

DIAMONDS ARE A SPY'S WORST ENEMY

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The life of a spy is not all the adventure and glamour that it's cracked up to be. As a matter of fact, sometimes it can be down-right boring. Or, so it seems to Sarah right now as she wearily climbs the stairs of the Monkey Bar on the way to her room. With Jake out of town for the last three days, and the *Clipper* not due to arrive until the day after tomorrow, life in Boragora has become as dull as a Russian novel. And she's sure the three locals she just finished singing a set of songs to would have to agree with her.

"What's happened to this place?" she asks herself irritably, opening the door to her room. "The South Pacific has suddenly become as exciting and full of intrigue as a convent." She doesn't even feel like making her report to headquarters. "What am I supposed to tell them?" she mutters, yanking her radio out from under the bed and attaching the wire. "That the grass grew another inch since the last time I contacted them?"

Stifling a yawn, she puts on the headphones and slowly taps out her message: Boragora here. Nothing to report. Hope something doing on your end.

The furious tapping that comes through her headphones causes her eyes to widen with apprehension as she struggles to keep up with it. When she finishes writing the long message and reads it back to herself, she feels a chill run through her. Maybe boredom is not so bad after all.

It's not quite dawn when the *Goose* finally docks at the end of the wharf, and Jake, Corky, and Jack emerge, each stretching his tired muscles. The fatigue shows on Jake's face as he pats his friend's back. "Well, it was a long haul, but we finally found the parts we needed. Now we shouldn't have any more trouble for a while."

"You don't care if I don't get to 'em till tomorrow, do ya, Jake? I'm really bushed!"

Jack barks twice in agreement and yawns widely, showing off every tooth in his mouth.

Jake smiles at them. "Sure. Let's all get some shuteye. I'm so tired, nothing in the world could make me fly anywhere today."

Reaching the front of the bar, they say their goodnights and go off to their separate rooms. Too exhausted to climb the stairs, Jack follows behind Corky.

After you've been a pilot for a while, especially as long as I have, you start to get that weary feeling that life holds no more surprises. With everything I'd done over the past few years, I had myself pretty well convinced that I had definitely seen it all. Well, believe me, when I walked into my room that night and found Sarah fast asleep on my bed, it had to be the very last thing I ever expected to find.

Jake's initial look of bewilderment slowly turns into a smug smile as he approaches the bed and sits down beside her. "What a night she picked

to finally decide this," he murmurs to himself, gently shaking her. "C'mon, Sarah, wake up," he whispers softly when he sees her begin to stir.

Her eyes flutter for a moment until his face comes into focus. "Oh, Jake! I'm so happy you're back!" she exclaims, sitting up to hug him. "I've been waiting here all night for you!"

He looks a little embarrassed. "Gee, Sarah, I'm glad you missed me, and I appreciate the gesture, but I'm really beat tonight. Could we just put this off till tomorrow? I promise I'll make it up to you."

She pulls away and stares at him, the indignation showing on her face. "Jake Cutter! If you think I'm here for just a one night 'quickie', you're sadly mistaken! I want a whole lot more than that! I -- I mean, there happen to be a few other things on my mind besides having a fling with you! That is -- I mean--" She swallows nervously.

He grins at her flustered expression. "It's okay. I'll wait until you can spit this out."

Her eyes narrow into slits. "Darn it, Jake!" she shouts. "I'm talking about a top secret mission here!"

"Not anymore," he declares, touching his ear with his finger in a pretense of checking his hearing.

She lowers her voice. "Listen. I was on the radio to HQ tonight, and they gave me a job to do. One of our agents intercepted a courier who was supplying industrial diamonds to the Japanese. Now, the agent's holed up on Tongalea with the diamonds, and we've got to get him out."

"We?"

"Well, HQ didn't mention you, specifically. But, they told me to fly there, and how else am I going to do that? Sprout wings?"

"I don't get it, Sarah. Why do they want you to go all that way to do this? It seems like an easy enough job just to get a man off an island."

Looking down for a moment, she says, "It's not as easy as it sounds. There's...someone else after the diamonds."

He starts to get that funny feeling in the pit of his stomach. "Uh-oh. This sounds like the part where we get shot at."

"Jake, we can't let anyone else get those diamonds! From what I was told, the Japanese military is a lot stronger than we all believed. If they lay their hands on them, they can open up even more war plants. It's not just our lives that are at stake here!"

"Okay, okay. But, who is this person, and what does it all have to do with you?"

"He's called the Red Dragon, and he steals military secrets and the like and then sells them to the highest bidder. He's totally ruthless, and

has already killed a few people who've stood in his way. No one knows what he looks like, but, somehow, he seems to know the identity of nearly all of our agents. HQ thinks he'd never suspect a woman, so that's why they chose me. I'm supposed to fly to Tongalea and get room 19 at the Tropical Paradise Hotel. The agent'll contact me there, and we'll all fly out together the next day. Now, what could be more simple?"

"Staying here and fixing the *Goose*."

Seeing the look on her face, he puts his hands up resignedly. "All right, we'll go."

She smiles triumphantly. "Thanks, Jake. I knew Uncle Sam and I could count on you. Now, remember, this is top secret. No one must know about it. Not even Corky."

"Not even Corky? What am I supposed to tell him? Don't you think he'll be a little curious about where the two of us are going overnight without him?"

"Well...I don't know. Tell him we're eloping or something."

He gives her a teasing grin. "Nah, it'll have to be something believable."

She's not amused. "Look, I don't care what you tell him as long as it's not the truth."

Trying to wipe the smile off his face, he says, "Okay, I'll think of something."

They both get up and walk over to the door. As she walks outside, he asks a little too loudly, "Hey, Sarah, when am I supposed to get some sleep? It's already morning."

"And a beautiful morning at that," states a cheerful voice from behind them. "Bonjour, mes amis."

They quickly turn to find Louie standing a few feet away, watching them with amusement. From the tiny gleam in his eye, it is apparent that he's drawn his own conclusion about the little scene he's just stumbled upon.

Sarah's face turns red. "Uh, hi, Louie."

Jake fumbles for an explanation. "I -- it's not what you think, Louie. We were just...uh... talking."

"But, of course!" declares the Frenchman, patting him on the shoulder. "I have had many an early morning 'conversation' myself in my day." Smiling slyly, he walks away.

Sarah stares after him in dismay. "Wouldn't you know it? A twenty-eight year spotless reputation ruined in one minute."

Jake grins at her. "Well, as long as it's ruined anyway..." Raising his eyebrows playfully, he gestures his head toward his room.

"I thought you were too tired," she murmurs

coyly.

Their smiles soon turn into a burst of laughter.

"Boy, are we going to have a lot of explaining to do when we get back," Sarah declares finally.

He nods. "When do you want to leave?"

"How about if I meet you on the dock at noon?"

"Okay. I'll check the charts and then get Corky working on the *Goose*. Something tells me I'm gonna want those engines to start in a hurry."

With a warm smile, she heads off toward her room. "See you later," she calls out over her shoulder.

Watching her go, he smiles back. "You're really something, Sarah Stickney White," he mumbles to himself, shaking his head. "I have a feeling that my life is never gonna run out of surprises as long as you're around."

Corky's indignant voice emanates from the cockpit of the *Goose*. "Boy, Jake! First ya tell me that you're not goin' anywhere today and that I can get some sleep. Then you're haulin' me out of bed almost as soon as my head hits the pillow and tellin' me to fix the *Goose* while you get some sleep. And, now, you and Sarah are goin' off someplace, and ya won't even tell me why or where. I don't like ya holdin' out on me, Jake!"

Jake rolls his eyes while he paces the pier. After listening to this carping for the last half hour, he's about reached his breaking point. "Where the hell is she?" he mutters to himself, scanning the front of the dock. Finally, he spots her strolling toward him, and sighs with relief until he sees the suitcase she's carrying in her hand.

"Hiya, Corky," she says brightly, leaning in the cockpit window to smile at him.

"Hiya, Sarah," he grumbles under his breath.

"What's with him?" she asks, turning to Jake in surprise.

"Better yet, what's with you?" he snaps, pointing to the suitcase. "If you think I'm haulin' that thing all over Tong--" He stops himself as Corky pokes his head through the front hatch. "--ataya, you're crazy! We're only gonna be gone for a day and a half!"

"Jake, did you say *Tagataya* -- overnight?" asks Corky, staring at them in shock.

Jake gives Sarah the eye and turns to his friend. "Just forget what I said, okay, Corky?"

"Sure, Jake. Sure," he mutters petulantly. "Why should I know anything? I'm just the guy who stayed up all mornin' fixin' the *Goose* for ya. I guess I should be happy ya trusted me to do that!"

After climbing down from the plane, he starts off in a huff.

Watching him, Jake feels guilty. "Corky!" he calls out.

