

**The Aloha Moon**  
**An Historical Novel by**  
**Cheryl Carroll**

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## PART I: UNCLE NOAH

### Chapter 1: Merry Christmas

***Boston Weekly Messenger, Society Page, December 24, 1813: Captain Noah Ellez' ship, American Enterprise, remains woefully overdue. Will our brave captain run the British blockade of Boston to arrive in time for Stuart Manor's annual Christmas Eve dinner? If he is delayed much longer, all of Beacon Hill will certainly miss his esteemed presence at this season's premiere social event. Please come home soon, Captain Ellez.***

“Who’s that big brown girl on the stairs, Johnny boy?” patrician Michael O’Neill chides his host as he strides into Stuart Manor’s ornate foyer. “Do you allow your servants the run of the house at parties?” He plucks a lace handkerchief from his sleeve and presses it to his nose.

Johnny Stuart frowns and approaches his barefoot stepsister who is hugging her knees in a dingy housedress on the bottom step of the elegant staircase. He points a bony finger at the second floor landing and hisses in her face, “Leah, get back to your room. Now!”

“I am waiting for Uncle,” Leah replies, her lip jutting with obstinacy.

“Go,” her stepbrother commands as forcefully as his skinny little frame can manage.

Michael O’Neill’s retinue of five redheaded brothers stare at the odd-looking girl on the staircase, and several female admirers titter behind their fans.

Leah pouts and inches her way up the stairs as slowly as possible. She stops at the top and sits cross-legged out of sight. on the landing with a bird’s eye view of the entry.

She sighs. *Oh Uncle, please hurry up and come home. I do not like these people. I long for a big hug in your warm coat... even though it does smell of your nasty pipe tobacco.*

She watches her stepbrother below playing host. *He looks like a scrawny child next to that gangly Michael O’Neill.*

Johnny takes Michael’s handsome topcoat and hands it off to the butler, muttering to his friend, “Unfortunately, my stepsister’s a bit slow, you know.”

Their conversation echoes to the upper floors in the marble hall, and Leah snorts. *Slow! If I am slow, then Johnny is a snail!*

“Yes, I understand,” says Michael. “We have one of those too. That’s Timmy over there. Brother number six. The O’Neill bloodline had grown weak by the time he came along.”

Leah leans over the banister curious to see the object of Michael’s scorn, a shy skinny strawberry blond lad shrinking out of sight into the background of the vestibule.

She sighs. *Poor lad, he looks as if they do not feed him.*

“We should have been brothers, Michael, old man.” Johnny claps his chum on the back and they stroll down the main hall to the sitting room, shaking hands with admiring guests along the way.

Leah runs barefoot down the back stairs and through the servant’s quarters to huddle hidden behind the pantry door, peeking through the crack for an unobstructed view of the sitting room. She claps her hands silently and grins, observing the party guests as if they were characters in her own private play, drinking, playing cards and gossiping.

Every eye turns to the two dandies as they saunter in.

“Michael, old son, welcome to Stuart Manor.” Her father pumps Michael O’Neill’s white hand. “I see you have brought some admirers.” He nods at the bevy of giggling, be-ribboned ladies in Michael’s wake. “Where’s that pater of yours?”

“Oh, he and Mother will be along soon. They enjoy being fashionably late, you know.” Michael sniffs as he takes a bit of snuff from a silver box and emits a delicate sneeze.

“But never late for dinner,” Stuart exclaims loudly enough for all to hear.

Leah rolls her eyes as the foolish party guests laugh too loudly at her father’s display of wit.

Her mother, coming from supervising dinner preparations in the kitchen, passes Leah hidden behind the door and enters the sitting room with a forced smile.

But before she has had a chance to greet her guests, Stuart grasps his wife’s skinny arm through her ruffled leghorn sleeve and rasps in her ear, “your daughter was seen on the stair. Either make that unnatural whelp presentable or keep her out of sight. Now!!”

Leah’s face melts and she blinks back tears. She runs lickety split through the kitchen and up the back stairs, two at a time, to her bedroom. She throws herself on the bed, her chin jutting and heart pounding. “Oh, how I wish they did not hate me so.”

Leah’s mother walks in and seats herself on the edge of the bed. “What were you thinking, coming down without your cap or slippers? Your hair has come out of the braid, and you look like a beggar.” She picks at Leah’s mass of black curls.

Leah sniffles loudly, “I only thought Uncle might...” and collapses onto the bed, sobbing.

“Leah, do you wish to come down to dinner or not?”

“Yes,” Leah answers between sobs. “Am I allowed?”

“You know what you need to do, my girl.”

Leah’s tears subside, and she turns to look at her mother, her eyes red and swollen. “Oh, Mother, please do not make me wear it. It hurts so.”

“Do you want to go to dinner?”

Leah turns over, her face buried in the pillow, her tall body stretched out over the bed. She sighs, surrendering with a pillow-muffled, “All right.”

“What did you say?”

She turns her head to the side. “I said all right. Bring the damnable thing out.”

“Leah, such language! Where did you hear that?”

“From Johnny, of course. Remember when he cursed the tailor for making his trousers so short his skinny legs poked out at the bottom?” She giggles through her tears.

