

The Later Sarah White

Barbara Adams

I only *thought* I had finally realized what an important part of my life Miss Sarah Stickney White had become after we all thought she was dead. Then, I held her in my arms again in that Philippine jungle, and I really knew! So you can imagine my disappointment, and hers, when it turned out she had about another week's worth of loose ends to clean up in Manila and wouldn't be able to fly back with Corky and me. Though I have to admit the *Clipper* was a lot faster and more comfortable than thirty-some hours on the *Goose*. We decided to make up for it my throwing a hell of a welcome-home party for her when she returned.

It was a bright sunny afternoon nine days later when the *Clipper* arrived bringing Sarah home to Borabora. Jake, Corky, Louie, and Jack were waiting at the dock to greet her. When she stepped off the plane, Jake's welcoming embrace was almost as enthusiastic as that first one in the Philippines had been. Corky settled for a warm handshake, and Louie added a sedate kiss on the cheek. Even Jack, for once, showed his affection by pressing against her leg, and wagging his tail delightedly when she laughed and petted him in response. They were walking back toward the hotel when the Reverend Tenboom approached.

"Sarah! It is so wunderbar to have you back with us again!"

She reached out to shake his hand politely, and was rather startled when he grasped it in both of his, pulled her toward him, and kissed her soundly on the cheek. "Liebchen, it seems we are

destined to have our chance after all," he murmured conspiratorially. "We must talk more later...."

She hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about, but then with the Reverend Tenboom that wasn't unusual. She smiled uncertainly, not sure what to make of this unaccustomed behavior. She had noticed the way he looked at her on occasion, but had done her best to tactfully make it clear he should reserve his 'blessings' for the native women of his flock. *They* never seemed to object, God alone knew why. In fact, they usually seemed very pleased by the attention, even when he took them on two or three at a time, as he often did. She suspected many of the male residents of Borabora were a little envious of his prowess, though of course they never said anything about it in her presence. She had teasingly tried more than once to get Jake's reaction on the subject, but all he would ever say was, "It's none of my business."

She extricated herself from the good reverend's grasp as gracefully as she could manage, and put him out of her mind as she walked on up to the hotel with the others. Jake quickly appropriated the hand so recently relinquished by the reverend, and this Sarah didn't mind a bit!

The afternoon gave way to an equally gorgeous evening, soft and warm, with a full moon shining through the palm trees; just the way a special night in a tropical paradise should be. By nine the Monkey Bar was jumping, with passengers awaiting the *Clipper*'s departure the next morning min-

gling with the locals, and all adding to the noisy commotion of Sarah's welcome-home party. The guest of honor was sitting at the big corner table with Jake and Corky and, intermittently, Louie and Gushie. The latter two had a busy bar to keep track of, but still managed to spend most of their time with Sarah. Jack was curled up on the floor between Jake's and Sarah's chairs. Just at the moment Sarah was feeling blissfully content with her life, and the world in general. Her mission in the Philippines had gone even better than she would have dared hope, and now that she was home again, Jake was being unusually sweet and attentive. She really should get reported dead more often! The three glasses of wine she'd already had undoubtedly had made their contribution to her mellow mood. She was a little surprised when the Reverend Tenboom walked up and joined their group, but she was too happy to dispute his presence, even if there had been a diplomatic way to do it.

She was a little tired after the long trip back, despite the undeniable comfort of the *Clipper*, and after a while the smoke and noise got to her. So when Jake left the table for a moment, she announced to the others, "I'm going to step out on the porch for a few minutes for a breath of fresh air. Tell Jake I'll be right back, will you?"

A few minutes later, she was leaning against one of the balcony support posts staring dreamily out over the lagoon and thinking how good it felt to be home with her friends again. She heard the swinging doors open, and soft footsteps approaching behind her. A warm hand gently touched her shoulder and she realized Jake must have followed her out, wanting to be alone with her. She turned to him with a welcoming smile -- only to be met by the hungry-eyed gaze of Reverend Tenboom! He wasted no time, his arms going around her and pulling her firmly against him. For a second she was too stunned to react. Then, as his lips touched hers in the beginning of an eager kiss, she snapped out of it and shoved him vigorously away, fixing him with an icy glare.

"Reverend, what do you think you're doing?" she hissed.

He was not in the least discouraged, much to her dismay. "Ah, mein little songbird, you will find a warm nest with me," he said gleefully, reaching for her.

She side-stepped and commanded, "Reverend! Stop this! What's the matter with you?"

He turned and seized her by the shoulders, and as she twisted free he pursued her, saying, "Sarah, there is no need to fight it any longer! I know all about it now."

She stopped to demand, "You know all about what?"

Tactical error. He cornered her again, still laughing. "Come to me, mein kleines dumpling!"

"Your welches what?" That threw him off guard long enough for her to wriggle free.

"So, mein little crumpet, you want me to chase

you, eh?"

Crumpet? CRUMPET?? Now where the heck did he get that from? Oops! Time to think about that later! She dodged again.

"I always did like a woman with spirit!" he announced happily, making another grab for her.

She managed to evade him and commanded harshly, "Reverend, cut it out! If this is your idea of a joke, I'm not finding it funny!"

Beginning to look rather perplexed, he entreated, "Liebchen, why do you struggle so when you know very well this is something we both want?"

"All I want is for you to keep your hands off me," she said menacingly.

"I do not understand. I mean, I know resistance makes the ultimate surrender all the sweeter, but don't you think you are overdoing it a bit?"

She hesitated in confusion. He took that for assent and enveloped her once more in his hot embrace.

"Oowww!"

She kicked him in the ankle.

"That was not very nice," he said reprovngly, trying to balance on one foot while holding the other ankle.

"It wasn't *meant* to be," she gritted. She was still finding this whole situation hard to believe, half expecting to awaken at any moment safe and sound in her own bed -- alone. She knew of the reverend's penchant for the female members of his congregation; anyone on Boragora who was not either blind or deaf couldn't help knowing, though she doubted if the reverend realized that. She'd always thought of him as eccentric, but still at least a quasi-friend. She just couldn't believe he meant to take her against her will. The major obstacle seemed to be convincing him that it really was against her will. She backed away as he finished massaging his ankle and started toward her, limping slightly, with a newly purposeful gleam in his eye.

She was beginning to become really alarmed. Had the man completely taken leave of his senses? She'd prefer to avoid making a scene, she told herself, but-- Then the awful thought struck her that, with all the noise from inside the bar, maybe no one would hear her if she did scream. Well, she'd just have to make good and sure that they did!

"Just think how embarrassing it's going to be for you if I have to yell for help, and everyone comes running out," she said desperately. "Or are you really out of your mind?"

At least he stopped moving in on her as he said reproachfully, "If I am, it is you who have made me so. You really should not have kept your passion for me a secret for so long. What if you really had died? Then we would never have had our

They all said their goodnights, then she and Jake started upstairs.

When they paused at her door, Jake looked at her with concern. "Are you gonna be okay tonight?"

She started to reply with a casual "Sure", but she sensed something in his tone. Looking up at him, she hesitated. "Well, I mean, I think so. Why?"

He stepped closer and gently put his arms around her. Gazing into her soft, liquid eyes, he was suddenly overcome by the realization of how close he had come to never seeing those eyes again, and the emotion that he had been suppressing all day began to rise to the surface, filling the air between them like a heavy perfume. His heart pounded as he fought the urge to say the words that were coming into his mind -- the words that he knew once said, would lead him into a commitment that he wasn't yet ready to make. Swallowing hard to choke them down, he backed away a little, letting go of her as he did.

She stared at him in bewilderment, but he glanced down to avoid her eyes, his fear of commitment growing stronger than his other emotions. Finally, he regained control, and, looking back up at her, forced a light smile. "Uh...no special reason. You just had a pretty bad time today. I just thought I'd check."

"Oh," she said softly, trying hard not to show her disappointment at another 'moment' lost forever. "Well...thanks for asking."

Nodding, he smiled again, but a bit of regret showed in his eyes. "Goodnight," he murmured, slowly backing away.

"Goodnight."

She watched him go and sighed. "I'll never understand you, Jake Cutter," she mumbled to herself as she turned to reach for her door handle. "Never as long as I live."

It was quiet and peaceful the next morning in the Monkey Bar. The slowly-turning ceiling fans dropped a gentle breeze on Jake as he sat at a table near the bar reading a newspaper left behind by one of the now-departed Clipper passengers.

Louie stood behind the counter, silently studying him for a moment before he reached to pour himself a cup of coffee. "I cannot imagine what you could find of interest in a Hong Kong newspaper, mon ami," he remarked, taking a sip and giving it a nod of approval. "I have always found British news to be infinitely boring."

After turning a page, Jake picked up his cup. "Yeah, you're right, Louie. No baseball scores, for one thing."

Smiling, Louie started to take another sip, but a noise on the stairs caused him to look up. He watched as Sarah entered the room with an irritable expression on her face.

"Coffee, please, Louie," she stated flatly, taking a seat at the bar.

Jake bent down the corner of his newspaper and glanced over at her. "Hi," he said brightly.

She barely smiled. "Hi."