The mechanic turns around and looks at him hopefully. "Yeah, Jake?"

"Uh...why don't you go get a beer? On me?"

Corky's face registers his disappointment. "Sure, Jake," he mumbles, turning back toward the bar.

"He'll understand once we come back and explain," Sarah says gently, touching Jake's arm.

He shoots her a disgusted look, then enters the side hatch of the plane. "Just stow that damned suitcase in the cargo hold, and let's get the hell out of here!"

"Well, aren't you ever a delight to be around when you first wake up!" she exclaims, lugging her case through the door. "I'm certainly glad I didn't take you up on your offer this morning."

"So am I!" he calls out from the front of the plane. "You probably would've had to pack a bag first!"

When she comes up to the cockpit and glares at him, he says testily, "Not that it's any of your business, but I'm usually fine when I wake up. It's just that when I have to search the entire *Marivellas* for a bunch of lousy second-hand parts, then alienate my best friend, and, finally, fly a half-baked spy and her suitcase to an island where some man I don't even know is waiting to kill me, all on five hours of sleep, I do tend to get a little touchy!"

"So, sleep after we get there."

"When? Before or after I get shot at?"

"How about during?"

"I swear this is the last stupid venture I ever let you talk me into," he mutters, hitting the throttles to start the engines.

She gives him a withering look. "Jake Cutter, if you don't stop it, I'm going to shoot you myself! If I had known that Attila the Hun was coming along with me, I would've packed some raw meat!"

"Well, why not? You've probably got everything else in that suitcase."

Fire comes out of her eyes. "If I weren't too much of a lady, I'd tell you where you could put that suitcase!"

After glaring at each other for a moment, they each turn away.

Fasten your seatbelts, she thinks to herself, looking out at the right pontoon as they begin to skim across the water. *It's going to be a turbu-*

lent flight!

While Corky stands on the dock watching the Goose take off, Jack walks over to him and growls.

"Threw you out in the cold, too, huh, Jack?"

The little dog barks twice and growls again.

"Yeah, I know what you mean. I guess you and me are just excess baggage now." He sighs. "What-aya say we go get a beer?"

When Corky and Jack shuffle into the bar, Louie greets them with a smile, but after noticing their long faces, he becomes concerned. "What is the matter, mon ami? You look as though you have lost your best friend."

"You got that right, Louie," Corky declares, reaching for a beer as Jack barks his agreement. "Jake and Sarah just took off to Tagataya together and made sure they left me and Jack behind."

"But why would they do such a thing?"

"I dunno, Louie. They're even stayin' over-night! Sarah took her suitcase!"

The Frenchman chuckles with amusement. "Oh, Corky. That does not mean anything. Sarah takes her suitcase to the powder room."

"No, really, Louie. Jake was actin' real strange and secretive, but he let it slip that they were gonna be gone for a day and a half. If I didn't know any better, I'd think they were goin' off to get married or somethin'! The only thing is, they spent the whole mornin' arguin', so I guess that's not it."

Louie looks thoughtful. "Hmmm. Not quite the whole morning," he murmurs to himself, remembering what he had seen earlier. "You know, I thought it strange that the Reverend was up and gone so bright and early today. Perhaps he is meeting them in Tagataya."

"Gee, Louie, do ya really think so? I mean, they were still yellin' at each other when the Goose took off!"

"Some people cannot express their true feelings, so they cover it up by fighting. I believe that is the case with Jake and Sarah."

"But why wouldn't they want us to be with them?"

"Perhaps they wanted some privacy at a time like this."

"Well, I dunno. It's all kinda mysterious."

"Ah, mon ami, what else could it be? They probably think that we would make too big a fuss, and they would prefer something simpler. For those two to come to this decision, they must have been planning it for quite a long time."

Corky lets out a short laugh. "You kiddin'? When we got in early this mornin', Jake said nothin' could make him go anywhere today. Then, all of a sudden, an hour later, he's draggin' me out of bed to fix the Goose!"

Mon dieu! Louie thinks to himself, raising his eyebrows in awe. *There must be a lot more to our Sarah than her innocent outward appearance would suggest!*

He turns back to Corky and pats him on the shoulder. "Come, my friend. We must find Gushie and prepare. It is not every day that we get to celebrate a wedding!"

Princess Koji is relaxing in her hot tub as the door panel slides open to reveal Todo. Bowing, he announces with disdain, "My Princess, a visitor is here to see you."

"Show him in," she orders, taking a cup of saki from her handmaiden.

Todo stands aside and Willie appears in the doorway, looking uneasy at finding her in her tub.

She smiles at his obvious discomfort. "Won't you join me, Willie? I have kept the other tub warm for you ever since I received your message."

Walking into the room, he replies nervously, "I am afraid this is not a social call. I must speak to you about a matter of great importance."

"To whom?" she asks calmly, taking a sip of wine and smiling seductively at him.

He quickly reaches for another cup that a servant girl is holding on a tray, and downs it in one swallow. Turning back to her, he tries not to stare. "Princess, do you realize how difficult it is to conduct business with you while you are in...there?"

Nodding slyly, she starts to stand up. "Would you prefer that I got out?"

"N...n...no," he stammers, putting his hands up and swallowing hard. "I will try to manage somehow."

Todo shakes his head in disgust at Willie's behavior.

"Now," asks Koji, settling back in the water, "what is this matter of great importance, and what does it have to do with me?"

Regaining his composure somewhat, he declares with enthusiasm, "I am prepared to offer you a place in history. You will be known as the woman who helped Germany to unite Europe! The gratitude of millions shall be yours as they--"

"Cut the baloney, Willie, and get down to how much," she states coolly.

Frustration shows on Willie's face. He hates it when she interrupts his patriotic speeches.

"One million reichmarks," he mumbles softly.

"To do what?"

"To take me to Tongalea."

She eyes him impatiently. "And then what?"

"To steal some industrial diamonds."

"From whom?" she asks sharply, her irritation rising.

"An American agent."

She's had enough. "My dear Willie, if you insist on making me drag this out of you, I shall give you to Todo. He is very good at making people talk."

Shooting a quick look at her henchman, Willie sees him sneer evilly and firmly grip his sword handle. Terrified, he turns back to the princess and gulps.

She laughs at his expression and then smiles benignly. "What's the deal, Willie?"

"An American agent is on Tongalea with some diamonds he stole from the Japanese. I need you to help me get them for Germany."

She stares at him in disbelief. "Do you mean to tell me that the little paperhanger is now reduced to stealing his ally's diamonds? And, to think that Neville Chamberlain is trusting him with Czechoslovakia!"

Willie is about to protest against the slur on his leader until he glances back at Todo. "Princess, the diamonds are already stolen. And, besides, I am sure that Japan would rather that Germany had them than the United States."

"Yes, I suppose it is much more comforting to be robbed blind by your friends than by your enemies," she states sarcastically, watching him shuffle with discomfort. He's so desperate for her help, and she loves having him at her mercy.

After a moment's reflection, she declares, "Well, Willie, your strong rationalization has won me over. I would be most happy to take you where you wish to go."

Breathing a sigh of relief, he asks hopefully, "Then, we can leave immediately?"

"As soon as you make arrangements to have the three million reichmarks delivered here."

He stares at her. "But the offer was for one million!"

Eying him coolly, she asks, "Do I look like a charitable institution to you? I don't even muss my hair for that much. Besides, I shall also throw in a genuine Samurai uniform for you to wear. It would not do for an American agent to be able to describe you to his cohorts. There's no telling who might catch wind of it."

Her last remark goes right over his head as he stands there pondering her counter-offer. Watching him in sly amusement, she thinks to herself, *Oh, Willie, how can you not know that anemic American simpleton is a spy? You certainly could not mistake her for a singer. With mentalities like yours, I sometimes wonder how Western civilization ever came into being.*

Finally, with a heavy sigh, he agrees to her price.

"Ah, then it is settled. Todo, tell the captain to gather his crew for the yacht. We will be sailing for Tongalea this afternoon."

"Hai!" the henchman responds with a bow as he turns to leave.

"And now, Willie," she purrs, leaning enticingly against the edge of the tub, "while we're waiting, why don't we turn this into a social call after all?"

Gazing into her sparkling eyes, he takes a deep breath. "Why not?" he asks with a smile.

For the past few hours, the silence aboard the *Goose* has been deafening. Jake steals a glance at Sarah and finds her still staring angrily out of her window. Starting to feel a little remorseful, he decides to try to bring her out of it with some conversation.

"How come nobody knows what this Red Dragon looks like?" he inquires calmly out of the blue.

She turns toward him. "What brought that up?" she asks with an edge to her voice.

"Well, it just seems funny that absolutely no one has ever gotten a good look at him."

Her eyes are solid ice. "I'm sure his mother did once."

He can tell she's not buying it yet, but he keeps trying. "So, how are we gonna know him if we spot him?"

