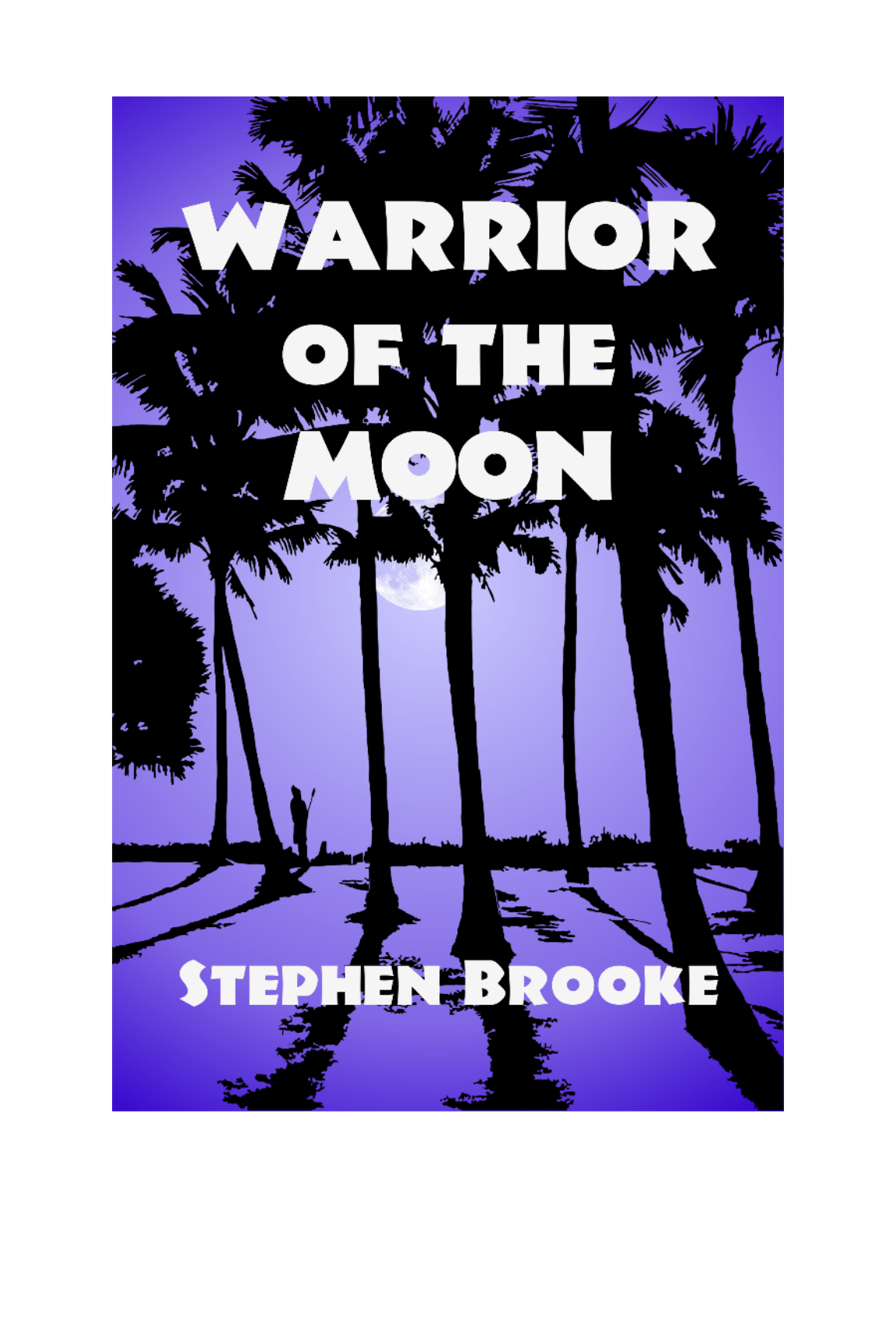




WARRIOR OF THE MOON

STEPHEN BROOKE

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I sense that trials await you.



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Arachis Press 2020

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I. ARRIVALS

1. *Moon Man*

MARATOA I AM named. My father was the Hero from the Sea.

He might deny this, saying there were others, Lord Beka, my uncle Bafa. They are great men. Marareta was greater.

As many noble Mora, I have more than one mother. She who gave birth to me was the prophetess of the Sacred Isle, that place of power bounded by A'auwa. Pana'a is both name and title. Pana'a is gray of hair but serves still as priestess. Rarely does she leave her island these days.

Rahaita, her niece and my father's first wife, is she who named me as her own, for a boy child could not reside on the Sacred Isle. I was an infant yet when she was slain by the mad king Hara'a. Father never loved another as her. Of this I am certain.

The woman who reared me, she whom I call Mother, is Panoha. That my father took her as his wife from duty rather than love is common knowledge. It is also known that he did come to love her in time. She gave him a daughter, my sister, Rahini.

I always wanted your father, Mother confided to me once, but had to pretend it was all politics.

There is an older sister too, Tita, by Panoha's first husband, the High King Maitoa, who ruled before my cousin Poneiva. She is wed now to King Revaru. All agree Tita is the firm hand he needed.

But Maratoa am I named, Warrior of the Moon. For some reason, my father sometimes calls me 'Moon Man' in the language of his birth. He seems to think this is very funny. There are few to laugh at his joke and they grow fewer, those who came from the sea twice ten years ago.

Now, another came. I had seen him, as had Malee. We had spoken from afar with Hurasu, the ageless Lord of Visions, who

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voyaged from the other side of the world. Why? That is best explained later.

Malee — she and I both knew Hurasu, had spoken with him since we were children, but had never seen the greatest of wizards. My father had traveled once across the mountains, to the great valley where he dwelt and ruled. There our own teacher and my father's best friend, the shaman Oorto, had learned much of sorcery.

I was busy being born at the time. There are epics sung across this land, the Land of the Sleeping Sky as our distant ancestors had named it. Those poems will better tell one of that time than ever I could. I am no bard.

The Sleeping Sky. That is what Mora means. Our ancestors found a land of peace after crossing an ocean of storms in nine great canoes, to establish the nine kingdoms of the Mora. So also say the epics. Father tells me not to believe all of them. He is a great skeptic.

Maratoa. Someone called me. Malee called me. I ever left a tiny part of myself in another world, in a little room there, where we could readily contact each other, speak to each other, no matter how far apart.

Malee, I answered, and went to her. *Are you near?*

She sighed. *Only past the hills. We might reach Marihana before night.* As is common, the movements of her mouth and the words that reached my ears did not quite match. I have been assured that practice can remedy that but it does not seem so important to me.

At Marihana. If she and her companions boarded canoes there they might reach us in as little as four days. Longer, probably. The Teiri's flow was sluggish in this season. *I shall await you,* I told her.

You will not, spoke another voice.

Oorto? I am not completely sure which of us said this aloud. It

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is sometimes hard to be sure of such things when speaking from afar.

The shaman chuckled. *You have been warned often enough that keeping too long to one meeting place such as this was dangerous. Others might discover it.*

Therefor, we had not told him about it, nor Hurasu either. So *you found us*, said Malee. *Why won't Maratoa await me?*

Because your grandmother Pua has passed. We shall all meet at her house. You must inform your father, Maratoa. I knew messengers would already be on their way, to here and throughout the Mora realm. Pua had been an important person, the sister and the mother of High Kings.

Are you already there? I asked.

I am. Ulani called for me. Pua's son must have sensed the end was approaching, and sent messengers. I did not even know he had returned to his mother's house.

Is your mother with you, Malee? he asked. *The lady Ma'ave?*

Her adoptive mother, the daughter of the lady Pua. That was why both of us could claim Pua as a relative, though we were completely unrelated by blood. *She is. I shall tell her.*

The competent Ma'ave would send messengers back across the hills, to the Mora trade village there, to her husband, Lord Gordie.

Then I shall see all of you here soon, said the shaman. *We will have things of which to speak.*

Lord Hurasu, primarily. He could wait.

2. Farewell to Pua

IT HAD BEEN long since my Aunt Pua left her home on River Teiri. Once she had traveled throughout the lands of the Mora, her advice and counsel sought by the powerful. That was before the time of my birth.

Pua was my aunt because she whom I named Mother, Panoha, had been wed to her brother, the High King Maitoa, before marrying my father. I have told you of this.

She was also a great friend of my father and, if one believed the tales, his lover for a time. I ever found that hard to believe, though their ages were not so different. Pua had grown fat and old early, as many of her family, while my father remained vigorous. I think she had no more than six tens of years behind her.

My aunt had walked with difficulty the last of those tens. So, for the most part, I remembered her.

Oorto awaited us on the river bank as we glided in. Many canoes rested there already, long and short, with the markings of their owners painted on them, even as we wear the tattoos of our families and ranks. Some were branded as belonging to the High King, the vessels used by messengers – and by any on official business – up and down the realm.

“I greet you, Mika,” called he. Mika was the Diwarna name of my father, the name those folk had given him when first he arrived in this world. Oorto chose not to use the name Marareta, as did the Mora. That name my mother Rahaita had given him, I had been told.

Moon King it means. Some say it was a jest of hers but it stayed with him.

“And I you, my friend,” my father returned. “Poneiva has not arrived, has he?” We both jumped out into the shallow, sandy-bottomed Teiri to pull our craft up onto the shore. Marareta and I had shared one small canoe, traveling quickly by ourselves. Others of our house would follow.

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The two embraced. "No one very important yet," replied the shaman. "Until you."

"But Naio is surely here." Pua's surviving husband had retired from commanding the Mora fleet years ago to dwell with her. A small smile found its way to my father's face. "And you."

"I had prepared already to journey north, to greet the arrival of Hurasu. Ulani's message only started me on my path a few days early."

"Yes, Hurasu. Has he spoken to you?"

"Not in many days." Oorto looked to me.

"Me neither." Nor Malee, I assumed. Not that I trusted the girl to tell me everything.

Great trees rose between river and house. It was not always so; even I could remember them being small when I was small myself. Mulberries, many; they grow quickly. We walked up the gentle slope. "Va'anoe should arrive soon," remarked my father. "His house lies near."

"Were we Mora," said Oorto, "we might wager whether he or the High King would come first." Both laughed at that. It is true that my people like to gamble. It is also true my father did not.

Naio awaited us on the porch, which wrapped around his house. It would remain his house, I was sure. Poneiva would see to that. The gaunt old sailor was shading his eyes with one palm. "More canoes come," he stated, and lowered his hand. "I welcome you, Taona Marareta, and you, Maratoa."

We greeted the man and mounted the low wide wooden stairs to join him. My father turned to Teiri. "Va'anoe. Now we need not bet, Oorto."

Va'anoe was king of the lands just south of our own house, which stood further down the flow of River Teoma, in the realm of Va'aru. Moreover, he was a nephew of Pua, a son of her brother Temani'itu. His election as king was through his mother's line, of

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course. So is it among the Mora. I have heard of things being done differently in other lands but that seems very strange.

The king had several canoes with him. Others would come by water, but the High King Poneiva and his entourage would walk from his tall house. That was a two day journey for most.

What was that faint humming sound? Some of the men who had just pulled their canoes ashore were looking about and up into the sky. It grew louder. "There," said Oorto, pointing toward a distant dark shape, appearing and disappearing among the clouds. "A dragon?"

That seemed doubtful. Dragons never strayed this far from the mountains. Almost never. Whatever it was, it descended toward us. The men at the river appeared uncertain whether they need run or fight. "An aeroplane," breathed my father. "From my world." This last came barely as a whisper. Down the steps he went, sprinting toward the Teiri. Father could move quickly for a man his age.

We followed, Oorto and I. The winged object — obviously not a living creature — was close to the ground now, making a long turn above the river. The noise it had been making changed to a sputtering and then ceased. Its flight straightened and it glided toward the water. There were two canoes attached to its bottom and they made contact with Teiri. It came to a halt and began to float downstream, slowly turning in the current.

"No power to the engine," said Father. He did not sound completely certain of this. "A rope! Long enough to reach it." He took one end of the line handed him. "Help me, Maratoa." We pushed our canoe into the water and paddled as strongly as we might toward the drifting aeroplane. It was below our landing spot now.

A loop of rope went around one of the supports above the twin canoes. We were too far downriver now for it to reach land but another canoe had launched with a man holding its other end.

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A large canoe with several paddlers. They stopped our visitor from floating further and slowly drew it back toward the shore.

On the side of the aeroplane, a door opened. I know of doors. We Mora use them not but some of our neighbors do. A woman stood there. I was fairly sure it was a woman, though tall and with few curves.

“I say,” she called, “does anyone here speak English? And just where the deuce is ‘here,’ anyway?”

3. Hello to Vehina

“YOU WOULD NOT believe me,” answered Marareta. “Let us get you ashore.”

I can understand English. It is the language of my father and he taught it to me. I liked having a secret language that none of my friends could speak. The only others I ever heard use it were those who came from the sea with him, Beka, Gordie, and others. They spoke the Mora tongue most of the time, even with each other, or the trade pidgin we use when dealing with the Kohari.

She was wearing quite impractical-looking high boots and some sort of leggings that puffed out above them. A long-sleeved blouse, too, all of a drab color, like sun-baked mud. She did not mind splashing down into the shallow water, however, and wading ashore. “This isn’t New Zealand, is it? But no, you are an American, aren’t you? Or maybe Canadian?”

I admit I understood little more than half of these words. “Not Canadian,” Father told her, “though born in northern New York, so I might sound something like one.”

“Ah. My airplane is Canadian. A Fairchild. I wouldn’t have an American plane, you know? And there just wasn’t a suitable one made in England.” She leaned in and whispered, though not very quietly, “I was tempted almost to buy a Junkers. Can you imagine? Lydia Viney in a German airplane!”

It seemed my Father could not imagine. “I have not seen an aeroplane in over twenty years,” said he, surveying her flying machine. “They have changed. By the way, this is not New Zealand nor any other land you know.”

“Most mysterious!” she proclaimed. “Is this your estate?” She looked up toward the House of Pua. What I had known as the House of Pua all my life.

“It is not. Naio is lord here.” He spoke slowly and seriously, as one might to a child. “Be respectful. He is an important man but,

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more importantly, his wife has just passed. We are gathered here for her funeral.”

“I promise to be on my best behavior, sir. Mustn’t upset the natives.”

I didn’t know quite what she meant but it brought a frown to Father’s face. None the less, he accompanied her to where Naio waited on his porch. “This is Lord Naio,” he told her.

“Lady Lydia Viney, at your service, sir,” she said. Father repeated this in our own language.

“I welcome you, Lady Vehina,” said Naio.

Marareta translated this for our guest. “Vehina would mean, more or less, ‘Water Woman’ in the language spoken here,” he told her. “You could do worse than adopt the name. The word he used before it is equivalent to ‘Lady.’ I felt it best to introduce you as an aristocrat right at the start.”

“Vehina?” The woman shrugged. “Quite all right with me, sir. Viney is a very old name, you know. Comes from the French but they spelled it with a ‘G,’ of course.” Her laugh reminded me of Palala, Lord Beka’s ill-tempered parrot. “Or so my husband assures me. Oh, I must let him know I am safe!”

Father shook his head. “You will never see your husband again. That is quite certain. I will explain soon.” Before she could answer, he turned back to Naio. “This woman came from the sea, as did I,” he stated. “I shall see to her needs.”

Naio nodded. “I thank you, Taona.” Though their exchange was formal, the two were old friends. Naio was a frequent visitor to the House of Marareta.

“Very well,” he said to Vehina — as I shall name her henceforth — “I am officially responsible for you. You can call me Marareta, but I was known as Michael Malvern in your world.” He chuckled, perhaps a little self-consciously. “And once upon a time as Mike Miller.”

“Malvern.” Her brow furrowed. “That seems familiar — and

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not just because it is a place in my home country. Well, never mind that, Mike. I say, will it be possible to obtain petrol for my airplane?"

Father shook his head. "She does not understand yet," he told me, in Mora. To Vehina he said, "There is no petrol here. There is no petrol anywhere in this world. You have come through a gate from the world we once knew and there is no returning."

She looked most doubtful but said only, "Might I return to my airplane and get my things? And see it is secured, as well."

"Indeed you might. Will you go with her, Maratoa? Oh, this is my son, Maratoa the Moon Man." He gave me a wink. "And this is my great friend Oorto." The Diwarna shaman had wordlessly rejoined us.

She raised an eyebrow at the introduction of Oorto. I knew not why. As we walked down to the river, she whispered, "The nigger doesn't speak English, does he?"

"What is a nigger?" It was not a word my father had taught me.

"The black fellow. Toot-toot or whatever your dad called him."

"Oorto. And no, he does not speak your tongue, though he knows many others." Then I felt obliged to add, "He is a great and wise shaman, and my teacher."

"Oh. I dare say I've put my foot in it again, haven't I?" She laughed. "And you don't know what that means either, I'll wager! Hmm, we should pull the plane up a little further onto solid ground."

I nodded. "And tie it off. It looks like a strong wind might blow it away."

"Smart lad," she remarked. A crowd of the curious, men and women, stood gawking at it. With their help we soon had it further out of the water and secured with sturdy lines. Vehina climbed up and started tossing bundles out to us. "Not much, really. I was traveling as light as I could."

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Oorto and I could easily carry it all up to the house. Vehina did not offer to assist, though she did sling a bag over her shoulder.

"It smelled bad," Oorto remarked to me.

"It did," I agreed. "Vehina does not smell too good either. Maybe we should throw her in the river."

"Maybe," he said. Then, "She may have a taboo about removing her clothes. So had the women who came from the sea with your father. They got over it."

"Best we leave it to the taona," I decided.

"Agreed." He glanced back at our guest, following behind us, her head turning back and forth as she took in all around her. It was beginning to grow dark. "She is tall," Oorto continued. "As tall as a Mora woman."

My people do tend to size, compared to the nations around us, the Diwarna, the Kohari. "But skinny," I said. "Hurasu should know of her."

"He will. Where to, Mika?" My father waited at the top of the steps.

"I have found a chamber for you, Lady Vehina," he said. "Not so easy with as many guests as are expected. You may need to share by tomorrow night."

We followed him into the House of Pua.

4. *The Flight*

LAMPS WERE BEING lit, on the porches and in the gardens.

"I had heard this American, Earhart, was thinking of flying around the world so I had to come up with something first," Vehina was informing my father.

"To fly across the Pacific," he said. "That would have seemed impossible the last I saw an aeroplane. Or rode in one — we went across Long Island Sound and I was terrified."

"Oh, I've been to New York! Lovely town. Except they weren't serving liquor then. Prohibition, you know."

"Prohibition? No, I don't know. We sailed in Fourteen and never returned. On James Nathan's private yacht."

"Nathan — of the Nathan Line? I remember hearing of his disappearance though I was only a little girl at the time. And the war was starting! That was much bigger news."

"The war? Then it went on?"

"For four years. It was very bad and the whole world was drawn in. You Yanks, too." She sat quietly for a moment. Only a moment. "James Nathan. I've read about him since too. Part of my research for crossing the ocean, you know? And you — Malvern. The artist, right? I think I've seen your work."

"Facile portraits," said Father.

"I agree," responded the woman. "No offense intended, sir."

"And none taken. I found a better life here. So, you intended to cross the Pacific by aeroplane. The first?"

"The first woman. And solo too, I might add! I purchased the latest Fairchild float plane, the Eighty-two. Heavily modified, with extra fuel tanks. The plan was to island-hop, of course. A girl has to stop and sleep!"

"Let me guess," spoke Mararetta. "You were caught up in a storm somewhere in the middle of the southern Pacific."

"I was. One moment my airplane was being tossed like a straw in the wind and suddenly the next I was under clear skies. Just like

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that.” She made a strange sound with her fingers, like something breaking. “I take it you had a similar experience?”

“We did. Nathan’s yacht sank and we had to take to lifeboats.”

Vehina nodded knowingly and picked up some more papaya. She had eaten a surprising amount since arriving. “I had no idea where to go. My instruments suggested I’d been blown back close to the South American coast so I headed east. My instruments also told me I was out of fuel when I glimpsed the cliffs along the coast here. I flew inland, looking for a good place to set down, and this seemed to be it. Mostly because of all the canoes gathered. I thought it might be a town.”

Father seemed to understand these things of which our visitor spoke but I did not. I listened and did not speak. She was a striking woman, in her way. Tall, as I have said, and thin but straight. There were muscles beneath those bulky garments she wore. Those still smelled, by the way. Someone really should get her to the river in the morning!

Vehina reminded me of no one so much as the Lady Teme, sister of the High King. A little younger, perhaps. It was getting quite dark. We sat on a rear porch, looking out over the gardens Temani’itu had planted when he dwelt here. There was a buffet spread for the many guests, who sat clumped here and there. I had not had the opportunity to speak with any of them yet. To be honest, the tale of Vehina was more interesting.

“Ulani should be listening to this,” I said. “He could make an epic of it.” This I spoke in Mora, to my father. He chuckled and translated.

“I have written several books,” replied Vehina. “That’s one reason I keep doing things like this. More material, more publicity!”

“There will be no more books,” came Marareta’s quiet reply. “You have flown from one world into another one, and there is no return.”

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"You are certain of this." She stared out at the lamps beyond the porch. "I will never see William again?"

"Your husband? No."

She sighed. "It is a good thing, then, we had no children. I hope I am declared dead quickly so he may remarry. Plenty enough women would be willing to fall in love with Sir William Viney."

"On the bright side," said my father, "women are permitted multiple husbands in this land so if you marry again you would not be cheating on him."

She smiled at that but it seemed a smile filled with sadness. "I cheated on him enough as it was. He's well rid of me."

"You will find," said my father, "that the Mora people do not quite understand the concept of cheating. Expect to be propositioned by more than one of the men here."

Vehina looked about the porch, seemingly with some interest. "But not tonight," he added. "They can see you are tired."

"They are handsome people. The women too. Do they always, um, go with their bosoms uncovered?"

"It is the custom," Father told her.

"Very well." With that she unfastened her blouse and slid it off. I was surprised to see more clothing beneath it. The ways of my father's world are strange.

He eyed the exposed garment. "Silk, is it not? I have attempted to interest the people here in its production." He shrugged, chuckling. "They prefer the bark cloth they have always worn."

"And not much of it," Vehina observed. She slid this second, sleeveless blouse off, over her head, to expose yet one more garment, covering only her breasts. "Well, here goes," she said, reaching around to her back to unfasten it. "And now I am one of your Mora," she said.

Father's laugh came short and perhaps rueful. "I have been here more than twenty years and I am not sure I am one, truly. You

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must begin to learn the language. Maybe the pidgin first, as did I and those who came here with me. It is easier and most Mora speak it at least some.”

“In the morning! Why don’t you show me to my bedroom, Moon Man?”

“Maratoa,” I told her. “Follow me.”

5. *The River*

I TRIED BUT my fingers could not make a sound as had Vehina's. Maybe my father knew how to do it. I would ask him later, if I thought of it.

She was on the rear porch early, seeking breakfast. Before even Oorto and I made our way there — we were sharing a room with my father, who had disappeared before we arose. The woman had left her boots behind but still wore the odd leggings in which she had arrived.

Someone should find her a decent loincloth. "Come," I said. "We are bathing in Teiri."

"Jolly good. I can check on Bob."

"Bob?"

"My airplane. I named him Bob." She followed us around the house on the covered veranda and down the front stair.

"There will be many more arriving today," I told her. I was not certain whether the funeral would be tomorrow or the next day, when Pua would be laid beside her brother Temani'itu. Slaves had already prepared the mound.

To Oorto I said, "We should begin teaching her the pidgin."

At once, he began pointing things out to Vehina, naming them in that tongue. Oorto is more comfortable in the pidgin than he is in Mora; he learned not the latter language till he was an adult. As my father.

She proved an apt pupil. Surprisingly so. "I say, I think I'll pick up your language readily enough," she asserted in English. "I know a great bunch of others already. None of any use here, I'm sure!" Her parrot-laugh erupted again.

"We are teaching you the trade pidgin first," I informed her. "My own Mora tongue is more difficult."

'Bob' was as we had left him. Or it. Others, women and men, were already splashing in the shallow water. I doffed my loincloth and dove in.

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"Oh, my," I heard Vehina utter as I came up. Oorto stood at her side, his smile at least a little smug. "I suppose I should have expected this," she said.

Perhaps I should have expected something too. "If you wish to keep your garment on, it is all right," I called. "It could use the washing."

She laughed at that. "I daresay it could." In she waded. "I should bring my other clothes down and rinse them too."

"Or burn them," I suggested, "and find something more sensible."

She shrieked and bolted out of the water. I did not know she would be so sensitive about her clothing.

"A crocodile!" she cried, pointing to a middle-sized one lazily making its way upstream.

"Not dangerous," I called out. "Fish-eaters only in the realm of the Mora. Where Oorto comes from there are great crocodiles that would swallow you right down."

Oorto had joined me in the water. He too wore a bark-cloth loincloth most of the time, rather than his people's traditional apron of woven grasses. It was more practical when he lived among Mora. "Back home," I continued, "he might be inclined to spear one like that and take it home to eat."

She stood a while on the sand at river's edge, the water lapping at her scrawny ankles. Her leggings had drooped and looked quite ridiculous. "The hell with these breeches," she said, and slid them off. I was not at all surprised to see another garment beneath them, a sort of abbreviated loincloth, maybe. It might be of that same material my father had named 'silk.'

"Canoes!" someone called out. From downriver they came. Three canoes it was, large ones. Large enough. Ah, my own family among them, following Father and me at a more leisurely pace.

"Greetings, Mother! You too, Rahiri, and all of you!" I turned aside to explain this to Vehina.

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“Your little sister?”

“Half-sister, you might say. We have different mothers. Um, birth mothers, that is. I consider Panoha my mother. That is the Mora way.” I was trying to remember all the strange customs of my father’s world. He had told me of them from time to time.

For that matter, our neighbors here, the Kohari, had strange enough customs of their own. “Ho, Rahiri!” I called. “Do you have a spare loincloth? My friend Vehina needs one.”

“Did she leave hers in your sleeping chamber?” my sister called back. This I did not translate.

“She is not Mora,” stated Mother. The canoes were near now, pulling in to the shore. “Nor is that,” she said, gazing at the aeroplane. “From your father’s world?”

“Even so, Mother. Vehina arrived yesterday.” That reminded me I should make sleeping arrangements for her tonight. “It might be well if she shared one of your rooms tonight.” Rahiri’s, I realized as soon as I said it. My parents would have a chamber of their own, the Taona Marareta being an important man.

“I am willing,” spoke Rahiri. “And here is a cloth for her.” She held up the garment.

All this I conveyed to our guest. She nodded, saying, “Thank her for me. And I will be honored to share my room with her tonight.”

She had good manners. But then, she was a noblewoman of her land – which, Father had explained last night, was not his land. All her words I passed on to my family. We waded out to join them.

Vehina’s little loincloth hung limply. I was intrigued by its color. I had never seen pink clothing before. It did not seem quite right. Only flowers should be pink. Nor had I seen anyone quite so light of skin under their clothing as this woman. I had not noticed that before, for her face and hands were tanned darker nor had we been out in the bright sunlight.

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She slipped off her remaining covering — self-consciously, though it was not too obvious — and wrapped Rahiri's loincloth about her. She seemed uncertain how to fasten it. My sister helped and then dropped back beside me as we went toward the house.

"She is very pale," Rahiri whispered. "And very skinny. And the hair between her legs is as light as that on her head!" Many a Mora has a head of hair lightened by the sun, so that did not seem strange.

"No need to whisper," I told her. "She does not understand our language." It looked like Oorto was giving her more lessons as we walked. "She is not very young, is she? She must have ten years on me."

"At least," my sister assured me.

The House of Pua is large, larger than that of some kings, and much larger than that in which I grew up. Still, the number of its rooms had a limit. Some would choose to sleep on the porches or in outbuildings or on the ground. The rainy season was not yet upon us.

I decided to choose the outdoors and leave our room to my father and mother. Oorto would likely do so as well.

"Your sister has taken over my teaching," he told me when we rejoined on the porch. We had not completely filled ourselves before taking Vehina off to bathe in Teiri. "Mika taught her some of his language, didn't he?"

I sipped from my bowl of millet beer. It was a good way to finish breakfast. "Some." Rahiri had never been as attentive to Father's English lessons. "Enough to help her teach. And to pester Vehina with questions!"

"There will be time for those." He stiffened of a sudden. "Someone calls. Ah, Malee."

I think he had hoped it would be Hurasu. She was calling to me also. A moment later the three of us were met in another world,

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a little twilit room somewhere in the infinite. *We're hurrying*, she said. *Revaru joined us as we passed his house.*

I answered. *We would have expected the king. And certainly his wife.*

Yes, Tita is with us. We might be there by nightfall. Um – Hurasu spoke with me. He thinks someone passed through the gate.

They did, Oorto told her. *They are here.*

She is here, I said.

She, huh? He'll want to meet her. That's all. People probably wonder why I'm not paddling! With that, she left us.

And we returned to the porch overlooking the gardens of Pua. Oorto was not jealous, I was sure, that Hurasu had chosen to speak to pupil rather than teacher. That was not Oorto's way.

He knew also that Malee was the most powerful, the most gifted of we three, at least in potential. That was a dangerous thing to be.

6. *The Bard*

ULANI LEANED ON his staff. His limp had been barely noticeable. I sometimes thought he carried the stick for effect and didn't really need it anymore.

"I smell a tale," he announced. Ulani was a bard, a good bard. Not a great bard; he knew this and it sometimes bothered him. Yet he was famed throughout the realm and his epic of my father's journey across the mountains was widely sung.

Little had come from him since then. "I fear Vehina's story would make no sense to most Mora," Father told him.

The bard sat down with us, a little stiffly. Maybe the stick was needed, from time to time. "A voyage across the sea is a voyage across the sea," he pronounced. "Regardless of what our heroine rode in."

Vehina would like being called a heroine. I already knew that much of her.

"But there were no great adventures," persisted my father. "Only a storm."

"Did she not say she had, um, composed several epics about her previous adventures?" I asked.

"Indeed," he answered. "And she brought copies of the books with her. Books none here can read."

Not even me. Father had thought it more practical I learn to read and write the language of Hurasu's people. I picked up a fig and nibbled at it. "Hurasu would want to add them to his library, I think."

Father nodded agreement to this. He had written out a complete account of his own journeys for the sorcerer. Very much out of date now. "He will certainly wish to meet our visitor," he said.

"And many will wish to meet the legendary sorcerer," spoke Ulani. "Perhaps not I. It might be disappointing. But that does not matter right now. We have gathered for my mother." He spoke

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directly to my father. "Marareta, I would ask you speak as you did at my uncle's funeral."

"Willingly," he replied. "The time is set?"

"The interment is at dawn tomorrow, whether Poneiva makes it here or not. We will have the memorial feast in the evening. Too late today, I would think."

Ulani would be the one organizing all this, wouldn't he? Naio would have left it to him. "That sounds reasonable," said Marareta. "Many powerful Mora will be gathered. There will be things to speak of."

"I came only to say farewell to my mother. Politics I leave to others."

"It was not always so."

Both men became silent. An attendant scurried up, a rather pretty girl. I wondered briefly — very briefly — where her sleeping chamber lay. "Lord Ulani, the High King's party has been spotted on the road." A messenger would have run ahead with the news. It might be some time yet before Poneiva himself arrived.

Ulani hoisted himself erect. "I must make sure all is ready. And then make sure Naio is ready to greet the High King before this house. What now?" Another attendant had approached. Not a girl and definitely not so pretty. "More boats on the river. From both directions!"

"Perhaps Mouiri," I said. That would be Ulani's younger brother, the son of Naio.

"Or Va'aru," suggested Father. "Though he travels little these days." Certainly not anyone from further away.

Ulani acknowledged this with a nod. "And possibly Revaru and my cousin and my sister from the other direction." And Malee. It would be wise to go meet her.

Rahiri and Vehina waylaid me before I got out of the house. "More relatives arriving," Rahiri told the older woman. "And the woman Maratoa is going to marry."

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Rahiri loves to make mischief. “So she has insisted since she was five years of age. I am not yet convinced.”

“She is Oorto’s niece,” Rahiri continued. “But her father came from your world, as did ours.”

“Ah. Survivors from the shipwreck?”

“Yes,” I replied. “There were six and ten all told. Many are now dead.” Some I had never known. I gave Vehina a grin. “As soon as you understand the Mora language you can listen to a long epic about it.”

“Believe it or not, young man, I am looking forward to it.”

7. *After the Funeral*

“SO YOUR FATHER has become a priest in this land?”

“He was seen as one almost from the time he arrived here,” I answered. It seemed reasonable to me. “He chose to follow the god of love and rain, Teva.”

“But never actively,” spoke Rahiri from Vehina’s other side. “Not at a shrine or anything. Father was too busy with war and politics.”

She was romanticizing it. Our father had longed for peace and would have gladly dwelt at some small shrine with the woman he loved. The world had not allowed him.

At sunrise, Pua had been laid in a rock-lined grave in a mound behind the gardens, near that of her brother. Temani’itu, that is; Maitoa’s grave lies near the House of the High King, where he had ruled. Our father had spoken and the slaves had covered the little chamber with soil. We all went to eat breakfast.

Rahiri gave her the high place at our mat, directly to my left. As our guest, that was completely acceptable. Vehina would have to learn what her rank entitled her to, in time. None of us could really say yet. She was a noble in her land. Poneiva had already recognized her as such here. But not a high noble, an *ari noe*. Not of the blood of kings. That would be sorted out.

It wasn’t necessary yet. She would not be invited to the feast tonight. Neither would Rahiri and I, for that matter. Malee was another matter; her father was the most powerful man north of the hills that bounded the Mora realm. Lord Gordie was a king himself in all but name. And her mother, her adoptive mother, was Pua’s daughter. Malee would be there, and in a high place at the mat.

“Marareta is also a friend of this king who showed up yesterday, right? The High King.”

“Our father has known Poneiva since he was a young man.”

“Maratoa’s age,” interjected Rahiri. “Long before anyone knew of him or thought he might rule all the Mora someday.”

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“Father may have had something to do with that,” I quietly added. So many suggested.

“A king-maker.” Vehina considered that. “And a maker of two fine children. I do want to hear the story and I am not willing to wait until I can speak your language!”

“You’ll get it out of one of us sooner or later,” said my sister. “Rahiniti has arrived.”

Not to mention her husband Toare, the greatest bard in all the land of the Mora. I motioned for them to join us. “You will have to move over and let them in between us,” I whispered to Vehina. “They are of greater station than we and take the higher places when we sit together.” This she might as well learn right now.

Toare was like an older brother to me. He had grown up in the house where I grew up, though it was then the House of Hareata, my father’s great friend and patron among the Mora. Panoha, she whom I call Mother, was the sister of Hareata, who had been slain in the wars against the rebels. This was when I was but an infant.

Ah, I tell you too much of these things, do I not? I know those who are not Mora do not carry about such genealogies in their heads. But Toare was indeed as a brother.

The couple knew, of course, who Vehina was. “Let us converse in the pidgin,” I suggested. “The Lady Vehina is learning it and might understand something of our speech.”

They were entirely willing, especially Rahiniti who was born not Mora, but Kohari, and was adopted by the late admiral Temani’itu. This made her part of Pua’s family. She spoke Mora yet with an accent and always would, I was sure.

I explained some of this to Vehina. “The words of the pidgin are a mix of the many Kohari dialects with a sprinkling of Mora,” I told her. “The syntax is all Kohari, but simplified.” I did not think I had ever had the opportunity to use the word syntax before. I am glad my father taught it to me.

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“Lady Rahiniti Kohari do talk-talk?” she essayed, her first stumble toward conversing in the pidgin.

Rahiniti laughed and spoke a couple sentences in Kohari. Probably it was the dialect used at the great temple where she once had served and danced. “That is Kohari,” she announced, reverting to the pidgin.

“Similar,” felt Vehina, reverting to English herself and sticking with it through the rest of the meal.

“The Taona Toare is a bard,” I told her. “Once an apprentice of Ulani.”

“Taona? I have heard your father called that.”

“It is a title of great honor,” Rahiri informed her. “It means teacher and healer.”

“More than just a man of knowledge,” I added to this. “A man of authority, who knows the right way things should be done. Only the greatest are so named.”

“Not Ulani?”

I shook my head. “No. He is known as Master Ulani and deserves the title, but none call him Taona.” She seemed satisfied with that and ate in silence while I gossiped with Rahiniti and Toare. Mostly with Rahiniti. She was a tiny woman by Mora standards but remained surprisingly firm and muscular. Toare had told me she practiced her dancing for an hour each morning, before the sun rose. After that, she had to chase after their many children.

No, not so much anymore. Some were nearly grown. None had accompanied them from their modest house, once the home of the great bard Master Isa, Ulani’s teacher. That lay south of us.

When they had left us, Vehina had more questions. “This Ulani is no longer a bard?”

“He will always be a bard,” felt Rahiri.

“But he has not crafted new work in a long time, and rarely performs,” I said. “Ulani became a valued advisor of the High King

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Poneiva and neglected such things. Then, for a time, he returned across the hills to the land where he was born.”

“He sought peace, Father says.”

I nodded in agreement to my sister. “Father has known Ulani long. He served as Pua’s aide when first they met. Barely a boy at the time.”

Rahiri had to add, “And Oorto’s lover.”

“That is long over,” I told the Englishwoman.

“I guessed Ulani was homosexual,” she remarked. “Oorto is a little surprising. Um, Ulani isn’t born Mora, is he?”

“His father was Mora. His mother was Diwarna. That meant he had no place in our society.”

“Not until Aunt Pua adopted him.” Rahiri suddenly sniffled. “She was a good woman. I miss her.”

As did I. Others would more. My father. None as much as Ulani, maybe. “Let’s find your cousins,” I suggested, “before they have to go sit at that feast.”

“What about her?” asked Rahiri.

“I’ve noticed more than one man looking her over. Maybe we should leave her to them.”

My sister punched me. Hard too. “Come with us, Vehina,” she said.

8. *Nobles*

“YOU ARE A noble,” stated my father.

“Well – maybe not in the strict sense. I’m Lady Viney because my husband was knighted. He makes beer.” She gave out another odd parrot-like giggle. “And I help him sell it with my exploits.”

Marareta explained this to the High King, with a few liberties. In particular, he let Poneiva think Vehina was born of a noble family.

“You’re closer to being noble than James Nathan or I ever was,” he told her. “And we were accepted as such here.”

“My parents were nothing but genteel upper-middle class,” she said. “But I’m not at all opposed to being in the Mora peerage.”

“Most importantly,” said Marareta, “if Poneiva publicly declares you a noble – which I am fairly sure he will – it means you are also accepted as Mora. As would be any children you might have.”

“They would be outcasts otherwise, right? Like Ulani was.”

Father glanced at me. Who else would be explaining such things to the woman? “Even so.” He turned back to Poneiva and they gabbed for some time. Little of it actually had anything to do with Vehina but she didn’t know that. Surely she thought her fate was being decided!

People were already leaving. There had been a great feast last night, in the high-ceilinged central hall of the House of Pua. As the House of Naio I supposed it would be known now, for Poneiva had made it clear it was to be his home.

“She should come to my house so I might greet her as a noble,” said Poneiva, yawning.

“She should also go to the Great Falls and greet Hurasu when he arrives,” replied my father. “I think it is important.”