While pouring the coffee for her, Louie looked concerned. "What is the matter with you this morning, chérie? You seem a bit out of sorts."

Sighing, she traced the rim of her cup with her finger. "I guess it's only because I didn't get too much sleep last night."

"Well, that is certainly understandable with all the excitement you had yesterday. Even I cannot believe it -- a gigantic sea creature falls in love with you and carries you off to his lair."

"Yes, I know. It is pretty hard to believe... although, lately, it does seem that my appeal has been running toward the strong, *silent* type." She stole a meaningful glance at Jake.

But, her remark went over his head as he sat engrossed by something he was reading in the paper. When he finished, a grin broke out on his face. "Hey, Sarah. There's an article in here that you should find very interesting."

"What? Did someone come up with a cure for dishpan hands?" she muttered, giving hers a disapproving appraisal.

He tried to keep a straight face. "No, it's an article on the science page." He read aloud, "After two years of painstaking research at Loch Ness, the London Board of Paleontologists has issued a statement declaring the existence of sea monsters to be totally beyond the realm of possibility."

"That's because they never had to *marry* one," she said dryly, reaching for her cup.

"Well, then," he announced seriously, "I guess we'll just have to convince them."

She turned to look at him incredulously. "And, how are we going to do that?"

Peeking out over the top of the newspaper, he gave her a small shrug. "Pictures?" he replied innocently.

She fixed him with a withering look, but when his clear blue eyes sparkled at her and his dimples framed an infectious grin, she had to give in to a good-natured smile.

As Louie looked on in confusion, their smiles turned into a burst of hearty laughter.

chance to-- Aaahh, but it is all right now. We can make up for all that," and he made another determined effort to seize her.

She did a neat duck-and-whirl and ended up facing him from two steps away, eyes blazing. "Reverend, I'm warning you. If you touch me once more, I'll scream. I mean it!" she added threateningly as he started toward her once again.

The determination in her face and bearing gave him pause. "Leibling, I keep trying to tell you, there is no need to hide your feelings for me any longer. He told me everything."

From the expression on his face she couldn't help thinking he looked like a small boy who had been given a bag of candy, and then had someone snatch it away again before he could eat any of it. Then, belatedly, his last statement registered. "Who told you *what*?" she demanded, suddenly suspicious.

"He told me that you wanted me," he repeated stubbornly, patiently, as though speaking to a slow-witted child.

"Who told you?" she insisted, more emphatically.

"Why, Jake, of course. When we thought you were dead."

Her sigh held a combination of disgust and resignation. "Jake.... Of course, Jake. Who else?" she muttered half under her breath, talking more to herself than to the reverend. "I should've known, any time things get into a hopeless muddle, I can always count on good old Jake Cutter being right there in the middle of it! Still, it's hard to believe he would -- what exactly did he tell you?" she asked, wanting to give Jake the benefit of the doubt.

"Why, that you wanted me!" At her look of shocked indignation, he added, "It was the day we got the telegram saying you had died. I remember his exact words. They were 'She had a yen for you.' I thought it seemed almost too wonderful to be true, and even Louie said something like 'Are you sure?', and Jake looked right at both of us and said 'Believe it.' And then I knew it must be so."

As he smiled broadly and started to move toward her again, she said sharply, "You wait right here. We're going to get to the bottom of this!" She turned decisively and strode back into the bar.

Jake was absorbed in telling Louie about an incident from his earlier flying days in Central America when he felt a small hand on his shoulder. He looked up to see Sarah smiling at him, rather enigmatically he thought.

"Can I see you...outside?" she asked with quiet significance.

"Uh, sure. Be with you in a minute. Just let me finish what I was telling Louie." He turned back to Louie and resumed his story. He became gradually aware that Sarah's hand was still resting on his shoulder, and she seemed to have stepped in

closer behind him. Then her hand was no longer just resting. It was stroking his shoulder gently. More like massaging. More like...caressing? Then the hand moved to his neck, and slid inside his shirt collar. *Definitely* caressing! This was a most promising, if unexpected, development. Evidently she'd missed him as much as he had missed her. Abruptly he decided the rest of his conversation with Louie could wait until later. Perhaps *much* later...

Jake was very close behind Sarah as they stepped out onto the porch. Slipping an arm around her shoulders, he deftly turned her to face him, his other hand gliding naturally around her slim waist. "Now, what was it that you wanted to talk to me about?" he whispered softly, his lips only inches from hers. "Or wasn't *talking* exactly what you had in mind, either...?" he added affectionately as he bent to kiss her.

The kiss never connected.

"Hello, Jake!" came the reverend's hearty greeting as he stepped out from deep in the shadows.

"Reverend," Jake said, looking up disgustedly as Sarah quickly stepped away. "Has anyone ever told you that your timing is lousy?"

"Not this time, it isn't," Sarah said ominously.

It suddenly dawned on Jake that her angry glare was directed at him, not the reverend. What the hell was going on here?

"Jake," they both began, almost together. They stopped, looked at each other, and Sarah said firmly, "I'll handle this!" Turning to Jake, she began skeptically, "There seems to have been some sort of misunderstanding--"

They were interrupted briefly by a scabbling of claws on the floor boards, announcing the hurried arrival of Jack. He had stirred from a pleasant nap just in time to see two of his three favorite humans disappearing out the front door. The nerve of some people, trying to sneak off without him!

"The Reverend Tenboom here," Sarah continued, "claims that you told him that I...ah..."

"That you had a yen for me!" the good reverend supplied happily.

Jake was purely astonished. "No, I didn't!"

"Yes, you did," the reverend insisted. "It was that day in the bar -- after you had gotten the telegram saying she was dead. You remember, we were all sitting around drinking and talking about other friends you had lost. And you told me 'she had a yen for you.'"

"Ruf, ruf!" Jack confirmed.

Oh god! Jake had forgotten all about that! Trust the reverend not to, though. Maybe he could weasel out of it somehow. Worth trying, anyhow.



Jake and Corky had business of their own to take care of, so they all agreed to meet back at the Goose at 4 p.m. For once, Sarah found all of the things she was looking for quickly. It was only 2 o'clock, but she decided to take a leisurely stroll back toward the dock. Maybe the others would have returned early too. If not, she could always wait on the Goose. She was walking along, absorbed in her own thoughts when her nostrils were assailed by an overpoweringly sweet odor, which she quickly mentally identified as cheap perfume. Someone must have broken a quart bottle of the stuff on the sidewalk. She looked around and realized it came from a woman standing at the curb, obviously a down-on-her-luck streetwalker. No wonder she was down on her luck, Sarah thought wryly. There probably weren't very many men on Tagataya with head colds severe enough to allow them to get anywhere near her! If the scent was this overwhelming out in the open air, and competing with the smells from the waterfront yet, what would it be like in the closed confines of a hotel room?

She stopped suddenly, as a delightfully nasty idea struck her. With Jake's often-demonstrated lack of aptitude for the espionage field, it would probably never occur to him that one of the first skills a trainee-spy was taught was lockpicking. In fact, she was counting on it! Taking a deep breath, she put on what she hoped was her most engaging smile and turned back to the woman. "Oh, excuse me, miss," she gushed, "but I just caught a whiff of your perfume--" understatement of the century! she thought, "--and I just love it! Would you think it terribly forward of me if I asked what it is, and where you got it?"

Jack and I had just returned from a four day trip, during which I tracked down and talked to eight different people on six different islands, not to mention flying over a couple thousand miles of ocean in between. And all I succeeded in doing was find the fellow who'd traded Jack's eye to a seaman on a freighter which he thought might have been heading for Sumatra. Now the cold shoulder I was getting from Jack was almost as chilly as Sarah's attitude had been ever since the incident with the reverend a couple of weeks ago. Not that I could entirely blame her, I guess. If I were a woman I don't think I'd want the reverend getting the wrong idea about me, either.

Oh well, I figured I could at least count on a warm greeting from Corky, but he was nowhere to be seen when we taxied in. In the end I had to threaten to throw Jack in the lagoon before he graciously consented to take the mooring line over to the dock for me. This was not shaping up to be one of my better days.

In the late afternoon, most residents of the Monkey Bar Hotel who don't have urgent responsibilities elsewhere tend to settle down for a nap. It's the hottest part of the day, not much good for anything else anyway, and an hour's rest before dinner seems to help revigorate everyone for the evening ahead. Such was the case this day, when the somnolent stillness was shattered by a volley

of colorful language, some of it quite original, from the direction of Jake's room. Everyone within hearing range, which in this instance included approximately three-quarters of the island of Borabora, came on the run. Sarah and Louie were among the first to arrive.

"Jake, what on earth -- is that *smell*?" Sarah finished, wrinkling her nose in distaste.

"You know very well what it is!" Jake thundered. "My room, and everything in it, smells like the inside of a Hong Kong bordello!"

With wide-eyed malicious innocence she responded sweetly, "Now how would I know that? *I've never been in a Hong Kong bordello!*"

Jake opened his mouth to reply, only then realizing that no matter what he said, it would probably be a mistake. Instead he turned, and was met by Louie's disapproving frown.

"Louie..." Jake began.