"Oh, he'll be easy to spot," she declares, turning back to her window. "He'll be the one shooting at us."

He has to smile.

The first thing I discovered about Sarah was to never underestimate her headstrong determination. It was a lesson I learned none too gently at the hands of a neatly placed champagne bottle on the day we met. She certainly wasn't easy -- in any sense of the word -- but, maybe that was one of the things I always found so appealing about her.

Looking over at her again, he sighs. "Listen, Sarah, I, uh-- Oh, hell. I was a little upset earlier. Can't we just forget it and start talking again, for God's sake!"

Incapable of hiding her amused smile, she

turns toward him. "Well, how can a girl resist a beautiful apology like that?"

Grinning sheepishly, he asks, "I wasn't really that bad, was I?"

"Oh, no! But, I did hear Germany was going to send for you if Hitler ever died."

Their short laughter breaks the remaining tension, and they begin to feel more relaxed.

"Please, Sarah. Promise me that you'll let me get some sleep tonight."

"Don't worry. I wouldn't disturb you again for all the tea in China!" But her smile fades as she suddenly feels a strange foreboding. "I only hope getting some sleep is all we'll have to worry about," she mumbles softly. Then, after a pause, she looks at him pensively. "Jake, why do you suppose it is that we argue as much as we do?"

After looking away momentarily, he gives her a sideways glance. "Maybe it's because we're a little afraid of what we might do if we ever stopped."

They gaze into each other's eyes for a long moment, both realizing the truth in that statement. But their thoughts are interrupted by a sudden lurching of the plane, accompanied by the coughing and sputtering of both engines. Quickly checking the gas, Jake finds the needle hovering on empty. "Damn! I was so busy listening to Corky's tirade, I forgot to top off the tanks!"

Sarah panics. "What are we going to do?"

"Don't worry. Tongalea's dead ahead, and we probably have enough fuel to land. But we're on the wrong side of the island. The hotel's on the other side."

"Naturally. What else can go wrong?"

"That!" exclaims Jake in alarm, trying to hold the *Goose* in the air as both engines quit at once. But it defies his efforts and begins to sink like a stone. "Hang on!" he shouts.

Sarah's face turns pale and she shuts her eyes while grabbing her seat with both hands. Jake stares in disbelief as the altimeter spins dizzily around.

"Come on, baby, catch," he mutters to himself, pumping the throttles furiously. Finally, when they reach less than a thousand feet, the port engine starts to sputter back to life and then ignites. Jake quickly brings the plane out of its spin and makes a nearly perfect landing near the island.

They look at each other with a sigh of relief. But, turning to stare out of the windshield at the massive jungle facing them as they pull into the lagoon, they realize that the worst is not over yet.

"Uh, how far would you say it is to the hotel?" Sarah asks, nervously fingering her hair.

"I only got a fast look at it from the air, but I'd say it's at least five miles."

"Five miles! But that means it'll be dark before we get there! All we need is to get lost in that jungle."

He grins at her. "C'mon, Sarah, I'm a pilot. It's against my religion to get lost. Besides, I've got a compass, a machete, and a flashlight. What more could you ask for?"

"How about a taxi?" she answers dryly.

He laughs. "Come on. Let's get going while there's still some light. Maybe we can find somebody around here who's got some gas."

As they start down the aisle of the plane, Sarah spots her suitcase wedged between two seats. "Five miles," she mutters under her breath, reaching to pick it up.

"You could always leave it here," suggests Jake with a smug smile.

She gives him the eye. "Are you kidding? After all the abuse I've taken because of it? I'd rather be captured by a tribe of cannibals!"

He chuckles. "That's probably next."

"And it would be the highlight of our day," she adds flatly.

After Jake locates his equipment, they step out of the plane and survey the jungle again. Then, turning to Sarah, he says cheerily. "Well, let's go."

Rolling her eyes, she sighs and begins to follow closely behind him.

It's late evening by the time they emerge from the underbrush into the clearing of a small village. Standing before them, illuminated by the full moon is a ramshackle, two-story structure with a weather-beaten sign hanging by one hinge that reads: Tropical Paradise Hotel.

Putting her suitcase down to catch her breath, Sarah stares at it and then at Jake. "I wonder whose idea of a joke that is?"

He chuckles. "C'mon, Sarah. This island's not so bad. I only saw seven snakes, five kinds of deadly spiders, one crocodile, and a few scorpions here and there. Then, of course, there was the quicksand, not to mention the--"

"Do you mind?" she interrupts with a penetrating look. "You can spare me the travelog. I was there, remember?"

He tries his best to keep from laughing. "But, my favorite part was when you almost stepped on that two-foot-long lizard."

"Ugh! Don't remind me," she shudders. "I never saw anything so repulsive in my life."

"Well, I think he must've felt the same way about your suitcase. He took one look at it and took off like a shot."

She stares at him curiously. "I've just got to know what this fixation of yours is all about. Did a suitcase terrorize you as a small child or something?"

"I don't know," he shrugs. "I guess I just like to feel unencumbered -- free and easy. You know what I mean?"

"I certainly do," she mumbles softly, applying his statement to their relationship. "Come on, let's get inside before I get an insect bite on one of the few remaining places on my body that doesn't already have one."

She gets up to reach for her suitcase, but he steps over to her and picks it up himself, causing her to look at him in surprise.

He glances down shyly. "I guess it won't kill me to carry it from here."

"Thanks," she says with a knowing smile, realizing he's probably only trying to save face with the desk clerk. But, after five miles, she'll take the gesture.

As they walk into the seedy hotel, the floorboards creak under their feet, and Sarah gets an uneasy feeling in the pit of her stomach. The dimly lit, dusty lobby is empty except for a drunk, his hat pulled over his eyes, asleep in one of the chairs. Staring at him, she leans over to Jake. "I don't know about this place," she whispers nervously.

He gives her a weak smile. "It's not exactly the Waldorf Astoria, is it?"

Just then, a gruff voice booms out from behind them. "What do you want?"

Practically jumping out of their skin, they whirl around to find themselves face to face with a tall, rough-looking, bald man eyeing them from behind the counter. His brawny arms are covered with tattoos, and his stern, surly face has a long scar running from his cheek to his ear.

Jake's arm goes around Sarah protectively as she stammers, "M--my name is Sarah White. I -- I think my uncle made a reservation for me here. Room 19?" She tries to disarm him with a friendly smile.

His face is like stone as he turns to reach for the cubbyhole behind him marked "19".

Sarah and Jake exchange glances. "I think that lizard is looking a lot better to me already," she murmurs softly.

The man turns back to her. "Here's your key," he growls. "And, this is yours, too." He hands her a small envelope.

"Thank you," she says, smiling faintly. "Uh...I'm sorry...would you mind giving the room next

to mine to my...uh...friend here?"

Giving Jake the once-over, the clerk reaches for the key to room 20. Then, after handing it to them, he says, "Second floor. That way," while pointing toward a rickety flight of stairs at the far corner of the room. "That'll be twenty bucks -- in advance."

"Very reasonable," Jake says, nodding pleasantly while reaching into his pocket. After paying him, he and Sarah make their way to the staircase.

After they're out of sight, the 'drunk' sits up in his seat and adjusts his hat. Reaching into his jacket, he pulls out a cigarette as a sinister smile appears on his face. "This is going to be a lot easier than I thought," he utters softly, lighting a match. In the light of its small glow, clearly visible on his hand is the tattoo of a red dragon.

Pausing outside the door of room 19, Sarah and Jake look at each other with trepidation.

"Here goes," Jake declares, unlocking the door and cautiously stepping inside. Looking around furtively, he spots an oil lamp on the dresser across the room and walks over to light it. While turning the handle to brighten up the room a little, he spots some cockroaches scurrying into the shadows and immediately decides not to mention them to Sarah.

"Well?" she calls out from the hallway, a fearful tinge to her voice.

"It's okay. We're alone...sort of," he replies, watching another cockroach run across the floor.

"Just what do you mean 'sort of'?" she asks, slowly poking her head through the door.

"Nothing," he replies cheerfully. "Just don't turn the light off all the way when you go to sleep; okay?"

As he walks back over to her, she eyes him suspiciously. "Why not?"

Putting his hands on her shoulders, he gives her a warm smile. "Just trust me."

She sighs and drops her suitcase. "Did you ever get the feeling that you took on one mission too many?" she asks softly, looking into his eyes.

Glancing at the floor, he says, "Yeah, once while flying with the Tigers over Hangchow."

"What happened?"

Gazing back up at her, he smiles sheepishly. "I got shot down."

She can't return his smile. Instead, she closes her eyes and steps toward him, and he holds her for a moment.

Sarah always tried to put on a brave front, but I could tell when she was really scared -- like now. There was a certain look in her eyes when that vulnerability she hid so well began to show a little. At times like those, I found it just as hard to hide my own.

