

# The Moon of Nanakuli

By

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Five o'clock of a murky afternoon it was, and Lewis' emotional barometer very low.



ANAKULI is a beach. It might, from the liquid, alluring, nonsensical name of it, be a song, or a perfume, or a woman, but it isn't. Yet Lewis found all three there one hushed Hawaiian moonrise—after this fashion:

Lewis had been going round the island over the week-end alone, in his battered, grey car, nursing a soul-searing grievance. Undoubtedly he had his reasons, but two days of sun and wind and sudden, fleeting rains and doubtful roads failed somehow to dislodge them, so that he came at the end, not of a perfect day, but of a sand-smitten, care-ridden Sunday, to the kiawe trees that hedge the way to Nanakuli and to the promise—glimmering vaguely through the kiawes—of the most perfect strip of ivory beach that he had ever seen.

It was just dusk—road and trees were powdered with shadow. There was an echo of surf in the air.

Lewis knew a sudden, overwhelming desire for the sting of the spray on his eyelids, for the coolness of breaking waves on his sunburnt shoulders. He drew the car up at the side of a ditch, got out his bathing-suit and a towel, selected in one sweeping glance the thickest clump of trees in sight as a likely dressing-room, and plunged across the road.

Behind him loneliness settled, absolute and void.

It was dark among the kiawes, and unpleasantly thorny. Lewis, emerging after a little, straight and sl'm in his old grey bathing-suit, cursed gently but with amazing attention to detail the discomfort of a pricked left heel. Then he came out upon the beach, and the loveliness of Nanakuli took him by the throat and silenced him.

Sunset had faded; only an eerie afterglow remained, smudging the clearness of the western sky with blood-stained gold, against whose dying ardours a line of black volcanic rock thrust jaggedly, beginning midway up the beach and running down into the water to end in a smother of creaming surf.

Well up the beach, between the rocks and the dark of the kiawe trees, there was a shack, grass-roofed and shambling-walled, barely perceptible in the waning light, the one sign of human habitation in a place otherwise free, delicious wilderness.

Lewis turned away from the shack with a shrug of distaste.

"Squatters," he conjectured idly. "Smelling of stale fish and smoke and palm-tree gin. There every prospect pleases, of course—"

But the beach silenced him once more. To the east of the crescent of sand and over the high, black shoulder of a treeless hill a glow was spreading—white fire, lambent, unearthly radiance, deepening with every breath.

Lewis had seen the moon rise before, but he stood there that night on the beach of Nanakuli and felt his heart stumble in his breast before the flawless, astounding magic of the thing.

It came slowly, just at first; out of the witch-fire glow, tipping the blackness of the hill, a paring of silver; then a sickle; then, before a man might catch his breath, a great, gleaming beauty of a full moon, ripe with mischief of all the centuries.

It washed the world in an exquisite pallor like the inside of a pearl; the sea gleamed like a great king's shield. It was then for the first time that Lewis saw the girl seated upon a grim, black rock, her dark hair blowing out behind her. She was looking out to sea, and he thought he heard her singing.

"It's the moon, of course. I'm going mad!" said Lewis succinctly, and started off at once to dispel the illusion. His footsteps made no sound upon the sand. The world was still as death or a dream.

THE girl, however, was real. When Lewis came to the first black ledge of rock and stopped and looked up at her, she turned her head and looked down at him with an equal incredulity, but without a trace of fear.

"Hello!" said Lewis gently.

"Hello!" said the girl, in the softest, mellowest drawl he thought he had ever heard. She did not

smile. She only sat there and looked at him and waited.

She wore a flimsy white shift of some sort that struck her between knee and ankle and that left her arms and legs and slender throat quite bare. Her flesh had a delicate darkness under the moon. The hair that streamed silkenly about her shoulders was darker even than her big questioning eyes. She had a wreath of white ginger flowers upon her head and the wild April sweetness of them came strangely to Lewis' nostrils.

He stared until his own cheeks crimsoned. She was so unbelievably a creature made for the evanescent moment, for moonshine on southern seas, for untrodden beaches, and for dead-gold sunsets fading over black volcanic rock.