Backing away a couple of steps from the overwhelming odor, the Frenchman interrupted reproachfully. "Jake, mon ami, you know I would never presume to criticize your choice of, ah..." with a significant glance in Sarah's direction, "*companions*, but must you bring them here?"

"Louie!" Jake bellowed again. The other bystanders' expressions ranged from puzzlement, to smiles, to smirks, to Sarah's; she couldn't restrain a giggle, which she tried unsuccessfully to hide behind her upraised hand. Even the corner of Louie's mouth had a slight, suspicious twitch.

"This isn't funny!" Jake fumed.

"Indeed not, mon ami," Louie said in mock severity. "We may have to fumigate the room..."

"No, it smells like that's already been done," Sarah couldn't resist interjecting.

Just then Corky came puffing belatedly onto the scene. "Jeez, Jake, what's goin' on? I was just takin' a nap and--" catching his first whiff of the offending odor, "Phew! What's that smell?" The sheer innocence of his remark caused everyone present to burst out laughing. With the notable exception of Jake, that is; he stood his ground and glowered. At that point Reverend Tenboom came bustling along to join them, exclaiming, "Jake! Such language! I was just -- mein Gott!" he broke off upon catching scent of the problem. Even Jake couldn't keep from joining in the renewed merriment at his expression. "What *is* that? It smells like..." he faltered.

"I'm sure Jake can explain it to you, Reverend," Sarah purred. "He knows all about these things."

"I do not!" Jake began defensively. It had been merely a figure of speech and, despite their present differences, he didn't want Sarah to get the impression that he really frequented such places. Then he saw her impish grin, and realized that she already understood and was just having

"Well, not in so many words..."

"Ruf, ruf!" Jack insisted.

Jake leaned down to whisper sharply. "Whose side are you on, anyway?"

The little dog looked back at him, grinned, and went over to sit close beside Sarah, who smiled in triumph. She and the reverend were both looking at him expectantly.

"Well, I guess maybe I did.... I mean, we were all so upset and everything...."

"Yes, but--" began Sarah.

"But why would you say something like this if it was not true?" the reverend persisted.

Jake had been wondering the same thing himself for the last couple of minutes, trying desperately to think up a plausible-sounding answer (other than the truth, of course) to that very question. Then suddenly he had it. "Ah, well, I saw you were taking her death hard, too, and you were talking about how attractive she was, so I just said that to try to cheer you up a bit, give you an even more pleasant memory of her. That's all."

The reverend's eager expression collapsed like a punctured balloon. "That's all it was?" he asked incredulously.

Jake nodded in affirmation. Reverend Tenboom slowly turned back to Sarah and asked plaintively, one last time, "Then you are sure...it is not so?"

He looked so crushed she couldn't help but smile a little as she said firmly, "I'm sure. I'm very sure!"

"Oh-h-h." He paused. "Well, then, I think I must say good night," he said with obvious disappointment. "I am sorry for the...misunderstanding." He turned away from them and walked stiffly off toward his cottage.

Jake thought he was going to escape with no further damage, but as he started to step back toward the bar entrance, Sarah grabbed his arm and hissed, "Not so fast, mister! You've still got a lot of explaining to do."

Turning back to her, Jake started in a low voice. "Well, I couldn't tell him you were a--" He was stopped abruptly by her hand, which she had placed quickly and none too gently across his mouth.

"Will you learn to keep your mouth shut!" she whispered angrily.

He looked at her in wide-eyed bewilderment. "But you just asked me..."

"Come on," she said. Still keeping her grip on his arm, she led him down the steps and out onto the open beach in front of the hotel. "Now, where we can be sure of not being overheard..."

"I was keeping my voice down," he pointed out.

"I know, but it's still safer this way. Now, why on earth would you do something like telling that man I had, how did he put it, 'a yen for him'? Don't I have enough problems here, without you contributing to them?"

"Sarah, I really am sorry. Honest, I am! I just didn't think." She rolled her eyes expressively. "I mean, we all thought you were dead. And I was about to say something about you being a spy--" Her eyes and mouth formed little shocked 'o's. "--and then, somehow, I just knew you couldn't be dead," his face lighting up at the remembrance, "and -- and -- well, I had to say something -- and that was the first thing that popped into my head."

"That figures," she muttered darkly. Then she went on to explain, "Even if I really had been dead, didn't it occur to you that by revealing me, you might also compromise some of my contacts? You could have gotten a lot of people in big trouble, maybe even killed!"

"Okay, okay! But I didn't do it, remember?"

"Oh, no! All you did was get me entangled in the sticky clutches of that -- that -- sanctified octopus!"

"Look, I'll talk to him and--"

"No! Please! You've done entirely too much talking already, thank you!"

"I thought you were dead," he repeated stubbornly, becoming a little irritated. His mood was not helped any by the underlying realization that she had a right to be angry with him. "And, anyway, would you rather I'd just gone ahead and told him you were a spy?" he finished defiantly.

"I would much rather you just hadn't told him anything!"

"Yeah, you and me both!" He said it so fervently that she had to smile in spite of herself.

As they started back toward the bar, she commented reflectively, "You know, the reverend looked so disappointed when he left us I almost felt sorry for him."

"Oh, don't worry about the reverend. All he needs is a good 'blessing', and he'll be just fine. Me, too?" he added hopefully, trying to fake a sneeze.

Her irritation with him rose to the surface again. "Whatever you like," she said acidly, "though somehow I've never thought of the reverend as exactly your type." Jake stopped in his tracks and stood gaping in open-mouthed astonishment as she smiled serenely and walked swiftly away.

By a week later, Sarah's resentment had abated enough to accompany me, Jack, and Corky to Tagataya, especially since she had some shopping she wanted to do.

but it took a moment for his words, and meaning, to sink in. Somehow she had just never considered that the man could have been capable of this kind of sensitivity. Then she thought back to the time of the earthquake and volcano eruption; how he had turned his chapel into a makeshift hospital. He hadn't just stood around praying, either. He had rolled up his sleeves and pitched right in helping her and Louie care for the injured. She began to suspect that she might have underestimated him, at least a little. It now appeared he was more civilized than she had been giving him credit for. The hopeful, almost pleading look on his face as he awaited her response convinced her that he was sincere.

She smiled. "Thank you. I have to admit I have been feeling, well, uncomfortable about you since that night. Maybe I have misjudged you a little. It was very kind of you to notice, and come to me like this."

He smiled back in obvious relief. "Ja, the whole matter was just...well, I really believed-- I mean, I thought Jake knew what he was talking about."

With a wry grin she responded sympathetically, "Yes, I think we've all fallen into that trap at one time or another!"

He rose to leave. "I must be going then, but I did want to have this talk with you."

Sarah also stood up. "I really was just about to go back to my room. I'll walk out with you."

Jake was starting up the front steps of the hotel, and looked up just in time to see Sarah and the reverend emerging from the bar together. They were both smiling and chatting amiably, the reverend politely holding the swinging door open for her. Jake stared in goggle-eyed amazement for a second, and even Jack stopped short in surprise. Then the tall American regained his composure and gave them both a pleasant, noncommittal "hello".

Sarah found herself secretly pleased by his look of discomfiture, and mentally filed it away for future reference.

After they had gone their separate ways: Sarah up the stairs to her room and the reverend off toward his cottage, Jake turned thoughtfully to his four-footed companion. "Now what do you suppose that was all about?"

Jack sat down and cocked his head in contemplation for a moment; then he looked up at Jake and with the canine equivalent of a shrug he got up, shook himself briefly, and trotted on into the bar to wait for that saucer of beer he'd been promised.

"Yeah, me too," Jake sighed in puzzlement, following him in.

By the time he met Sarah again at supper, Jake could contain his curiosity no longer. "What was the reverend doing here this afternoon? I thought you were avoiding him."

So Jake had noticed also. He wasn't quite as

obtuse as she'd thought. "Oh, he just came to apologize again for that night. He'd noticed I'd been avoiding him, too, and I think it really bothered him."

"I'll bet!"

"No, he was actually very nice about it. He wanted to assure me that he really did think of me as a friend and he hadn't meant to scare me. It was just that he'd believed you..."

Jake smiled sheepishly. Making that unthinking remark to the reverend that day was a mistake he'd probably never live down. "Yeah, well, I gotta admit, that's going to go down in history as one of the classic boners of all time." He gazed off into space. "Hell, I can see my tombstone now: 'Here lies Jake Cutter. He told the Reverend Tenboom Sarah had a yen for him. Rest In Peace, If You Can.'" He was pleased to see her respond with an amused smile. "Seriously, though," he added, "I'm afraid it's like the song goes: 'What can I say, dear, after I say I'm sorry?' Except maybe, you can rest assured I'll never do that again!"

Cutter's Goose banked sharply in the bright afternoon sun as Jake circled the island, making a low pass over the small cluster of plantation buildings before touching down neatly in a plume of spray. A single figure emerged from the house and hurried to stand waiting as the *Goose* taxied in and nosed gently up to the dock.