“Her falling from the sky does seem portentous, doesn’t it?” asked the king. “I wish I had been here to see it.” He turned his

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attention to me. "Has this wizard told you when he is coming yet, Maratoa?"

"No, my lord. He's more likely to tell Malee anyway."

Of a sudden, my father sat erect and spoke seriously. "I do not want that girl anywhere near Hurasu when he visits. He would wish to take her to his home across the mountains. Of this I am sure."

"To serve him?" asked Poneiva.

"And perhaps to be his mate. She has great power, Oorto tells me. It would be a temptation. And — it might also be too much of a temptation for Malee if he tried to seduce her to his service."

"They are already too friendly," I stated. I had never put it into words that way before but it was how I felt, wasn't it?

My father smiled. "Maratoa has always thought he was responsible for taking care of the girl, since he was six and she was five."

"Maybe he is," said Poneiva. He rose. "I need a nap. We drank too late last night and I must walk home tomorrow. You come visit me sometime, Lady Vehina." With that, he left us. Father translated his last words for the woman.

"I certainly shall visit Lord Poneiva," she said. "He is, um, big, isn't he?"

"Always a large man. Unfortunately, prone to growing fat like many of his family."

"He was a great warrior," I added to this.

Father laughed outright. "I am sure he could still outfight you, my boy."

"As could many others." I have no illusions as to my fighting skills.

A moment later, the High King reappeared at the doorway. "No nap for me, I fear. My sister has just shown up."

"Then let us go greet the Lady Teme," said Father. "I assume Bafa is with her."

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Poneiva shrugged his massive shoulders. "I was not informed but it would be likely."

Everyone expected the High King's nephew Maneata to succeed him, someday, though but a boy now. There were rumors of a prophecy; I knew the prophecy was more than a rumor and that my birth-mother Pana'a had spoken it.

So the boy's mother, Teme, was an important woman. I called her aunt, for her husband was brother to Rahaita, she who was my name-mother. That would be Bafa, another who came from the sea with my father, and who was adopted by the king Arierona.

Vehina trailed along behind, at my side, though she had no idea where we were bound, nor why. I whispered a warning to her. "Poneiva's sister is here. Best not to call attention to yourself. They'll speak to you if they wish."

"The royal family, eh? I've had encounters with the one back home."

"Also old friends of my father." And of me. I had but recently spent two years as apprentice warrior in the court of Ponu, successor to Arierona. It is custom for young noblemen to so serve.

My warning was for naught. As soon as Bafa spied her she was barraged with questions, beginning with, "Is that your aeroplane?" He asked in English, so he must have been told something of her already.

The pair of them stepped aside to converse, while Teme spoke with us and her brother. "We did not know of Pua's death until we were already on our way north," she explained. "Bafa insisted he must meet this Hurasu."

"He will," said Father. "Did you intend to come along?"

"The man means nothing to me. I shall stay here a while with Ma'ave, I think." She and the daughter of Pua had become fast friends, though rivals — enemies, even — in their early days. To be sure, both still wished to someday see their own sons mount the dais of the High King.

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No sons, nor daughters, had accompanied her and Bafa, it seemed. "Let's go out and find something to eat," my father suggested, "and then get you two settled into a room. You have brought no entourage, I see." It was like him to think of practical things. This made him useful to the powerful. The not so powerful, too.

"Only a pair of warriors, so we would not have to paddle on our own all the way down River Teoma." Teme could also be practical.

She was a tall woman, and had become more substantial with age. When I was little, she was as slim as Vehina. This I remembered. "Come along, Husband," she called, "before you make me jealous."

Yes, jealous. Despite Father's words to Vehina about cheating, the Mora are human and can be jealous. Teme, to be sure, joked with Bafa. She had loved him since she was a girl. It was he who taught her to shoot with the bow.

The tale of how she used that bow to become a heroine is another for the bards to give you. Ask Toare sometime. His is the best account. We all followed Father onto the porch. It was still early and much of what had been set out for breakfast remained.

Positioning Vehina was no difficulty. Bafa steered her to the left of his wife. The rest of us were arrayed on the High King's right, I at the end. But first I must be the one to go and fetch bowls of fruit and taro paste and millet beer for all. Yams, too. I am fond of yams.

"What are we to do with Vehina?" Poneiva was asking when I returned, balancing many bowls and baskets. "Perhaps she should go to your house, Bafa?"

"Perhaps," said Father. "First she should journey to the Great Falls with us to meet Hurasu."

Bafa nodded. "Good idea. I am eager to meet the man, you know, after hearing your tales of him for twenty years!"

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“Then so be it,” declared the High King Poneiva, helping himself to a rather large bowl of sapa fruit.

9. Preparations

“I’LL COME ALONG to the House of Marareta, of course,” Malee told me.

“Does your mother know this?” asked Oorto. He meant Ma’ave.

“Yes, Uncle Oorto. This we agreed upon before leaving my father’s house.”

Oorto’s sister, Demba, was birth-mother of Malee. She died when we were both very young. Malee has no blood of the Mora in her, her mother being Diwarna, her father from another world. I have been told Demba was very beautiful.

Malee, maybe not so much. She took after Lord Gordie.

“We leave in the morning,” Oorto told us. “First to Mika’s house, then on to Aedina. I think it will be up to you to arrange the journey, Miki.” This he had named me when I still a small boy. It meant ‘Little Moon’ in his tongue. Oorto rarely used it anymore, recognizing I was a Mora warrior now.

Unfortunately, Malee also sometimes called me by the name. About that I could do nothing.

Oorto was right. I should arrange things. Not that it mattered so much; those who intended to show up would show up. They would find a canoe or maybe walk. It is easy to swim across Teiri or even the mightier Teoma. “We will be bringing Vehina along,” I noted.

“And we must give her more language lessons on the way,” he added to this.

I should go find her. And what was to be done with her aeroplane? We would not tow it all the way to my father’s home!

“It’s rather useless to me now, isn’t it?” she said when I found her and posed the question. “Your Bafa suggested I simply leave it here for now. He might find use for some of the materials later on.”

Yes, Bafa would. He was greatly interested in metals and there was much metal in it. It should be pulled further up the bank and

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secured. I would speak to the head of Pua's household. Naio's household, that is. I should speak to Naio as well of this and thank him.

I found both men together, which saved time. Mouiri, the son of Pua and Naio was there as well. I had heard he arrived barely in time for the funeral, having paddled all night. It was far from where he served below the Great Falls.

"I leave all up to you," Naio told his chief servant, "and to my able daughter. Do not squabble too much with her, I ask. I myself intend to accompany my son and meet this Hurasu."

Another to join us. Whether he and Mouiri would stop at the House of Marareta, I knew not. Nor did it matter right then.

So who else would be paddling down Teiri and Teoma with Father and me? Mother and Rahiri, of course, and the servants who had accompanied them. Three of them?

Bafa, with his two retainers. Teme would not need them in her brother's house. Malee and Oorto and Vehina. I could think of no others.

Maratoa!

Lord Hurasu, I answered. I was not overly surprised. This I had anticipated for days.

I have told you not to call me 'lord,' he chided. Not here.

Yes. Will the others join us?

They will not. I speak to your father through you, this day. He is the one who should know I approach the land of the Mora.

His words made sense to me. Oorto and Malee had no authority. Not that I did! *You are near?*

I believe so. From the south have I sailed, across a great expanse of open water, but now have come upon a chain of isles.

Those my father followed? I knew the tale of his voyage here.

No. Those lie further north. I believe no man has seen these islands before nor sailed these seas. Not I, anyway, my boy! Tell Malvern I may be only three or four days distant. He paused.

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Hurasu might have looked thoughtful but I do not know. Never had he shown himself when he spoke afar to Malee and me. Maybe to Oorto, but I had not asked. *Or a week.*

I shall tell Marareta, I promised him.

Very well. With that he broke off cleanly. As ever. I went to tell my father.

“The more reason to be on our way,” was all he had to say. “Sleep well for we paddle far tomorrow.”

Fog lay on the Teiri the next morning, before dawn, as we loaded our canoes. Mouiri and Naio, I saw, had decided to paddle with us. Others were also set to launch and some would be with us for a while, turning aside here or there. Or continuing when we turned aside.

“I look forward to seeing your estate, Malvern,” spoke Vehina, gazing down the steaming river. “I say, do you have horses there?”

I had heard of horses but had only the most nebulous idea of what they might be. Like very large dogs, maybe, from what Father had told me. He only smiled. “There are none in this land. Nor any beast upon which you might ride.”

“Oh dear! I suppose I shall have to try out a crocodile,” she told him. She joked, I hoped. “I was considered a pretty fair rider. An all-around sportswoman, the press called me.”

“Then let us see how good a boat-woman you are,” he responded, handing her a paddle.

“Goodbye Bob!” she called out as we launched into the Teiri.

10. *The House of Marareta*

“WE CAMP HERE,” I told Vehina. It was not so late but it was a good spot. Almost all the canoes had pulled over to the bank without anyone asking or ordering. “The joining of the rivers is a little below this spot.”

Even leaving with dawn, it takes more than one day to journey from the House of Naio to the House of Marareta. First down the broad, shallow Teiri to where it meets the Teoma, the great central river of the Mora lands. Almost all the water in our land ultimately flows into it and then into the ocean at the Great Falls.

“Who, ah, lives here?” she asked, eyeing the open thatched shelters that stood above the river.

“Such campgrounds are maintained by order of the High King,” I told her. “They lie up and down the land, along river and road.” I might mention that our visitor and I had shared one small canoe all day, the one in which Father and I had traveled earlier. He journeyed with Mother today.

I looked her over. “You are sunburned. Rahiri!” I called out. “Bring oil.”

Both she and Malee came at my call. Malee shook her head. “Like my father,” she commented.

Rahiri told her, “You should have worn your blouse.”

“I threw it out,” said Vehina. “Starting a new life, you know?”

“A pretty stupid start,” said my sister. Malee might have said something similar if she understood English. Her father thought that a waste of time when there were so many more useful languages.

While the two of them oiled the woman, I went to see how the others had fared through the day. Bafa was a little red also. He spends too much time in his workshop and not enough in the sun.

“I’m going to soak in the river a while,” he declared. “Cool water is better than oil. You should tell Lady Vehina so.”

Though the water of the Teiri was not so cool, I was sure Bafa

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was right about this. Soon, quite a few of us were in the river. "This is the heartland of the Mora nation," he was telling Vehina. "The richest land, the most thickly populated. Rather different upriver where I live."

"But we are going the other way, are we not?"

"That we are." He switched languages. "Ho, Naio! Are you stopping with Marareta?"

"We will paddle past his house, I think," answered the old sailor, half-floating near us. "I do intend to stop in the House of Va'aru before continuing to the falls."

"Neatanu will be interested in our visitors," allowed Bafa. "Both the one coming from the sea and this one." He nodded in the direction of Vehina.

"I think many here may be interested in her," replied Naio, and backstroked away. He was undoubtedly right. Even if she was a rather bright red at the moment.

I made a decision and went at once to my father. "The Lady Vehina should not be in the sun tomorrow," I told him. "Allow me to take her to our house tonight."

He thought on it only a moment. "A good idea, my son. Do so." I went to tell the woman. She was miserable enough by now that she didn't care much what I intended to do. In minutes, I had her in the canoe and was pushing out into the dark Teiri.

"We will join you," came Naio's voice. He and Mouiri were launching their own canoe. Mouiri was, in most respects, a younger version of his father, as tall but a little wider of shoulder. That was the blood of his mother's family but I doubted he would grow fat. At least not while he lived the strenuous life of a sailor.

"You are welcome, Lord Naio," I responded. They would be welcome. We stroked side by side for a while, with Vehina huddled in the prow of our canoe.

"She does not speak our language, does she?" asked Mouiri.

"She doesn't." I had known Mouiri all my life and was not

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inclined to address him as 'lord.' "We have been teaching her the pidgin."

"Rest well, Lady Vehina," said Naio in that language. In Mora, he told me, "I think she sleeps. She will miss much beauty."

"There will be other days," I said, "and other nights." We paddled on. The moon was not yet risen but the skies were clear and star-filled. Torches shone here and there by the river, or fires before huts. Docks loomed, to disappear again into the dark, and the deep shadows of great spreading trees lay upon the water. There was beauty in this night, in this Land of the Sleeping Sky.

"Teoma," spoke Mouiri. We were at the juncture of the rivers, where the sluggish Teiri added its waters to Teoma. The flow was stronger, the water cooler. It could be much stronger in the rainy season, sometimes practically impossible to paddle against. But this was the dry season and we traveled the other direction.

I would have to watch that I did not go past my home in the dark. It would still be dark, I was fairly sure. Vehina roused and sat up. "What marvelous scents," she murmured and fell silent again.

There were lights here, too, but fewer shone as the night grew longer. "The next village," announced Mouiri.

I looked across to the dim houses we passed. He might be right. The scents — Vehina was right too. Marvelous, was the English word she used. I liked it. Citrus was in bloom and we grew much citrus on the estate of my father. Yes, and traded it up and down the rivers of the Mora realm.

"There," I called out. A small stream emptied into Teoma. Many canoes were drawn up on the sandy bank beyond it. Ours glided in beside them. "Stay and rest a little before journeying on," I invited my companions.

"That we shall," replied Mouiri. "Rouse Rika from his sleeping mat and have him fix us a meal!"

Rika had not come with Mother but remained to run the household. Once he had been my father's personal attendant and

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walked with him across the Mora realm and even across the mountains to Hurasu's valley.

"I think Rika may sleep a while," said his father. "We might do well to do the same, and share a meal before going on."

The House of Marareta was set well back from the river, on a low rise. We silently followed the path toward it. The stream beside us could be heard but not seen. To our right lay groves and the fish pond, all barely to be made out. Two torches burnt before the door of our house, and one warrior stood watch.

"Stairs," I warned Vehina. She did not stumble but carefully and slowly placed one foot after the other. She did not look up until we reached the porch.

"So this is the House of Marareta." She giggled. "And we have it all to ourselves!"

"Your father is not with you, Maratoa?" asked the guard, before noting the identities of my companions. "Lord Mouiri, greetings. Lord, um —" I think he was trying to make out Naio's tattoos by the flickering torch light. He could tell he was someone important but had never met the man.

"Lord Naio," I told him. It was a name anyone would know, the one-time commander of the Mora fleet. "Everyone is asleep, I would guess. No need to rouse them."

"Right. Sir." The title was an afterthought. The warriors here rarely addressed me so. Maratoa was nobody, in truth. I could go serve some nobleman as a warrior, just as they did, and be of no higher status. I knew not if that was the life meant for me.

"Let's find food," I suggested, "and then sleeping mats." They followed me in.

11. Songs

VEHINA AND I were both stretched on mats, spread on the bamboo floor of the south porch. We had eaten late there and then slept. Rika stood over me. "Has Lord Naio left?" I asked.

"Hours ago." He eyed my companion with considerable curiosity.

That our noble guests would be gone I had expected. Probably they were halfway to Lake Aedina and the House of King Va'aru. Vehina stirred. "Oh. Owww!"

Rika considered her. "I'll have Hepetea come out and tend to you, my lady," he said. "And have some breakfast brought, too. The taona is on his way?" he asked me.

"Yes. I expect we'll see him by noon or so." I was hungry. Sore, too. Not as sore as my guest. I must consider her needs first. "This is the Lady Vehina. She speaks no Mora but is learning the pidgin. Best speak to her in that tongue." Or attempt to do so.

He did not quite hurry off. Rika was middle-aged, a bit fat, and tended to move with the gravity proper to the head servant of a noble household. Never the less, both food and his wife Hepetea, accompanied by one of their teenage daughters, appeared shortly. They had Vehina slathered with more coconut oil in no time.

"I smell good enough to eat," she announced.

"You were well-cooked yesterday," I reminded her.

"Indeed! Um, your people are not cannibals, are they?"

It was too silly a question for me to be offended, and I was sure she spoke in jest. For the most part. "Not the Mora, nor any people of whom I know. The Kohari hunt heads, however."

"Ah. Good to know." She stuffed more cold yams into herself before going on, in a quieter voice. "I understood few of Lord Naio's words last night, when I was half-awake, but know he must miss his wife."

"I am sure he does." I hesitated only briefly. If Vehina were to be Mora, she might as well know all about us. And Mora are

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nothing if not great gossipers. "They long had an odd sort of marriage. He would be off with his fleet for months, while Pua went on one diplomatic mission or another. But these last ten years he remained at her side."

She nodded. "The boy is cute. Is he married?"

"To the sea, as his father. But he neglects a wife at home too." Vehina must be of about an age with Mouiri, a bit past three tens of years. I knew better than to ask her about that.

She shifted herself a little. "Ah. Ah. I'd best not move much this morning. You must give me language lessons right here, my boy. I think maybe I am picking up this pidgin of yours."

And so we did, for a while. Then we ate more and napped again until it was time to eat once more. True, it is always time to eat in the house of a Mora noble.

"He is a lazy sort, isn't he?" someone asked.

"Almost as bad as you."

"Ha, now I remember why I quit being your apprentice!" spoke Toare. Ulani stood at his side, leaning on his staff.

"*Your* apprentice wouldn't even come with you," Ulani reminded him.

"Someone had to watch the children. You never had that problem."

Ulani laughed loudly. "You have me there! It seems an excellent use for the boy."

"Where did you two come from?" I asked.

"We had no reason to stay where we were so we followed after your father. It seems we caught up shortly after you left him."

"Between Naio's steward and my sister," said Ulani, "there was little for me to do in the house of my mother."

"And now Rahiniti is there as well," Toare added.

"Your parents and the rest of them are trailing behind us somewhere. All your people here wanted to talk with Marareta as soon as he pulled his canoe ashore. 'When should we pick the

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citrons, Taona?’ and ‘Are the carp large enough, Taona?’ and that sort of thing.”

“That could be a song,” felt Toare.

“More your style, my boy. I only compose plodding epics.”

Neither Toare or I was willing to make any comment on that. “There they are,” I said. I could hear the clatter of my family’s arrival, feet on the front stairs, cries of greeting from the servants and warriors. Malee and Rahiri appeared shortly.

“Two bards in the house,” said Rahiri. “We must make them compete!”

“But what will be the prize?”

My sister looked around and then grinned broadly. “Lady Vehina!”

The woman looked up at the mention of her name but did not know what was going on. We might not be able to get away with that sort of thing much longer. “I’m not sure that would entice Master Ulani,” I told her.

“She’s skinny enough to pass for a boy!”

“I think no one will be touching the lady for a while,” Ulani said. “It’s best I stand aside and allow Toare to sing for you, anyway.”

Various rude noises greeted that pronouncement. Some might even have come from Toare. “We are trying to convince Master Ulani to perform for us,” I informed Vehina. “You would not understand any of it.” Mora is a difficult language, I am told. Poetic Mora is more difficult.

“Father could sing Kohari songs for you,” offered Rahiri. “Or even English ones.”

“Oh, we need Beka for that.” He would be at the falls, I was sure. But Rahiri would not. She was not going to meet Hurasu. If Father had his way, neither would Malee. I suspected he would not have his way.

The conversation shifted back to Mora. “Uncle Ulani can

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sometimes be convinced to sing for us at my father's house," said Malee. "But he will not speak of politics."

"Better to leave that to your mother," the bard told her.

"You know more of such things than the Lady Ma'ave," spoke my father, stepping out onto the porch. "Or Gordie, for that matter. They haven't your understanding of what drives men."

"And women," appended Rahiri.

"And women, indeed. Pua was one who saw clearly and she saw the abilities that lay within you, Ulani."

"And you, Taona."

Father only smiled. "I suppose that is so. Any more word from the Vision Lord, my son?"

I shook my head and glanced toward Malee. Hurasu would be more likely to speak to her or Oorto now; I had only served as a messenger when he had last called to me.

"So be it. We should leave again in the morning." He switched to English. "Do you think you can travel tomorrow, Vehina?"

She attempted an answer in the pidgin. "Yes. Paddle no, um, luggage woman!"

My father laughed. "The Mora call useless people 'canoe fillers,'" he told her. "But you may be a canoe filler for a while. And be sure to cover yourself."

"I'll get her a poncho," volunteered Rahiri. Then, "I wish I could come along!"

"Not this time. I would that you stayed too, Malee."

That was a surprise to her. "Hurasu expects me!"

Father shrugged. "So let him be disappointed." Not so disappointed as Malee, I was sure.

She looked ready to argue. It would be of no use. Oorto looked like he might wish to raise some objections too.

"We will eat together at dusk and then rest before our journey. Though perhaps one of our bards might first help us pass the evening."

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“I will throw lots with you,” Toare told his former master. “The low number gives whatever poem the other demands.”

Ulani could not resist. He lost. Or won, depending on how one looks at it.

We sat on the lamp-lit porch and in the gardens, all of us, and many servants and warriors of the house, to hear him. Ulani was a renowned master – who would wish to miss that? To be sure, Toare was even more respected but many had seen him grow up here. He would never inspire the same awe.

As I listened at his side, Toare leaned in to whisper, “His epics do plod sometimes, but they are full of beauty – and his voice is better than ever mine will be.”

Lady Vehina might have felt the same had she not fallen asleep almost at once.

12. *Aedina*

RAHIRI HAD FOUND not only a bark-cloth poncho for Vehina but also a wide-brimmed straw hat.

What she had not found this morning was Malee. "She was not in our chamber when I awakened and is nowhere in the house," she told Father. I was suspicious of her ignorance. I am sure our father was as well.

"I suppose we shall catch up to her," was all he had to say.

In truth, any authority the Taona Marareta had over Malee was nebulous, at best. She was an adult. Even her parents could not order her about, here in the land of the Mora.

But Father had been within his rights to forbid her to travel with us. That Malee knew.

Rika bade us a farewell as four canoes launched beneath the black-pearl sky of early morn. He had met Hurasu once; he had no desire to do so again. Not so Ulani, despite his earlier words. "My curiosity proves too great," was all he was willing to say.

Toare had been curious about Hurasu all along and was eager to go. "Rahiniti doesn't need me about anyway," he claimed.

Father and I shared one canoe, with Vehina, he taking a place in the prow. Four warriors, Bafa's pair and two of Father's service, had accompanied us but they traveled in canoes with Ulani and Oorto. Bafa and Toare had chosen to paddle the smaller dugout in which the bards had arrived, perhaps catching up on things. I could certainly hear their voices rising and falling in the morning stillness. Both were talkative.

I knew my father wished to converse privately with me. We paddled for some time in silence, allowing the river to carry us as much as our own effort. "I fear Hurasu," he spoke, unexpectedly.

"That I know and understood, Father. It is sensible. I fear him myself." That I could admit, to my father, to myself. "But we can not hide Malee from him. The two can and do speak with each other from afar. Being together physically will make no difference."

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"You are very persuasive, my son. And you have thought this through." I heard his chuckle, though I could not see his face. "Poneiva should make a diplomat of you."

Others had hinted of such a career. It was possible but I knew my gifts might lead me elsewhere. For some time, only the dipping of our paddles broke the silence.

My gifts. I have not explained those, have I? Once a man of the Mora would have hidden any sorcerous ability or, worse, failed to recognize it. That is a pathway to madness, as with King Hara'a. But Malee and I knew we had been born wizards since we were small. Malee inherited this from her uncle's Diwarna family. Her grandmother was a famed shamaness. My birth-mother, the priestess Pana'a, passed these gifts to me, gifts I shared with my name-mother, her niece Rahaita.

But what to do with this gift? Or curse, perhaps. That I did not know. I could only walk my path and see where it led.

Vehina napped on and off as we floated down Teoma. I think she was in greater pain this morning than yesterday. That would subside.

"I say, a lake!" We had indeed entered the southern end of Aedina. It is more a widening of Teoma than aught else. "Will we pass through it?" she asked, sitting up and giving its expanse a good looking over.

"A waterfall lies at its far end," my father told her. "It prevents further travel by canoe." Not the Great Falls. Those were beyond two lesser cataracts. "We will stay the night at the House of Va'aru." With his paddle he pointed to the king's high house rising on the left shore of Aedina.

I wondered if Malee was there. I could try speaking with her from afar. I had resisted doing so all the day.

No, leave that for later if we do not find her in the king's house. We stroked toward the far shore.

It is said Hareata, Toare's father, looked much like his cousin

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Va'aru. He had also been a rival when the king was elected. Toare would not be considered a possible successor, being in the male line of descent.

Va'aru, therefore, is also a cousin of my mother Panoha. The sons of Tita or Rahiri would be eligible for the dais of Va'aru – but perhaps too distantly related to be considered seriously. Anyway, all this means Toare and myself, and Father, for that matter, were Va'aru's kin and ever welcome in his house.

Incidentally, Toare looks nothing like Va'aru and resembles his mother Mehetu, thin and long of face. I tried to explain all this to Vehina before she met the king.

"None of that matters," my father told her. "Va'aru welcomes all. His hospitality is renowned." This was true. We tied up at the docks. There are many docks before the House of Va'aru, and elsewhere around Aedina.

But Vehina had caught something in my explanation. "Does this mean you could be king here?" she asked me. "Panoha is your mother, right? Or does the adoption angle make you ineligible?"

"Panoha has not adopted Maratoa," Father explained. "He remains the son of Rahaita."

"Oh. I see." She said no more of it, nor did we. I suspected someone had told her a little of my name-mother, maybe Rahiri, more likely Bafa.

It is true that had I been formally adopted, I could legally be considered for election. But it would be more than rare for an adopted son to take the dais.

As oft he did, Va'aru sat on his front porch. The king, grown old and gray, smoked a great bamboo pipe as he looked out over his lake. Mouiri and Naio flanked him, Malee taking a place on the steps below them.

"Welcome, Taona!" called out the king. "Your friends hurried here before you!"

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"Yet we are all in the same place at the same time," Marareta responded.

Vehina sniffed the air. "That is marijuana, isn't it?" she whispered in my ear.

I did not know the word. "The stuff he is smoking. Quite illegal back home."

I thought I understood the word illegal. It seemed to mean taboo. "Ah, kalina. It is mixed with tobacco. If it is illegal, how do you recognize the odor?"

She only laughed at that. I continued. "Kalina is an important crop. We make our ropes of it." I gave her a wink. "You must shinny down one of those ropes tomorrow."

"Any rope you can handle, boy, Lydia Viney can handle!" She appeared to realize something of a sudden. "Oh, you mean down those cliffs I flew over, don't you?" She no longer sounded quite so sure of herself.

"Old women climb down them," I assured her. Some old women. Well, one or two. "And have races back up!"

I do not think she believed that.

"And this," Father was saying, "is the Lady Vehina. She does not yet speak our language."

"And only a smattering of the pidgin," Naio put in.

"I greet my Lady Vehina," spoke Va'aru, in the pidgin.

Vehina might not have completely understood the words but she was adroit enough to recognize what was going on. "Most I am to please be, Lord Va'aru," she said. That was good enough. 'Lord' is acceptable even when addressing the High King.

But she went on. "Good is, um, water." She waved an arm toward Aedina. "Swim good is?"

Old Va'aru roared. "Tell the Lady she may swim in my lake anytime!"

We did. Father warned her, "The current can be swift in Aedina. You do not wish to be swept over the falls."

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Before any swimming, we went in to eat. The feast spread upon the mats in the House of Va'aru is the stuff of an epic all on its own.

13. *To the Falls*

“WE CROSS TO those docks down there,” I said, pointing out a spot across the lake and closer to the far end. “Then one must walk.”

Vehina peered at them through the early morning mists. “I could swim it, I am sure. But I’ll only splash here this morning.”

She felt less pain from her sunburn, it seemed. Now she itched. “You are a strong swimmer, then.” I gave her a looking over. “You seem too lean to float well.”

“Like Naio, eh? Or you and your father, for that matter.” Vehina did not wait for an answer to that, but plunged into Aedina. I followed. The water was deep off the end of the docks.

That did not seem to bother the woman. She stroked quickly and expertly toward the center of the lake. I was not inclined to follow, but only floated there. “I wonder if she could swim all the way across A’auwa,” came a voice from behind me. Bafa squatted at the edge of the dock.

That was nonsense. A’auwa is a far wider lake than Aedina. Even canoes need near half the day to cross. He must have recognized my dismissal of the idea. “Men, and women too, have swum greater distances in my world and in much colder water. We humans are capable of things you might not imagine.” He chuckled softly. “Such as flying.”

“I saw her fly,” I told him. Admittedly, I did not believe it possible until then. Except on the backs of griffins or dragons, of course. Those are real but aeroplanes were only a story to me.

Vehina turned and lazily backstroked her way toward us. I think Bafa approved the view that afforded him of her slim body. He certainly did stand up to see her better. “The rest of our party is at breakfast,” he announced after a few seconds. “We would do well to join them.”

I clambered out and Vehina followed. This was not difficult, for these were floating docks, not ones on piles, and close to the

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level of the water. Vehina, it is to be noted, yet wore her loincloth when she swam. She dripped all the way into the House of Va'aru.

Neatanu had joined us, and his wife Hueta. They sat on one of the porches, eating and conversing with my father. "That is James Nathan," I whispered to Vehina. "And Judith." That name was nearly impossible for a Mora to pronounce. I thought I got close.

"They are very old," she remarked. That they were. Neatanu must be past seven tens of years. His hair and beard were white.

"Neatanu is going to join us at the falls," my father announced, as we took our places at the mat. It was simplest to direct Vehina to the lowest place on the left. I took the same on the right.

"Perhaps my last time to look upon the sea," spoke the old man.

His wife shook her head. "So he has been saying every time he has gone for the past decade." She remained a rather gaunt woman, but had become a bit stooped with age.

"And sometime it will be true," came his rejoinder.

All of this was in the Mora. I translated some, as I felt necessary. Vehina was more interested in her fruit and cold chicken.

The sun stood higher than we might have hoped by the time we crossed Aedina. That was as it was. Plenty of time remained to reach the Great Falls. The trail from the docks rose and fell but, overall, descended toward the coast. Teoma roared in the valley below us, crashing over lesser falls before reaching the sea.

Neatanu, I think, slowed us down less than Vehina. "My feet are getting sore," she quietly informed me after some time. "I am not used to traveling unshod."

It was something of which none of us had thought. Not even Father. That she did not openly complain was admirable, I thought, and I did not mention her discomfort to the others.

There was nothing to be done about it anyway. "We are at

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least half the distance there,” I told her. The way was busy with travelers, passing both directions.

“Those are not Mora,” she whispered. Two men strode by, large pack-baskets on their backs. They wore knee-length kilts rather than loincloths. Aside from their bowl-like haircuts and lack of tattoos, they might have passed for men of my nation.

“Kohari,” I answered. “Going to trade at Aedina. They are permitted no further into Mora lands.”

“The headhunters?” There might have been some alarm in her question.

And I may have failed in my attempt not to snicker. “Not these ones. Only merchants — harmless until one falls into haggling with them!”

“I do suppose cutting men’s heads off would be bad for business,” she commented. “I must learn more. About everything.” We marched on a while. “Those Kohari speak the pidgin, right? You must teach me more of it.”

And so we spent the rest of our trek, for the most part. I could smell the sea long before we reached it. Had I concentrated, I might have caught its scent even at the House of Va’aru. Some claim they can, when the wind is right.

One can also hear the roar of the Great Falls from a distance, first as a soft murmur, not to be noticed unless one was listening for it. I pointed it out to Vehina.

“I think I hear it. Are the Great Falls truly great?”

Marareta dropped back to join our conversation. “Great enough. When first I saw them, I compared these falls to Niagara, the greatest I had known. They are as high perhaps, but not so wide, and certainly not carrying as great a volume of water. Even in the season of rains, Teoma remains a relatively small river.”

“But impressive still.”

“Yes. As are the Great Falls. You will see.”

“If we can get you down a rope,” I added to this. The rushing

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of the falls grew louder, though we were moving away from the river.

“I see the sea!” cried out Vehina. “Oh, I must learn how to say clever things like that in your language.”

I thought she joked but was not certain. One could see the water now, the vast blue ocean beneath the vast blue sky. Ahead lay the ropes and those who guarded them.

14. *Those Who Sail*

THE ROPES WERE never left dangling, being kept coiled atop the cliffs when not in use. This was old custom, not only here but everywhere the Mora people dwelt along the cliffs. There must never be a way left for enemies to enter our land.

It is true the cliffs grow lower further west. However, between Teoma and the point of Ahurataca they rise unbroken and impregnable. Fishermen climbed down their own ropes, here and there, to their canoes in the little coves that lay below. Those ropes were drawn up behind them.

The men here both guarded and handled the thick ropes. Goods went up and down — mostly up — throughout the day. People too. Some climbed up and down the lines without seeming care, men, women, children; others were raised or lowered in baskets, as were the goods. Neatanu raised no objection to riding in a basket.

Vehina peered over the edge to the sand, far below. “I say, doesn’t anyone ever slip and fall?”

“From time to time,” Father admitted. “It is rare.”

“But humans are humans and do err on occasion. Very well.” With that she went to one of the hanging ropes and lowered herself quickly and without hesitation, as she had seen others do. I think maybe she was fearful of slowing down and looking.

Even Naio, who is not young, used the ropes. How many times had he passed up and down here over the many years he had commanded the fleet? Long had the beach below been his true home. It was not far past noon when we all stood below the cliffs.

“They are something, aren’t they?” Vehina had moved from the shadow of the rock wall and stood gazing at the Great Falls, hands on hips. “And they’re larger in the rainy season?”

“But not any more interesting,” my father told her. “There is a way beneath to the far side of the lagoon.” The lagoon was the great

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pool beneath the falls, where the water of the Teoma flowed on into the ocean. Many craft were pulled onto the sand on both sides.

"Friendly Kohari camp over there," I informed her. "We could visit them and let you practice the pidgin."

"My son has a sensible idea for once. First, let us go to the House of Those Who Sail the Sea."

This was a long low open hut, post, beam, and thatch, as are most Mora houses. It was set on the sand, midway between water and cliff. "The sailors of the fleet live here," Marareta explained. "Not all the time of course." Though the structure was without walls, here and there a mat had been hung to give the semblance of a room. Many hammocks swung haphazardly throughout the house.

"Now and again a great storm will wash all this away," I told Vehina. "Sometimes the canoes, too."

"Those we fill with rocks and trust to stay put," spoke a new voice. In English, it spoke. "I had heard there was a newcomer to our world." The big man gave Vehina a curious look.

"Lady Vehina, I present Lord Beka, admiral of the Mora fleet," said my father. "Adopted brother of the High King."

"And one of your castaway crew, I assume. Hello, Lord Beka."

"Welcome to the House of Those Who Sail the Sea," he replied. Unlike his brother Poneiva, Beka remained lean. He was as large otherwise, and even broader of shoulder. A green and yellow parrot sat on one of those shoulders, eyeing us with evident evil intent.

"Come on in and share a meal if you're hungry. Beer if you aren't! Greetings, Lady Malee. Oorto. You've brought quite a crowd, Marareta."

"We come to meet Hurasu," said Oorto.

"So I have heard." Beka turned his attention back to Vehina. "Yes, I was one of the crew of the *Double Lucky*," he told her. "We grow fewer."

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"Andarua was the most recent of us to pass," said Neatanu. "Andrew Bailey, my longtime steward and friend."

"Not so," spoke Beka. "Bamiree was slain earlier this year when Kohari boats raided up the Gurang. They grow bold again. Too bold."

"I did not know this," said Father. "That was Henry Wise, one of the seamen, who chose to live among the Diwarna," he explained. Of the Kohari he said nothing. Beka had undoubtedly discussed the matter with his brother.

There was much fish. It was a staple in this house. Also plenty of yams and fruit and great quantities of beer. It should not be surprising that the conversation soon shifted back to Mora and Vehina was left out. Palala, Beka's parrot, now sat on its bamboo perch, occasionally screaming obscenities in the pidgin. Whether she understood those, I do not know.

It was one way to learn a few new words.

"There doesn't seem to be much ceremony here," Vehina whispered to me.

"That is the way in this house. Few of the old taboos of birth and station hold power here." My elders continued to gab. "Are you bored? We could —"

Then — *Maratoa*.

I went at once. No Oorto or Malee? I was alone in our meeting place.

You are knowledgeable of the coasts, he said. *Look through my eyes*.

This he had never invited before. I knew how, having shared visions with Oorto. A rocky coast lay before me, rising to low broken cliffs. *Know you where I am?*

I do. West of here.

Good. Tell the others. That was all.

Some had recognized I was speaking from afar. Others were oblivious. "Hurasu spoke to me," I reported. "He sails off the

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coasts of King Hei'iro now. I would expect him by the setting of the sun."

"I would hope so. Dangerous to lie close to that coast overnight," felt Mouiri. "Is this man a good sailor?"

"I taught him," said Father, rising. "I think I shall visit my friends across the lagoon while we wait. Who comes with me?"

Vehina and I both rose at once. More slowly, Ulani. The others, I think, did not wish to miss their naps.

Ah, Bafa, too. "One never knows what might be found for sale over there," he said. Mostly, he was interested in sources of ore but his curiosity ranged wide.

"It was among the wares of a Kohari merchant here that tin ore was first found," I told Vehina. "He thought them only rather lackluster gems."

"A crystalline form," Bafa further explained. "Marareta's friend Hurasu has mines in his valley, we have been told. Copper too." That Bafa had found his own sources of metal since, he did not mention but it may be noted that a bronze knife hung at his waist.

Ulani had listened to our English without complaint. When he now spoke, it was in the pidgin. "This is the language they speak on the other side of the lagoon, Lady Vehina. It is also the common tongue in the lands controlled by Lord Gordie, Malee's father." His breath came almost as a sigh. "I fear someday it will be the language of all of us, Kohari and Mora alike, and we will forget all the old poems."

I think she understood at least part of that. I might say the same of myself. The Great Falls loomed before us, their thunder drowning further conversation. Marareta led the way into the rock gallery behind them, where one might walk from the one side of the lagoon to the other. Not that it was so difficult to swim across if one were in a hurry. Sharks were few and only once had a great

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crocodile of the Gurang ever strayed this far south. So far as was known.

It is surprising that the falls are not so noisy when one is beneath them. We could speak again, had we wished. Vehina seemed entranced by the water pouring from above. She had best watch her footing on the wet and slippery rock or she would be in that water!

Then out into the afternoon sun again, with the open huts of the traders before us. "I hope they are waking from their midday naps by now," remarked my father. He was well-known here, a frequent visitor, a friend to those who bought and sold, as he had been to many of their fathers.

Perhaps he felt comfortable here because he had never become completely Mora. Did Ulani feel so, as well? Or even Malee?

We were greeted. Father spoke with old acquaintances and complimented their many children. Vehina practiced her pidgin. Ulani and Bafa strolled about together, looking at this and that. Bafa even haggled over some item or another. I gazed out to sea, past the boxy boats of the Kohari traders, past the waves breaking at the mouth of the lagoon.

Hurasu was out there.

15. *A Canoe*

"BEKA COMMANDS HERE, is that right?" asked Vehina.

"In name," I told her. "Mouiri does most of the work, as Beka's second."

"And Beka was officially Naio's second when he commanded here," said my father.

"But didn't actually do much of anything. He had no desire to be admiral and took the position only to please his brother." There was no reason not to tell her this. Everyone knew. Even Poneiva.

"Then this Temani'itu I heard of was before Naio?"

Father nodded. "Naio was long his second. And his brother-in-law, of course."

Lady Vehina laughed at that. "Everyone here seems related to everyone else!"