“No I certainly do not. It is not lady-like and I never want to hear you use such language again. If you are to be seen in public, you must at least appear to be a presentable young lady, despite the gossip.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Dejected, Leah crawls off the bed, removes her faded cotton day dress, and stands in her pantaloons and chemise, arms out, yielding to the inevitable. She grits her teeth as she watches her mother open a drawer in her carved burl wood chest and pull out a crème-colored corset. It is a thick garment, with several layers of linen and wool, with stiff stays and embroidered pink roses and green vines climbing up the waist.

Her mother surveys Leah's plump and already curvaceous figure. "With this body, you should have started this when you were ten. You have not yet reached fourteen years and your shape is already beyond hope." She frowns at Leah's ample hips and begins the untangling of the corset's laces.

"Was my father big like me?"

"I hardly remember, that was a such long time ago. He was lost before you were born."

"What about Johnny's mother? Was she little like him?"

"I do not know, Leah. She died giving birth."

"What gossip, Mother?"

"What do you mean?"

"What you said ... despite what gossip?"

"Oh, you know how tongues wag. Town busybodies say we keep you from society because you are deformed or afflicted with some mental defect. You know very well, Leah, we want to protect you from the British war pillagers and that is why you are not seen out."

"Except for church on Easter and Christmas," Leah reminds her mother.

"Yes, except for church."

"And when Uncle is in Boston ..."

"Yes, and when Noah is here. 'Tis better for all if you are considered delicate."

Leah looks at herself in her dressing table mirror, and observing nothing delicate in her visage, suppresses a laugh. She is two inches short of six feet tall. Her hair is long, thick and black with unruly curls, which her mother French braids tightly, and stuffs beneath a cap. Her features are broad, her eyes large, brown and wideset, her cheeks high-boned, and skin tawny.

She watches her mother in the mirror working the complicated laces. *How could it be that my big soft body came from this hard, pale little person?*

She grips the bedpost as her mother wraps the dreaded corset around her waist, fitting it first to her breasts, and then cinching the laces in the back, working them from top to bottom and then jerking them again from bottom to top until she can't get it any tighter.

"I cannot breathe, and it is poking me," Leah whines, her ribs immovable in the wire cage. The merciless whalebone stays jab at her plump flesh.

"Hush, we all must suffer in one way or another."

Grace slips Leah's pink satin gown over her head and begins to fasten the tiny ivory buttons up the back, the yards of shiny satin fabric engulfing Leah's tall body. In the Empire fashion, the skirt hangs from below her breasts, falling to the floor, where it is accentuated by a large ruffle with white lace circling the hem.

"I look like a pink bedspread," Leah blurts out, observing the image of herself in the billowing pink skirt and imagining her plump breasts as pillows.

"Never mind, Leah, stay seated and out of the light. And for God's sake, keep your gloves on. Your hands look like they are meant for servant work."

"But Mother, how am I to eat?"

"Don't be impertinent, girl. You will eat as little as possible, and say nothing." Grace grabs Leah's hand like a vise, and leans to within inches of her daughter's face, the veins standing out in her forehead. "And remember, attract no attention to yourself."

Leah and Grace enter the bright, noisy dining room as the guests are finishing their sumptuous vanilla crème éclair dessert. Leah tiptoes to her stepfather's chair, mumbles, "Good evening, Father," and shrinks away. But not soon enough.

John Stuart, holding Leah with his steely gaze, looks her up and down and snickers with derisive laughter.

"Oh, Lord. That girl gets taller every day," he says loudly to his guests, and then frowns at her over his spectacles. "It's one thing if a girl has grace and is tall, but to be tall and graceless, that is quite another thing." He waves her away, shakes his head and screws up his face as if an unpleasant odor had assaulted his nostrils.

Leah casts down her eyes and returns to her mother's side, placing her corseted body uncomfortably on the edge of the chair. Her chest heaves with humiliation, Her cheeks are so hot they sting. *Damn him. Damn him to hell.*

"Do you not agree, my dear Michael?" Stuart inquires of the eldest O'Neill son.

"But of course." The boy winks at the row of pretty girls at the table who giggle and blush, their curls trembling and fans fluttering at his coveted attention.

Leah works her gloves in her lap. *Oh how I wish I could summon the courage to speak.*

"Not only grace, but good breeding is of utmost importance." Michael O'Neill continues. "Families such as ours must lead the way in culture and politics since we carry the best of the English Protestant bloodlines. Johnny and I will see to that, won't we Johnny-boy?"

"But of course." Johnny brandishes his wine glass.

Leah presses her glove to her mouth to keep from laughing out loud. *Oh Johnny, how many times have I heard you hoot loudly at jests I am certain you do not comprehend! I'll wager you do not know what mischief O'Neill refers to, and yet you are eager to comply anyway. You are such a dunce.*

"We Stuarts, of course, can be traced back to the English kings," John Stuart proclaims. "Johnny here might as well be a prince, for the royal blood running in his veins." He proudly claps his son on the back. His mother, God rest her soul, was also a Stuart, my third cousin.

The dinner guests are impressed, but none more so than Johnny who preens and blushes. Leah's brow knits. *How odd. ... I thought the English were our mortal enemies ...*

"Now, the Ellez family history ... that is quite another story."

Father Stuart fixes his eye upon his wife, who is hiding discreetly in the shadows next to Leah. His steely tone sends a chill through Leah's body.

"Don't ..." Mrs. Stuart's mouth silently warns when her eyes meet her husband's.

"Some say the Ellez bloodline was tainted long ago by dark-skinned heathens." His gaze passes to Leah's tawny skin, brown eyes and wild black hair, and there it lingers.