"Sarah, why don't you see what's in that envelope?" he asks gently.

"Oh, yes. I almost forgot about it," she replies, recovering enough composure to let go of him. "That desk clerk was so charming, I couldn't think of anything but him."

While she digs through her pockets, he looks curious. "I wonder what it is?"

Pulling it out, she gives him a sardonic smile. "Well, it's a cinch it's not the room service menu."

After she opens it up, Jake leans over her shoulder, and they read it together:

"Can't meet at hotel. Too dangerous. Think Red Dragon has spotted me. Instead, meet at waterfall one mile east of town. 9:00 a.m. tomorrow. Be careful.

X."

Sarah shudders as a chill runs down her spine and turns to look at Jake.

Smiling confidently, he pats her on the shoulder. "Everything's going to be all right. Now, let's get some sleep before I drop over from exhaustion."

"Okay," she replies, forcing a faint smile as she walks him to the door.

He opens it and turns back to her. "Good-night," he says softly.

"Goodnight. Ordinarily, I'd say don't let the bedbugs bite. But, tonight, I guess that'll be impossible."

With a grin, he squeezes her arm. "Don't let Scarface hear you say that."

She manages a short chuckle before he walks off toward his room. Then, she turns around and gazes warily at the bed. Reaching for the top of the sheet, she quickly pulls it down and jumps back. To her delight and utter amazement, there's nothing crawling there. Breathing a sigh of relief, she carries her suitcase to the dresser and begins to get undressed.

Later that night, Sarah tosses and turns in her bed. As her mind drifts somewhere between wakefulness and sleep, she feels the presence of someone in her room.

"Jake?" she murmurs, opening her eyes slowly. Sitting up and gazing across the room, she sees a strange man, his face revealed in the light of the

oil lamp, standing at the dresser. For a brief moment, time seems to stand still while they stare at one another. As he comes toward her, she thinks she must be dreaming -- until she feels his hands clutch her throat. Desperately fighting him off, she manages to loosen his grip enough to let out a sharp scream. Panicking when he hears Jake pounding on the door, the man quickly darts out of the window.

After finally breaking the lock, Jake runs into the room to find Sarah gasping for breath and sobbing. He sits on the bed and puts his arms around her, holding her head against his chest.

"What happened?" he asks with concern.

"A...a man was here...choking me," she gasps, struggling to regain control. "I couldn't breathe. Oh, Jake, he was going to kill me!" She holds him a little tighter.

Patting her back gently, he whispers, "It's all over, Sarah. He's gone now. I'm here."

She pulls away to look at him and takes a deep breath, but, just then, her eyes widen in realization. "It must have been the Red Dragon! He had one tattooed on his hand!"

"Did you get a good look at him?"

"As good a look as I ever want to get," she says with a shiver.

"What was he like?"

"He was tall with dark hair and a moustache -- and the coldest grey eyes I've ever seen. I'll never forget those eyes." Laying her head against Jake's shoulder, she sobs a little more.

I'd seen Sarah frightened before, but never like that, and, I'll tell you, it really unnerved me. I started to get a real bad feeling about the entire mission. It was like we were suddenly caught up in some kind of deadly game where all the rules kept getting changed, and all we could do was keep playing along until somebody finally won. And something told me it wasn't going to be us.

Slowly leaning back, Sarah searches his eyes. "Please don't leave me, Jake. He might come back."

He attempts a boyish grin. "I won't leave. But, I hope you know this means that you'll be spending another day with me after I haven't had any sleep."

Mustering a smile, she says, "Don't tell me you're going to give Attila another run for his money."

"I hope not. But, when we get back to Boragora, I may give Rip Van Winkle a run for his."

Looking down, she says softly, "You mean if we get back to Boragora."

He reaches out to touch her face, and she lifts her eyes back to him. "We've got to get back. After all, we have to explain everything to

Corky and Louie." Giving her a warm smile, he adds, "And, there's a matter of a twenty-eight-year spotless reputation to save, isn't there?"

Right now, as she gazes into his sparkling blue eyes, she'd like to throw that reputation to the four winds. But, as always, the moment passes without anyone making the first move.

Getting up from the bed, Jake looks around for a place to sleep, but, remembering the cockroaches, he immediately decides against the floor.

She watches his dilemma and smiles. "Maybe we should just go down and sleep with the bum in the lobby."

He laughs, glad to see that her sense of humor is returning. "There's a chair in my room. I wonder why there isn't one in here?"

"I guess you must have the Presidential Suite."

Smiling, he heads for the door. "Well, I suppose I'll just go bring it in."

Sarah hesitates for a moment, looking down at her hands. "Uh...Jake, wait a minute. I think we should both have our wits about us tomorrow. So...if you want...maybe I could just...move over a little."

As she gazes back up at him, their eyes meet, and they both know what they'd really like to say, but neither one is able to say it. Instead, Jake attempts a grin.

"You just don't want me to spoil the decor of this room by bringing that chair in here, right?"

She smiles weakly. "Right. I'd hate to ruin this hotel's chances of getting on the traveler's ten best list."

Stepping away from the door, he waits while she makes room for him on the bed. "Hey, do you snore?" he asks, trying to keep a straight face.

"Certainly not!" she declares indignantly.

Laying down, he looks at her, his eyes twinkling. "How can you be so sure?"

"I had Whitney as a roommate in college, remember?" she answers coyly. "She would've told me."

"Oh," he says with a grin.

"What about you?"

He shrugs. "So far, I haven't had any complaints -- except from Jack."

"Oh, brother," she mumbles, rolling her eyes as she turns her back to him and tries to get comfortable.

Smiling, he turns the other way, and, in a matter of moments, they are both fast asleep.

The rest of the night passes uneventfully, and, soon, morning arrives.

Slowly opening his eyes, Jake squints at the sunlight streaming through the window and quietly sits up. He yawns, stretching his arm muscles as he turns to gaze at Sarah's still form, sleeping peacefully beside him. Sighing wistfully, he gets out of the bed and crosses over to the dresser to take a look at himself in its cracked mirror. While reaching into his pocket for a comb, his eyes fall on the agent's note lying open on the counter-top, and a sense of panic sweeps over him. Going back to Sarah, he gently wakes her up.

"Is it morning already?" she grumbles sleepily, trying to force her eyes open.

"Sarah, this is very important. Where did you put the note the agent left you?"

She looks at him with a puzzled expression. "In my suitcase. Why?"

His voice has a tinge of fear. "I found it on the dresser this morning."

Realizing the implications, her eyes widen. "Oh, my God, Jake! You mean, the Red Dragon read the note?"

"I'm afraid so. But, maybe if we hurry, we won't be too late."

"What time is it?" she asks, throwing off the covers.

"Seven-thirty," he replies, checking his watch. "I'll go downstairs and give our friend the keys back while you get dressed, okay?"

Nodding, she quickly moves to the dresser. But, when she sees him start out the door, she calls out innocently, "Oh, Jake? Would you ask him if he'd watch my suitcase until we come back?"

He stares at her incredulously for a moment but finally gives in with a resigned sigh. "I'll try."

After he leaves, Sarah looks all around, feeling completely flustered. She doesn't know what to do first. How she wishes this mission were over and they were back on Boragora! She promises herself that she'll never be bored with that little island again as long as she lives.

By the time Jake comes back, Sarah is dressed and ready to go.

"What took you so long?" she asks, opening the door to his knock.

"I went to find some gas for the *Goose*. And, besides, you know what a talker that desk clerk is."

She gives him the eye. "What about my suitcase?"

"Well, he said he'd keep it, but don't be surprised if you have to pay a ransom to get it back."

Sighing heavily, she says, "I'd pay a ransom to get us out of here, right now. Who knows what this day is going to bring?"

"Hey, come on," he declares brightly, taking hold of her arms. "We can't give up now, can we?"

She looks up at him and tries to smile. "No, I guess not."

Smiling back, he says, "Let's go," and carries her bag through the door. Sighing again, she follows him out.

"Unless I miss my guess, the waterfall should be right around here somewhere," says Jake as he and Sarah come through some trees and stand at the edge of a river.

While they listen for the sound of a cascade, Sarah spots a man's footprints near the riverbank. "Look!" she exclaims, grabbing for Jake's arm.

They follow the footprints downstream until they hear the unmistakable sound of a waterfall, and, after running a little further, they find themselves at the edge of a steep cliff. Cautiously peering over the ledge, they see the lifeless form of a man lying in a crumpled heap next to the shore. Closing her eyes and turning away, Sarah buries her head in Jake's shoulder.

"Looks like we're a little too late," he says, holding her gently.

She pulls back a bit and looks at him. "I guess we should go down there and make sure he's really dead." Trying to sound hopeful, she adds, "Maybe he's not; maybe we can help him."

"You're right," Jake agrees as he lets go of her and tries to find a way down the side of the embankment.

