

# MARRIAGE OF INCONVENIENCE

Karen B.  
Valentine

A breathtaking sunrise came up from the Pacific Ocean, giving everything in its wake a lustrous sheen. Silhouetted against the glistening water was a small tropical island -- its lush, green beauty slowly coming to life in the light of the brilliant rays.

But, suddenly, the morning stillness was shattered by the thump of a distant drum. It was immediately followed by another and then another, until the whole island seemed to vibrate to the sound. Then, the chanting began -- softly at first, but soon building to a towering crescendo -- "Lo-gan-di! Lo-gan-di! Lo-gan-di!"

Lying in the middle of the island was a Polynesian village, where, at that moment, a ceremony was taking place. Clothed in a simple white dress, a pretty native girl was sitting on a litter in the center of the square. She had a slightly fearful look on her face as she watched the warriors dance around her, chanting to the rhythm of the drums, while behind her, some native women fixed tropical flowers in her hair.

Then, just as suddenly as it began, the deafening sound stopped and the native chief stepped out of a nearby hut. He was a fearsome-looking man, over six feet tall, with a stern, impassive face, and he wore an elaborate headdress made of exotic plumes and animal teeth.

As he strode toward the frightened girl, the crowd of villagers parted before him. Reaching her, he halted and gave her what appeared to be some sort of blessing. Then, turning around, he extended his long, muscular arms. "Lo-gan-di!" he

shouted to the crowd.

"Lo-gan-di!" the natives repeated, raising their hands toward him.

Turning back to the girl, he commanded some warriors to lift the litter, and, as they did, the drums started beating again. Walking to the front of the crowd, the chief led the procession toward the back of the island.

As they went along, the elevation became steeper, until they finally came to a precipice at the top of a high cliff which jutted out over the ocean. The girl was taken down from her chair and led up to the very edge where the chief met her to give her a ceremonial kiss on the cheek. Then, he motioned for some warriors to take her to a small, hidden ledge that rested within the massive cliff wall just below where they were standing.

When she was in place, the drumming ceased again while the chief approached the precipice. For a moment, he paused and stared across the water. Then, spreading his arms out widely before him, he shouted, "Lo-gan-di!" in a booming voice. As the sound of it carried out over the waves, he turned around again and led the natives back toward their village.

After she'd been left alone for a while, the native girl ventured a timid look down at the ocean. She seemed both unsure of what she was looking for and also somewhat unnerved at the prospect of finding out.

As she watched, the sea started to pitch and

sway as some sort of movement from underneath sent a stream of bubbles to the surface. The girl's eyes grew wide -- first, with wonderment and then, with sheer, stark terror as a looming shadow covered her entire face. Opening her mouth, she uttered a blood-curdling scream.

And, as her cry echoed out over the hills and slowly faded away, there was once again a beautiful, peaceful island basking in the glow of a tropical sunrise.

Late afternoon, almost one year later, the *Goose* was flying over the ocean. Inside the plane, the look on Jake's face was beginning to resemble the one the native girl had as he stared at the instrument panel in disbelief.

There are only a few times in a pilot's life when he knows the meaning of the word 'fear'. One is when he's being shot at. Another is when an engine quits, but, for my money, there's nothing that brings on the old cold sweat like staring at an entire cockpit full of instruments and knowing that not a single one of them is working.

"Have you got *any* idea where we are?" he asked in frustration, glancing at Corky.

"You kiddin', Jake? I gave up tryin' an hour ago! That storm really blew everything out but good!"

"I knew the three hundred bucks Louie's paying us for this venture wasn't gonna be worth it. It'll probably cost us that much to fix the plane."

"Is everything all right up there?" asked a slightly nervous voice from behind them.

Jake turned to look down the aisle and tried to smile. "Sure, Sarah. Nothing to worry about."

Looking at him skeptically, she glanced down at the unfamiliar ocean below her, and started to finger her hair a little.

"I'll bet that's what they said to Amelia Earhart," she muttered to Jack, watching him head toward his parachute seat.

The little dog responded with two sharp barks as he nestled in.

Glancing at Corky resignedly, Jake lowered his voice. "I guess we're gonna have to go down."

It wasn't quite low enough.

"Down?" Sarah asked with a touch of panic, sticking her head into the cockpit. "Down *how*? As in three-point landing or as in splattering our bodies all the way to the China Sea?"

Jake let out a short laugh. "Oh, c'mon, Sarah. What do you think? You know what kind of pilot I am by now."

Trying to smile, she patted Corky's shoulder. "Well, it was sure nice knowing you, Corky."

"You too, Sarah!" he declared enthusiastically, until he realized what she meant. Then, he turned to his friend in alarm. "Hey...Jake!"

"Sarah's just pulling your leg." Jake smiled confidently, but at that instant, the port engine started to cough and backfire, and black smoke came pouring out of it. Glancing over at it, Jake swallowed hard. "I *hope*."

They all looked at one another for a long moment. Then, Sarah turned around. "Move over, Jack!" she called out, hurrying down the aisle.

Biting down on his cigar, Jake grabbed the yoke. "Not now," he muttered to himself, quickly scanning the horizon. "Corky, do you see any place to land down there?"

"Yeah, Jake! There's an island with a lagoon at three o'clock!"

Banking to the right, he spotted it. "Atta boy!" he exclaimed to his beaming friend. Then, he turned to shout toward the back of the plane. "Strap in, Sarah!"

"Don't worry! I'm way ahead of you!" she shouted back.

Jake struggled a bit with the sputtering plane, but finally brought it in for a perfect landing.

As they taxied up to the beach of the island, Sarah walked back to the cockpit and breathed a sigh of relief. "I really have to hand it to you, Jake. You certainly know how to handle a crippled plane."

"That's 'cause he's had a lotta practice!" Corky blurted out emphatically.

Two loud barks rang out, and Sarah started to laugh as Jake turned to give her a wry smile.

When they got out of the plane and looked it over, Jake shook his head. "That Louie and his exotic delicacies. Someday I'm going to know better than to traipse all over the Pacific tracking down his goodies. Why did I ever listen to him?"

"Probably 'cause this time the three hundred bucks did most of the talkin'," offered Corky, climbing the wing to check the engine.

Jake grinned sheepishly at Sarah, and she smiled back at him.

"I think we only need a coupla plugs up here, Jake. But, the instruments are gonna be another story."

"Well, just get the engine fixed for now, and we'll worry about them later. Maybe we can find somebody to help us on this island."

While Corky worked on the engine, Sarah and Jake scouted the beach. After a short time, Sarah stopped and shielded her eyes from the sun to take a look all around. "Hmmm, I don't know. There doesn't seem to be anyone here."

But, just then, the drumbeats started, and she and Jake exchanged looks.

"I guess I spoke too soon," she said nervously, unconsciously fiddling with her hair again.

"Maybe they're friendly," suggested Jake hopefully.

"And, if they're not?"

He patted her shoulder. "Well, then, it's sure been nice knowing you."

She gave him the eye as Corky yelled, "I'm done, Jake!"

They walked back over to him while he scrambled down from the wing.

"Uh...Jake?" he asked shakily, glancing around with wide eyes. "Uh...Jack wants to know what that drummin's all about."

Jake looked down at the little dog in amusement. "Why don't we go see?"

Jack's quick bark made Corky's eyes grown even wider. "That means 'no', Jake!"

Jake placed his hand on his friend's shoulder. "C'mon, Corky. We'll show him we're not afraid, right? After all, look at Sarah. She's not scared, are you, Sarah?"

"Uh...n...no," she answered, trying to cover it up with a weak smile.

But, when Jake went back into the plane to get his gun, Sarah and Corky read the uneasy expressions on each other's faces.

Emerging from the hold, Jake looked irritated. "Damn!" he muttered, starting to buckle his gun belt. "I forgot to reload it. There're only two bullets left now."

Sarah and Corky exchanged looks.

"Uh...Jake? Couldn't we just use the radio?" Corky asked anxiously.

Finishing with the belt, Jake looked up at him. "We don't even know where we are. How are we supposed to tell someone else?"

"Well, um...why don't we just wait here for a while and see if someone comes by?" offered Sarah while Jack barked his hearty agreement.

Jake smiled knowingly at them. "C'mon, you guys. The sun'll be setting in a few hours, and we don't want to be stuck in the jungle in the dark, do we?"

"No, but..." Sarah hesitated.

"Then, I suggest we get a move on before it's too late," he declared, starting toward the underbrush.

As Jack growled in disgust, Sarah glanced

resignedly at Corky. Then, she looked down at her dress and open-toed shoes and sighed. "Someday I'm going to learn to bring hiking gear along whenever I take a trip with Jake," she muttered under her breath as they all followed him into the jungle.

The sun was still hovering over the hills behind them when the foursome finally came upon the native village. Crouching down in back of some vegetation, they looked in awe at the ceremony going on before them.

On the other side of the village, seated at a low table on a raised platform were the native chief and another frightened pretty native girl. The white dress she was wearing was very similar to the one worn by the previous girl. While the native women served them food, which the chief was devouring with greater relish than the girl was, some warriors were dancing in the center of the square, chanting something unintelligible.

Jake turned to Corky and whispered, "Can you understand anything they're saying?"

"Uh...I think somebody's gettin' married -- probably those two up there," he whispered back, indicating the girl and the chief.

"Well, she really looks thrilled about it," Sarah commented sarcastically.

"Can you blame her?" asked Jake. "How'd you like the thought of waking up next to *that* every morning?"

Raising an eyebrow, she started to say something, but immediately thought better of it. Instead, she said, "I really don't like the looks of this. Could we just get out of here -- *please*?"

Jake gazed at her pleading face and smiled. "I guess you're right. Besides...weddings always make me a little nervous, anyway." His eyes twinkled at her unamused look.

Just then, Corky felt something sticking in his back and turned to look behind him. His face going white, he stammered nervously, "Jake...I -- I -- I don't think we're gonna be able to leave."

"Why not?" Jake inquired, still smiling as he turned toward his friend. But then, he felt something in his back, too, and looked up.

Standing behind them were two fierce-looking natives holding long, sharp spears aimed directly at them.

With short glances at one another, the friends slowly rose to their feet and stared speechlessly as one of the natives gestured toward the village. "Ookala. Wambogo," he said firmly.

"H -- H -- He wants us to go with them," Corky explained to Jake.

"I got *that*, Corky. The pointed end of a spear kinda speaks a language all its own."

Barking twice, Jack hid behind Corky as Sarah grabbed onto Jake's arm.

Gulping, Jake nodded weakly at their captors while leaning cautiously toward Sarah. "Don't make any sudden moves."

She looked at him fearfully. "Does *fainting* count?"

The natives gestured impatiently with their spears again, and they all slowly turned toward the village.