I had become good friends with John and Carolyn Gilson since I started making twice-monthly mail and supply runs to their isolated plantation. Carolyn was almost ten years younger than her husband, and it always surprised me a little to think that a beautiful and vivacious young woman could be happy living on an island eight hundred miles from nowhere, with only her husband and a bunch of native field hands for company. Apparently she was, though. She and John were completely devoted to one another. They had the kind of marriage I'd hope to have myself some day -- if I ever got ready to settle down. About four months earlier they'd hired a young Dutchman named Carl Van Ryn, who'd had experience in the Dutch East Indies, to help run the growing plantation. He'd quickly become a friend as well as an employee. I always looked forward to my visits there. Usually all three of them came running to meet us when they heard the *Goose's* engines. That's why I was surprised -- and a little uneasy -- to see only John today.

The nose hatch opened and Jake stood to toss the mooring line to the waiting man. While the line was being secured, Jake lifted Jack out. Then he climbed through the hatch and hopped over onto the dock after the little dog, calling with determined cheerfulness, "Hey, John, where is everybody?"

The middle-aged plantation owner silently finished knotting the rope before looking up. Seeing his anguished expression, Jake hurried to him, asking quietly, "John, what is it? What's wrong? Where's Carolyn?"

some fun at his expense.

Jake was beginning to regain some control over himself, and determined to do likewise with the situation. The assorted stray bystanders, sensing that the fireworks were now over, began to drift away as Jake addressed his friends in a more moderate tone, and volume. "Look, I've been gone for four days. I just now got back. I locked my room when I left, and it sure didn't smell like this then! Let's see... Louie, you have the only other key, don't you?"

Louie looked mortally offended. "Jake, surely you are not suggesting that I--"

Jake shook his head in hasty denial. "No, no, of course not, Louie. I merely meant to ask, did you let anyone have it for any reason? Like, oh, cleaning, or to fix something, anything like that?"

"Mais non. And the duplicate keys to the rooms are kept locked in the cabinet in my office, and I have the keys to both of those with me at all times."

"Yeah, I was afraid of that," Jake said. "Well, I guess the first priority had better be to open the room to let it air out, if it can, and wash everything washable."

"I'll give ya a hand, Jake," Corky offered with his usual unhesitating loyalty.

"Me too," Sarah added. At Jake's quizzical look, she explained. "Well, I wouldn't be much of a friend if I didn't stand by you when you've got trouble, now would I?" Besides, she had just realized with a sudden flash of inspiration, this way if Jake, or more likely Jack, who didn't smoke cigars, should later happen to notice any trace of an all-too-familiar scent lingering about her person or room, this would neatly account for it.

With Corky's and Sarah's help I got my clothes carried out and washed -- twice. Those balmy tropical breezes you read about in the travel literature were a little slow, but they did eventually get the room pretty much cleared out. I slept on the *Goose* for the next three nights though. And where was 'man's best friend' through all this? My faithful canine companion made it a point to make himself scarce during the daytime, and slept in Corky's room at night. After another week, and a dozen or so cigars, my room finally began to smell like home again. That fact was confirmed when Jack condescended to resume sleeping there.

Still, the aftermath of the incident wasn't all bad. In the course of helping with the cleaning and airing out, Sarah thawed considerably. I think she felt that the embarrassment and discomfort the situation had caused me somehow balanced out the problem I'd created for her with the Reverend Tenboom. I wasn't sure I understood the reasoning, but the result was welcome nevertheless. As I think I've already indicated, I'm really very fond of Sarah and I don't like being 'on the outs' with her.

In fact, I'm a little ashamed to admit it, but it had even crossed my mind at one point to wonder if Sarah could have somehow had something to do with my problem. I abandoned that idea pretty promptly though. Sarah is just too much of a lady to stoop to something like that; and besides, that still didn't solve the problem of the locked doors. I looked carefully, and there was no sign of anything being forced or tampered with. I asked around, and so did Louie, but nobody seemed to have noticed anything unusual. I finally had to just write it off as one of the unsolved mysteries of the universe.

By the time they'd gotten Jake's room reasonably fit for human habitation again, Sarah found herself feeling decidedly more cordial toward him. Popular wisdom to the contrary notwithstanding, she decided there was a lot to be said for the therapeutic benefits of revenge.

The Reverend Tenboom, however, remained another matter. Yes, he had apologized when he left them that night, and had shown no further sign of aggressive intent since, but Sarah couldn't seem to shake the memory of the confusion and fear she had felt. She found herself going out of her way to avoid encountering him when she could, and being extremely tense and uncomfortable in his presence when she couldn't. She assumed no one had noticed, least of all the reverend.

She was sitting in the bar one hot afternoon, at their favorite corner table, playing a desultory game of solitaire. Jake and Corky were down at the dock, working on the *Goose*. Business was slow and she was feeling thoroughly bored. There were only three customers in the entire barroom. She heard footsteps and looked up from her game to see the reverend approaching her table. She looked around quickly, as though seeking reinforcements, and instinctively started to get to her feet.

"Sarah, I must talk to you."

"Oh, but I was just going--"

"Please, sit down," he said in a surprisingly kindly tone. As she hesitated, he added, "You will be safe here, with other people around." She looked up sharply, startled to realize he must have sensed her feelings. Warily, she sat back down and he joined her.

"Sarah, I have noticed the way you have been avoiding me since...that unfortunate evening. I am truly sorry to have upset you so. I honestly believed that you wanted..." His gesture completed the thought. "I never meant to harm you or frighten you, and it grieves me to see you reacting this way. Of course, you are a very beautiful woman and I -- ah, but that is how the problem arose in the first place, nicht wahr? What I am trying to say is, I still think of you first as a friend, and I would never knowingly do anything to hurt you." As she sat staring in amazed disbelief, he concluded. "Please, accept again my apology for that night, and my assurance that I am your friend and you have nothing whatever to fear from me."

She realized he was waiting for a response,

Sensing the despondent man's need for companionship, Jake relented with a smile. "No, I don't have any commitments that won't keep for a while. Just let me go down to the *Goose* and radio in so they'll know where I am. I think Corky's always convinced I'm going to crash at sea any time I fly without him!"

"Ruf, ruf!" Jack promptly confirmed.

That night they sat up talking and drinking until very, very late.

The following afternoon John Gilson walked down to his dock with the crew of *Cutter's Goose* to see them off. Jake had just lifted his canine copilot through the forward hatch when he turned and caught a glimpse of the desolation in his friend's face. He went to him and asked in sudden concern, "John -- you're not going to...do anything foolish, are you?"

It took him a second to catch the pilot's meaning, then he smiled wanly. "No, I'm upset, but I'm not that upset! Don't worry," he added reassuringly, "I'll still be here next time you come."

Giving his friend an encouraging pat on the back, Jake returned to the *Goose* and climbed aboard. As he turned to taxi for his takeoff run, Jake looked back to see the solitary figure standing forlornly on the dock watching them go.

You just never know about people, especially women. You think you really know one, know what she'll do -- and what she'd never do -- and she'll surprise you. Though I'd known them less than a year, I'd have trusted Carolyn Gilson just as much as I trusted Sarah. I was as shocked at what had happened as John was. Well, almost, anyway. It was the sort of thing that gets you to thinking -- and wondering.

Mail is delivered to Boragora twice a week, coming by boat from Tagataya. Some of the outlying islands get their mail delivered by air, via *Cutter's Goose*. It would seem only logical that Jake should also pick up Boragora's mail while in Tagataya -- but when has the bureaucratic mind ever been logical? Especially the French bureaucratic mind. Boragora is not far enough from Tagataya to rate air delivery, and that's that. Even letters marked 'air mail' come by air only as far as Tagataya, and from there they travel by sea, along with parcels and several-weeks-old newspapers and magazines. Rules are rules, as Jake and Louie had been firmly informed more than once. The Monkey Bar is the distribution point for mail for hotel residents, and other Americans or Europeans living in the vicinity, such as the Reverend Tenboom. The mail boat doesn't seem to follow any discernable schedule, though it does pretty well average the prescribed two visits per week. Nevertheless, word of its arrival spreads like magic, and there is

always an eager crowd waiting by the time the mailbags have been unloaded and toted up to the hotel.

Jake and Jack were still away on their supply run when the boat came in on Tuesday afternoon. As Cushie passed out the mail, calling people's names, Sarah found herself thinking it was like Christmas morning twice a week. Then her name was called. There was an envelope from the Vassar Alumnae Committee, probably wanting a contribution. She wished them luck. With the world in the throes of the Depression, there probably weren't many alumnae who had any money to spare. She certainly didn't! Then her name was called again, and this time it was a five-weeks-old *Colliers* magazine. Well, better late than never. It felt unusually thick, however, and as she paged through it, another smaller magazine fell from where it had been hidden among the pages. That one was in a foreign language -- German, she found as she flipped through it -- and then she saw the Reverend Tenboom's name on the address label on the back cover. It appeared to be a journal devoted to descriptions of chess matches. She looked around and saw the reverend toward the back of the crowd. Approaching him, she held out the magazine. "Here, this seems to be yours. It was caught in between the pages of my *Colliers*."

"Ach, good! I have been waiting for this!"

"You read about chess matches? In German?"

"Oh, ja. I don't speak it, of course," he added hastily, "but I read a little. You don't need much, really; chess terminology and symbols are pretty much the same in any language. And since no one else on Boragora plays chess, reading about it is better than nothing."

