

The WAR of the ROSES

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It's late at night when Jake, Sarah, Corky, and Jack walk wearily into the Monkey Bar. Louie greets them from behind the counter and offers up some refreshment.

"What a day!" Sarah groans as she slumps into a seat and reaches for her glass.

"Boy! I'll say!" Corky agrees, leaning against the bar and quickly downing a huge swallow of beer.

Jack barks twice and lays down on the cool floor beneath Sarah's chair.

Louie stares at their tired faces with concern. "What on earth is wrong with all of you?"

"Well, first, that liquor distributor on Tagataya turned us down again on the champagne you ordered. That's the fifth time now," Jake complains, flopping down beside Sarah. "Then, the Goose wouldn't start, and it took hours to fix it. Then, we had to wait out a storm before we could come back."

"Not to mention that it was the hottest day of the year," adds Sarah, pulling at her damp clothes. "I wish I had the strength to take a bath, but I'm afraid I'd fall asleep and drown."

"Ah, ma cherie," Louie says with a twinkle in his eye. "I would be most happy to stay with you while you bathe to see to it that does not happen. All you need do is ask."

She gives him a wry smile and takes a sip of beer. "Thanks anyway, Louie. But, I think I'll just wait until tomorrow."

"Well, in that case," sighs Louie, feigning disappointment, "I do have something else that may bring some life back to you. You received a cable today from a friend of yours."

She brightens a little. "Is it from Whitney? She said she'd try to get back again before the end of the year."

"No," answers the Frenchman with a sideways glance at Jake. "This is from a friend of the male persuasion."

Sarah looks puzzled. "Who is it?"

"I have forgotten his name -- something Italian, I believe. I will get it for you."

While waiting for Louie to get the telegram, Jake starts to get a funny feeling in the pit of his stomach. He doesn't like the hopeful, expectant look that's coming over Sarah's face.

As Louie hands her the telegram, Jake looks upward and thinks, *Oh, God, don't let it be...*

"Doug Dradugio!" exclaims Sarah excitedly. "He's coming in on the *Clipper* tomorrow!"

Jake shoots a look toward heaven and turns to Sarah with a forced smile. "Hey, that's great."

"Who's he?" asks Corky in bewilderment.

"Oh, just somebody Sarah used to know in her way, long ago past."

She gives Jake a narrow-eyed look. "You're making me sound like a crotchety old lady! It was only six years ago! And, besides," she adds, "I not only knew him, I also loved him."

"I stand corrected," says Jake flatly as he reaches for his beer.

"I can't wait for you all to meet him!" Sarah bubbles happily. "I'm sure you'll really like him!"

"I'm sure, too," Jake mutters under his breath, draining his beer glass.

Louie glances at Jake and then turns to Sarah. "How did the two of you come to a parting of the ways?"

"Oh, it was just one of those things, Louie. We both wanted something different out of life."

"Did you get it?" asks Corky innocently.

She looks thoughtful and stares down at her beer glass. "Yes, Corky, I suppose we did."

Not liking the silence that is starting to envelope them, Louie changes the subject. "What was that you were saying about the liquor distributor?" he asks Jake.

"Oh, that joker at the warehouse refuses to place your order. He claims that there's a shortage of champagne coming in from Paris."

"Why that bandit! He is just angry with me because I refused to pay his new exorbitant price instead of the one we previously agreed upon! I have written the colonial governor, but, so far, I have received no reply."

"Well, I tried my best, Louie, but he wouldn't budge. You're either going to have to pay his price or forget about champagne for a while."

"Forget champagne! A Frenchman would rather forget how to breathe! I shall write a more forceful letter to the governor!"

Oblivious to this whole discussion, Sarah continues to stare into her empty glass. Her mind is far away at an airport in Boston, Massachusetts in 1932, reliving a heated argument. She remembers how she left Doug standing at the gate without a good-bye or a backward glance. She thought he was out of her life forever. But, now, he's coming back to remind her of the choice she made back then -- and, for the first time in her life, she truly wonders if it was the right one.

Watching her, Jake begins to feel uneasy. He hopes he's not reading too much into the look on her face, but he feels as if she's beginning to slip away from him. Instinctively, he reaches out to touch her arm. "Sarah," he says gently, bringing her out of her trance. "Are you ready to go

upstairs? If you are, I'll walk up with you. I think we could all use some sleep."

"Boy! You're right there!" Corky agrees. "How about you, Jack?"

Barking twice, the little dog yawns widely as Corky picks him up.

Mustering a smile, Sarah nods absently at Jake. "I wonder why he's coming here?"

"I guess we'll find out tomorrow," Jake says, taking her arm as they rise from their seats. He tries to look cheerful as they say their good-nights, but while he and Sarah walk silently up to her room, he can't shake the slight twinge of apprehension that's creeping over him.

Pausing in front of her door, she turns and looks into his eyes. "It's sort of scary to take another glimpse at your past, isn't it?" she asks with a meaningful look.

He glances down, avoiding her eyes. "You mean like when I thought I saw Elizabeth again?"

"Yes," she says, noticing his evasion.

"Yeah, it is; especially when you realize how time can cloud reality. No one is ever as wonderful as they appear to be in our memories." He looks back up at her. "Or else, we'd still be with them, instead of where we are right now."

And where are we right now, Jake? she thinks to herself, closing her eyes in anticipation of his goodnight kiss.

Their lips touch, and the familiar tingle of electricity runs through her, but she also senses a deeper feeling coming through. Is he somehow trying to answer her subconscious question, or is it just her own emotions rising to the surface? If only he would tell her how he feels! She needs to hear it now more than ever.

They part, and she looks up at him breathlessly, waiting to see if the words will finally come this time. But, as usual, all he says is, "Goodnight, Sarah."

"Goodnight, Jake," she sighs. Turning quickly around to hide her disappointment, she enters her room and shuts the door.

There was so much more I wanted to say to her, but couldn't. The words always seemed to stick in my throat. I was sure she had to know by now how I really felt about her, and I could only hope it would be enough to get her through this confrontation with her past.

Maybe there was nothing to worry about, anyway. Maybe it was only a case of an old friend wanting to see her again after all this time. Maybe he was fat and bald by now, or even married with kids and everything...and, maybe I was the King of Siam.



Sitting down in front of her dresser, Sarah studies her face in the mirror. Are those crow's feet near her eyes? She never realized before how fast time was flying by. How much longer could she wait to hear those words that may never come from Jake? How much longer could a woman of her background and intelligence pose as a singer in a backwater South Seas bar? How much longer could she get a thrill out of being a spy and risking her neck on some dangerous mission?

She's not sure she wants to know the answers to those questions. *This* is the life she wanted. She had rejected the one that Doug had offered her. But, what about now? What does she want *right now*?

She sighs heavily. "I'll bet Jake's right," she tells herself aloud while reaching for her nightgown. "Doug is probably very different from the way I remember him. I'll take one look at him tomorrow, and I'll know right away why I left him. Then, I can go on living this way without any more doubts." She smiles at herself as she looks in the mirror again. "And, besides -- those aren't crow's feet around my eyes -- they're laugh lines from being so happy with my life." She starts to feel a little better already.

I definitely didn't like the look of anticipation on Sarah's face as we all waited for the *Clipper* to dock, or the fact that she was wearing her prettiest dress. And, she seemed exceptionally beautiful that day, besides-- Or, did she always look that way, and was I only then just beginning to realize it?

Sarah's expression changes to jubilation as she reaches out and points to the ramp. "There he is!" she shouts, running toward the plane.

They all watch her while she embraces the handsomest man they've ever seen. He's tall, dark, and tan, and his muscular physique is discernable even through the cut of his tailor-made three-piece suit.

Corky stares in awe and leans toward his friend. "Boy, Jake! He puts Errol Flynn to shame!"

Trying to appear unconcerned, Jake shrugs. "I guess he's okay -- if you like that type."

Louie gives him a sly smile. "And, what type is that, mon ami? The handsome, rich, successful, intelligent type?"

Jake shoots him a look. "Listen, Louie, nobody's perfect. I'm sure he has a few flaws here and there just like the rest of us."

"Oui. But, I am afraid we only have a day and a half to find one. I do not believe that will be enough time."

Trotting over to sit at Jake's feet, Jack barks twice in agreement.

Jake's voice is a bit sharp. "Let's just can this conversation, okay? They're coming over."

Sarah and Doug walk toward them, arm-in-arm, laughing and talking the entire way. She looks positively smitten as she introduces him to her friends. "Doug, this is Louie. He's the Magistrate de Justice here. Louie, this is Doug Dradugio, the newly-appointed Consul-General of the Philippines."

"Je suis content de faire votre connaissance," says Louie with a bow.

Doug gives him a dazzling smile. "Ah, Louie, votre ile est tres belle."