The drumming and chanting came to a sudden halt when they were brought into the square. The other natives started to murmur among themselves as they gazed at the strange intruders.

When they were presented to the chief, he rose and stared at each of them, but his eyes soon became fixed on Sarah.

Glancing around nervously, she found that all of the natives were staring at her intensely. "What are they looking at?" she asked, moving closer to Jake.

"I don't know. Maybe they've never seen a redhead before," he replied, putting his arm around her protectively.

"Well, then we're even -- because I've never seen anything like *him* before, either," she whispered in awe as she watched the chief approach them.

When he stopped in front of them, Corky quickly told him in the natives' language that they'd come as friends.

Nodding, the chief looked Sarah over carefully before turning to Jake. "Nuwala boto?"

Smiling faintly, Jake mumbled out of the corner of his mouth to Corky, "What did he say?"

Corky looked apologetically at Sarah. "I -- I -- I think he's...uh...askin' if Sarah...*belongs* to you."

Indignantly, Sarah started to open her mouth, but Jake immediately stopped her. "Sarah, maybe we oughta humor him a little. I don't think these guys've heard that women got the vote. You know what I mean?"

She hesitated and looked around to see that the natives had formed a wide circle around them. Backing down, she nodded at Jake. But, when she saw the hint of an amused smile cross his face, she realized she'd been had, but she said nothing.

"Tell him 'yes', Corky," Jake grinned.

When Corky gave their reply, the chief asked him another question, and the mechanic's face turned crimson as he stared at the chief in dismay.

Bewildered, Jake and Sarah asked in unison, "Well?"

Licking his lips, Corky stammered. "Uh...h... he wants to know if...uh...i...i...if Sarah's ever...uh...i...if she's ever..."

"If I ever *what*?" she demanded impatiently.

"I...if you've ever...uh...ever..."

"*Corky!*" exclaimed Jake in exasperation.

Closing his eyes for a moment, Corky swallowed hard. Then, he gave them a meaningful look and whistled softly.

"*What!*" shouted Sarah angrily, instantly recognizing Corky's euphemism. Her fear forgotten, she turned to the chief with blazing eyes. "Okay, mister, that's it! This has gone far enough! What business is it of *yours* if I..."

Jake quickly clamped his hand over her mouth as the natives started murmuring again. He tried to sound worried, but, in spite of everything, he was beginning to find a little humor in the situation. "Uh...I think you oughta answer his question, Sarah. After all, we are his guests...and they *do* have five-foot spears."

As he slowly removed his hand, she narrowed her eyes at him. "You're really getting a big kick out of this, aren't you?" she asked, reading his face.

Coughing, he attempted to wipe off his smile, but it showed through anyway.

Taking a deep breath to calm her temper, Sarah turned to Corky. "Tell him 'no'," she said curtly, flashing Jake a hard look.

"Oh, good," Corky sighed, just glad to have it over with.

When the chief received his answer, he smiled with satisfaction and began to confer with his council.

"I...I think he's impressed," Corky told his friends with relief.

"So am I," mumbled Jake under his breath. But, neither that nor his sly smile escaped Sarah's notice, and she looked like she'd love to pop him about then.

While the chief talked with his ministers, the foursome overheard the word "Logandi" being repeated many times.

Jake turned to Corky. "What does *that* mean?"

"I dunno, Jake. I never heard it before. Maybe he made up a new word for ya, Sarah."

"Well, if I weren't a lady, I'd make up a few words for him, too," she said in disgust. "And, for someone *else*." She glared at Jake.

Trying to avoid her look, Jake had a realization. "Hey, I've got it! I'll bet it means *red-head!*"

Sarah fixed him with an icy stare. "And, I'll bet it means trouble!"

Jack emitted two loud barks, and they all glanced down at him. Then, Sarah and Corky looked back at Jake -- Corky with wide eyes and Sarah with steely ones.

"Oh, c'mon," said Jake, trying to lighten them up. "These natives seem pretty friendly to me."

"Oh, sure. That's easy for you to say. They're not drilling you about your personal life. But then, maybe they don't have enough time to listen to yours."

Jake grinned at her. "Well, at least they're not trying to kill us."

"On, no? Maybe they intend to slowly *embar-rass* us to death."

"Jake? Why do you suppose they wanted to know that about Sarah?" asked Corky curiously.

Jake shrugged. "I don't know. It must be some kind of test outsider women have to pass before they let them into the village."

"Well, no wonder they never saw a redhead before," Sarah remarked dryly.

Just then, the chief turned toward them. "Howana. Bogota rono."

Corky started to shuffle nervously again, his face registering discomfort.

"What *now*?" muttered Sarah, rolling her eyes skyward.

"He...uh...wants to *buy* you from Jake," Corky replied hesitantly.

Sarah gave Jake a challenging stare. "This is getting a bit out of hand, don't you think?"

Putting his hands up, Jake smiled confidently. "It's okay. Just let me handle this."

"Well, why not? You've been doing such a marvelous job so far."

Turning to the chief, Jake shook his head, making a sideways motion with his hand. "How do you say 'no thanks', Corky?" he asked, putting on a frozen smile.

"Tunama," replied Corky, wishing he'd never heard of this language before.

Still smiling, Jake repeated it and waved his hand again.

His expression indicating that he wasn't the type who took 'no' for an answer, the chief commanded some natives to bring him something, and they soon returned with an old, wooden sea chest.

The chief gestured toward it and then toward Jake. "Hana regato," he said, pointing to Sarah.

Jake kept smiling and shook his head again. "I really don't need one of those."

The chief ordered the natives to open it, and the three friends gaped in disbelief to find it filled with gold coins and precious jewels.

"Jeepers," uttered Corky in amazement as Jack barked his agreement.

His eyes like saucers, Jake stared at the contents in awe.

Sarah's initial astonishment soon turned into annoyance when she saw Jake's mesmerized expression. "Jake," she declared firmly, tugging on his sleeve. "Put your eyes back in your head and tell him 'no'."

Breaking out of his trance, Jake swallowed hard and tried to recover his composure. Smiling weakly, he shook his head again. "Tunama," he said with a slight touch of wistfulness.

Sarah was fuming, but she managed to control it. However, the chief's face was starting to show signs of his displeasure as he commanded the natives to take away the chest and bring him something else.

They came back with three of the most beautiful island girls Jake had ever seen, and it registered in his eyes as he looked at them.

"Umra. Sebano hapno mana," grunted the chief, gesturing between the girls and Sarah.

Watching Jake's spellbound stare, Sarah decided she'd had enough. "Jake Cutter," she stated evenly, "if I see those eyes of yours bug out one more time, there are going to be *two* eyepatches around here."

Jack barked twice and wagged his tail in vengeful anticipation.

Smiling sheepishly, Jake came back to reality and turned to see her frosty look. "Aw, c'mon, Sarah. You don't really think I'd sell you, do you?"

She fixed him with a steady gaze. "Well, all I can say is I certainly hope he doesn't haul out some airplane instruments next, or I guess I'll probably be waking up beside him every morning, anyway."

Grinning, Jake turned back to the chief. "Tell him 'no' again, Corky. Just explain that I couldn't possibly part with Sarah. After all, she's one of my favorite..." He paused to give her a playful grin. "...possessions."

"This has got to be a nightmare," Sarah mumbled to herself while Corky gave Jake's reply.

A dark scowl came over the chief's face, and he gave a sharp order to his warriors.

"Uh, oh," muttered Corky with huge eyes when the natives lowered their spears menacingly and advanced toward them.

Jake's grin vanished as he quickly reached for his gun and fired it twice over his head, stopping the natives in their tracks. "Tell him to make them back off, Corky," he said, trying to look calm while Sarah clutched his other arm in fear.

"But, Jake! You're out of bullets now!" she cried in panic.

"We know that, but *they* don't," he murmured hopefully.

Corky nervously repeated Jake's demand, and the chief raised his hand to signal his men to put down their weapons. Then, he slowly stepped toward Jake and put his hand on his shoulder. "Bonamo pobutoo," he nodded conciliatorily.

"I...I think that means they give up!" exclaimed Corky.

Jake looked at the chief in surprise and started to put his gun away. "Well, *that* was easy."

"A little *too* easy," mumbled Sarah warily, still holding on to Jake's arm.

Jack growled and barked twice.

The chief cast a threatening glance down at the little dog, and Corky quickly bent to pick him up. "Cut it out, Jack!" he warned. "Or else you're gonna bark us into big trouble!"

The chief then turned toward the table he was sitting at earlier and commanded the native girl to come over to him.

Sarah flashed Jake a look, but he put up his hands and smiled coolly to show her he was in complete control.

"Mato begumo. Hani rama lonato," said the chief to Sarah, gesturing toward the girl.

Taken aback to see that he was addressing her, Sarah gulped and looked at Corky questioningly.

"He says he wants to give you her dress as a present, Sarah -- sorta like a peace offering."

Sarah turned back to the chief with a nervous smile. "Oh, that's okay. I...I really like the one I've got on. You see, I bought in on sale at Bloomingdale's about two years ago, and it's always been one of my..." Stopping in mid-sentence, she watched in dismay as the chief calmly lifted the dress off of the native girl and held it out to her.

"Ano cumolo," he said, indicating that Jake should do the same to Sarah.

Jake barely heard him as he stared transfixed at the naked girl. But, soon, he caught Sarah's glare in his peripheral vision and remembered her warning. Reaching up to gingerly touch his eye, he cleared his throat. "Uh...what did he say?" he asked Corky, trying hard not to look at the girl.

Totally speechless, Corky covered Jack's good

eye with his hand and looked at Jake helplessly.

"Ano cumolo," repeated the chief, impatiently motioning again.

Jake finally caught his meaning and turned to Sarah with a faint smile.

She eyed him with a penetrating look. "*Not* in your wildest dreams," she uttered with conviction. Then, she turned to the chief. "All right, if you insist, I'll take the dress. But, I'm a big girl, you know. I *can* dress myself." Stepping forward, she yanked the dress out of the chief's hand and draped it back around the girl. Then, putting her arm around her, she led her toward a nearby empty hut, giving Jake and the chief an irritable backward glance as she went.

Not accustomed to such bold behavior from a woman, the chief stared after her in disbelief, finally turning to Jake for an explanation.

Smiling weakly, he gave the chief a small shrug. "Redheads," he said simply.

Meanwhile, inside the hut, Sarah muttered to herself as she started to take off her dress. "The things I get myself into trying to do somebody a favor... 'Go with them, ma cherie,' he said. 'They would not know beluga caviar from mouse droppings.'... 'Sure,' I said. 'Why not?'... That's me -- always ready to help. Why don't I ever learn? I swear, when we get back, I'm going to tell Louie just what he can do with his caviar and..." Stopping, she looked over at the native girl who was staring at her fearfully. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Running to her and grabbing her arms, the girl whispered frantically, "Entande! Moramo powana Logandi!"