The sun was sinking low, to our left. The cliffs would hide it soon. A crowd gathered and grew at the edge of the water, anticipating the arrival of Hurasu. The seas were not heavy, but an onshore wind had arisen, making the waves unruly and blowing streams of mist from their ragged crests. I would not have wished to launch a canoe this afternoon.

"A sail!" came the call from further up the beach. A man atop the cliffs was waving; he would see any craft before we. It was to be hoped Hurasu, or whoever piloted his canoe, saw the lookout and the falls, and would know this as the place to put in.

"Do you think we should call to him?" asked Malee, very quietly. I shook my head. It might be distracting.

"There!" came another cry. A sail, reddened by the sun, climbing and dropping among the waves. It seemed to be moving directly toward us.

"Is the fool going to attempt coming straight onto the beach?" asked someone.

"He does not know the lagoon is there," said another. "It can't be seen."

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“But any sailor would see how the waves broke at its mouth!”

Or realize the water coming over the falls must flow out somewhere. I suspected Hurasu, as knowledgeable as he was, was no expert on sailing the sea. Had not my father said he taught the man to sail on the lakes in the Valley of Visions?

“Ah, he veers! He has found the channel.”

The canoe practically shot into it, wind and wave carrying it forward. So small a canoe! And only one man in it. He steered well enough through the inlet and toward us.

“Double outriggers,” mused my father. “And a squarish sail. It is unlike Mora canoes.” It was a dugout, however, not a boat built of pieces of wood sewn together, as the Kohari use. Many eager hands helped pull it onto the sand.

The man who stepped ashore was not physically commanding. Lithe and lean, and shorter than me — of a height with my father. His skin color was that of undyed bark cloth, his hair and eyes black. A nose like the beak of a hawk jutted above a ragged beard. He was ragged everywhere, to be honest, down to the damp loin-cloth of indeterminate hue.

“Greetings, Malvern,” he spoke. Not loudly, but the voice was clear and carried above that of the wind. The language was Zikem, that spoken in Hurasu’s valley. “And my friend, Oorto.” He switched to Mora. “I greet all here and ask leave to enter the Land of the Sleeping Sky.”

Beka stepped forward. “You are welcome here, Lord Hurasu, as a friend of the Taona Marareta.”

The sorcerer gave him a looking over. “One of those who came with Malvern?” He put the question in English. This, as well as sailing, he had learned from Father.

The admiral, however, chose to reply in Mora. “I was. I am known here as Lord Beka. Come to our sailors’ house to rest and eat.”

“I shall. Maratoa, will you bring my few belongings along?”

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He knew what I looked like, even if he had never shown his face to me.

Malee seemed torn between helping me or staying close to Hurasu. She chose the latter. Vehina came with me. "I do not know that language your Hurasu spoke. It is not Mora nor the pidgin, I can tell."

"It is Zikem. He created that language himself, and Malee and I both learned it when little." She knew nothing of who Hurasu was, not that we could speak to him from afar, not that he was thousands of years old. Let her think for now only that Oorto or Father had spoken it to us.

When she learned our languages better, she would know more. And ask more! There was little in the canoe, which looked decidedly clumsy to me — far too clumsy and far too small to attempt the crossing of an ocean. Water skins, near empty, a couple leather bags and — a metal sword. I knew the swords of my people or the Kohari, wood edged with sharp flint or obsidian. I knew the bronze sword the priest Hito had brought back from the Valley of Visions. Never had I seen such as this. It was beautiful.

"Extraordinary workmanship," murmured Vehina, peering over my shoulder. "And not a speck of rust." I slid it back into its leather sheath and we hurried to catch up with the others.

By the time we did, he had been informed of Vehina. "So it was you who came through the gate," said Hurasu. "And in a flying machine, such as those Malvern once described to me."

"It was," she admitted. "You speak English, sir, but you are not one of those who came with Marareta, I am sure."

"I have had occasion to speak it recently." This he did not explain but went on. "Mora, I learned centuries ago but have had little reason to use since — even when conversing from afar." His dark eyes went to Malee and me.

Vehina seemed quite bewildered by the things he was saying.

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"Centuries?" she whispered to me. I only nodded. This was not the time to explain.

"I have sailed from another gate, on the other side of the world," Hurasu continued. "Across a wide and empty ocean to this coast."

That was impressive. "You sailed all the distance alone?" Father asked.

"There was none to accompany me. My *thun* died on that other side of the world." Thun meant 'number one,' his chief aide. "You knew him, Malvern. He was one of the young wizards who came to my service after the defeat of Teshum."

"Ah. Yes, I remember." My father became subdued. I recognized the look of loss on his face. I had seen it before, but rarely.

"You are remembering Rahaita, as well, who studied beside them. I know that was a great sorrow for you, Malvern."

"It is yet."

"I felt her death. My loss was not as yours, nor even Oorto's, but a loss none the less. Is the girl who slew her murderer with you?"

Father had to smile at that. "A middle-aged woman now and probably at the house of her brother, the High King. Lord Bafa here is married to her." He nodded toward his friend.

Hurasu only glanced at him. "By the sacred lake. I remember it. You love A'auwa, do you not?"

"I do." As he loved my dead mother, whose memory was wrapped up with A'auwa. On its shores had they fallen in love; on its shores had she perished.

With that, we entered the House of Those Who Sail the Sea and our speech became that of the Mora.

II. VOYAGES

16. Hurasu

“So BOTH OF you have composed epics of Marareta’s exploits?” asked Hurasu.

“We have indeed,” piped up Toare. “My master Ulani of his journey to your land, as told to him by Oorto, and I of the civil war that followed.”

“Gladly would I hear them when time permits. You have written them out also, have you not, Malvern?”

“And others. I am sure the spelling varies greatly as I had to make it up as I went.”

The sorcerer nodded. “It is the story of your voyage to these coasts twenty-two years ago that most interests me now. Some of that you told me when you came to my realm and some of it was written down. That is why I am here.”

“You seek the gate through which we came. Oorto has told me that much.” But very little else, Father’s tone suggested — or accused.

“So I might close it. I fear those from your world, Malvern. They have advanced too far.” His eyes went to Vehina. “Our latest arrival is evidence of that.”

“I agree.” I saw Beka nod his head as well, and Bafa. This was their world now, not that one from which they had come.

“We can speak of that tomorrow,” said Lord Beka. “Feast with us now, sleep in the house of we who sail. You have had a long journey.”

“Longer than any Mora has undertaken since we came to this land,” added Naio.

“Hurasu saw your ancestors arrive,” my father told him, in a quite matter of fact tone. That had to sink in for a few moments.

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It was Ulani who broke the silence. "Is it true that they came in nine canoes?"

Hurasu smiled at the question. "You wonder whether your epics have it right? There were indeed nine great canoes, carrying fewer than a thousand individuals. They could not tell me where they came from, only that they had sailed southward from their home after losing a war."

"Tahiti, maybe, or the Marquesas," suggested Neatanu.

To this Father added, "There are many possibilities and none of them matter now."

"They do not. They have dwelt here many centuries and their numbers increased and they became the Mora. I do suspect they were the largest single group of humans to ever pass one of the gates."

We had followed Beka into the long low house of the sailors. Mats were spread on the rough floors and a feast upon the mats — simple fare, perhaps, compared to that in some noble houses, but plenty of it. Fish and fowl, fruit and yams, many bowls of beer.

All around us sat those who sailed, on many mats. None took precedence over another in this house. Women however, though few, continued to sit together on one side of each group. Some habits the Mora do not put aside so readily.

So Vehina ended up at Beka's left hand, and Hurasu at his right. I knew the sorcerer was questioning her in a low voice but could not hear. Hunger proved stronger than curiosity and I soon paid them no more attention.

I was not disappointed by Hurasu. No, I had never seen him but my father had described his appearance thoroughly. I had spoken from afar with him, not frequently but often enough. I knew the sorcerer. Some, I knew him.

Octopus. It rarely traveled as far as the House of Marareta. Nor did many of the fish here — not fresh from the water. I helped myself to more. Maybe I should be a sailor and eat fish all the time.

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Oil lamps were being lit, here and there. Only small ones within the house. The scent of the coconut oil was faint, lost on the wind blowing strongly still from the sea. Torches and fires appeared outside on the sand, and across the lagoon. I could hear the surf breaking in the dark and the air was full of moisture and salt. It made me feel uncomfortable. Sticky. Perhaps I shouldn't be a sailor after all.

Father loves to sail. Not here so much, but upon A'auwa. Were it not for his duties, his household, he might spend all his time there.

One by one, men and women rose and wandered off, to their beds or onto the darkened beach. The feast was being cleared away; there was, to be sure, a constant buffet available here as in any great house. I doubted I would need visit it before morning.

All I needed now was a mat and sleep. Hurasu and all the rest could wait.

17. Council

ANY STICKINESS COULD be washed away in the mostly-fresh water of the lagoon. Many bathed there this morning. Bafa was among those splashing when I slipped in. Much of the lagoon is quite shallow; a deeper channel runs through its center, the outflow of Teoma.

Ah, and there was Vehina as well, further out. I felt, in some small way, responsible for the woman, and perhaps a little guilty for not seeing to her last night. "Your seafaring friend has already been here," she called to me. "He looks much better cleaned up a little."

"He wants to get right to business now that he's here," Bafa added to this. "One would think he'd want more rest after such a voyage."

"The question," said Vehina, wading into shallower water to join us, "is not whether he wants rest but whether he needs rest. He does not seem to."

I had heard Father's tales of the man's endless vitality. He knew much more of Hurasu than was told in Ulani's epic. More than Hurasu had ever been willing to reveal to Malee and me, as well.

"I, on the other hand," the woman continued, "could certainly use another day or two of doing nothing."

"And you need not," I assured her, "other than learning more of the pidgin."

To which Vehina answered, "Learn good speak." She frowned. "Speak learn good?" She switched from pidgin to English. "One of those."

"Or neither," remarked Bafa. This earned him a well-aimed splash.

The three of us proceeded toward the House of Those Who Sail the Sea. Others of our party we passed on our way. We would beat them to the breakfast feast laid out on mats in that house, but there would surely be enough for all.

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Father and Hurasu were already huddled there, in deep discussion of some matter or another. Empty bowls rested before them. No need to intrude. Beka had joined the two by the time we had filled bowls of our own. They seemed ready for business. I concentrated on the business of filling my stomach. Was Hurasu asking his companions something? Beka pointed off toward the northeast. The sorcerer nodded and headed that direction, rather quickly.

My father came and squatted beside us, smiling. "Our Hurasu knows the Mora have strict taboos about where one may, um, dispose of bodily wastes. Something he needn't worry about for some weeks past." He turned then to me. "Gather everyone, please," he said. "All we who journeyed down Teoma together, save the four warriors we brought along."

"Expected," felt Bafa, after Father returned to his place beside Beka. "I'll help you search." Vehina made no such offer; we left her stuffing herself with roasted kuru fruit. Too bland for me, unless nothing else is available.

Most were at hand, eating as were we. Neatanu sat nearby with Naio and his son speaking, not surprisingly, of things of the sea. We told them of Marareta's request. "About time," was Neatanu's opinion.

Malee was with her uncle and Toare, still busy filling themselves. There were many emptied eggshells in Malee's bowl. Duck, perhaps. "Ulani?" I asked. Not to be found.

"I'll help you look," said Toare. Oorto and Malee would join the others when they were full, I assumed.

We found the bard among the fishermen, listening to their songs as they prepared their canoes for the day's work. "Each day they go out there," he said, gazing toward the sea. "Each day, alone in the great ocean, with no voice but their own. Their own and those of the waves and the sea birds." He sighed. "I could not live so, yet I envy them too." He followed us back to the house, taking care with the placing of his staff in the soft sand.

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We were the last to the council. Hurasu spoke as soon as we took our places. "I ask we talk in the pidgin for the sake of Vehina — I am not as familiar with it myself as with Mora, but it was spoken by those who accompanied you to my valley, Malvern."

Father nodded an acknowledgment to this. Both those of mixed heritage and Mora had accompanied him across the mountains and they spoke the pidgin as a common tongue.

"And," Hurasu continued, "I have explained as well I can to Vehina the concept of gates and of worlds so she should be able to follow us."

"Try I do well," she announced.

"The two of them sat together quite late last night," Bafa whispered to me.

"Someone should teach her Mora," I whispered back. He did not volunteer.

Hurasu began. "As I told you, I have warded the gate from the world of Marareta that lies on the other side of this world. That is a tale for another time." His gaze swept across those gathered. "Not the gate through which Vehina or your Mora ancestors passed."

"Which you wish to close now," said Father.

"In a sense. I can not truly close the gates, any gates, but I can ward them to make entry more difficult. And it was already difficult to pass them! I think we will have no more visitors coming through that other way."

"So what do you need of us?" asked Naio. Many heads nodded at that practical question.

"Help in locating it. Lying in the ocean, it is more difficult to find. I would hear of your voyage here, those of you who sailed from that other world — Marareta, Beka, Neatanu. You as well, Vehina."

Father spoke again. "As the Mora and as Lady Vehina, we in the *Double Lucky* were driven south in our own world, and found the gate at the center of a storm."

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"Yes, the power of the storm is needed to open the way," said Hurasu. "A vortex of wind and lightning."

"Neatanu and you tried to figure out some of that, didn't you?" asked Lord Beka. "Just where we were when it happened."

"We did" said Neatanu. "Our original course lay pretty much southwest from Panama to Tahiti."

"And we were close to our destination when the storm carried us off that course," added Father.

Neatanu took up the narrative again. "I couldn't take any readings, you understand, but we might have ended up as far south as thirty-five degrees of latitude."

"And around one-twenty longitude," said my father. "We do know we were somewhere southeast of Tahiti, perhaps between Pitcairn and Easter Island, before that storm carried us completely off course and to this land. I also know those names mean nothing to you, Hurasu."

"Nor does that matter," he replied. "It is this end I need to ward. I do suspect the gate through which you passed is, in a sense, an opposite pole to the one I entered in the land of the Scythians."

That interested Bafa. I didn't quite understand it myself. "Then those gates open into similarly opposed places in this world?" he asked.

"Oddly, they do, though I know not why."

"Not the same latitude, I know," said Neatanu. "We came out further north here."

"And that through which I passed opens far south, on a large and rather desolate island on the other side of this world. It is not a welcoming place for travelers." A pause, perhaps while he remembered that land. "There are many other gates here, leading to and from many other worlds, and there seems no pattern to any of those." A short laugh. "None that I can see."

"But you need find only the one." Father considered this. "I

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could draw a map as far as the first island we reached. Beyond that is open ocean.”

“I took readings when we came through,” offered Neatanu. “So did Nesmith, and they agreed with mine. Close enough. Somewhere around Thirty-two North latitude. Our longitude numbers were meaningless. Where is Greenwich in this world? But I still have his sextant and might be able to approximate the position.” The old man shrugged and gave a slightly rueful smile. “But I’d have to go to sea to do that.” That was something he obviously did not intend.

“This sextant,” spoke Hurasu. “An instrument? A tool? Can any others use it?”

Blank looks. Father and Beka were the ones who knew of sailing the seas of another world but had not learned this skill, apparently. “Malee’s father,” said Neatanu, “Gordie. But he is nowhere near and most unlikely to join us.”

Then, reluctantly, from Bafa, “I learned a little years ago. I could probably pick it up again. However,” he continued, his voice quite firm, “I have no intention of going to sea either.”

“Do any of us?” asked Father. He turned to our guest. “Or did you intend to sail on alone?”

“I made no plan,” spoke Hurasu. “Nor shall I now. Can you teach me to use this sextant, Neatanu? And allow me its use?”

“I could. The basics, you understand.” He thought a moment. “It’s somewhere in the House of Va’aru, I think. Hueta would know where”

“We’ll send for it,” said Beka. “No, wait, I’ll go for it. No one else would be likely to recognize the thing!”

“Then we’ve little else to discuss, have we?” asked Father. “I’ll go with you, Beka.” In a few minutes they were climbing the ropes and on their way.

“Do you think they’ll come back today?” Malee asked me, as

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we wandered our various directions, looking for some way to fill the rest of this barely-begun day.

“They certainly could,” I replied.

“But it is more likely they will stay the night with Va’aru,” felt Oorto, who walked with his two students. None of us had spent much time yet with Hurasu. There was truly no reason to.

“We must have Toare give his epic tonight,” I decided. “The one of the civil war and my mother’s death. Hurasu wished to hear and, well, Father doesn’t like to listen to it, you know.”

It was a good idea. We would find the bard sometime today. Later. Maybe after another meal and a nap.

18. *The Lagoon*

TOARE DID GIVE his epic that night. The whole thing, the war, the death of one High King and the rise of another, the madness of Hara'a, the death of Rahaita and the vengeance of Teme, keeping us up late around the fires. Many men of the sea gathered to listen; many seemed entranced by the tale of heroism, of love, of sorrow. It was as good as I remembered.

Vehina, of course, did not understand, but Hurasu whispered to her through the performance, translating apparently. The two sat together and did so still when I went to find my sleeping mat.

Bafa again beat me to the lagoon the next morning, but alone this time. "I have not seen Vehina this morning," I said to him.

"She shared her mat with Hurasu," he said. "Both making up for long journeys without companions, I think."

I was amazed, perhaps. Not that it would happen but that Hurasu would have the energy for it. Or Vehina, for that matter.

What could such a tryst mean to the ancient sorcerer who, by my father's account, had bedded thousands of women over thousands of years? He believed that almost every person in our world could count Hurasu as an ancestor. Me included.

We passed them, still together, on our way back to the house. I nodded politely, only. If there was to be talk, let it be over food. If there was not to be talk, I was hungry anyway.

It was Vehina only who joined us on our mat, I and Bafa and Malee and Oorto. The woman began at once to share with us, whether we wished it or not. "Hurasu wanted to know as much of my world and how I came here as I could give him," she confided. "I understand Marareta spent time with him and told him much. Across some mountains?"

"Beyond high mountains to the east. That is the subject of another epic," I said. "Ulani will have to give it to you."

"Oorto was there with Marareta," Bafa added. The shaman was unable to follow our conversation, nor could Malee.

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So Vehina switched to the pidgin. She did a credible job of it. "Tell me could of, um, journey Hurasu land? Help, uh, help learn pidgin maybe could, Oorto?"

"I'll give you a hand with it," volunteered Malee. "Between us we should be able to make her understand."

The shaman seemed willing. Or perhaps unwilling to disappoint. Oorto was that way. It would be a long tale so I left them to it. I did not go far for I spied our visitor seated with our sailors — Neatanu, Naio, Mouiri. I took a place without speaking. Only Mouiri bothered to look up.

"These Mora make charts out of sticks, showing how the waves and currents run around coasts and islands," Neatanu was saying. "Naio knows much of that sort of thing."

"I was a navigator once," spoke the former commander of the Mora fleet. "I studied with the Taona A'vee."

"But did not follow that course," said Hurasu.

"No, other winds blew." A smile briefly passed across his sun-darkened craggy face. "One led to Mouiri's mother."

"The Lady Pua. Marareta told me much of her, those years ago, and of events in this land. Though I had news from time to time, it was good to hear the young bard's account last night."

"It was a dark time," Naio said. "We prepared to sail away from here into exile if all was lost. I think we can thank the Taona Marareta that it was not."

And Pua and Hareata and Poneiva and many others, my father would object if he heard this. I, however, was quite willing to allow him to be praised.

"He might have saved my kingdom, too," spoke Hurasu, almost under his breath.

I spoke. "My father says you would not have lost it for long."

He only smiled at this. "Perhaps not. I have lost and reclaimed it more than once." Suddenly grave, he continued. "Your mother

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saw that I would still rule when I was an old man. It was the prophecy she gave me in my land.”

“You wished her to stay. Father has told me this.”

“I did. Maybe she would be alive today had she. Maybe you would have brothers and sisters across the mountains. Who is to say?”

“No one,” answered Naio. “As I, Rahaita chose a course.”

They wouldn’t have been my brothers and sisters, though, as Rahaita and Father did not marry and name me their son till they returned to the Mora. Cousins. Cousins who never were.

Beka and Father returned before noon, with the sextant. I had seen it once or twice, among Neatanu’s mementos, but knew not what it was nor its purpose. I knew little more now. It was of metal, that I could tell, and freshly cleaned and shined.

“And with this you can determine your position?” asked Hurasu.

“It can help you determine your position,” was the answer. “I’ll teach you what I can of its use.”

“I would be your student as well,” said my father. “And Beka. It would be good if both of us knew a little of using the instrument.”

Maybe I should too. Later. I would be in the way if I asked to learn now.

“Beka intends to go with you,” Father continued, “and will put one of our largest canoes at your service.”

“And you?” asked Hurasu.

“Perhaps I am too old for such adventures.” He sounded unsure.

“It is not important at the moment, but you know the way better than any.” Hurasu turned to Lord Beka. “A canoe, you say?”

“Allow me to show you our fleet.” He at once turned to lead the way toward the great lagoon.

I was most certain Hurasu had already looked over the collec-

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tion of canoes beached there. The Mora fleet was mostly on our side; fishermen and Kohari traders used the other.

"The vessel on which we traveled was greater than the length of the greatest canoes here," said Father, as we marched across the sand. "Not the smaller boat in which we arrived, but the great one that was lost in the storm."

"The *Double Lucky*," muttered Neatanu. "An ill-chosen name if ever there were one."

"One-hundred and forty-four feet it was," Father continued. "And metal-hulled, though that proved no blessing."

"Popped its rivets when the storm hit us," Neatanu admitted. "Folded right in two almost as soon as we abandoned ship."

"And you were already in the vortex of the gate when you did so, I would guess," said Hurasu. "Ah, they might not be the equal of your doomed ship, Neatanu, but they are large!" He surveyed the fleet, some of the canoes drawn up onto the sand, some floating in the shallows.

"The double canoe is the largest in the world!" proclaimed Beka, pointing it out.

Hurasu nodded amiably. He might have been slightly amused. "That may well be true. I have certainly seen no larger."

"We have two of them but one is out to sea now. Marareta and Neatanu designed them so Lord Temani'itu could truly claim to have the largest ever built."

"Temani'itu. I remember the name from the poem last night." Hurasu gazed again at the great double canoe. "It is not the canoe I would choose for this voyage."

"Nor I," agreed Naio. "A large single would be more practical for the deep ocean. Swifter and more nimble." He hesitated a moment before saying, "I too intend to sail with you."

"That means you have to stay and run things," Beka told Mouiri. I think he already knew that.

"That one," said Beka. It was not the very largest of the single

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hull craft but it was large enough, a single outrigger with twin masts.

Naio nodded agreement. After a moment of gazing at the canoe, so did Hurasu. "I could do this in a small canoe, by myself or with a Mora sailor or two."

"I believe my friends seek an adventure before they grow too old," said Father. "I may have had enough adventures, myself. Let's go out to it."

The water was deep enough to swim and shallow enough to wade. Some did one, some the other. Oorto stayed on the shore and watched us. Us — yes, every one of us who had come down from the House of Va'aru. We clambered aboard. It was not so easy to climb up from the water. I pulled myself onto the outrigger and walked up a spar to the hull. I saw Vehina follow me, as agile as any Mora sailor. Others came over the sides on ropes.

Neatanu went to stand in the bow, holding up his sextant. Familiarizing himself maybe. It had been long unused I was sure. Soon, his would-be students gathered around and he began explanations. Best they learn quickly if the old man was not coming along!

Would I go? Nothing had been said but I too wanted an adventure. What better one than to voyage far into the trackless ocean with these men — these heroes?

Maybe we could even get Toare to compose an epic of it.

19. *Departures*

"I WILL NOT have you on this voyage, Malee," stated Hurasu. "Nor you, Oorto."

"Where Malee goes," asserted the shaman, "I go. As her guardian and as her uncle."

"Exactly." Oorto and Malee exchanged a few words in Diwarna, leaving the rest of us out. Whether Hurasu understood them, I do not know. "Who then voyages with me?" he asked. "Naio and Beka have spoken and their companionship is welcome. More so in that they are providing the canoe."

"And a crew," added Beka.

"I would come, if you will allow me," spoke Ulani. He managed to maintain a serious voice, despite the smile playing on his face. A bard's training, I suppose. "Someone must compose the epic." Ah, a chance to get one up on his former apprentice.

"Indeed so. Marareta knows his presence would be welcome. I also would wish Vehina to accompany us."

"Absolutely," she answered at once. "I have no intention of being left out." Father did not speak.

The others had already made it clear they were not going. That left me. "I would wish to voyage with you," I stated. I had not decided fully till that moment. Know that I had been thinking about it!

"So I expected." Hurasu turned to Father. "Is this acceptable to you, my friend?"

He nodded. "If my son goes, I go."

"It is decided then. We shall talk about preparations later, Lord Beka. For now, I need more of this melon."

It was good melon. The green sort, though I've nothing against the orange. Already, it was growing dark. Our voyage could be planned tomorrow. And then? How soon could we sail from the lagoon?

How soon would I see those islands told of in the epics of my

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father's journeys? I had never been beyond Ahurataca in a canoe, though further north on foot. All the way to the House of Gordie and the basin of the mighty Gurang.

I went to the water's edge after our meal, stared out over the darkened ocean. Anticipation and apprehension battled in my heart. Why should I go with the sorcerer? Was not my place here? Malee would say it was. She would know now I was something more than the boy she had grown up with.

My father came and stood beside me. "Already, Naio and Beka are discussing preparations with the lord of the valley. I was unneeded there. But," he said, "expect to sail tomorrow."

"So soon?"

"It takes little time to make a canoe ready. And I am sure Beka and Naio had already made their plans."

"Unlike we who decided at the last moment," came Ulani's voice. The bard emerged from the gloom.

"Your decision was expected by no one," said Father.

"I too wished one last great adventure together, Taona. Always have I been on the edge of your epics and maybe so this time too." He paused, continued in a softer voice. "And I have nothing else in my life. Nothing to hold me in one place."

There was no more to be said of that. We stood a while longer in silence, the sea wind in our faces, before turning back to the House of Those Who Sail the Sea to find our sleeping mats.

Early was I roused from that mat. Malee. "They are about to sail," she said. Her voice trembled a little as she continued. "Let's get some food first."

Most of the others of our party were doing the same, whether they intended to voyage with Hurasu or not. The sorcerer himself was not to be seen. With the canoe already, I was certain.

Best to stuff myself with fruit. Fresh food would all be used up aboard the canoe in a couple days. Then dried fish and dried fruit, and dried-up sailors to eat it all. I was still filling up on the

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sour oranges cradled in my arm as we walked across the sand, Malee and I, and Oorto, who had quietly joined us.

I hoped they included the little oranges in our provisions. They kept well and were a favorite of my father. These might well have come from our groves! At the edge of the lagoon, Malee looked out at the vessel that would carry me away, before turning to face me. "You must speak to me from afar. Every day!"

"Or when you are able," said Oorto. "Do not ask Miki to make promises you know he might not be able to keep."

She made a face at this but did not contradict the shaman. "I wish I could come," she half-whispered. I was glad she would not, though I was not completely sure why Hurasu had forbade it.

I embraced both and waded into the water to help with the ropes. It took many men to pull the big canoe off the beach and into deep water, on several ropes. Some of us then clambered aboard and others returned to the beach. Malee and Oorto stood there, Mouiri beside them. The Mora gave a final wave and turned away, but the others watched us paddle into the lagoon's outflow and set the sails. I knew not so much of tending sail on a large canoe but was quite capable of reaching the water with a paddle!

Even though these paddles were longer than I was accustomed to, on a big canoe such as this. The massive dugout cut easily through the waves and passed out into open ocean. From here, the sails should do most of the work. Our destination lay somewhere out there in that vast expanse of blue water.

I could only hope our navigators had learned something during their brief lessons from Neatanu.

20. *Cliffs*

“WHEN I SAILED on a canoe like this to raid the Kohari temple, it was filled with men. At least eighty of them.”

I knew the story of that raid, made to rescue Neatanu and other prisoners condemned to die on the altar of Mihasa the Sun Bird. It was an epic of its own, happening before Father’s journey across the mountains. Ulani’s tale of that journey only mentions the temple in passing. He preferred to concentrate on the romance between my parents.

Beka nodded. He had sailed with my father. In fact, he was a hero of that epic, more so than Father. “You weren’t there, were you Naio?” he asked.

“No, Temani’itu left me in charge at the falls while he commanded the fleet.” A brief pause, the twitch of a smile. “I would think there were more men in that fleet than in the nine canoes you once spied, Lord Hurasu.”

“I would not doubt it,” said the sorcerer. “Your nation has increased greatly.”

“And intermarried with the Kohari that lived in their land before them,” added Father. “Few are willing to believe this but I have seen evidence in old buildings and carvings.”

Hurasu only smiled at that, making no comment. Rather, he returned to our original subject. “The forty-two men we carry should suffice,” he said.

“Forty-one, and one woman,” Vehina put in. I should note we conversed in the pidgin, at Hurasu’s request. “It seems crowded, even so.”

“It is,” admitted Beka. “I felt it prudent to bring extra warriors.” Those reports of Kohari incursions in the north would have played a part in his decision.

We were not yet in the north, but still coasting along the cliffs that bound the Mora realm, rising tall to our right. “We castaways named these cliffs ‘Dover’ when first we spied them,” Father told

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Vehina, “for they shone white in the fierce tropic sunlight. But they are not the chalk of England’s Dover, being of a tougher granite, here showing whitish, there more gray.”

The woman sighed. “I passed above the cliffs of Dover more than once, off to Paris or wherever. Carefree. That’s what my life was then. What is it to be now?”

Father had no answer nor, I believe, did Vehina expect one. Whether she told the truth about a carefree life, I was not sure. She might just be telling herself so; the Lady Vehina seemed too driven to ever be completely carefree.

Ah, who am I to be asking such questions? One might think me a priest.

“There is a little too much growth on the cliffs there,” said Father, pointing out a bit of green against the white walls. “It should be reported and removed.”

“Nothing that would facilitate climbing is allowed,” I offered in explanation. “Even natural ledges are broken away.”

Father nodded in agreement, somewhat absentmindedly, and gazed upward. “It is near noon,” he announced. I did not understand the significance but others seemed to. Naio and Beka, Hurasu and my father all congregated near the prow of our canoe. I saw the flash of metal and knew they were making their first attempt to use Neatanu’s sextant. Was it necessary to do so at noon? That was when they first used it yesterday. I would ask sometime, maybe. I could see Beka shaking his head. Frustrated, he seemed.

But in time they appeared to reach some sort of agreement about things and went about other business. Some napped. Hurasu chose to stand in the prow, gazing forward.

Vehina and I sat with others who idled, shaded by an awning of woven grasses, watching the cliffs slide by. It was monotonous, though here and there a little cove appeared, and even canoes. “Beka does not know enough of numbers to use that instrument properly,” she remarked after some time. I noted hesitance, perhaps.

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"I could but felt it best not to intrude on the business of men. I got in trouble too frequently doing that at home." She spoke the pidgin fairly well by now, so I will no longer note her occasional stumbles.

"Mora women do not subordinate themselves to men," I told her. "We are not Kohari!"

"But I am not Mora nor ever likely to be. Not really." That did not make much sense to me but I did not say so. Had not the High King accepted her? Our progress seemed slow. The winds had been light in the morning and not overly favorable in the afternoon. This vessel was too large to beach in one of the little coves overnight. Or too large to get back off the beach the next morning, I might better say. We would remain at sea in the dark, certainly.

The crew was accustomed to that. They patrolled below the cliffs regularly, usually turning back at Ahurataca but sometimes voyaging on as far as the Gurang. Traders went even further, all the way to those lands inhabited by Kohari. It had been reasonably safe to do so for years. Once, one chanced losing ones head.

We did remain at sea but the night was clear and the moon rose in time. "Enough to navigate by," felt Naio. Beka might be in command here but he wisely left such decisions to the seasoned sailor. Were there fighting — ah, then Beka would be at the head!

"There is Ahurataca." I pointed out the promontory, gleaming silvery in the moonlight, to Vehina as we glided by. "It marks the northern end of the Mora realm. The cliffs turn inland here."

She strained to see the shore in the darkness. "The coasts lie lower beyond, then?"

"Mangrove swamps, all the way up to the Gurang."

"That's a great river, right? Full of those crocodiles you mentioned."

That was so. I had never sailed this far, in honesty, but had heard much of the Gurang Basin. Something bit me. Then something else. "There may be no crocodiles close but the mangrove are full of blood-thirsty insects."

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We were all swatting at mosquitoes and tiny biting flies shortly. Naio turned the nose of our canoe toward the sea. I had assumed he would do so once past Ahurataca anyway. There was no reason to hug the coast here. We are not Kohari, afraid to brave the depths of the ocean, fearing them full of monsters and demons.

Never mind that I had never sailed far beyond the sight of land myself. I am Mora. None the less, I felt a moment of uneasiness when Ahurataca, rising above all else, at last disappeared below the shimmering horizon.

21. Boats and Bows

THE DAWN WAS at my back or I might have awakened earlier. That meant we were traveling northward again, having turned sometime in the night. A voice had roused me. For a confused moment, I thought it was someone aboard the canoe.

Wake up, you lump!

Good morning to you, Malee, I replied. I hesitated to show myself, knowing how I must look at the moment. Ah, Malee had seen me worse. I joined her in our little private universe, a universe that was no more than a single dimly lit room. Oorto had told us there were thousands of such worlds we might discover and use.

I believed that until Hurasu told me they were infinite in number. I fear Oorto can not quite grasp the concept of infinity, wise though he is. None of that matters at the moment nor, perhaps, at any other moment.

I am at Va'aru's house now, Malee announced. *Your father's warriors are sticking with me. He must have told them to.*

He would. We sailed past Ahurataca last night.

Is that woman still sharing a mat with Hurasu? she asked. That was an abrupt and unexpected turn.

Aboard a canoe? You know that is taboo.

Oh, yes, your silly Mora rules. I suppose there isn't any privacy anyway. Too bad my father doesn't know you're headed his way.

Messengers would have been sent, I offered.

But not soon enough. I think Oorto and I will travel on in a day or two and stay with your mother. A moment's hesitation. Messengers have gone there too. Panoha would not have expected the two of you to run away like this.

Then you must give her my love, I said. I did feel a little guilty about it. *And that of my father. Regular reports too.*

I think that would be best. Don't let Hurasu get you into too much trouble! With that, she faded. I returned to myself in the canoe, to see Hurasu himself looking down at me.

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“Malee?” he asked. I nodded. “I thought to speak to Oorto later but if you two are going to meet, it may not be needed.” The wizard gazed out across the water. “On this course we draw further away from the coast, I know, for it curves back toward the east. Naio would as soon we continue so but your father and I wish to use the sextant within sight of land today. It would be good to note some positions along the coast.”

“Latitude only, I would guess,” spoke Vehina. She had been sitting quietly nearby. I hadn’t even noticed her. “Without accurate measures of time and with strange stars up there —” She pointed a slim forefinger toward the sky. “Longitude would seem difficult. Impossible maybe. You know, I hadn’t really noticed how different the stars were until last night.”

Hurasu shrugged. “This world is not advanced enough in its sciences for any of this to matter. We will take a few readings for our own use and then this sextant will become of no use to anyone.”

“Like the book of tables I carried in my airplane. What’s for breakfast?”

I knew not what a ‘book of tables’ was and if, indeed, it was of no use then there was no sense in asking. Food, however, was quite worth asking about. Dried fish, dried fruit. Millet cakes but no beer. Water only filled the skins we carried.

More than one man tended a line, trolling in hopes of catching fresh fish. These had lures contrived of shell and feather, and oyster shell hooks. There was little else to do. A few minded the sails. Some practiced with their weapons until the sun rose too high and it grew hot.

Naught but a flint knife hung at my side, more tool than weapon. Our course did trend more easterly, toward the coast. It was not in sight at noon, and no one bothered to use the sextant. I slept.

The coast was a distant dark line when I awoke again. We

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were maintaining a parallel course, I thought. Naio tacked back and forth so much I was unsure which way we were headed. It would be some time yet to dusk.

“Boats!” came a call from the prow. “Kohari!”

At once, every man had a weapon in his hands. Many held spears. Father had one himself and handed me another. This I knew was but precaution; we were unlikely to be attacked. “No bows?” I asked, looking over the crew.

“I saw some among the weapons we carry,” he replied. “They do not seem to be a popular choice.” I saw his war club dangled from a thong on his wrist, where it had been at his waist seconds before. Father was counted an expert in its use.

Mora had at once become the language here, leaving Vehina in the dark. She was rightfully apprehensive. Two boats only, they were, and not large. “Not a danger,” I whispered to her. “Traders, most likely.”

“Or fishermen,” my father added. They waved and passed on in their clumsy tubs. Already the men were stowing their weapons. The spears were kept nestled along the sides of the canoes, ready at hand. I should have paid more attention to that.

“Where are these bows?” I asked. “You know I am better with a bow than a spear.”

“With your teachers, you should be.” He proceeded toward the stern.

Vehina and I both followed, though none invited her. “Teachers?” she whispered.

“Father means Bafa, mostly, who taught and organized the first company of Mora archers. They serve at the House of Ponu, where I apprenticed.” Though I had known Bafa as far back as I could remember, yes, and learned archery of him as a child.

“Oh. His wife is renowned for using a bow, right? Toare told of her in his epic.”

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She had taken in more of the story than I might have expected. "Teme. Best not to mention any of that to the taona."

"Understood. They must be terrible memories to carry with one. Ah, those are well-made bows. What sort of wood?" Six were nestled into one of the storage boxes, along with numerous arrows.

"These are of sapa wood," spoke Father. "Called, I believe, the paper mulberry where we came from. It is plentiful and works well enough." He narrowed his eyes, appraising the slender woman. "You are an archer?"

"A champion as a girl," she replied. "Other interests took my attention after that. May I?"

Vehina picked one up as soon as assent was nodded, first sighting down its length, then holding it at arm's length, as when one shoots. "A true longbow," she remarked, and no more, before replacing it. However, as she and I returned to our place, Vehina asked, voice low, "The strings are made of your kalina, are they not?"

"I believe so." I admit that was an assumption.

"Looped and served. I suppose that works well enough."

"It is how the Kohari do it. They used bows long before the Mora were willing. The craft of their making we learned largely from them. But not the craft of shooting them properly. Bafa taught us that." I had to smile then, for what I said next seemed absurd to me. "Many warriors saw it as a coward's weapon only a generation ago."

"Considering how these sailors flew to their spears, perhaps some still do."

Vehina might have been right about that. Of one thing I was sure, however — I would take a bow the next time an alarm was raised.

22. *Navigation*

“BY THE STARS and by the moon and sun, I steer,” Naio stated. “By the currents and the winds and the waves. These one can learn to read.”

“Of currents I know little,” replied Hurasu. “But I have traveled around this world more than once guided by the stars.” He sighted through the sextant. “This is only another way to use them.”

It was dusk. Those stars of which they spoke had begun to show themselves against the darkness. “Further south,” the sorcerer continued, “there are three stars that point to the true south. Beyana’s Arrow they call them in the land I just visited. But that is below the equator and may not be spied from here.”

I think we all looked then toward the star that sat ever in the north. Any sailor, any traveler knew it. “We haven’t the knowledge to use these stars as anything more than pointers,” spoke Father. “We need to take a sighting tomorrow when the sun reaches its zenith. I would hope we could be near the mouth of the Gurang then.”

“We will be,” promised Naio.