"Merci, vous etes trop amiable."

During these pleasantries, Corky turns to his friend and whispers, "Gosh, Jake! He even speaks French!"

"So do most of the prisoners on Devil's Island," mutters Jake under his breath.

Just then, Sarah and Doug approach them. "This is Corky," she announces brightly. "He's the best mechanic there is, and he also plays a pretty mean piano. Corky, this is Doug Dradugio, an old friend of mine."

"Hiya, Doug," says Corky, reaching out his hand.

Doug shakes it and smiles. "Hey, Corky, I'm a piano man, myself. Maybe you can give me a few pointers."

Sarah smiles coyly at him. "Oh, come on, Doug, don't be modest." She turns to Corky again. "Back home in New England, Doug used to play for the Boston Symphony as a guest soloist on a number of occasions."

"Jeepers!" Corky exclaims with wide eyes.

Doug looks a little bashful. "Oh, it was nothing, really. Sarah always did make a big thing over stuff like that." He exchanges a warm smile with her.

Jake is turning green up to his eyeballs. *I can't wait to see what she's gonna tell me about him.*

They turn to him, and he puts on a frozen smile. Distracted by Doug's presence, Sarah begins, "And, this is Jack...I -- I mean, Jake..." She smiles apologetically at him.

Flashing her a stony look, he turns to Doug. "I'm Jake. Jack is the *dog*. Sometimes Sarah has a hard time telling the difference."

Doug shakes his hand. "I'm very glad to meet you. Sarah told me a little about you at the dock."

"Oh, yeah? Well, my bark is a lot worse than my bite."

The other man laughs, patting him on the shoulder. "She said you were a very fine pilot. Is that true?"

Jack barks once, but Jake pays no attention to him. "I'm okay. Why? Oh, no...wait. Don't tell me, let me guess..." He snaps his fingers. "I've got it! You were Lindbergh's secret co-pilot on his trans-Atlantic flight, right?"

Hearing the touch of jealousy in Jake's voice, Doug smiles knowingly. "No, actually, I'm a sailing man, myself. But, I've always admired pilots. It must be a pretty exciting life."

"It has its moments."

Sarah frowns, puzzled at Jake's behavior. She doesn't know whether to be amused or annoyed. So, opting for neither, she decides to ignore him for the moment.

"And, *this* is Jack," she bends down to pick him up, "the smartest dog in the South Pacific."

He growls.

"Sorry. In the world!" she declares with a laugh.

Jack barks twice and gives Doug the once-over with his one good eye.

Doug smiles and pats him on the head. "Hi, boy! How'd you like to help Sarah show me to my room? I'll spring for some steak for you later."

Jake interrupts, a condescending tone in his voice. "Bribing him won't help. It always takes Jack a while before he warms up to strangers."

Giving him a look that says, 'Speak for yourself, Buster,' the little dog jumps out of Sarah's arms. Barking twice, he trots over to the hotel and waits beside the outside steps.

Jake makes one last attempt at preserving his rapidly fading dignity. "Maybe I should try to explain. Jack's method of communication to you, Doug. You see, when he barks twice, it means--"

"Yes'," interjects Doug, his perfect white teeth widening into a bright grin. "And, one bark means 'no', right?"

Jake's defeated reply is barely audible. "Right."

With a smug backward smile, Sarah takes Doug's arm, and they both follow after Jack.

Crestfallen, Jake watches them go, turning away when Louie pats him on the shoulder.

"Ah, mon ami, you are doing very well. In only five minutes, you have managed to lose your ladyfriend and your dog. What are you planning to do for an encore?"

"I didn't lose anybody, Louie! They're just a little caught up in the newness of his arrival, that's all. Everything will return to normal by this evening -- you'll see."

"I certainly hope so!" Louie says with a smile as he turns to go back to the bar. "I would hate

to think that you will have alienated the entire population of the island by then, instead."

Ambling up to Jake, Corky's face is filled with concern. "You don't suppose that Sarah's fallin' for that guy again, do ya, Jake?"

"Of course not. Besides, even if she is, so what? He's leaving on the *Clipper* tomorrow. I'd say that's hardly enough time for him to sweep a level-headed woman like Sarah off her feet."

"Gee, I don't know. If anybody could do it..."

"Well, who cares, anyway! If she wants him, she can have him. I'm not about to stand in her way."

"You're not? But, Jake, I thought you..."

"Corky!" It comes out sharper than he intends and he pauses before going on more calmly. "I'm really thirsty. How about if I buy us some beer, what d'ya say?"

"Sure, Jake," Corky shrugs and follows his friend down the wharf to the bar.

Later that evening, in the crowded Monkey Bar, the four men sit at a corner table drinking wine and beer while waiting for Sarah to arrive. With the prospect of Doug's departure the next morning, Jake is feeling better than he had earlier. The afternoon has passed without any overt signs of a rekindled romance, and he feels reassured enough to make friends.

"I'd like to apologize for my mood this morning, Doug. I had a bad day yesterday, and I guess it spilled over a little."

The other man reaches out to shake his hand. "No hard feelings, Jake. Believe me, I know how it is to face the thought of losing Sarah. I guess you saw me as a rival."

Glancing at Louie and Corky, Jake tries to act nonchalant. "Oh, no, that wasn't it. I mean, Sarah and I are just...well...friends, that's all."

Corky and Louie stare at him while Doug eyes him with keen interest and says, "Really? I thought--"

Jake lets out a short laugh. "Nah, she's just a good kid."

A wide smile brightens Doug's face. "I'm really glad to hear you say that, Jake. You've helped me make up my mind."

A slight edge of panic rises in Jake's voice. "About what?"

"Instead of leaving tomorrow, I've decided to stay until the *Clipper* comes back through here again." Jake stares at him speechlessly as he continues, "You see, my original purpose in coming here was to try to get Sarah back. I haven't been

able to get over her from the moment she left me in '32. So, when I ran into Whitney in Washington, and she told me where she was, I knew I had to stop here on my way to the Philippines to see if she still had any feelings left for me. But, when I met you, I got the impression the two of you were involved, so I decided not to interfere. I'd never try to come between Sarah and any new happiness she may have found."

Jake begins to resemble a mannequin while he motionlessly listens to Doug go on, a frozen expression on his face.

"Now that you've shown me how wrong I was," Doug finishes with a grateful smile, "I'm going to do everything in my power to win her back."

Corky and Louie exchange subtle glances as they give Jake the eye, but their friend can only manage a faint, half-hearted grin.

Doug turns to Corky. "By the way, Corky, Sarah told me you have some rare old sheet music. I'd really like to see it, if you don't mind."

"Uh...sure, Doug." He gives Jake a quick glance. "It's right over at the piano."

They leave the table, and Louie allows a pregnant pause before he pats Jake's arm. "Very clever, mon ami. He played right into your hands. Now, he is giving you two weeks to find that flaw. I am certain one will pop up in that amount of time."

Jake is too deflated to give him a retort. *Why do I always do this to myself?* he wonders.

A few minutes later, after they are all back at the table, Sarah finally appears at the landing. She is a vision of loveliness in a blue chiffon dress as she seems to float down the stairs toward them.

Doug rises to meet her, and Jake envisions her floating out of his life, as well.

Taking her hand and leading her toward the table, Doug says softly, "She walks in beauty like the night, Of cloudless climes and starry skies, And, all that's best of dark and bright, Meet in her aspect and her eyes'."

She smiles dreamily and gazes up at him. "You used to read me that poem on our picnics together, remember?"

"How could I forget? It's always amazed me that Lord Byron could have written it without ever having met you."

Jake's loud cough stirs them from their reverie. As they sit down, Corky says, "Jake knows poetry, too, don't ya, Jake?"

Jake stares at him in confusion. "What?"

"You know -- remember the one that British sailor taught us? Let's see... How'd that go?"

Uh...oh, yeah. 'There was a young lady from France, Who used to put--'"

"Uh, Corky," Jake interrupts quickly, feeling his face beginning to turn red. "Why don't you get us some more beer?"

"Huh?...Oh, sure, Jake. I get it. You want to be the one to tell it, right?"

Jake nods and smiles weakly as Corky saunters off to the bar.

Biting her lips to keep from laughing, Sarah looks at Jake's embarrassed face. *It's too bad Doug didn't show up a little sooner,* she thinks to herself. *It's kind of fun to see Jake squirm like this. Maybe now he'll stop taking me for granted.*

Coming to the rescue with more wine, Louie hands the bottle to Doug. "I hope you like this vintage."

Without looking at the label, Doug deftly uncorks it, closes his eyes and waves the cork under his nose. "Baron de Rothchild, 1922, une annee tres bonne."

"Mon Dieu, you are correct! I have never seen that done before!"

Sarah smiles at Doug. "Doug's father had an excellent wine cellar. We used to sneak in and sample it sometimes when no one was looking."