"What? I'm sorry, I don't..."

"Moramo powana Logandi!" repeated the girl, her face a picture of terror as she gestured wildly with her hands.

Sarah shook her head in bewildered frustration. "What does that *mean*?"

The girl took her to a window and pointed across the village to a native standing in the doorway of a hut. On his face was a hideous mask that resembled the head of a sea serpent. As she stared at him, Sarah started to get a strange feeling in the pit of her stomach, but before she could say anything, a native woman came into their hut and gave the girl a stern look which made her back away from Sarah.

"We'll be ready in a minute," Sarah said pleasantly, forcing a smile.

Ignoring her, the woman turned to the girl, speaking firmly to her in a warning voice. Then, giving Sarah a hard look, she strode back out again.

Sarah walked over to the girl and held her arms. "What are you trying to tell me?" she asked entreatingly.

But, the girl just shook her head, the fear showing in her eyes.

Sarah realized that the woman had apparently intimidated the girl into being silent, and she gave her an understanding smile. "It's all right. Listen, I'll tell you what -- since I have to wear your dress, how would you like to wear mine?" She reached out to hand it to her. "Go on. Take it. It's yours," she said gently.

Touching the material, the girl looked at her in disbelief and pointed to herself questioningly.

Sarah smiled warmly. "That's right. It's for you. Just...take care of it, okay?"

The girl gazed at Sarah with moist eyes for a moment before turning around to put the dress on. When she was done, she held the white one out to Sarah.

After feeling the coarseness of the fabric, Sarah sighed. "Well, at least they had the decency to take the flour out of it first," she grumbled to herself, pulling it on over her slip.

When she finished dressing, she turned around again and tried to be cheerful. "Ready for the fashion show?"

But, the girl grabbed her arms again and gave her a look that sent a chill down her spine. "Moramo powana Logandi," she whispered gravely. "[Entande -- Entande!]" She tried desperately to make Sarah understand.

Suddenly, the native woman who was there before came back into the hut. Looking over at her, Sarah forced a smile. "We're ready," she announced, putting her arm around the girl as they walked outside together.

Oohing and aahing, the other women crowded around them, touching the girl's new dress. While the commotion was going on, Sarah worked her way back to Jake, Corky, and Jack, and pulled Jake aside.

"Very becoming," he smiled, looking her over.

"Never mind the dress," she said tensely. "I have a feeling there's something a whole lot worse to worry about."

"What?" he asked, instantly concerned.

"I'm not sure exactly. But, while we were in there, that girl kept repeating that word to me."

"What word?"

"Logandi -- the one that even Corky doesn't know the meaning of."

"Well, if she was saying it to you, maybe it *does* mean redhead."

"No! She was terrified -- almost as if she was trying to warn me about something."

Jake flashed a grin. "I wish somebody would've warned *me* about redheads," he said ruefully, rubbing the spot where she had hit him with the champagne bottle at their first meeting.

She gave him the eye. "Jake, this is serious. Something fishy's going on. Can you explain why they want me to wear this dress?"

"I don't know." He shrugged. "Maybe they think it's 'you'."

She eyed him again. "And, maybe there's someone or some *thing* else around here who's never seen a redhead, either."

"Oh, Sarah. Your fantasies are running away with you."

"Really? Take a look at that guy over there." She pointed to the native with the mask. "What's he got that on for?"

"French charades?" he offered with a smile.

Taking a deep breath, she stared at him in exasperation.

"Okay, okay," he gave in, trying to be serious. "He's probably imitating some god or other -- just a figment of their imaginations."

"Well, something tells me this figment likes women dressed in white."

Before Jake could respond, Corky came over to them. "Uh...Jake? I -- I -- I think the natives are gettin' sorta restless over there," he stammered anxiously, gesturing with this thumb.

Jake looked toward the chief who was once again conferring in low tones with his council. "What are they saying, Corky?"

"Well, I -- I didn't catch much of it, but I heard 'em say that Logandi word again. I tried to ask 'em what it means, but they just clammed up. I think Jack's startin' to get the heebie-jeebies."

"He's not the only one," Sarah stated flatly as Jack barked twice.

Jake was determined to calm everybody down. "Okay, Corky. Go back over and tell them we'll be right there."

"S...sure, Jake," he replied hesitantly, walking off with Jack.

"Now, Sarah, stop worrying." He gently put his hands on her shoulders. "Nothing's going to happen to you. This is all probably just some kind of initiation -- sort of like what you must've gone through at college."

Raising an eyebrow slightly, she gave him a wry look. "I guess I must've been absent the day my sorority brought in the suspicious-looking natives with ugly masks and five-foot spears."

After staring at each other for a moment, they both suddenly broke out in a burst of hysterical laughter as the whole situation struck them as funny.

"I suppose you're right," Sarah agreed finally, smiling up at him. "My nerves just got the best of me."

"It's understandable," he replied, reaching out to tenderly touch her face.

Her eyes grew soft as she looked into his. "You know, I used to be a very logical person until you came into my life."

Smiling warmly, he started to say something, but, just then, Corky came back and interrupted. "I found out where we are, Jake! It's called Mola Kani!"

"Mola Kani? I don't remember ever seeing it on a map."

"Me, neither. It must be outside the shippin' lanes."

"Swell. How are we gonna find our way out of here?"

"I dunno, Jake. But, I think you guys better get over there quick. Me and Jack are runnin' outta small talk."

Jack barked twice, and Jake smiled down at him. "Okay. We're coming. Ready, Sarah?"

"Ready as I'll ever be," she sighed resignedly.

Jake put his arm around her, and they all walked back to the chief.

In spite of all the encouraging things I'd just said to Sarah, I have to admit that I was feeling a little uneasy myself. Right then, I mean -- there we were -- stranded on an uncharted island, with a plane with no instruments, armed only with an unloaded gun and two crates of caviar to go up against a whole village full of secretive natives and their chief, who happened to have a strange fascination for virtuous redheads. Not that I could really blame him, in Sarah's case...but, a little voice inside was telling me that *his* interest in her wasn't exactly for the same reason as mine.

The darkness of night now hung over the native village, with the only light coming from a few scattered torches and a large bonfire burning in the middle of the square. Illuminated by the flickering firelight was the table on the raised platform, and seated at it on the floor beside each other were the native girl, the chief, Corky, Jake, and Sarah. Jack was lying down behind Jake and Sarah. The native women were going from one to the other of them, serving them food from wooden bowls.

As evening came, we all started to feel more relaxed...especially when dinner was served, and we

found out that we weren't *it*. Although the food wasn't recognizable, on the whole, it wasn't too bad, and, pretty soon, everyone seemed to be taking it all in stride...well, *almost* everyone.

Examining something on her plate, Sarah made a face and set it down. Turning to Jake, she sighed, "If somebody wouldn't come up to me at graduation and told me that someday I'd be stuck on an island in the middle of nowhere, dressed in a burlap bag, eating I-don't-even-want-to-know-what, with two men, a one-eyed dog, and a bunch of strange natives, I would've told them they were crazy."

Grinning, Jake handed Jack a piece of food. "Well, this is what you wanted, isn't it? The life of adventure?"

She watched the little terrier growl after he sniffed at his morsel and nodded an "I know" at him. Then, sighing again, she looked back at Jake. "Right now, all I want is a hot bath and a good night's sleep back at the hotel."

Jack barked twice emphatically.

Reaching over, Jake patted her arm. "Don't worry. We'll leave first thing in the morning. There has to be some sign of civilization near here where we can get some help. All we've gotta do is fly until we find it."

"Or, until we run out of gas," she mumbled gloomily.

Jake put on his best optimistic smile, but Corky tugged on his sleeve before he could speak. "Jake, the chief says they're gonna have a ceremony now, and he wants us all to watch."

"Oh, yeah, come to think of it, we did sort of interrupt his wedding, didn't we?"

"Gee, I dunno. I'm gettin' all confused."

"Well, why don't you ask him what's going on?"

"Good idea, Jake." Turning around, Corky questioned the chief. But, when he got a reply, he looked back at Jake and Sarah with wide eyes.

"Well, what did he say?" asked Jake as they both stared at him inquiringly.

Corky licked his lips restlessly. "I...It's not the chief who's gettin' married."

"Well, then, who *is*?" asked Sarah, starting to get that strange feeling in her stomach again.

Corky swallowed hard. "Logandi!" he declared in frightened bewilderment.

Sarah and Jake exchanged glances, but before they could say anything, the chief stood up. "Mal-oma hooapo Logandi!" he shouted, signaling the drumming to begin.

As his voice rang out across the village, two warriors went into a hut and emerged carrying the masked native on their shoulders. The other men formed a line behind them, and they all began to

chant while they danced around the bonfire. "Lo-gan-di! Lo-gan-di! Lo-gan-di!"

"Guess it doesn't mean redhead," Jake mumbled under his breath, his eyes wide with wonder.

Grabbing his arm, Sarah asked shakily, "Wh...Who do you think he's supposed to marry?"

Jake felt her tremble a little, and he reached for her hand. "It's probably just a symbolic thing -- you know, a mock wedding to celebrate the coming of spring or whatever." He tried to sound cheerful for her sake, but his heart started to pound furiously to the rhythm of the drums.

The ritual went on for a short time, but then the frenetic thumping suddenly stopped. The masked native got down from the other warriors' shoulders and strode through the crowd until he came to the table. "Mabooko loma powana," he called out in a gruff voice.

"That means he wants to dance with his bride," whispered Corky excitedly.

The chief pointed toward Sarah, and she watched in horror as the masked native looked at her. "Oh, Jake, do something! He's coming over!" she cried in panic.

Giving her a reassuring smile, Jake started to stand up. "Uh...look, Chief, I'm afraid Sarah doesn't want to..." He was immediately met by five spears aiming at his chest. Gulping, he slowly sat back down again. "On the other hand," he said, looking at Sarah helplessly. "What's one little dance?"

She stared at him in dismay and then turned to see the masked native standing directly in front of her. Jack growled, but Jake held him back while two natives came from behind Sarah and lifted her to her feet.

As they brought her toward the native, she stammered, "I...I...I'm not a very good dancer."

But they walked right past him and, instead, took her to a small row of steps nearby and left her at the top. Then, they returned back to the table.

When the drums started up again, the masked native walked over to her and began to undulate his body sensually to the beat.

Jake felt uneasy while he watched his movements. "He is only going to *dance* with her, isn't he, Corky?"

"I hope so!" he answered in alarm.

Noticing their apprehension, the chief decided to allay their fears. "Wanomi mati hana," he said calmly. "Semalo komo matu. Konamo mani betomo dema."

Corky breathed a sigh of relief and turned to this friend. "It's okay, Jake. He said it's just a thing they do every year in tribute to their water god."