There is silence in the room; the guests issue sidelong glances and eye their plates.

"Mother," Leah whispers, "What does he mean?"

"Shush girl," Grace replies with a pained expression and tear-filled eyes.

"Father, you have made Mother cry!" Leah blurts out.

Grace Stuart rises and grips Leah's arm. "Nonsense, girl." She half-smiles at the gathering. "Come my lamb, you tire so easily. It's time for you to retire."

Stuart winks at Johnny who bursts out in mocking laughter. Relieved someone is laughing, the girls all begin to chuckle too, their escorts then joining in the fun as well.

Leah acquiesces, and Grace escorts her daughter out of the dining room and bustles her across the foyer and up the stairs. Wordless, her mother completes the not-so-gentle unbuttoning of the dress and un-cinching of the corset, and leaves to join the ladies in the sitting room.

Leah strips the corset from her body and kicks it across the room. “You dreadful thing. I shan’t ever wear you again!” She falls on her bed crying softly into her pillow. “Oh, how I wish I could sail away from here. Please, Uncle Noah, please come home soon and take me away from them forever.”

Moments later, the front door booms shut, echoing through the cold marble halls of Stuart Manor. Leah jerks to attention, abandoning her misery. *Uncle! Oh, please, let it be Uncle!*

She throws on her housedress and runs to the landing to see the butler talking to a tall and elegantly uniformed gentleman. She sighs. *It is indeed a captain, but not the right one.*

“Good evening, Captain Poe,” the butler greets him with a smile, taking his splendid red and black tri-cornered hat and woolen greatcoat.

*He is Uncle’s dear friend. I wonder if he knows when Uncle will come.* Leah slinks down the staircase, hugging the wall, making her way through the servant’s hall to the broom closet opposite the entrance to her father’s study. Here, unseen, she can observe all guests entering the foyer, and listen at the study door for any interesting tidbits of gossip.

“Dinner has concluded,” the butler informs Captain Poe. “Would you care to join the gentlemen in the library? Or Cook could prepare you a bite to eat, if you are so inclined.”

“No, Marshman, I think a smoke and some brandy will do. I know my own way.” He smiles at the butler and strides down the hall to the library. As he passes her hiding place, Leah can smell the bay rum on his slicked back black hair, and the damp wool of his captain’s jacket.

Poe opens the carved double door into a room smelling of leather bound books and cigars. Leah creeps across the hall to the study doors, and presses her ear to the keyhole.

“Poe, my good man,” she hears her father welcome him. “How good to see you again.”

*I wish I could see him.* She turns the doorknob ever so slowly, and then pulls the door open just enough to see the whole room through the crack without being discovered.

Her heart flutters as she observes the renowned Captain Leo Poe accept a fat cigar and a warm brandy snifter. He sinks into a brown leather chaise, stretching out his long trouser-clad legs. “Ah, the pleasures of the landlubber,” he says, pulling at the cigar.

“Do tell, Leo, what news from the Pacific?” her father inquires.

“The news, men? The news is sandalwood. Those trees might as well be gold for the value they are given by the Chinese. The demand increases faster than the damned trees can grow.”

“The more they want it, the more we can charge for it,” boasts her father. “There’s more money in Hawai’ian sandalwood than in textiles, that’s for certain. Maybe even more than whales, mark my words.”

Leah observes the gentlemen’s heads bob in agreement as they salute each other with their cigars.

“Captain John Palmer Parker has married a Hawai’ian princess and started domesticating the cattle on the largest island of Hawai’i,” Poe reports.

“A princess, you say?” Her father’s familiar derisive laugh rings out.

Leah cringes and bites her lip. *I know that laugh. Too often have I been on the receiving*

*end of its venom.*

“I wonder how big and brown this princess is. Do you think she’s worth a few cows, eh, Poe?” Her father’s jowls bounce merrily as he elbows Johnny.

“Although huge by our standards, the Hawai’ian royalty are really quite beautiful,” the captain admonishes Stuart in a stern voice. “And quite sporting. Even the chiefesses. Big doesn’t necessarily mean graceless, you know.”

Leah’s eyes widen. *Could this be true? A land where you need not be dainty and fair to be loved?*

“Have you ever met the King of Hawai’i?” an O’Neill brother asks.

“Yes. I feasted with him and his retinue at what they call a lew-ow. Kamehameha is a mountain of a man, maybe seven feet tall, all muscle, and with great regality. He united all the islands three years ago, which was quite a feat. He’s been open to trade with us, and speaks fairly good English already.”

All eyes follow Poe as he rises and strides to the bar to refresh his snifter. “Oh, and I am happy to report, coffee is now available at his table. A Spanish advisor to the king has introduced it to the court. So the islands are becoming quite civilized.”

“Is it true the mountains spit fire?” asks young Sean O’Neill.

“They certainly do. There are two volcanic mountains in the center of Hawai’i that are so big they can be seen for miles away at sea. Both belch cinders and hot liquid rocks when the ‘gods’ are angry.”

“Ha, ha,” John Stuart mocks. “These native cultures. Such children.”

Leah sticks her tongue out at her father through the crack in the door.

“Oh, I wouldn’t be so quick to demean, John.” Poe hovers over the shorter man in a menacing pose. “The Hawai’ians are the finest sailors I have ever seen. They made their way from Tahiti hundreds of years ago to a handful of tiny islands in the middle of the Pacific with no navigational tools or charts to guide them there.”