"Very nice moon!" he said with a feeling of deep chagrin at his own banality. He held his breath waiting for her to answer.

"Yes," said the girl with a kind of naive soft gravity, "ver' nice moon. You too much like this place?"

"By gad! I should say I did!" said Lewis fervently.

"Where you come from?"

He gestured vaguely towards the road behind the kiawes.

"I go round island—car—too hot, too tired—I see beach—think I like swim—leave car beside the road—(You cursed ass!" he finished fiercely to himself. "Talking pidgin to a dream like this.'). But the dream only nodded its lovely head in unquestioning acceptance of his method of speech.

"This ver' good beach for swim—no coral—not many shark."

"You live here?" demanded Lewis irresistibly.

For an instant she looked away, smiling to herself as if she had not heard him. Then her eyes returned gravely to his.

"Long time I live here. I born Nanakuli."

"What?" Lewis had never heard so silken-soft a sound.

She repeated slowly: "I born—Na-na-ku-li—tha's name this place. You think—pretty?"

"It's perfect," said Lewis softly. "I can hardly believe I'm awake." He put out one hand and swung himself up beside her. He smiled, and Lewis had in his softer moments a smile not easy to be denied. The Eternal Boy, at such times, looked out of his eyes. Women never failed to see it, and to weaken before it.

"I like stay little while and talk to you—all right?"

"All right," repeated the girl serenely. She moved over to make room for him with just a touch of shyness, and the perfume of the wild ginger flowers in her hair floated to him as she turned. In that white, unearthly air her eyes were pools of shadow, her skin had a lucent warmth and smoothness.

"Sit tight, old boy," said Lewis to himself. "She's only a pretty little squatter after all."

But it took all his reserves of calm to keep that fact in mind. There was a fragrance about her and a delicacy. She might have been made of moonlight.

"You live in that house?" he asked at last to discipline his mounting excitement.

She nodded sweetly.

"I got father, mother, one sister. My sister marry nice Portugee man. She live Honolulu—got plenty holuku, six small children. I never go Honolulu myself." There was a wistfulness in her lowered tones that tightened Lewis' throat. He thrust away from him the vision of the holukued sister (a holuku is a sort of loose native dress very grateful to increasing curves)—thrust away the vision of the nice Portugee man and the six small children, fastened his eyes upon the slim, flower-crowned thing beside him, and tried not to spill his heart at her feet before the moon should at least be overhead. Thus entangled, he made desperate attempt at conversation.

"Your father Hawaiian man—where he stop now?"

She lifted a dreaming gaze. "My mother, Hawaiian. My father, English-man—name—Ed-monds-son. He stop inside house—sleep—drunk, I think."

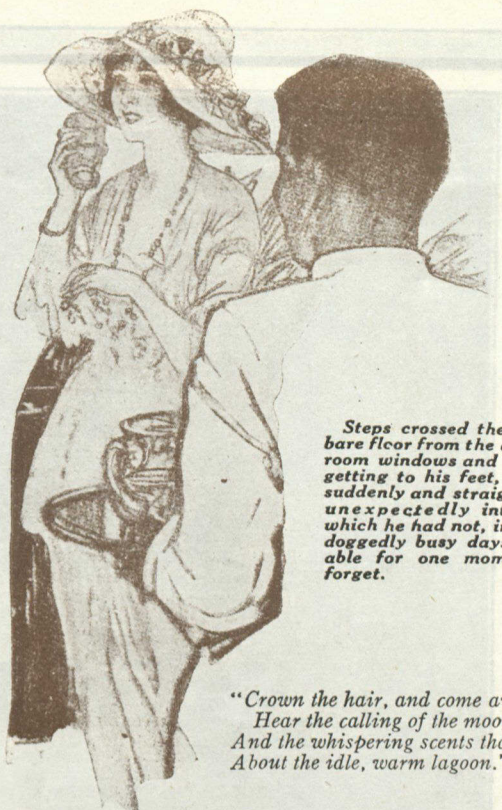
At Lewis' muttered exclamation she shrugged and gestured daintily with two small brown hands.