"Water god?"

"Don't ask me. But, he said that Sarah'll be right back as soon as that guy's done dancin'."

Jake looked a bit uncertain, but he tried to shrug it off. "Don't worry, Sarah!" he shouted over the increasingly rapid drumbeats. "He's almost finished with his dance!"

"That's exactly what I'm worried about!" she shouted back fearfully as the native went into a wild frenzy.

Then, suddenly, the drums fell silent, and he froze for a moment in his stance. Looking slowly up at her, he began to stealthily climb the stairs. When he got close to her, she gulped and backed away slightly, but, in a quick motion, he grabbed her hand and held it high.

"Lo-gan-di!" roared the crowd in unison to cheer his symbolic victory.

Sarah felt like she was going to faint, and a part of her wished she would, as the native picked her up in his powerful arms and carried her down the steps. The other natives bowed to him while he strode through them, holding his prize.

When he arrived at the table, he set her down and raised her hand again.

"Lo-gan-di!" repeated the natives, waving their arms and spears.

As soon as she was turned loose, Sarah scrambled back to Jake, and he stood up to put his arms around her. "Are you all right?" he asked with concern.

Taking a deep breath, she tried to put on a smile. "I am *now*."

The chief walked over to her and patted her on the shoulder. "Holapu molo," he nodded.

"I think that means ya done good, Sarah!" exclaimed Corky enthusiastically as Jack let out two strong barks.

"Thanks," she muttered, her voice dripping with sarcasm as she gave the chief one of her best piercing looks.

When she sat down again, the chief motioned with his hand and ordered the native women to bring more food.

Sarah and Jack exchanged glances as a woman put something brown and slimy on Sarah's plate. "I'm with you," she mumbled in response to his disdainful bark. Then, she turned to Jake and Corky. "Can one of you please tell me what that Busby Berkley production number was all about?"

"It's a once a year thing, Sarah!"

Jake smiled with relief at her quick recovery. "Yeah, I think you just saved their crops or something."

Giving her plate a scornful glance, she pointed to it with her finger. "Well, I certainly hope that means they won't have to live without any of this wonderful stuff."

Jake grinned at her. "Actually, it's not half bad...if you shut your eyes first."

She looked at him skeptically. "And, I'll bet it's even better if you shut your *mouth* first."

Two barks rang out, and Sarah let out a short laugh as she glanced back at Jack. Then, she smiled warmly at Jake.

As he returned her smile, Jake's face showed a trace of admiration.

I've never been able to figure out what there was about Sarah that got to me the most... He paused to gaze at her pretty face and sparkling blue-green eyes. ...Okay, other than *that*. But, maybe it was the way she had of always bouncing back. No matter how tough the going got, she always got through it...even when she was scared to death.

Jake's reverie was broken by Corky's excited voice. "I was just talkin' to the chief, Jake, and he told me that it's all over for Sarah, now!"

Jake smiled with relief, but Sarah got suddenly tense as she peered across at the native girl. "You can take that *two* ways, Corky," she murmured cautiously, noticing the fear still in the girl's eyes.

Jack barked twice, and they all exchanged uneasy looks.

The rest of the evening passed without any more surprises, and, finally, the feast was over. Corky stayed behind for a minute to talk over something with the chief, while Sarah, Jack, and I followed two of the natives to a couple of empty huts that were standing at the edge of the village. By then, all of our fears were forgotten, and the only thing we had on our minds was getting some sleep...well, maybe not the *only* thing...

When they reached the huts, Jack immediately dashed into one of them and made himself comfortable, while Sarah and Jake stopped at the entrance of the other.

Glancing inside, Sarah turned to Jake with a soft smile. "I guess we aren't going to have to worry about bedbugs tonight. There's no bed."

Smiling back, Jake stepped closer and gently put his hands on her shoulders. "Well, then, I guess we'll just have to worry about something a little larger...like a tarantula."

She gave him a wry look. "Thanks. I really needed to hear that."

He let out a short laugh. "I'm just kidding, Sarah. I doubt if there's anything *that* big around here."

She sighed wearily. "Even if there is, it'd have to be as big as a house to get me to stir tonight."

Nodding, he embraced her, his face registering other feelings besides fatigue.

Just then, Corky approached them happily. "Guess what, Jake? The chief said we won't have any more problems after tonight! I think he's gonna have his warriors take us outta here to go get some help!"

"That's great, Corky," said Jake, reluctantly turning loose of Sarah. "How are they going to do it -- by boat?"

"I dunno. He just said he'd make sure we'd all be gone right after daybreak."

Sarah groaned. "Oh, don't tell me they're going to wake up *that* early."

"Aren't you in a hurry to get out of here?" asked Jake in surprise.

"Sure. But right now, I'm in more of a hurry to get to sleep."

Smiling warmly, he gazed into her eyes. "Well, then I guess we oughta get started."

They looked at each other wistfully and then at Corky, who was just standing there watching them innocently.

After a moment, Sarah sighed and gave them each a smile, putting something a little extra in Jake's. "Well...goodnight," she said softly.

"G'night, Sarah," replied Corky brightly, still not moving.

After glancing at him, Jake turned to Sarah with a resigned look. "Goodnight."

Giving each other a little wave, they went into their separate huts.

They say there's always a calm before a storm. Well, I suppose they're right. I couldn't remember a more peaceful night. Even the insects were quiet... He laid down and tried to get comfortable on the blanket that served as a bed. ...As the gentle waves of sleep washed over me, I couldn't help but feel that our troubles were all behind us. Little did I know...they were just about to begin.

The first rays of the sun were filtering into Sarah's hut as she lay fast asleep on her blanket. From the contented smile on her face, it appeared that she was having a pleasant dream. Moving slightly, she murmured something under her breath as a footstep sounded softly beside her.

Out of nowhere, a hand clamped over her mouth, cutting off the startled scream she started to make. Her eyes opened widely. She stared dumbfoundedly at the burly native while he dragged her to her feet.

"What's going on here?!" she demanded when he removed his hands and began to tie hers together in front of her. "I thought the fun and games were over!"

He didn't say a word -- just pushed her outside. When she came through the doorway, she saw that the entire village was assembled in the square. They were gathered around a litter which was standing in the spot where the bonfire was the previous evening. The native took her to it and threw her roughly into the seat. Then, he started to tie her feet as the other natives surrounded her. She watched them, her heart pounding in fear.

Suddenly, there were loud voices coming from across the square, and she looked up to see Jake and Corky being dragged from their hut by four strong natives -- one on each of their arms.

"Sarah!" shouted Jake in alarm when he spotted her. He tried to break away, but the natives were much too powerful for him, and they managed to restrain him.

"Oh, Jake!" Sarah yelled in terror, trying vainly to loosen her bonds. "What's happening?!"

But, the drumbeats signaling the start of the ceremony drowned out his reply. The warriors began to dance around her, and soon the chanting started. "Lo-gan-di! Lo-gan-di! Lo-gan-di!" The native women began to put flowers in her hair while she struggled even harder to get free.

Shortly, the loud thumping ceased, causing Sarah to stop, too. Looking up, she saw the chief walking toward her with a satisfied smile on his face. She took a deep breath and swallowed hard when he stood before her, but she tried to put on a brave front. "You'd better have a good explanation for this!" she exclaimed angrily.

"Moramo powana Logandi," he stated calmly while a native pointed a spear toward her face.

Her eyes enlarged as she stared at it. "I...I...I guess that's as good an explanation as any," she stammered.

Jake and Corky were seething with frustration as they tried desperately to escape the natives' grasp. But, two spears aimed at their heads soon ended their struggles as well.

The chief gave his invocation and then turned to the crowd. "Lo-gan-di!" he shouted in triumph, raising his arms as they echoed it back to him. Then, he ordered his men to lift the litter, and, to the beat of the renewed drumming, they began to exit the village.

Too frightened to speak, Sarah turned her head for a moment to look at Jake's helpless, horrified face. But, the sound of his voice calling out her name soon faded away as the procession made its way along the well-worn path to the far side of the island.

When they finally reached the cliff, the na-

tives took Sarah down from her seat and carried her to the very edge of the overhanging precipice. Looking down at the jagged rocks below her, her eyes widened in realization. "Oh, no," she mumbled under her breath as the reason behind that embarrassing question from the day before suddenly became all too clear. She was about to become a sacrifice!

When the drumbeats stopped and the chief approached her, she started to babble. "Y...you don't really want me for this. I...I mean, I lied to you before. Actually, I've really been around. Just ask anyone, th...they'll tell you -- 'Boy, that Sarah White is a real cheap floozie'. H...honest...really..."

The chief just smiled at her and directed the natives to take her to the ledge. She twisted and turned but they got a good grip on her and did as the chief ordered.

Spreading his arms out majestically as he stood on the brink of the jutting cliff right above her, the chief bellowed out, "Lo-gan-di!" with pride in his voice. He was sure that his god would be very pleased with this strange woman with the fire in her hair. Then, he turned back to the villagers, and they slowly made their departure.

Sarah's heart was in her throat as she peered out over the ocean and wondered just what she was being sacrificed to. But, when the image of the masked native flashed by in her mind, something told her she didn't really want to know.

A rooster crowed, signaling the dawn in Borabora while Louie restlessly paced the dock. From his disheveled appearance and the trail of crushed out cigarettes all around him, it was apparent that he'd been there for quite a while.

When he paused to light another one, Gushie wheeled up to him. "Have you been out here all night?"

The Frenchman took a long drag and stared off into the sky. "Oui," he said wearily.

Gushie's voice was solemn. "I tried the radio again a few minutes ago. Still nothing."

Trying not to look worried, Louie nodded and flicked his cigarette into the lagoon. They didn't seem to taste right anymore. "Mon dieu, where could they be? They should have arrived fifteen hours ago. The governor will be here this afternoon expecting beluga caviar, and what am I to serve him? Tuna fish?"

Gushie knew that Louie was concerned about more than the caviar. "Maybe the Goose broke down again, and it's just taking a long time to fix it," he offered hopefully.

Turning around to face him, Louie said with conviction, "For this occasion, I took every precaution. Corky assured me that the plane was in perfect running order. I made Jake show me the bills of purchase before they took off. And, Sarah

guaranteed me that she would see to it that the others stayed out of trouble. I simply cannot imagine what could have gone wrong this time!"

"Well...maybe they just got tied up somewhere."

As they exchanged meaningful looks, back on Mola Kani, Jake and Corky were all alone, tied back to back to a wooden stake at the edge of the village.

Jake struggled at his bonds in frustration. "Corky, are you getting anywhere with these ropes?"

"No, Jake! I think those natives were boy scouts!"

Grimacing, Jake tried again.

"Uh...Jake?" asked Corky somberly. "Where do ya suppose they took Sarah?"