Doug returns her smile. "Until the time when the maid caught us, and we had to give her a bottle so she wouldn't tell Dad."

She laughs at the memory. "That was the only time in my life that I was ever led astray," she says coyly.

"Oh, brother, bring out the shovels," Jake grumbles under his breath, turning to search for Corky. He gauges this to be about a seven-beer evening.

Doug sighs wistfully. "You know, Sarah, it's hard to believe that the last time I saw you, we parted on such bad terms. I hope the kindness you've shown me today is a sign that you've forgiven me for acting like such a fool."

"We both acted a little foolish that day. I guess we've grown up a bit since then."

"John LaFarge once said, 'The past, though it can never be relived, can always be repaired.' I hope you'll allow me to start doing that right now."

"As far as I'm concerned, it's forgotten already."

Jake begins to wonder how long he can stomach this. *It would serve them right if I threw up right now,* he thinks to himself wryly. *The only problem is they probably wouldn't even notice.*

Doug pours some wine in Sarah's glass and hands it to her. Gazing into her soft blue-green

eyes, he touches his glass to hers. "Ah, my love, take the cup that clears, Today of past regrets and future fears."

Smiling warmly at each other, they both take a sip.

"Hey, that was really swell!" exclaims Corky returning to the table. "Who said that? W.C. Fields?"

Jake rolls his eyes heavenward. "Corky, can I have a beer?"

"Sure, Jake, right here." Corky sits down and hands one to him.

Taking a deep swallow, he leans back in his chair. *It's gonna be a long night*, he thinks wearily.

"Ah, Louie, le vin est magnifique!" Doug declares, raising his glass toward him.

"You know, the man *does* speak English!" Jake snaps, gesturing at Louie with his thumb. "You really don't have to keep impressing us with your 'parlez-vous'!"

Sarah stares at him angrily, but Doug smooths it over. "I'm sorry, Jake. I guess I have been overdoing it a little. It's just that I rarely get a chance to practice all the French I studied in college."

Jake backs down as he feels Sarah's eyes penetrate through him. "It's okay," he says quietly.

Louie interrupts the deathly silence that follows. "I wish I had some champagne to offer you, but the liquor distributor has been giving me a hard time of late."

"What do you mean?" asks Doug.

"He is trying to gouge me into paying more for it than we agreed upon and it has done me no good to complain to the governor."

Doug brightens. "What kind of champagne is it? Dom Perignon?"

"Oui, why?"

"My father and I handled a few legal cases for them in Paris. I'll bet I could put a little pressure on this guy."

"Forget it," Jake chimes in, waving his hand. "That crook won't listen to anybody. He thinks he's a law unto himself. I've already tried everything -- including threats."

Louie eyes his friend coolly. "Well, perhaps it would not hurt to let Doug try. After all, we have nothing to lose but your pride, which, I believe it is safe to say, is already not faring too well this evening." He stands and motions to Doug to join him. "This way to the radio, s'il vous plait."

When Doug and Louie are out of earshot, Sarah

turns to Jake and fixes him with a piercing look. "You are really something today!" she says in a loud whisper. "I mean, jealousy is one thing, but, downright rudeness is quite another!"

"Jealousy!" Jake tries to look indignant. "Jealous of what? That walking encyclopedia? You must be kidding!"

"Then, why else are you acting like an immature adolescent?"

"Maybe I'm catching it from you! Have you taken a look at yourself lately? You're hanging all over him like a lovesick schoolgirl trying to get a date for the prom!"

She glares at him. "Really! Well, I guess instead I should start acting as shy as you always act when your old girlfriends come to town -- like the time you actually kissed that nun!"

"That was different! I didn't know she was a nun."

"Well, that's funny! I thought the black and white habit sort of gave it away, didn't you?"

"No! Because we always used to...I mean, she sometimes wore...uh...ahh, skip it!"

"That's the trouble with you, Jake! You're always at a loss for words when you need them the most!"

Corky sits with wide-eyed amazement, looking from one to the other as they continue to argue. Finally, he interrupts timidly. "Uh, can I say something?"

"What?!" they both shout, turning to him.

"They're comin' back," he says softly, pointing across the table.

Jake and Sarah give each other one last glare, putting on false smiles as Doug and Louie return.

"Ah, Sarah, your Doug is a godsend!" Louie beams, patting him on the shoulder. "In only five minutes, he had that thief groveling at his feet!"

"It must be getting awfully crowded down there," mutters Jake in disgust.

Sarah flashes him a look and then smiles up at Doug and Louie. "Well, Doug always did have a way with words," she says with special emphasis for Jake's benefit.

"Especially someone else's," Jake adds under his breath.

Louie turns to Jake and asks, "Will you fly to Tagataya tomorrow to pick up the champagne, mon ami?"

"Sure. It sounds like a lot more fun than this place is gonna be."

"Would you mind if Sarah and I tagged along?" Doug asks. "There are a few things I'd like to

pick up before I leave for the Philippines."

"But, Doug, what about the *Clipper*?" Sarah asks in surprise. "It leaves at ten tomorrow morning."

"Oh, you're way behind the times," says Jake with a sardonic smile. "Doug is staying for two whole weeks."

Sarah's face lights up with enthusiasm. "Really, Doug? That's wonderful! What made you change your mind?"

Jake can feel it coming as he closes his eyes and braces himself.

"Jake did," replies Doug happily.

Sarah turns to stare at Jake. "You did?"

He raises his eyebrows and ironically nods at her.

"How?" she asks, looking back at Doug.

"Well, when I first came here, I thought I might be in the way. But, Jake explained that the two of you were just friends. So, now, I'd like to stay for a while and spend some more time with you, that is if you don't mind."

Sarah feels her temper rise as she gives Jake a sideways glance. But, she manages to control it and smiles at Doug. "Mind?!" she exclaims, pouring on extra enthusiasm. "I'd like nothing better! I've needed a change of scenery around here for quite a while!"

Doug takes her hand. "Gushie promised to play a special song for us on the Victrola, if you would care to dance with me?"

She flashes him her brightest smile. "I'd love to."

As the music plays, other couples shuffle out to join them, and there is soon a small crowd dancing in front of the bar counter.

"Gee, Jake! I think Doug's got Sarah wrapped around his little finger!" says Corky with concern.

"Along with a few other people," Jake remarks, giving Louie a pointed look.

"Sacre bleu! I see no reason not to be friendly with him. After all, at the rate you are going, you should have them married by the end of the week!"

"Ya gotta do somethin', Jake!"

"What?" Jake gestures helplessly.

"I believe you are going about this all wrong, mon ami. Instead of being disagreeable, why do you not try to beat him at his own game? Show Sarah that you can be as debonair as he is, n'est-ce pas?"

"Sure!" Corky agrees excitedly.

Jake looks thoughtful for a moment, then smiles smugly. "You know, you're right, Louie. I have been known to dazzle a few women in my day, including Sarah."

"That is the spirit!" Louie declares as Jake rises from his seat and heads off toward the bar.

"Do ya really think he can do it, Louie?" asks Corky with a touch of doubt.

"One can only hope. After all, it only took one iceberg to sink the *Titanic*." To himself, he thinks, *However, so far tonight, our Jake has had all of the effectiveness of an ice cube.*

As one song ends and another begins, Jake taps Doug on the shoulder. "May I cut in?" he asks pleasantly.

"It's all right with me, if it's all right with Sarah."

"Why not?" Sarah gives Jake a frosty look. "What are *friends* for?"

When Doug goes back to the table, Jake starts to dance with her. Looking down a little, he says, "Listen, Sarah, about this friendship thing -- I...I'd like to explain."

"Please do."

"Well, he was saying...and, I thought...but, then he..."

"Eloquent as always, I see."

He starts to flare up. "Hey, I'm sorry! I guess I just don't have a 'way with words' like your friend the poet laureate! I can't believe you're actually falling for that corny stuff he's been spouting!"

Eying him with a withering look, she states flatly, "For your information, Jake, Doug happens to be very charming. Why don't you go see if he gives lessons?"

"Is that what you want from me? Other people's words coming out of my mouth?"

She stops dancing and glares at him. "It's better than having no words coming out of your mouth!"

He matches her glare. "Well, I can tell you this much -- if you're waiting to hear me speak French or say flowery little phrases, you've got one hell of a long wait!"

"Maybe I'm through waiting to hear you say anything at all!" She turns on her heel and storms back to the table, leaving Jake in the middle of the floor.

"Come on, Doug," she says, trying to sound calm. "Let's go outside. I could use some fresh air right now."

While Doug stands up to leave with her, she turns to Louie. "Please tell my 'friend' that Doug

and I will be joining him on his trip to Tagataya tomorrow. We both have some shopping to do." Then, after taking Doug's arm, she quickly pushes their way out of the bar.