"Oh—no pilikia! (trouble)—all time drunk. I think he like forget. Be-fore—he stop 'nother country. Not like this. All time—wear good clothes—all time wear shoes. He have money then—everybody like. Now"—she broke into a mellow note of laughter—"little fish; plenty drink, plenty sleep. He say like I tell you, he like forget. That's ver' good way—eh?"

"Certainly it's one way, if you like," admitted Lewis curiously. "And you—you dream of old ivory and rose leaves—I suppose you'll marry a nice Portugee man, too, and grow fat and clumsy—and—"

"I not too old," she interrupted haughtily.

"Eighteen—that's not too old. But I no marry Portugee man"—her chin lifted proudly. "Some day



Steps crossed the wide, bare floor from the dining-room windows and Lewis, getting to his feet, looked suddenly and straight and unexpectedly into eyes which he had not, in seven doggedly busy days, been able for one moment to forget.

"Crown the hair, and come away! Hear the calling of the moon. And the whispering scents that stray About the idle, warm lagoon."

I go England—marry Englishman." She pointed with a slender forefinger straight across the moon-swept empty splendour of the sea.

"England over there?"

"Thereabouts," said Lewis gently.

"You think I b'long more better England?"

He smiled down into her eyes that dared him to deny her.

"If it comes down to that, I think you b'long in 'magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn—You're just Romance—that's what you are! I'd begun to believe you didn't exist."

She frowned adorably. "I no understan' how you talk that way."

"No," said Lewis regretfully; "I suppose not. You see, it's like this. I'd heard all my life that these islands of yours were the Garden of Eden, and I was disappointed after I got here because I simply couldn't see it—until to-night. By the way, your name is Eve, I suppose?"

"My name Kealoha," she told him softly. "You lik' that name?"

"It's too perfect," said Lewis again. "I don't know what I ever did to deserve it."

She laid one cool little hand for the barest flutter of a second over his, and in that second Lewis' pulses raced. Then, before he could stop her, she sprang from the rocks and stood on the shining wet sand, a figure of sheer enchantment.

"If you are not happy, I think more better we go swim—thas' good for forget—everything! No be sorry any more—eh?"

LAUGHING, she ran out into the sea, her white shift modelling her slender limbs in lines of an exquisitely tender youth; the wreath of flowers still upon her head, she flung herself into a breaking wave, and the moonlight glimmered upon one lifted arm as she struck out for the reef.

Lewis followed, not by any means so calmly as he might have wished. He was, in the majority of instances, a young man who knew his way about, and it startled him somewhat, annoyed him not a little, to find himself pursuing this creature of foam and faery with all the unconsidering ardour of the boy he used to be.

He fancied the scent of her wild ginger flowers came back to him on the wind. He thought he heard a luring sigh of laughter, and the sound tingled through all his veins.

Something sang in his mind like music, while the water slipped away from his eager strokes.

"A man had given all other bliss . . . to waste his whole heart in one kiss upon her perfect lips!"

"It's that damned moon!" groaned Lewis savagely, and quickened his way through the grey, velvety shadow of sea that lay between them. The feel of that sea on his face and body was unadulterated ecstasy, cooler than April rain, sharper than breaking bubbles of pale gold wine. He caught up to her, a little way out, and they drifted side by side without a word.

After a long time she sighed to him sweetly: "You happy now, eh?"

Like the inside of a great milky pearl, the whole world set them round with silence.

She turned her face to his, small and soft and mysteriously sweet, like the fragile white flower in her streaming hair. Her eyes held his for a moment—ror a moment only.

"Listen!" she whispered.

From the shore a faint call came to them, twice repeated while they drifted, waiting.

"My father," said Kealoha, suddenly. "I think he not sleep any more." She put one hand to her mouth, and cried back startlingly clear across the water. Then she swam very fast, without parleying, straight for the beach, with Lewis close behind her.

"You go back by kiawe trees," she panted over one gleaming shoulder. "I no like he see you—please!"

"I'll do whatever you say," Lewis returned reluctantly, his idyll melting away before his eyes. "But I'm not afraid of your father, you know."

"Please—tha's more better for me," she begged.

So Lewis said simply that he would do as she told him.

Only—when they came

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