Jake stopped struggling, his face registering his anguish. "I don't know, Corky," he sighed, looking in the direction of the natives' exit. "But, we've got to get loose and find out!"

Just then, they heard a rustling noise behind them and quickly turned their heads to find Jack crawling stealthily out of the jungle.

"Well, thanks a lot, Jack, for all your help," grumbled Jake. "Next time I need a watchdog, I'll hire Rin-Iin-Iin."

Growling, the little dog sat down and trained his one good eye on them.

"Ya know, Jake's right this time, Jack. Ya really shoulda..."

Corky's sentence was interrupted by an impatient bark, and he and Jake looked up in surprise to see the native girl emerging from the bushes where Jack was hiding.

After glancing around fearfully, she slowly came toward them.

Noticing the sun glistening off an object in her hand, Corky's eyes bulged. "Jake! Sh...She's got a knife!"

"I can see that, Corky," said Jake warily.

The girl stopped and gazed at them for a moment, the uncertainty showing in her eyes. Then, she reached out with the blade.

Holding their breaths, the two friends shut their eyes until they realized she was cutting their bonds. When they were finally freed, Jake turned to the little terrier with an apologetic smile. "Sorry, Jack."

Snorting, he turned away in a huff.

"Aw, Jake. Now he's gonna be sore at us for days."

"Well, we'll worry about that later. Right now, I've got to find Sarah." Turning to the native girl, he said, "Corky, ask her if she knows where they went."

After he and the girl exchanged a few words, Corky looked at Jake in alarm. "She said they took Sarah to a cliff at the back of the island! They're gonna sacrifice her to Logandi!"

Jake grabbed the girl's arms. "Ask her if she'll take me there."

Corky questioned her, and she nodded her head slowly.

"Great! Okay, Corky, you and Jack go back to the *Goose* and wait for us there. If we're not back in an hour, take off!"

"But, Jake! I'm not leavin' you and Sarah here!"

"Do as I say! Now, get moving!"

Dejectedly, Corky picked up Jack and started heading toward the jungle.

Watching him, Jake began to feel guilty for his outburst. "Uh...Corky?" he called after him softly.

His friend turned around with sad eyes. "Yeah, Jake?"

Smiling sheepishly, Jake gave him a thumbs-up sigh.

Corky's face broke out in a small grin as he returned it. Then, he and Jack disappeared into the vegetation.

Turning to the girl, Jake grabbed her head. "Let's go!" he exclaimed.

Nodding, she began to lead him down a different trail toward the cliff.

Soon, they came to a break in the trees and bent down to peek out over the smaller plants. The cliff was right before them, but there was no sign of Sarah or the natives.

The sound of waves crashing far below them sent Jake's heart into his throat, but he tried to remain calm as he started toward the precipice.

Clutching his arm, the girl attempted to hold him back. "Logandi!" she cried pleadingly.

He gave her a reassuring pat on the hand and broke free of her grasp. Swallowing hard, he walked slowly to the edge and looked down at the pounding surf, staring at it disheartenedly for a moment. Then, he closed his eyes. "Sarah," he whispered softly.

But, from somewhere below him he heard a faint mumbling sound, and stooped down to listen. His face lit up with joy and relief as he caught some

of the words.

"...Just close your eyes, and you'll realize, it's just a distant shout of..."

"Sarah! Where are you?" he called out, looking all around.

"Oh, Jake!" came her relieved voice. "I'm right below you!"

He scrambled down the side of the cliff and onto the hidden ledge. Approaching her, he tried to cover up his emotion with a wry smile. "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?"

She wasn't in the mood for levity. "Would you please untie me?" she asked with a look. "Before whatever it is that's coming for me gets here?"

Jake took the native girl's knife out of his belt and started to cut the ropes from her hands. "Now, Sarah. I told you. This Logandi thing is just a figment of the natives' imagination."

"Well, let's not wait around to test your theory, all right?"

After finishing with her hands, he stooped to cut the bonds from her ankles. "It's sort of a shame, really," he said with a mischievous tone in his voice.

Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What is?"

"Well, that now we'll never know what kind of bride you would've made."

"Not if *someone* around here doesn't start playing his cards right," she muttered to herself.

A sly grin came over Jake's face while he worked on the ropes. "This whole thing is your own fault, you know. If you'da just taken me up on my suggestion that time when Kramer was sleeping in my room, you never would've had to go through..."

"Oh, my God!" Sarah exclaimed, her eyes widening as she stared over Jake's shoulder in shock.

"Aw, c'mon, Sarah. I'll bet the thought has crossed your mind once or..."

"*Jake Cutter!*" she interrupted in frightened exasperation. "Take your mind out of the gutter and cut those ropes faster!"

"Why? What's wrong?" he asked, glancing up at her as he sliced through the last cord.

"Because a figment of the natives' imagination is about to..." She couldn't finish it, her voice becoming paralyzed with fear.

Staring at her expression curiously, Jake got up to take a look behind him. There, standing upright on its hind legs before his startled sight was an enormous, prehistoric-looking creature, his massive body easily bridging the distance between the ocean below and the high ledge on which they were standing. The water from which he had just emerged glistened off his dark green scales in the

dazzling sunlight, giving him an even more menacing presence as he glared at Jake through smoldering eyes.

Jake was frozen to the spot in awe as the monster opened its huge mouth in an earsplitting roar and lashed out with one of its hands.

Screaming in terror, Sarah watched the blow knock Jake off the ledge, but he grabbed a crevice in the cliff and held on for dear life.

The monster then reached out for Sarah as she backed against the rocky wall and seized her in his fist. Raising his head skyward, he emitted a loud, triumphant roar.

Sarah kicked and beat on him to no avail, until she saw Jake climbing back onto the ledge. "Run!" she shrieked.

But, the creature saw him, too, and quickly lashed out again, knocking Jake against the cliff wall. He hit his head and slumped unconscious onto the ledge.

"Jake!" Sarah shouted in alarm. But, he didn't move. "Put me down!" she yelled angrily, trying harder to get away. "I've got to see if Jake's all right!"

Holding her within inches of his face, the monster studied her closely. She stopped struggling and swallowed hard when she got the full effect of his terrifying features and large teeth. With a somewhat confused look, he held her up toward the sun and watched the light reflect off of her hair.

"I...I guess you never *did* see a redhead before," she stammered nervously.

He stared fascinated for a moment, but then let out another ferocious roar. Sarah fainted as he brought her toward his mouth.

The cool water trickling down his cheek caused Jake's eyes to flutter, and he started to regain consciousness when he saw the concerned face of the native girl coming into focus above him.

"What...How...?" he asked groggily, slowly raising himself up on his elbows. But, suddenly, the memory came back to him. "Oh, no! Sarah!" he exclaimed, trying to get to his feet. But, the pain in his head forced him to sit back down again. Seizing the native girl by the shoulders, he searched her face. "Sarah?" he asked tensely.

The girl looked down for a moment and then back at him, tears filling her eyes as she shook her head sadly.

His mouth turned dry, and his heart skipped a beat as he stared at her in disbelief, his mind racing in a desperate attempt to deny the undeniable. Closing his eyes tightly, he tried to shut out the sight of the girl's despondent look. Then, he slowly turned to gaze out over the ocean.

It's hard to describe that feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when hope begins to run out on you. It's kinda like standing on the pitcher's mound in the bottom of the ninth, no outs, bases loaded, score tied, and watching Joe DiMaggio step up to the plate. Believe me -- I've been there -- I know the feeling. But, for some reason, right then, I just couldn't accept the idea that the game was over for Sarah. I don't know why -- call it optimism, wishful thinking, or just plain stubbornness. Whatever it was, I just wasn't ready to give up on her yet...even though the count was down to '0 and 3'.

Corky's face showed his anxiety as he fidgeted in the pilot's seat of the *Goose*, looking through the windshield toward the jungle. "It's only been an hour and a half, Jack. I think we oughta give 'em a few more minutes, whataya say?"

Barking twice, Jack put his front paws on the dashboard to take a look for himself.

Corky's expression brightened a little. "Does that mean you're not still mad at Jake for think'n' ya deserted us before?"

With a sharp bark and a growl, the little dog got back down and curled up in the copilot's seat.

Grimacing, Corky glanced over at him. "Guess I should'na brought that up again, huh?"

Just then, a hand reached through the cockpit window and touched Corky's arm, startling him and causing him to jump. He spun around and stared into his friend's face, his alarm turning to instant joy. "Jake! Boy, are we glad to see you!"

A bark of protest emanated from the direction of the copilot's seat.

Jake glanced over at Jack, but Corky said, "Don't listen to him, Jake. I asked him if he wanted to wait a little longer for ya, and he barked 'yes'."

Jake tried to smile. "I guess it's a good thing that nobody ever listens to me around here."

Grinning, Corky shifted position to try to look behind him. "I see the native girl, but where's Sarah?"

Jake's expression turned grim as he fingered the window molding. "Corky, could you come out here a minute?"

Reading Jake's face, Corky felt uneasy. "Sure, Jake," he replied softly.

When Jack and Corky came out of the plane, Jake walked over and put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Sarah's not with me," he said somberly.

Corky stared at him horrorstruck. "Jake...y...you're not sayin' she's..."

"No! She's *not* dead!" Jake declared forcefully, as if the sheer volume of it would make it be

true.

"Then...where is she?"

"I don't know, but I think there's someone who might. That's where you come in."

"Me? Jake, what're ya talkin' about? I don't know anything!"

Jake sighed. "There's not enough time to tell you the whole story, but Sarah got taken off by some kind of gigantic sea monster. I need you to ask the native girl if she knows if he's got a den or something here on the island."

Corky's eyes bugged. "Y...Y...You mean... there really is a Logandi?"

"In spades," Jake nodded pointedly.

Gulping, Corky turned to the girl. After conversing with her for a few minutes, he looked nervously back at Jake. "She said that once when she was a kid, she found a cave that was partially underwater. She went in to have a look and followed a tunnel to the inside of a sunken volcano. When she told her mom about it later, she warned her that an evil spirit lived in there and that she should never go back there again."

Jake's face lit up. "That's gotta be it!"

Corky shuffled his feet a little. "Jake...she also said she saw some..." He swallowed hard. "...some *bones* in there." His eyes gave special emphasis to his meaning.

Trying to appear confident, Jake patted his friend on the shoulder, but his voice was a bit shaky. "Don't worry, Corky. I'll find her in time."

"Hey, wait a minute! What about me? I wanta go, too!"

Jake's tone was serious. "I want you to take the *Goose* off-shore and wait for us there."

"But, Jake..."

"Corky, any minute now, this island's gonna be crawling with natives looking for us. We've got to make sure the *Goose* is safe. It's our only way out of here."

Corky nodded, but the disappointment showed on his face.