Making their way down the arduous path, neither of them speaks. They both feel a sense of doom closing in on them, but neither of them wants the other to know.

When they finally reach the bottom and approach the agent, they find that he is indeed dead. But, scrawled in the soft mud next to his hand are the words "Dead Man's Cave".

"He must have made that right before he died!" Sarah exclaims, trying not to look at the body. "That's probably where the diamonds are!"

"Could be," nods Jake. Then, he suddenly remembers something. "Wait a minute! Didn't we pass a cave on our way to the hotel yesterday?"

"I wouldn't know. I was too busy outrunning

deadly things to pay much attention to the scenery."

"Sure! It was right at the spot where we saw that lizard! The reason I noticed it was that it reminded me of the cave on Baku where we found the brass monkey."

She looks at him incredulously. "You were getting nostalgic at a time like that?"

He grins. "Anyway, it slipped my mind until just now."

"Do you think you could find it again? This time hopefully without the lizard?"

Shaking his head uncertainly, he replies, "I don't know. Maybe if we go back to the hotel and try to retrace our steps through the jungle. With all the vines I cut down, there should be a pretty good trail."

Glancing at the agent, Sarah feels a lump form in her throat. "What should we do about him?"

Jake follows her gaze. "There's not much we can do, except maybe try to finish his mission for him."

Turning back to Jake, Sarah's eyes shine with determination. "Then, that's exactly what we're going to do!" she declares forcefully. "Come on!"

As she strides off toward the rocky trail, he pauses to watch her for a moment and shakes his head in smiling admiration. Then, he sighs and follows closely behind.

When they stop in front of the hotel, Jake asks, "Do you think we should see if our friend in there's ever heard of Dead Man's Cave?"

She gives him a look. "I'm sure he has. They probably named it after someone who stayed in his hotel."

Laughing, he says, "Maybe we should just try to find the one I saw yesterday. How many caves can an island this small have, anyway?"

She smiles with renewed spirit. "I'm ready when you are."

After they've gone about three miles, they stop to rest on a rock.

"I don't get it, Sarah. I'm sure it's got to be around here somewhere," claims Jake, wiping the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve.

Before she can reply, they hear a noise behind them and whirl quickly around to find a man pointing a revolver directly at them.

"You are quite correct," states the Red Dragon evenly. "Dead Man's Cave is just a few yards away. I hope you will both find it to your liking, con-

sidering that it will be your home for all eternity."

Reaching for Jake's arm, Sarah tries to calm her fear as they stand facing their adversary.

"The agent had the diamonds on him when you killed him, right?" Jake asks coolly. "It was you who wrote that message next to his body."

"Correct again."

"But, why didn't you just wait for us there, instead of luring us to this place?" asks Sarah.

"Because, my dear, the deaths of too many agents would bring the U.S. government into this investigation in full force. I am only a few steps ahead of them as it is. But, if you both just 'disappear', your government will think that you killed the agent for the diamonds and are keeping them for yourselves." His voice takes on a commanding tone as he waves the gun at them. "Now, throw down your weapon, and start moving to the left."

Glancing at Sarah, Jake slowly removes his gunbelt and tosses it to the ground. Then, they turn around and follow the Red Dragon's orders.

When they reach the entrance to the cave, they face him once again.

"You'll never get away with this!" Sarah declares defiantly, staring him in the eye. "My government will track you down wherever you try to hide!"

He gazes at her, a bemused smile curling his lips. "You know, as I watched you sleep last night, it occurred to me what a shame it would be to have to kill such a beautiful, courageous woman. It truly fills me with regret."

Her eyes blaze. "Yes, I could tell by the way you were choking me to death!"

"A necessary evil of my occupation, I'm afraid," he says with an apathetic sigh. "It's not one I particularly enjoy, but, as you well know, in this business there are many unpleasant things one must do in order to preserve one's skin. I cannot allow you to stay alive to identify me."

Glancing at Jake, Sarah swallows hard and steps toward the Red Dragon. "Then, let him go," she pleads, indicating Jake. "He's not an agent, so he wouldn't know who to contact about you."

Coming up behind her, Jake puts his arm around her shoulders. "I'm not going anywhere without you."

"This is all very touching," states the Red Dragon calmly. "But, I am afraid we are wasting time. Once I blow up the cave entrance, you will be able to talk all you want until the air runs out."

Looking defeated, Sarah turns back to Jake, and he puts his arms around her comfortingly. "That was a brave thing you did," he says with

feeling. "You're quite a woman, Sarah."

"All right, both of you, inside," orders the Red Dragon, motioning with the revolver.

As they start walking slowly through the entrance of the cave, they see several sticks of dynamite lining the outside and pause for a moment to exchange glances.

"I would suggest that you get as far away from the opening as possible. Even though I am an expert with explosives, there is always the chance that the entire front of the mountain will come down."

"Thanks for the advice!" snaps Sarah hotly, turning to give him one last look. "You're going to be sorry you did this!"

"Not as sorry as you are going to be, I imagine."

"Look, why don't you let us go?" asks Jake. "You've got the diamonds. There's nothing we can do to stop you now."

"It's useless to discuss this any further. You might as well save your breath for your last conversation inside."

Sighing, Sarah and Jake turn to look at each other once again before they start walking toward the back of the cave. Along the way, Jake strikes a match and lights an old torch that's hanging on a ledge above their heads, using it to illuminate the dark passage. Reaching the end, they search desperately for a sign of weakness in the walls, but to no avail. Putting the torch into a crevice, Jake turns to Sarah, and, as they hold each other, an explosion shakes the mountain to its very foundations. They flatten themselves against a wall and cover their heads against the falling debris. In a few minutes, after the dust clears, they look up to find that there is only about ten feet of space between the pile of rocks that was once the tunnel and the wall against which they are standing.

Letting go of one another, they begin desperately digging at the rubble, but the hopelessness of it all too soon becomes apparent. Sarah stands up and hurls a small rock at the pile in frustration, then closes her eyes tightly in a determined effort not to cry. Coming up behind her, Jake lays a gentle hand on her shoulder, and they look at each other silently, neither able to think of anything to say.

Finally, Sarah forces a fragile smile. "Well, I guess it's better than spending another night in that hotel."

He can't help but smile back. "You're right there," he agrees, brushing off his jacket.

Sitting down and leaning against the wall, Sarah sighs heavily. "You know what I just started thinking of? My mother. I've always tried to avoid that memory, but now I can't."

Jake sits down beside her, resting his arms on

his knees. "You never told me much about her."

"I know. I've never told anyone much about her. It's always hurt too much."

"Do you want to talk about her now?" he asks softly.

Glancing up at the ceiling, she says, "Yes. I think now is a very appropriate time for it."

He nods, encouraging her to go on.

Taking a deep breath, she begins. "She was a very beautiful woman, a talented musician and singer, a kind, understanding mother...and, I loved her very much. She and Daddy and I lived in a big house in Cambridge, and every weekend, it came alive with laughter and music. Daddy's colleagues from the university would come over, or other friends and relatives, and, while Mother played the piano, Daddy would lead the singing. Soon, everyone else would join in -- even me. Sometimes, Mother would sit me down beside her at the piano and show me what keys to play, and we'd sing a little duet for everyone. I was always so thrilled to hear their applause at the end, and I used to dream that, one day, I'd be a famous singer and of how proud Mother would be of me." They exchange soft smiles, each thinking of how fate had twisted her youthful dream.

"Well, one night, after I was supposed to be in bed, I sneaked out of my room and sat at the top of the winding staircase, listening to the happy sounds below me. And I started thinking of how lucky I was to have such a wonderful life. But, before too long, Mother discovered me and took me back to bed. As she tucked me in, I remember grabbing her arm and telling her that I wished my life would always stay just the way it was. Smiling, she said, 'Nothing can stay the same forever. Sometimes you have to lose something in order to gain something else. It's the only way we learn to grow up.' Then, she kissed me goodnight and got up to leave. But, at the door, she turned back and said, 'Don't ever stop wishing for the impossible, Sarah, because, someday, you might make it come true.' Then, she smiled again and said goodnight." Glancing toward Jake, her voice cracks with emotion. "It was the last thing she ever said to me. The next morning, she was dead -- a cerebral hemorrhage, the doctor told me. I was only nine years old at the time." She stops for a moment as a tear wells up in her eye. "It was my first lesson in losing," she sighs, staring at the cave walls all around her. "And, now, I suppose this is going to be my last."

Jake's heart goes out to her as he gently squeezes her hand. "I know how you feel, Sarah. Growing up without a father has always filled me with that sense of loss. Sometimes I wonder how differently my life would have turned out if I had only known him. That's probably one of the main reasons I've spent half my life flying from place to place. I guess, in a way, I was searching for that lost part of me."