Leah gasps in delight at her father’s comeuppance, stifling herself from cheering Poe on.

Stuart’s eyes narrow at the captain’s challenge. “Touché, sir. Point taken, my friend,” he replies, clapping Poe on the back.

Leah snorts. *Friend? As if the noble Captain Poe would ever be your friend.*

“I hear the women run around n-n-naked and offer themselves to sailors. Is that true?” asks young Sean.

Leah giggles silently as she observes the young man’s face blush crimson.

“The climate is temperate in the islands year ‘round. So nakedness is their custom. Strangers are accepted as family, and sexual intercourse is considered a warm welcome in their culture.”

All the men shake their heads in amazement. Leah’s mouth falls open and her eyes grow big.

Michael winks at his friend, elbowing him. “How fortunate! Perhaps we should venture there for a warm welcome, Johnny.”

“No doubt about it,” says Johnny.

Leah covers her mouth to keep herself from crying out to her brother. *What a liar you are! How often have you boasted you will never set foot on any of Father’s smelly old boats! But*



*I will. I am going to that place where everyone is family. Uncle Noah will take me there on his ship. Just you wait and see!*

###

***Park Street Church Bulletin, December 25, 1813: At the Christmas service this evening, our congregation will be blessed with the presence of our two leading families, the John Stuarts and Michael O'Neills of Beacon Hill. Following the service, we invite our esteemed guests to a reception in their honor in the Sanctuary. A Happy Christmas & Prosperous New Year to all!***

The elegant Park Street Church is located at the intersection of Park and Tremont streets at the northeast corner of Boston Common. Although only a few blocks from Stuart Manor, the Stuarts always leave an hour before the service and take their closed carriage under cover of darkness so Leah will not present a public display of her shortcomings on the way. They prefer the evening service, since it is more sparsely attended.

The Stuarts arrive even before the assigned greeters have taken their positions in the vestibule. Elated to be out of doors once again, Leah throws open the carriage door and bounces down onto the pavement, despite her mother clucking at her to wait for the men to go first.

Shifting her weight from one foot to the other in the cold, she waits impatiently while her family exits the carriage. She can tell Johnny is particularly proud of his holiday ensemble. He wears a fashionable waistcoat with fur shawl collar, a brocade vest with embroidered red cherries on it, and a shiny, flat-crowned, top hat of brushed beaver fur. When he makes an appearance at the coach door, he looks around, looking for the customary admiration from an adoring public. Leah giggles at his crestfallen expression when there is no one waiting to worship him at the curb.

Leah stands at mock attention as her father makes his appearance. Although he is about as far from military service as a man can get, his navy blue overcoat is adorned with military frogging on the collar and chest, and gold decorative braids and tassels at the shoulders and the sleeves.

Her diminutive mother is helped out of the coach by her son and husband. She wears a gray silk dress, unadorned, no jewelry save her wedding ring, with a weather-practical bonnet.

Leah sighs. *Poor Mother.* She never smiles, not even in church. She wears no rouge to color her gray cheeks or ribbons to tie up her thin blond hair. Her only luxury, a gift from her brother, is a beautiful Russian fur mantle which, from the raised eyebrows of the parishioners every year, has long been the envy of every woman in the church. Leah loves the warm smell of that coat.

The four Stuarts, a family gray and hard despite their fashion finery, walk down the side aisle to settle into their front row pew. Leah starts to remove the large-brimmed black hat with its thick veil falling to her waist, but her mother hisses at her.

“Keep it on Leah, for modesty’s sake.” So Leah sits in the pew, covered from head to toe in black, a thick mantelet-style cloak hanging to her ankles, and man-size black kid gloves covering her large square hands.

The other parishioners begin to arrive, the ladies wearing stylish leghorn bonnets or exotic turbans trimmed with ribbons, feathers, and flowers, presenting a veritable rainbow of colors as they fill in the pews. All save Leah, a dark, grim island languishing in their midst.

As she slumps on the bench, the whalebone stay in her corset mercilessly grinds a bruise into her right breast. She squirms, attempting to shift her weight to protect her tender skin from the prodding stay.

“Sit still,” her mother spits in her ear, gripping her wrist and digging her talons into Leah’s skin. Johnny shoots her a mean glance as well. Leah’s eyes well up, her feelings hurting almost as much as the bruise.

The service is nearly over when Leah smells the aroma of a familiar pipe tobacco and feels a loving squeeze of her hand. Her beloved uncle slides into the pew beside her, supplanting her brother. Suddenly, all feels right in her world. Noah Ellez takes Leah’s hand in his, and she can feel its warmth even through her glove. *Finally! Now I can be happy!*

Over the tight-jawed misgivings of her family, Leah is allowed to accompany her uncle in public. As they leave the church, Noah surveys the clear starry sky. “Would you care to walk by the wharf, my dear? It’s a fair night, and you seem to be well bundled up.” He surveys her bulky disguise with a chuckle.

Leah laughs as she removes the heavy veil and large bonnet, revealing the lace cap wrangling her unruly locks. The evening breeze cools her warm cheeks.

Uncle grins as Leah’s face emerges from the sea of black, “Ah, there’s my darling Leah!”

They make their way down the sloping hill on State Street until they see the dark water and the glinting reflections of city lights in the harbor. Even from three blocks away, they can hear ships in the night, straining at their lines, creaking and moaning.