Hurasu had returned the sextant to its wooden box. “We should be able to figure out our latitude there,” said he.

“Yes,” agreed father. “I would suggest traveling on north to the correct latitude and then try to sail due west along it.”

“Running down a westing, we would have called it in the old days,” said Beka. “Inefficient but we’ve no other choice, have we? What of Neatanu and Nezama’s readings? Didn’t they figure out the longitude?”

Father shook his head. “Their longitude readings may have been accurately done, as they pretty much jibed with each other, but they were based on calculations from another world. And time-pieces from another world, which we no longer have. All useless to us.”

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"Not that those timepieces would have remained accurate so long, even if we had them still."

"They would not," agreed father. "They carried no chronometers, only their watches."

Vehina suddenly had something to add. "Oh! I had a chronometer in the Fairchild. We could have brought it!"

Father considered this. "Maybe we could have used it in some way. It doesn't matter now. Hmm, you didn't happen to have a watch, did you?"

She held up her wrist for some reason. "I'm afraid not. Never liked to wear one."

"Then that is that," spoke Hurasu. "We need no instruments anyway when we have Naio."

"Quite true," agreed the old sailor. "Arisu!" he called. "Help me with this sail."

It had grown dark. I returned to my accustomed place and Vehina again settled near me. "Who is Nezama?" she asked after a while.

"One of those who came from the sea. An evil man who kidnapped my mother and carried her across the mountains. Ulani's epic would tell you of him." I hadn't seen much of Ulani. He did not join any of our councils. Vehina and I did whether invited or not.

"Well," she said, "if I am to hear this epic of his someday, I should speak Mora. It is time you teach me that language too." That, I told myself, would be a better use of Ulani's time. However I only grunted a noncommittal response to Vehina.

Ulani might be singing no epics, nor any other songs, but music arose around us from the Mora sailors this evening. It seems a good way to fill the evenings at sea and their songs were still in my ears as I drifted into sleep.

To rise with the sun. A great canoe such as this always includes a minor priest in its crew, to make blessings and offerings,

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to see that all taboos are remembered and observed, and also to take charge of all waste. This last does not seem so pleasant a duty but I suppose one becomes used to it. We are not Kohari, to dump our trash or our feces over the rail and forget it. There was a pot near the stern we all used; he would dispose of its contents with proper ceremony — primarily an apology to the sea — when it became necessary.

With more than forty in the crew it was frequently necessary. It meant also that those who, as I, had just awakened would need to wait their turn. We politely looked elsewhere. My eyes went to the horizon where the sun was just showing itself above the low-lying mangrove. Sails?

“Look there!” I cried out.

“Kohari,” said someone. “Hoping to hide behind the light of dawn.”

“To weapons!” came the call. Beka stood in the prow, holding a stone war-hammer. Sailors busied themselves with the woven sails and Naio himself took the steering oar. I at once grabbed a bow and many arrows. On a second thought, I grabbed another for Vehina. Were we to be the only archers?

Four boats? Or five? Yes, five. Their sails danced against the red sky. Large boats they were, though none even half the length of our great dugout. They angled toward us from the northeast.

“Best you stay at my side,” I told Vehina. “We can help each other choose targets.” That was a polite way of saying I didn’t know how she would react in combat. I was not even sure how I would react.

Maratoa.

For a moment I thought to simply ignore the call. No, better to let her know not to bother me. *Not now Malee! We’re in a fight!*

She broke off at once. The clumsy Kohari boats spread out, hoping to engage from more than one direction and block our way. They could not match our great canoe for speed in any wind, not

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even when driven by paddles, but had advantages in close combat, turning more quickly. Their high sides offered protection for archers. There would surely be archers among them.

But our canoe was large and its own sides rose high. Also, it was heavy enough to crush any Kohari boat it was driven into, for they were made of flimsy kuru wood boards, stitched together with palm fiber and caulked with some resin known to their builders. Even our outrigger was likely to be sturdier.

Naio knew this full well and directed our craft straight at one of the attackers. Others were within arrow range now and rained their shafts on us. There might be twice, even three times, the men on those five boats as in our canoe. But we were Mora, each easily worth any three Kohari. So I had been told all my life.

"Who's the leader over there?" hissed Vehina. "I want to get a shot at him."

It was hard to say. If a seasoned warrior led, he would not be showing much of himself. If not — I saw a flash of ruddy light. Someone wearing copper jewelry? "There," I said, pointing, "The one standing in the stern." It was the largest of the Kohari boats. He might not lead but he was surely important. "We'll both aim for him. Ready? Now."

We released our arrows as one. Both struck. I like to think mine was the one that killed the man. A priest, I suspected, but it did not matter. A cry rose from our canoe, a different cry from the boats. More like a wail from them.

Naio plowed us into the boat for which he had aimed. Alas, he only struck it on the end and did not make kindling of it. None the less, we left it sinking as we caught the wind and pulled quickly away from the Kohari raiders.

"Will they follow?" Vehina asked no one in particular. The consensus was they would not. Only one man had been struck with an arrow, not badly it seemed, but he sickened and died within the hour.

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“Poison,” spat my father. “I thought they had given up its use.”

“We must remind them why they did,” said Beka. There was consensus on this, too.

By noon we sat at the mouth of the Gurang. Hurasu and Father took their sighting and seemed pleased with it, while Vehina sighted her first great crocodiles of the river. She was duly impressed and possibly also pleased.

23. *Disappearing*

I HAD SPOKEN to Malee, of course, as soon as I could. Oorto joined us. She would have told him there had been trouble.

We must send messengers to Poneiva at once, he said, *and to Malee's father.*

Malee had something to add to that. *And to Mouiri. He might want to send canoes after those raiders.*

Yes. Let your father know we do this, said the shaman.

I did. We were already departed from the Gurang, our heading once again to the north of west. There had been Kohari in the river but they were friendly traders and hunters, and no fonder of raiders than were we. Bad for business, was the general feeling.

"A priest, you say?" asked one. "The cult of Mihasa has been trying to regain some of its power."

"So are those of half a dozen other gods," said another. "But you can bet they were after heads."

"Ha, never bet with a Mora. They take their gambling too seriously," his comrade informed him.

The sextant came out again the next noon, with all four leaders gathered. The increasingly rugged shore remained in sight but I doubted it would much longer. Naio was not one to waste time following a coast.

"Can you take accurate enough readings to measure our progress?" asked Vehina when they finished.

Father answered. "From day to day, I would not trust our calculations too much. Over the course of several days, certainly." He looked back the way we had traveled. "From the readings we have taken we have extrapolated Ahurataca's position as about fifteen north. Knowing that might help us find our way home. A long voyage lies ahead of us first. Longer than I had realized."

"We ended up far south of where we came to this world," Beka put in.

"There are currents that would push you south," said Niao.

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"Though you may have meant to sail due easterly. I have sailed beyond the chain of islands at times."

"Temani'itu passed through them to circle back to the Kohari temple from the north. I remember this." Father laughed. "And could not believe such navigation possible at the time."

Beka laughed louder. "Neither could the Kohari when we swooped down on them!"

Vehina was at least a little puzzled. "I did not see any islands. Had I, I might have set down there."

"Ours was the first land you spied?" asked Father.

She nodded. "Those white cliffs caught my eye from far off. I think — I think I got a bit disoriented, not realizing I had gone from the southern hemisphere to the northern. A northern hemisphere, I should say, eh?"

"Yet you ended up in the same place as us. Just more directly," he said.

"You shall see those islands soon, Lady Vehina," promised Naio. "I shall turn us on a course toward them now." He looked toward Beka and Father, not asking permission, only letting them know his intentions.

"Sounds good," felt Beka.

"I could have passed over islands in the dark," Vehina admitted to me when we returned to our shaded mats. "But I saw no lights. No one lives there?"

"I think not. Not on the ones further west, anyway."

"Hmm. I hope we stop. I wouldn't mind walking about on land again, just for a while."

I could agree with that. "And maybe find some fresh fruit."

She took a quick look toward Hurasu, again standing at the bow. "And maybe have Hurasu to myself again." My disapproval must have been evident. I truly did try to conceal it! She smiled but seemed to feel a need to explain. "Again, just for a while. And he is a white man."

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“White? Oh, you mean like my father and Beka.” I was not sure what that had to do with anything. “I suppose he is.”

Vehina laughed. I was not sure what that meant either. “More or less! He seems, oh, Levantine maybe.”

“I know not what that is but Hurasu was not born in your world. He only passed through it from another.”

She raised her eyebrows. “So a third world? He only told me of two.”

Then he told her very little. I chose not to add to it. “We are drawing further away from the coast,” I commented.

Vehini gazed out eastward across the water. “So we are. It was getting downright mountainous, wasn’t it?”

“On the other side of that range lies the lands of the Kohari,” I informed her. Maybe we were still too far south for that to be completely correct but it did not matter much. The distant mountains soon disappeared completely.

In part, I wished they had not. I had heard the story of Father being chased down this coast by Kohari boats and would have liked to see the point where he and Beka made their desperate, hazardous turn among rocks where their enemies feared to follow. Perhaps on the return journey – preferably not pursued by Kohari!

The sun also disappeared, in its time, and only the dark ocean lay about us. I thought I heard someone playing softly on the flute as I disappeared into sleep.

24. *Charts*

"THERE IS A wide gap in the chain," explained Naio, "toward which I steer."

"I remember crossing that gap," said my father.

Our navigator held an intricate weaving of sticks and string in his brown long-fingered hands. He glanced at it again before rolling it up. I suspected he did not really need it. Naio knew these waters. "We could stop on one of the islands. There is fresh water to be found."

"I remember that too. I favor pulling in somewhere. What say you, Hurasu?"

"There would be no harm in it. As I do not know when the gate might open again, there is no urgency to reach it."

Eyes turned to Beka as the nominal commander here. "All right with me. I remember some of those islands too." His brow furrowed in thought. "Didn't you draw up a map, Marareta?"

"I did, and borrowed a copy I made for Neatanu while we retrieved the sextant. My only guarantee is of its inaccuracy. Ho, Maratoa," he called, "will you go find it in my bag?"

I had seen such a map in my home on many occasions. Sometimes I had just looked at it and wondered about the places it showed, laid out as if a very high-flying bird were looking down on the world. Perhaps it looked that way from Vehina's aeroplane. The chart was easy enough to find, as Father carried little else with him. He hadn't any oranges left.

Father unrolled the map atop a storage box, smoothed the bark paper. "There is the channel." He pointed it out. "Lots of islands further east, not so many to the west."

"And the Kohari visit those to the east sometimes. A few even live there," Naio told us. "Fishermen."

"That's where we first ran into them," said Beka. "They had captured Neatanu and his party. Um, here." He put a finger on the fourth large isle east from the wide gap. He slid it over to the first

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on the west side. "That's where we found that fine harbor. There were some who wanted to stay."

Naio nodded. "I know it well. Alas, so do the Kohari, though none live there that I am aware of."

"Too far from their homeland," felt Beka. "Too far for those who are not good sailors."

"I would prefer to stop at the next isle west," said Naio. "You found a decent harbor there, did you not?"

"Decent that day," replied Father. "If the winds and swell were from a different direction, maybe not, as it is somewhat open to the sea. But I think I could find it readily enough." He considered that a moment. "It should accommodate this canoe."

As it was nearly noon, the sextant came out and I went elsewhere. Then I truly went elsewhere and called Malee to come and talk. There was nothing to say, really, but I was bored and maybe lonely. Maybe I even missed her. I would never have admitted that not so long ago.

I am with Panoha and your bratty sister now, she informed me. And Oorto, of course.

I'm with the same people I was the last time we spoke. It is very boring. Did Bafa and Toare go?

On to the House of Pua and their wives. Bafa took his two men with him. Maybe we'll go visit too.

I think Malee was bored also. *Your mother is there*, I pointed out.

And every one of my brothers and sisters. We left Daddy all alone. A pause. *Rahiri wants to visit with Aeta.* That was Malee's younger stepsister, and of about the same age as Rahiri. A troublesome age.

No, not always. Malee hadn't been troublesome. She had seemed grown up since I first met her – and she had only five years of age then!

The two of them are sure to get into mischief, I told her.

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Like you and your father. It's a good thing you have your mother and me to watch after you.

Not now. We escaped!

Not forever. This I know, Warrior of the Moon. This I know.
With that, she left.

Did she know? Had Malee truly seen enough of the future to know I would return? Or marry her, for that matter! I knew prophecy was never so certain. Nor did prophecy seem to be her gift. No, I believed Malee had simply decided on this vision of the future as a little girl and had not let loose of it.

Prophecy. My birth-mother was a great prophetess. I would not think of asking her to look into what might be for me. It would be a burden for both of us. But such visions might come without being sought.

Vehina had lingered while the sextant was read. She seemed interested — more so than Hurasu. Both of them joined me in the shade now. We spoke not; the words allotted to this voyage had mostly been used up, I think. After a time, the wizard pulled out a little roundish clay object and blew on it.

A flute. It was not at all like the bamboo pipes Mora musicians played upon, and sounded different too. The notes he played seemed strange, as if they did not fit together. "This is what the people of my valley call a dudu," he said when finished. "It has amused me many lonely hours of my journeys."

"My father sometimes plays on the sef," I said. "That is a Kohari instrument, a, um, box with strings."

"Oh, he didn't bring it, did he?" asked Vehina.

I only shook my head. "My parents did waste their money on harp lessons for me when I was a child," she continued. "Rather large to haul along on a plane."

Hurasu blew a few more notes and then stared out at the sea. "The only other entertainment for me, crossing the seas alone, was to visit from afar with other wizards and perhaps even to risk

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glimpsing into other worlds. That I have always been leery of since coming here. I did not wish to attract attention.” He turned his dark eyes toward me. “There is much yet you could learn about those infinite worlds. We must speak further of it sometime.” With that he returned to his dudu.

Vehina and I also gazed out across the endless blue ocean. I might have been falling asleep — my eyes might even have been closed — when she gasped, “What was that?”

“Where?” She was still looking at the water.

She pointed. “There. A whale?”

A fin. Vehina had not been the only one to spot. Men were peering toward it when the great shark breached. It was near half the length of our canoe.

“One of the largest I’ve seen,” someone commented.

“A shark? I didn’t know they grew so large,” said Vehina.

“Sharks such as that have not roamed the seas of your home for millions of years.” Hurasu’s voice was low and matter of fact. “In this world, even more fearsome creatures lurk in the depths. Believe me; I have seen some of them.”

“That’s good to know,” came Vehina’s rather dry response.

“Some consider them sacred to the god Wanga, the Great Shark himself,” I added. I wasn’t sure why I chose to. I just thought I should say something. “Ni’inoe it is called in Mora.”

“Are we safe?” asked Vehina. “I mean, it wouldn’t attack, would it?”

“Not so large a canoe,” I assured her. “However, had it come on Lord Hurasu in his little craft he might never have reached our shores.”

“That is very true,” agreed the Lord of Visions, and returned to the making of odd melodies on the dudu.

25. *Memories*

A BROAD OPEN bay opened on the southern side of the island. "It will do," was Naio's opinion. He found a channel through the reefs and into calmer water without hesitation nor difficulty. I wielded a paddle for the first time since we left the Great Falls.

"A lot better than I did twenty years ago," said Father. "But the waves are smaller."

"Yes," agreed Beka. "They were huge when we came through them!" This fooled no one, least of all Lord Naio.

"We'd best stay off the beach," said he. "It's a good anchorage."

"Soft bottom," commented one of the sailors.

"We'll have to expect some drift." Naio turned his eyes to the beach. "Golden sand. Your memories were true, Taona."

"I wasn't sure if I believed them myself. If other memories prove true, there is a stream up that way."

"That I remember as well. Falls came down from those cliffs behind the beach," said Beka. I could see the cliffs, not very high, rising behind the palms and sand. Cliffs seemed to largely encircle this island. As much of it as I had seen.

Father's eyes were gazing higher than those cliffs, at the mountains behind them. "This I believe is the highest of all the islands we saw. We climbed far up there to see what else lay in this new world." He looked even higher then, toward the sky. "Too late for the sextant. We must use it tomorrow, before leaving this place."

"And before then, we should fill our emptied water skins. I'll take them ashore in the small canoe," announced Naio. This we had towed behind us, a craft large enough for only two or three men. "The rest of you must swim. It is not far."

It was not. An easy swim. "As long as your ni'inoe didn't follow us here!" spoke Vehina.

"This I doubt," said Naio, "but some of his smaller relatives might be about. You are welcome to ride with me, Lady Vehina."

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“And be a canoe filler again? No thank you, sir!” With that she plunged into the crystalline water. Many followed.

Not Hurasu. “I feel we should take some weapons with us,” he stated. “I remember your tale of a huge lizard, Malvern. This is the island, is it not?”

“It is.” I knew that tale too but had not realized this was its setting.

“As large as a crocodile, right?” I asked. I looked toward the shore. There might be actual crocodiles in those waters as well, mightn’t there?

Father laughed at that. “Some crocodiles. There are ones twice the length in the Gurang. Still, I think a few spears might be wise. Naio can paddle them ashore.”

“Bows too,” I added to this. These weapons we handed down to the navigator when he brought the little canoe alongside. Then I too dove into the bay and swam toward the sand.

Hurasu and I emerged together. I was surprised to see the long sword hanging over his shoulder. He must not like to be separated from it.

And its metal must be proof against the corrosion of salt water. Bafa would be interested in knowing that, not that it would really tell him anything.

There were many birds, birds of the sea, birds of the forest, some white, some colored of the rainbow. This I noted at once. “Those look like Palala!” I called out, pointing toward a flock of raucous parrots that had congregated in the palms.

Palala had remained at the House of Those Who Sail the Sea with the unfortunate Mouiri. The parrot had been purchased from a Kohari merchant below the Great Falls, long years ago. No one had any idea of the green and yellow bird’s origin.

“And they seem just as friendly,” said Father, following me from the water. He turned to look back toward the canoe. Waves

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broke on the reefs beyond it and the open sea lay beyond those. "A little too open, both to storm and attack. Let's help Naio."

And get our weapons along with the water skins. Many hands pulled the small dugout well up onto the coarse sand. Most of those hands soon held spears. Beka made sure some held skins as well and directed the men to the fresh water stream tumbling over the cliffs. That before all else. I went with them, carrying a bow. I handed Vehina one as well.

"Now this is my idea of the south seas," said she, as we passed into the shade of the palms. "I do not believe I would ever want to leave this place."

Vehina lied to herself again. I could see that and could see there was no harm to it. "One could spend years exploring here," I said.

She raised her eyes to the mountain peaks. "Indeed so. And I would not be able to resist." Then a quick sidelong glance at me. "You already can see my weaknesses."

"Or strengths." Ah, Maratoa, you sound like a priest again. Or a diplomat. There was a small waterfall and pool beneath it, before the stream cut its way through the sand and on to the bay. The skins were soon filled. They would be heavier on the return to the beach!

Nor could they all be taken out to the canoe in one trip, not that they were that many. We had not been at sea that long, after all. Beka and Father were busy organizing things when we got back to the water. "Don't you think we should leave some men on the canoe in case of attack?" asked my father. Beka nodded; he seemed to think it a good idea.

Naio felt otherwise. "And what could they do? Better to have most of the crew together, ready to fight or to escape into the forest."

"I agree," came Hurasu's voice, calm and flat. "Are we going to be able to bathe in that pool?"

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"Absolutely. I could stand to wash off myself," said Beka. "Drinking water from the falls only now, not the pool. Any of the falls." There were several of varying size coming over the cliffs, some nothing but a trickle down the rock face. I thought I might just go stand under one rather than share the pool.

So I did. I could not help wondering about the land above these low cliffs. To look out over the sea from one of those high ridges as had once my father! There was nothing in the land of the Mora to compare, not even Ahurataca. We would not take the time here to satisfy my curiosity. When I got back to the beach, the little canoe was returning. A dripping Ulani stood awaiting it.

"My staff is aboard," he explained. "I can swim as well as ever but not carrying a stick with me."

"You could hold it between your teeth," Beka told him.

"And be unable to speak or sing?" said my father. "One should not ask such of a bard."

Hurasu spoke. "I have yet to hear the epic of Marareta's visit to my home, Master Ulani."

Ulani shook his head. "First, you must tell us your own tale, as promised."

"That would only be fair," admitted the sorcerer. "But then you are obligated to give us a performance later."

"Agreed." Ulani gathered his staff from the canoe and carefully made his way up the beach. The rest followed; there was little to do at the water's edge. A camp was already set up near the pool, though mostly the men had done no more than spread sleeping mats. We would not be long here; no need for shelters, even the most simple.

It was decided to chance a fire. All knew Kohari were unlikely to show up, especially unfriendly Kohari in large enough numbers to be a threat.

Some fresh fruit had been discovered, chiefly wild bananas, nearly ripe, and of course coconuts. I could see great plum trees

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above the cliffs but their astringent fruit would not yet be ripe. Perhaps we could climb up there and investigate in the morning. If we waited until the noon before departing, there would be time enough.

Now, dusk was settling on our camp. Time to settle ourselves as well and let the morrow come when it would.

26. *At the Fire*

“THERE ARE TWO gates that lead directly from the world of your ancestors to this one,” stated Hurasu. “The world also of those who came more recently from the sea, Marareta, Beka, and now Vehina. Or perhaps they lead here from two nearly identical worlds. That does not matter.” I think maybe I was the only one there who understood that. Maybe Father.

“Neither,” he continued, “is easy to pass and it requires great power to open them. Storms brought both you and me, though I had some magic to assist my passage. It was hard to use it in that world!”

“They go the one way only, don’t they?” asked my father.

“It is so. The one I came through opens on an island far south and west of here, cold and bleak, that some name Nagi. I entered the gate to it in the mountains that border the land of the Scythians.”

Again, most did not of what he spoke including, this time, me. “The Urals, maybe?” asked Vehina. “We would call that land Russia now.”

“Yes, Russia. Those who had passed more lately named it so.” Hurasu stared into the fire for a moment. “They had even more powerful weapons and more advanced technology than yours, Marareta, and yours had worried me enough. So I traveled to that other gate, once things were running smoothly again in my realm, to see who might have passed through recently. It was good I did for I halted an invasion.

“I have blocked that gate on the other side of this world now. Blocked, not closed – I have not the power for that. Not even a god has such power. However, none but an extremely powerful sorcerer could break through my warding.” He smiled but there was no mirth in it. “Those do not and can not exist in the world from which you came.”

“Why not?” asked Vehina. It was a good question; I knew the

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answer in part from things Oorto and my father had said, but did not completely understand.

"It is a world with little connection to others. That makes it difficult to use any of what you would call magic. It is almost shut off from all other universes. But not completely, as our own presence here shows.

"I think you and others who passed the gates were, in some sense, drawn in. Were it not so, even fewer would have blundered through. When that other gate opens, it has the appearance of a cave. As it opens only during violent storms, such a cave is enticing to any who might seek shelter. Small tribes have passed through, surely, but mostly it must have been one or two individuals at a time."

"And so also with the one that opens in the ocean, I would think," said Father. "Lone canoes caught in the storm."

"And airplanes," added Vehina.

"Yes, now airplanes," agreed Hurasu. "The more reason to feel an urgency to block both. As I have said, the ways can not be closed nor removed. They exist as part of the fabric of being and can only be warded against entry. Blocked. Having warded the one on Nagi, I turned myself toward the land of the Mora."

"Across the great empty expanse of the ocean," said Naio.

Hurasu chuckled at the man's more than slightly melodramatic tone. "There were some islands. And I had sailed north along the coasts in one of the skin-covered boats made on Nagi before procuring a more ocean-worthy canoe."

"Barely," Naio murmured.

"Yet adequate. The canoe on which I arrived at your falls came from a folk who know the sea. As you, they came through the gate in the deep ocean but their ancestors sailed west rather than east."

"They are like us?" came a voice. One of the sailors.

"More akin to the Diwarna or those who dwell in my valley, I

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think. But with a mix of ancestors, as all the peoples of this world.” Hurasu composed himself a moment and continued. “It is a long voyage to be sure. I had never attempted it before though I have found my way around this world more than once. A long voyage and a boring one, yet the quickest way here. I spent much time making noise upon the dudu.

“But it ended. As I neared your lands I sensed the gate had opened and closed again, and I suspected someone had passed through.” A few eyes went to Vehina. My own too, I admit. “It was too late to do anything toward warding it. This is why I need to be near, so I can see when it opens. The actual warding I could do from the other side of the world.”

Ah. That explained some things that had puzzled me. I knew that distances meant nothing. Did I not speak from afar to Malee as readily when she was across the hills in her father’s house as when she sat in the next room?

“So we sail to find this gate,” spoke Beka. “Will you recognize it when you see it?”

“I will feel it when I am near. There is always the slightest of connection to your world, as if the soft whisper of a breeze has found its way around a closed door. As to how it will look when it does open —” Hurasu spread his arms. “That I am not sure as I have never seen it before. The other portal did have its cave-like appearance at both ends. Perhaps this one will as well.”

“I don’t remember any caves,” Beka said. “We were just floating in the eye of the typhoon one moment and were somewhere else the next.”

“It was night and very dark,” Father noted.

“It was, but I remember a great flash of light just before we, um, found ourselves here.”

“We shall learn when we see it,” was all Hurasu had to say.

To which Father added, “If we find it.” My father has ever

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been one to see how things might go wrong. Some prize that and seek his advice. Others avoid him.

So ended that discussion and that tale, none having more to say. Some of the sailors sought their sleeping mats. Some conversed in lowered voices. Others remained around the fire and sang. I did not hear my father nor Lord Beka join in.

Where Hurasu went, I can not say. He had disappeared into the night. Maybe just off to relieve himself, I first thought, but the man did not reappear. Vehina came and sat down beside me where I rested, a little distance from the fire. "Hurasu is avoiding me," she announced, without preamble.

"Avoiding all of us, maybe," I said. Despite his apparent calm and self-assurance, undertaking such a great task must weigh on one.

"Perhaps. What did he mean by magic? I know you are the sorcerer's apprentice." She snickered slightly after stating this but I am not certain why.

How to explain something at once so simple yet so strange? "He told you something of the many worlds, did he not?"

"Many? How many? I've heard of three so far."

"They are infinite," I told her. "At least in potential."

"Oh. Very well. I've heard such theories." It turned out I was the one to be surprised.

I went on. "'Magic,' as Hurasu called it, depends on the ability to connect to the infinite worlds, to enter, in part, into them, to see, even to bring things to one from them. When we speak from afar, we go to one of those worlds, meeting with others there."

"And you are born with this ability."

"So it is."

"Well, that's straightforward enough. I thank you, Moon Man. Now I know whom to ask when I need things explained!" She rose and gave me a short, appraising look before saying, "Off to my lonesome mat."

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I am not stupid and know what thought she had. A thought she was wise to dismiss — it was not the time nor place for it. Perhaps on some other beach on some other night.

27. *Hunters and Hunted*

THERE WERE STRANGE sounds in the night. This was to expected in a strange land. Beka, perhaps remembering his giant lizard, set several guards to watch the camp.

I would like to see such a creature. Father tells me it was like the large lizards of the Gurang, the ones he calls monitors and Oorto's people name *canjar*, but twice the size of the greatest known there.

Some of the sounds were surely the wind and the water and the insects. Some sounded like they might be monkeys. Monkeys also dwell in the Gurang basin but there are none in Mora lands. Father claims our ancestors ate them all. He might even be right. I would not eat a monkey, I think.

A giant lizard, maybe. I was tired of fish. I should speak to someone of hunting or at least going atop the cliffs to gather more fruit. Many of the crew were already settled down to a cold breakfast. There was no order or hierarchy to where they sat, their mats spread here and there on the sand.

It was nice to be able to have a little fresh fruit in my bowl this morning, though it could have been riper. I filled it and joined Father and Hurasu, conversing in low voices. The sorcerer glanced at me. "I was telling your father how I felt an uneasiness about that other gate. It seemed as if someone had partially cracked it open and when I arrived I found it was so." He shook his head. "Had I not traveled there when I did, and been fortunate in finding aid, a great evil might have been unleashed on this world."

"But you feel none of that here," said Father.

"I do not and so I think there is not as much haste in finding it. But it should be barred soon. It must be barred soon, for others will find it in your world, sooner or later, and come up with a means to open it."

"But I thought none had enough magic there," I said.

"The gate to Nagi was opened not with magic nor with a

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natural storm but with the power of machines. One man showed the Russians how to do this and now he is dead." Hurasu seemed to find some satisfaction in saying this. "But what one discovers, others will in time."

Father nodded in agreement. They were probably right. "I should go hunting," I said. "Or at least go above the cliffs to gather more fruit."

"There is time enough this morning," said my father. "For that matter, I am not even sure we will leave today. Beka is in charge. Ask him."

In theory, Beka was in charge. In truth, I think Father was. Beka and even Naio would defer to him, and Hurasu had no authority. But the big man was entirely in agreement with sending out parties to hunt and gather when I put it to him. Vehina and I and a pair of sailors, Heavu and Move'ehu, made up one group. A way up through the cliffs was easy to locate, for it was broken and crumbling in many places. It was soft rock and it rained much here and, too, the roots of the great forest trees above us thrust down through the face of the cliffs.

"More bananas," observed Heavu.

"Easier to get them on the way back," said his companion. He came to peep over the cliff. Vehina and I already stood there, looking out over the bay. "It would be safe to throw them over. They're hard yet."

I turned from the view. "Good enough. Which way shall we head?" I was not in any position of authority here. I was only a warrior in rank, and a young one. Yes, yes, I was noble and some would tend to look to me for leadership because of that. Neither sailor offered an opinion.

Ah, there was another noble here. And my senior! "You choose a direction, Lady Vehina." I knew she would not in the least mind being in charge.

"Up this little valley," she said. To me she whispered, after a

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minute or so, "I want to get up high enough to see more." I only nodded. I would not mind getting a better look at things myself.

We saw more bananas and, surprisingly, kuru. "Someone must have planted those once," I observed. Men had brought the kuru to this land, my own ancestors according to the tales, though the Kohari grew the fruit extensively as well – and used its bark for cloth, its wood to build their boats.

"Someone might have tried to make a life here," allowed Move'ehu.

And failed, I thought. "Maybe they left pigs behind too," I said. I would greatly appreciate fresh pork. We worked our way up the narrow valley. A little stream flowed beside us, bouncing down over many low ledges of dark smooth stone. There was more brush here than beneath the great spreading trees of the forest further up the slopes but more chance of flushing game. These sailors were noisy. They were no hunters.

"We could take plenty of birds," whispered Vehina. "Is parrot good to eat?"

"I would not chance losing an arrow on them." Though I might not mind wringing Palala's neck and serving him up roasted.

She drew and released suddenly and smoothly. A covey of heavy-bodied birds burst into the air and away but one lay pierced through. Heavu ran to pick it up. "Well struck, Lady Vehina!" he called, picking it up. He wrung its neck but it might not have been necessary. "Heavy." The sailor carried it back to us, using both hands.

The plumage reminded me of the sky of dusk, when stars had just appeared, dark bluish-gray, speckled with white. "I don't recognize it," I commented, "but I'll wager it tastes good." That was a wager no one would take.

"Do we carry it with us?"

Why was he asking me? "We're close to camp still," I said. "Why don't you carry it back and we'll go on a little further."

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“And throw those bananas down while you are at it,” added Move’ehu.

There might have been annoyance in the look Heavu shot his comrade, but he raised no objections. “I’ll wait for your return in camp then,” he said, and set off down the gorge, the bird dangling over his broad back.

Vehina led our way forward. I did not realize for a minute or two that she was gradually climbing the side of the valley, approaching the taller trees along the line of the ridge. The going was easier beneath them for little grew in their shade but the steep way was making fat Move’ehu huff some. She halted at the top.

“Too many trees to see much of anything,” she muttered. “We would have to go higher.”

“No time,” I pointed out. Move’ehu nodded agreement.

“No, I suppose not. But perhaps we can spot some game from up here.”

Many fallen leaves lay beneath our feet. They were moist from the rains and made little noise. It would rain again soon, I suspected, or at least after noon. It might yet be the dry season at home but the monsoon had reached this island.

“Oh, the perfect lookout!” An outcropping of dark stone jutted from the earth and out over the valley. Vehina stepped onto it without hesitation. There were more like it further on, forming a low broken cliff.

I was nervous to see her standing so close to the edge. This soft wet rock seemed treacherous to me. I carefully slid forward; Move’ehu wisely remained well back. It was indeed a good lookout but I could spy no game, not even more of the large birds. No succulent roasted pork for us tonight! “We could go back down and look for fruit,” I suggested.

“We can’t go down right here,” Move’ehu pointed out. “Do we go back the way we came?”

Vehina peered up the valley, again getting far closer to the cliff

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edge than made me comfortable. "It looks like there is a place to descend a little further along. We could follow the way back to the beach from there."

That seemed reasonable. "It is time we returned," I said. What? Had I seen something move from the corner of my eye, in the deep shade of the forest giants? Maybe something edible! I slid an arrow from my quiver.

No. Nothing seemed to stir and it would not do to go into that gloom searching. But I kept the bow ready. Vehina, having observed me, did the same without asking any question. Along the brink of that cliff we filed, weaving in and out of the trees. Where was the break she had spied?

Again, something moved. I was certain this time. Not game, I was also fairly certain. We were being stalked. We were game. Could it be one of the great lizards? I had wanted to see one but not right here!

A howl, not of one voice but several. Forms burst from the forest, upright forms. Men. No, but something like men. Then they were on us.

Vehina had released an arrow even before me. A cool head the woman had! I fear my own shaft flew wild as they closed and one manlike creature careened toward me, swinging a club. I stepped back – and over the cliff.

28. *Wild Men*

“HERE!” SOMEONE WAS calling. “It’s Maratoa!”

I opened my eyes. A sailor, wasn’t it? Afi’itu, that’s who it was. The priest. But why was he waking me up?

All that had happened rushed into my head of a sudden. More men were coming. Naio. My father. “What happened?” asked the latter.

“I fell from —” I turned my eyes upward. Had it been so far? “From up there.” I pointed to the cliff far above me, at the top of a long slope. “We were attacked and I went over the edge.”

The fall was short, the cliff not much higher than a tall man, but I must have rolled and tumbled a good way further. Far enough that our attackers couldn’t find me. Or did not wish to bother.

“Kohari?” asked Naio.

“No.” I rose, steadily enough, to my feet. “They were as no men I have ever seen. They seemed almost animals.”

There were murmurs among the men. “The Kohari tell tales of this island being haunted by demons,” said one.

My father cursed softly in English. “I saw what might be a wild man of some sort when we stopped here twenty years ago. But I was uncertain. I should have spoken of it.” He shook his head and that seemed to be that. “What of the others?” he asked.

“I do not know. I was pushed over on the first rush.”

“Then we go up there and look,” stated Naio. “Can you climb?”

I nodded. I seemed to be unharmed, aside from a knot on my head and many scratches. Bruises would surely make themselves seen in time. I still had my quiver and most of its arrows but no bow. About that I could do nothing.

“We waited till well past noon for you to return and then Heavu led us on the way you had come,” Naio told me, as we made our way up the valley wall, nine of us all told. It was not a difficult climb.

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Little was to be seen. "There was certainly a scuffle," spoke Father. "Would we had Oorto here to read the signs. Ah." He picked up a bow, undoubtedly Vehina's. "You might as well carry this," he said, handing it to me.

"There is blood," remarked Heavu. "But whose?"

"It leaves a trail," said Father. "Someone was wounded." Or slain. We all thought that, I am sure.

Soon enough, we found it was the blood of Move'ehu. Those we followed had paused to crudely butcher his body, leaving the offal and the head. This had been broken open and the brain apparently consumed.

"Cannibals." I think it was Afi'itu who breathed this. But were those creatures who attacked us men at all?

"We will cover him over on our return," said Naio. "First we must learn if Lady Vehina survives. If not," he growled, "we may still take vengeance."

There was unanimous approval. Unfortunately, the blood trail was no longer quite so obvious. These sailors might not have been able to follow it at all. Oorto had taught me things other than sorcery, however, useful things. I am no Diwarna tracker, no, but the wild men had not taken much care to hide their passage.

They did not seem to take any care at all. Perhaps they had no enemies here on this island where no men lived. Not now — had they slain those who tried to settle here? That we might never know. No sentries were posted at their camp, a haphazardly arranged collection of frond-covered lean-tos. We came upon it suddenly, as surprised as were those we had pursued.

There was no fire. This I noticed for some reason as I drew back my bow and let fly a arrow, into the breast of the first cudgel-bearing beast man who charged toward us. Others gripped clubs, as well, or spears or great chunks of sharp-edged stone. The females and young stood and watched, perhaps thinking there was no

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danger to them. Indeed, a few females, maybe those without children, charged us as well.

In a minute it was over. We were trained Mora warriors. Two wild men lay dead and the others disappeared into the jungle, the wounded limping after those who fled more quickly. "About time you showed up!" came a call from one of the huts. "I'm not sure whether I was on the menu but did not want to find out."

Vehina was rather well trussed up. Her captors might not have been far advanced in other arts but they knew knots. "They ate poor Move'ehu while I sat here," she near-whispered, as we freed her. A few passes with a sharp flint edge will deal with any knot.

"Gather his bones," Naio ordered the men. "We will see they are properly honored." Some appeared to have been split for their marrow. I went to where my father was carefully looking over the bodies of those we had slain.

"These are not the wild men I encountered in the mountains," he said. "More primitive." They were not large. They would have stood no higher than my shoulder. But in shape, they were little different from any other man. Their naked bodies were very hairy and the skin surprisingly pale.

Ah, but the heads! The faces thrust forward and heavy ridges jutted above the eyes, with the forehead receding abruptly. Father took hold of one of the heavily bearded jaws, felt it, pulled the mouth open. "No chin to speak of. But the teeth are quite human." He shrugged and rose. "We were fortunate they did not attack us when we visited here before."

"They might have been on the other side of the island and not noticed you," I offered.

"Maybe so. Are we ready to go?" The unfortunate Move'ehu's remains had been gathered into a bag and we set out toward the cove and camp. You may be assured we kept good watch as we went. These wild men might or might not pursue but no trained warrior would let down his guard in such a situation. Who could

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say what might lurk in the darkness beneath the great forest trees — and night was coming soon.

The bones we added to the rest of our fallen comrade's remains and covered all over with rocks. "Say a prayer, Afi'itu," requested Naio. "But keep it brief."

He did, remembering Move'ehu to the gods and especially to Rai, the god of the sky. Sailors have a special devotion to Rai. His realm is seen at its greatest when one is surrounded by the ocean.

Then march on, quickly. There was still a hint of light on the horizon when we reached the cliffs above our camp, and welcoming fires below.

29. *The Unknown*

“WE DID TAKE a reading before going to your rescue, Vehina,” said Father. “We find this island lies at around twenty-two degrees of latitude. Our course must go much further north.”

To this Beka appended, “I would not have guessed we drifted so far south after arriving.”

“But you did,” said Vehina. “And so we head into the unknown. Unknown even to the valiant Naio.” He seemed to have impressed the lady today. Naio, I suspected, would be pleased by that.

And I wondered if Vehina realized it.

The fires were kept burning high tonight, and the sentries doubled, not that anyone slept. We could do that tomorrow, once underway. At dawn, Naio would guide us out through the reefs and we would, indeed, head into the unknown.