"Oh, but I do! Play chess, that is," she said impulsively. Then she realized maybe she shouldn't have said that. While she was no longer going out of her way to avoid the reverend these days, she didn't necessarily want to seek out his company, either. It was too late to think of that now, though. She felt a sudden flash of sympathy for Jake.

"But that is wunderbar! I never suspected! In, ah -- the Netherlands -- women usually do not play. Chess, that is," he added with a conspiratorial wink, remembering their recent contretemps. "We must have a game soon!"

"Oh, well, I haven't played in several years. I'm sure I'm hopelessly rusty. I just used to play some in college, and mostly with my father, when we were out on archeological digs. Not much else to do in the evenings, out in the middle of nowhere. But I'm afraid I wouldn't be a very worthy opponent for you."

"After two years on Boragora," he assured her, "anyone who knew how the pieces move would look like a worthy opponent! You have always struck me as being a highly intelligent young woman. I think you are just being too modest. Can we not at least try a game or two and see?"

He really did sound enthusiastic about the

"She's gone."

"What do you mean 'gone'?" He paused. "You don't mean -- dead?"

"No, in a way I almost -- oh, Jake, I don't know what I mean! I don't know what anything means anymore."

The pilot placed a steadying arm around his friend's shoulders. "Take it easy, John. Tell me what's happened."

Suddenly the plantation owner seemed to remember why his visitor had come. "Uh, wait a minute. Let me get some of the men started unloading the supplies. Then we can go up to the house and I'll tell you about it over a cold beer." He paused, looking around. "Speaking of beer, where's Corky?"

"Oh, he's busy rebuilding an old carburetor we got hold of. He's hoping to get it into good enough shape to use for a spare, if we have to. You know how hard it is to get parts out here. He was just getting started on it, and since I had a pretty heavy load with your stuff and the other two stops I made before this, I told him he could stay behind and keep working on it while Jack and I made the trip."

A few minutes later they were about to walk out of the kitchen, frosty bottles of beer in hand, when an impatient "Whuff!" sounded behind them. They turned, and Gilson said, "Oh, sorry, Jack, I almost forgot." He took a saucer from the cabinet and carried it with them into the small but comfortably furnished living room. Both men poured their contributions into the saucer and Gilson set it on the floor. The little dog lapped at it eagerly, happily ignoring the two humans. The plantation owner smiled wistfully at him before turning a more serious face to his friend.

"I hardly know where to start." He sighed, lowered his gaze. "But then again, it's not really all that complicated." He looked up to meet Jake's eyes. "She left. With Carl."

"Yeah, I'd been noticing I didn't see him around either. Left for where, though? And how? You don't mean they ran away together?"

Gilson nodded his head miserably.

"I find this hard to believe; she seemed so happy with you. And Carl seemed like such a nice guy. How did it happen?"

"Well, it's hard to say where it started." He paused, thinking. "We were both so happy to have found Carl. He was a good foreman, and good company. Carolyn and I loved each other -- or at least I loved her, I always thought it was mutual." Jake nodded sympathetically but didn't speak, waiting patiently as his distraught friend groped for words. "Anyhow, as I was saying, Carolyn and I loved each other, and loved being together; but let's face it, we both enjoyed having somebody new to talk to. Everything seemed fine for a while. Then Carolyn found out Carl played cribbage. She'd always liked the game, and, well, as you know, I've never cared much for cards. I'd tried a few times

but I never could quite get the hang of it. Just didn't really have that much enthusiasm for it, I guess. Carolyn always said it didn't matter. Well, Carl enjoyed cribbage too, so they took to playing in the evening a couple of times a week. At first it was here, but then more and more often they took to going to his cottage, 'so they wouldn't disturb me,' they said. I didn't think anything of it. Heck, I was happy she'd found someone closer to her own age that she could talk to. I knew she loved me -- or I thought I did -- so it just never occurred to me that there was anything more than that to it. Until one day last week, just before the freighter was due in to pick up the latest harvest -- that's when they told me they were leaving on it. They said neither one had meant it to happen, but they'd fallen in love and they wanted to go away where they could live in civilization and build a life together."

Jake shook his head in stunned bewilderment. "God, John, I'm so sorry. I don't know what to say. It just doesn't seem possible. I mean, they both seemed like such nice people."

"They were. No, I'm not being sarcastic, I really mean that," he added in response to Jake's skeptical expression. "You know what hurt the most? They both kept telling me how sorry they were, that they hadn't meant this to happen and they didn't want to hurt me. And I think they really meant it. So now they're gone, and I can't even hate them for it. But this place is so lonely now..."

Jake sat thinking for a moment, then brightened. "Tell you what, John, why don't you come back to Boragora with me? No, better yet -- we'll go to Tagataya, paint the town red! I haven't had a chance to cut loose and live it up for a while myself, and the change would do you good. How about it?"

"Thanks, Jake, but I can't. Or at least not right now. There's still the next crop to get in. The crew are good enough workers, but there are a lot of decisions that have to be made, and especially with Carl gone there's nobody else here to make them but me."

Jake finished his beer and slowly got to his feet.

I really wanted to do something to help John, but I didn't know what. What do you say to a man whose world has just collapsed?

"Uh, you don't have to leave so soon, do you?" Gilson asked with almost an edge of desperation in his voice.

"Well, I--"

"Why don't you stay for dinner? No, make it overnight. That way we can have dinner and a few drinks, make an evening of it. You don't have to be any place else right away, do you?"

not have played lately either, his reading had apparently kept him up on the game. He gallantly insisted that they try another, as it was still early; and this time, though she again lost, Sarah gave a much better account of herself.

"Aha, you see, you show improvement already," he said enthusiastically. "We play for another two or three weeks and you will be back in practice. Then I think I cannot count on winning. You can come again next Thursday?" he asked hopefully.

She briefly wondered how Jake would react to that idea, then decided she would worry about that later. It might do him good to learn that he could not always take her for granted, and she could still continue to see him all the rest of the week. Besides, she really did enjoy the game, and secretly agreed with Willie's contention that she could probably do much better if she began to play regularly again. "Sure, why not?" she agreed.

Willie offered to walk her back to the hotel, but she assured him that wasn't necessary. It was nearly midnight as she walked along the hotel porch heading for the outside staircase to return to her room. In the deep shadows she at first didn't notice the solitary figure sitting in one of the chairs which were scattered along the porch.

"Evening, Sarah."

She jumped, startled, then relaxed as she recognized the voice as Jake's. "What are you doing here at this hour?" she demanded more sharply than she meant to.

"Gee whiz, Sarah, can't a guy even sit and enjoy the fresh air and moonlight if he wants?"

Her eyes narrowed in suspicion. "And just how long have you been 'enjoying the fresh air and moonlight'?"

"Oh, I don't -- why? Did you think I was sitting here waiting for you? You do, don't you? Well, I wasn't," he said just a trifle too emphatically.

"Well-l-l." she said, "the possibility did cross my mind."

"Look, I don't care who you spend your time with. Or what you do. After all, we're both adults. You don't owe me any explanations."

"Explanations? No, I should say I don't! And, anyway, we really were just playing chess!"

"Sure, that's why you left the bar and went to his cottage. To play chess."

"Yes, as a matter of--" She stopped, staring at him accusingly. "How do you know where we went?"

"Oh, I, uh..." Damn it, Cutter, you've put your foot in it again! he thought. "Well, where else would you go? You wouldn't be playing chess while taking a romantic stroll along the beach, now would you?"

"Jake Cutter, you're jealous! And of the reverend yet. I'll bet you followed us when we left the bar, didn't you?"

"Of course not. I...just happened to step out for a breath of fresh air about then and saw you go, that's all," he said, working on the theory that a feeble excuse is better than none.

She didn't quite know whether to be pleased or exasperated. She decided to go with pleased. "Well, as long as you're here -- just purely by coincidence, of course -- would you like to walk me up to my room? Or did you want to stay out here and enjoy the moonlight some more?"

"Not unless you want to stay and enjoy it with me," he admitted.

As we climbed the stairs and strolled along toward her door, Sarah was bubbling over with enthusiasm. Somehow I wasn't really listening to her though. Instead I was remembering the desolate look on John Gilson's face as he told me how things had started so innocently with Carolyn playing cribbage with Van Ryn.

When they reached her door, she paused, expecting his usual good night kiss. He just looked at her intently for a moment though, and said a rather perfunctory "good night". Sarah watched in dismay as he walked away toward his room. She didn't even have the heart to start their customary "Good night, sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite..." ritual. She sensed intuitively that he would not respond tonight. Oh, well, what the heck, she thought. I'll just make it a point to be as nice to him as always, and he'll get over it in a couple of days. Anyway, she didn't see why Jake's petty -- and unfounded -- jealousy should keep her from something she enjoyed. There were certainly few enough diversions on Borabora.

The following Thursday Jake didn't wait until after supper to inquire as to Sarah's plans. Encountering her in the bar at lunchtime, he asked, "Well, what's on for this evening? Playing chess with the reverend again, or have you satisfied your curiosity now?"

She gave him a puzzled look. "We are playing again, as a matter of fact."