"Now...if there was only something I could use to distract the monster while I get Sarah out of there..." Jake muttered, staring off toward the jungle, lost in thought.

"All we got is a buncha caviar," grumbled Corky in frustration.

"That's it!" Jake exclaimed, grabbing his shoulders. "The caviar! I'll bet he'd love it!"

Corky looked down at the sand and dug up a little with his shoe. "Yeah...if he's not already

..." Pausing, he looked up at Jake with woeful eyes. "...full."

Inhaling deeply, Jake slowly nodded his head.

With a groan, Sarah slowly woke up and tried to get her bearings while her eyes took in the unfamiliar surroundings. Sitting up, she put her hands to her temples in an attempt to clear the remaining dizziness from her mind. When she lifted her head to look around, she found that she was lying on a flat natural rock formation at the edge of an underground lake in what, at first, appeared to be a cave. But, as she raised her head higher, she saw that the walls around the massive lake were cone-shaped, rising up to form the inside of a tremendous mountain. Through a large opening in the very top, a beam of sunlight penetrated, illuminating the vast interior of the cavern as it fell onto the shelf on which she sat. Holding on to the wall behind her for support, she slowly got to her feet and stared spellbound at the strange but beautiful sight before her.

"Where on earth am I?" she asked herself in subdued tones. "I don't remember..." Stopping in mid-sentence, she watched the water start to churn in front of her, and she backed against the wall in fear. "N...Now I do," she gasped wide-eyed when the enormous head of the monster appeared above the surface of the lake. Her heart pounded furiously as he fixed his eyes on her.

A low growl issued from his throat while he reached his hand toward her. But, surprisingly, his touch was almost gentle as he nudged her away from the wall to bring her closer to him.

Swallowing hard, Sarah stared into his frightening face and stuttered, "Y...You don't really want to eat me. I...I mean, I...I don't taste very good. Y...You'd just get sick...Really..."

The creature turned his head to the side and studied her carefully as the brilliant ray of sunlight brought out the fiery highlights of her hair. There was something almost human about the way he looked at her, and it unnerved her completely. Afraid to say anymore, she just stared at him helplessly.

Raising his other hand from the water, he laid a huge, flapping fish at her feet, watching her face for some sign of approval.

Looking down at his offering, she didn't know what to do. She wasn't about to eat a live, three-foot-long fish, but she certainly didn't want to offend him, either. Deciding that her only recourse was to play dumb, she gazed back at the monster with a weak smile and shrugged innocently.

Uttering a deep, guttural sound, the beast grabbed the fish and tossed it into his mouth in demonstration of how it was done.

"Oh," she said softly, her face turning a little green as she nodded at him.

Reaching out again, he pushed her delicately

toward the wall. Then, he dove underwater and was gone.

Brushing her hair off of her forehead, Sarah breathed a deep sigh of relief. Even though she realized that the creature's enchantment with her probably wouldn't last long, she hoped that if she just had a little time to think, she'd somehow be able to figure a way out of this mess.

But, just then, she heard a loud splash coming from around the side of the shelf, and she quickly turned to see what caused it. Her heart leaped into her throat as she gripped the wall in fearful anticipation. But, only a non-descript wooden crate floated by, and soon, her fear faded into bewilderment as she watched it curiously.

"Don't tell me the honeymoon's over already," rang out a cheerful voice from behind it.

For a moment, she was transfixed, staring in disbelief to see Jake climbing out of the water. Then, she ran to embrace him. "Oh, Jake! I'm so happy to see you, even your wisecracks are starting to sound good!"

Jake's face betrayed his emotion while he held her, but he tried to hide it under a glib smile when she gazed up at him. "Where's your...uh... husband?"

"I think he went to get me some breakfast. Then, I guess, sooner or later, I was going to be *his*."

Jake grinned. "Love 'em and eat 'em, eh? Sounds like the key to a happy marriage."

Giving him the eye, she let go of him. "How did you ever find me, anyway?"

"Your friend, the native girl, brought me here. I guess she was sorta grateful to you for taking her place as the sacrifice...not to mention the *dress*," he added playfully.

Sarah sighed. "Well, if we ever get out of here, I'll give her the shoes to match."

They exchanged soft smiles, and then, Jake walked over to the water's edge and tried to haul the crate out of the lake.

"What's in there?" asked Sarah inquisitively.

"Louie's caviar," he replied with a grunt, dragging it up onto the shelf. "It's a good thing they always pack this kind of stuff water-tight. I brought it along, hoping that the monster'd think it'd be an even tastier delicacy than you."

"You know, Jake, that's the funny part. I don't think he's really in any big hurry to eat me. It may sound silly, but I think he...well...sort of loves me in a way."

Pausing for a moment, he stared at her questioningly. Then, he shook his head and shrugged as he took out the native girl's knife to try to pry the lid off the crate. "Well, I guess you do look kinda cute in white," he said with a strain in his

voice, failing to budge it.

"No, I think it's my hair. I never realized that redheads were at such a premium in this part of the world. I'm going to have to start charging Louie a lot more for my services."

Jake stopped struggling with the crate and raised his eyebrows at her in an amused, suggestive look.

She caught it and gave him a wry smile. "As a singer," she added pointedly, coming over to help him.

They both worked on it for a few minutes, but to no avail.

Jake wiped his brow with his sleeve. "Jeez, Corky must've really nailed this thing on to stay. Guess he was afraid we'd spill some of the jars we opened when we carried it to the cave."

Sarah stopped tugging at the cover and sighed. "The monster's probably going to be gone for a while. Can't we just get out of here?"

"The only way I know is to follow a narrow ridge around the corner there that leads to a tunnel about a hundred yards off. It's small enough that he won't be able to follow us inside, but it's pretty slow going till you get there. In case he comes back in the meantime, I'd kinda like to give him a choice of meals -- if you know what I mean." Seeing her uneasy look, he smiled. "Why don't you check around and see if you can find something to help us get this thing off while I keep at it."

Nodding, she wandered to the far edge of the platform, glancing all around as she went. But, when her eyes landed on an object caught between some rocks, they widened and her face turned pale. "J...Jake?" she called out shakily.

He stopped working and came over to her. "What is it?" he asked, resting his hand on her back to lean in to look.

When he saw what she was staring at, he inhaled sharply. Lying mangled among the debris was a human skeleton and the remains of a white dress. He turned to look into Sarah's anxious face and tried to smile. "Must've been a brunette," he offered in an unsuccessful attempt at cheering her.

Her eyes radiated with fear as she looked directly into his. "Jake...let's get out of here...please."

Nodding solemnly, he put his arm around her and walked with her to the water's edge. Then, he turned to face her. "I guess we could try swimming out, but I don't know about you and that dress. I think you're going to have to take it off."

Sarah's eyes got large, and she seemed to stare right through him. "Oh, my God," she uttered softly.

He put his hand on his hip in slight irritation. "Oh, hell, Sarah, this is no time to worry

about..."

His speech was interrupted by a tremendous roar booming out from behind him, and as he watched Sarah back off in fright, he got that sinking feeling. Slowly turning around, he came face to face with the enraged creature. "One of these times, I'm gonna realize what she means by that," he mumbled to himself with a gulp.

The monster's eyes blazed as he swiped the air with his hand, narrowly missing Jake's ducking head. Sarah cowered against the wall, unable to move while Jake dashed for the crate.

"Get out of here, *now!*" he yelled back to her.

"B...But what about *you?*"

"I'll be okay -- just go!"

Sarah stared at him for a moment, the indecision showing on her face while the monster pounded his fist right next to where Jake was standing.

Scrambling away and ducking in back of the crate, Jake flashed her a pleading look. "Sarah, get going. I'll be right behind you -- I promise."

With a look of anguish, Sarah slowly started to edge her way toward the side of the platform. The monster didn't see her as he reared up his head and roared fiercely at Jake, who was trying to distract him by darting all around the crate.

After a few minutes went by, Jake checked behind him and breathed a small sigh of relief to see that Sarah was gone. Then, he turned his attention back to the crate.

The beast lowered his head and emitted a deep growl, his cold, dark eyes following Jake as he frantically tried to pry the lid off. But, soon, there was another deafening roar.

Jake looked up just in time to stumble out of the way as a huge, webbed fist came crashing down on the crate, splitting it wide open and causing its contents to spill into the water.

Lifting himself up from where he fell, Jake stared at the battered crate in awe. "Well, I guess that's *one* way of opening it," he mumbled softly.

As the black ooze began to flow into the lake, the creature stopped short and looked at it in confusion, temporarily forgetting all about Jake.

Seeing his chance to escape, Jake scrambled to his feet and dove into the water, coming up for air a few feet from the shelf. Shaking the droplets from his eyes, he searched for the tunnel, then started swimming furiously toward it.

The monster didn't notice him as he hesitated to examine the strange black substance floating around him. Scooping some up in his hand, he gave it a taste and then hungrily began to lap up the rest.

Standing knee-deep in water at the entrance to

the tunnel, Sarah watched the monster suddenly turn in their direction. "Hurry, Jake, hurry!" she called out to him in panic.

Jake heard the indignant cry of the creature resounding across the cavern, and he stroked with all of his might toward Sarah's voice.

With a thunderous splash, the beast dove into the water after him.

Sarah's heart pounded as she stood helplessly watching Jake's race for life. "Come on!" she implored him, motioning excitedly with her hands.

When Jake finally reached her, he collapsed exhausted at her feet, but she grabbed him by the arm. "Get up!" she exclaimed. "He's right behind you!"

Struggling to his knees, Jake held onto her for support to stand. But, just then, the creature rose from the lake directly in back of them and eyed them with a threatening look.

They gazed up in terror as he emitted an angry growl and thrust his scaly hand toward them. But, they moved away just in time to make him miss. Turning quickly around, they grasped each other's hand and splashed through the murky water of the tunnel as fast as they could while the monster took another swipe at them. After slogging along for a few yards, they flattened themselves against a slimy wall and held their breaths while the huge hand searched the tunnel for them.

With a cry of frustration that echoed throughout the cavern, the monster finally gave up and withdrew his arm.

"Let's go!" yelled Jake, grabbing Sarah's hand again, and they stumbled their way deeper into the tunnel until the sound of the creature's bellowing was barely audible in the distance behind them.

Halting for a moment to catch their breaths, they stood together in the dim light and looked at each other with relief.

"That was a little too close," said Jake, running his hand through his hair.

Sarah nodded and inhaled deeply. "I can't believe we got away."

"Thanks to Louie's caviar."

She pretended to pout. "Yes, I suppose he liked that even better than me."

Jake put on his boyish grin. "Well, you know what they say -- the way to a monster's heart..."

She gave him a wry look. "That's *one* route I'd rather not take, thank you."

Shrugging, he glanced down shyly. "Well, then, I guess...for what it's worth...you've still got me."

