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An Excerpt From: ISLANDS

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The boat came out of the sunset. He thought at first it was an illusion. It wouldn't be the first time he'd conjured a ship from his imagination. He watched for almost an hour as it grew bigger and bigger. When it got close enough for him to determine it was indeed real and not an illusion created by his lonely, overactive imagination, René Dubois rose from the dock where he'd been sitting after his evening swim.

No ships other than canoes carrying information and refugees had stopped here at Île Dorée in over a year. There were no pleasure cruises going on in Polynesia in the spring of 1943. There was damn little business going on except that of warfare. So René thought it was safe to assume the boat was a military one. But whose military? It was small and came with very little fanfare.

Just as he was contemplating sounding an alarm, he saw the American flag painted on its side. Ah, Americans. René hadn't met many, but those he had met he liked considerably. They were generally a loud, arrogant, healthy, entertaining lot. So different from the English and French. A bit similar to the Australians, however. New worlds make new men, René thought idly as he watched the boat slide into place beside the end of the dock.

René rubbed his bare stomach with regret. He was hardly dressed to welcome an American contingent of naval officers. He shrugged, the gesture so habitual that most of the time he was not even aware of the movement of his shoulders. Ah well, it was his island after all. If the Americans didn't like the casual dress code here, he would refrain from being half naked in front of them in the future.

He walked toward the small launch. There were only four men aboard, so this was to be a brief visit. His chest constricted. He would make the most of their stay, invite them to dinner at the villa, open a few bottles of his best wine and ply them for information of the outside world. He was so hungry for news, for company, for conversation. He loved Île Dorée and the people who lived here. He had no desire to leave, but sometimes he felt like Robinson Crusoe with a hundred Fridays. He wanted the companionship of westerners. He longed for the sharp twang of an American. He'd even settle for the crisp tones of an Englishman or the nasal diction of his native France. Anything from someone who didn't remind him he was a stranger in this strange and beautiful world.

When a lanky American hopped up onto the dock from the deck of the boat René went still, waiting. The American was tall and fresh-looking, young, handsome. For a

moment, René felt as if he were in a Hollywood film watching the hero walk out of the sunset. Or did they do that at the end of the film? Yes, they saved the girl and defeated the villain, then they walked into the sunset. This American resembled a Hollywood actor.

René stood there immobile as the American walked over to him. He moved with an easy grace few could accomplish after just stepping off a boat. His arms and legs were long and lean. He was tall, almost as tall as René. René nearly laughed out loud with delight. He couldn't wait to stand toe to toe with this American and look him in the eye.

He wore a naval uniform. But the cap shaded his face and made it impossible to see his hair or features. René got a glimpse of a strong chin and square jaw as the American turned to look left and right of the dock. René just stood there, watching. Part of his inaction was due to the pleasure of watching the American walk to him, but most of it was due to caution. René waited for situations to come to him. He did not seek them out.

Finally the American came to a stop a few feet from René. The sun was setting quickly, the light fading. But René could see light-colored eyes assessing him from head to toe. He hoped the American liked what he saw. René thought perhaps the other man had indeed found something he liked when he lingered over René's chest and legs. Oh yes, American, he thought, look all you like. And if you see something you want, it's yours for the taking. For if René hadn't talked to a westerner in over a year, it had been longer since he'd had sex. And he suddenly desperately wanted to have sex with this tall, lanky, American movie star.