"Don't say it, Louie," Jake sighs, raising his hands as he returns to the table.

"Boy, Jake! You really blew it!" Corky exclaims emphatically.

Jack, who walked in just in time for the 'floor show', barks his agreement.

"I believe that *they* have said it all," states Louie, raising an eyebrow.

"Now what?" Jake asks, flopping into his chair and taking a long swallow of beer.

Louie considers a moment. "Well, now, I suggest you buy a new suit."

"And, what's that gonna do?"

"Nothing, but, at least, you will be appropriately dressed for their wedding."

Jake gives him the eye. "Louie, this is serious. You gotta help me."

"I am afraid you may be beyond help, mon ami."

Jack barks twice and trots off toward the kitchen.

"Thanks," mumbles Jake, taking another swallow of beer. "Let's face it, I'm never going to be able to beat him in a charm contest."

"Jake, tonight you could not beat Genghis Khan in a charm contest," Louie announces with conviction.

"Okay, okay, I get the point."

"Maybe you can do better tomorrow," suggests Corky.

"Oui, they will be going with you to Tagataya. Perhaps you can impress her with your flying ability or something."

"Ahhhh, this is senseless!" Jake declares, his pride taking over. "Maybe I should just forget it. They were made for each other. Who am I to interfere?" He starts to build up his wall of defenses. "Besides, I lived without her before she came here, and I can live without her again. No woman is worth all this trouble!" He gets up from his chair and starts toward the stairs. "See you in the morning," he says over his shoulder as he begins to go up to his room.

Shaking his head Louie turns to Corky with a sigh. "I will never understand why you Americans insist on turning love into some kind of game."

"Don't look at me, Louie!" Corky protests with wide-eyed innocence. "I never even figured out the rules!"

Outside the hotel, Sarah and Doug walk along the pier in silence. Her face still shows traces of anger.

"Sarah, are you all right?" he asks, giving her a sideways glance.

She stops and manages a weak smile. "I'm sorry. I guess I made an idiot of myself in there. It's just that sometimes Jake makes me so mad, I could..." Her voice trails off at the disappointed look on Doug's face.

He stares at his shoes. "You really do care for him, don't you, and, as more than just 'friends'?"

She gently touches his arm, and their eyes meet. "Yes, I care for him. But, I'm beginning to wonder why."

"I guess I shouldn't have come here. The last thing I would ever want to do is cause trouble for you."

"It wasn't your fault. Jake's the one who's been causing trouble for me since the day I met him. This isn't the first time we've ever argued, God knows."

"Maybe I should leave tomorrow, after all."

"Not on your life!" she exclaims, taking his arm. "I'm glad you came! You've really given me a lift, and I'm looking forward to spending the next two weeks with you."

"But, what about Jake?"

"What about him? He has no hold on me! We haven't even...uh...I mean...we've only just..." She starts to get a little flustered.

Doug smiles at her while they climb the stairs to her room.

"Well...you know what I mean," she says finally.

There's a twinkle in his eye as he grins at her. "I think so."

Sarah lowers her head in embarrassment. "I guess you must think I'm pretty strange."

He reaches out to touch her face, and she gazes back into his eyes. "On the contrary. I think you're pretty wonderful."

Sarah's heart starts to pound as she anticipates his next move. Closing her eyes while he leans toward her, she expects to feel the excitement of his kiss. But, to her surprise, when the moment comes, there is nothing -- no bells, no violins -- only a calm, pleasant sensation.

After they part, she covers up her disappointment with a smile. "Goodnight, Doug."

"Goodnight, Sarah."

From the starry-eyed look on his face, it's obvious to her that he must have heard the bells and violins. She slowly closes the door and listens to his departing footsteps. "Darn it, Jake," she sighs to herself, "before you came along, that was all I ever felt, and it was enough."

Depression gives way to resentment, and she strides furiously across the room to her dresser. "And, it's going to be enough again!" she declares forcefully, splashing water on her face from her washbasin. "I'm not going to let that stubborn, noncommittal fly-boy ruin me for all men!"

As she starts to dry off with her towel, she sees her reflection in the mirror and stops to stare at herself for a moment. It slowly dawns on her why she has always needed to seek excitement in the outside world -- because she never found it within herself...until she met Jake. He seemed to touch a secret spark that was buried deep inside her, opening up a well of feelings and sensations she never knew existed. She closes her eyes and sighs sadly. "Why does life always have to have so many choices?"

Bright and early the next morning Jake enters the Monkey Bar, Jack following closely behind him. Jake takes a seat at the counter, and Louie pours them each some coffee.

Jake takes a sip and then looks around. "Well, where are Prince Charming and Snow 'Stickney' White? I'm not waiting around all day."

"They are in the kitchen, mon ami, packing a picnic lunch."

"How nice. Maybe I'll go pack some ants."

Louie smiles a little as he reaches for his cup. "Have you devised a new plan of attack yet?"

"I told you last night, Louie, I give up. It's her turn now."

"And, what if she decides to go off with him? Could you live with that?"

"Sure! Sarah's a big girl, and she's old enough to make her own decisions. Far be it from me to influence her."

"Jake, you know I am not one to give unwanted advice, but in this case, I feel I must. It has been obvious to me for some time that you care deeply for Sarah and that she cares for you. I believe if you just tell her or, at the very least, show her in some way how you feel, she will forget Doug in a minute. If you do not, out of some false feeling of pride, you may lose her forever. The choice is yours."

Jack barks twice, and Jake gives them each a look. "Well, you're right about one thing, Louie. I don't want your advice. Or *yours*, either," he says to Jack.

The little dog growls and struts out of the bar in a huff.

"Tell the flawless couple I'll be waiting in the *Goose*," Jake calls out behind him as he bangs his way through the swinging doors.

Louie shakes his head and sighs. Turning around to put some glasses away, he is surprised to find Sarah beside him.

"Was that Jake I saw leaving just now?" she asks with a touch of softness in her voice.

"Oui," answers Louie, eying her curiously.

"What did he want?"

"He wanted me to tell you and Doug that he would be waiting at the plane."

"Oh," she says quietly.

"Where is Doug?"

"He's still in the kitchen, giving the cook his recipe for veal jardiniere."

"I might have known," Louie says under his breath. He watches Sarah gaze toward the door and senses that she has something on her mind. "Is there anything I could do for you?"

She hesitates for a moment and then looks down. "Oh, Louie. I don't know what to do. Doug is so romantic and charming -- and kind and thoughtful -- and witty and intelligent and..."

"Do not forget 'thrifty, brave, clean and reverent'."

She doesn't smile as she looks back up at him. "Come on, Louie. This is no laughing matter. I think I'm going to have to make another important decision in my life...I mean, ordinarily, any girl would give her right arm for a man like Doug."

"I imagine that I hear the unmistakable sound of a 'but' coming up."

She smiles faintly and glances away. "But...last night when he kissed me goodnight...there was no magic -- no...~~fireworks~~ --" Her eyes return to search his face. "You know what I mean?"

"I believe so. And, with Jake?"

She sighs heavily and lowers her eyes again. "The Fourth of July."

"Then, that is your answer."

"What is?"

"You must follow your heart."

"Oh, Louie, I've been following my heart since I was twenty-two years old, and where has it gotten me? To a two-bit island in the South Pacific."

Louie raises his eyebrows in a disapproving look.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. It's just that I'm close to thirty already, and I'm afraid I'm going to wake up one day and find that I've missed out on the whole American dream. You know -- a husband, kids, a house with a white picket fence -- and that I'll realize it's what I really wanted all along. Only then, it'll be too late."

"But, Sarah -- to have all of those things without real love is worse than not having them at all."

"I think I do kind of love Doug in a way. It's just not a passionate sort of love. But, then, there are more important things in life than passion."

"Please, ma cherie!" says Louie indignantly. "You are talking to a Frenchman!"

She smiles. "Anyway, there's a lot to be said for stability, commitment, and responsibility, too."

"All of it not repeatable in polite company," Louie replies with distaste. "Except perhaps the word 'boring'."

"You're really a big help, Louie!" she says irritably.

"I am sorry I cannot give you the advice you want to hear. Perhaps you should write to Dorothy Dix and ask her."

"Ask her what?" inquires Doug as he enters the bar, carrying the picnic basket.

"Uh...what to take along on a picnic with a handsome man from your past," says Sarah quickly, giving him a nervous smile.

"How about 'a loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou'? Although I'd settle for just 'thou'."

As they start out the door together, she steals a glance back at Louie. Their eyes meet and he senses that what he said has made an impression on her. "Now, if I could only count on Jake to take my advice, also, perhaps everything would turn out all right." He pauses for a moment and considers the odds of that happening. "Hmmm. I wonder if I can get my good suit cleaned in time for Sarah's and Doug's wedding?"