“Listen to the ships singing, Leah. They are ready for sea. Were it not for the British blockade, they would be riding the mighty waves and filling their sails with boisterous winds and their holds with valuable cargo.” Noah’s gentle voice is imbued with his deep passion for the sea.

“You talk as if they were human, Uncle.”

“When you spend as much time with a ship as I do, you feel she is human. You know how far you can push each vessel, how many waves she can conquer, how much wind she can handle.”

As they stand gazing at the tall ships anchored near the Long Wharf, an elegant couple approaches. The gentleman wears a red captain’s uniform with many medals; his petite lady companion is dressed in a pale blue mantle with white fur and matching bonnet.

Leah feels a twinge of envy as she sees her uncle’s face beam.

“Chevalier. How good to see you again.” Uncle removes his tri-cornered captain’s hat and greets his friend, kissing him on both cheeks.

“And my dear Françoise, how charming you look this evening,” he says, taking her hand and kissing it, as well as both her cheeks. “What a becoming frock, my dear.” He winks at her.

“Noah, vous êtes toujours le coquin.” Françoise Chevalier teases him, her throaty laugh carrying across the stark Boston night.

Despite not wishing to share Uncle's company this evening, Leah cannot help but admit that she is ever so proud of him. He is so charming with such intriguing friends. And such a kind and thoughtful man, too.

After the appropriate introductions, the three begin speaking in French too fast for Leah to follow, so she wanders off along the harbor wharf. She hears odd grunts and singing, and investigates, catching sight of illumination coming from a low brick smokehouse nearby.

Hardly breathing, she peeks through the crack in the door to see six large golden men with long black coarse hair sitting around a crackling fire in the smoky half-light. They are shirtless and shoeless, their tight stylish breeches barely containing large muscular thighs. In the firelight, Leah can see white teeth and full lips, and sweat beading on tan faces and semi-naked bodies.

As one stands to sing, he is so tall his head grazes the ceiling beams of the squat building. The men's eyes appear to be closed, and one keeps time by slapping the heel of his hand against a painted gourd decorated with red and yellow feathers dancing in the firelight. As they all join in the chanting, their mellifluous music washes over her as she stands quiet and still. She feels herself falling under the spell of its seductive rhythms and the hypnotic voices of the six native men. Something within her stirs and she reaches for the door latch. Before she can turn it, she feels a hand upon her shoulder drawing her away from the ritual within.

"This is not a place for a young girl, Leah. You must not wander away. I am responsible for you. Your parents would have me keelhailed if you were harmed on my watch."

"I doubt they would care," Leah mumbles under her breath. "Who are those men? Their singing was so beautiful."

"Never mind about them. They are from Owayee. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions brought them over from the Pacific Islands. They are studying English and learning to be Christians so they can be ministers when they go home."

"They did not look like any ministers I have ever seen," Leah chortles.

"No, it doesn't seem like they are taking to it, does it?" Uncle laughs. "But as I told you, Leah, they are not for you to think about."

But think about them she does, their music, their passion, the sweat streaming down their golden bodies. *Could they come from the place where everyone is family?*

Leah is uncharacteristically quiet on the rest of the walk home. As they reach the front steps of Stuart Manor, an ivory crescent moon appears behind the church steeple.

"Leah, look there." Uncle points to the bright slice of a moon setting in the dark sky.

"It's the Aloha Moon."

"What do you mean, Uncle?"

"Do you see how the new crescent moon cradles the shadow of the old full moon? The great Italian scientist Leonardo Da Vinci wrote about it hundreds of years ago, and Shakespeare called it the 'new moon with the old moon in its arms.'"

"Why do you call it 'the aloha moon'?"

"During my first billet as a lad on a whaling vessel, I became friendly with a Tahitian sailor named Mea Ono, who was a Kahuna, and he told me about it. 'Aloha,' in the Hawai'ian language means love and welcome. So the aloha moon represents the loving embrace of the young man holding his sweetheart, the baby in its mother's arms, and the young generation

embracing the old one with respect. It means a loving and welcoming family.”

“What is a kuhuna?”

“Hmmm, a kahuna is a kind of a native doctor. Mea Ono was a sea kahuna. He told me that waves called to him in his dreams, and trade winds sang songs in his heart. Mea Ono could dip his fingers in the sea, taste the wind, and tell how far we were from land or whether there was a storm coming or which way to go to avoid fog banks, or how to find wind in doldrums.”

“Honestly, Uncle?”

“Keep this a secret, Leah, but I have seen Mea Ono control clouds and rain.”

“You are teasing me.” Leah folds her arms and sticks out her lower lip. She detests being teased, having borne so many of Johnny’s taunts.

“No, Leah, I am not. As Hamlet says, ‘there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy’ or something like that ... please don’t hold me to an accurate quotation, dear, I know how well you know your Shakespeare.”

“How could anyone control clouds?” She squints her eyes as a warning to tell the truth.

“I asked him, but he could not tell me. He called it a ‘knowing.’” He leans to whisper in Leah’s ear, “I swear I have seen him talking with dolphins too.”

“No.” Leah notes a serious tone in his voice. *Could he be telling the truth?*

“Yes, he asks the dolphins for directions.” He grins at her, his breath visible in the cold. Leah bursts out in laughter. “Oh Uncle. What a ridiculous idea. You are teasing me.”

“Not at all,” her uncle protests, still grinning.

“Did he talk to whales as well?” She challenges him, face to face, hand on her hips.