Smiling affectionately, she gently touched his cheek. "I guess you'll do," she murmured softly as

he looked back up at her.

They gazed into each other's eyes for a moment, and then slowly came together in a gentle kiss.

After they parted, Jake smiled. "How did you get to the tunnel so fast?"

Raising an eyebrow, she replied, "Are you kidding? With that thing after me, I could break the four-minute mile."

He chuckled. "Yeah, I probably could've given Johnny Weissmuller a swim for his money, myself."

Their easy laughter dispelled the remaining tension.

Jake got out his flashlight as they started to walk again. "The entrance isn't too far from here, and then, it's only about a quarter of a mile to the *Goose*. Sure hope Corky's got it ready to go."

She nodded emphatically in agreement.

Finally, daylight appeared ahead, and they exchanged happy looks.

"Wait'll we tell Louie *this* one," Jake remarked, putting the flashlight away. "We actually have a story that tops all of his."

"Yes, but he's not going to like what we did to his caviar."

"Well, at least we still have one crate left. That's more than he usually gets after one of our adventures."

When they reached the opening, Jake climbed out first, then turned around to help Sarah. "It oughta be smooth sailing from here on," he said confidently.

Smiling, she took his hand to pull herself out, embracing him as she stood. But, as they turned to go, they were met by three spears aimed at their chests. Stopping in their tracks, they stared in dismay at the angry faces of the natives who were holding them.

"Out of the frying pan, into the fire," mumbled Jake softly.

Sarah gulped and clutched them tightly. "I almost forgot about them."

"Yeah, but I guess they didn't forget about us."

Just as one of the natives gave the order to attack, a streak of brown, black, and white tore out of the jungle and sank its teeth into his leg.

"Jack!" cried Sarah joyously as the native's cry of pain caused the other two to turn, giving Jake the opportunity to level one of them with a quick punch. As the native went down, Jake grabbed the spear out of his hand and turned to the last

one while Jack chased off his victim. Sarah looked on in suspense, watching the two men circling each other warily, each one waiting for an opening. Beads of perspiration trickled down Jake's face while he and the native took turns parrying each other's assault, with neither one getting a clear advantage. But, finally, with a deft move, the native disarmed him and sneered evilly as he moved in for the kill.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a rock thudded against the native's head, and he fell in a crumpled heap at Jake's feet. Sarah and Jake traded startled looks until they saw the native girl emerge from a clump of trees to their right just as Jack returned.

The girl smiled shyly at them as Jake gave her a relieved "Thanks".

Jack barked twice indignantly.

"You, too," Jake grinned.

Walking over to the girl, Sarah gave her a hug. "I guess I owe you another dress," she declared happily.

The girl's soft smile abruptly changed to an expression of alarm as she stood motionlessly and listened for a moment. "Entande!" she exclaimed excitedly, gesturing with her hands.

Sarah looked at Jake questioningly.

"Something tells me that's Mola Kanese for 'Get the hell out of here!'" he said, reading the girl's face.

Two emphatic barks rang out from Jack as he hightailed it into the jungle with Sarah following closely behind.

Jake started off after them, but hesitated at the edge of the clearing. Looking back at the girl, he gave her a grateful smile. "Thanks again," he murmured softly.

Returning his smile, she made an awkward thumbs-up sign, and a wide grin broke out on his face as he made one back at her before disappearing into the greenery.

After watching him go, she glanced down at her dress and ran her hands slowly along the soft material. Lifting her eyes again, she stared off in the direction of their departure, and a tear quietly fell down her cheek.

Corky was badly in need of a drink as he peered anxiously out from the cockpit of the *Goose*. He nervously rubbed his chin while his eyes searched the shoreline from one end to the other.

Finally, he saw Jack scurrying across the sand with Sarah and Jake right on his heels. His happiness instantly turned to dismay when he spotted the reason for their haste -- twenty spear-wielding natives bursting out of the jungle in hot pursuit.

"Uh-oh," he mumbled as his hands darted toward the switches, his eyes widening in fear.

Picking up Jack, Jake stuffed him into his jacket while he and Sarah stared splashing through the surf toward the plane. Spears flew across the air, landing in the water on all sides of them as they ran.

The *Goose's* engines sprang to life when Corky pumped the throttles. Then, he turned to watch his friends make their mad dash through the ocean and said every prayer he'd ever heard.

Sarah got to the plane first and opened the hatch just as a spear whizzed past her head. After tumbling into the hold, she got up and took Jack out of Jake's outstretched grasp. As soon as his paws touched the floor, the little dog made a beeline for his parachute seat and settled in while Sarah reached back for Jake.

"Give me your hand!" she shouted over the thunderous noise of the engines as another spear sailed by.

He reached up toward her, but, just then, the plane started to taxi away, causing him to lose his grip on the hatch. He started to fall, but Sarah quickly grabbed him by the jacket and held on until he got a grip on the doorway again. As the plane picked up speed, he tried to flip himself into it, but the water resistance kept him down.

Sizing up the situation and summoning all of her strength, Sarah clutched him under both arms and pulled him into the cargo compartment. But, the force of her heave knocked her flat on her back, causing Jake to land directly on top of her.

They stared at each other for a moment in their compromising position, then Jake gave her a playful grin. "I'm going to have to try this method of boarding more often."

Eying him coyly, she played along. "Well, I needed to think of *something* to make sure I'd never have to be a sacrifice again."

Their short laughter was interrupted by Corky's concerned voice. "Jake...I...I got trouble up here."

Sarah smiled at Jake's put-on look of disappointment. "Coming, Corky," he called out, getting to his feet. As he made his way through the plane, Sarah stood up and followed him.

"Hiya, Sarah," said Corky, his face lighting up a little when she poked her head into the cockpit. "I sure am glad you're okay!"

"Thanks," she replied, patting his arm. "What's wrong up here?"

"Flap selector's stuck," grunted Jake, struggling laboriously with it. Finally, he gave it a powerful shove, and it clicked firmly into place. Exhaling deeply, he turned to give her a reassuring look.

Satisfied, she went back to sit down, and soon

the plane lifted off into the sky.

Looking back toward Sarah with a big smile, Jake told her, "We can relax now. We're on our way."

Corky stared at him dubiously. "To where, Jake? The instruments're still out, remember? Even I remember that."

Turning toward him, Jake nodded dejectedly. Then, he banged the panel in frustration. "Damn! Doesn't anything work in this plane?"

Glancing right above Jake's head, Corky's eyes got big. "Jake...? I...I...I think there's one thing that's workin'."

"What's that?"

"Th...the gas gauge," he replied, pointing up at it.

Jake turned to look and saw the market hovering a little above empty. Shaking his head, he reset the controls to run the engines leaner. "Keep your eyes peeled for something familiar," he called out toward the back.

Four anxious faces started searching the horizon.

Did you ever get that eerie feeling that something happened, and you were suddenly the only people left on Earth? Well, the thought was starting to cross my mind as the time slipped by with no sign of human contact. Corky'd spent the last half hour sending out 'may-days' in every language he knew, while I flew with one eye on the gas gauge. Sarah and Jack promised to holler if they spotted anything, but, so far, there wasn't a peep. I don't mind telling you, I was plenty worried.

Jake's eyes turned from the gas gauge to Sarah as she stepped up to the cockpit. "Something better break pretty soon," he declared.

"How much further can we go?" she asked with concern.

"Well, now that depends," responded Corky, looking thoughtful while he did some figuring in his head.

"On what?"

Jake gave her a pointed look. "On whether someone starts dumping cargo."

She looked at him and sighed. "Meaning me, I suppose."

"I'll help ya, Sarah," volunteered Corky.

"No, that's all right. We need you on the radio. And, anyway, I think I've got it down to a science." She turned and headed off to the cargo area.

After opening the hatch, she pushed the caviar

toward it. "Serves you right, Louie, for getting me into this in the first place," she muttered under her breath as she watched the crate tumble out of the plane.

Jack dragged some of the smaller pieces of freight over to her, and, one by one, they met the same fate.

When everything else was gone, Jack brought his parachute over and dropped it at her feet, barking twice mournfully.

She smiled at his supreme sacrifice. "That's okay, Jack. We're not that desperate yet. Besides, the way this trip is going, we're probably going to need it later on."

Barking twice, he dragged the parachute back to its original place, and promptly curled up on it.

She watched him in amusement for a moment. Then, she shut the hatch again and made her way back to the front.

"Aren't you getting *anything*?" asked Jake, staring at Corky incredulously.

Corky shook his head. "Sorry, Jake -- nothin'...see?" He pulled the earphones out, and the radio emitted a loud crackle.

"Don't tell me it's not working, too," sighed Sarah, leaning wearily into the cockpit.

But, just then, a familiar sultry voice cut through the static. "Ah, Jake Cutter. What a pleasant surprise. What are you doing in these waters?"

After they all exchanged astonished looks, a slight scowl came over Sarah's face.

Jake grabbed the microphone. "Princess Kogi, is that really you?"

She laughed seductively. "In the *flesh*...so to speak. But, I am afraid you didn't answer my question."

"That's because we don't even know what waters we're in. Our instruments are out. We sure could use some help."

"I thought you were looking for civilization," Sarah hissed over Jake's shoulder. "She doesn't qualify."

The princess's frosty tone could be discerned even through the static. "I see the term 'we' includes the sanctimonious songstress whose impertinence knows no bounds."

Jake glanced back to see Sarah's eyes narrowing into slits. "Uh...Sarah was only kidding, Princess," he blurted out, quickly turning around to avoid the look he knew he was going to get. "We're *all* real glad we found you."

Kogi's voice softened a bit. "According to my spotters, you are about thirty miles away from

where my ship is anchored off Hani-Ro. I will send up two of my planes to escort you here. By the time you land and come aboard, I will decide what I shall do with you."

Corky looked at Jake anxiously while Sarah seethed.

"Thanks," Jake sighed gratefully.

A haughty laugh came through the speaker. "Don't thank me yet," she murmured mysteriously as the transmission ended.

After pausing for a moment to contemplate what she meant by that, Jake turned around, bracing himself for Sarah's icy stare. "What would you have me do, Sarah? We're in the middle of Japanese air space, in an unarmed plane. We have no idea how to get home, and we've only got about a half hour's worth of gas left. I don't see that there's a whole lot of choice here."

"Jake's right, Sarah," Corky chimed in. "We'd soon be nothin' but shark food."

Sarah's expression didn't change. "Well, at least with the sharks, we might stand a fighting chance."

Two loud barks echoed from the back of the plane, causing all heads to turn toward Jack. Raising an eyebrow, Sarah gave the other two a triumphant look.

A short time later, they were all ushered into Kogi's magnificent stateroom, and they stared in amazement at the opulent surroundings. Even on a ship, all the trappings of her wealth and power were in evidence -- from ornate furnishings to rare paintings and priceless chandeliers. She was seated on a gilded throne across the room from them with Todo at her side.