A full moon hung over the bay, the palms casting long shadows. The unknown. Isn't all of life unknown? We sail on, seeking. That was why I had come on this voyage.

I stood and gazed out at it for some time. It was perhaps not wise to stand alone so, but I did bear a spear. Our leaders were gathered when I returned to the fires.

“They were not your ‘first children,’ but something more primitive,” Father told Hurasu.

The wizard nodded. “Or perhaps something that degenerated in isolation here.”

“Their weapons seemed crude. The spears were no more than sharpened sticks.”

“Bamboo,” said Vehina. “Sharpened bamboo.”

“Be that as it may, it is wise to post many guards this night,” stated Naio. A smile slipped onto his weathered visage. “We can not have them eating Lady Vehina.”

“I should think not! But I do think some of the males may have had other ideas,” she claimed.

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Hurasu's comment came dry and nonchalant. "Chances are they would have eaten you when they were finished, anyway."

He showed neither surprise nor regret when tears came into her eyes and she bolted from our company. Naio scowled at him but said nothing.

"She has been through much today," said Father, softly.

"And it does her no good to hide behind the person she has created for the world to see," Hurasu replied. "Better she accept that she is mortal, that she came close to dying once again." He sighed. "If anyone knows of mortality it is I, who have lasted three thousand years." Hurasu looked around. "Is Ulani about? Maybe he can finally let me hear that epic. It would seem a good way to fill this night."

"Swam out to the canoe earlier," Beka informed him. "He thought we were all mad for remaining ashore." He looked across the nighted water. "But I wouldn't swim out there in the dark for anything."

"Then you must sing for me. You and Marareta. I have been told you both are full of songs."

Many voices raised in song that night, not just those of Father and of Lord Beka. The sailors kept it up until dawn, with songs of home, of heroes, of life, holding back the fear of what might lie beyond the glow of their fires. Vehina came and sat beside me after a while, seemingly unperturbed by anything that had happened.

Could Hurasu have purposely meant to distance himself from her? That I could not figure out.

"Do you sing, Lord Hurasu?" came from one of the sailors.

"Give us a song of your homeland!" called another.

He half-smiled. "I have had many homelands and learned many songs in many languages."

"What are those songs you play on your little noise-maker?" asked Beka.

"Ah, those are tunes of my people, those who dwell in the

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valley beyond the mountains. They have their own music, very different from yours or that of the Kohari. But it is not my music, not the music of the world in which I was born." He mused on some thought or another for a moment. "I'll give you a song I heard in the land I recently visited."

Hurasu sang rather well, though without much emotion it seemed to me. "I know that tune," Vehina whispered, leaning in. "It's Russian. I'll bet your dad knows it too."

Maybe he did. I wondered why Hurasu did not sing a song of his birth land. But that was his business, was it not?

At sunrise, all that was left was to swim out to our canoe and paddle hard at Naio's command. Soon we had cleared the reefs, the waves foaming and breaking to either side as we threaded our way through the channels the canny navigator's eye discerned. The sails caught the wind and carried us north.

North and north we traveled, and nothing but open ocean. Each noon, the sextant came out and there seemed to be satisfaction with our progress. Except from Naio.

"We could travel more westerly," he insisted. "Already I try to keep a heading a little west of north to make up for the currents and winds that prevail here."

Everyone agreed this was probably so. "Still, we would not wish to end up west of the gate," said Father. "We might never find it then. It is safer to reach our latitude well east of it."

Naio grumbled but sailed on northward. It was noon on the tenth day my father announced, "It is time to turn west."

30. West

"WE ARE NEAR," spoke Hurasu. He sensed the gate's presence in some way, I was sure. So could I. It was a little like when someone calls from one of the other worlds, seeking to speak from afar.

But there was no presence, no voice, only the feeling that *something* was there. The sacred isle in Lake A'auwa could arouse such a feeling in me, though it was barely perceptible. A gate of sorts existed there, I had been told, not one that could be passed through but a place where the walls between the worlds grew thin. So could the priestesses better seek prophecy there.

It also made it dangerous to those who had latent, unrecognized ability. Being close to that isle had driven some mad, unable to deal with the voices of countless worlds in their heads. Pana'a's sister, the mother of Rahaita had been such a one; she had swam as far out as she could on the lake one night and never returned.

"So we remain here?" asked Naio.

"We do. How long, I can not tell you. It could be an hour, it could be years. The gate will open when it opens."

"Years we do not have! If it opens not within thirty days we will have to leave to find water."

"And that island on which we stopped is the nearest source, is it not? So be it. The journey should be easier now we know the location."

Father at once said, "If we leave before you accomplish your task, we journey all the way home. Another expedition would have to come, some other time."

Hurasu accepted this with a nod, though I am sure he disliked it. Naio, on the other hand, was pleased. He and the young navigator Arisu went aside to make plans.

A large swell rolled, out of the north, but the winds were not heavy and we simply rose and fell through the day and through the next day, as we kept the canoe's nose turned into the waves and attempted to maintain our position. Hurasu could direct the naviga-

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tion now, for he knew the direction of the gate, whichever way we might turn, and could sense our distance from it.

And we waited. Hurasu told us, "Storms open the gate, so we can assume it is the season of storms in that other ocean. Perhaps there is a good chance of another. If not, I at least know the season to come searching."

"That one took me quite by surprise," Vehina informed him. "It was an early storm and not expected." Hurasu seemed pleased by that.

The second night Ulani gave us his epic at last. This time, it fell to me to translate for Lady Vehina, though she had picked up some Mora. Some Mora is not enough to comprehend a great epic couched in poetic language! Hurasu listened attentively, occasionally smiling at one passage or another. How accurate were they? Much of that story had been given to Ulani by Oorto, and the shaman would have seen the events through different eyes than others.

Not that Ulani would hesitate to interpret them as he felt best served his creation. That is expected of a poet.

I spoke afar to Malee the next morning, as I did many mornings. There was little else to need my attention here. I told her Ulani had been prevailed upon to give his epic. Neither of us had heard him sing it since we were small, though it was part of the stock of many lesser bards.

None deliver it as well as Master Ulani, I said. Not even Toare. Taona Marareta was a mighty hero. We sometimes forget that about your father.

Hurasu as well. He is both a great warrior and a great wizard. You needn't choose between them, you know, she reminded me. *I'm unlikely to be great at either.* Yes, that made me sound sorry for myself. I regretted saying it at once.

You must have some talent or Hurasu wouldn't have wanted

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you to come along instead of me. Now Malee was the one who sounded sorry for herself, or maybe just peeved with the wizard.

I had my reasons, came a voice. We might have known Hurasu could enter our private world if he wished. He could have been listening in all along. That thought made me slightly nervous. *And maybe you will learn them sometime. For now, this gate is my priority.*

And once it is closed no one can enter from the world of Marareta and my father? asked Malee.

So it is. There are many other gates in this universe but those do not concern me much, at least not now.

I would like to see one of them, ventured Malee.

And pass through it? The sorcerer laughed. I was certain the Hurasu seated in our canoe remained quite impassive. Those around him might not even be aware he spoke from afar.

Marareta passed near a gate when he came to my valley. It lies in the shadow of the great volcanic cone beside the road. I remembered that mountain from the epic. Surely Malee would too. *That way leads nowhere of any importance, a world of desert, but a place where men could live, if need be. I have never entered it myself, you understand, though passage is in both directions. I did not wish to take any chances. Some of my people have investigated.*

Oorto felt there was a place of power there, said Malee.

Hurasu nodded. *He would sense it.* Of a sudden, he held up a hand, cocked his head.

Do you feel it, Maratoa? It is happening.

III. ISLANDS

31. *Opened and Closed*

I DID FEEL it. More than feel it. I saw it. Not that it was much to see in this world.

“A whirlpool?” I heard someone ask.

“But the water flows out, not in.”

Water from another world, I realized. It was not much of a whirlpool but there was movement. Movement in the air above the sea, too? A whirlpool of air, a shadow on the water.

I could also see beyond it. Or into it. I know not how to describe this. It was not as when I sent a part of myself into another world. That other world, the one beyond the gate, was *here*.

A sudden flash of light. From where? Under the water, maybe, or from everywhere at once. Lightning. That’s what it was, distant lightning. As distant as another world.

Hurasu seemed to reaching through the portal into that other world. *This must be done at the other end, to prevent it from opening there again*, he said. Whether to me or to himself I am uncertain. I am not sure he even noticed I was still with him.

I admit it. I do not understand what he did. I can only describe it symbolically, as a latch placed on the gate. Maybe that was what it was to Hurasu too. A binding of the way. Then it was closed. No trace of the gate remained in our world.

But there had been something else before the way was closed. “Something came through,” I murmured. “Something large.”

Hurasu nodded. He looked tired, more tired even than when he had landed at the Great Falls. “But remained beneath the surface. A whale perhaps.” I do not think he believed this.

“It is done,” he announced to all. “You may return home, return to the Land of the Sleeping Sky.”

“And sleep safely ourselves,” I mumbled to myself. That way

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from another world was frightening. I was glad it had been closed, that no one would be coming through it ever again.

"Home sounds good," felt Naio. "And we can go straight this time!" At once, he and others busied themselves with the sails.

What had Hurasu done? I might ask sometime. Right now, I chose to renew the connection with Malee. Oorto was with her. *It's all done*, I told them. *We're on our way home.*

You seem disappointed, noted the shaman.

I had to laugh. *Maybe I am. It was quickly done and with no fuss at all. It seemed a little like when one blocks a person from speaking from afar.*

We could feel it, said Malee. *Both of us.*

Said Oorto, *I think we also felt it months ago when Hurasu closed the other way. We did not recognize it for what it was then.*

Yes. We had, hadn't we? A voice, shouting, intruded. *Something is going on*, I said. *We'll speak more later.* I broke off to see what was happening.

That is not always so easy when one sends oneself afar. Yes, most of 'me' remained in the canoe, but my thoughts were with that part of myself that had traveled elsewhere. To remain aware of two worlds is a skill a wizard must learn — and practice.

Many were staring out over the ocean, seeking. "Was it your ni'inoe again?" asked Vehina.

"Too large."

"Maybe a great whale!"

"There!" It was only a thick rod of some sort, protruding from the water, leaving a barely perceptible wake. What lay beneath it, beneath the surface? As one of the great waves passed over its position, we could make out a dark shape, long and fish-like, through the translucent water. As a monstrously large barracuda, it seemed, but I knew it was no fish of any kind. Then all disappeared into the depths.

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The silence was broken by Vehina. "I think it was a submarine."

"I think you are right," said my father. Beka nodded his agreement.

"A machine of some sort?" asked Hurasu.

Father answered. "A ship that travels beneath the water. Many were already in use when I left that other world."

"And many more have been built since," said Vehina. "You do not have such in the world from which you came?"

"We had no need of such machines in the world of my origin, for magic was powerful there. We wished to fly? We called upon elementals to bear us through the air. It is a world where such things are too easy. I fear that destroyed it, in time." Hurasu shook his head. "No, that is wrong. I do not fear. I know it lies in ruins but it is no longer my world nor shall I ever see it."

"And you have prevented this world from being destroyed," I ventured to add.

"I would like to think so. At least there will be no more submarines."

"But we may have to deal with this one," spoke Beka.

"Unless it comes ashore somewhere far from us," Father said. "We may never hear of it again — and they will run out of fuel, sooner or later." He turned to Vehina. "Who do you think they are? British, maybe?"

"Or American or Japanese," felt she. Japanese was a new word to me but I knew the other two. Kingdoms of my father's world.

"Whoever they are, they may not know they are in another world."

"A more important question might be why they were at the gate when it opened," said Hurasu. "Luck?"

"Luck put us there two decades ago," Father reminded him.

Hurasu's smile was enigmatic. It often seemed so. "Most likely."

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"But you doubt it is so this time."

"I do." There was no more to be said on the subject. Naio had turned the prow of our great canoe southeast, toward home, and the wind filled its sails. I would almost be willing to wield a paddle to get us there sooner.

Rain followed our course. A stop somewhere to fill our water skins might be unneeded if it kept it up. We caught it in the many wide wooden bowls carried for just such a purpose. What we did not drink at once we added to our stores. There was little else to do but huddle beneath an awning and watch the encompassing ocean.

"The seas grow large," remarked Hurasu, settling beside me as the sun sank toward a cloud-shrouded horizon. "A storm far off to the south."

I made a noise indicating acknowledgment. No more was necessary nor expected.

"You did not understand what I did at the gate, did you?" he asked.

"Only that you somehow, um, fastened it shut."

"Ah. Perhaps you grasped more of it than I realized." He nodded, perhaps in response to some thought of his own, and stared out over the darkening sea for a few moments. "A series of latches, in truth. One might have been insufficient. Or you could call them barriers. Neither is entirely accurate."

"Nor inaccurate," I hazarded.

"Even so. Warding is perhaps the most difficult of all magic, if you will allow me to use that word. Wizards in general dislike it."

Oorto had never objected to it. Neither did I. "You could learn it but I do doubt you would master it. Your gifts lie elsewhere."

I wondered if he intended to tell me where but, no, he went on. "The gods are better suited to such tasks, for they are not bound to their worlds the way we are. It was necessary that I, in a

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sense, place one foot in that other world while keeping one here, so I could draw from this one.”

“Oh. Then you put a part of this world there to block it?”

The wizard seemed surprised. “Close enough, my boy. Whether you have the talent or not, you do grasp the theory.”

“It sounds difficult.” I was perhaps being a tad facetious.

“Indeed. The isolation of your father’s world made it more so. I could not reach around through other worlds as I might normally do.”

I did understand that. In theory, as Hurasu had pointed out. “And it is easier for gods? I’ve never met a god.” Both this man and Oorto had warned against seeking them. Even my birth-mother thought it a bad idea, though she was the servant of a goddess.

“Then perhaps,” came a voice that seemed to contain both the sweetness of the honey and the sting of the bee, “it is time you did.”

32. *Yuza*

HOW HAD A woman come onto the canoe, a canoe in the middle of the ocean? She was tall and supple and extraordinarily beautiful – or was she?

She took a place beside Hurasu. None seemed to have seen her in the dusk. “Yuza,” said the wizard. “An unexpected visit. I greet you, my lady.”

“We felt the gate close, my sister and I,” she responded. This Yuza, this goddess surely, was unlike any people I had ever seen – even those come from another world. Her coloring differed little from Hurasu’s but her face had high strong cheekbones and a nose that stuck out not half as far as the wizard’s. Her hair lay in two long dark braids.

“You speak Mora.” He seemed surprised by this.

“I took it from this boy’s mind.” The goddess cocked her head at him. “Surely you knew gods could do this.”

“I avoided deities before meeting you and your sister, my lady. How fares Beyana?”

“That is for her to tell you when she is ready. My, it is rather hot here, isn’t it? I should have dressed more appropriately.”

The Lady Yuza was clothed from toe to neck in leather and fur and some heavy cloth in rich dark colors, with designs as intricate as a Mora’s tattoos woven into and stitched upon it.

“I am sure we could find you a loincloth,” spoke Hurasu. She only sniffed at the suggestion. “I doubt you intend to remain long,” he continued.

“Only long enough to see what had happened. This gate is thoroughly closed now too?”

“It is. You know you could probably have done it yourself.”

The goddess shrugged. “Had I studied such magic. I was busy with other arts.”

Hurasu turned to me, sham-confiding, “This is the trouble with gods. They are so caught up in the trivialities of their

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immortal lives that they forget all else. Had anything dangerous to them ever come through these gates —”

“We would simply have gone back to our own world and not let it concern us,” Yuza concluded.

“Leaving mortals to deal with things as they could.” Hurasu’s smile seemed almost indulgent. “As they usually do. But I blame not you nor any of your divine kin, my lady. This is your nature. You are a goddess of love and it is useless to ask you to be something else.”

She laughed at that, a beautiful liquid laugh. “Love? How polite of you, Hurasu.” Yuza gave me a wink, a wink that made me slightly uncomfortable. “I am a goddess of sex, the Queen of Snakes! And now must I go.”

She stood and was at once entwined in snakes of dark smoke. When it cleared, she was gone.

“Smoke drawn from some other world?” I guessed.

“Yes. The writhing smoke cloaks her disappearance. It can be disconcerting to actually see it. Terrifying even, for many.” He looked about. “No one seems to have noted her. I suspect she also drew shadow about herself while she was here.” It was quite dark now, and the sky was overcast. No light of moon or stars fell upon us — only a drizzling rain.

“She seemed at first the most beautiful woman I had ever seen,” I admitted.

“So it is with every man, even those who know her. I could not help feel it when she appeared just now.” But it did not last, not for Hurasu, not for me.

“Sexual attraction,” he stated. “That is what it is truly, to any man. Maybe even to any woman. Our minds confuse that with beauty, at least for a time. In her own world, in the form Yuza wears there, I suspect she would be completely irresistible. She must need diminish herself a little when she travels to other realms.

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This is one thing I do know about gods.” A low chuckle. “And most of it I learned from Yuza and her sister. Especially her sister.”

“You yet learn?” Hurasu was surely the most knowledgeable man in the world — and it seemed unlikely any other would ever have the longevity to match him.

“There are always new lessons to learn, even for one such as I. Yes, I still learn things even about myself. I have grown for three thousand years and hope to grow for two thousand more. Otherwise, why live those years?”

That I could not answer. Our canoe sailed steadily on through the dark.

33. *Smokers*

“THE THREE SMOKERS,” announced Naio.

My father surveyed the trio of islands. “I did not know these existed.”

“We passed near them on our voyage north, as you would have when first you sailed these seas.” He pointed to the southwest. “Another chain lies in that direction, westward from our homeland but far out in the ocean. We can continue southeasterly from here and retrace our route down the coast.”

The Smokers were large, surprisingly large, and somewhat barren. And they did smoke. There were fires beneath these isles. We had advanced into the midst of them, each about equally distant from where we floated.

“I suppose one could call this a bay,” spoke Vehina.

I wouldn’t. The islands were too far apart to say they actually enclosed this water. “Are we going to land?” she asked.

Naio shook his head. “There is no reason.”

“Aside from curiosity,” came her reply.

Father grinned at this. “I admit to being curious myself. I wouldn’t mind climbing up one of the cones a little way and taking a look at things. It is unlikely there will ever be another chance.”

“I should not have left my binoculars behind,” stated Vehina. Then, a bit more softly, “Nor maybe my revolver.”

“You had a gun with you?”

“It seemed a sensible precaution. A small Webley.”

Father only nodded at this and said no more of it.

I shielded my eyes with my palms, above and below for there was a glare on the water. “There are coconut palms,” I announced. “Maybe other fruit too.” I needed fruit!

“Very well,” said Naio. “If I can find a safe place to land you.” He looked to the sun, a little past its zenith. “There is time enough to do it now.”

A heavy swell still rolled from the south. Here and there waves

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feathered or broke as they passed over reefs in this gulf. The southernmost of the three isles blocked some of it and Naio brought our canoe up in its lee. It looked even less hospitable close up, much of it barren rock with a black sand fringe. But palms and other vegetation could not be denied the right to grow where it will.

We approached cautiously. "There are many shallow places, ridges beneath the water," Arisu confided to me. The young navigator had taken the steering paddle — as he usually did unless Naio wanted it — and I stood beside him. Naio himself was alternately tending the sails and checking the bottom.

"Down sails!" he suddenly called out. "We paddle from here." I abandoned my place in the stern and went to wield a paddle with the others. I could see no good coves on the jagged shore. None large enough for our long canoe.

Naio held up a hand, signaling a stop. "Close enough. There is a little sheltered place over there." He pointed. "Swim or take the small canoe. Who goes?"

Many had little interest in this barren isle. It was nothing new to those who sailed, I supposed. I was tempted to remain aboard and nap myself. An anchor stone was tossed into the water. Not much line followed it.

"I'll swim," said Vehina, and dove overboard without further words. I could only shrug and follow. The way was short and the waves small on the sheltered shore; we stroked easily to a shallow cove of rock and black sand. Who followed? My father. A couple of the sailors. Beka was coming in the little canoe. Was that Ulani with him? More men were taking to the water behind them.

Everywhere, nesting seabirds — on the sand, in the rocks, in the sun and in the shade of the palms. They paid us no attention but continued their raucous discussions with their neighbors. "A safe place to hatch their young," remarked Father. He looked up. "Except for the hungry skua." Those passed over now and again.

"The crabs too," said one of the sailors. "They will take unat-

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tended chicks, especially at night.” I was willing to take his word for it. Also, I decided I would rather not be here at night.

No Hurasu? He was not among the dozen or so of us gathered here. Father was gazing toward the ridge above us. “I’ve no intention of climbing,” said Ulani. “I’ll remain here with those who plan to gather coconuts or eggs.”

That included most of the sailors. Not all — Arisu had swum over and now stated, “I would see more of the waters that lie around these islands. It will help me understand them.”

Two major cones rose from the island but we were not very near either. “We should be able to make it to the top of that ridge,” spoke Father, pointing.

Vehina gazed up at it. “Would we see any other land from there?”

“I doubt it. But the reading we took just north of these islands puts them only a couple degrees from our familiar chain.”

I had no idea what that meant but Vehina seemed to. “There is no guarantee this world is the same size as ours. A degree might be more or less distance than there.”

“It’s close enough, I think.” A slight smile. “It was never a consideration until we had the sextant.”

“And it will cease to be one when we are safe at home,” said Beka.

We set out up the slope. The palms quickly gave way to scrub and to bare rock, jagged here and there, but smooth ways could be found. Even so, sandals might have been a good idea. The dark surface grew hot in the sun!

And there might be other heat below it, fires burning deep. I did not like to think of that. Beka and Father and Vehina led the way; I followed with Arisu and another sailor, a young man. Veae was his name. A friend of Arisu, I thought.

Everyone else remained at the beach. There were still bird nests, even halfway up the ridge, though not so many. “There are

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many recent lava flows,” remarked my father. “There and — there.” He pointed out areas to the east of us, closer to the great volcanic cone. “None flowing at the moment, it seems.”

Mid-afternoon brought us to the top. Bits of green showed here and there in the weathered rock. “The ocean,” said Arisu, gazing south. “I was not sure we would be able to see it.”

“But far away,” noted Veahe. A long slope led down to the water on this side. I had anticipated more high ridges to block our view. Perhaps we all did.

“The islands we visit next would be there,” said Arisu, pointing a little east of south. “The swell seems grown even larger.”

I couldn’t say about that but those dark lines stacked to the horizon did look ominous. There were places where the ground smoked down there. That was ominous too.

I turned to look back the way we had come. There lay our canoe, far below us. So tiny it appeared. A blue expanse beyond, but one could see where the water was darker and lighter, deeper and shallower, in that broad gulf formed by the Three Smokers. The other two smokers sat calmly puffing at a distance.

Vehina took my arm. “There,” she hissed, pointing. A dark shape beneath the water, well beyond our craft. Not ni’inoe, not a whale.

“The submarine.”

The others gathered around, attempting to make it out. “It is surely following us,” said my father.

“Do you think they see us?” Beka asked.

Father hesitated, perhaps forming his thoughts, and Vehina jumped in. “Not unless they surfaced and used binoculars.”

My father nodded. “So they may not realize they have been spotted. Let us do nothing to alert them.”

Arisu stood pondering the submarine before saying, “It is at least twice the length of our canoe. You no longer have the largest

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vessel in the world, Lord Beka.” He did not succeed in hiding that he thought this funny.

“For the moment,” the Admiral replied. “Let’s get back.”

Dusk lay on the water by the time we reached the cove. Many had already swum back to the canoe. “About time,” said Ulani. “The men have been ferrying coconuts out to the canoe all afternoon. If we’d any wood for a fire, we might have cooked some coconut crabs too. But,” he continued, holding up a basket, “we caught many for our next stop.”

Beka only nodded. He had things other than food on his mind. “Come then,” he ordered, heading for the small canoe, pulled up on the dark sand. Ulani followed, full of unvoiced questions. The rest of us swam for it.

Naio nodded gravely at our news. “It makes sense if they know not our world. Perhaps they will ask directions in time but I trust not men who keep themselves hidden! I am tempted to slip away in the dark.” He gave a quick sidelong look at Hurasu. “However, Lord Hurasu has asked me to stay here over the night, but out further.”

“As near the center as practical,” said the wizard. “Though it may not matter at all.”

“I do not understand why but I am willing if the taona thinks it a good idea.” Not Beka. My father. As I have said, he truly led here.

“You may understand in the morning,” said Hurasu. He shrugged. “Or if nothing occurs, it does no harm.”

“Very well,” said Father. But I noticed him in conference with the sorcerer a short time later and did not completely like the furtive looks they gave me. We did anchor near the center of the three islands and despite the occasional distant rumble I readily found sleep. I had worked hard this day.

Malee? I called out to her. She did not hear. For what did she search? A canoe — no, it was one of her father’s boats. A glimpse of

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Oorto. With her? I was not certain. And a dark woman. I knew that was Malee's mother, the long-dead Demba. Had I ever seen her? I stood beside A'auwa now. My father wept. It rained. A strange man with a sword as long and shiny as that of Hurasu, but curved. He was dressed all in white cloth. It looked like what Vehina had worn when she arrived.

Fire around me. All the volcanoes were erupting at once. I sat up with a cry. The nearest sailors looked at me with curiosity. "A bad dream, Maratoa?" one asked. They laughed at this but it was a laugh without malice, the easy laugh of friends.

Dream? Had I dreamed? I was awake now, wasn't I? I shrugged and laughed myself.

"Dream he did," spoke a soft voice. Hurasu sat cross-legged nearby. "So, it happened as I had hoped," he said. "A dream of prophecy in this place of power. Tell me of what you have seen before you lose it."

I did, as best I could. He made no comment, only nodding once or twice. There was not much to tell, really.

"Good," said the sorcerer when I finished. "The telling should help fix it in your mind. We will talk more of this in the morning."

With that, he lay down to sleep. I did the same.

34. Gifts

I FELT YOUR dream, said Malee.

You were in it, I told her. *And Oorto*. I was not going to mention her mother.

It is only right you dream about me now and again. In fact, she continued, *no other women should appear at all*.

The girl's claim of ownership, even at this distance, was exasperating. Malee had been doing this as long as I knew her. *I need not dream of women. I have Vehina here*. I knew I shouldn't but could not resist.

If you want someone that old and skinny, I might tolerate a second wife. You are on your way home again?

We just paddled once more into the open ocean. The waves are taller than the pines by A'auwa!

This I do not think she believed. I found it hard to believe myself as the mountains of water passed beneath us. *I should go to the Falls to greet you*, she said. *I'll tell Mouiri you will arrive soon*.

Tell my mother too. With that we ended our meeting, returned to our own world. Only a few days now. What would Hurasu do once we arrived? Cross over the high mountains to his kingdom?

Right now, he sat down beside me, my father with him. "Malee?"

I nodded. What did the two of them want?

Hurasu let me know at once. "Though my foremost reason for traveling here was to close that gate," he said, "I also was interested in you and Malee." He nodded toward my father. "And I did not mind visiting my old friend Malvern."

"You were most welcome to visit," Father replied. "Some of those who traveled across the mountains with me might not mind seeing you again. Most still live."

"Hito skirted my borders again a few years ago. I understand it resulted in him having his own epic." Those few years were nearly twice ten.

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"And perhaps he deserved one more than any of us. His stepson is the bard Toare, you know."

"A useful relationship for both, I would think. But back to our young mages." Hurasu spoke now to me, his voice almost imperceptibly grown more serious. "You and Malee are both unknowns in that part of your heritage comes from another world, from your fathers. Who can say what ancestors passed abilities on to you, abilities they were unable to use in that world?"

"But you are also their ancestor," said Father. "Neither would have these gifts if they did not inherit them from both parents."

Hurasu raised an eyebrow. "You understand that, do you? It took me a while to recognize the fact." Again, his enigmatic smile. "In the world of my birth everyone has such powers."

My father shrugged. "It is simple enough. There are scientific theories about inheritance that explain it."

"Ah, your world and its science. We will have to talk about this some other time." The wizard turned his attention back to me. "Despite my being a somewhat distant ancestor, neither of you is likely to have more than a normal lifespan, unlike many wizards of my valley. That does not matter so far as your powers are concerned. Malee seems to have come fully into those powers though she needs more training, to be sure. You have some growing yet."

"But not to Malee's stature," I said. I had no illusions there.

"Perhaps not. But your gifts differ. It seems clear that, as your mother, you have the ability to prophecy within you."

"Both his birth-mother and name-mother," murmured Father.

"Indeed. Malee needs be neither risked nor tested. Not as a mage. You, I believe, need both to become who you should be. That is why you are with me and she is not."

"My dreams last night were prophetic?" I thought them only a nightmare.

Hurasu might have been amused by the question. He was

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never easy to read. "I would think so. I recognized your Three Smokers as a place of power, a place where the walls between the worlds become less solid. That is sometimes so in locations where there is great physical power such as a volcano. Or the storms that opened those gates from the world of your father."

"There isn't an actual gate in that gulf, is there?" asked Father.

"No. It might be more accurate to call it a window, though neither gate nor window truly describes such a nexus of power. The nearest gate of which I am aware is that one in the mountains. The one I mentioned to Malee and Maratoa."

"Beside the road you traveled," I added. "Aiee! That was a big one." We had just dropped over the peak of one of the huge waves.

"It is good the wind is behind us," remarked Father. "For the most part."

"It is," agreed Hurasu. "Maratoa, you would do well to think on what you dreamed. Understanding might come." With that he rose and left us.

Prophecy. Was that my future? I had never taken my studies in sorcery too seriously. I had seen myself as a warrior since I was a small boy. And men were not prophets! That was for the priestesses.

There was no more to be said of it for now, but I doubted not Hurasu had some plan or another for me. Ah, that could wait until we were home. We sailed on through day and night and day again.

35. *Shelter*

"YONDER ISLAND WAS the first land we encountered in this world," said Father. The monstrous waves battering it prevented a close approach. It was an unimpressive place, little more than a single volcanic cone rising from the water. "I think it has grown since we last saw it," he remarked to Beka.

We passed north of the little island, away from the side where the great waves crashed. Naio gazed at them for a minute or more before saying, "The swell lessens. Now, Taona, do we sail directly home or follow the chain of islands?"

Lessens? He could have fooled me.

It was Hurasu who spoke. "I would learn more of these islands. Surely knowledge is worth a couple days more of travel."

Father agreed. "I would not mind seeing them again myself."

"Nor would I," spoke Ulani. "I have seen them only in the words I sing." He gazed toward the little isle we pulled away from. "This one rather disappoints."

"A great cone of fire in the epic, as I recall," said Father. "A beacon guiding us to safety."

"It did," Beka pointed out. "But there's barely enough fire to roast Ulani's crabs right now."

"Another reason to follow these isles and stop on one of them," replied the bard. "I'm not about to carry my delicacies all the way back to the Great Falls." They remained closed in their basket, feeding on scraps of coconut meat.

"Stop? We'll see," was all Naio had to say about that. "At least these waves will keep any Kohari home."

It was not far to the next island of any size, a low atoll. It too was mentioned in the stories. At the moment, some of the great waves washed completely across it. No place to stop! A much larger, more distant island, a blue mountain against the blue sky of morning showed further east.

"That looks like a pleasant place to stop," spoke Vehina.

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"That is the island where we met the wild men," I told her.

"Oh!" She sighed and gave it a lingering look.

Naio laughed. "This I think he knows from the tales of his father's journey, not from any skill at navigation." He too turned his eyes toward the distant shore. "We may land anyway. We are aware of the danger now and can guard against it."

That would mean approaching on the south side of the island, for there lay the harbor we had used before. Reefs lay in the channel we now traversed, and here and there the waves broke, completely in one spot, only their tops feathering at another. Naio and Arisu guided us surely around them.

They kept a man at the top of one of the masts to serve as lookout. "Ho, Naio," he called, "the underwater canoe still follows!"

"You see its eye-stalk?" Father and Vehina had explained the purpose of that part of the submarine that protruded from the water.

"No, the underwater canoe floats on top of the water now!"

"They can't run underwater all the time," said Vehina. "Need to take in air and use their diesels." I am sure only Beka and Father knew what a diesel was. I did not.

"Under the water or on it, they do well to follow us," was all Naio had to say. "These are treacherous waters. We should lie north of yon island tonight and seek a landing tomorrow."

We found a cove surrounded by high cliffs as the sun set. It would do well. And we no longer rose and fell!

But there was no place to land. That need wait for morning light. In that morning light, we approached the bay where we had landed before. There would be no landing today, that was certain. The great waves crashed on the reefs, allowing no passage.

"There was a heavy surf when we first saw this island but it rolled from the north," said Father.

Naio nodded. "Though it opens as much to the east as to the

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south, this bay is too exposed. We knew it was so." He shielded his eyes, gazed toward the distant lagoon. "It might be possible to thread our way in but I will not chance it."

"Then to the next isle?" asked Vehina. It was visible enough. And large. The largest of all those in the chain, I had been told.

"We shall at least sail by it," he replied. "Arisu! We turn east!"

More time to sit idly. As Hurasu had suggested, I thought now and again on my dream. It still made no sense and I felt it was unlikely it ever would. There were only disjointed images to it. Maybe I would dream again.

Or maybe I could go seek visions. That thought frightened me. Seekers in far places may get lost in them. Better to let what would come, come in dream. Perhaps by A'auwa or some other place of power in my homeland.

We arrived at the next island well before dark but Naio felt it best to seek shelter from the waves rather than travel on. This isle, too, rose mostly in cliffs. "We saw usable bays along the east coast," my father told him, "when we sailed around this island."

"I know of them. Not unlike the one we just passed by but perhaps more protected. We might chance one of them." His frown came close to becoming a scowl. "I do not want to lead that under-water canoe to our homeland. Maybe it will show itself if we stop here."

I think we all expected Naio to guide us around the north side of the isle at dawn. He pointed our prow south, into the swell. Soon a broken rocky coast rose on our left as we turned east again, toward the morning sun. The mighty waves battered against that foreboding shore, throwing up towers of churning water. I thought we sailed just a little too close!

More so when Arisu informed me that many reefs extended out into the sea along this coast, making the passage all the more hazardous. He and Naio took turns at navigation, threading our way through the treacherous waters. A vast wave might crash a

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little to this side or that of us, in a tumult of thunder and spray. I would be sure then we were lost! Yet they brought us through them safely, as safely as I might paddle down placid Teiri.

It was indeed a large island, larger than the kingdom of Va'aru, I think, and definitely higher. The Land of the Sleeping Sky may be ringed about by mountains but there is not much going up and down within their confines. The climb by the Falls of Pana'a, at the outlet of A'auwa, is the steepest I know.

"Beyond that point," Naio informed us, gesturing toward a mass of broken rock jutting into the heaving seas, "lies the harbor we seek." He looked toward the sails and, satisfied with them, went to the stern to take over the steering paddle.

"We approached this place from the other direction when first I saw it," said my father. "First we sailed around the north side of the island."

"I remember a deep channel," added Beka.

"Haven't you sailed here since?" I asked. He was the admiral of the Mora fleet, after all.

"Sailed past. Never stopped."

"I'm not completely sure you could get one of the double canoes through the passage," said Father. "I'm not even sure about this one."

Beka considered this. "Width shouldn't be a problem," he decided. "It is pretty long. Could be unwieldy if we try to enter."

To Vehina I whispered, "I doubt either of them remembers well enough. We'll have to trust to Naio."

"I'd trust him more than most," came her reply.

The jagged headland was awash with the foam of the great waves, which here rose straight from the sea with no reefs to impede them. Naio swung our vessel wide about the point. I knew not why. Perhaps to find a better vantage of what lay beyond? Ah, a reef projected beyond the promontory's tip, with the monstrous walls of water rising, their crests tumbling over as they struck it.

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Naio and Arisu and many of the other sailors stood looking at it, as our canoe passed to the east. "A heavy shore break," said one.

"Not so much in the channel though," felt another.

Naio nodded at this and looked the other direction. The waves pounded the coast further on but there was a way through here. "We go in," the old navigator decided. He and Arisu conferred in low voice for a few moments, with pointing here and there and nodding of heads. Then the younger man went to the steering paddle and Naio announced, "I'll handle the sails. The rest of you paddle!"

There was an outer channel, where we sat at the moment, with unbroken – or only slightly diminished – waves passing through to crash on the shores further east. Or north of east, I think, for the coast had begun to turn that direction. We passed through it, stroking strongly and angling to our left, toward the waves that had already broken on the reefs. Large they were still!

But no longer mountains. Hills maybe. Then, to my amazement, we were sliding down one of those hills. This I did not think was good; surely our canoe could not survive when it broke, crashed on the beaches ahead of us. No, we were being steered back the other direction now, toward another channel and beyond that channel lay a spacious harbor, the promised lagoon. Further out, to our right, the waves broke, but dissipated when they reached the deeper water of the inlet. We slid away from the steeper slope of our wave, out to where it rolled gently, and in through the channel, while the wave broke on the shores to either side, dissipating into churning white water. It had little strength or size left when it entered the sheltered lagoon.

I think I had little strength left too! A deep breath, a look around. Beaches, palms behind them and the slopes rising steeply behind those. True shelter at last.

36. *Surf*

“THAT WAS SOME excellent surfing,” stated Vehina.

Father sounded at least a little amused when he asked, “You have ridden a surfing board?”

“I tried it out, as I have many things. I’ve surfed the waves at Waikiki.”

“Bafa and I saw a man named Kahanamoku ride a surfing board in our world, shortly before setting out on our journey. This was in New Jersey.”

“Oh, I’ve met Duke,” Vehina had to inform us. She was paddling with the rest of us, leisurely stroking toward the sand beach. There was no need for exertion now.

“I am sure the Mora, those who first came here, are of his people. Polynesians,” said Father. “I thought I might like to attempt surfing sometime, perhaps at the Great Falls.”

“A splendid idea,” Vehina felt. “Ah, paddles down.” Naio had signaled the halt.

This lagoon was as large as that below the Great Falls, but there was no large river flowing into it. A modest stream cut through the sand and maybe two or three other smaller ones. There were falls, as at the island of the wild men, tumbling down cliffs and over rocks.

Hurasu stood and looked over the wide harbor. “The Mora should take possession of this place,” he said.

“Before the Kohari do,” Beka finished for him. “There’s no interest in it. Too much open space in our homeland still.”

“And north to the Gurang valley,” my father added.

“Right. And this island would be hard to defend, too.”

“Then no one lives here?” asked Vehina. “No more of those ape-men I would hope!”

Beka shook his head. “No rumor of such here but I wouldn’t be surprised if a few Kohari have taken up residence in the interior. Isn’t that said to be, Naio?”

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"It is. Refugees from the fighting in their homeland in recent years and from the headhunting of the old days. They would keep well away from this lagoon if they feared discovery." The navigator turned back to getting the canoe anchored. Probably Beka could have paid more interest to that.

Ulani came to stand beside my father. Both silently surveyed the beaches. "It was there," said Father, pointing, "that we saw the message Neatanu left us. I would think the tree it was carved on is long gone."

A palm. I had heard that from more than one account, as well as the epic. Twice ten and two more years? Yes, certainly gone. But plenty more had grown since.

"The tale of it lives on," replied the bard. "For now, at least." It must be strange to see for the first time places he had sung about. It was strange to me who had only heard the epics.

The small canoe had been brought alongside now and empty water-skins were being tossed down into it. "Swim ashore, those who will," called out Naio. Some plummeted in at once. We were near the beach, nearer than at the last island we had visited, or even the one before it.