While the *Goose* flies along toward Tagataya, Jake sits brooding at the controls. The sound of Sarah's and Doug's laughter coming from the back of the plane only adds to his foul mood. He puts on his radio headphones to try to shut them out, but the ensuing silence makes it worse by allowing his mind to dwell on the situation even more.

Sarah is trying to put on a good show, but Louie's words start to weigh heavily on her mind. She wonders what Jake is thinking and feeling right now -- and, at the very least, she wants to make amends for their fight last night. She excuses herself to Doug and walks up to the cockpit, sit-

ting down in the co-pilot's seat.

Jake glances over at her in mild surprise and removes the headphones.

"Are we in some kind of trouble?" she asks, pointing to the radio.

"Oh, no, I just wanted to hear the sound of another human voice for a while."

"Will mine do?"

He finds it hard not to return her warm smile so he turns to look at the instrument panel for a moment. "I guess."

"Boy, the ocean is really beautiful today, isn't it?" she asks, gazing out of her window.

He knows she's trying to be friendly again, but his pride won't let him give in. "It looks the same as it did the other 4,000 times I've flown over it."

She starts to feel a little annoyed, but manages to control it. She realizes he's just being his usual stubborn self. "Well, I was only making conversation," she says softly.

"Did you come all the way up here just to tell me about the ocean?"

"No. Actually, I wanted to ask you to come along on our picnic with us," she says cheerfully. "How about it? There's plenty of food."

"Aw, gee, Sarah, I'm afraid I can't. I left my book of sonnets and my French dictionary back at the hotel."

She gives him an icy stare. "But, I see you did bring along your feeble wit."

He matches her eye for eye. "It may be feeble, but at least it's mine," he responds, raising his voice a bit.

"Of course it is!" she exclaims, rising from her seat. "Who else would want it!" She turns on her heel and storms back down the aisle. Jack looks up at her from his parachute seat and eyes her questioningly.

"Don't look at me! He's your owner!"

Jack barks once in protest.

Casting a hostile glance behind him, Jake presses harder on the throttles. This trip can't be over soon enough for him.

Doug glances at the stack of champagne crates waiting for them on the dock in Tagataya. "Do you want me to help you with those?"

"Nah," says Jake with a wave of his hand. "You two run along on your picnic. I can handle them myself." He gives Sarah a sharp look. "Probably by the time you're halfway through solving all

of the world's problems, I should have the champagne loaded and ready to go."

"Try to see if you can manage to keep the plane in the air this time," says Sarah coolly. "I don't want to have to wind up dumping it all in the ocean again."

"No, this time I think I'll dump the people," Jake mumbles to himself, glaring at her.

"Are you sure you won't change your mind and come along?" asks Doug. "It might take quite a while to get all my shopping done after the picnic."

"Oh, don't worry about me. I'm sure I can find something else to do."

"Yes, maybe you can find another poker game and gamble away Jack's other eye," says Sarah, returning his glare.

The little dog looks accusingly at Jake and growls.

"Now, don't get *him* started," Jake bristles angrily.

"Well, I don't blame you, Jack," says Sarah, nodding at him. "If you know what's good for you, you'll come along with us!"

As they start off, Jack hesitates for a moment and gives Jake a penetrating look.

"Hey, come on, Jack. You don't really think I would..."

He barks twice, growls again and starts to follow after Sarah and Doug.

"Jack! Come back here!" Jake shouts. But it's too late. He's already out of sight.

"All right, go with them. I couldn't think of a worse punishment for you if I tried!"

"As for you, Miss Sarah Stickney White," he mutters, reaching for the first crate, "I'm glad you finally met your match! I hope the three of you will be very happy together -- you, Doug, and Lord Byron!"

As he lifts the box, he feels a strange sensation running through him. He stands motionless for a moment and stares at the rest of the crates while a memory comes back to him. This is the exact spot where he first laid eyes on Sarah as she leaned against other champagne crates, fending off the advances of her manager.

Even in those first few moments, as I watched her, I could sense that there was something special about her -- something that made her seem to be worth fighting for.

He puts the box back down and sighs, a feeling of deep depression coming over him. "She still is worth fighting for. The only trouble is, this time, I can't fight with fists -- I have to fight with words. And, in that department, Doug has me

hopelessly out-gunned."

While he gazes dejectedly down at the dock, his eyes land on a shiny green object wedged in the corner of the cement border around the pier. When he pries it loose and examines it, he finds that it's a little piece of glass. A sheepish grin breaks out on his face as it reminds him of the bottle she broke over his head that day.

"Come to think of it," he says to himself wryly, "I was hopelessly out-gunned back then, too."

He lets out a short laugh, throwing the glass up in the air and catching it. Stuffing it into his jacket pocket, he thinks back on all they've been through since that day -- the adventures, the laughter -- the tender moments.

Maybe Louie was right. Maybe he could beat Doug at his own game.

When Sarah, Doug, and Jack return, loaded down with assorted packages, they see Jake standing near the *Goose*, smiling at them. Sarah immediately becomes wary, but his manner is extremely cordial.

"Did you have a nice time?" he asks pleasantly.

Jack barks twice and Sarah says with a hint of sarcasm, "Yes. Sorry you weren't there."

"We must have bought out half of Tagataya," says Doug happily.

"Let me help you with those," Jake offers, reaching for Sarah's packages.

She eyes him curiously as she hands them to him.

"Well, I see you did get all of the crates put aboard," says Doug, looking around.

"Nothin' to it. I even had enough time to do a little shopping of my own. Here ya go, boy," he says, stooping down to give Jack a package of beef jerky.

The dog eyes him suspiciously, then slowly walks over to sniff Jake's breath. After convincing himself that Jake is sober, he readily tears into the wrapper.

Jake laughs and stands up. "After you," he says, pausing beside the side hatch and gesturing with his hand to Sarah.

Giving him an uncertain look she steps into the plane and looks around cautiously, as if she expects something to pop out at her. But, nothing does, and she makes her way to her seat, followed closely by Doug and Jack.

Sarah's eyes follow Jake in wide-eyed amazement as he walks up the aisle toward the cockpit, whistling softly to himself. Doug looks at her questioningly, and she raises her eyebrows and

shakes her head. *Jake Cutter, you are the eighth wonder of the world*, she thinks to herself.

It is early evening when the *Goose* lands back in Boragora. Jake helps Doug and Sarah with their packages and then stands by the cargo door.

"Aren't you coming?" asks Sarah.

"In a minute. I have a few things to check out in the *Goose* first. I'll catch you later."

"Thanks for taking us," says Doug.

"Don't mention it -- anytime," says Jake with a wave. "Oh, Sarah, would you ask some of the guys in the bar if they'd come down and help me with the champagne crates?"

"Sure," she replies with a warm smile. Then, she turns to walk off with Doug.

Doug can see by the look on Sarah's face that she's glad Jake is being friendly to her again. He begins to realize that, in spite of their many arguments, there's a lot of affection between them. And, now that it seems Jake has stopped digging his own grave, Doug realizes he's going to have to work a little harder to win Sarah away from him.

Time to bring out the heavy artillery, he thinks to himself as they reach the porch.

Sarah turns to him and says, "I'm going to go in and get someone to help Jake. Would you mind taking my packages up to my room?"

"Of course not," he replies gallantly, allowing her to load him up.

"I'll see you in the bar later, okay? Oh, and by the way, you're in for a big treat tonight. You're actually going to get to hear me sing!"

He smiles warmly at her. "If it's true that 'music is only love in search of words', then, I'm sure it'll find them in the beauty of your voice."

She gazes into his eyes for a moment. "I... uh...better get into the bar or Jake will soon turn into Mr. Hyde again."

He nods and smiles again. Then, he starts toward the stairs.

"Why can't Jake ever say things like that?" she sighs dreamily as she watches him go.

It is much later as Sarah sits in her room, putting the finishing touches to her hair. Suddenly, there is knock on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's Doug."

"Just a minute." She gives herself the once-over in her mirror. Then, satisfied with what she

sees, calmly walks over and opens the door.

He looks very handsome in a pale gray suit, and when he sees her, his face lights up with admiration. "'So fair -- she takes the breath of men away who gaze upon her unaware!'"

Feeling the warmth radiating from him, she gives him a nervous smile. "Thank you. Do you like my new dress?" She holds the skirt out a little, modeling it for him.

"It's lovely," he replies, noticing how the dark green of the dress brings out the color of her large, beautiful eyes. Then, he reaches into his pocket and takes out a small box. "And, I hope that you'll allow me to make it even more so by accepting this gift as a token of my appreciation for all you've done for me since my arrival."

"What is it?" she asks when he hands her the box.

"It's just something I bought in Tagataya while you were trying on dresses. When I saw it, it brought back wonderful memories of our past, and I couldn't resist it." He pauses. "I hope it will do the same for you."