"Here in the bar?"

"Oh, no, we gave up on that last week. Concentration in here is impossible, too many interruptions. We'll use his place again."

"But all you're going to do there is play chess, right?"

Catching his drift, she twisted a strand of her hair hesitantly before responding, "Well-l-l. probably... But then you know what they say," she couldn't resist adding, "'a hundred native girls can't all be wrong...'"

"Yeah, that's what I kinda thought," he said, face and voice suddenly turning cold and distant.

idea, and she used to enjoy the game. It *would* be nice to be able to play again. What the heck? As long as the ground rules were firmly established in advance... "Well, all right. But this will be strictly chess, right?"

"Of course. Of course. As I told you before, that other matter was just a misunderstanding. Though if you should change your mind, you will be sure to tell me, ja?" The twinkle in his eye made it clear this last was said in jest.

"You'll be the first to know, I promise."

"When can we play then, tomorrow?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, but tomorrow's Wednesday, when the Clipper is in. That's Louie's busiest night, or anyway one of them, and I have to sing then. How about Thursday?"

"Ja, that would be good. How about my cottage?" At her decidedly skeptical look, he quickly added, "I mean only that it will be quiet there, and we can concentrate."

"That may be," she said doubtfully, "but I think I'd really prefer the Monkey Bar, if you don't mind?" Her tone of voice made it clear that last was not really a question.

"All right, whatever you say," he agreed, if somewhat reluctantly.

She added, "We'll just find a quiet, out-of-the-way table, that's all."

By this time the mail distribution had been completed, and most of the crowd had drifted away. "Until Thursday, then. About eight o'clock?" he finished.

"That sounds fine, I'll be looking forward to it." And the more she thought about it, she found she really was.

With Jake's return the next day, she belatedly realized there was one small, additional complication. He customarily kept her company on her evenings off when he was not away flying somewhere; she would have to explain to him about Thursday. She idly wondered what he would think. Oh, well, they'd be right there in the bar, so he could see there was nothing untoward going on. The bar was unusually busy Wednesday evening, and somehow it was after supper on Thursday before she got around to bringing up her plans for that evening. They were finishing their meal when Jake asked, "Well, what would you like to do this evening? Theater? The opera? The ballet? Take in a double feature at the Bijou, or go dancing at Augie's? Or how about just a nice, simple romantic walk along the beach, for a change?" he finished, at last entering the realm of the possible on Borabora.

"Umm, actually I'm afraid I already have other plans for tonight." Suddenly she felt a little awkward about it. "The Reverend Tenboom and I just discovered at mail call Tuesday that we both play chess, so we've planned on a game for this eve-

ning."

"Oh." Jake sounded distinctly disappointed.

"You don't mind, do you?" she asked quickly, not sure what she would do if he said 'yes', but unaccountably hoping he would.

"Oh, no, of course not. I just kind of assumed... Where are you going to be playing?" he asked, trying hard to sound casual.

"Right here in the bar." He looked relieved at that, and she added, "He originally suggested his cottage, but I thought here was better. You're welcome to watch, of course."

"Thanks," he said drily.

True to his word the reverend appeared promptly at eight, chess set under his arm. They set up on one of the smaller tables off to the side of the room, and began to play. Jake actually did take Sarah up on her invitation to watch, as he found he somehow didn't quite know what else to do with himself that evening. After a few minutes, however, he decided he preferred more exciting forms of entertainment -- such as watching the tide come in. He returned to Corky and some other acquaintances at the bar.

It took Sarah only about forty-five minutes to concede that there was no such thing as a "quiet, out-of-the-way table" in the Monkey Bar, even on a relatively slow night. After the fifth interruption by well-meaning patrons wanting to buy her a drink, ask what they were doing ("funny-looking checkers..."), or just say a friendly hello, Sarah admitted defeat. "Willie," (he had insisted she call him by his first name since this was a purely social occasion), "you were right. We'll never be able to concentrate here."

"My place?" he suggested.

"Well, that may look funny, to certain people," she said, glancing in Jake's direction, "but using my room would look funnier yet! Same rules, though, right? No touching anything but the chess pieces?"

"Oh, ja, absolutely. Sarah, there are many women on Borabora who are at least nearly as beautiful as you, and with whom I can, ah--" He cleared his throat and started again. "I would not risk alienating the one potential chess partner I have here."

Thus assured, she helped him gather and pack the chess pieces.

Jake had been engrossed in conversation, but looked up as Sarah and the reverend walked past him toward the door. He said nothing, but Sarah didn't miss the eloquently raised eyebrow.

To her slight surprise and great relief, Willie proved a perfect gentleman. They settled down to serious play at last in the peace and quiet of his small living room. Her lack of recent experience showed, as she lost the first game with embarrassing rapidity. Even though Willie might

apart forever, even though neither one really wanted it that way. Since she had been in a sense the instigator, she figured it was up to her to make the first move toward reconciliation. She cornered Jake outside the hotel one afternoon just after lunch.

"Jake, can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Well, maybe later, Sarah. I was just going--"

"Please? I-it's important."

He looked at her thoughtfully, then softened. "All right, Sarah, what is it?" he asked more gently.

Swallowing hard, she began. "Jake, I know what you've been thinking about the reverend and me." His eyes rolled in exasperation. He was obviously not prepared to believe her. "Really, we just play chess," she hurried on desperately. "There's nothing more to it than that. He's just a friend, that's all."

"Sarah, I've told you before, you don't owe me any explanations. There were no commitments of any kind between us. You do you as like. It doesn't matter to me."

Damn! The more she tried to explain, the worse it looked. She was chilled by his use of the past tense in referring to their relationship too. She made one last try. "Look, if you don't believe me, just drop in on the reverend's cottage unannounced some Thursday evening. You'll see for yourself."

"Sarah, I do not go around spying on people!"

"Oh, no, you just refuse to believe what they tell you, and you won't check to find out the truth for yourself either!"

Her logic was unassailable, but Jake was feeling betrayed and in no mood for logic. "If that's all you had to say..." He turned and started away.

"You're hopeless! I don't know why I even bothered to try to talk sense to you. Believe what you want, I don't care!" she shouted at his retreating back, regretting those last words the instant they'd left her lips.

"Good! I don't care either!" he called back over his shoulder.

Sarah looked down at her feet and saw Jack, who had lingered behind. "Is that true?" she asked him.

"Ruf!" he responded promptly, looking up at her and wagging his tail.

"That's what I thought," she said with a relieved sigh.

Jack scampered off after his primary human attendant, leaving Sarah wondering whether it was just her imagination, or had the wise little dog really winked at her?

Knowing it was just Jake's stubborn pride that motivated him didn't make him any easier to reach. Sarah considered dropping the chess evenings, but she did enjoy them. Also, she had the feeling Jake would just take that as further confirmation of imagined guilt. Damn the man anyway! She knew she really should just forget about him. After all, she was here to do a job, not to romance some thick-skulled flyboy who couldn't take a joke! But she also knew in her heart that forgetting him was the last thing she could ever do.

For his part, Jake made a determined effort to pretend that everything was perfectly normal in his world. It didn't work though. Even Corky noticed a subdued sadness about him.

Cutter's Goose was moored at the dock in Tagayaya. Her pilot and mechanic were in a bar they favored, enjoying a cold beer and talking with some casual acquaintances. Jake happened to be standing with his back to the attractive blonde as she walked by. One of his companions saw her and said, "Oh, Jake, there's somebody I'd like you to meet." He called to the young woman over Jake's shoulder. "Hey, Dorothy, c'mere and meet Jake Cutter!"

She approached the group, breaking into a pleased smile upon catching sight of the handsome American as he looked her way. He did not return the smile. Instead, he scowled at the other man, snapping, "George, when I want to meet women, I'll let you know!" With that he banged his half-full beer glass down on the bar, its contents sloshing precariously. "C'mon Corky, we haven't got time to stand around here all day!" he said harshly.

"But, Jake, I thought you said--"

"Don't think! Just come on!" Jake roughly pushed his way through the crowd at the bar, then looked back and down and added in the same tone, "That goes for you too. Move it! Or do you want to swim back to Boragora?"

Jack seriously considered biting him in the ankle, until he remembered Jake was wearing boots today.

Corky finished off his beer in two hasty gulps before following his unaccountably angry friend. With each unwilling step he cast a longing glance back toward the bar. After only three steps he couldn't stand it any more.

"Uh, Jake, hold it -- there's somethin' I gotta do!" Without waiting to see if his companion had halted, the little mechanic dashed back to the bar. He pounced on Jake's abandoned beer glass, just inches ahead of the bartender who had been about to remove it, and rapidly downed its contents. Then wiping the back of a grimy hand contentedly across his mouth, he trotted back to the impatiently waiting Jake with a relieved smile. "Okay, I'm ready now," he announced brightly.

"Corky--!" Jake began, then stopped, realizing remonstrance was futile. To Corky, wasting beer

"Hey, that's supposed to be a joke, you know."

"It certainly is!" he said sharply, and walked away without a further word.

"Nice to know your friends have such confidence in you," she muttered to herself as she watched him go.

That night he was not waiting for her when she returned.