The navigator returned to us. "I have assigned a few the duty of remaining aboard," he reported to Beka. His eyes turned toward the passageway into the lagoon and to the churning seas beyond. "I wonder if the underwater canoe is still out there. It would be dangerous for it to lurk where the waves crash."

"Perhaps," came Hurasu's even voice, "It would be best were it destroyed."

Father shook his head. "I would not wish the death of its crew."

Hurasu only shrugged at this and, turning, dove into the water. He stroked strongly toward the shore.

"How many do you think are on that submarine?" asked Beka.

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"Probably more than on our canoe," came Vehina's answer. "I'm for land." She followed Hurasu into the water. So did the rest of us, Ulani tossing his stick down to the canoe first.

As I bobbed next to my father, he remarked, "I remember now that I feared there might be crocodiles in this water. I'll have to say something about it when we reach the sand."

I did stroke a little harder after that. A camp was already being set up, near a pond. A camp of sorts, frond-covered lean-tos, or simply sleeping mats spread beneath the palms.

"Do we stay long?" asked Father. "I would as soon be on our way quickly."

"We should wait until the waves subside a little more," said Naio. "I would not wish to sail back out through them right now." I had no doubt he could, if need be, but saw the wisdom to this.

"They are already falling," added Arisu.

Father nodded, seemingly satisfied with this. "There are mangrove marshes down at the far end of this lagoon." He waved toward the east, past the inlet. "They might harbor crocodiles."

Beka at once called out, "No more swimming! Tell all!"

"Unless necessary. Keep an eye out, anyway."

"Best to use the small canoe," felt Naio.

"No time to explore here, it would seem," I whispered to Vehina.

"However shall we get into trouble?" she responded.

Somehow, I thought we would find a way. For now, it was enough to be on solid ground again. I helped others gather wood for a blaze. We would most certainly consume Ulani's crabs tonight. We might even add some more to them. I could see them scuttling about beneath the coconut palms, or sometimes even climbing up them. We do not have many coconut crabs in Mora lands for few palms grow below our cliffs, nor can the crabs scale those cliffs.

The night was dark. We feasted and then lay down to sleep,

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most of us. Guards were posted of course; that I was willing to leave to others, Beka, my father. The thunder of the waves seemed distant, a low, slow rhythm of the night, a chorus of frogs and insects rising over it. I had no problem finding slumber, slumber without pesky dreams.

I was jolted awake, as were men all around. A great thump? Or perhaps a loud groan. "Maybe a wave striking the shore," someone hazarded. There were murmurs of agreement to this possibility. "Some of the rocks might have given way." The sound was not repeated. Torches were lit.

A bright light shone suddenly at the inlet, a cold light, brighter than the moon. It seemed to move. A sound of clamoring voices rose, distant but carrying across the still, dark lagoon. A sound like — like what? Perhaps like Vehina's aeoplane. It started, stopped, started again, sputtered to a stop.

"I believe," said my father, "our submarine has run aground."

37. Aground

"SOMEONE MUST PADDLE out to it," Beka stated.

Naio was skeptical. "Now? It might be better to wait for light."

"If they are in trouble, dawn may be too late," replied the admiral. "Two men in the small canoe, to see what has happened." I think he intended to be one of those men.

"Let them be Mora," said my father. "Not anyone who looks European. They can learn about Vehina and me later, if need be."

"And me," added Beka.

"I sometimes forget you are not Mora, my friend."

"I am Mora. We both are." Beka, I knew, was sincere about this. Whether my father felt himself fully Mora, I was never quite sure. He had moods and his thoughts on the subject varied with them.

But he only nodded at Beka's words, smiled slightly, and said, "We need send someone who might be able to speak to them, whoever they are. Someone who can speak English."

He meant me, of course. "Who goes with me?" I asked. No sense in arguing about it.

"I will." "I'll go." "Me!"

Naio shook his head. "I would prefer someone more seasoned." He looked over the volunteers. "Heavu."

There was still a faint clamor coming from across the lagoon. The light continued to move about too, sometimes turning our way. Could those sailors over there see us? A sudden sharp hard noise, repeated several times.

"Gunfire," said Father. "Perhaps we should wait till the sun rises."

I was not completely sure what gunfire was, though guns had been explained to me. A way to kill from afar, as with an arrow. Should I fear a gun more than a bow? "I'm ready to go now," I stated. "How about you, Heavu?"

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"I'm ready. Let us take torches with us."

I thought that a fine idea. We used two of the sort carried on the canoe, long staves with oil-soaked bark cloth wound tightly around one end. One we kept afire and wedged into the stern of our little vessel. Another could be lit when needed. We did not desire its light in our faces as we paddled. The two of us stroked out onto the calm obsidian water.

Only a sliver of waxing moon had risen to light our way but the skies were mostly clear and star-filled. The dark shores could be made out, contrasting with that luminous vault, the palms and the cliffs behind them to our left, the rocky point separating us from the ocean to the right. All we could see of the submarine was its light.

Which pointed now at us. It was blinding. I gestured angrily for someone to move it. They should know better! A sharp command in a language I did not know rose from somewhere before us and the light was turned aside.

If we could hear them, they could hear us. I called out in Mora, "Friends!" and then again in the pidgin. I was answered in that same unfamiliar tongue. It sounded like nothing I knew. For no particular reason I repeated my greeting in Zikem, the language of Hurasu's valley. I shouldn't have expected anyone over there to know that.

We were close enough now I could make out the bulk of the submarine. Large indeed! Perhaps even thrice the length of our great war canoe. Twice and half again, anyway, and far wider. I leaned back and lit my torch from the other one.

A loud shout from the submarine, More than one, I think, and shouts of warning, I was sure. I think also that they may have saved my life. I became alert at once, as a monstrous form shot out of the depths, jaws wide, the many teeth glittering in the light of star and torch. I shoved my brand without thinking directly into the crocodile's maw.

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A moment later my spear was in my hand but the beast dove and did not resurface. Cheers arose from the still unseen crew of the submarine.

It was time they were seen. Heavu and I paddled closer to the side of the crippled vessel, as close as we dared with waves still battering it. Men stood atop it, men in white clothing. My dream! “Do you speak English?” I called out.

“I do,” came an answer. It was too dark to make out faces but I was certain it was the same voice that gave orders before. “What is this island named?”

I had no idea. Maybe Heavu knew. We conferred a moment and I shouted, “Matanak. That is the island’s name in the trade pidgin.” A Kohari name, in essence. I decided to add, “I am called Maratoa and this is Heavu.”

“Lieutenant-commander Yasu Sato,” he called back. “Of the Imperial Japanese Navy. You speak English. Are there English near here?”

I was not about to explain all that nor anything else for that matter. I answered only, “No.” That was honest. We were all Mora, even Vehina. Had not Poneiva accepted her as such?

I could see him conferring with other men. Most wore the same white clothes. “Do you need any assistance now? Is anyone injured?” I called out. Not that I could do anything about it.

There seemed some hesitation before he affirmed that no one was harmed. Perhaps Lieutenant-commander Yasu Sato did not think he should say too much.

“We believe the waves are abating,” I shouted to him. “We could attempt to pull you off in the morning, or get your crew to land. You will be safe until then?”

“If we stay out of the water.”

“And the mosquitoes don’t drain us!” Came another voice. More than one man over there spoke English. The accent was very different.

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The mosquitoes were bad here. I had thought it might be safer to remain floating in the channel than to attempt paddling back in the dark. The mosquitoes convinced Heavu and me to return at once and give our report. We stroked as rapidly as we might back across the lagoon.

I was grateful Vehina had showed up and given me reason to practice my English. Speaking with Father was not the same. But these were not men from her kingdom nor my father's. They were strange men with strange ways, and strange tools and weapons. This I must not forget.

Nor forget that I had seen these men — or those like them — in my dreams. So I was a prophet truly. I had not taken it seriously until now but it weighed on me as we slid across the dark depths.

We saw no more crocodiles but I was willing to allow others to wade into the water and pull our little canoe onto the sand. "Who are they?" were Father's first words to us.

"Japanese," I replied. "But some spoke English." Two, at least.

"That's not good," was all Vehina had to say about it. Maybe she knew more of these Japanese people than my father or Beka. I had no doubt she would be asked to share her knowledge. And if not asked, she would share it anyway.

"They seem to be in no danger," I went on. "They are stuck in the sand on the far side of the channel and the waves are holding them there."

"So they may be able to free themselves when the swell subsides," said Father.

"Or changes its direction," Naio added.

Father nodded at this. "We have a couple hours yet to dawn. Let us decide how we shall deal with these Japanese."

I left that to my elders, choosing to use those hours to finish my sleep.

38. *Exchanges*

AS THE SUN rose behind it, we could readily see the submarine, run aground on the east side of the inlet. By that light of dawn, all that had happened in the dark seemed now a dream. A crocodile — it had nearly taken me! I had no time to think on that then but now my knees shook at the memory of it.

“We will take our canoe over there,” decided Beka, “but not too close. Half the men aboard with Naio, the rest remain here with me.” That seemed sensible to everyone.

I was one to go, to be sure. Those men in the submarine had seen me — or heard me — and I was to be our voice a little longer. “If we are not satisfied as to their intentions, we will sail away and leave them stuck,” Father confided to me.

Naio was able to bring the canoe closer to the beach, so the swim was not so far. Still too far for me! I was greatly relieved to pull myself into the hull with all my limbs intact.

We glided slowly and cautiously toward the submarine, paddles rhythmically dipping into the still water, gray with morning’s mists. The surf’s sullen boom still rose to our right, beyond the rocky point. “Did their leader give you a name?” asked Father.

“Some long title — commander? I think there was more to it. And Yasu Sato. At first I thought that was one long name but I’m sure now it was two.” Fairly sure.

He nodded. “Commander Sato. That should do.” We stroked along without speech for a few moments. “Vehina tells me the Japanese have been aggressively expanding their domain in the other world. She thinks we should not trust these men.”

“They are far from that domain now,” I said.

“And will never return. This must be made clear to them.”

I wondered if they might already know. Or suspect. “They may not be so friendly to twenty Mora in a war canoe as they were to two of us,” I remarked.

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“Which is why we shall again put you in the little dugout and send you ahead,” my father answered. “But not with Heavu this time.”

Did he intend to accompany me? Naio held up a hand to signal a halt. “Try to keep the canoe about here, Arisu,” he called. “Maratoa, you and I will go see our visitors.”

We were to the west side of the inlet, just far enough out into the deeper water to avoid the breaking waves. They did not rise so high nor break so hard on this side. The submarine’s pilot had taken the wrong course in — it seemed likely the breakers had pushed them into the shallows and now held them there. Naio and I climbed down into the small canoe and paddled toward the stranded vessel.

It looked even bigger in the light. The submarine was all over a pale gray, without a single marking upon it. Mora canoes bear almost as many tattoos as Mora people! Several men stood atop it, having surely seen our approach. They held on tightly as the waves rocked the craft and sometimes splashed over it.

“Sleep must have been uncomfortable for them last night,” I remarked.

Naio laughed at this. “It will continue to be. We won’t be able to pull them off very soon.”

I doubted the great canoe, even with forty strong Mora paddlers, could ever pull that hulk out of the sand. I was in hailing distance now. “Commander Sato!” I called out.

“Lieutenant-commander,” he called back. He sounded like he thought it was funny. “Welcome back, Maratoa-san.”

I felt safe drawing closer to the submarine in the daylight. Too, maybe the waves had dropped just a little in size. Not as much yelling would be necessary. “I bring one of our leaders with me,” I told him. “This is Lord Naio.”

Hajimemashite, Naio-sama,” came Sato’s voice across the water. “We greet you as a friend.”

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This I must translate for Naio, who called back a polite greeting. To it I added, "The Lord Naio speaks no English."

"But he certainly handles a canoe well," spoke the man standing at Sato's side. It was surely the other voice I had heard in the night. Naio was skillfully keeping us close, much closer than I ever might have dared.

"Does anyone else over there speak English?" called Sato. "Or Japanese, for that matter?"

"There are English speakers." I would tell him no more than that.

"Ah, then we must go over to your fine vessel and speak English with them." He turned and spoke sharply – gave orders, I would think – to those behind him. A young man, in the same white clothing, stepped forward. "Sub-lieutenant Abe knows English. I suggest he accompany Lord Naio."

And I would not? I relayed this to the navigator. "If you are willing to stay, I will take this young sailor back to the canoe. But," he continued, looking up at the patiently waiting submarine captain, "I think he is more interested in having you to question than in sending the boy to speak with us."

Undoubtedly so. I could only smile and answer, "It is good I know nothing." I turned back, called out, "Very well! We'll try to get close enough."

Abe had moved to the top of a ladder on the side of the submarine. I thought a rope would be safer but this was not the time to attempt an explanation. Naio brought us close enough I could step out onto the outrigger, grasp a rung and swing over. Were there crocodiles in the depths below me? I was not willing to wait and find out, but clambered up as quickly as possible. The Japanese sailor was a little more hesitant about lowering himself, scanning the waters repeatedly before clumsily half-falling into the canoe. He seemed to have no balance at all!

I watched them paddle away before turning to my hosts. Small

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men. I had not realized that when I sat below them in the water. Many stood no higher than my shoulder and I am only average for those who are Mora.

Yes, I know I am but half-Mora by descent and my father is not a large man. I felt some trepidation about being alone among these Japanese, whatever our respective sizes. For all I knew they could be headhunters like the Kohari, ready to take me to their altar for sacrifice.

Oh, surely my father or Vehina would have warned me were that so. "I must ignore you for a few minutes," spoke Sato, "while we hold a memorial for the man we lost last night." He spoke briefly with the others in their own tongue. Shortly, more sailors began to climb out of the submarine's belly and line up on the wooden decking, clinging to what they could. Waves yet battered and washed over the vessel; there was some rocking but I doubted it would roll over and feed us all to the crocodiles.

More than twenty of them. How many lingered below? Sato addressed them in Japanese, eliciting an occasional response. There was some bowing in various directions that I did not understand. Then they were done.

"Seaman Matsumoto was taken by a crocodile. You may have heard us shooting at it." He assumed I would know about guns, didn't he? Lieutenant-commander Sato did not quite understand the world he was in. "We were attempting to launch a raft," he continued.

"You might succeed now."

"Not until we know the situation better and Abe returns to us." He gazed toward the canoe. "This island is not your home, I presume."

"It is not. The land of the Mora is further south." No harm in letting him know that.

"Mora?" Sato frowned at some thought. "Not from New Zealand?"

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His companion smiled, so slightly. "Those are Maori, sir. This boy and his people may not be from any land we know."

The captain nodded. "If Niyazov is right."

This other man was the only one not dressed in white, wearing simple clothing of that same dirt-color as those in which Vehina had arrived. It covered a compact, muscular frame. Oddly, his beard grew only on his upper lip.

"I do not know who Neasofa is," I told them, "but if he says you are in another world, he *is* right."

This surprised them. I could tell though they tried not to show it. Not the news that they had entered a new world, I think, so much as the fact that I knew of such things.

Neither pursued the subject. "Our objective at the moment is to get our vessel free," said Sato. "I know there are no tides to speak of on an island near the equator, so we can't count on that for help."

They could do nothing till the waves subsided. We all knew that.

"We do not know if we can count on anything for help," said the other man. "These Mora might be justified in letting us sit here and sailing away to their, ah, homeland in the south." I could not tell for certain whether he was serious or jested.

"I suspect you would sail away," replied the captain. One thing I could tell about Sato was that he did not much like this man. Conflict, tension, hidden but there. I have learned to see such things in the house of my father, in that of the High King.

"This is Takahiro Hashimoto," said Sato, introducing his companion at last. The man bowed, but not very deeply. I only nodded my head at him. He was older than the captain, wasn't he? Perhaps older than anyone I had seen here so far, though I doubted even he had four tens of years.

The two of them exchanged some words in their own language before Hashimoto disappeared into the submarine. Sato looked out

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over the lagoon for a while before asking, "How do you come to speak English, Maratoa-san? Is there an English settlement somewhere near?"

"The closest English are in another world, the world you have left behind." As before, I no longer counted Vehina as anything other than Mora. "My father came from that world."

"Ah!" He began to understand things, I was sure, to build a house of what he had learned. "Abe and your Lord Naio return. He is your leader?"

I turned to see the small canoe moving our direction. "A leader and a great sailor." That was enough to say, for now.

"Hmm, and your father is also a leader?"

Sato was beginning to understand too much maybe! "It is so."

"Then," said Lieutenant-commander Yasu Sato, "I must speak with him."

39. *Visitors*

"THEY HAVE A small raft," said Naio. "I told them six men may paddle to our camp but no more."

"That seems reasonable," felt Father. "We learned almost nothing from our young guest and I would wager they learned little from theirs."

I certainly hoped so. Maybe I shouldn't have spoken with the Japanese at all.

"Yet we know why they are here," Hurasu stated.

"We can make a good guess," Father countered. "It hardly matters now, though, does it? We have made gestures of good will to each other and can move on from there."

I told them all I could as we paddled back to our camp. It was not yet mid-morning when we reached the beach. Not a single crocodile had shown itself on our trip, neither going nor returning, but I had not the least doubt they had swum in the depths below us.

"This Hashimoto is the second in command?" asked Beka after I had given a second report on land.

"I — think not. There seemed to be some sharing of their command." An uneasy sharing.

"And apparently not a naval officer," added Father. "We'll learn no more until they visit."

"When they do, I want half the men well back, maybe even on high ground," Beka said. "I'll not trust them." He looked at Naio and shook his head. "I wish we could have told them to bring no firearms."

"If more than six come later, we will stipulate this," Father told him. "For this six, you must act the leader, my friend. I'll not step on your authority here. Indeed —" He hesitated. "It might be as well if I and the Lady Vehina were not seen at all."

"Sato knows my father is here," I admitted. "I saw no reason to hide that."

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“Nor was there. Abe has seen me anyway.” He shrugged. “I’ll attempt to remain unobtrusive.”

“But you may be right about Vehina,” said Hurasu. “I too should perhaps not make my presence known.”

That seemed sensible to all. Even to me, though I felt none of it was likely to matter much. Although it also seemed unlikely to matter, I announced, “I saw these men in my dream.”

Father only nodded. Hurasu gave me a long, penetrating look before saying, “We must explore this further.”

I too wished to explore it. So much need yet be explained, be understood. First, though, to fill myself with food; knowledge could be added later.

That chore kept me busy for some time. Fresh fruit had been gathered that morning — no bananas grew wild here but there were many other choices, some of which I had never seen before, green, red, small, large. Many were disappointing in flavor but I was assured they were all safe to eat. I was still enjoying my meal when a shout came from the lagoon.

Our visitors were on their way. I went down to the water’s edge to see them slowly paddle our direction in their clumsy raft. Six men, as agreed, I could see as they drew nearer. Sato I recognized as he stepped onto the sand.

“Two officers. They wear pistols,” Father whispered to me.

“And the long swords I saw in my dream.”

Sato and a younger man, perhaps about my age. Of those whom they led, one, I think, was in a position of authority over the other three. At any rate, he gave orders that they obeyed without any words. That man and another remained with the raft; the other two followed the officers. They seemed nervous and clutched their weapons. Those, I assumed, were what Father and Beka named rifles.

I thought it might be best if I introduced everyone and

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stepped forward even as Beka did. "Lieutenant-commander Sato," I said, "this is our leader, Lord Beka."

Sato bowed to him. "I greet you, Lord Beka, and thank you for the hospitality of your camp." Then he looked him over. "An American?"

"A Mora," Beka replied. "But born in Canada."

Sato only nodded and waved his young companion forward. "I present Ensign Haruki Kato." He spoke to the man in their own language and Kato bowed even deeper than Sato. "The boy has no English to speak of."

"He is welcome here," said Beka. He nodded toward my father. "This is the Taona Marareta."

Again, bows. "Maratoa's father, I assume?"

"I am. And yes, I came from America a long time ago."

"I admire the United States. I studied engineering at Stanford."

Beka asked, "That's in California, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is. Home of the Stanford Cardinals baseball team, as well." The man sighed, perhaps a little self-consciously. "I have missed seeing the Major League scores these past weeks."

"You'll be seeing no more scores," Father assured him. "Come along to the camp." He eyed the sailors' weapons. "I would suggest you not bring rifles on any future visit."

"But it is understandable this time," Beka added to this. Our visitors could be expected to take precautions. We all saw this.

"Very well. Lord Naio is not here?"

"He felt his presence was needed elsewhere," was all Father had to say on it. Naio in fact was on the canoe with a small crew, keeping an eye on things from that position.

"And Hashimoto is not with you," I observed as we strolled toward our camp.

"I did not want him, nor could I bring him without upsetting

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my second in command. Both are spies, so I left them where they might keep an eye on each other.”

“Spies?” asked Beka.

“Lieutenant Ishikawa, my second on this mission, is Tokkeitai, Naval Intelligence. Hashimoto reports directly to someone very high up. Too high for me to be comfortable knowing his name. It is quite beautiful here.”

A waterfall and a pond below it, surrounded by palms, lay central to our camp. I knew more warriors hid on the high ground beyond. A meal was not hidden but laid out on mats for us. Sato, as leader and honored guest, was shown to a place at Beka’s right. The rest of us sat where we would, in the fashion of sailors.

“I know we but get acquainted today,” said the Japanese leader after a few moments of passing food bowls about. “And that is well enough. But I must ask if you think we can get our submarine loose.”

“Perhaps when the surf subsides,” spoke Beka.

“Perhaps,” agreed Father. “Our canoe could pull some but I am not sure if it would help much.”

“And,” Beka went on, “we are definitely not getting in with the crocodiles to help dig you out.”

“A pull might help, along with our engines,” said Sato. “Forty strong paddlers? That’s what I estimated from spying on you these past several days.” He smiled when no answer came to this. “I shall be open and let you know I have a crew of similar size. Forty-five men, all told. Well, no —” His cheerful demeanor disappeared for a brief moment. “Forty-four since we lost Matsumoto. Not all sailors or fighting men, I can also tell you.”

“I expected more on a vessel such as yours,” spoke Father. Did he believe our guest lied? If so, it was not revealed in his tone.

“Twice that would be more typical. But our voyage was not typical.” A slight smile appeared on Sato’s squarish open face. “That is something we should discuss later, I think.”

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There was general agreement to that, but Beka did state, "If your submarine is stuck for good, we have room enough to take you elsewhere. To our homeland, if you wish."

Sato nodded amiably. "Though this is a lovely setting, I do not think my men would wish to live here without women." He fired off a few sentences in his own language then, maybe saying the same thing in Japanese. The two sailors laughed; the ensign blushed.

I had chosen to take a place at his side, hoping to draw him out, but Kato sat quietly through the meal, ignoring me and taking furtive glances about the camp, at the men. I tried not to dislike him, telling myself he was only nervous among a strange people, far from his homeland.

Not long past noon, our guests left us. "My officers will grow nervous if I stay too long," the Lieutenant-commander had joked. I think we all suspected he told the truth. There was much talk and discussion following their departure, Naio and Hurasu and even Vehina joining in. I had no desire for this and found a good place to nap.

After some time, a voice said, "I believe Hurasu is looking for you." I opened my eyes to see Ulani leaning on his staff.

I yawned. "He could have called me from afar." The bard knew about that sort of thing.

"Not that pressing, I assume," he replied, lowering himself to the sand. Then, "I do not like these Japanese. I can tell they think themselves better than us."

"Whereas we Mora are better than everyone," I said.

Ulani smiled but there was little happiness in that smile. "So our people like to think. Maybe we are no better than our visitors." He looked up. "Ah, your master has tracked you down."

Hurasu was indeed striding our direction. "It is time," he said without preamble. "Time to seek your visions."

I knew he was right. I would never be more ready, nor might there be a better opportunity. "What must I do?"

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He seated himself on the sand before me, giving Ulani only a glance. "We will enter the trance together, but where you might go, I am not sure I can follow. I can accompany you part of the way." His eyes met mine. "Help you find that way."

"This is the way my birth-mother follows?"

"In essence. Pana'a stands where all things are at once and traces the weavings of time. I taught Rahaita to find that way when she came to my valley." The sorcerer seemed lost in thought for a moment. "You are much better trained than she was."

I had a lifetime of training. My name-mother Rahaita knew nothing of the ways of sorcery when she crossed the mountains to the realm of Hurasu. But Oorto had told me she was an apt pupil, and more gifted than he.

As is Malee. Ha, if I learned to prophecy I could show that girl something, couldn't I? She had ever outstripped me in all other skills.

"Come. Let us set your feet on the path." We went *elsewhere*, just as if we meant to speak from afar, but traveling together.

Try not to enter any one world, came the sorcerer's voice. *Stand outside all of them.*

In nothingness?

Hurasu's retort came sharp yet good-natured. *You know that is an impossibility. The void is empty by definition so you can not be in it. Simply do not enter any world.*

Ah, be neither here nor there. So simple! I chose not to say that aloud. It would have sounded far too sarcastic.

Now focus on some object. Our canoe, perhaps. Try to follow it through time.

I found it with surprising ease. Whether that was normal or I had a talent for it, I did not know. But follow it? *There – there are more paths than I can count. How can I know which?*

That you must figure out on your own. I can go no further. I will try to send my voice with you. That voice was faint, as it was.

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Weren't the possibilities infinite? No, no. Huge in number, for we started from a fixed point, but not infinite, and many of them the same in all things that mattered. A weaving, Hurasu had called it, and I must find the one thread that mattered.

Put that from your mind. It is flowing water and it will follow a channel, the channel of what is most probable in my world. See where it takes its course, tumbling with least resistance.

Men. Kohari, in large bark-cloth collars and high crowns. Priests, engaged in some ceremony, by the sea. What boils out there in the water, rising from the depths? A great snake, staring at them and then disappearing.

A great fleet of Kohari boats. I did not recognize the rocky coast behind them. The square sails were more than I could count.

A voice, distant. Hurasu? *Come back*, it called. *Return!*

How? I could not see the way. I was flowing onward, caught in time. The paths before me grew, more and more ways to turn and none of them leading me back. Our Mora canoe appeared over and over, sailing this way, that way, sometime alone, sometimes in battle, sometimes broken, sinking.

Then, of a sudden, I stood beside A'auwa, the full moon shining on the water. I heard a woman's voice. *I am a god watching from the heavens.*

Another voice. *Come.* Also a woman, but quite different. A light touch on my arm, directing me? Ah, there was the way! All I need do was turn around and look — or had it been so simple?

I opened my eyes. Hurasu and Ulani were staring at me, obviously concerned.

"I got him back for you," came a female voice. There stood a tall woman, clad in leather shirt and pants, and with a bow slung over her shoulder. For a moment I took her for Yuza; she was the same yet different.

And she was quite pregnant.

40. *Beyana*

“BEYANA,” SAID HURASU. “You were unexpected.” His eyes went to her stomach “As is your condition.”

“Your child,” she answered. “As you might have guessed. I was certain you were going to be slain on Nagi, so I allowed myself to become pregnant. I was not going to lose you entirely, my love.”

The goddess turned her eyes to me. “Nor was I going to let this boy be lost, though he might have found his way back on his own, in time. And – I think there may have been another there too.”

“I heard a voice,” I offered.

“As did I,” said Hurasu. “It was the voice of Rahaita, brought somehow out of the past. So did she speak when she first sought prophecy.”

Beyana nodded. She probably heard it too. “I think there may be another deity involved here.”

“Perhaps so,” the sorcerer agreed. “Maratoa has seen the past before.”

“Hmm. Someone led him to a place of safety. Where was that you stood, young man?” she asked. “It was beautiful.”

“Lake A’auwa.”

“Perhaps not quite the A’auwa you know,” Beyana said. “Not that it matters. It was decidedly better than being lost in limbo.”

I could agree with that. “I saw Kohari too,” I reported. “A great fleet. And – and priests calling up some sort of monster from the depths.” I found that last part hard to believe now. It was very real in my vision.

I’m not sure Hursau found it believable either. “I expected no coherent visions this first time,” he said, “but having gone where you did, the doors of dream may have been opened.”

Ulani had held his tongue through all of this. Not so easy a task for the bard!

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"You are no goddess of the Mora, my lady," he began, "nor of the Kohari. But surely you are a goddess."

"I am Beyana and all my worshipers live on the other side of this world. Save one." She gave Hurasu a wink.

"Then allow me to be another," he responded. Ah, Ulani! He remained a diplomat even if he had rejected politics.

"Certainly, though you will find me a willful and forgetful deity. It is my nature. I care more for the hunt than for men. Most men."

"Those she leaves for me," spoke Yuza, stepping from her writhing snakes of smoke. "So you know now," she said to Hurasu.

"Yet I know very little," he replied.

The Queen of Snakes was much less heavily clad than last we had seen here, a single long garment of some thin material covering most of her. It shone softly and clung to the form below. Again I thought her the most beautiful woman I had ever laid eyes upon, though my mind warned me it was not so.

"Neither do we, really," Yuza said. "Demigods, and their mix of the divine and human, are unpredictable."

Beyana took the subject up. "Our child might be a god or might be mortal."

"Or anywhere in between," finished Yuza. "I have had several children by mortal men but this is something new for my sister."

"Never a man so powerful," Beyana told her.

"This is true. Nor so long-lived." Yuza turned suddenly to me. "This one is powerful too."

"He is," agreed her sister. "He sees the future."

"Ha, maybe we should ask him whether you carry a girl or boy!"

"A handsome boy, I hope. One who looks nothing like his father. It must be useful to see what is to come. Have you seen your own children, Maratoo? Or a wife?"

I shook my head. "No, Lady Beyana. When I tried to look,

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my own future was always right behind me where I could not see it.”

“That is the way with prophecy,” stated Hurasu. “One can not see oneself.”

“And perhaps that is just as well,” felt Yuza. “Let’s go home, Sister-mine.”

“Very well,” said Beyana, adding before both disappeared in smoke, “but we shall be keeping an eye on you and those across the water. They too have something to do with the portal you closed, do they not?”

“That they most certainly do,” agreed Hurasu.

41. *Revelations*

WHO WAS THE other presence in my vision? This, I was sure, I would never know unless she chose to show herself.

No one and nothing appeared in my dreams that night. I slept soundly and woke ready to deal with a more pressing matter — our Japanese visitors. “We are taking the canoe out to the submarine again,” my father informed me, “with half our men. The rest remain here with Beka.” This had been decided sometime while I wandered other worlds with Hurasu.

And Hurasu would be with us this time, his presence no longer hidden. Nor would be Vehina’s. “It is best to be open now,” Father continued. “We should not appear secretive.” Not that we wouldn’t have our secrets. I understood this. But hiding the presence of Vehina would seem suspicious when the Japanese learned of her — and it was likely they would, in time.

Eight men were in the raft that paddled over to us, once we took our position in the channel. The waves were definitely diminished and they seemed to have no great difficulty launching. Five clambered aboard our canoe, some more easily than others; three sailors remained in the raft, clutching their weapons. No rifles were to be allowed aboard. This had been agreed.

“I believe that is a machine gun they have set up on the deck of their submarine,” said Vehina.

Father peered toward it a moment, then nodded. “We may still be within range of it. Arisu!” he called. “Let us drift away from them a little, slowly.”

“I am surprised there is no large gun.” All this was in Mora, at which Vehina was becoming fairly adept. When she didn’t know a Mora word she would fill in with one from the pidgin and make herself understood. To us — there was no chance of Sato or any of the others understanding her words.

Except ‘gun.’ Neither Mora nor the pidgin had a word that

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held the same meaning. Whether any of the Japanese caught its use, I am not certain.

Yasu Sato again led, but neither of the young officers we had met accompanied him this time. Two older men were helped aboard, and one was surely not of their nation. He reminded me of no one so much as our two recent divine visitors. Hashimoto and a man in white I had not seen before made up the rest of the party now standing before us.

"My second in command, Lieutenant Nobu Ishikawa," said Sato, introducing the other officer. He was taller than the others, and very narrow and, I thought, stood like a post someone had driven into the ground. He bowed in the manner we had come to expect from these Japanese.

"Takahiro Hashimoto," spoke the Lieutenant-commander, "and his charge, Doctor Vladimir Niyazov." The one mentioned before, the one I had given the Mora name of Neasofa, and would probably continue to think of as such. Hashimoto said something to him in a language I did not recognize but was sure was not Japanese.

Vehina leaned close and confided, "German. I understand that language but there is no reason to let them know, eh?"

"And Doctor Gorou Okada." This man was small and bald and had some sort of odd fabrication of metal and crystal perched on his nose. Maybe Father would know what it was.

There was more bowing and greetings made in our various languages. "Our friend Vehina," said my father, indicating the woman. "Formerly known as Lady Lydia Viney."

At the mention of the name, Ishikawa scowled and unleashed a torrent of vehement Japanese.

Sato raised an eyebrow at him before telling us, "The Lieutenant claims Lady Viney is a spy, sent to interfere with the Empire's peaceful dealings in the Pacific."

Vehina only let out an 'hmmph,' and Father moved on.

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“And this is Lord Hurasu. He is the expert on how we moved from one world to another.”

Hashimoto explained this to Niyazov. His dark eyes focused on the wizard, his brow contracted. Was there a touch of fear in his expression? “He says you look like Zahunsky.”

“Xahun and I came from the same world. I can tell you he is now dead.” A thin smile. “By my hand.” Hurasu then added a few words in what I was sure was yet another language. Niyazov responded in the same tongue.

“I picked up a smattering of Russian when I was on the other side of this world,” explained Hurasu, “but hadn’t the time for learning the language. Nor did I need it once the gate was shut.”

There was translating and everyone seemed satisfied enough – but curious, I was sure. “We can discuss these things later,” my father told them. “But we must ask why you are here.”

The Lieutenant-commander did not hesitate. “To find this gate of yours, of course. We’ve gone through it, haven’t we?”

“You have, and there is no returning. It was always one way only and now Hurasu has blocked it completely.”

“So I have,” the sorcerer agreed.

Ishikawa and Hashimoto exchanged words in what I was sure was yet another tongue. How many did these people speak? I suppose I shouldn’t have been surprised when Vehina addressed them in that same language. Perhaps neither should the Japanese.

A few somewhat polite words and then she reported, “They both speak French. Not as well as I, of course. On the other hand, my German is barely adequate.” She laughed and, switching from Mora to English, told Sato, “They won’t be able to get away with talking behind your back anymore, sir.”

“I am sure they spoke well of me always,” he answered. “So we are stuck here, it seems. This will require discussion with my officers and crew.” There was hesitation before the rest came. “Understand that our purpose was to investigate, not to fight. We

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have only one light machine gun and a small number of rifles. Best I be open and tell you this now.”

“And we have bows and spears,” answered Father. “And the means to leave if we choose.”

“And my sword,” Hurasu added to this. “I see you carry swords.”

“It is a requirement of a Japanese officer. I find them a nuisance.”

Hashimoto chuckled. “Fortunately, it is not demanded of me. But, sir, I think those rules may no longer apply.”

“They’d best apply a while longer if we are to maintain discipline,” replied Sato. “My sword is but a mass-produced one, of no great quality. What is known as a *showata* blade. The lieutenant carries a fine traditional sword.” He spoke some words to Ishikawa, who gave a slight bow and drew his sword, holding it before him with two hands. I think the lieutenant was more than proud of it.

Hurasu pulled his long straight blade from its scabbard as well, holding it in the same manner. The two locked eyes for a moment and returned their weapons to their sides. “An excellent blade,” murmured Hurasu. “The best I have seen outside of Atlantis.”

Several evinced curiosity at the mention of that name, and not all of them Japanese. None asked questions. I did not doubt they would come in time. Indeed, ‘Atlantis’ was another thing I should ask my father about.

Father was gazing toward the submarine. “We’re not getting you loose today, that is certain,” he said. Father was again openly in charge, despite his earlier attempts to remain inconspicuous. The Japanese seemed to accept this. “You and your men are welcome to visit our camp. No rifles. If you feel you must wear your pistols, we will allow this. No more than twenty men at once. This is acceptable?”

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It could have been an order rather than a question. "It is, ah, Lord Marareta."

"Taona. You may call me the Taona Marareta. It is but a title of respect and of no great importance."

Lieutenant-commander Yasu Sato had enough sense, I was sure, not to believe that.

42. Tea

BEFORE WE LEFT, Sub-lieutenant Abe joined us on our canoe. Sato used the word *liaison* to describe his role. A new word for me but one readily enough understood. An ambassador of sorts. I decided I should teach him our language.

The pidgin first, as we had with Vehina. It would be good enough for communication but we could still speak the Mora tongue when we did not wish him to understand. "Lieutenant Ishikawa is knowledgeable of some native dialects," he told me. "It serves him in his duties with the Tokkeitai."

This was not particularly useful knowledge, except it told us the lieutenant had experience dealing with those who were not of his nation. Whether he dealt well with them we could not know — but I suspected otherwise.

The next morning, thirty paddlers manned our great canoe. We had ropes. The Japanese had more ropes. Perhaps we could help pull them loose.

"The seas are but half the size they were when we arrived," noted Naio. Waves still washed against the submarine, however, pinning it to the sandy shallows.

"Then we could readily leave whenever we choose," Hurasu commented. "I think it would be wise to do so." He did not command here but his advice carried weight. Father certainly respected him. He also mistrusted him — this I had seen.

Lines were stretched from the bow of the Japanese vessel and its engines came to life. We strained at the paddles but to no avail. It would not budge from the sand's grasp and the waves pushed too hard against our efforts.

"Perhaps it would be better to pull from the other direction," mused the lieutenant-commander after we abandoned the attempt. "On another day."

Naio was in agreement with this when it was put to him. "On another day, yes." He gave the submarine a long look, perhaps plan-

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ning just how he might accomplish its release. "We could pull its stern out into the channel, maybe."

So the waves no longer broke against its flanks. That made sense, but I was not confident we could move that great hulk.

"I'd best return to my command," said Sato. "It is only proper that I invite you to share our hospitality, as we have shared yours."

There were many sidelong looks after this statement. Dare any of us go into the belly of that monster over there? "I will accept your invitation, sir," said Hurasu, "and I ask you to accompany me, Maratoa."

I avoided the temptation to mask my concerns with a nonchalant shrug. "Very well," was all I said, keeping as much emotion from my voice as possible.

"And I too," spoke my father. "We thank you for the gesture, Lieutenant-commander."

"And I welcome you, Taona," came the reply, Sato using the proper title this time. "I welcome all of you." He glanced about to see if there were any more takers. No. That surprised me not at all. We crossed over in the raft, with a promise to paddle us home later. There was no reason to doubt this but we might have anyway. At least some.

"This deck seems rather barren," commented my father as we climbed aboard the submarine. "And I note a lack of markings."

"Officially," said Sato, "this vessel does not exist. The records show that it was decommissioned and broken up a few years ago. All this so it could undertake secret missions of, ah, reconnaissance."

"Spying."

"Among other things. That was not our mission on this trip." He led us down a steep stairway into the hull. "The submarine has been modified to stay at sea longer, the torpedo tubes removed to allow extra fuel. The deck gun was dispensed with also."

It was cramped. Smelly too — worse than Vehina's aeroplane.

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We followed him down a narrow passageway. The floor tilted a bit to remind us the vessel was stuck. There was some swaying back and forth as well. My heart told me I should run the other direction and find the fresh air! Almost would I be willing to jump into the lagoon and risk the crocodiles.