As they approached her, she smiled benignly. "Ah, Jake. How nice to see you again. Welcome to the *Ninja* -- the flagship of my fleet. What do you think of it?"

Jake couldn't quite find the words as he looked all around and gestured with his hands. "Well...i...it's...uh..."

"Gaudy, if you ask me," muttered Sarah in disgust.

Todo reached for his sword, but the princess waved him off. Eying Sarah up and down, she said coolly, "I don't recall anyone asking you. Besides, I should think that someone dressed in that...attire...would not be so quick to hand out opinions on taste...although, I must admit, it is something of an improvement over most of the things I've seen you in before."

"Now, just...!" started Sarah, her eyes blazing, but Jake held her back.

"Try not to pay any attention to Sarah today, Princess," he said quickly. "She's had a pretty

rough time."

"Yeah!" piped up Corky. "Some natives tried to marry her off to a sea monster!"

Kogi looked at Sarah, an amused smile curling her lips. "Oh...is that so? Well, I can't tell you how sorry I am to see that it didn't work out. But, don't despair. I am sure someday you will find someone a little less discriminating who will be happy to marry you."

Shaking Jake off, Sarah glared at the princess defiantly. "I haven't noticed anyone beating down your door lately -- unless they were trying to get out!"

Jake tried desperately to keep a straight face through all of this, but Corky looked on in alarm.

Kogi calmly rose from her chair and walked over to Sarah, the smile still dancing on her face. "How odd that you should mention getting out, when that is precisely what *you* are about to do. Todo, show our 'guest' to the galley. I believe a few hours spent washing dishes may serve to cure her of her audacity." Her eyes gleamed with delight. "Just be sure to watch her around the silverware."

Sarah's face was livid. "You can't do this! I'm an American citizen!"

Kogi's eyes turned steely as she gave her a meaningful look. "You are an American citizen who is unauthorized in these waters. Perhaps you would rather I had you executed as a *spy*, instead."

Gulping, Sarah backed down a little, turning to Jake for support.

He put on a disarming smile when Kogi fixed her cold eyes on him. "Uh...look, Princess. Let's not get carried away here. I'm sure Sarah's willing to apologize and..."

Sarah nodded emphatically, but Kogi cut them both off. "Silence! If you all wish to have yourselves and your precious *Goose* transported back to your small island, there shall be no more discussion on this subject!"

Jake swallowed and gave her a feeble nod of agreement which restored the smile to her face. "Todo, follow through on the orders I gave you," she commanded coolly.

Bowing, Todo approached Sarah, scowling menacingly as he seized her by the arm. She looked pleadingly at Jake, but all he could do was give her a helpless shrug and a small wave before she was led away.

Kogi watched her departure in sly amusement. Then, she became all sweetness and light as she turned to Corky. "My guards will escort you to my sumptuous dining hall if you are in need of food and drink."

"And, *how!*" exclaimed Corky, his face a veritable picture of desperation. "Can I, Jake?"

His friend smiled sympathetically at him.

"Sure. But, just go easy on the saki, okay?"

"Sure, Jake! Thanks! You, too, Princess!"

Jack whimpered softly.

"I believe your animal wishes to join you."

Two loud barks rang out.

"I...Is it all right?" Corky asked nervously.

"Of course," she replied pleasantly, motioning for her guards. "See to it that these two get all that they ask for," she ordered.

Corky's face lit up while the guards led them toward the door. "See, Jack. I told ya this'd be better'n the sharks."

Snorting disdainfully, the little terrier trotted ahead.

"Ya just can't admit it when you're wrong, can ya?" Corky grumbled, following him through the doorway.

Kogi turned to Jake questioningly. "What was he talking about?"

Shrugging, Jake tried to look innocent. "You got me."

Smiling suggestively, she strolled over to him. "Yes. I *do*, don't I?" she murmured, tracing the neckline of his shirt with her finger. "And, now that your friends are otherwise occupied, it seems that the two of us shall have to think of something to do to amuse ourselves on this long voyage."

Jake looked a little uncomfortable. "Well, I...uh...play a mean game of checkers," he offered hopefully.

Her smile turned into a rippling laugh.

It was closing time in the Monkey Bar. Over the sounds of glasses clinking and chairs scraping, Louie's voice was muttering epithets in French while he adjusted the dial of his short-wave radio. Finally getting a response, he exhaled deeply in exasperation. "Oui, I am well aware that it is two o'clock in the morning," he replied to the inevitable query from the voice on the other end. "I am merely inquiring as to whether you have yet received a distress signal from the amphibious aircraft I contacted you about earlier."

As the radio operator launched into a tirade about the ancestry of impatient Frenchmen, Gushie wheeled into the bar with a look of happy relief on his face. "Louie, they're back!" he exclaimed.

Looking up expectantly, the bar owner uttered a curt, "Bon soir," into the microphone and flipped the switch, cutting the man off in mid-sentence. Then, he came out from behind the counter and approached the doorway just as the weary travelers made their entrance. His exultant smile turned

into an open-mouthed stare of disbelief when his eyes took in their disheveled appearance and Sarah's dress. Stopping in his tracks, he gave them each a thorough appraisal, finally turning to Jake inquiringly.

"Louie, we got..."

"Please, mon ami. Before the wild story, my caviar, s'il vous plait."

Jake shifted awkwardly while Corky reached into his pocket and pulled out a jar. "Here ya go, Louie," he said, handing it to him with a hopeful look. "I saved this one for ya."

Louie's eyebrows tilted upward in dismay as he gazed at the lone object in his hand.

"Uh...there's a very good explanation," offered Jake.

Without taking his eyes off the caviar, Louie mumbled softly, "I hope it is worth three thousand francs."

"It is," Sarah declared with feeling as Jack let out two strong barks.

Hesitating, Jake glanced at the floor for a moment. "Actually, it's more like ten thousand," he said timidly.

"What?!" exclaimed Louie, looking back up and staring from face to face.

"Yeah," Corky chimed in. "Uh...let's see... there's the money you owe the princess for bringin' us back here, a...and the three hundred dollars you owe us for the trip, plus the cost of the stuff in the first place. That comes to...ah...about..." He attempted to add it all up in his head but soon gave up. "Well, plenty!" he nodded earnestly.

Louie looked at Sarah as if she was his last glimmer of hope at understanding all of this, but she could only give him a weak shrug and a sympathetic smile.

Sighing, he shook his head in defeat.

Jake put an apologetic hand on his shoulder. "Can I buy you a beer?"

Looking them each over one more time, Louie managed a faint grin. "No, I am afraid *this* story seems to be calling for something a bit stronger."

Relieved smiles went all around while Gushie wheeled over to the bar. "One Singapore Sling -- coming up...Sarah's secret recipe," he called back to them.

Louie raised a questioning eyebrow at her, and she let out a short laugh. "Don't worry, Louie. After one of those, you'll forget everything -- including your name."

They all dissolved into laughter, back pats, and hugs.

An hour later, they were sitting at a table together, coming toward the end of their story.

"Mon dieu! It is incredible!" exclaimed Louie while Jake paused in his narrative to take a sip of beer.

"And, as if that wasn't enough, we had to end up getting rescued by that perverted princess," grumbled Sarah in disgust.

Jake smiled at her impishly. "Oh, I don't know. That part wasn't so bad."

Flashing him a look, she said dryly, "Yes, I'm sure some of us were able to lie down on the job."

"What did she have you do?" asked Louie.

"She sent me to the ship's kitchen and made me wash the whole day's worth of dishes. I just couldn't believe how many there were! Every time I was sure I was done, they brought me more. That crew must've eaten enough to sink a battleship!"

Corky started to shift nervously in his seat, a look of extreme guilt coming over his face as she continued, "And, what animals! Honestly, some of those plates looked as if they had actually been *licked* clean!"

Now, it was Jack's turn to look uncomfortable, and he sank to the floor guiltily as Corky sneaked a furtive glance down at him.

"What did she make you do, Corky?"

At the sound of his name, Corky jumped and stared into Sarah's inquisitive face. "Huh?" he asked, licking his lips anxiously.

"I asked what the princess did to you," she replied, looking at him curiously.

"Uh, well...she, uh...sh...sh...she..." He swallowed hard and turned to Jake. "I...Is it okay if I go get some more beer?" he requested with a pleading look.

"Sure," Jake grinned knowingly. "Go ahead."

Corky's face radiated with relief as he rose from his seat. "Thanks, Jake! Comin', Jack?"

The little terrier barked twice emphatically and raced him to the bar while Sarah looked on, perplexed.

Louie broke into her thoughts. "I am sure you both will be pleased to hear that I managed to come up with a suitable substitute for the caviar at my reception for the governor and his party this afternoon."

Shaking her head a little, Sarah turned to him. "Oh, yes. How did that turn out?"

"Amazingly well, under the circumstances. It seems that the governor is something of a connoisseur of tuna fish."

Jake and Sarah stared at him in disbelief.

"You mean to tell me that we went through all that, and he would've been content with tuna fish all along?" Sarah questioned peevishly.

Louie's eyes twinkled. "Well, he was a bit put-out at first, but I assured him that you both would be more than happy to go back for some in time for our next tete a tete."

"Oh, no," declared Jake, raising his hands in protest.

"And, you can count *me* out, too," Sarah stated flatly.

Louie feigned a hurt look. "Oh, you surprise me, Sarah. Surely you would not want to disappoint one of your most ardent admirers/"

"What? Who?"

"The governor. Why, just today, he inquired what had happened to that lovely, charming singer he had enjoyed so much the last time he was here."

Sarah's face lit up. "The governor said *that*?" she asked, her eyes shining.

Glancing at her dreamy expression, Jake smiled mischievously. "And, what did his wife say?" he remarked pointedly.

She shot him a look, but when he put on his boyish grin, she couldn't help but grin back.

Louie chuckled at them. "It is so good to have you back," he announced happily, patting them both on the shoulders.

Jake smiled. "How about another round?"

"Not for me, thanks," sighed Sarah wearily. "I think it's about time I turned in."

"Come to think of it, you may be right," agreed Jake, rubbing the back of his neck as he rose from the table with her.

Just then, Corky returned carrying two beers. "You guys leavin'?"

Jake nodded. "Yeah, it's been a pretty long day."

"Then...can I have your beer?"

"Sure."

"Gee, thanks, Jake!"

Jake's eyes gleamed as he watched his friend sit down. "Well, after all, you deserve it. You had a long day, too...especially with what *Kogi* put you through."

Corky slowly gazed up at him with a worried look, but when he saw Jake's grin, he relaxed and smiled.

Sarah was a little puzzled by their strange behavior, but she was too tired to ask at the moment.

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, cherie? 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.