The third Thursday evening Sarah and the reverend played again. As they were repositioning the pieces for their second game, he asked, "Jake does not mind that you do not see him these Thursday nights now?"

"Oh, he's not here today. He went out on a charter flight this morning. I noticed he kind of made it a point not to ask me whether we were playing tonight, though. I think he does mind, a little, but that won't hurt him. He doesn't own me, after all, and it's as well for him to realize that."

"You are fond of Jake, though, no?"

"You might say that, I suppose..."

"Are you in love with him then?"

"Let's leave it at 'fond of', Willie. That leaves more room for those moments when I could cheerfully wring his neck," she said, her smile taking most of the sting out of her words.

He grinned. "And you want him to think we do something more than play chess?"

"Well, I wouldn't go quite that far, but if he wants to wonder for a while, it's all right with me," she conceded, returning his grin.

"So what do you tell him about our evenings?"

"Oh, I just tell him the absolute truth, that we play chess. His own active imagination will probably take care of the rest."

With a happy twinkle in his eye, Willie said, "Remember how we stopped Corky from leaving Bora-gora, that time he thought he was responsible for the burning of the *Goose*?"

She laughed at the memory of Corky's total befuddlement. "Yes, I was so grateful that you picked up on what I was trying to do. You added just the perfect touch to make it convincing."

"Let us face it, Sarah. We are natural conspirators, you and I. It is such a waste we cannot be spies or something," he said with a hearty chuckle.

Sarah laughed outright. "Us? Spies? What a preposterous notion!"

"Ja, isn't it?" Willie agreed, joining in her laughter.

Her chess skills had returned enough that she actually won the second game that evening.

While Sarah continued to enjoy her chess games with the reverend, her secondary plan to stimulate Jake's interest by arousing a bit of jealousy appeared to be backfiring. At first, with the exception of Thursday evenings, they continued to see each other pretty much as they always had. Jake remained civil, even pleasant, but the special warmth which had previously characterized their relationship now somehow got lost in the shuffle. He didn't get over it in a couple of weeks as she had expected. Gradually their times together became less frequent, and she began to suspect he was avoiding her. Beneath his surface coolness she sensed, or hoped she did, an underlying hurt. If she was wrong about that, then she could see no hope of resuming their former relationship at all.

One afternoon a few days later Jake was walking along the path by the beach, heading for the hotel. He happened to overtake two young native women just in time to hear one saying to the other, "...what I need is a good blessing. I think I go see Reverend this evening."

The other responded in some alarm, "Oh, no, not tonight!" At her companion's questioning look, she explained, "This Thursday. Thursday is Reverend's night to play games with the American."

Yeah, I'll bet! Jake thought, stung by the added knowledge that he was in a sense responsible for bringing the two of them together, or at least calling them to each other's attention, in the first place. What did she suddenly see in that sanctimonious phony anyway? He'd always had the impression that Sarah viewed the reverend pretty much as he did, an aberration to be tolerated with as good grace as possible, since they all lived in such close proximity. Now she was spending her Thursday evenings off with him -- every week. Not to mention who knew how much other time, while he was away flying. She even talked about it with evident enthusiasm. Chess, indeed! Their pretense of playing chess in the bar that first evening had been pathetically transparent. 'Chess' was obviously a synonym for 'blessing', which was a euphemism for -- oh, the hell with it! He'd noticed Sarah becoming acquainted with some of the native women over the past few months, and they certainly seemed to welcome the reverend's 'blessings'. Maybe they'd given her a different perspective on the matter. The guy must have something going for him; he even took them on two at a time -- often. Besides, Sarah was an adult and it was none of his business, he reminded himself firmly. She was entitled to make her own decisions, and her own mistakes. He told himself he really didn't care. Of course, he would never say that aloud in Jack's presence, because Jack would probably contradict him. And Jack would be right...

Finally Sarah decided this had gone far enough. Their respective pride could drive them

really care. The villagers do not usually call for me unless the situation is critical. I need Sarah for this. She is the closest to a nurse I have, and besides, Luala knows her and will find her presence reassuring."

Jake was still looking for an 'out'. "Can't you just ask one of the other native women to help?"

"They do not speak English well enough -- or French, for that matter. I will probably have to work quickly. I must have someone who is familiar with medical terminology and who will be able to follow my instructions instantly."

"But, Louie..." Jake appealed, desperate.

Louie eyed him speculatively. "Unless, of course, you would care to volunteer to assist me?" he asked pointedly.

That produced the desired effect. "Uh, right. I'll get Sarah."

As Jake hurried off Louie observed sagely to no one in particular, "Somehow I thought you would..."

It was with some trepidation that Jake knocked on the reverend's door. He was startled when Willie answered almost immediately, fully dressed and looking not in the least flustered. "Jake, what a pleasant surprise!"

"Oh -- um, uh, I'm afraid this isn't a social call, Reverend, I've come for Sarah. One of the native women is having trouble having a baby, and Louie wants her to come with him right away." As the reverend stepped back from the door, Jake could see Sarah getting up from a small table, where there was indeed obviously a chess game in progress. Jake suddenly felt like he wanted to crawl in a hole and hide. Small as the room was, Sarah had overheard his message and was already moving quickly toward the door.

"Sorry, Willie," she said, "but I guess we're going to have to finish this one another time. Where's Louie now?" she added, turning to Jake.

"He was going to fetch his medical bag while I came for you. He'll be waiting in front of the hotel."

"Right, thanks," she said, dashing off without waiting for Jake, or even thinking about it.

It was a little after one a.m. when Louie and Sarah finally returned. It had been touch-and-go for a while, but Luala was going to be all right, and so was her beautiful new baby daughter. Sarah was feeling triumphant but thoroughly frazzled as she and Louie approached the hotel. She stopped. "Louie," she said, touching his arm, "you go ahead. I think I want to just stay here and soak up some peace and moonlight for a little while."

Louie looked at her closely. "Are you all right, cherie? You look very tired."

"I am," she admitted. "Don't worry. I'm fine. I'll go on up to bed in a few minutes."

"Very well then, I will see you tomorrow. And thank you again for your help. I could not have done it without you."

She smiled and nodded acknowledgement as he turned to go into the hotel. She wandered over a few steps and leaned wearily against the trunk of an old palm tree. Watching the moonlight dancing on the water of the lagoon, she could feel the tension of the past few hours beginning to drain away from her. Due to the softness of the sand, she didn't hear footsteps. Her first indication that she was not alone came when a second shadow appeared on the sand beside her own. She turned sharply, stifling a gasp as a familiar voice said, "Shhh, it's all right. It's just me. I'm not dangerous -- unless terminal stupidity is catching."

"Jake, it's the middle of the night. What are you -- oh, I know, you were just enjoying the fresh air and moonlight."

"No, I was waiting for you." In the bright moonlight she looked disheveled and exhausted, touchingly vulnerable. To Jake she had somehow never looked more beautiful, or appealing, and he ached to hold her and make everything all right again. "Sarah," he began hesitantly, "what can I say? I was wrong. I should have known there was nothing going on between you and the reverend."

Sarah studied her toes for a moment, then looked up with a self-deprecating smile. "I didn't exactly go out of my way to correct that impression. Actually, I was kind of hoping at first that you would be a little jealous," she confessed. "I never wanted to hurt you, though; I never thought you'd take it so seriously."

Jake hesitated briefly, then took a deep breath and forged ahead. "Well, there may be some things you didn't know. Do you remember my mentioning the Gilsons?"

That question took her by surprise. "Uh, yes, we'd talked about me going along on one of your supply trips some time so I could meet them. I remember you said they were the most happily married couple you'd ever known, and you thought I'd like them. And I'd still like to do that some day. But what's that got to do with us?"

"Well, on my trip before last, Carolyn was gone, and so was Carl van Ryn, their new foreman. They'd run off together."

"Like for good?" He nodded. "Oh, how awful for poor John. How did it happen?"

"Uh--" Suddenly he was somehow embarrassed to tell her. Still, it was a pertinent question, more so than she knew. And she had the right to know. "Actually -- they really got acquainted when they started playing cribbage together."

"Oh, dear," she said softly, making the connection immediately. "And it was just about that time that I started playing chess with the reverend."

was very nearly an act of sacrilege. He settled instead for a brief glare in the mechanic's direction, then turned on his heel and without looking back strode toward the entrance. Corky and Jack were hurrying to catch up when, just inside the door, Jake abruptly stopped.

"Umpff!!" Corky ran into him, nearly knocking both men off their feet. Jack, bringing up the rear, narrowly missed being bowled over by a rear-end collision with Corky's size 12 boot. As they sorted themselves out, Corky demanded loudly, "Jake! What the hell ya doin'?"

"Acting like a first-class jerk," he admitted with a rueful shake of the head.

"Ruf, ruf!" Jack instantly agreed.

Jake gave the little dog a sour look before conceding, "Sorry, guys, but I think I owe some other people an apology too." He returned to the bar and his erstwhile companions. "Hey, George, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you like that." Without waiting for a response he looked at the young woman who had been the catalyst of it all. She regarded him with an icy stare. A well-deserved icy stare, he grudgingly admitted to himself. "Look, Miss, uh..." She arched an eyebrow at him, much as Sarah might have done, and said nothing. He cleared his throat awkwardly, tried again. "Yeah, well, uh, I guess I deserve that. Hell, I *know* I do! What I'm trying to say to both of you is, I'm sorry." He shook his head slowly. "I don't know what got into me. I don't usually act like that."