To the left and into a small room. I assumed all rooms were small here. A low table stood central and men were about it, seated on the slanting floor. The two Sato had named spies, Ishikawa and Hashimoto, were there, along with Okada and Niyazov. I had learned from Father that their titles of 'doctor' meant something similar to his own of taona. But not quite the same.

Another man was standing to the side, busying himself with some tools I did not recognize. I could recognize that there was a preparation of food involved. "Petty Officer Shimizu will serve the tea," Sato stated. "I fear we can not use our good cups with the vessel rocking so." This, I think, was a joke.

Father spoke. "We have found no tea in this world though we have admittedly not searched most of it. However, we do grow coffee now in the land of the Mora." Those who had come from the sea with my father had introduced it to us. I had missed coffee on our voyage.

"I know nothing of either of these," said Hurasu. "They were not known in the lands I traveled two-thousand years ago, before I left your world."

"Two-thousand?" asked Doctor Okada. "What is this nonsense?"

Hurasu only glanced at the man, without answering. Hashimoto, however, took up the subject. "You are not of our world, you say, nor of this one."

"I am not. I passed through yours on the way here, lingering a few centuries." He paused. "As did Xahun. He who named himself Zahunsky."

Niyazov caught that name and spoke at some length in

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another language. I think it was the one Vehina called German. Hashimoto did not bother to translate it. Would that Vehina were here to do so!

We seated ourselves with the others. The tea was served in metal cups, only half-filled so we would be less likely to spill, I think, as the submarine swayed. It was no worse than the rocking of a canoe at sea; sailors become accustomed to dealing with such things.

Niyazov spoke again, eyeing Hurasu. This time Hashimoto did translate. "He asks if you are the one who closed the way behind Zahunsky."

"I am. As I closed the other way behind you. Not," he continued, "that you could have passed back though it. But none will follow you."

I tasted the tea while my companions pondered this. It was not bad but it was not coffee.

"Let me tell you of Niyazov," said Hashimoto. "He is a Russian, as you may recognize."

I noted Okada translating all this into Japanese for Ishikawa's sake. The lieutenant barked out a laugh and made some sort of remark.

"We are reminded," Hashimoto said, apparently amused – or acting as if he were – that Doctor Niyazov no longer calls himself Russian but claims to be a Turkestan nationalist. This certainly played some role in his defection."

"Along with a fear of being caught up in a purge," added Okada.

This time Hashimoto's amusement was surely genuine. He continued his account. "Doctor Niyazov was one of Zahunsky's chief assistants. Following his apparent failure and disappearance, the project was abandoned. But Doctor Niyazov knew he had succeeded, that he had passed into another world."

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"Where he perished," said Sato. "Is that correct?" This was directed at Hurasu, who nodded.

"Our doctor was sent in disgrace to the east, to work at a mining facility, where he contacted us. We had heard something of Zahunsky's experiments. The Germans had gotten wind of it too and were investigating. I learned of that myself, being stationed in Berlin at the time, and that was one reason I was assigned to this mission." He gave the Russian or whatever the man was a long look. "Not that anyone actually believed any of it. Be that as it may, Zahunsky did leave notes that gave Niyazov a good idea of where the other gate might be located."

"So we were sent to look for it," spoke the Lieutenant-commander. "I think we all believe now, even the ever-skeptical Doctor Okada."

"I still reserve judgment on several aspects of this affair, sir," stated Okada.

"This is exceptionally good," said Hurasu of a sudden. "I must find tea plants for my valley."

"Trees," Father said. "Small trees, I believe. They should grow well there, I think."

"But we have no way of showing you what they look like," said Sato.

Hurasu appeared thoughtful but made no immediate reply. Was he thinking of poking about in other worlds to get a look at a tea tree? It was impossible to bring one back, of course, unless it came through a portal. Or it was impossible to bring one back and have it remain, to put it more accurately. Sooner or later it would be pulled back to its own world. Oorto had impressed that on Malee and me early, though he discouraged such practices in general.

When the sorcerer spoke, it was of other things. "I should tell you something of Xahun and myself, and the world of our origin."

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“Atlantis,” said Okada. “Western mythology.” He seemed to dismiss it with those two words.

“Yes, Atlantis. Whispers of that land — or one much like it — reached your world but the stories fall far short of what once was. No more.” He shook his head. “All destroyed now. A wasteland. So I have learned.”

“There are many worlds then?” asked Hashimoto.

“There are infinite worlds. Mine was a world rich in magic, a home of powerful sorcerers. I sought to be one myself, to rule, but met defeat and fled. Ah, the beauty of Atlantis, the towers that seemed to touch the heavens, gleaming in the light of the two suns! I shall see such never again.”

Okada was attempting to remain skeptical, I was sure, but having difficulty. He seemed entranced.

“So it was I found my way to your world, a world with little magic, and then to this one. A way opened in the mountains you name the Urals — the way I closed not so long ago, but not before Xahun passed through with his troops. Most of those troops,” he added, “now dwell in peace on the Isle of Nagi, on the far side of this world.”

“That is good to know,” said Hashimoto, following an exchange of words with Niyazov.

“I agree. I wished them no harm. Xahun was another matter; he was one of those who laid waste to Atlantis and then came seeking new worlds to conquer and rule. He was a creature of evil — and I might have become the same had I remained.”

“A second chance,” spoke Sato. “Now all of us are beginning again. I shall never see my wife, shall I? Our families are dead to us and we dead to them.”

“But we live on here,” Father said.

43. *Languages*

“LIEUTENANT ISHIKAWA BELIEVES we should take control of this lagoon and island, making it our base.”

“It is too vulnerable,” I said. “Unless one wishes to spend ones life hidden in the mountains.” I didn’t really know this for sure but that was the consensus of my elders and I was quite willing to share it with Ichirou Abe.

We spoke mostly in English but I continued in my effort to teach him the pidgin. Kato, too, though that proved more difficult as we had no shared words. Both should have Mora names, I felt, but hadn’t decided on ones yet. It might be well to ask their opinions first.

Anyway, it would certainly be best if our Japanese visitors did come home with us and became Mora. Best for them and for us.

Vehina was making a similar attempt to teach Neasofa, one of several who had come to visit the camp this evening. He had accepted the Mora name at once when it was suggested. “The name I was given is Russian,” he stated. “Any other name would be preferable.” So Vehina translated his growls. I think he went out of his way to sound and look angry. Neasofa was a squat, thick person, with heavy eyebrows and prominent cheekbones above a dark beard, so it was not too difficult for him.

“In fact,” Vehina confided when we joined the others for a meal, “the man is delighted to be in a new world with a new life. His old one was not so good.”

“If he had to work for Xahun, I am not surprised,” spoke Hurasu. There was something of a jest in that but he sounded much more serious as he continued. “I have been told life was hard in the Russia he left.”

When this was translated, the man nodded a vigorous agreement. He then went on for some time before giving Vehina room to translate. “He tells me his doctorate is in engineering,” she

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reported. "He assisted Zahunsky in assembling some sort of machine that would open the way between worlds."

"Xahun explained that to me," came Hurasu's terse comment. "It will work no longer."

"So he understands." More speech between the two. "He says something like a great tunnel or cave opened at the end in Russia and then it suddenly collapsed and disappeared. As did those who had passed through. Some who had just entered were killed, he thinks. There were cries of anguish but no bodies." Vehina's eyes moved from Neasofa to Hurasu. "He was happy to hear that most made it through safely."

A few more words. "Except for Zahunsky, of course."

Abe spoke up. "It was felt important that engineers be part of our mission. The captain, Ensign Kato."

"But not Okada," guessed Father.

"No, he is a physicist." The young sailor snickered. "He greatly desired to prove all of this a fraud. Especially when he could find no flaws in the papers Niyazov brought with him."

Neasofa listened to the translation of this and then laughed uproariously. I think I preferred him when he scowled. I also preferred that he not look at Vehina in quite the manner he did. Hurasu appeared to share that with me. So it was that he and I just happened to stay with the pair after our meal, an unspoken agreement between us.

Not that we couldn't have spoken from afar and discussed things without Vehina and Neasofa being aware. I should speak with Malee soon. I had been neglecting our bond.

Tomorrow. I'd be sure to do it tomorrow. Right now, Neasofa was in the midst of another language lesson. All three of us barraged him with words from the pidgin, probably confusing the man terribly.

"Poor fellow," spoke a feminine voice.

"He looks like one of ours, doesn't he?" answered another.

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"So he is, my ladies," said Hurasu. "People of his nation were among those who passed into Nagi in the not too distant past."

A string of words erupted from Neasofa that seemed neither German nor Russian. Beyana cocked her head. "Hmm, a Turkic dialect, to be sure." She replied to him in what was seemingly the same language.

He fell face first in the sand at their feet. "Why did you never do that, my love?" asked Beyana.

"Silly girl," said her sister. "Don't you know Hurasu is an atheist? He doesn't believe in us."

The wizard shook his head, giving the two a tolerant smile. "On the contrary. But I know enough of infinite being not to take deity too seriously." He looked down at Neasofa, who was carrying on about something, his face buried. "Unlike this fellow. Won't you do something about him?"

"Do get up, mortal," commanded Yuza. "Oh, wrong language." She repeated it, in German, I thought. He rose to his knees, staring up at the goddesses, and addressed them in the same language.

"He's calling them the gods of his ancestors," reported Vehina.

"Not true, strictly," Hurasu said. "Related. One among infinite variations."

"Indeed?" She shrugged. "I suppose it fits in with his Turkestan nationalism Hashimoto mentioned." Vehina gave the two goddesses a long looking over but made no comment.

"She is not one of ours," spoke Yuza, "but I think in another sense she might be one of yours, Sister."

Beyana nodded. "A huntress, yes. And here comes another whose heart would serve us."

Ulani approached across the nighted sand. A fire burning somewhere behind him silhouetted his form. The bard leaned on his staff, proclaiming, "I serve beauty, my ladies, and you are most beautiful this night."

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This could not be denied. Both still covered most of themselves up, in light clinging material of some sort. It did not hide their shapes at all. Nor Beyana's pregnancy, to be sure.

"We should take him home with us," decided Beyana. "He could sing and flatter me and take my mind off what this vile Hurasu has done to me."

"But he would pop back here after a while," Yuza told her. "And what if his friends had sailed away?"

"Hmm, then I must remain here a while."

Yuza eyed Vehina. "I think perhaps I shall as well."

Vehina only smiled.

44. Resting

"I TRIED TO be a good Marxist atheist all my life," muttered Neasofa. "Last night showed how wrong I was about everything."

Takahiro Hashimoto translated and said no more for a few seconds. Then, "Is what he says truth? Or some fever dream?"

"He indeed sat at the feet of a goddess last night," spoke Hurasu, as though it were the most ordinary of things. "Deities do sometimes have dealings with mortals in this world." That they certainly did, Lord of Visions!

I too had had sat with Hurasu and Ulani and the goddess Beyana for a time while Yuza and Vehina had wandered off into the darkness. Neasofa had seemed ready to follow but a few words from the Huntress – for so Hurasu called her – brought him back.

Perhaps part of me had wanted to follow as well. Not from jealousy, you understand, but a feeling of being responsible for Lady Vehina. That feeling I was sure I shared with Hurasu.

Hashimoto and Sato then carried on at some length in Japanese. They clearly disagreed about something but I was not sure what. It seemed a good time to go a bit aside and speak to Malee.

We are growing impatient, was the first thing she said to me.

That's not my fault.

The underwater canoe is still stuck? You should leave it!

My father thinks otherwise and his is the voice most hear.

They might do better to listen to that of Hurasu, I said only to myself. I think – I have said before it is sometimes difficult to be sure of such things when speaking from afar.

We but gossiped after that, of the little things going on in both our lives. Malee had spent a couple days at the House of Those Who Sail the Sea but now waited our return at the more comfortable House of Va'aru.

And Vehina has a goddess lover? she asked. *What thinks Hurasu of that?*

He has his own goddess lover, I reminded her.

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Hmmph! You'd better not get involved with one. Or anyone else!

There were no other women near so that seemed unlikely. *I'll try*, I told Malee. *But no promises.*

She laughed but perhaps it was unkind of me to have said it. *Try hard*, she told me, before we made our farewells.

Malee. For all I knew, maybe we would marry. I loved her but was it as I should love a woman? We were too like brother and sister at times.

And, too, she was aware I had not avoided the company of other women. There had been lovers. Malee had taken none. Ah, all this could better be thought on when I returned home. I did not even know what to do with my life yet. My new-found ability to prophecy might change things, if I let it be known.

Vehina was seated quietly nearby when my consciousness returned to this world. "Your girlfriend?" she asked.

I chose not to correct her misconception. "I spoke to Malee." Then I could not resist asking, "And what of your girlfriend, my lady?"

I had not heard her raucous parrot-laugh for some time. "Gone and unlikely to return to me. I take it this sort of thing is not shocking to the Mora."

The question made no sense to me. Vehina recognized this and went on. "She told me all about her sister and Hurasu. I feel no jealousy, of course, but maybe some pique over your wizard's indifference. Beyana should be far more angry!"

This was a little too close to the thoughts that had just been walking about in my own head. "Remember he has had thousands upon thousands of lovers in his long life," I said. I wondered how he compared in this to the immortal goddesses.

"So he should have learned better by now." Her mock scowl turned to a laugh. "What is planned for today?" she asked. "Will there be another attempt to pull the submarine off its sandbar?"

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I shook my head. "It has been decided to rest today and try again tomorrow."

"That explains why the Japanese officers are taking their leisure here, I suppose." Vehina frowned. "You know I do not trust them."

"But perhaps a day of hospitality to them might bring friendship."

"If they aren't scheming to take control here somehow."

Would they? I knew nothing of these people. Maybe Vehina was right. What I did know was that our leaders would be taking precautions. Father is as mistrustful as any man I know and always seeing the worst that can happen.

He now sat with Hurasu and the others, still where I had left them. "Any sign of Ulani?" he called out on spying me. "I could use his political expertise."

Father had plenty enough of his own, I could have said. Instead, I only shook my head and took a place with them.

"These two," he said, indicating the Japanese officers, "are uncertain of their future course."

"Assuming you can get them unstuck," said Vehina.

"That does make a difference," Sato admitted. He looked about this idyllic beach before saying, "There are worse places to be stuck I am sure."

"But we'll assume we are going to get unstuck," Hashimoto said. "I favor accompanying you back to your homeland and maybe making it our homeland. If you will have us."

"And I am not so sure about making such a decision at once. There is much more to this world, and other peoples I am told."

"I like these people."

"As do I," said Sato. "That does not mean I completely trust them." He did not attempt to hide this by switching from English. It was a sensible statement and I am sure he knew we all understood.

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"Then visit them," Vehina told him. "Do you think the submarine would fit into the lagoon below the Great Falls?" This last question was addressed to no one in particular.

"It is wider and deeper than the one here," I offered. But maybe even trickier of entrance and the depth was all to the middle.

"We both want what is best for the crew," said Hashimoto. "Sato has an obligation to those under his command, of course."

"And I do not completely like the idea of them giving up who they are and becoming Mora."

"I highly recommend it," Vehina stated. "I'm quite enjoying being Mora."

"You are few," said Father. "Wherever you settle, you are sure to be absorbed into the populations already here."

The two Japanese men looked at each other for a moment, before Sato spoke. "This is what Lieutenant Ishikawa has been saying. He wants to find some women — steal them maybe I should say — and then establish ourselves somewhere apart from other men."

"A new Japanese nation," added Hashimoto. "A new empire."

"With himself as emperor?" Hurasu's voice cut like an obsidian knife.

Hashimoto chuckled. "He might be content with shogun." None of us knew the word, save Sato.

"But Ishikawa wants to take control here. There is no doubt of that," said the Lieutenant-commander. "He remains committed to the idea of the Japanese Empire and if he can never return to it, then he will strive to start it up anew here. Ensign Kato listens to him, I fear."

"And you do not agree with this?" asked Father.

"I do, perhaps, agree with us being in control of our own future. This is why I am cautious about going at once to your land."

Of a sudden, Neasofa broke his silence, pouring out a torrent of German.

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"It seems," said Hashimoto, "that Niyazov has become somewhat disenchanted with his Turkic goddesses and now wishes to embrace being Mora completely." He listened a moment as the man went on. "Ah, he says it seems those most like him, those who worship Yuza and Beyana and their kindred, live on the other side of this world. He would never be able to go there."

"Nor would he much like it if he did," Hurasu told him. "Nagi is a cold and bleak place. Life is hard there."

"He has already taken on a Mora name," I pointed out.

"And we should do the same?" asked Hashimoto. "Or is Takahiro good enough?"

"Taki and Hiro are both good names," said Father. "I've never heard them stuck together in that manner." Nor would it make any sense.

Vehina at once announced, "Then Taki you shall be. This will make things much simpler."

The man only shrugged and the conversation moved on to other subjects, fishing and farming and seabirds and I forget what else. When Vehina became bored and rose, I did so as well. Hurasu, I thought for a moment, would accompany us but he turned back to the others.

"I am as bad as Hurasu and Yuza, aren't I?" she asked, after strolling silently for some time in the shade of the palms. We were walking eastward along the beach, the marshes still some distant from us. "I have only taken pleasure and have none to love."

"You like Naio, don't you?" I had eyes.

She seemed embarrassed, perhaps. "He is, um, not exactly young."

No, he wasn't. "Six tens of years maybe? Not much older than my father."

"And both vigorous men. But Naio mourns his wife."

This was true. My eyes had seen that too. "He does. He also must think of his place as a leader here. When this voyage ends you

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may find him another Naio.” Ah, here I was counseling again. Hadn’t I told myself not to do such things?

“I hope this voyage reaches its end soon then.” We spoke no more of the matter nor of much else, but turned back toward the camp before parting. A group of our Mora sailors crouched on the beach, deeply involved with the readying of ropes. The rest of us, those without duties, amused ourselves and the Japanese sailors who came and went through the day. These were very reserved, for the most part, but polite.

It grew dark; torches and fires were kindled here and there among the palms. All had rested today. We would attempt again to loosen the submarine from the sand tomorrow. For now it was best I found my mat and sleep.

45. *In the Channel*

THE DREAM REMAINED vivid in my mind. I rose and sought Hurasu at once. He sat beneath a palm, gazing out over the lagoon and playing tuneless tunes on the dudu.

"I have dreamed," I announced, and told him all I remembered.

He nodded at the end of my account. "We must tell your father of this."

Father — not to mention Beka and Naio — was not so quick to give credence to what I had to say. "The boy could be wrong," admitted Hurasu, "but I would doubt it. Best to take precautions."

Beka need think only a moment. "Load up everything. We shall all be on the canoe when it paddles out to the submarine." Word was spread quickly, men busied themselves. I think most were ready to sail away, whether we freed the Japanese vessel or not.

And all our arms could pull all the harder to free it. But that was not the primary reason every one of us would be aboard the canoe.

Were the Japanese watching us? I knew they had tools that allowed them to see things clearly from a distance. And they expected our canoe to come out to them this morning. What would they think of us packing up our belongings?

Maybe they wouldn't recognize that for what it was. It made no difference anyway. By mid-morning we all had paddles in hand and were unhurriedly stroking toward the inlet. I could hear Naio remark, from where he stood in the prow, "The winds are favorable. We can use our sails as well."

Sails, paddles — and weapons. All had been warned to have weapons at hand though few knew why! Vehina and I kept our bows and plenty of arrows close. Those were the reason we had stations near the front of the canoe.

The submarine had shifted little, maybe settled a little deeper into the sand, and was barely being rocked at all. There were still

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waves, waves of little consequence, breaking along the verges of this channel. Two sailors stood on the vessel's deck, holding rifles, Sub-lieutenant Abe between them. He would be the one relaying our messages.

They might or might not need those rifles. But not against us! I wondered if Father would say anything to them of weapons. He was to go over there this time, not me, and supervise the affixing of ropes. Better I stay with my companions and my bow.

A clear morning, so far — a few distant clouds lay behind us, climbing up from the mountains and promising afternoon rain. That had become common here. It should be rainy season at home by now too. A multitude of seabirds, raucous gulls, gliding skua, terns with their black-tipped narrow wings, wheeled above the water. Herons stalked along the sandy shores, white and brown and blue. Far out, modest waves feathered on the outer reefs, not large enough to truly break. Their direction was more from the southwest now.

Father paddled over in the small dugout with two men, conferred a moment with Abe, as we took a position further out in the channel, our stern pointed toward that of the submarine. Ropes were conveyed back and forth, our ropes, the lines of the Japanese.

From time to time, I took a nervous glance toward the ocean. Only glances. Would they hurry? I wanted to be done with this, whether we succeeded in freeing the submarine or not.

Arisu had pulled in the steering paddle, which would only get in the way of the ropes, and took a paddle with the rest of us, calling out the strokes. Naio and two sailors hoisted and tended the sails. "Huh! Huh!" called out Arisu as we strained. Behind us, I heard the sound of the submarines engines, the frothing of water. "Huh! Huh!"

A loud noise, sudden, one I can not describe. The end of a snapped rope came flying, cutting through the edge of one of the sails. "Any hurt?" called out Naio. No answer. "Huh! Huh! Huh!"

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We all felt the slackening of the lines. "Keep paddling!" called out Arisu. "Huh! Huh!" They tightened again, slackened again. A glance back revealed the great hulk of the submarine slowly backing out of its sandy prison. The lines remained slack.

"Paddles down!" A cheer erupted from both vessels.

There were more Japanese sailors on the deck now, several with rifles, and there was the weapon that had been called a machine gun. Was there to be treachery?

Pointing. They were pointing toward the sea. I turned. "Kohari!" someone shouted.

There, at the mouth of the inlet, lay the fleet I had glimpsed in my dream of the night before. Kohari boats, nine of them. That some were those we had encountered before, I much suspected. Yes, that one with the new, darker wood at the stern was surely the vessel we had run down. Too bad it hadn't sunk!

"Let loose the ropes!" shouted Naio. "To weapons!"

IV. MONSTERS

46. Battle

WE HAD KNOWN the Kohari would come. I had seen them.

And how had the Kohari known we were here? Maybe they didn't and it was just chance their boats sailed into the lagoon at that time. Maybe some passing boat, some small vessel we hadn't noted, had sailed by and seen us. It was even possible we had been spied from one of the ridges high above us.

Or maybe they had those who could see things even as I did. I had never thought of the Kohari in that way before but could see no reason now not to!

I rose, holding my bow ready, an arrow nocked. Vehina stood beside me. We were not the only ones who had been prepared to take up bows. This was the sort of battle where they would be needed.

We could have sailed through and by the clumsy Kohari boats and escaped into the open sea. They could not have followed swiftly enough. But Father and two more Mora remained behind. These none would think of abandoning.

Nor would we abandon the Japanese, whether they were truly friends or not. It appeared that we were departing, however, for we drove forward toward the opposing vessels. Arrows rained on us from all sides. Poisoned? Who was to say? The thick woven awnings that protected from the sun now protected from enemy shafts.

We picked our targets carefully, aiming for leaders and steersmen. Then we were through the thick of them. One thing to be said for the Kohari tubs, they could turn about quickly with their shorter length and shallow draft. The fleet followed us. Somewhere behind, I could hear the submarine's engines working.

"Turn!" cried out Naio. "Right side back paddles!" Ninety feet

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of massive dugout started to come about. This the Kohari never expected; they had surely thought we were making a run for it. Howls of delight rose from their boats. Ha, they thought they had these foolhardy Mora!

More so when we ran for the lagoon rather than giving battle. We would have no chance there, unable to use our speed. I had known nothing of this strategy but could guess why it had been chosen. Our canoe sped past the submarine, now floating freely. I could see the sailors lined up on its deck. There was nothing else to look at for the Kohari were all behind us.

Loud banging noises. Guns, as I had heard them that night of the Japanese vessel's ignominious arrival. Then many noises, all together. "They're using the machine gun," said Vehina. Again we turned our canoe about and stroked toward the scene of battle. It was obvious my father had warned the Japanese to be ready for an attack. The Kohari could not be ready — not for what they faced.

We ran one boat down. Others milled and wallowed, the raiders calling out to each other. The machine gun spoke only now and then, in short rapid sequences, like a woodpecker drilling into a tree. The rifles continued to pour their lethal pellets into the boats, as did we archers now we were in range again. Many Mora took up their spears, ready to leap aboard the enemy vessels.

Below us, crocodiles had gathered to take some of those who had fallen into the water, whether dead or alive. They weren't really very large crocodiles, not like some in the Gurang, but just as lethal. I suspected the one I had repelled in the dark had not been nearly as huge as I remembered it.

The Kohari were unwilling to engage, turning their boats seaward to flee us. Shots no longer sounded from the submarine. That was well for we were now among the enemy vessels. "Let them go!" cried out Beka. Our jeers followed them, those who remained alive. Two boats had been destroyed, many men slain.

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More by the Japanese than we, we had to admit. That sort of thing does not go down well with a Mora warrior.

"You were right," Beka said to me.

Right in that I had known Kohari were coming. I had not known when. Had the raiders not shown when they did, we would have departed this island once the Japanese submarine was freed. Now, there was no great hurry to go.

"How did we know they would help?" asked Vehina, nodding toward the submarine, floating directly to our left.

"Marareta was to warn them and give Naio a signal if they agreed to follow our plan of battle."

"Had he not given us the sign," said the navigator, "we would have continued out to sea. That was agreed."

I would like to think Father would have been safe with the Japanese had that happened. But I was not even sure he was safe with them now. We backed out of the channel and into the lagoon, the submarine following carefully directly behind us. Its engines did not roar and strain now but hummed some alien music.

They stopped. Far enough in for Lieutenant-commander Sato, it seemed. He was being cautious. I might have been more cautious and not entered at all.

There were some Kohari on its deck, men who had climbed from the water. We had pulled a handful of prisoners out as well. Normally, such would be taken to Mora lands to be slaves for a few years. We do not enslave for life as do the Kohari, and many choose to remain among us as free men, and take Mora wives.

That might not be practical on this voyage. "Any injuries?" Sato called to us across the water.

"Only to our prisoners," Beka shouted back. No Mora had much more than a scratch.

"If they need medical attention, send them over. We do not carry a doctor but we have a trained medic."

Two badly wounded Kohari were carried over in the small

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canoe. I doubted they would live anyway but let the Japanese be responsible for them! Father returned with the canoe.

“More than one man over there was struck with an arrow,” he reported. “We will soon know if they carried poison on their tips.”

“Did you warn the Japanese of this?” asked Beka.

“I did.” Father turned to me. “Your vision proved true. To see you now with the powers of your mother — ah, Maratoa, I —” He seemed unable to say more and only embraced me.

I knew he meant Rahaita and that this had aroused memories of her, the emotions, the ache of her loss. But Pana’a fitted as well. She was the one who passed this gift to me. I should speak with my birth-mother when we returned home.

Soon now that would be.

47. *Prisoners*

I CLIMBED THE metal ladder to the submarine deck. The vessel felt different now. It felt alive, as did our great canoe, ready to voyage into the open ocean. There had been no sense of that while it sat immobile.

Once again, I was to be the voice of the Mora here. Also, a translator of the words of the Kohari. Most of them would know the pidgin, being men who sailed far from their homes. The peasants in their fields spoke only their own local Kohari dialects.

And even those were not so different from the pidgin that one couldn't make oneself understood, at least in part. Or so I am told. I've never visited any Kohari peasants.

Ishikawa was in charge, Sato having gone ashore, but Sub-lieutenant Abe greeted me on the deck. Two Kohari bodies lay there. "We are not sure how best to deal with these," he admitted to me.

"The Kohari cremate their dead," I told him. "There is a custom to save the bodies until some great person has died and then burn them at the same ceremony. Perhaps they think the ordinary people can slip into heaven alongside the important ones." This was something of a joke, one that Mora told each other. I think the Kohari custom was simply custom.

"I'd as soon throw the bodies to the crocodiles," muttered Abe.

"That would be great disrespect. The Kohari consider the water to be the abode of demons." Not even the Mora would do such with Kohari dead — if Kohari were present. If they weren't, it did not matter so much. So I told him. "I wouldn't throw them overboard here in the middle of the lagoon, anyway. No point in attracting the crocodiles to us!"

"Ah, yes. Very sensible, Maratoa-san." He said no more on the subject. Not to me. I am sure he reported all to Ishikawa or Sato. "Come below with me, if you will." Two sailors remained, another

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accompanied us down the ladder into the bowels of the submarine. "Our prisoners are all together."

It was not to the prisoners he led me but to the Japanese wounded. Three men rested on raised mats, all bandaged somewhere. "The most badly wounded," Abe informed me. "The rest have returned to their own bunks." He spoke a few words to the man tending them before turning back to me. "This is our medic, Petty Officer Masaru Sasaki."

The man gave me the sketchiest of bows for he was busy tending his patients. One patient, primarily. Sasaki looked up and spoke gravely to us. "This sailor is dying, he tells us," said Abe. "He believes from poison. None of the others who were struck with arrows show the same symptoms."

"So only some Kohari sent poison shafts our way."

"That seems so." The two Japanese conversed again. Sasaki rose to lead us into an adjoining room. Here were the Kohari prisoners, some of them wounded as well. None looked ready to die.

But they did eye me and one addressed me in the pidgin. "Are we to be slaves?"

"That is for your captors to decide. They are not Mora and will have their own ways." He nodded, recognizing he would receive no more satisfying answer. Five they were; we had twice that number at the camp.

The medic was looking them over as we spoke. A cursory examination; he had already tended to their hurts. He nodded, spoke to the sub-lieutenant.

Who announced to me in English, "I am to take the prisoners up on deck. Would you tell them so?"

I did. They filed in silence behind Abe and me, our lone armed sailor bring up the rear, down the dim hallway, up the ladder, into the fresh air. A light rain fell, creating a thin mist on the lagoon's surface, but I did not mind.

"Lieutenant Ishikawa ordered me to get them up here if they

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were healthy enough." He looked where the two bodies yet lay. "The unhealthy were already here."

Probably the wounded men we sent them, I decided. That mattered little. I looked over the others. What would set a young Kohari — they all seemed young — to go raiding? Did the words of the priests sway them? Or just the thought of being warriors, or taking heads or loot? "What gods do you serve?" I asked them.

One immediately spoke. "We follow Bagap."

That astonished me. I did not know anyone actually worshiped the Great Snake who dwelt at the bottom of the sea, husband and adversary to Mihasa the Sun Bird. Mostly Kohari just used his name when cursing.

I did not have the chance to remain astonished for the submarine began to disgorge many Japanese sailors, Lieutenant Ishikawa at their head. Two bore a litter, a body in it, covered with a cloth. I saw more than one sailor giving our prisoners looks of hatred, those with rifles fingering the triggers. There was a murmur among them and though I understood not the words, they surely wanted the blood of the Kohari.

A sharp command from Ishikawa settled them down. He spoke at some length with Sub-lieutenant Abe, both glancing toward me from time to time.

"We recognize," began Abe, turning his attention to me, "that only some of these men carried the poisoned arrows. Could you, ah, ask them of this?"

He was being most roundabout. "Did any of you carry the arrows of poison?" I asked the prisoners outright.

They shifted uneasily, glancing sidelong at one another. "Macat," said one, at last, nodding in the direction of the man. It was he who had said they served Bagap.

The speaker continued, feeling emboldened now. "Only those who serve in the temple use the poison. The priests know the secret of its making."

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This I reported to Abe and he passed to Ishikawa. The lieutenant considered the man, his fingertips lightly tapping his holstered pistol. He barked something toward Abe.

"We wait for the captain," the young man told me. The wait was not long; Sato might have seen us gathered on the deck and felt his presence necessary. He and Hashimoto were both in the raft paddled out to us, accompanied by a pair of sailors.

Lieutenant-commander Sato barely acknowledged my presence before conferring with Ishikawa. The lieutenant was surely urging something on him, and loudly enough that the men could hear it. Sato considered the prisoners for some time before turning his attention to the shrouded corpse.

He gave an order and the body of the Japanese sailor was carried back into the submarine. "Kondo will be buried at sea once we depart," Abe whispered.

Sato then turned to again consider the Kohari captives. He pointed toward Macat and issued a terse order. Two sailors grasped the man by his arms, pulling him forward and then to his knees, crouched with head jutting forward. Hashimoto seemed ready to object but kept his silence.

Yasu Sato brought his long blade from its scabbard in one movement and with no hesitation brought it down on the Kohari's neck. The head rolled a short distance.

I thought the Japanese sailors might cheer but a quick stern look from their captain quashed that. The other captives looked sick, thinking perhaps they were next.

No. Sato handed his sword to an attendant who carried it into the submarine. To clean it, I guessed. He issued orders in an even, emotionless voice and then disappeared into the vessel himself.

"We are to take all three bodies to shore for disposal," Abe told me. "And the prisoners too. It has been agreed to turn them over to your people."

He set about organizing this. I was ready to get in the little

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canoe that had brought me and return to shore. Enough of these Japanese and their ways! They took heads even as did the Kohari.

Already sailors were busy sluicing the deck with buckets of salt water, brooming away the blood. "May I share your canoe?" asked Taki. By now all the Mora were calling Hashimoto "Taki." I shall too.

I nodded an assent and we climbed down to it, tied to a lower rung of the ladder. We paddled a few strokes toward the beach. Then I had to speak. "He didn't want to do that, did he? Ishikawa forced his hand."

"Be not so certain. Our Sato is two men, and one of those men was willing to play the role Ishikawa urged on him."

Maybe that was so. I would certainly see that other man in him from now on. "And what sort of man are you, Taki?"

"A practical man. I served my government as well as I could, and enjoyed the game of espionage. Now, there is no Japanese government to serve and my first concern is my own survival."

I suspected that had always been his first concern.

48. *In the Dark*

"THE KOHARI BELIEVE," said Father, "that Mihasa in the sky and Bagap in the sea are forever squabbling over who should rule the land that lies between them. Who should rule over men."

"But there are a bunch of lesser gods and goddesses too," added Beka.

"Who have their cults and temples, sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating. When we first arrived in this world, the cult of Mihasa very much dominated."

"I would like to hear the story of your time here," said Taki. "And I would rather not wait until we get to your homeland. I am sure other concerns will take our attention then."

"If we choose to stay there," stated Sato. He remained subdued and without apparent emotion. He had been so all the afternoon. Taki only shrugged at these words.

"Perhaps we'll find the time tomorrow," my father said. It had been decided we would rest and ready ourselves then and sail home the day after. The Japanese *were* going to follow us to that home; this had been agreed.

Lieutenant Ishikawa had been none too happy when he learned this. He did not seem happy anyway. This evening he remained on duty on the submarine, as we talked but made no real plans.

Abe was with him but Ensign Kato sat with us. The young man — ah, he was about my age in truth — had made surprising progress in learning the pidgin. And the more he learned, the more questions he had to put to me.

Now, he leaned in and remarked, "Go Taki, um, Vehina where live go."

Taki had been spending much time in her company this day. I suspect most of us noted it. Certainly Naio, who scowled when he thought none were looking.

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Kato had not bothered to whisper. None of the other Japanese understood the pidgin. Vehina did, and laughed at the remark.

"You think our Taki is likely to follow me home?" she asked, in English.

That Kato did not understand but I think he knew his remark had been made known to his superiors. He ducked his head in embarrassment. Taki only smiled, saying, "Many would follow you home, madame."

"Oh? What of the handsome Lieutenant Ishikawa?"

"He still thinks you are a spy and an enemy," said Sato, "but that hasn't kept him from looking at you."

Taki laughed. "What other woman is he going to look at?"

"What woman is any of us going to look at?" Sato turned his attention back to his meal.

So Sato too? I would guess most of these men had left wives behind, wives they were beginning to realize they would never see again. Children too. That must be hard.

"In a few days," announced Father, "there will be many Mora women to look at. I advise you to learn the language quickly so you may speak with them."

Mora women were good to look at, that was true. It would be good to see them again! Also Mora food. I might have missed that more, that and good Mora millet beer. I refilled my bowl with a shiny purplish fruit that was ripening in some abundance along the beaches. It was flavorless, at best.

Already dark it was, and our small fire was burning down. Much of the driftwood along these shores had already been used up over the nights we spent here. Here and there, men were settling down on their sleeping mats or conversing quietly in small groups.

Shouts? Distant, coming from the eastern end of the lagoon. Surely the Kohari had not slipped back? The camp roused at once, men standing, listening to the night. Was that gunfire?

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Beka at once issued orders. "Some follow me along the shore!" he cried out. "The rest to the canoe!"

"Bring torches!" Father added to this.

None were being asked to swim to the canoe nor even to paddle out in the small dugout. Naio had brought the great craft as close as he might before mooring it and had run ropes to the sturdiest palms on the beach. Men now shinnied out to it on these. The outrigger, in truth, was but a moment's swim to reach but I would not risk even a few seconds in those nighted waters.

Sato peered out over the lagoon. "There is no light at the submarine." He hesitated a moment, perhaps uncertain which way to go. "I should reach my vessel," he announced, and started across one of the ropes. It is to be admitted he was hardly slower than the Mora warriors and that I might blame on his boots! He called as he slipped into the canoe, in Japanese, but I thought I heard the name 'Kato.'

"Stay me, uh, Sato, make say." Ensign Kato frowned and then turned the frown to a grin. "Stay not here place, huh? Beach stay." He was inviting himself along with those who were heading down the beach. That included me. We followed Beka. Some held torches aloft.

There were no more noises in the night, only the bellowing of a crocodile somewhere in the marshes ahead. We would not go that far, I was certain. Shouts from behind us and then the sound of paddles rhythmically dipping in the lagoon. Not all the shouts were in Mora.

I could see the torches on our canoe as it pulled even. It halted by the dark submarine, we marched on. A moment later, a bright light, a beacon, suddenly shone. It swept across us and then on toward the eastern margin of the lagoon.

"There!" cried out someone as the light caught some object floating near the shore. Kato said something in his own tongue, almost whispering. It was the raft the Japanese used.

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It should have been tied to the submarine. Eyes shown in the dark water, just beyond the illumination of the submarine's light. "No man is going out there," ordered Beka. I think none of us were considering it.

The canoe loomed up out of the gloom. "Did you find any men?" came the call.

"None!" Beka shouted out. "And we go no further in this dark!" Already we were into the smaller mangrove, sprouting here and there along the water's edge.

"Someone snag that raft!" came a command. It might have been Naio's voice but it sounded odd and hollow coming over the still water. The submarine's light still shone on it. It had been mangled; that I could see even from where I stood.

And what of the men who had been on it?

49. *Gathering*

"I FIND IT hard to believe of Sub-lieutenant Abe," said Sato, "yet all evidence points to him. He is under arrest for now."

Taki snorted. "I do not believe it at all."

"We shall see. He failed in his duties as officer of the watch, if nothing else. The only clear facts are that two men are missing, and four rifles, along with much of the ammunition."

"And one rifle has been recovered," said Father. "Still in the raft. The others are undoubtedly at the bottom of the lagoon."

Sato nodded. "It is likely they intended to hide the rifles somewhere and return to the submarine. Whoever planned this thought it could be done quietly and no one the wiser. But why?"

"Desertion? An attempted coup?" suggested Taki. "The only men we know for certain were involved will tell us nothing."

The raft was tied up directly below us. It had been half-torn apart by crocodiles. The two sailors hadn't a chance.

"We had but eight rifles," said Sato. "There is no reason not to admit this. Now we have five and have lost half our cartridges as well."