It's funny how when death is staring you in the face, you can talk about so many things you've never talked about before -- your past, your fami-

ly, your philosophy of life. But, somehow, you can never get around to the really important things -- like the emotions you're feeling inside you right then. I suppose it's a form of denial, a way of hanging on to the hope that it's not really the end. But, as the hours ticked away, it was becoming more and more evident that if some things didn't get said now, they never would.

It's now much later in their conversation.

"You know what has me the most upset about this whole thing?" sighs Sarah. "Besides having dragged you into it, I mean. The fact that Doug Dradugio was right."

Jake looks at her in bewilderment. "Who?"

She gives him a half-hearted smile. "Doug Dradugio -- the first love of my life. There've only been three, you know."

"What was he right about?" His tone indicates more than a little interest.

"He told me I'd wind up like this someday, if I didn't listen to him."

"He sounds like a fun guy."



"Actually, he was really very charming. Most of the time, anyway. I met him at college. He was a good friend of Whitney's boyfriend-of-the-moment, and she arranged a blind date between us. Having just gotten out of boarding school I was pretty shy around boys, but he put me at ease right away, and soon, he was coming up to Poughkeepsie from New Haven every weekend. He was a Yale man, fourth generation, and his father was a prominent attorney in New York. We used to take long walks in the woods or go horseback riding, or maybe have a picnic on the lake and read poems to each other. In the summers, when I wasn't with Daddy, we'd go sailing off Cape Cod on his father's yacht or take a trip into New York for dinner at '21' and a musical on Broadway. Sometimes, we'd get into heated political discussions." She smiles as a memory comes back to her. "We once solved all of

the world's problems over a ham sandwich in the campus coffee shop," she laughs. "I guess you could say he was every girl's dream -- handsome, athletic, intelligent, and thoughtful. Every time he came to see me, he brought me a single red rose." She sighs. "Back then, I thought he was everything I was looking for in a man."

"So, what happened?" Jake inquires, starting to feel sorry he ever asked in the first place.

"Oh, the usual -- a difference of opinion. After college, I wanted a life of adventure and excitement. He wanted me to marry him and become a society matron -- you know, join the country club, raise a fifth generation Yale man, and throw a lavish tea party once a week."

"Sounds awful," he says dryly.

"It did to me, too," she agrees with a slight nod. "I asked him to give me a chance to live a little first. When I was at boarding school, the only fun times I had were when Daddy came to get me in the summer. He always took me to some exotic place, and I promised myself that, when I was old enough, I'd see the whole world before I settled down. Well, Doug didn't want to wait, and he told me I had to choose between him and my 'silly fantasy' as he called it. So, I chose the fantasy. I guess I just needed a little something more than he was offering. Well, anyway, as we stood in the airport terminal, waiting for my flight to Cairo where I was joining Daddy on a dig, we knew we were spending what were going to be our last few moments together. It was strange. For a long time, neither one of us could think of anything to say. But, then, all of a sudden, he took hold of my arms and said, 'You're going to be sorry someday, Sarah. You weren't cut out for a life of adventure. One day you're going to find yourself in a predicament that you can't get out of, and you're going to think of me and what you gave up. Only then, it's going to be too late.' I got real angry at him and walked off without saying goodbye. I never saw or heard from him again." She sighs heavily. "And, now, here I am -- just like he said."

"But, was he really right, Sarah? Are you sorry you made the choice you did?"

"Well, I'm sure sorry we're going to die like this. And, I'm sorry that I failed at my mission." She looks into his hopeful deep blue eyes. "But, I'm not at all sorry I chose this life. Although it's had some rough spots, it's also had some of the most exhilarating moments I've ever felt -- moments that were worth any price -- even this price. I never could have had them with any other life."

Jake seems relieved. "Do you ever miss him?"

She ponders a minute before answering. "I suppose I don't miss Doug for himself but, sometimes, during those rough spots, I've missed what he once represented -- those carefree days of the past when I had no responsibilities, when there wasn't an impending war hanging over our heads -- when everything seemed so simple." She pauses to give him a soft smile. "But, I think, most of all, I miss the roses."

After smiling back at her, Jake glances down, a trace of regret showing on his face.

She gently touches his arm. "How about you? Are you sorry?"

"Not really," he replies quietly, still looking down. "But, I guess sometimes our memories can still haunt us a little."

"Are you thinking about Elizabeth?"

His eyes are wistful as he gazes back up at her. "She was my first love, you know."

"I know," she sighs resignedly. "She must have hurt you pretty badly, didn't she?"

"I guess what hurt the most was the realization of how much I was fooled by her. I only saw what I wanted to see -- like you did with Ted."

She shudders at the mention of his name. "How could I have ever loved someone like that -- a madman who murdered my father?"

"Love is strange, Sarah. You don't choose it; it chooses you."

"You sound as if you're talking from plenty of experience," she says wryly.

He lets out a half-hearted chuckle. "You'd be surprised at how few there've been, really."

"I'll bet," she states with a skeptical look.

Lowering his eyes, he says seriously, "Actually, after Elizabeth, it was never easy for me to express my feelings. The more I cared about someone, the harder it was. Most women gave up on me long before I could ever tell them how I felt."

Her voice grows soft. "She must have really been something."

"She was," he murmurs, staring across the cave. "I was in the army then, in the pilot's training program. She was the general's daughter. We met at a dance at the base, and I guess I fell for her at first sight. We had our differences, though. She wanted me to stay in the army and settle down, and I couldn't wait to get out and see the world." He glances at Sarah and musters a smile.

"Sounds familiar," she smiles back.

"Yeah. Well, right before my discharge, her dad found out about my background and refused to let us see each other anymore. She begged me to re-enlist, saying that her dad would probably change his mind about me in time if I became a career man like him. I told her I couldn't, that I had some dreams I had to follow, and I asked her to come with me. Instead, she told me to take a year to try to find what I was after and then come back to her. I was afraid of losing her, but she reassured me -- 'I'd wait forever for you,' she said." His face clouds over as he hesitates and looks at the ground. "Within three months, she was married to a captain -- one of her father's 'fair haired'

boys. Now, she has her career man, and her dad has a 'respectable' son-in-law. So, it looks like everybody got what they wanted. Everybody but me, that is. I guess I'm still chasing those dreams."

Sarah quietly lays her hand on his shoulder, and he gazes back at her sadly. "You know, they say you never get over your first love. But, I don't think it's the love you don't get over. It's the pain."

Looking into his eyes, she says softly, "Until you find someone you can share it with."

They stare at each other for a moment, and then, Jake asks, "You mentioned three loves in your life. Who was the third?"

Glancing briefly away, she tries to collect her nerve. But, when she gazes back up at him, the words fail her, and she can only answer his question with her eyes.

Gradually, he becomes aware of what she's trying to tell him, and his feelings start to take control. Reaching out, he gently holds her by the arms, and they slowly come together. Their tender kiss soon turns into a passionate embrace as a wave of emotion washes their memories away. There's no time left to worry about what might have been or their old fears of commitment. There's only now and the two of them alone, facing the end together.

When they finally part, she stares at him hopefully, and, after swallowing hard, he starts to speak. "Sarah...there's something I've been meaning to tell you for a long time, but, instead, I've always kept it inside. I guess 'cause it's got a word that's never been easy for me to say."

As he hesitates again, she inhales deeply to try to calm her pounding heart. "What word, Jake?"

While watching her, something clicks inside him. "Breath!" he exclaims.

That was definitely not the word she was waiting for, and she gapes at him in disbelief. "What?!"

"Breath! Sarah, don't you get it? We've been stuck in here for hours now, but we're still breathing normally!"

"I wasn't a second ago," she mutters irritably, still unsure of what he's driving at.

Standing up, he grabs the torch. "And, look! Fire needs oxygen to keep burning! There's got to be air coming in from somewhere! All we've got to do is find it, and we should be able to dig our way out of here!"

She doesn't know whether to be upset or overjoyed. If he had only come to this realization five minutes later. Feeling the moment slipping away, she quickly gives it one last try. "But, Jake. Aren't you going to finish what you were saying first?"

He tries to look innocent. "Huh? Oh, gee, Sarah, I must've gotten so carried away, I forgot

what I was talking about. Well, I guess it wasn't anything important."

Giving him a narrow-eyed look, she gets to her feet. "Probably not. And, besides, maybe you'll even think of it again in six or seven years!"

He's barely able to hide his grin as he runs the torch along the cave walls. Suddenly, the flame starts to flicker, and he points to a crevice a few feet above them. "There!" he shouts. "The force of the explosion must've made an opening! I can't believe we didn't think to check it before this!"

After sticking the torch back into the wall, he stands below the crack. "C'mon, I'll give you a boost, and you can tell me what you see up there."

Sighing resignedly, she walks over to him and steps into his cupped hand. When he lifts her, she peeks over the small ledge and feels the excitement surge through her as she sees daylight coming through a hole in the wall. "Jake! There is an opening! And, the dirt looks pretty loose! I'll try to dig some out!"