The blonde smiled uncertainly, edged warily around him and quickly walked away. George mumbled something that sounded like "'s okay," and turned back to his beer and his other friends.

Corky nodded wisely. "Yep, I gotta hand it to ya, Jake, you sure know how to win friends and influence people!"

Okay, I *do* know what my problem was. It was Sarah. I knew the similarity between her starting to play chess with the Reverend Tenboom and what happened with the Gilsons was just a coincidence. At least that's what my head was telling me. But my heart was insisting the parallel was just too strong.

Sarah had just started out for a walk one morning when she turned to see Corky trotting to catch up with her. She paused to wait for him.

"Hi, Sarah! Do you mind some company?"

She sensed he had more on his mind than just walking. "Of course not. I just thought I'd like to get out for a while before the heat of the day sets in."

"I know, I saw you leave. I followed you," he confessed. In his usual forthright manner, Corky came right to the point. "Have you and Jake had a

fight or somethin'? He's been awful quiet lately -- and touchy! I've noticed you two haven't been spendin' much time together, like you used to. What's goin' on?" he finished plaintively.

Corky's immediate acceptance of her, from the moment she first set foot on Boragora, had caused her to think of him as a special friend. Besides, she need to talk to someone... "Oh, Corky, I don't know! It's all so confused. The Reverend Tenboom and I found out we both play chess, and since no one else on the island does, we wanted to play together. And that's really *all* we do." Corky's nod of understanding and acceptance showed no hesitation at all. "Only, as far as I can figure, Jake doesn't believe that. He thinks the reverend and I are...well, you know. At first I thought it was kind of funny. But now it seems like he -- Jake, that is -- just keeps drifting further away from me."

"Maybe you should just talk to him, and tell him the truth."

"Oh, Corky, I've tried. That only seems to make things worse. The more I try to tell him it isn't so, the more convinced he becomes that it is. I don't know what to do."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Jake can be awful stubborn when he makes up his mind about something. You want me to try to talk to him again?"

"Thanks, Corky, but I don't think it would do any good. I don't want him ending up mad at you too. It all started as sort of a joke. I didn't mean to hurt him, but now it looks like I have, and I can't figure out what to do about it!"

Corky stopped walking, obviously preparing to turn back. "Well, gee, Sarah, if you think of anything I can do to help, all ya gotta do is ask. You know that, don't you? And, whatever happens, I'm still your friend."

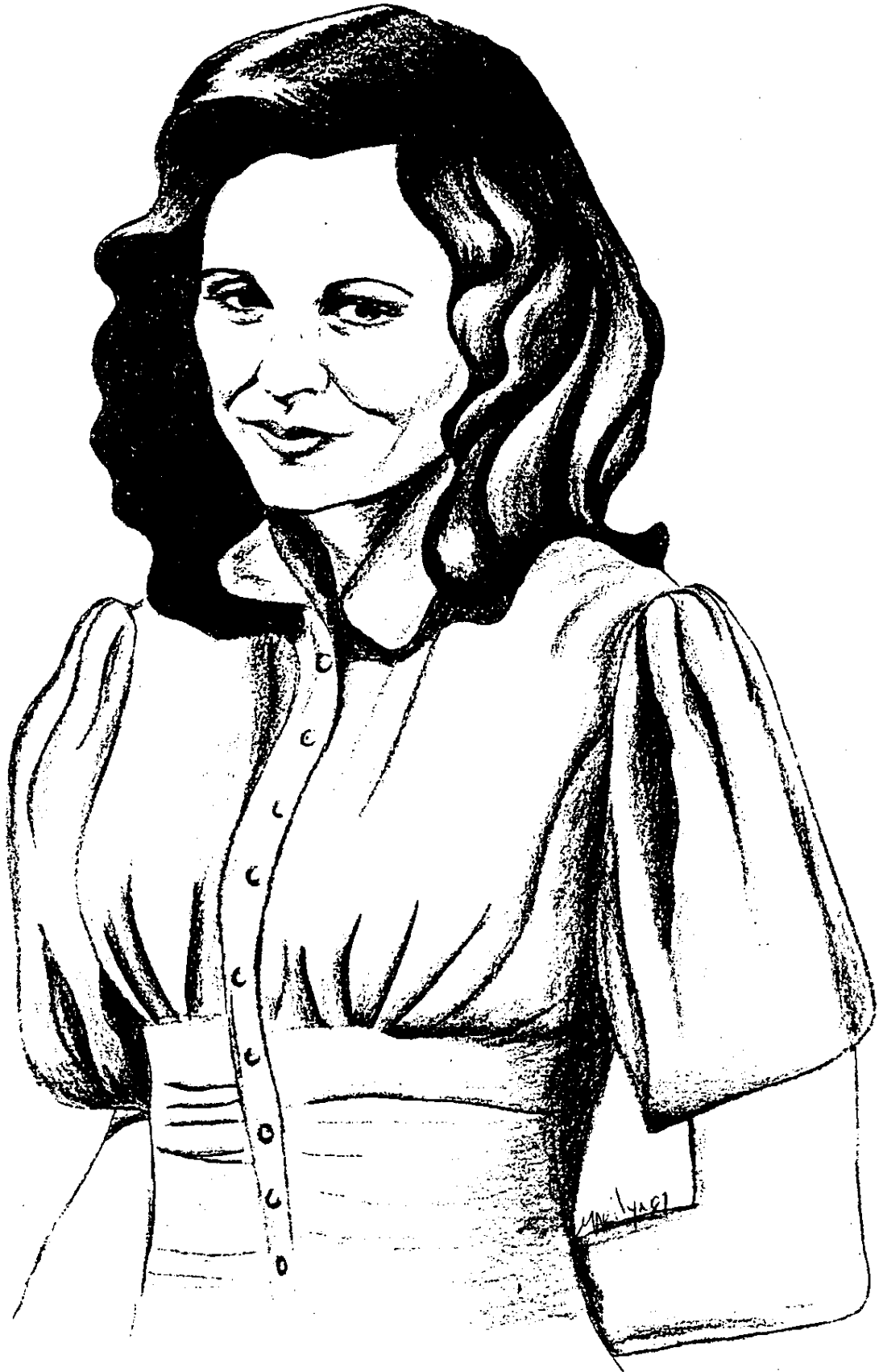
"Sure, thanks again. I know I can always count on you."

"Right, well, I better be gettin' back before Jake starts to wonder where I am."

The following Thursday evening Jake and Louie were sharing a leisurely drink in the relatively deserted Monkey Bar. A runner arrived from the native village about half a mile away with a message for Louie. After conferring with the man in private, Louie returned to Jake, his face showing consternation. "It is Luala, one of the native women. Her baby is due, and she is having difficulty in delivering. They want me to come. While I am getting my medical bag, please go and bring Sarah immediately. I believe she is visiting the Reverend Tenboom."

"Louie, wait! I can't just go barging in there!" At Louie's inquiring look, he explained, "They're -- you know."

"No, I don't know, and at this moment I do not



end, wasn't it?"

He glanced at her, their eyes meeting for an instant before he looked away again, nodding affirmation.

"Jake," she said with a sympathetic smile, "I know I've done some very strange things in my time, and I'll probably do a lot more. But--" her smile deepened to a broad grin, "--I think I can safely and categorically assure you that I will *never* run away with the Reverend Tenboom!"

He returned her smile, but only half-heartedly. His expression quickly became more serious again as he continued. "But that was only one of a number of things..."

"Such as?"

"Okay, first you were gone to the Philippines for over a month, *before* we got the telegram saying you were dead. Then after I found you there, you had to stay another week and couldn't come home with us. It was still only your first night back when we had that blow-up about the reverend -- not that I blame you for being mad about that. Then it wasn't until after that 'gas attack' on my room that you began to act like your old self with me again, and just shortly after *that* came this business with the Gilsons, and you starting to play chess with the reverend. It seemed like every time I began to feel close to you, something happened

and you pulled away from me again. I just didn't know how to take all that. Can you understand how I was feeling?" he finished, giving her a searching look.

"I never thought of it that way. I guess it's my turn to say 'I didn't think.'"

"Yeah, but you tried to tell me often enough. I was just too stubborn to listen."

"Then, you really do care," she said softly.

He nodded, smiling diffidently. Then he looked at her more intently. With suddenly growing confidence, he asked, "Wait, you said you were hoping I'd be jealous?" She nodded, embarrassed. "Then you must really care for me too, at least a little?" Another nod, her eyes lowered. "Truce?" he suggested hopefully.

She hesitated. "Wel-l-l."

"Pretty please? With a cherry on top?" he added with his most engaging boyish grin.

"Actually," she said slowly, looking up at him shyly, "I was thinking of something more along the lines of...mutual surrender."

His tender look was all the answer she needed, as she melted into the welcoming warmth of his arms, and his kiss.



later.max