Noah’s face stiffens and he shuts his eyes for a moment.

“Yes, he did. And after that voyage, neither of us signed on to whalers again. Whaling gleans the most profits, but seeing those great beasts and sensing their intelligence through his eyes, I could not do it again.”

“I am glad, Uncle. I do not like these awful whalebone stays anyway.” She squirms in her corset, teeth audibly chattering and body shivering beneath her great cloak as they stand on the Stuart Manor steps under the aloha moon.

“I don’t blame you, my dear. Come now. It’s too cold to stay out here any longer. And besides, don’t you want to open your gifts? Marshman has put them in the sitting room, I believe.”

“Oh, Uncle, I forgot!” Leah gathers up her skirts and scales the grand steps to Stuart Manor pulling her uncle behind her. No sooner does Marshman open the great carved door, than she runs down the hall to the sitting room.

She plops down on the settee and picks up a flat, rectangular gift wrapped in iridescent silk fabric with a French grosgrain ribbon. She pulls off the ribbon and wraps it around her head, tying it in a bow on her crown. “Is this a book, Uncle?”

“Well, you must open it and see.” He settles into the maple rocker next to her.

She unwraps the fabric and reads, “*The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe. What is it about?”

“Crusoe is shipwrecked on an island. It was written nearly a hundred years ago, but it’s still a whopping good tale. I think you’ll enjoy it, since you love sea-going stories so much.”

“Yes, I have read every single book in Father’s library. And all the ones about sea

captains many times.” She picks up another gift and unwraps it. “Another book!”

“’Tis a special book. I bought it for you in England before the war. It is called *Sense and Sensibility* and is all the rage in London. Its author is ‘A Lady,’ but I am told an Englishwoman named Jane Austen wrote it. It is quite charming. I think you will enjoy it.”

“Of course I will. If only because you gave it me.” She holds the book to her chest.

“When I grow up, I shall write novels and become a novelist, and go wherever I please.”

“I have one more special gift for you, Leah.” He retrieves a small velvet pouch from his waistcoat pocket and hands it to her.

Leah’s heart begins to pound. *What could this be?*

She opens the pouch to find a beautiful hand-chased silver locket on a long silver chain.

“Oh Uncle, look. It has my initials on it. L.E.S.” She turns the locket over and reads the tiny engraving. “To darling Leah from Uncle Noah.” Her heart beats even faster.

“Silversmith Paul Revere made this for you himself.” She opens the locket and a tiny painting of her uncle peers back at her from within. There is his round face, curly close-cropped graying hair, jolly pink cheeks, warm smile and kind brown eyes. Leah blinks back tears.

“’Tis a miniature, Leah, as close to this homely face as an artist can get, I’m afraid. I declined his suggestion that he improve my visage, better sense trumped my vanity.”

“I am so glad Uncle. I love your dear face just as it is. Now I can have you with me all the time now. This is my favorite of all the gifts you have ever given me.”

She hugs him and plants a kiss on his weathered cheek. “I love you so much, Uncle. I wish you didn’t have to go away.”

“Yes, I know. Soon, I will become a landlubber.”

*Oh, how I wish there were more enthusiasm in his voice.* “Promise?”

“Come now, it is late. I must be up early to pick up my house plans from the builder.”

His slumping shoulders cause Leah to doubt he could ever leave his beloved ship, as if he were standing with one boot on the gangplank of *The American Enterprise* and the other on the porch of Serenity Cove.

“May I accompany you, Uncle? Please?”

“Yes, and you may also go with me to the new melodrama play at the Federal, if you go to sleep right now.”

Leah closes her eyes, falls limply to the settee with her head on its arm and pretends to snore. She opens one eye and whispers, “I am asleep, Uncle.”

Noah kisses her on the forehead and leaves, chuckling.

***Boston Weekly Messenger, Society Page, December 26, 1813. Construction has begun on Captain Noah Ellez’ four-story Georgian mansion on Bowdoin Street. It is sure to be one of Beacon Hill’s premiere residences. The entire top floor is modeled after the captain’s cabin on the good ship American Enterprise, and will command an extensive library and extraordinary view of our fair harbor. Now all our captain needs is a lady of the house ...***”

Leah sneaks down the stairs and positions herself behind the kitchen door, watching her father and brother in the breakfast room. Johnny’s plate is heaped with sausages, poached eggs,

cheeses, bacon, boiled potatoes, and various breads. To Leah's delight, he talks with his mouth full of all of them.

"But why can't we move up to Bowdoin Street, Father? We can afford it, can we not? If we started this year, a house could be built by our Christmas Eve Party next year. And it needs to be five stories, Father, not just four."

Leah presses her hand to her mouth to stop the giggle from escaping. *Johnny wants Uncle's house.*

"Circumstances force me to say no to you, Johnny. I've invested in two more whaling vessels. Whales continue to line our pockets and there are just so many fish in the sea. Mark my words, Johnny, a prudent businessman must strike while the iron is hot."

"But my iron is hot now, Father. We are on the wrong side of Beacon Hill. You have to admit that. All we see is that damnable river and the hoi polloi on the common. And our great room is much too small for a ball. How am I to compete with Michael for the best girls? Really, Father. You do not understand the pressures of being in my position." He sticks out his lower lip.

"Oh, I think I do, my son. You mark my words. We'll turn a quick fortune on the backs of those big fish. Between the whaling and sandalwood markets, O'Neill and I are making a killing. I'm talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars, Johnny. You will have as many houses as you want."