Her hand trembles as she opens the lid. Then, her eyes widen in surprise when she sees what's inside. Sitting on a bed of black velvet is a dazzling silver pin in the shape of a rose. Several rubies are set into the petals, and two small emeralds adorn each leaf. She stares up at him speechlessly.

Putting his hands on her arms and looking intensely into her shining eyes, he recites, "'Twas in a foreign land upon a sultry day, I chanced to see a rose that took my breath away, So beautiful it seemed, I scarce could pass it by, Yet feared to take it home, lest it should wilt and die. But, when I'm gone again, in my dreams I'll see, Upon a foreign strand, a rose that blooms for me!'"

He leans slowly toward her, and she feels swept away by the romance of the moment. But, when they kiss, the feeling fades again, just like before, and her frustration becomes almost unbearable.

After they part, she looks down so he can't read her eyes. "Doug...I can't accept this," she says haltingly. "It's just...too much."

He lifts her face toward him. "Nothing is too much for you. There are no strings attached. I just wanted you to know how wonderful it is to be with you again. Please keep it."

She looks at his pleading face and musters a smile. "Okay."

He looks relieved. "Now I'll leave you alone so you can finish getting ready. Try not to be too long. I can't wait to hear you sing!"

She smiles and nods at him as he flashes his brilliant grin and walks away. Then, she looks down at the rose and feels the turmoil building inside her. "What am I going to do?" she sighs,

going back to the mirror to pin it on her dress.

Jake eyes his mirror with satisfaction. "Not bad," he says approvingly to the reflection of himself dressed in his new beige vested suit. "And, now, for the 'piece de resistance' as good old Doug would say." He reaches toward the corner of his dresser and picks up a single red rose that he had been keeping in a vase since their return from Tagataya. "Well, Doug, you are about to be 'hoisted on your own petard' so to speak," he says proudly, impressing himself with his analogy. "But, don't worry. I'll be glad to fly you back to Tagataya tomorrow so you can catch the *Clipper*. As a matter of fact, I'll even spring for the gas!"

He steps smartly along the colonnade toward Sarah's room, humming to the muffled sound of the music coming from the bar below. When he reaches her door, he hides the rose behind his back and knocks lightly.

"What happened, Doug? Did you forget something?" asks Sarah as she comes to the door and opens it.

She stares at Jake in wide-eyed awe. Just seeing him in his suit sends the electricity running through her.

Jake's initial happiness at seeing the impression he's made on her starts to vanish rapidly when his eyes rest upon her pin. There's not the slightest doubt in his mind where it came from, and he feels his wall begin to go up as he realizes he's been out-gunned again.

"Jake. You look so..." she can't finish it, giving him a breathless smile.

"Yeah, you, too," he says with a touch of resentment. "Especially with that pin. Something new?"

She's too smitten to hear the edge in his voice. "Huh? Oh, this." She looks down at it. "Doug gave it to me a few minutes ago -- just to thank me for all I've done, he said." She tries to make light of it.

He gives her an insinuating look. "You must have done quite a *lot*."

The glow begins to fade as her own resentment starts to surface. "And, what's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing," he mumbles, looking away for a moment. "Anyway, I just came to tell you that I won't be coming down to the bar this evening. I have a lot of work to do on the *Goose*."

"In that suit?" she asks skeptically.

He's at a loss for a second, but recovers quickly. "Of course not! I just wanted to show it to you to get a woman's opinion. I thought I might wear it to Tagataya next weekend. Who knows? Maybe I'll get lucky."



"Oh! Well, have fun!" she exclaims, her anger rising. "It's too bad you're not coming to the bar tonight -- maybe you could pick up someone there!"

"I doubt it. I'm sure everyone's heard by now that you'll be singing tonight, so the place'll probably be pretty empty. Besides, I could use a little peace and quiet this evening."

"As far as I'm concerned, you can have peace and quiet for the rest of your life!" she shouts, slamming the door in his face.

Jake stands looking agonizingly at the door for a moment. He wants to knock on it again and apologize to her, but he just can't do it.

When she hears him finally walk away, Sarah goes back to her mirror and stares at it furiously. "I'm through, Jake Cutter. Do you hear me? Through! Through with your stubbornness and your changeable moods! Through with your caustic remarks and your inability to commit yourself! Through with waiting forever for nothing! I have a chance now to have a real man in my life, and nobody's going to stand in my way!"

She reaches for the handle and opens the back door. "And, that goes for you, too, Louie!" she mutters to herself, stomping down the stairs. "I don't care if I don't feel passion for Doug now. Maybe in time I will. But, even if I never do, I still don't care! I lived twenty-eight years without it before, and I'm sure I can manage to live without it again!"

Reaching the landing, she takes a deep breath and flashes a dazzling smile at Doug when she spots him sitting with Corky and Louie. With each step she descends, she pushes Jake further from her thoughts, until, by the time she arrives at their table, she has him completely out of her mind.

Outside the bar, Jake is sitting on the dock where he has been for the past few hours. Looking down at the rose in his hand, he feels several emotions running through him -- jealousy, anger, regret, despair, and finally resignation. He gently drops the flower into the lagoon, and watches it float away. "It's over," he sighs. "He's won the War of the Roses. I can't fight him anymore, and, what's more, I don't even want to. If he's what she wants, then she should have him."

He feels a tap on his shoulder and looks up to see Corky's concerned face.

"Are you okay, Jake?" he asks, offering him a bottle of beer.

"Sure, Corky. Thanks." He takes the bottle and drinks a little.

"Uh...Jake...you better get into the bar quick. Sarah and Doug are gettin' kinda cozy."

Jake gives him a faint smile. "I really appreciate what you're trying to do, Corky, but I think it's time we all got back to worrying about more important things than Sarah's love life.

Something tells me it's not going to be any of our concern much longer."

"But, Jake! You can't just...just let him come in here and...and...and take her away!"

Jake stands up and pats his shoulder. "How about taking a look at the port carburetor? I didn't like the way the engine was sounding on my way back here today. I'll join you as soon as I get changed."

Corky nods dejectedly. "Sure, Jake." Then, he turns and slowly shuffles off toward the Goose.

"Sarah could make anyone love her, even Corky," Jake says to himself, sadly watching him go.

It's funny how you can go on for years, living your life without a care, and, then, someone comes along and changes everything. Before you know it, they become a part of you, and if they leave, they take that part away forever. All of a sudden, you start to realize that, either with them or without them, your life is never going to be the same again.

As they stand at the door to Sarah's room, Doug takes her hand. "I had a wonderful time tonight, Sarah."

"So did I," she says with a smile.

"You know, it almost seems as if that whole period of our lives that we spent apart never existed -- at least, it does to me. I feel as close to you now as I did back then...maybe even a little closer."

Sarah tries to suppress the touch of panic creeping into her heart. She knows what he's about to say, and she's spent all night convincing herself that she wants to hear it.

"I love you, Sarah. I've never stopped loving you. I know that I can't hope that, after all these years, you could feel the same for me. But, if time is all you need, I'll give you all the time in the world. Just please tell me there's a chance."

She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. There they are. The three words she's waited to hear for so long. She may not feel the tingle of excitement that she always thought she'd feel, and it may not be the voice that she wanted to hear say them, but it's a nice, pleasant feeling and a sincere, caring voice.

She opens her eyes and looks up at him, making her decision. "You don't have to wait, Doug. I love you, too," she says quietly.

He looks at her in surprise and then puts his arms around her. "Are you sure?"

"Of...course, I am."

He kisses her and she tries to respond to the

strong feelings that are emanating from him, but she can't. She tells herself it doesn't matter but, somewhere inside her, she knows it does.

When they part, he is overwhelmed with emotion. "Will you marry me?"

She knows she can't turn back now. She's past the point of no return. She has to follow through on her decision all the way. Her mind is made up to marry him, and no matter what her heart says, she's going to do it. Her heart has had its way with her for far too long. Now it's her head's turn.

Her reply is barely audible. "Yes, I will."

She sees the rapture on his face and only wishes she could feel it, too.

He kisses her passionately and then reaches to open her door.

"Uh...Doug..." she says uncomfortably, catching his intent. "We may be a little older now, but the rules are still the same."

He stops and smiles apologetically. "I'm sorry. I guess I got a little carried away."

I'm glad someone did, she thinks to herself. But, she manages a weak smile. "It's okay."

"I can't wait to see the looks on everyone's face tomorrow when we tell them our news!"

"Neither can I," she says under her breath. "Especially..." She stops, refusing to think about him at this moment.

"I'm going to dream about you tonight," he says softly, giving her one last kiss. "I love you."

"Me, too," she says weakly, feeling some of her resolve starting to give way. She just can't seem to make herself say the words again.

