

The Moon of Nanakuli

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steadily. His nice grey eyes had grown a little dark; his mouth was taking on a certain setness.

"Then they went swimming together. Lissa walked right down into the water, mu-mu and all, not wanting him to see her sophisticated yellow silk bathing suit, and when they had swum almost out to the reef, the Hattons missed her and began to call, so she told him her drunken father was awake and that he must go—and he did as soon as they got back to the beach. He slipped off through the kiawes, and Lissa went back to the Hattons. You said it was absolutely the most romantic thing that ever happened to you, didn't you, Lissa? Full moon and all that, and the poor man so obviously thrilled over the adventure he was having."

"Oh, he was—of course," said Lewis. He added, looking full into Miss Greenwood's impassive little face: "Is that all?"

"Mercy, yes!" said Mrs. Ledwell. "Wasn't there some sort of an affectionate parting? There usually is, I'm told."

"Was there, Lissa?" asked Mrs. Ledwell, sweetly. "You didn't say."

"If there was," said Miss Greenwood, lifting soft, dark eyes to meet Lewis' squarely, "I have forgotten it."

Then she went home, but before she could make good her escape, Lewis, seeing her to her car, destroyed completely the foundations of her composure.

"I'm glad you didn't tell that I kissed you," he said very quietly. "It shows that part of it at least meant something to you. Am I to see you again?"

"I think not," began Miss Greenwood, icily, then finished in a rather breathless flame of fury: "I hope not—ever!" and was whirled off down Kalakaua Avenue, crimson to her delicate eyebrows.

NEVERTHELESS she did see him again.

She had no notion of seeing him. She said as much to Mrs. Ledwell, observing that she did not care for the kind of man Lewis was, and found life too short to admit such people to one's friendship. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, he was unrelentingly in her mind, and since it is almost impossible in Honolulu to avoid, even an uninteresting man for ever, at the end of three weeks more Lewis rang up Miss Greenwood upon the telephone one day and said, humbly as any woman's heart could wish:

"First of all, won't you please forgive me?"

She said coldly—they had not seen or spoken to each other since that unfortunate afternoon on Molly's veranda—"Nothing to forgive—"

"I've got to go away, you know—"

"Why I'm going next week myself," she thawed a little.

"Now, listen. I'm having a beach party, for good-bye, and I want you to come. Please. You might as well. Probably we'll never see each other again."

She said she couldn't, of course. It was all of five minutes before, touched by a rather pathetic insistence in his voice, she relented and said she would.

"And you'll let me drive you out in my car?"

"Oh, impossible!" Eventually, however, she conceded that too, swept by some inward weakening, some unadmitted longing, feeling rather like a queen bestowing a favour by reason of his outspoken and touching gratitude.

At the last he said carelessly: "Don't say anything about it to Molly—Mrs. Ledwell, that is; I'm not sure I'm asking her." That too rather pleased Miss Greenwood. Molly was apt to be very much in evidence of late.

So he came for her at half-past four on a heavenly Sunday afternoon, and they drove off together through a green and gold and azure world.

"Who's going?" she asked as he seated himself in the car beside her and laid a hand on the wheel.

"Oh, just people," said Lewis vaguely. She felt his eyes on the curve of her cheek and blushed. It was a thing which, in spite of all her deliberation and finesse, she did readily.

About an hour-and-a-half later they came to a strip of ivory beach glimmering vaguely through close-set kiawe trees.

"Why, this is Nanakuli, isn't it?" said Lissa Greenwood curiously.

"Yes," said Lewis, and added: "You don't mind?"

"No. Why should I?" But there was a certain uneasy stiffening in her tone. She thought that he was laughing at her. "The Hattons are on one of the other islands now. Anyhow, I fancy they wouldn't object to us."

He found the path through the shadowy trees and she went before him

down upon the beach. Sea, sky, and sand were rosy with sunset. It was a world of drowsing flame—but an empty world, a lovely, still, unpeopled world. Beside the big black rocks where she had sat and sung, looking out to sea, she faced him swiftly, with mounting incredulity.

"Where are the others?"

"There are no others."

"You mean—?"

"Just what I say—there are no others."

"You wouldn't dare!"

Lewis smiled down into her widening eyes. "Why not?"

That and his smile left her silent. Silence was all about them. The surf purred, in an echoless golden waste of quietude.

"Then nobody knows"—she left that where it fell, flung back her small dark head, and looked at him proudly.

"What did you bring me here for, like this? It's unspeakable of you. Even if you're only—you must know better. Do you want me to be talked about hideously?"