Stuart rises and greets Captain Ellez as he enters the breakfast room from the hall.

"Noah, good fellow, what plans today?"

Before Uncle can answer, Leah bursts in from the pantry. "We are going to look at Uncle's house, and then we are going to a melodrama at the Federal Street Theatre."

"Federal Street? You better hope it's not one of those dreadful English actor snobs who pretend they're Americans so they can act in our plays despite their Navy sitting in our harbor. I say, Go home, if you don't like our theater." Johnny punctuates his opinion by tossing his napkin on the table and leaving the room, his substantial nose in the air.

Leah's brow knits, and she frowns. "Uncle, are we seeing an English actor?"

"I don't know my dear, I personally do not see much difference between the two. I'm sure we will enjoy ourselves no matter what the actors' allegiances."

"Nasty weather today. I would take a carriage if I were you," Stuart says from behind his newspaper.

Leah steeples her hands in prayer, eyes pleading. He replies, smiling at her, "I think we'll take our chances."

"As you wish," Stuart mumbles as he exits the room.

"I bet he is going to tell Mother to make sure I'm dressed properly," Leah says.

"I wouldn't take that bet."

Noah winks at Leah and they share a conspiratorial smile.

Having finished breakfast and received her mother's reluctant permission to be seen in public, Leah follows Uncle Noah out of Stuart Manor's front door into Beacon Hill. They wind their way through its narrow, cobblestone streets of newly built Federal style brick row houses with ornately carved doors, wrought iron railings, and traditional red brick walls with white trim.

Turning the corner at Cambridge Street, Leah gasps at the magnificent view as they walk to her Uncle's property. Carpenters, masons and plasterers crawl over the house's wooden

skeleton, hammers banging and saws rasping. Noah shakes hands with his builder, who unrolls the plans, smoothing them out on a board between two sawhorses.

“Leah, see here.” Uncle points out an elevation drawing on the plans. “This is what Serenity Cove will look like. This stone parapet surrounding the roof is called a widow’s walk.”

“Where the captains’ wives look for their husbands’ ships in the harbor?”

“Yes, unfortunately some ships do not return, but widows can still hope in vain their loved ones are alive on a beach or in a city somewhere in the world.”

Leah feels a sudden tightness in her heart, and a lightness in her head. She reaches for her uncle’s hand. “Remember now, you promised you will be in port more often, Uncle.”

“That’s my plan.” he pats her hand.

They make their way down Bowdoin Street, past the Park Street Church, and then over to Franklin until it crosses Federal where the impressive Federal Street Theatre stands. They traverse the ornate lobby and find their seats.

“Oh Uncle, we can see every little thing from here.”

Delighted, Leah claps her hands, and before she knows it, the curtain parts to reveal a skillfully painted backdrop of a charming cottage surrounded by a garden of multi-colored flowers.

A delicate blond girl wearing a green taffeta dress dances onto the stage. Leah can hardly believe this girl is a real person. She leans forward to get a better look at the alabaster skin, the golden ringlets and those sapphire eyes. *Oh, if I could only look like her – so dainty, so precious.*

The actress begins to sing in a sweet voice:

*“Mid pleasures and palaces, Though we may roam,  
Be it ever so humble, There’s no place like home.”*

After finishing all the verses, she curtsies to the audience, and with a smile on her exquisite face, straightens her curls and steps back. The audience erupts in enthusiastic applause.

A tall skinny man sneaks in from stage right. He has an exaggerated black stovepipe hat, a long false black mustache, and a black cape that he swings about the stage as if he owned it. As soon as the audience sees him, a thunderous “Boo!” envelopes the theatre, and Leah involuntarily jumps in surprise.

Considering the number of novels and plays she has read and re-read, the plot is soon obvious to Leah. The mean villain has power over the blond heroine because of a mistake her father made before he died, so now she must marry the bad man. The hero rescues the heroine to the audience’s great relief, and at the end of the performance, the couple sings ‘Home, Sweet Home’ in harmony as they walk hand in hand into the little cottage.

The audience members howl with approval, clapping and whistling.

Leah stays in her seat, entranced, until the last person has left the theatre. She imagines herself as that heroine, her hand in the hero’s, walking together into a house of love.

Her uncle interrupts her reverie. “Come, Leah, we must go now.” As they emerge from the theatre into a bright winter afternoon, Leah tries hard to remember the many verses of *Home Sweet Home*, singing it over and over.

“Oh Uncle, I feel so happy. How I wish all your voyages were done and we could go out to the theatre any night we wanted.”

“In due time, Leah, in due time. But not yet. I have business to take care of, and then I

must return to New York.”

“Oh ... ” Her voice breaks. *I hate New York. I hate The American Enterprise. Always taking you away from me.* She fishes around in her pocket for her hanky.

“You know the rules, Leah. No tears.”

She smiles as big as she can. “No tears,” she says bravely, as they well up in her throat.

#

The rest of the day, Uncle is attending to business, so Leah remains in her room. She entertains herself with her recollections of the melodrama, dancing around her chamber, rehearsing all the parts over and over, and making up what she can’t remember.

Finally, she slips into bed and sleep engages her mind. The next thing she knows, she is singing and dancing around a charming cottage in a green costume with rouge on her cheeks and lips. In her dream, the play’s villain slinks onto the stage, looking suspiciously like her very own father. He grabs her arm and wrenches it.

