in the lagoon. Hollis nodded and finally dozed off. He dreamed he had landed, and approaching the shore, he saw LaGuna. Mugzy dashed up and down the sand in front of her, barking wildly. With an unrestrained cry of joy, LaGuna said, "You're back, Oh, Hollis. It's you. Hollis. Thank God. You've come back to us."

She was deliriously happy.

"Oh, LaGuna," he said, dropping his packages to meet her

outstretched, trembling hands, which he imprisoned into his.

Having a smile on her lips and tears in her eyes, she said, "I wanted you so to come back. I've waited every day. I've wanted you so near me; in fact, so much it hurts."

Her face looked flushed, as was his. He held her close to him, clutching her in silence. Their hearts were too full for words.

She laughed. "I am glad you made it here before my time came. I missed you, Holly."

"I missed you, too, LaGuna," he sighed as he peered into her beautiful, wet eyes. "Nothing can tear us apart again. Never."

"I knew you couldn't stay away forever. That same moon-silvered lagoon and the diamond-studded sky are still waiting for you."

"You have changed a little, Holly. You are even more handsome."

"You are my love and my life."

Mugzy pricked up her ears and, thinking it her turn, jumped upon Hollis and almost knocked him down. Mugzy displayed great delight, turning about in a circle trying to catch her tail. She barked almost incessantly as if to show her glee in seeing the returned American.

The beat of tom-toms came from the village, and the natives danced and sang as they went along the path to the village. It was like a great homecoming to return to the wonderful, appreciative natives.

"Shall we go into the house?"

"Yes, dear," he answered, taking her hand and placing it

around his waist. They ambled to the old Philippe manor, her head against his broad shoulder.

"How have you and your grandfather been getting along since I left?" he asked.

Her sad eyes swung away from him. "Our house has been empty ever since," LaGuna answered, her face bathed in sorrow. "In fact, the whole world caved in."

Hollis opened the door to let LaGuna in. This time, the dog followed last. Even Mugzy sensed the situation. He looked at the side wall and noticed the crossed swords and coat of arms were missing.

"Where's Le Philippe?"

There were moments of silence. Even Mugzy stood motionless on her haunches. LaGuna walked to the sunporch, and Hollis followed her. He stared at the cross set together by seashells, set off with flowers under the old Hibiscus, Le Philippe's favorite tree.

LaGuna took Hollis by the arm and led him to the kitchen. Mugzy followed.

"What's up now, love?"

"I have a surprise for you," she smiled.

He smelled the aroma of coffee. She poured him a cup, then said, "Watch, it's hot." But as she handed the cup to him, it spilled.

"Doggone, I'm sorry, Holly," said Jane. "I was bringing you some coffee and the plane pitched, and I spilled it all over you."

"That's okay, Jane," Hollis said, blinking in surprise. "I was only dreaming."

The dream vanished instantly. He wiped the coffee from his clothes and looked around the cabin of the seaplane.

Banika still lay ahead. The coffee revived him, and he looked out the window, noticing the first glimmer of light in the east.

But what if something happened to her? Maybe she gave up on my returning and married one of the tribesmen, or maybe there was an epidemic. She'd be right in the middle of it trying to help out. What if she had the baby prematurely—what am I saying? I'm not even sure she was pregnant. There were no letters from her. She could have had an accident. Maybe trouble from some of Moa's old pals who never liked the whites. I'm being ridiculous. Hollis tried to get back to sleep, but it was impossible.

The dawn was pretty well along when Hollis noticed the speck on the horizon. There was no doubt about it. "There it is," he shouted.

As the plane approached Banika, they could make out Mount Pelu and the heavy jungle at its base, and the various streams running down from it. There was the one that passed by Le Philippe's house, running into the lagoon. The village was still quiet. In a few moments, the pilot had maneuvered the plane down smoothly on the lagoon. By the time the rubber boat had touched shore some of the natives awakened by the roar of the plane had gathered on the beach. Hollis looked and looked but could not see LaGuna. There was Negu. Someone was pounding a drum back at the village. A cheer of welcome went up from the crowd as they hit the beach.

"He's come back. Dr. Hollis is back!" Negu yelled and shook his hand.

"Where's LaGuna?" Hollis started to say when he heard a loud barking and saw a great German Shepherd appear at

the end of the path, stop, bark loudly again up the path, then bound across the sand toward him. Mugzy knew him, and Hollis knew that LaGuna must be close behind.

The End

Editor's Note on the Ending

After the final chapter, beneath the typed words "The End," our father wrote:

"P.S. This copy does not mention a black haired boy being held in her arms."

We do not know when or why he added this handwritten postscript, nor do we know whether this particular copy was ever sent to publishers. We were therefore uncertain how to interpret it. Did he intend to revise the ending to include the boy, or was he simply recording a detail that this version did not contain? Should we attempt to change the ending or leave it as it was?

Fortunately, while transcribing his wartime correspondence, I discovered that the ending had been a point of discussion. In one of his letters, our father wrote that his friend Hollis Russell, whom he called Holly, preferred a more romantic ending:

"He wants it to end lovey, dovey, but I want it up in the air—uncertain."

This showed that, during the wartime drafting of the novel, our father wanted the ending to remain uncertain, in keeping with the title Uncertain Journey.

I later found an earlier draft of approximately 500 pages containing a more conventional happy ending. In that version, Hollis returns to Banika and searches for LaGuna among the people gathered near the shoreline. When he

does not find her, Tai tells him that LaGuna is waiting for him in their hut with a special surprise.

Hollis races to the hut, where he finds LaGuna and a young child playing on the floor beside her. LaGuna lifts the child, places him in Hollis's arms, and says:

"Meet your daddy, Junior!"

She then tells Hollis:

"Yes, sweetheart—our boy! Just like you!"

Interestingly, our father marked the passage containing the reunion with LaGuna and their son for omission.

Because our father marked the earlier reunion scene for omission and wrote that he wanted the ending left "up in the air—uncertain," we decided not to rewrite or reconstruct it. Throughout the novel, our editing has been deliberately light, limited primarily to correcting typographical errors, punctuation, and minor inconsistencies while preserving our father's language, voice, and story. In keeping with that approach, we have preserved the ending as it appears in the surviving manuscript.

— Laurie A. Grimm