"I think this could not have been done without Lieutenant Ishikawa's knowledge," Taki stated, hesitating but a moment before adding, "and collusion."

"That is to be determined. You will not publicly accuse my officers, Hashimoto, as long as you serve on my vessel."

"I no longer consider myself to be under your command, sir. Not since we entered another world."

Quick anger turned as quickly to — what? Weariness maybe. Sato sighed. "I know I have no authority anymore. Yet someone must lead our people to a new home." He abruptly turned, to my surprise, to me. "We hope to gather fresh fruit before embarking. Could you help my steward with this, Maratoa?"

"Certainly."

"Come along with me then, your father permitting." He

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glanced at Father, who nodded an approval. "Despite its encounter with crocodiles, the raft can still carry us over." We climbed down to it from our place in the stern of the canoe, only the two of us paddling it over. Taki had shown no indication of wishing to join us.

I followed the Japanese captain up the ladder and down another into the submarine. "You met Michi Shimizu before, when he prepared tea for us. Though he is not an officer, Shimizu has authority here as my aide."

I understood this. Shimizu was as a Mora commoner who had risen high in the ranks of warriors but could never be named a commander. The priest Hito had been one such, second to the hero and captain Aranu, before deciding to find his destiny elsewhere.

We found him in a room full of food, fruits and vegetables on shelves and in boxes. There were also many small round metal objects, wrapped in paper with writing of some sort. I could not read it.

Sato introduced me, or so I assumed, for he mentioned my name, nodding toward me. Then he said, "Maratoa, I present Petty Officer Michi Shimizu." The man bowed, rather deeply. On a whim, I stepped forward and greeted him as Mora greet friends, placing my right hand on his left shoulder.

"I greet you Mahiki." That was a good Mora name and easier to pronounce! To my surprise, he caught on and placed his own hand on my shoulder.

"Michi knows some French," said Sato. "With Lady Viney, ah, Vehina's assistance, you should be able to work together." He spoke for a minute or so to the man in Japanese. Shimizu bowed and hurried off somewhere. "He's going to find a couple seamen to help you. My aide is an amateur botanist and interested in taking cuttings or gathering small plants. In fact —" He motioned for me to follow him into the next room. "He manages to grow a few things even inside this metal monster." There were pots and baskets

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with plants growing in them in a corner of what was surely another storage room. "They haven't seen enough light lately, I suspect. Michi gets them up on deck when able."

I was not going to comment that they looked none too healthy. Sato led me back up to the open air, where Shimizu waited with two sailors. They carried short metal swords of some sort, with wide blades and sharp only on the one side. Shortly, we were paddling ashore.

I jumped out onto the sand as soon as I was able. I was becoming less and less fond of being near this water! The sailors pulled the raft up and produced large cloth bags. Vehina? No problem finding her. She sat leaning against a nearby palm, attended by Hurasu and Neasofa.

"I'm bored, Moon Man!" she called out. "Come and take me away on an adventure!"

"You must accompany us on our expedition. Mahiki speaks, uh, one of the languages you know. French?"

She addressed him in what was probably that tongue and he responded. "He speaks it better than Ishikawa," she said. "Better accent." They exchanged a few more words. "Ah, his family did business in Indo-China."

I didn't know what that was and didn't much care. "Tell him his name is Mahiki in Mora. If it's all right with him." I wouldn't force the name on the man.

They spoke French some more. "He's fine with it. I told him it meant 'self-possessed.'" That might have been as good a translation as any and more flattering than some. "We're going to gather specimens?"

"And fruit to eat." If there was any left. It was up to me to lead the way, I supposed, and Vehina and the Japanese fell in behind me. It was only mildly surprising that Hurasu and Neasofa joined. Everyone was at loose ends this day.

Mahiki's face was unremarkable until he glimpsed unknown

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plants. Then it lit up like a lover's! He was unremarkable in most ways, a small man, balding though not that old, maybe. It was hard to tell.

He was especially impressed by the guavas. "The ancestors of many land plants in this world would have come through the gate on the other side of the world," said Hurasu. "A few seeds may have come in with birds through the nearer one, however. Or, of course, carried by men." Vehina translated and soon the two were engaged in a long conversation I could not follow. I turned my attention to making sure the sailors picked the proper fruits. It wouldn't do to poison our new maybe-friends.

Yes, maybe. The goings-on of last night showed there were those who could not be trusted on that submarine.

By the time we were done, Sato and Taki had come over to the camp. they sat with my father, sharing a lunch, and listening to the tales of Father's life in this world. The lieutenant-commander rose when he spied us.

"I shall go back with you," he announced. "I feel I should remain aboard the submarine this night."

Taki looked up at him. "And I think I shall remain here. For now."

Sato only smiled thinly at this. "But not yet ready to abandon us? I'll send Kato over in a while, once we finish stocking our fresh fruit and water." He nodded a farewell to Father and strode toward the lagoon. Mahiki followed, the two sailors behind. I and the rest of my entourage had no reason to go out to the sub. And there was food here. I sat down.

Sato and Hashimoto were rivals but not enemies, I had decided. They quarreled at times, they had different ideas of how things should be done, they stepped on each others toes. Both were trying to determine how they and the other Japanese could best fit into this new world.

Perhaps Taki sensed my thoughts. "Sato is an engineer and

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thinks like one,” he said. “This fits here and that fits there and then everything will work properly.”

“Not only engineers. It is the curse of modern man to think so,” stated my father.

Father believed nothing ever worked properly. The rest of that day, there was no need for anything or anyone to work. We were prepared, the Japanese were prepared. In the morning we would sail for home. That called for one last feast here and the sailors from the submarine were invited. Many came, perhaps even half of them.

No need to hold back any more of the driftwood. The fires roared, men sang and even danced in their flickering ruddy light, among the long shadows of the palms. All that was missing was beer.

I looked out over the peaceful lagoon. Things seemed well; the one dim light glowed on the Japanese vessel, a pair of even dimmer oil lamps on our canoe. Then, more light at the submarine. Someone, I realized at once, had opened the hatch and I was spying the light from within. This was nothing unusual.

What followed was. Shouts. Gunfire? Both very subdued, coming from somewhere within that metal hull. Others had heard too and were coming down to the water’s edge. The Japanese sailors seemed as baffled and unsure as we Mora. Most of them – a few seemed to be coming together in a group. Five or six men they were.

I ran at once to Beka. “Those men may be up to something,” I stated, waving an arm toward the clump. That maybe I shouldn’t have done, for they saw me and began to edge away from the light of the fires.

Gun shots rang louder now. Figures could be seen moving on the submarine deck. “They launch their raft!” someone cried out.

“Back from the shore!” roared Beka. “And find your weapons!”

50. *Treachery*

THE RAFT FLOATED dangerously low, overloaded. Eight men I could make out. Fortunate they were no crocodiles lurked in this end of the lagoon! Lieutenant Ichikawa sprang from the raft as soon as it touched sand, a small gun in one hand. The others quickly followed.

Five held rifles, pointed toward us. The six sailors I had noted before hurried to join them. Fourteen all told. One at least was wounded. Behind them, the submarine's powerful light suddenly came on; its beam swept across them, returned. What might have been curses arose.

It was Taki who stepped forward and addressed them. Ishikawa barked one harsh laugh and then spoke at some length. A few more words were exchanged before our interpreter stepped back.

"It seems the lieutenant's plans have again gone awry," he said. "His plan had been to take over the submarine and force you Mora to serve him. Now, he seeks only to be allowed to leave."

"Into the jungle?" asked Beka.

"He would seem to have no other choice. Ishikawa knows he can not take on all of you, even with guns. And I suspect he has left enemies behind on the submarine."

Father nodded at this. "He was unable to capture it."

"Apparently so."

We stood there, facing off for a few moments. Ishikawa's face remained impassive but his eyes flicked from man to man. "Tell him he may depart," spoke Beka.

"I could put an arrow into him," I announced, not very loudly.

"Me too," added Vehina.

"There would be no point," Beka replied. "Not in slaying him nor in risking any Mora lives." Taki relayed the message to the Japanese leader.

One brusque nod from him. "Kato!" he then called out. The young officer stepped forward. An exchange of words followed.

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"He is inviting the ensign to join him," reported Taki. "And also asking him to speak to our captives. He knows the boy has learned something of the pidgin."

Kato turned to us, saying, "Want Kohari see."

Beka considered this and shrugged. "Why not? Someone bring them."

The prisoners were brought forward, all fourteen of them. None had run away though no one had been guarding them. More Japanese words from the lieutenant to Kato. "Um, Kohari, um, go?" He gestured toward Ishikawa and his followers. "Friends."

Our Kohari captives looked rightfully skeptical. Father addressed them. "You may go with this man if you wish. Or return with us to Mora lands. We promise no harm to you."

I caught a movement on the lagoon from the corner of my eye. Mora going out the ropes to our canoe. And two had commandeered the abandoned raft and were paddling it toward the submarine. Its light remained on us.

The prisoners seemed uncertain. Finally, five only started toward Ishikawa's group. More words. "Food bring," Kato told them. I could see the Japanese had no supplies with them.

The Kohari looked toward us. "Take what you can carry," Beka said. "We will not starve you."

That took little time. Kato now stood at Ishikawa's side and the two seemed to argue. Kato shook his head vigorously and turned to leave. I know not what angry words Ishikawa uttered but he struck the younger man suddenly across the face with the back of his hand, knocking him to his knees. For a moment, his hand touched the hilt of the long sword, but he thought better. Perhaps the spears and arrows immediately aimed at him had something to do with that!

A few minutes later, all of Ishikawa's men slipped into the dark, keeping their rifles trained on us to the last. Some, at least, would know the best ways up from the beaches and into the island

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interior. They were no longer our concern; we would sail away and leave them tomorrow.

Would we? How had fared those in the submarine? The raft returned now. I could make out only the silhouettes of those in it, with the powerful light behind them. Four men, two of them the Mora who had paddled out.

Ah, Sub-lieutenant Abe, a prisoner no more. He stepped ashore slowly, as if he carried a great load on his back and feared to sink into the sand.

Beka greeted him. "It is good to see you safe, Abe," he said. "How fare you and your crew?"

Abe breathed deeply before replying. "We have several wounded and three dead. One of those is Lieutenant-commander Sato."

51. *Sailing Away*

"THAT PUTS YOU in command of the submarine," spoke Taki.

"With barely enough crew. And we have no rifles now, nor ammunition, so the machine gun is useless."

"They may not be needed again," said Beka. "Come and sit. Tell us what happened."

Abe as much collapsed as sat. "I must return shortly. I have left Shimizu in charge. He is competent." He hung his head a long moment. "More competent than I."

"You repelled Ishikawa," Taki pointed out.

"And I can thank Shimizu for that." He turned his head partially toward the sailor who had accompanied him. "Seaman Ito here, too. It was he who came and unlocked my door."

I knew Ito, slightly. He was the cook on the submarine.

At that moment, Kato came forward and saluted. His face was a bit banged up. I think Ishikawa broke his nose. "The Ensign showed his own courage here," said Beka. "And his loyalty."

Abe rose and returned the salute. Then he embraced Kato. I was unused to seeing the Japanese do that sort of thing. Of course, Mora grab hold of each other with little provocation. They spoke a few words to each other in their own tongue.

"I heard the noise of battle from my room," said the sub-lieutenant, taking his seat again. "There was no way to know what was happening but Shimizu seems to have taken charge of the defense when — when Sato was shot down. The reports are not clear but it would seem that when Ishikawa tried to relieve him of command he fought back. Had he not — had he not, none would have been alerted and the mutiny might have succeeded."

Taki was translating this to Kato in a low voice. The boy scowled and spat out a few words in Japanese. "The ensign says he would have killed Ishikawa had he known of this."

I was certain he would have tried. "It was Yasu Sato who asked to have me along on this voyage," continued Abe. "A friend

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of my father.” He sat silently for a few seconds. “The rifles Ishikawa’s men stole are not suited to a battle inside a submarine. Ha, no guns should have been fired inside it! I had my pistol. Now we have Kato’s as well. And Sato’s.”

“And mine,” said Taki. “Though it fires a different cartridge.”

Abe nodded. “There were also a pair of older revolvers in the stores and some ammunition. Two of our petty officers found them and joined the fight.” For the first time, something resembling a smile came to his face. A smile of satisfaction, I think. “The petty officers were all loyal. The three of us with firearms were enough to make Ishikawa retreat. He had expected to take control without a fight, I think, and knew he couldn’t take the time to root us out.” He sat silent again for a short time. “Those two and Shimizu are the ones who saved the submarine, not I.”

Seaman Ito unexpectedly spoke a few words. Taki listened, nodded. “Our valiant cook disagrees with the sub-lieutenant. He says he is a leader any man would follow. Also, that the crew broke out machetes and hatchets to back him up.”

“They did. That is so. They are good men.” Abe’s voice broke, just a little, on the last words. “And I should return to them. We shall bury the captain at sea tomorrow. There is no reason we can not leave as we planned.” He conversed briefly with Kato before turning back to us. “We will speak in the morning.” Ito and Kato followed him to the raft.

“That we will,” said Father. “We should all get our sleep until then.”

All but the guards Beka would post. He would certainly be more vigilant than ever tonight. I doubted, though, that Ishikawa and his men would return. Let the jungle have them. With that pleasant thought I slipped into slumber.

Ah, but I dreamed. No, not a dream that meant anything, not a prophecy. I dreamed restlessly. The slain Sato passed through my

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dreams, and his slayer. Malee and Rahiri and home; these too I dreamed of. It would be good to see home again, at last.

Kato had already paddled over to our camp again by the time I awoke, to speak with Taki. "Our new captain thinks he could use my help," the older man told me when I ambled over to the pair. "He is undoubtedly right. I had intended to sail home with you Mora, you know."

I did know this. "You will take Neasofa with you?"

"I might as well. Though he might prefer to be with Vehina. Let's have some breakfast before I go." There was food laid out and disappearing rapidly. Men were eager to be away. We filled bowls and sat.

"I would hazard," said Taki, after he had blunted the edge of his hunger, "Ishikawa wanted Kato as much as a translator as for anything else. Still, he might have seen the boy as a potential ally. He is an idealist and a nationalist." I did not understand the second of those words. "Young too, and perhaps easily influenced. He was assigned to this voyage partly because of some engineering expertise and partly from being part of an old noble family. An impoverished one, it must be admitted. Just the sort Ishikawa might think he could sway to his cause."

"No younger than I," I pointed out.

"Quite true. Both come of age on this voyage, I think."

Maybe Kato had. I was already a man. I let it pass. "Haruki Kato," I said, "I shall name you Hare. That means 'manly' in the Mora tongue."

I think it embarrassed him but he stammered out some sort of thank you or acceptance. I couldn't say exactly which it was.

"Quite excellent," said Taki. "I've learned a bit of your pidgin now and could follow some of that."

"I'd best speak Mora around you from now on." He but laughed at the remark.

An hour later, all were aboard their vessels and our canoe

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eased out through the channel into the open ocean, the submarine in our wake. The seas were small, the passage easy. It was to be hoped it would remain so all the way home.

52. *The Other Side of the World*

I SPOKE WITH Malee as soon as we were at sea, sails spread and paddles down. I think she was glad we were finally on the way back.

I suppose I should go down to stay with the sailors again, she said. If Oorto is willing to come. I think he would rather feast in the House of Va'aru.

Can you blame him? I asked. *He is with you?*

About somewhere. Oh, a visitor.

You are perceptive, Malee, came Hurasu's voice. Almost as an afterthought, he allowed his form to be seen. *We can speak with your mentor some other time.*

And you must wait to hear of all our adventures. Ulani is composing an epic even as we speak.

An epic needs a hero, she returned. Who is it to be? Oh, I know. Lady Vehina!

In truth, she was probably as much the hero of this journey as any of us. No one really stood out. Certainly not me.

Ulani can invent one, said Hurasu. That was also true. *Who?* He spoke a few words in a language I did not recognize. There had been another presence, one I glimpsed for but a second. A girl? Pale, like Vehina.

A student from the other side of the world, Hurasu said, after she disappeared. *Best she not involve herself with us.*

Not someone from your valley? asked Malee.

That's not the other side of the world, I pointed out and at once wondered if that was too blunt. Malee and I had never worried about that sort of thing in the past but now — well, the world changes and we had too.

From Nagi, said Hurasu. *Maybe I'll let her speak with you someday. She needs to learn Zikem first.*

Poor girl. She'd be much better off learning Mora. With that, Malee broke her connection. Hurasu and I did the same.

"Who was that girl?" I asked at once.

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“Woman,” he said. “A woman with an heroic husband so get no ideas.”

I did not think he was being serious. Anyway, she was on the other side of the world.

“Marareta,” the sorcerer called, “perhaps you should hear this tale as well.”

Father came and sat down with us. “There’s little other entertainment on this canoe,” he said. Vehina must have thought the same for she joined us too.

“Until recently,” began Hurasu, “I might have thought Malee the most gifted sorceress in our world, even more than any of those who dwell in my valley. No more; one came from another world who outstrips her.”

Father lifted an eyebrow at this. “Another world? You mean mine?”

“Yes, but her father came from my own. The world I have named to you as Atlantis. He was the Xahun I have mentioned.”

“Your enemy,” I said.

“But she is not, nor does she know of her paternity. In time, I think, she may come to suspect the truth but I trust you to tell her nothing.”

He meant me. “I don’t even know who she is.”

“Vasa is her name and she dwells on Nagi. Those with power are almost as common there as in my valley.” He smiled. That smile hinted of self-satisfaction. “Perhaps because I dwelt long on the island and left a number of descendants.”

“And why do you tell us of her?” asked Father.

“Because she will most certainly become involved in the lives of Malee and your son. Not now. When they are ready.”

“And never meet in this world,” I said.

“Most likely not.”

A hail came from the submarine. It had been following close

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behind us, atop the water, but now had pulled alongside. It was Hare — Ensign Kato — who called out, “Stop bury!”

Father appeared baffled but I caught his meaning. “They wish to halt and bury their dead at sea.”

“Ah. Naio, can we stop a while?” Our navigator and his men had the sails down shortly. It was mid-morning and the seas rolled gently; a few high clouds were stealing into the dome of the sky. Far up, some large bird soared.

Four dead they had, all wrapped in the same white cloth. Which was Sato I did not know, nor did it seem to matter. A dozen sailors, perhaps, lined up on the deck for the brief ceremony. Abe said some words and it was over.

Many of the Kohari were there too. It had been decided the submarine had more room for them than we but they had little liking for its interior. Most had remained outside through the morning, squatting or sitting on the wooden deck.

A shadow crossed the water between us. I looked up to spy the great sea-eagle, with its white body and dark wings. Not only I, for I heard many murmurs and maybe some prayers.

“Its wingspan must be over six feet,” breathed Vehina.

I nodded. At least. “It is revered by the Diwarna.”

“And our own Mora people hold it sacred to the Woman of the Moon,” said Father. The goddess my birth-mother Pana’a served.

I saw more than one of the sailors across the way bow toward the bird. Perhaps they thought it sacred too — at least on this day. It climbed again into the vast sky. Far from land it was, most likely nesting on one of the islands lying east of that we had just left.

“That eagle is not found on the other side of the world,” stated Hurasu. “Many of the land animals in this world did come through the gate there. Their ancestors, that is, though certainly some evolved here.”

“Then most sea creatures would have come through the gate

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we just visited?" asked Doctor Okada. We had spoken in English for his sake. Okada had chosen to sail with us Mora. That I had not expected and had been surprised to see him come aboard. In truth, I had seen little of the man since we first met.

"That would seem likely. But who is to say whether those two ways were always where they are now? Even the continents move about, do they not?"

"It is believed so. I would like to hear of your time on the other side of the world, as you put it."

Hurasu watched Naio and his helpers raising the sails again before speaking. "We are days from our destination. Telling my tale would be as good a way as any to fill the time."

So we listened, the rest of that day, and learned much. All of us.

53. *Moonlight*

THE RAIN HAD poured mightily. The submarine's light shone dimly behind, through the afternoon and evening. All the Kohari had gone inside.

Now the sky was clearing and a strong light shone, the moon grown large again. Naio chose to take in the sails, lest we lose our friends in the night. He would have preferred to sail on, I was sure.

It did give the opportunity to council with those friends. The submarine pulled close to our side and Abe was paddled over on their raft. It had been patched some. No one would fall through one of the holes in the bottom now but it did float a little lower on one side than the other.

The day was discussed, and the morrow. A polite inquiry came from Father as to how Abe's new command went.

"Well enough. We have plenty of fuel yet," the young man reported, "and our wounded should all recover." He did hesitate before saying, "One of our sailors has been reporting strange dreams and voices since we came to this place. I fear he is going mad."

Hurasu was attentive at once. He surely suspected the man had latent powers, awakened in this world. So it had been with Vasa, whose tale he had given us earlier. "I should speak with him," he said. "When we reach the Mora lands will be soon enough."

"Keep him drunk in the mean time," I added to this. I knew the Japanese had strong drink aboard. Beer too, I suspected, and resented that they had offered me none!

The sorcerer chuckled. "A good suggestion, in truth. It will muffle those voices for now." He considered things a moment. "Maybe I could go over and see him sooner."

"As you wish, sir." Abe, I think, did not take it very seriously. "I saw you using a sextant at the noon," he said to Father.

"We can manage a rough estimate of latitude. No more." He shrugged. "And probably no more is needed."

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I knew the mouth of the Gurang was to be our target, before proceeding down the coast to our homeland. I also knew — oh, believed anyway — Naio and Arisu could find it without the aid of the sextant.

“I have instruments,” said the Japanese officer. “The training to use them, as well.”

“Probably a working chronometer,” Vehina whispered in my ear. She had used the word before but I had no more than a vague idea of its meaning. A way to tell the time, as if one couldn’t look at the sky. No one seemed particularly interested in talking about Abe’s instruments and the conversation turned elsewhere.

“How fare your Kohari guests?” asked Beka.

“Well enough. Ensign Kato has their charge. I think he is learning more of your pidgin from them.”

It was agreed we would start off again at the first light of dawn. I assume Abe then went back to his submarine. I am not sure for I had already gone to my sleeping mat.

The sub-lieutenant was a leader now, captain of his vessel. His dealings would be with Beka and Father and Naio, not with me. For the next few days, that was; all that should change when the long gray craft nosed its way into the lagoon below the Great Falls. I would see those soon. Soon, I repeated to myself as I fell into sleep.

I stood not at the falls but by A’auwa. A full moon hung above the sacred lake. *I dream*, I told myself. Twice had I seen A’auwa in dreams, first the A’auwa of the past, as it was on the day Rahaita had been slain. Of that I was fairly certain. Someone had shown me that past.

Then when I went seeking under Hurasu’s direction and nearly lost myself. Again, someone had shown me A’auwa, led me to safety. But it was not the A’auwa I had known. I could see that now.

This sacred place exists in more than one world, came a silver

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voice, the voice of a woman, a voice that sounded young yet felt more ancient than mankind.

My master Hurasu would say it exists in infinite worlds. At once, I realized it was a stupid thing to say.

Does that matter? she asked. *You are by this A'auwa, my A'auwa, the A'auwa in the world of your gods.*

You are the Woman of the Moon.

I am. You are important to me, Warrior of the Moon, as is your mother Pana'a. As was Rahaita. Her sigh held a great grief, a grief beyond my understanding. As is your father, for that matter. He was recognized as one of mine by Oorto as soon as he came to this world.

And by Rahaita.

Though she was not aware of it. She thought her naming of him as Moon King was all her own idea.

And her naming of me?

A laugh. As her sigh held deep grief, her laughter filled me with an inexpressible joy. *That too, perhaps. Know, Maratoo, that I can see the future no better than a mortal and not as well as you! Yet I sense that trials await you.*

I can not see those, Lady Marahina.

I know. But you can see much and will learn to see more. As my beloved Pana'a, you may serve your people.

The goddess remained hidden. Or maybe that was she, floating in the sky above A'auwa. I doubted that Marahina was really the moon, though. That was the sort of thing one told children. *I know not how to serve them, my lady. I know not what I am. Warrior? Sorcerer?*

Another has told you one can be more than one thing.

It was perhaps more convincing to hear this from the Woman of the Moon than from Malee. I looked about me, taking in this more-than-A'auwa, this A'auwa of the gods. Again, I wondered where Marahina hid.

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It would not be well for you to see me in my true form, undiminished, here in this world. Perhaps in yours some day, Moon Man. The world around me faded. The last I felt of it was a breath of fragrant breeze, pine-scented, carrying me to wakefulness.

54. Another Goddess

“THIS ONE SPOKE to another goddess last night.”

I opened my eyes to see Yuza looking down at me. “So he did,” I told her.

I needed to go visit the priest’s pot in the stern but politely remained. “She is the one I glimpsed before. A Mora goddess?” Yuza sat down beside me. I wondered if she had pulled in shadow to hide her presence from the rest of the crew.

“The Woman of the Moon.”

“Ah. Her power must have been greater last night, with the moon nearly full.” I scolded myself for not thinking of this. “Never have I met her. Hmm.” Her brows contracted into a brief frown. “I do not think I have met any Mora deities. Xido isn’t one, is he?”

“I’ve never heard of a Xido.”

“He doesn’t look like one of your people anyway. Now where is that wizard?”

I didn’t know. I allowed her to search for Hurasu while I went to relieve myself. I am sure she raised a few eyebrows, appearing in the middle of the ocean to wander about our canoe, but all knew of her by now.

Mora gods didn’t do that sort of thing. Not that I had heard of. She was with Hurasu by the time I got back. Naio and Vehina sat with them too.

“Xido has visited my valley realm, incognito,” the Lord of Visions was saying. “I didn’t bother him and he didn’t bother me.”

“He looks like your people then,” spoke Naio.

“Close enough. In fact,” he continued, “the folk from whom I obtained my canoe, across the ocean, are followers of his pantheon and look much like him.”

I knew Hurasu’s subjects looked much like the Diwarna, that they were Diwarna, perhaps, but long separated from their kin in the Gurang valley. Who these people across the ocean were, I did not know. It was not likely to matter, was it?

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“Oh!” said Yuza of a sudden. “I meant to tell you of Beyana. She is well but too near birth to travel between worlds herself.”

“It might harm the child?” asked Vehina.

Yuza shrugged. “Best not to take chances. Especially when it has a mortal father.”

“You know,” Hurasu said, “she is quite capable of speaking with me from afar.” There was at least a trace of accusation clinging to those words.

“Gods don’t do that sort of thing,” sniffed Yuza. “It doesn’t pay to be too intimate with mortals.” It was a little late to worry about that with Beyana and Hurasu, I thought.

“Visiting in dreams is much better. As the goddess who visited Moon Boy last night.”

Eyes turned to me. “The Lady Marahina spoke to me,” I admitted.

“The other presence we sensed,” said Hurasu. I only nodded. Ulani and my father had joined us. Father only regarded me, his look thoughtful. Was there some trace of sadness mixed in that look?

“It is most rare for the gods to speak so these days,” said Ulani. “Not as they did to the heroes of old.” A small smile. “According to legend.”

“What of Lady Rahiniti?” I asked.

Ulani laughed now. “An unlikely hero, was she not? Yet I do believe Rehe spoke to her. Maybe the goddess of the morning star does yet. I have not asked her.”

“My niece is favored,” Naio put in. “Te’eta has visited her dreams as well.”

Father scowled at the mention of that name, the Lord of the Red Sky, husband of Rehe. His cultists had led the rebels during the civil war, the war in which my name-mother died. But he knew it was not the fault of any god, but of men.

Had it not been for his feelings, I might have explored Te’eta’s

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priesthood myself, as I sought for a direction. Not now. My paths were no clearer but I knew they led not that way.

"Once gods and great heroes walked among the Mora," spoke Ulani. "Again, according to the legends."

"I think the Taona Noe, the Great Teacher of those legends, might have been our friend Hurasu," said Father, nodding in the man's direction. "He has told me he visited the Mora when first they came to this land."

"That is possible," admitted the sorcerer. I thought it more than possible.

Naio peered at him. "Could you then have been the ancestor of the first High King, Uiri?"

"I was his grandfather." Hurasu paused, his brow furrowing. "Or was it great-grandfather?"

"Grandfather, I think," said Ulani. "The epics tell of Uiri's mother being a prophetess and her father being a god." Again his slight smile. "Not that the epics are always accurate. Not even my own."

"The son of a prophetess," murmured Vehina. She did not look at me but I understood what she was implying.

Hurasu spoke. "That was some generations after your people first settled in the Land of the Sleeping Sky. I visited more than once in those days."

"Ho!" came a cry. I turned to see Arisu shinnying up one of the masts. "Sails!" he called out, peering toward the eastern horizon. "Kohari! Many Kohari!"

55. *The Fleet*

“ALERT THE JAPANESE!” ordered Naio. “Anyone not needed in battle should be inside their vessel.”

Those were few. Only Okada and Ulani, in fact. Yuza gave us all a lingering look before disappearing into her smoke.

Vehina had no intention of deserting and went to find her bow. I did the same. We might not need to fight. We might outrun those distant boats, so distant I could barely make them out, and the submarine could hide beneath the water.

Naio had the same thought, and shifted our course southerly. We would not make as good a speed for we must quarter into the light winds. “To the paddles all!” he called out.

Ulani and Okada were sent to the other vessel in the little dugout, which was let out on a rope behind us until it reached the submarine following in our wake. That done, Abe brought his craft alongside, keeping even with us. Hare stood on deck, a few sailors with him and one of the Kohari captives. Perhaps they hoped the man could provide information about those boats approaching.

Approaching rapidly from the southeast, for they had the better of this wind. At least twenty boats spread in a broad, roughly curved line, a net in which to trap us. Would we get past them? I thought not, but that did not mean we could not break through, turn east and run. We strained at the paddles, casting furtive looks at the limp sails. Turn further west, run toward the deep ocean where the Kohari could not and would not follow?

Niao did not seem to consider it, nor turning about and running north. Perhaps he thought we couldn’t outrun them without a stronger breeze. Or knew we couldn’t.

That is why he was in charge and not I. A glance toward the submarine showed that all had gone inside. Was it sinking into the waves? Did Abe intend to desert us?

This would not be easy. Too many enemy boats were congregated where we needed to break through. “Archers!” called Beka.

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“Stand ready. The rest of you keep paddling as if Tu himself were after you!”

The god of war had a reputation for devouring men. We were about to be devoured ourselves if we couldn’t get past. I nocked an arrow, ready to release as soon as we were in range. There would be many arrows returned. Too many.

Of a sudden, a long gray form launched from the depths, crashing into the nearest Kohari boat, smashing it even better than would our heavy war canoe. A cheer arose but too soon, maybe it was. We were being ringed about, our opponents remaining beyond a good bow shot — though I might have attempted one anyway, given a tempting target.

Could the submarine clear our way? The Kohari feared to close with it, that was certain. Some of these had surely been at the island and remembered the gunfire there. They could not know all the Japanese rifles were gone, the machine gun useless. But the submarine had just shown it could be every bit as deadly without them. Slowly we paddled forward, the submarine beside, wondering whether the Kohari would give way.

I could see Hare and his companions again on the deck. They must not intend to go beneath the water again. Better to show their great vessel and awe these Kohari! Still, I stood ready with my bow, with the other archers.

And what was going on over there? A man, surely a priest, raising his arms. Praying to some Kohari god or another. Too far for a good shot, it was. I hoped the distance would lessen.

This fleet. I had seen it in my vision, had I not? But not here, not in the open ocean. There had been an unknown coast behind it. And priests. I had seen priests at the shore, calling forth —

“Aieee!” came a wail from across the water. It was the Kohari who stood beside Hare. “The bakawan! They have called the bakawan!”

Before us, the water boiled and a great snake-like form rose.

56. *The Bakawan*

THE BAKAWAN FIXED its eyes upon us. Gray and green was its sinuous body, and a long red tongue flicked from the monstrous maw. Stiff whiskers grew on either side of the head.

"The spawn of Bagap." That was my father's voice, as calm as ever. I envied him that trait. "The priests have called it forth from the abyss."

"As you foretold," whispered Hurasu. I had not noted that he stood beside me. His long sword was in his hand. "It is being controlled by one over there."

"I have seen him. Do you spy him, Vehina? The one with the tall crown in that boat to the rear." The Kohari priest stood tall, presenting a clear target, but it was a long distance.

"Shall we have another shooting match?" she asked. We both pulled and let loose and nocked another arrow before we knew where the first had sped.

The priest was down. I'll admit, I think it more likely Vehina hit him than I. Admit it to you, not to Vehina.

The huge sea-serpent cast about, seemingly confused. "It has still a geas to destroy this canoe, I think," spoke Hurasu. "But none to direct its actions. Ha, it might well turn on the enemy boats when through with us!"

Then it fell upon us.

Had the priest yet controlled it, the bakawan might have made short work of us. Instead, it crashed against the canoe haphazardly, its head following the men thrown into the water as its predatory instincts took over. The Kohari could not close nor did they even let loose arrows at us. They waited, ringing us about, to watch what would happen.

Sailors were streaming out of the submarine. Little armament had they, but some grasped machetes — for so they named the little swords — and others hatchets. A few held pistols, and Taki and

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Hare their long swords. Then one man threw a small round object toward the monster.

A loud noise, a plume of water, an horrendous screech from the bakawan, like the largest sea gull in the world. The thing had hurt it. Or enraged it. It rose high and fell onto the prow of our canoe, splintering it, breaking part of it away.

"Everyone to the submarine!" cried out Taki. "We can dive and get away!"

Ropes were thrown, our two craft lashed together. It is not to be assumed the Kohari noted none of this for they now began to draw closer — not too close — and rain arrows. I think one or two might have hit the bakawan. Whether it even noticed them, I can not say. It was already in a bad mood.

Again and again it thrashed against the great canoe, further breaking it apart. The outrigger separated, making our footing all the more unstable. We archers did not waste any of our own arrows on the creature. Those were for the Kohari. We continued to loose shafts toward their boats.

"Another grenade," hissed Vehina. I followed her eyes to see the Japanese sailor again throw something at the bakawan. It hurt it this time. Enough so that it dove beneath the waters.

Had it gone? We could not guess, nor could the Kohari, but they took this as signal to move in. Within a minute, warriors were climbing into what remained of the canoe, and attempting to clamber onto the submarine. "Hurry!" cried out Taki. "We can not wait much longer!"

He leaped across to us, shining sword in hand. "Sato's," he said, holding it up, and immediately drove toward the Kohari coming over the other side of the canoe. I could see Hare doing much the same on the deck of the submarine, clearing away any Kohari warriors incautious enough to get close. I think he used the sword much more skillfully than Taki, not that I had time to stop and admire! I heard shots too, from the pistols.

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A great spray, an eruption, as the bakawan launched itself from where it had hidden in the depths. This time, its target was the submarine.

“Come! We leave!” came Hare’s voice. I had abandoned my bow by now — arrows all gone — and brandished one of the spears. Only a few of us remained on the canoe, backing toward safety. Those who yet lived had made it across, I was sure.

“Go!” I growled at Vehina. She was of no use in close fighting. The woman gathered herself to jump the narrow gap when the thrashing of the bakawan tipped the canoe and threw her into the water. I should not have let myself look, should not have taken my eyes off the Kohari for the slightest moment, for in a moment I was down.

“Do not kill him!” someone ordered. “He is wanted.” I struggled against the grasping of many hands. No use. Was Taki fighting on? I couldn’t see him. And where was Hurasu? He had still been in the thick of combat, I was sure. Water sloshed around me. The canoe was sinking. Or filling with water. Maybe it couldn’t completely sink.

Strong arms jerked me to my feet. There lay the submarine but its hatch was closed. No man remained on its deck but the monstrous bakawan continued to thrash against the metal hull, striking again and again, wrapping itself around and around as if to crush it.

Then I watched both sink into the sea.

57. Taken

SIX WE WERE. Six of whom I knew, six who had been brought onto this boat. Taki was one. Vehina was another.

"They pulled me out of the water," she whispered. "Are they going to cut off our heads?"

I shook my own head, still attached to my shoulders. If they intended to take it, they would have already. I had seen them hack some from the dead and wounded Mora still on the great war canoe. Ah, Naio's pride would sail no more! It had been left, a derelict of shattered wood, as the Kohari sailed away.

"We stayed too long," commented Taki, seated on my other side. He addressed a Japanese sailor seated across from us, the only one captive here. "Ikeda fell into the water, it seems," he reported, "and was fished out as was Vehina."

Perhaps the two Mora sailors who shared our captivity had suffered the same fate. "Do you know what came of Hurasu?" I asked them. "Or Naio?" I knew both had stayed to the last on the canoe.

But neither man knew their fate any more than did I. It was growing dark. Soon the moon would again shine upon the waters, upon us, but all would be changed from last night. Why had Marahina spoken to me then? Had she some idea of what would come, even if she claimed no ability to prophecy?

Malee. I should speak to Malee. She heard me at once.

I am a captive, I told her. The Kohari have taken our canoe. I do not know what has become of Hurasu.

At once she sensibly suggested we look for him. And found him. *I would have quested for you shortly, he said, but I was somewhat busy.*

Are you safe? On the submarine?

No. Naio and I were the last on the canoe and chose to seek the safety of the water. We hid amid the wreckage until it grew dark and the Kohari boats sailed away.

WARRIOR OF THE MOON

You are in the water? asked Malee. She sounded rightfully concerned.

No. The little dugout was still tied to the broken hull of our canoe. Naio and I now paddle it toward land. Wherever that may be.

Naio will find it, I assured him. I was assuring myself as well.

He is steering us north. He says the islands are the closest land.

We go north too, I said. *You must inform everyone, Malee. I think my father is safe, and Beka. And still headed toward the Great Falls I would think.*

Someone suddenly slapped me across the face. "You speak from afar," said the priest glaring down at me. "No more!" He turned to an attendant. "Give him the drug."

The little bald sub-priest knelt down, cackling. "Some *mayaya* will make your voyage more pleasant. No more voices in your head!" To a pair of warriors he said, "Get his mouth open."

Mayaya. The drug that was given to those about to be sacrificed on the altar of one god or another. And, it was said, more than a few priests were addicted to its use. My mouth was forced open, the draught was forced in. I could not keep myself from swallowing eventually.

My cares faded from me, my thoughts lost their hard edges. They floated about in my head and one could not connect with another. I might have slept. More *mayaya* was given to me the next day, I think. I can not remember.

I do remember arriving in a small harbor, filled with Kohari fishing boats, and being led up a dirt path to a wooden stockade. I heard the banging of copper gongs and the rattle of bamboo percussion. Above stood the moon, grown great and beautiful. Why did it not speak to me?

Malee! I called out but heard no answer.

AFTERWORD

“WARRIOR OF THE MOON” is the first novel of the Sleeping Sky Trilogy, continuing the saga begun in the three Malvern books and continued in the Mora Trilogy.

A note about pronunciations of Mora names: typically, all the vowels in these are pronounced separately, even when we have a string of them in a row. Thus Mouiri is spoken MOE-oo-EER-ee. I have used an apostrophe to indicate the stop between repeated vowel sounds, as in A’auwa, pronounced AH-ah-OO-wah. As for words from other languages, I leave you to make your best guess.

Author and artist Stephen Brooke lives and works in an old farmhouse in the Florida Panhandle. All his books are available from Arachis Press, a small publisher dedicated to presenting meaningful literature for readers of all ages.

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