She wakes up with a start, her heart pounding and her mouth dry. She puts on a robe and creeps downstairs, bound for the kitchen. As she’s tipping the milk jug to fill a cup, she hears muffled voices that seem to come from the potato bin. She opens the little bin door and listens. Leah realizes the voices are those of her father’s guests in the gentlemen’s study, which abuts the kitchen.

She suppresses a squeal of delight, and stuffs her large body into the little space on top of a pile of earthy-smelling potatoes. Through a small grate, she can observe her father and brother, Uncle Noah and his friend Captain Poe, and O’Neill and his three eldest redheaded sons, Michael, Jr., William and Patrick.

John Stuart is speechifying in his gravelly voice.

“Oh yes, the future looks bright for all of us, gentlemen. Did you hear Francis Cabot Lowell and his fellow merchants have built a power loom right here in Boston that will revolutionize the manufacture of textiles? And since there is no end of the supply of farmer’s daughters or indentured servants who’ll work the mills for next to nothing, labor will be no problem.”

Leah feels the grip of nausea as her father brags on his evil deeds. *I am surprised you have not put me to work in one of your mills, you horrible greedy man.*

“Plus,” O’Neill Senior boasts, “when we add the whaling and sandalwood trades to our current markets in textiles, tea, and spices, the whole of the civilized world will be in our pockets.” The men raise their glasses, congratulating themselves.

Young Patrick O’Neill pipes up, “Why is there such a passion for sandalwood?”

“Noah, you are the botanist among us, tell Patrick here why sandalwood will most likely build Johnny’s new house on Beacon Hill.” He winks at his son.

“There are ages-old traditions in Asian countries that use the fragrant wood in incense, perfumes, and medicines, not to mention the ubiquitous sandalwood fan. Three American merchants made an exclusive deal with King Kamehameha for the wood, who receives his profits in American goods,” Noah says.

Leah recognizes that tight frown on her uncle’s face. *He is not happy about something.*

“What could those savages want of our goods?” Michael O’Neill asks.

“They want furnishings that make them seem more civilized. Even if they rot in storage



like the mildewing silks, furs and stovepipe hats in their warehouses. I have also seen crystal chandeliers, rosewood writing tables, mirrors, even a billiard table.”

“A billiard table? I can’t imagine.” Patrick O’Neill says.

*What dunces, those O’Neill boys.*

Leo Poe rises and ambles over to his host, towering over the seated man. The tall captain confronts Stuart. “Although King Kamehameha has attempted to keep a firm grip, it is rumored other Boston merchants have managed to develop an illegal sandalwood trade outside the purview of the king. You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you, Stuart?”

Leah jerks to attention. *Finally, someone challenges Father!*

Her father chokes a little with surprise, but quickly recovers his composure. “Well, yes, as a matter of fact I do. O’Neill?”

O’Neill grins back at Stuart. “Well, John, it seems we have been discovered. You may as well tell them the good news.”

“Several years ago,” John Stuart says, “Our ship *Bounteous Maiden* had the occasion to trade with one of the major chiefs of Kauai. In one afternoon, we acquired a cargo-hold with several thousand dollars worth of sandalwood. What do you suppose we paid for it?”

Anticipatory silence fills the room.

O’Neill puffs up his chest and counts on his fingers, “Six bottles of wine, four hatchets and three muskets with ammunition.”

“Is that all?” Johnny asks, amazed. “Why, that’s less than fifty dollars.”

Stuart and O’Neill grin with pride. “Yes, son,” Stuart says. “And we have been able to arrange for the same deal with two other island chiefs.”

“And right under the big brown nose of the King,” O’Neill boasts.

All the gentlemen in the study celebrate their friends’ success, toasting them and clapping them on the back.

*What pompous asses.*

Leo and Noah do not engage in the self-congratulations. Leah observes them exchange a look, and then they say their goodbyes, leaving the study together.

Losing interest since her uncle has gone, Leah stifles a yawn, and is just about to leave the potatoes behind, when she hears her father talking about Captain Poe.

“Good riddance!” Stuart spits out the words. “That Poe is getting too big for his britches. Mark my words, he better agree to carry sandalwood, or he’ll be looking for another contract.”

O’Neill says, “he feeds his crew too well, and takes too much time off. *The Liberty* lies idle in Hilo Bay two months of the year. He might as well be taking money from our pockets.”

Leah makes a mental note for the morning. *I must tell Uncle what Father said about his friend.*

Knowing she has access to everything these men say and do is a heady feeling. It gives her the confidence to broach the forbidden topic with Uncle. *I will ask him in the morning. He must take me away from here, to the place where everyone is family, even me.*

Leah can hardly keep her eyes open. She gathers up her nightgown and gingerly slips out of the bin, closing the little door behind her. She sneaks up the stairs to her bed.

Early the next morning, Leah awakens before dawn and runs barefoot in her nightdress and robe to Uncle's room. She flings open his door. His bed is already stripped and his luggage gone. Her arms fall to her sides and she stands there staring at the bare mattress. Her body is frozen in the hallway, shoulders sagging, head hanging limp, chest aching. Never before has Leah's heart felt so empty and her life seemed so hopeless.

"He went to New York." Her mother's voice intrudes from behind her. "You won't be going out much now, Leah. I'll send the scullery maid up with your breakfast. Go get your chamber pot and leave it outside your door."