"See you in the morning -- and every morning for the rest of our lives," he says with a smile as he backs away. Then, he turns and walks toward his room.

Shutting her eyes for a moment, she reaches for the doorknob. "For the rest of our lives," she repeats to herself while a strange sadness starts to come over her. She walks slowly into the room and sits down on the bed, Jake's face appearing in her mind. She can no longer stop herself from thinking about him. If he only could have admitted his feelings for her or even just asked her to stay -- anything that would have shown her that she meant more to him than his stubborn, male pride. But, she's tired of living on just hopes of a future with him. Time is running out on any future at all. And, if he's determined to remain silent, then she'll be just as determined to see this marriage to Doug through to the end -- even if it's not exactly everything she's always dreamed of.

"It'll be close enough," she says quietly carefully removing the rose pin and looking at it

in her hand. "I just know it will."

It takes several days before the shock of Sarah's and Doug's announcement begins to wear off on Corky and Louie. But, it's finally replaced by despair as they helplessly watch the days fly by, knowing that Jake will not do anything to make her stay. They've pleaded with him every day, but it falls on deaf ears. Even Jack has gotten nowhere with him. Jake tells them that he doesn't care -- that he's, in fact, glad that she's going, and he refuses to discuss it any further.

You know, if there's one thing I've learned about human nature, it's that you can talk yourself into almost anything if you try hard enough. By the time the *Clipper* arrived two weeks later, I had myself nearly convinced that Sarah's leaving was all for the best. She'd been a distraction to me -- a barrier to the carefree life I wanted to live, and I thought that, without her, I could go back to living it again. Just to prove that I didn't need her, I stayed away from her for the whole two weeks. I told myself that, after all, she was just a woman like all the others I've known in my life -- nothing special. So, okay -- maybe I did used to look forward to seeing her warm smile greeting me every morning in the Monkey Bar, and maybe I kinda liked the way she always made me feel as if all those slightly off-key songs she sang were meant only for me, and maybe it did sorta get to me to see that certain look she used to have in her eyes whenever she allowed her inner feelings to show a little. That still didn't mean I couldn't live without her.

Oh, there's one more thing I learned about human nature. Sometimes you can't believe everything that somebody tells you, not even when you're the somebody.

Sarah hasn't had much time to think about leaving as Doug treats her to a whirlwind courtship. Each day is filled with canoe rides around Borabora, hikes up to the volcano, picnics on the beach, and boat rides to the neighboring islands. Each evening, they dine alone by candlelight in the back room of the Monkey Bar on gourmet delicacies that Doug has ordered in from Tagataya especially for them. After dinner, they take moonlit strolls around the lagoon and talk about their past while Doug picks her a wild flower or two. It's all so romantic that Sarah soon finds herself falling under Doug's magic spell. Whatever doubts she may have had in the beginning start to fade as Jake becomes a distant memory. She has managed to force him out of her mind. His absence has proven to her that he doesn't care, so she refuses to let him penetrate her reverie. With each day that goes by, she becomes more and more convinced that she's making the right decision. Doug really is the man of her dreams. He's open and honest and loving and kind, and he treats her as if she were on a pedestal. It's been a long time since she's been up there, and all she knows is that she's beginning to like the view.

Finally, it's the night before their departure, and everyone but Jake is at the little farewell party that is just now starting to break up. The mood is somber as Corky, Louie, and Jack walk them to the steps.

Sarah feels a lump form in her throat as she gives the Monkey Bar a long look. This will be the last night she will ever spend in it, and the memories begin to flood her mind.

Sensing that she's in need of support, Doug puts his arm around her. "I know how you must feel. But, don't worry. We'll come back and visit whenever you want." He turns to Louie. "Is that all right with you?"

"You are both welcome at any time. Your old room will always be waiting for you -- free of charge."

Sarah smiles weakly. "Please don't start with the goodbyes already, Louie, or I'll never make it 'til tomorrow."

"You are right, ma cherie. For now, let us just say *bonne nuit*."

"G'night, Sarah," says Corky, his eyes welling up.

Jack adds two sad barks, and she bends to stroke his soft fur.

"Goodnight -- don't let the bedb--" She feels her own tears begin to build up and she can't finish it. "Well, you know what I mean."

Doug understands their sadness, but finds it hard to contain his own joy. With a smile, he says goodnight, and leads Sarah upstairs.

Corky, Louie, and Jack exchange melancholy looks while they watch them go.

"Tomorrow we will lose the brightest presence this island has ever known," Louie says quietly. "And, with her, will go all of the sparkle from our lives."

Jack barks in agreement.

"If only Jake would do somethin'! I'll bet she'd stay if he asked her to!"

Louie pats Corky's shoulder. "We have tried, mon ami, but he will not listen. All we can do now is hope for some kind of miracle."

As she and Doug stand at her door, Sarah manages to regain her composure. She even feels a little relieved to know that she will soon be away from this place and the memories it contains. She has truly accepted the idea of marriage to Doug, and she feels strongly now that she has enough love for him to make it work.

Doug puts his arms around her. "Tomorrow we're off to the Philippines and a whole new life! Let's get married as soon as we get off the plane!"

She smiles at his enthusiasm. "After 3,000 miles, I don't think I'll be in any shape to get married. I'm sure we can survive until the next day."

"Well, it'll be hard, but I guess I'll make it." Then, he hugs her and sighs with happiness. "Oh, Sarah, I can't tell you how glad I am that you finally came to your senses about that silly notion you used to have. I mean, this is some life of adventure -- living and singing in a seedy tropical bar! If I'd have known this, I would have come to rescue you months ago. I'm sure you may think you're going to miss the friends you've made here, but just think of all that's waiting for you in Manila -- a mansion, limousines, servants, diplomatic receptions, lazy afternoons by the pool. And, on top of all of that, you'll have me to take care of you. What more could you ever want?"

The warning bells go off inside her head when she recognizes the old condescending tone in his voice and the familiarity of his speech. He's offering her the same things that she ran away from so long ago. *It's different now*, she thinks to herself, trying to calm her pounding heart. *I've had my share of excitement. Now it's time for all of this.* But, the while thumping continues as she looks up at him and forces a feeble smile. "I can't wait."

Too enraptured to notice her hesitation, Doug leans forward to kiss her. By now, she's used to feeling nothing from his kisses, and it hasn't bothered her as much as it did before -- until this moment.

"Well...goodnight," he says with a loving smile, turning to walk away.

"Goodnight," she says softly as she goes into her room and shuts the door, leaning against it for a moment. She tells herself that all she has to do is get through this night, and then her doubts will all be behind her.

Down at the lagoon, Jake is standing on the shore, staring out across the ocean, thinking of Sarah.

For a while there, I really thought I was over her. But, now that her departure was imminent, I just couldn't get her out of my mind. I imagined that I could almost see the Philippines as I looked toward the horizon, and my mind drifted back to the time when I went there to track her down when everyone thought she had died. He remembers the moment that he finally found her, and the joy with which he swung her in the air. I knew then that someone who had made me feel so alive couldn't possibly be dead. But, now, I felt all the life ebbing out of me like the tide in the lagoon.

He sighs and sticks his hands into his jacket, absently playing with an object in his pocket, until he suddenly recalls what it is. Pulling out the little green piece of glass, studies it, his face slowly lighting up into a hopeful smile.

I just couldn't let her walk away, not after

all we'd been through. I knew I had to give it one last try.

Sarah is just about to get undressed when she hears a knock on her door. "What now?" she mumbles to herself. She was hoping to have a little time alone tonight.

She opens the door, and her heart skips a beat when she sees Jake standing there. They gaze at one another and she feels waves of different emotions washing over her -- the old familiar tingle of excitement at his presence, the deep feeling of love that she had tried to suppress, the hopeful anticipation that he's come to ask her to stay -- and the frustration of knowing that she can't stop herself from feeling the other three. But, she's determined not to let any of them show. "Oh... Jake. What are you doing here?"

"I...uh...just wanted to see if you were okay."

"And why shouldn't I be?" She's not about to make it easy for him, not after all this time.

"Well, I...uh-- Look, Sarah, do you have any idea how upset Corky is by your leaving? You're the only woman he's ever been close to in his life."

So you're still playing games even now, aren't you, Jake? she thinks, attempting to hide her disappointment. *You're going to start using other people's feelings as excuses to make me stay instead of your own. Well, I'm afraid it's much too late for games now.*

She tries to appear calm as she looks at him. "I'm sure Corky will survive without me. After all, he still has his other friends...and you."

"Well, what about Jack? Who's gonna give him table scraps and take care of him when he's sick? You're the only person in the world that he's ever let give him cod liver oil."

"I guess you're just going to have to start taking some responsibility."

Seeing that he's getting nowhere fast, he tries a different approach. "What about your assignment here? Or did you forget you were a spy in the midst of all this hoopla?"