After a while, Jake's hands start to get tired. Glancing up, he says, "Sarah, I'm not complaining, but could you hurry up a little. You're not the lightest thing in the world, you know."

She turns to give him a look. "I'm going as fast as I can. And, anyway, I hope you're not implying that I'm heavy. I'll have you know I lost four pounds over the past two weeks helping Louie with the bar."

"Really?" he grunts, making a grimace as she shifts her weight to turn around again. "Well, I think I found them!"

Feeling her temperature rise, she jumps down from his hands. "Maybe you'd rather I lifted you!" she snaps irritably.

"No, just give me a minute," he says, making an exaggerated effort to massage his hands. "I'm sure the circulation'll come back soon."

She can't believe what's happening between them. Just moments ago, they were inches away from confessing their true feelings, and now, they're back to playing their old games, as usual. *Is this how it's always going to be?* she wonders in frustration.

Seeing the look on her face, Jake gives her a boyish grin. "Hey, Sarah, I'm only kidding. You're really pretty light. I guess I'm just a little weak from hunger and lack of sleep. C'mon, let's try it again, okay?"

She sighs. She never can stay angry at him when he grins that way. "Okay," she gives in, smiling back.

It takes quite a while, but she finally makes an opening big enough to crawl through, and she jumps down with a triumphant shout.

"Now," says Jake, "all you have to do is get

back to the Goose and radio for help. There's gotta be somebody near here who can come to get me out."

"Don't you worry. I won't give up until I locate someone, even if I have to call out the Marines!"

He lets out a short laugh. "Maybe you can get the desk clerk to come. I'm sure he'd be glad to do a favor for us."

Shivering, she declares, "Please. I can barely stand the thought of asking him for my suitcase back. I can just imagine what's probably living in there by now."

As she steps closer for her final boost, Jake surprises her with a warm embrace. "Good luck," he says seriously. "And, be careful."

"I will," she promises, looking into his eyes.

They kiss lightly; then, he helps her up again. While struggling through the tight opening, she glances heavenward. "You know, when I said I wanted a life of adventure, these last two days are not exactly what I had in m--" Her thought remains unfinished as she tumbles out of the opening and rolls down the side of the embankment, landing on her face at the bottom. Lifting her head slightly to spit out some dirt, she sees two odd metal shoes planted firmly in front of her, and glances up in surprise to find Todo giving her his toothy sneer.

"I always knew there were strange creatures on this island," purrs a sultry voice coming from behind her. "But, I never realized that they were this strange. I see that your coordination is on a par with your singing, my dear."

Sarah knows who's speaking without even turning her head. Trying to control her temper as she gets to her feet and brushes herself off, she looks at Princess Koji. "I'm glad you're here, Princess. I could really use some help."

"I have known that for quite some time now, but I am afraid there is nothing I can do for you. However, perhaps a competent nutritionist would be able to work wonders."

Sarah's blood starts to boil, and she temporarily forgets about Jake. "Listen, you tasteless, overstuffed, obnoxious little--!"

"Will somebody get me the hell out of here?" shouts Jake's anxious voice from inside the cave.

Waving off Todo, who is clutching his sword in anger at Sarah's outburst, Koji turns to give her a calm smile. "Ordinarily, in cases of impudence such as yours, I would allow Todo to have his fun. But, considering the fact that you have nothing of consequence on your body to lose, I shall permit you to remain intact. Besides, unless my ears deceive me, there is a much more pleasant diversion awaiting me."

After glancing at Todo's menacing look, Sarah backs down. "Jake is still stuck in the cave we were -- uh -- exploring. Do you have any equipment

to get him out?"

"Have you ever known me to be unprepared? Todo, take some warriors with shovels and ropes to the cave and release our friend." After he departs, she gives Sarah the eye. "Just what were the two of you doing in that cave in the first place? Knowing you, it wasn't the obvious."

"Uh...we were -- uh -- just--"

While Sarah fumbles for an answer, something occurs to Koji, and she looks around for Willie who was standing right next to her when Sarah 'dropped in' on them. She finds that he's managed to work his way to the back of the group of soldiers, but, even though he's dressed in a uniform and helmet, his nervous, six foot three frame sticks out like a sore thumb among her smaller warriors. A look of amusement crosses her face as she turns around again to Sarah who is still trying to explain. "Enough of this babbling," she declares flatly. "I shall simply ask Jake when he gets here." Gazing upward, she smiles with satisfaction. "Which should be very soon by the look of things."

Sarah glances behind to see Jake being led down toward them and runs to embrace him. "Oh, Jake! I'm so glad you're out of there!" she exclaims joyously, throwing her arms around his neck.

He grins at her enthusiastic welcome. "Well, I owe it all to you."

The princess' eyes get steely as she watches the reunion. "And what am I? Chop suey?" she asks with distaste.

Quickly pulling away from Sarah, Jake smiles nervously at Koji. "Uh, you, too, Princess."

"That's better. Now, tell me how you both got trapped in that cave."

Jake shifts his feet. "Well, we -- uh -- just--"

Eying him impatiently, Koji points to Sarah. "Don't tell me you've been taking speech lessons from this one."

Jake clears his throat. "We were sort of looking for something, but it wasn't in there."

"Nothing you would be interested in," Sarah adds quickly.

She gets a penetrating stare. "Since when am I not interested in diamonds?"

Jake and Sarah look at each other in amazement, then back at Koji. "You know about the diamonds?" Sarah asks, wide-eyed.

"Of course," she replies with a sly smile, stealing a glance back at Willie. "A little cuckoo bird told me."

"But, what do you want with them?" asks Jake.

"My dear Jake, what does any woman want with diamonds? I am sure even that poor specimen next

to you could answer that question."

Sarah gets ready to say something in retaliation, but remembering Todo, thinks better of it. Instead, she blurts out, "Princess, you've got to help us find a man! He's tall and heavyset with black hair and a moustache! He's the one who trapped us in the cave! He's got a gun! He's dangerous! He's--"

"Dead," finishes Koji calmly.

"What?!" exclaim Sarah and Jake in unison.

"On our way here, we saw a man answering that description fall into a quicksand bog. It took him quite a long time to die."

"Why didn't you rescue him?" asks Jake incredulously.

"What do I look like? A Saint Bernard? I only rescue people that I deem to be worthy of my efforts. Besides, my warriors and I have been fruitlessly searching this island all day. We were in need of some entertainment."

Sarah and Jake stare at her speechlessly.

She's amused by their reaction. "Why should this man concern me?"

"He had the diamonds," answers Jake, trying to recover his composure.

A low moan filters out of the group of soldiers.

"What was that?" asks Sarah, glancing nervously around.

"I believe one of my Samurai just had a touch of indigestion," Koji replies with a smile. "Well, I suppose that means this tedious expedition is at an end at last. This has been a most tiresome day. Todo, I wish to be carried back to the ship. Have some soldiers, including that tall one back there, bring my litter to me." She enjoys Willie's stare of dismay before Todo leads him off.

Turning to Jake, Sarah sighs sadly. "I guess I really failed this time, didn't I?"

He puts his hands on her shoulders. "No. Maybe it's better this way. With neither country getting the diamonds, maybe we'll have a few more years of peace in the world." Looking into her eyes, he adds, "And, besides, the most important thing right now is that we came through this together -- alive. I'd call that a pretty big success, in my book." As she smiles affectionately at him, he smiles back. "You know, maybe your mom was right. Sometimes, you can make the impossible come true."

"Well, in that case, there's one thing I don't ever intend to give up wishing for," she says coyly.

Koji's put up with about as much of this as she can stand. "I would love to stay and chat with you both all evening, but I am afraid my dinner

would never stay down. So, since my litter is here, I will be taking my leave."

While she gets up on the chair, she flashes Willie a playful smile. Then, with a groan, he and the other three soldiers lift her off the ground.

"Uh, thanks again, Princess," offers Jake with a nod.

Turning to him, Koji says pointedly, "Someday, dear Jake, I will think of a way for you to properly repay me. But, until then, your thanks will be sufficient." Her face registers cool disdain as she glances at Sarah. "As for you, I am afraid that nothing about you is sufficient."

While watching Koji's departure, Sarah's eyes narrow. "One of these days, I'm going to pop that lady one!"

Jake laughs. "I'd pay good money to see that!"

She smiles and then sighs wearily. "Speaking of paying money, I guess it's time to go ransom my suitcase and finally put this mission behind us."

"Sounds good to me," Jake agrees as they start back down the trail toward the hotel.

Later that evening inside the Monkey Bar, the last minute preparations are being made. A huge sign with the words *Congratulations Jake and Sarah* printed on it has been hung on the back bar, and every table has a candle and several pieces of 'wedding' cake on it.