"By whom? There isn't even a seagull," said Lewis gently. He waited until she stormed at him again, her little hands clenched tight against her sides.

"I never heard of anything so mad. It'll be dark in half-an-hour. You think I'm going to stay here alone, with you? Why did you do it?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you why," said Lewis quietly.

When she obeyed him with an exaggerated aloofness he put his hand into the pocket of his jacket and took out something small and yellowish, faintly discoloured and a little dry.

"I brought you here to assist at a funeral."

"You must be mad."

Her eyes threatened him.

"The funeral of Romance," said Lewis, turning the thing over and over in his hand. He finished softly: "This is one of the flowers you had on your hair that night. I want you to dig a little grave for it and bury it, and say a little prayer over it. Then I'll take you home and never see you again."

Well?"

"This is too utterly ridiculous," she told him coldly. "Bury it yourself, if you like."

Lewis leant one elbow on the rocks beside her and shook his head unsmiling. "No. I brought you here to do it. Shall I tell you why?"

Her lifted shoulder betrayed a deep disinterest, in the face of which she continued evenly: "All my life I've had dreams—fool dreams, if you like—about the sort of thing that happened that first evening here on Nanakuli beach. Oh, I'm cured! I'll never have 'em again. But, by gad, I'm going to keep the memory of that one! I'm going to see that it has a fitting end. My girl doesn't exist—the girl I found here on these rocks under the last full moon, the girl that went swimming with me in the moonlight, with flowers in her hair, and the loveliest smile in the world on her mouth. She's gone—she never really was—but she was mine while she lasted, and I'm going to—"

"She was me," said Lissa Greenwood, abruptly. She took off her hat and laid it down upon the rocks, ruffled her soft dark hair, and flung him a look of defiance. "Kealoa was me—so that's all there is of that!"

The sunset deepened all about them. Nanakuli beach now was washed with rose, streaked with violet shadow, empty as the first day, silent as the first night.

"You!" said Lewis, and laughed insultingly. "You're just a nice little girl, no more, no less. Plenty like you in the world. You're pretty, and clever, and careful. They turn you out by the thousands from finishing schools—but you're not Kealoa!"

"Who made her, then?" The big, dark eyes were stormy; under the smooth, soft skin a flame of colour was creeping.

"Nobody made her—I dreamt her. I dream of her every night!"

"Don't you suppose a girl has dreams as well?"

"Not your kind of girl."

His half smile mocked her. She caught her breath in a surge of helpless anger.

"How dare you classify me—like that! Didn't I play Kealoa in the beginning?"

"Yes; and didn't you boast about it to a table full of sniggering idiots? No, Kealoa wasn't you. She was just an exquisite little wandering soul that slipped into your body for one moon rise—that's all. You'll never have her again!"

"Give me that flower!" said Lissa Greenwood, between her little white teeth.

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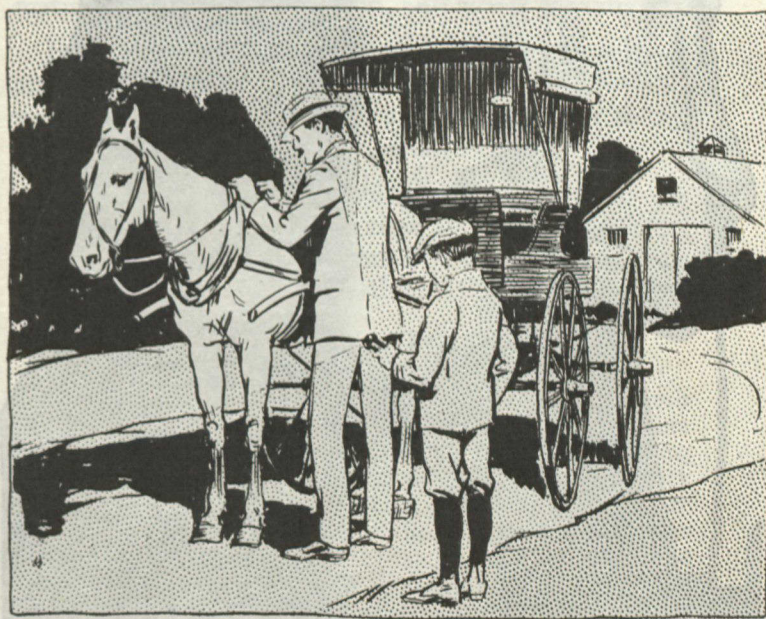


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