"I've already radioed HQ, and they told me they have a man they can send over right away."

"Oh, swell! I can't wait to hear *him* belt out a torch song!"

"I'm sure he'll have a different cover."

"Well, then, that's another thing. What's Louie supposed to do without a singer?"

"In some people's opinion," she says testily, "he's been doing without one all along."

Jake glances behind her as he becomes aware of

a sweet, pungent fragrance coming from within her room. "Where the hell did all those flowers come from?" he asks, eying the vases of roses that seem to fill the room. He knows the answer, but it will at least give him some time to think.

"Doug had them brought in by boat a few days ago. Aren't they beautiful?"

"Yeah, sure. If you don't mind living in a greenhouse."

"It's better than living in a fantasy world."

"Oh, and I suppose you're not. Don't you remember what you told me when we were trapped in that cave?"

"As I recall, it wasn't me who had a problem with their memory that day."

"You told me then that you could never have been happy with any other life but the one you chose. Now, all of a sudden, you've got the idea in your head that you're going to want what you didn't want before."

"I've done a lot of thinking since then, and, now, I realize that I was young and naive when I made that choice. Maybe it's time we all decided to grow up."

"Are you including me in that statement?"

"Well, if the flying jacket fits..."

"Listen, Sarah, I'm not the one who's talking myself into marrying somebody I don't love."

"And what make you think I don't love Doug?"

"You can't love him because you love..." He stops himself quickly. "You don't really love him -- you're just in love with his...roses," he gestures toward her room.

"There are many kinds of love, Jake," she says evenly.

"Yeah? Well, that's not the kind that makes a marriage work."

"What would you know about that kind?"

They stare defiantly at each other for a long moment. Then, Sarah says, "Well? Have you said everything you came here to say? Because if you have, I'd like you to leave now so that I can get some sleep. I have a big day ahead of me tomorrow."

"I guess I have only one more thing to say," he declares icily. "And, I'll even put it in French, so you can start getting used to it. Bon voyage!" Then, turning quickly, he storms away.

She slams the door, feeling the rage build up within her. "Ohhh, Jake Cutter, you are the most obstinate, pig-headed, arrogant man I've ever known!" she mutters angrily to herself, throwing a few remaining things into her suitcase. "I'm the best thing that's ever happened to you, and you're

too stupid to admit it! Well, it serves you right that I'm marrying Doug! Your loss is going to be his gain! Fireworks or no fireworks, I'm going to make this marriage work if it's the last thing I ever do!"

She stops for a moment and looks at her suitcase as her eyes fill with tears. She knows that, in spite of everything she's just said, Jake is the only man she will ever truly love. She knew from the moment she saw him standing at her door just now. Or, was it from the first moment she ever saw him? Why did he have to come back now and remind her of it just when she had almost forgotten how it felt?

"I can't let you get to me, Jake," she says to herself, closing her eyes tightly. "Not this time. This time is too important. Doug will be able to make me happy -- I'm sure of it. I'm not a child anymore who needs a thrill a minute. Right now, all I need is someone who makes me feel loved and needed. I only wish it could have been you."

She lays back on her bed and stares at the ceiling. "I guess we can never get everything we wish for. So, instead, sometimes we have to settle for what we need."

Later that night, Sarah tosses and turns in her sleep, as a frightening dream starts to take hold of her. She sees herself standing in a swimming pool on an estate, surrounded by people she doesn't know. They are all gathered around the sides of it, staring at her, and when she looks down to see why, the water instantly turns into quicksand. She screams for help, but the people have disappeared. Instead, she sees Doug standing near the edge throwing roses at her with a smile on his face. She shouts to him and begs him to save her, but he can't understand what she's saying because he only speaks French. As she feels herself sinking deeper, she hears a sound high above her and glances up to see the *Goose* flying overhead. She waves and screams, trying to get Jake's attention, but he is too far beyond the reach of her voice. The last thing she sees are the rose petals all around her as her head slowly sinks beneath the surface of the quicksand.

Sitting up with a start, she opens her eyes widely, feeling the cold, damp sweat envelope her. Her heart races, and she can't breathe as the fragrance of the roses in her room starts to suffocate her. Jumping out of bed, she runs to her window and takes a deep breath of the cool night air. "It was just a nightmare," she whispers, trying to calm down. But, the memory of it won't fade away. She walks over to her basin to splash cold water on her face and stares at herself in the mirror. "Oh, my God. What am I doing?" she asks herself in dismay.

The next morning, in the Monkey Bar, everyone but Jake is gathered near the bar counter, talking softly among themselves. Sarah feels almost numb, but she tries not to show it while she holds on to Doug's arm.

Just then, a *Clipper* steward walks in and announces that the plane is now boarding. They all trade looks and then file out of the bar with the other passengers.

When they get to the dock, Corky feels awful about Jake's not being there, so he tries to make an excuse for him. "Jake is real busy this mornin', Sarah, doin' somethin' with the *Goose*. He told me to tell you goodbye for him."

Sarah nods and gives him a faint smile. She knows he's fibbing, but she appreciates the effort.

Smiling smugly, Doug drapes a possessive arm around her and begins to tell Corky, Louie and Jack about the plans he has for their future. Sarah tunes him out as her eyes are drawn to the *Goose*, and the solitary figure loading it up with supplies. She suddenly feels an overwhelming need to talk to Jake one last time, even if it's just to say goodbye. They owe each other at least that much.

"Excuse me, Doug," she says distantly. "I'll be right back. There's one more thing I have to do."

Doug starts to protest, but she doesn't hear him as she walks out onto the pier. Corky and Louie exchange hopeful glances while they watch her go.

Jake looks up from a crate he's lifting and feels his heart leap when he sees her. He had hoped to get away without having to say goodbye. Putting the crate down when she stops in front of him, he forces a weak smile.

"Hiya, Jake," she says softly, trying to return it.

"Hiya, Sarah."

"Jake...about last night...I..."

He puts up his hands. "Let's just forget about it, okay?" he says gently.

"Okay," she says with a small nod. "Are you...uh...going somewhere?"

"Yeah. I thought I'd fly on down to Petit Bijou. You know, sorta get away from it all for a while."

"You aren't leaving on my account, are you?" she asks, a hopeful tinge to her voice.

"Oh, no. Of course not." He doesn't sound very convincing.

"Isn't this a little sudden?"

"Oh, I don't know. Actually, I've been planning to for days."

She can tell that he's lying, but what does it matter now? "Oh... Well, have a good flight."

"You, too," he replies quietly.

Blinking back the tears that are beginning to fill her eyes, she says softly, "Well, goodbye, Jake."

"Bye," he chokes, feeling his throat tighten up.

They look into each other's eyes for a long moment, both wanting to say more, but neither being able to find the words. Finally, she turns around and starts to walk away.

"Sarah?"

She stops with her back to him and closes her eyes. "Yes, Jake?"

"I...uh...memorized a poem for you the other day, but I never got a chance to say it. I kinda hate to waste it...so, maybe I could tell it to you now?"

She takes a deep breath and says, "Sure."

He hesitates a bit, feeling a little shy, but then begins. "Little by little a bond is built, Day by day it grows, Stronger at last than a wall of stone, Lovelier than a rose."

Her heart begins to pound as she turns around to face him. "What are you trying to say, Jake?"

He looks down for a moment. "That...if you could only give me more time, maybe someday I could give you more than just...roses."

She can't speak while she gazes at him, her heart filling with emotion.

"Please don't go, Sarah," he says with feeling, looking back into her eyes. "My life would be sorta...empty without you."

"Oh, Jake," she sighs. "Why didn't you say this before?"

He shrugs and tries to give her his old sheepish grin. "Oh, I don't know. Actually I've been planning to for days."

They both break out in wide smiles as she runs to embrace him. They meet in a long, deep kiss, and the sparks of electricity can almost be felt at the *Clipper* dock. Louie and Corky exchange relieved, happy looks while Doug stares on in disbelief.

"What do you call *that*?" he asks incredulously.

Louie pats him on the back and begins to escort him to the *Clipper*. "I believe the American term for it is 'fireworks'," he replies, trying to hide his amused smile. "However, loosely translated into French, I am afraid it means 'au revoir'."

"What?" he asks in confusion.

"Oh, that means 'goodbye', Doug!" says Corky informatively, taking Doug's arm to escort him from the other side.

Jack barks twice from behind them.

Totally bewildered Doug stands in the entranceway of the plane. "But...what am I supposed to do now?"

Louie smiles benignly. "I suggest you buy a magazine. It is going to be a very long flight."

While Doug stares at the two friends in dismay, a *Clipper* steward firmly guides him into the passenger compartment. Louie and Corky wave to him, trading triumphant smiles.

Then, turning back to where Sarah and Jake are still kissing, they swear they can see rockets, flares, and sparklers light up the sky.