Louie turns from the radio with a triumphant smile on his face. "Jake has just radioed in. They will arrive here in fifteen minutes!"

The large crowd starts chattering with excitement as they gather near the entrance of the bar. While Jack climbs up to sit on top of the piano, Corky positions himself in front of the keys and limbers up his hands. After speaking softly to Ahmed, Louie stands proudly at the door in anticipation of the Monkey Bar's finest hour.

As the Goose maneuvers up to the dock, Jake glances over at the copilot's seat and smiles warmly. Sarah looks so peaceful and contented, sleeping with her head against the side window. There's something about that look that really gets to him, and he can barely resist the urge to kiss her while he shakes her gently. "Sarah, we're home," he says softly.

She starts to move a little and her eyes begin to flutter. "What did you say, Doug?" she mumbles.

Jake's smile vanishes. *So that's what's making her look so happy*, he thinks to himself with a pang of jealousy. His voice is louder as he shakes her a bit harder. "C'mon, Sarah."

She wakes up with a start and looks around,

feeling somewhat disoriented. "Oh...Jake."

"Well, I'm glad to see you remembered my name."

"What?" she asks, trying to get her bearings.

"Nothing." He covers up with a smile. "Did you have a nice dream?"

Looking thoughtful, she replies, "I don't know. I don't remember. But, I hope this isn't part of it. Please tell me we're actually back in Boragora."

Giving her a sharp look, he gets up and starts toward the side hatch. "Are you sure that's where you really want to be?"

She stares after him in bewilderment for a moment, and then follows him down the aisle, picking up her suitcase along the way. Stepping onto the dock, she looks at him questioningly. "Is something wrong?"

"Wrong? What could be wrong?" he asks with strained cheerfulness. "We're home now, and the bar's open. All's right with the world."

As they walk down the pier, Sarah starts to feel uneasy. Was it something in her dream? She wishes she could remember it. All she knows is that, at this moment, she needs some reassurance that the decision she made so long ago about her life was the right one.

When they reach the end of the dock, she grabs Jake's sleeve and looks shyly into his eyes. "Before we go back to civilization and our former lives, don't you think you could -- uh -- maybe try to recall what you were going to tell me in the cave?"

He raises his eyebrows in mock surprise. "Gee, did six years go by already?"

The heat rises within her as she watches him stride off toward the bar. "Jake Cutter, you are the most impossible man I've ever known!" she shouts. "No wonder all those other women left you!"

Stopping in front of the porch, he turns to see her storming her way up to him. "Well, then, why don't you get smart?"

"Maybe I will! Maybe I'll just leave here and go somewhere where I'm appreciated!"

"Sorry, Sarah. They don't allow suitcases on Devil's Island."

Slamming the bag down, she exclaims, "Oh, I couldn't go there! The sensitivity of the inmates would be more than I could handle after you!"

"And, your shrieking would be more than they could handle!"

"Shrieking!" she shrieks. "Oh, I'm afraid you haven't heard anything yet!"

While the battle rages on outside, all eyes are on Louie inside the silent bar. Even Jack gives him a skeptical one-eyed look. A momentary bit of doubt crosses Louie's face, but then, he laughs. "Do not worry, everyone," he says confidently. "It is the way they show their love."

After exchanging bewildered looks with one another, the crowd again stares toward the doorway in awe.

"Where do you think you're going?" Sarah demands as Jake steps up on the porch. "I've got a whole lot more to say to you!"

"Well, I can't listen to any more on an empty stomach," he retorts, heading for the bar.

"You're going to listen to me, like it or not!"

Glaring at one another, they each push open one of the doors. At that moment, everyone inside yells out, "Congratulations!" and pelts them with rice. Jack barks twice loudly while Corky begins to bang out the wedding march on the piano.

Louie approaches them with a wide smile on his face, putting his arms around both of them. "Ah, mes amis, I am glad to see that married life has not changed you. You are acting just as much in love as ever!" Turning around, he shouts, "Gushie! Free champagne for everyone!"

At that news, the entire crowd makes a mad dash for the bar counter while Louie beams at them proudly.

Sarah and Jake stare at each other and then at Louie in total mystification. "What the hell are you talking about?" Jake asks.

"Ah, you thought you could fool a Frenchman, eh? But, I saw through your little scheme. You forget, I was there when you emerged from your, shall we say, 'early honeymoon?'" He gives them a sly wink.

Exchanging embarrassed smiles, their anger fades away.

"We're not married, Louie," says Jake with a sheepish grin.

Louie's eyebrows go up in dismay. "You are not?! But, what about that scene the other morning? And the secretiveness? And the wanting to be alone? Mon dieu! What about the suitcase?"

Sarah gently touches his arm. "It's a long story."

Seeing the sincerity in their eyes, he turns around and bellows, "Gushie! Make that free beer for everyone!"

Jake walks over to Corky, who is still engrossed in the wedding song. "You can stop now, Corky," he says softly, patting his shoulder. "We didn't get married."

"Aw, gee, Jake. I was just startin' to get

used to the idea."

Growling in disdain, Jack jumps down from the piano and strides toward his water dish. Humans sure can be stupid sometimes.

After all the other guests have departed, Jake and Sarah tell the story of their adventure to Corky and Louie as they sit at a table, eating the last of the cake and drinking beer.

Corky's eyes are wide. "Boy! You guys are lucky to be alive!"

Jake smiles. "I know. For a while there, we thought it was all over, but we made it."

Looking at them questioningly, Louie asks, "What on earth did you find to do in that cave for all of those hours?"

After grinning in Sarah's direction, Jake turns back to him. "Oh, we just...talked."

With a sigh, Louie shakes his head. "Sacre bleu, you two are enough to break a Frenchman's heart. You talk entirely too much."

"On the contrary, Louie," states Sarah flatly, giving Jake the eye. "Not quite enough."

Just then, Willie walks slowly into the bar, the pain showing on his face as he gingerly holds his back. "Excuse my intrusion," he apologizes to Louie. "But, I was wondering if I might trouble you for some medication for a backache. Failing that, I would settle for a good bottle of Scotch."

They all look at him in surprise, and Jake asks, "What happened to you, Reverend?"

"I am afraid that I found myself in a rather compromising position today, and, as a result, I have had to carry a large burden on my shoulders." Wincing, he tries to straighten up.

"Where have you been these past few days?" asks Louie as he brings him the whiskey.

"Off chasing some wild geese, you might say," he replies, taking the bottle. "Danke and good-night." He nods to everyone and leaves.

"Did anybody understand a word he said?" asks Corky, staring after him in confusion.

Everyone shrugs and shakes their heads.

"Sometimes I think the Reverend's collar is on a little too tight," Louie states with conviction.

Returning to their conversation, Corky asks, "Hey, Jake, what did you and Sarah talk about while you were stuck in that cave?"

Sarah eyes Jake with interest as he starts to put another piece of cake in his mouth. "Yes, Jake. Please tell them what we were talking about.

That is, if you can remember."

Seeing her expression out of the corner of his eye, he tries to stifle a grin. "Oh, nothing really important," he says with a shrug.

She manages to conquer the urge to shove his cake up his nose while she rises from her seat. Instead, she puts on an air of indifference. "Well, on that note, I think I'll turn in. My tolerance level isn't what it used to be."

Watching her go up the stairs, Corky asks in bewilderment, "Will somebody wake me up when everybody starts making sense again?"

Jack barks twice in agreement.

As she slowly ascends the second level of steps, Sarah feels depressed. "Why do I always fall for the wrong guy?" she asks herself, approaching her door. With a heavy sigh, she opens it and enters her room. "Or, rather, why won't the right guy ever fall for me?"

Reaching for the light on her table, she turns it on and looks around, her eyes widening in surprise to find a single red rose sitting in a vase on her dresser. Walking over to it and lifting it out, she feels its fragrance fill her senses, and she is instantly transported to a different time and place -- the world of poetry and romance that she left far behind on her long road to adventure, a world that she has never missed more than she does at this moment.

Suddenly, she hears a noise behind her and turns quickly to find Jake standing in the doorway, smiling timidly at her.

"Jake, did you..." she asks in amazement, gesturing with the flower.

He looks down. "Yeah. I radioed in from the *Goose* while you were sleeping and asked Louie if he could find a rose to put in your room. I thought, well, that you might like to get one again, after all these years."

She stares at him speechlessly as he continues. "I realize that I can't bring the past back for you, Sarah, and I can't promise anything about the future. But, if you stick around for a while, maybe I could try to do something about the present." Glancing up at her, he smiles shyly. "I was kinda hoping that the rose could be a start. I know it's not much, but, is it okay for now?"

Walking over to him and looking into his eyes, she smiles warmly. "It's okay for now. And, besides, I've got nothing better to do for the next six or seven years, anyway!"

Their smiles start to broaden into grins, and we...

Freeze Frame
The End

