



ehold, the sea! Watch the cliffs, rising like grim giants hundreds of feet in the air, with thick beards of kelp waving at their base! Red and orange octopus, bursting through green and bubbling foam! Schools of kelp, with delicate green hues, and then a black ray, darting with birdlike motion! Sculpins mimicking the rocks, and small fry seemingly walk with pectoral fins for limbs, beneath a jutting rock the whips of the crayfish wave – nearby the black murray, or eel – and in the open channel swim mighty whales, the orca, the dolphin, the porpoise, and rolling in the ground-swell, sunning its oval body, the gigantic sunfish! Whitefish, goldfish, redfish, and on rare occasions the brilliant-colored king of herrings, the opal! The mullet, the garfish, the remore, clinging to sharks with its horrible maw...the satin fish with pluming fins of vivid vermilion...and the deadly swordfish, *Xiphias gladius* and *Tetrapturus albidus*, sly masters of the sea – all these, and more, circle the waters of the teeming bay...

He walks through the streets, feeling as though everything must be touched in just the right way. The ground lights up with a path of golden fire. He eats a swordfish dinner. He learns to play the harpsichord.

“Heavens, no! Dear boy – the harpsichord is a delicate instrument. Play it with a lover's touch.” Her fingers hang over the keys like cages; then they drop down, and up springs a jaunty Renaissance rag. She turns to face him. “Now isn't that nice?”

“Someday I'll walk with a cane, too,” he thinks later. “A long, long time from now.” But now the sun soaks his sailor suit, filling him to bursting. The crowd flows by like ships in the bay. Crisscrossing through alleys, he cuts over

onto main street, through crowds deposited for adventure and romance, only for the day. But he lives here, every day – all summer long, and more besides.

The whole scene could be viewed from the glassed-in porch on the second floor. Their home overlooked the entire bay and the endless expanse of the sea, stretching out forever. He watches the white steamers drift to the pier between umbrella'd beaches. Crowds gather to meet them and the new arrivals flow in and disappear.

Nine a.m. A distant ship on the horizon, one just beyond the harbor, and another drifting out into open seas. As the latest steamer arrives, race boats appear from both sides, zigzagging around them, women in white swimsuits waving inside plumes of jetting spray. The big ship's horn sounds. Children dive off the pier and swim all around the boat, climbing onto deck and flipping backwards into the water. The ship docks before the waiting crowd, and clutching their luggage, the tourists walk down into the street.

He stands on a chair staring into a pair of enormous iron binoculars set on a stand bolted onto the ground, watching them flow into the streets in white suits and silken dresses.

His daily ritual continues. The two beaches are filled with towels of a million colors. Sun overhead in skies of purest azure. Those pale tourists would soon be painfully red – a sure way to recognize the inexperienced.

Figures grow larger as he rolls his finger on the zoom. Now he can easily recognize anyone familiar on the boardwalk. He can follow them from one end of town to the other. He can look up the side of the mountain across the harbor or down to the shops below. He can watch incoming ships, examine captains or matrons as they strolled the aisles.

But, he knows, they won't be able to see him – all they'd be able to see is the metal triangle of his roof, reflecting the sun. Even seen from downtown, he knows that he stands safely within the shadows, invisible to all.

And so his focus can drift safely to the beaches, the subject of his enduring interest. Now he sweeps across the figures on the sand. Truly, there was one message coming from the beach, rising with the scent of cocoa butter as the sun warmed those glazing forms. Sweat shone like hot glass; beads of moisture formed, pebbling glistening skin. The female form in all its glory, blazing in the heat.

The beach was heading toward the crescendo of its rhythm, heat soaking into flesh and bone. And soon it is into him as well. With his every breath he feels its arrival. Thus the rhythm of his days: to wait until he felt it screaming, then walk down through distant birdsong, ocean breeze, the hum of paper bees. First down wood steps along the side of the house, then a crazy patchwork of broken paths and garden beds between houses above and below. Again the incredible wildness of the mountain possesses him: swaths of bamboo, dry grass,

wildflower, licorice.

He watches the bricks beneath his feet, the holes he's long memorized. Beyond the path the staircase goes down the mountain. Scrub oak and cherry trees cast shadows along the steps and green railing, as, to his right, the brown and black tram – the tram his father built – grinds slowly up the hill. Dead ahead he can feel the presence of the beach, the people, the ships.

At the bottom a narrow road curls around the park down below, decked with swings, tables, and a new cannon, just arrived. He walks through the park, then down into the city below.

The streets are alive with hundreds, thousands of teeming souls. No idea what they think or what they do. He passes among them along the road between shops and beach, lingering before windows, looking for something or nothing, suffused with sunlight, then into the pavilion square, where red, yellow, and turquoise tiles glisten in glittering fountains. Patterns glimmer in the hot asphalt. He follows them perfectly, each step coming down easily:

Step on a crack

You'll break your mother's back

Step on a line

You'll break your mother's spine

He crosses over to the white facade of the Albacore Club, with its statue of a leaping dolphin and white picket gate, then through the door at the side of the building. Bastard Bob nods with a tip of his boater behind his bamboo desk, littering with tackle and reels. He peruses stacks of artifacts with a giant magnifying glass, examines display cases holding primitive reels, rare and exotic devices, the entire room filled with ancient lore of the sea. A deep sea diving suit stands in the corner; a marlin arcs over the wall above the doorway. And through slats of the heavy white shade he can see the tourists passing silently. Staircases lead to rooms he's never traveled, a causeway back to private pier and restaurant lined with white chairs. From a distance men in white suits are engaged in conversation, laughing, silently drinking. Behind them the bay is a long blue band, glittering with a million stars, infinitely.

Bill opens one of the glass cabinets. The books are covered in shark and stingray leather; smelling of brine. He takes one and sits. A hundred lashes! One hundred and eighty welts! On the quarterdeck aft, the third officer is struck down with a marlin spike, while across the frigate's deck, shadows in grotesque shapes crawl up the oaken walls – ever-dancing, shifting eerily beneath the swaying lamps. The crew, tattooed and bloodthirsty, bug-eyed with lust, shambled into view. Fog grows like a snowball as breakers scream with fury over the deck, rising like stately green umbrellas before crashing down. The officers look up to see the mutineers rushing in a dark pack, an angry cloud jutting spikes and spears: “Here they come!” the first mate shouts above the squall. “Here they come, like

the hordes of hell!”

He closes the book. When he steps back out upon the road, the island is beaming, a glorious engine. Now men with rifles strung over their shoulders travel into the hills, disappearing up roads into the underbrush.

Chimes sound from the tower: still not yet noon. He climbs up the steps on the hill. Hands slide over the splintering beams of the green guardrail, pulling himself up to the broken brick path, and once more to the house. Maps hang with sketches of horses and shells, lit by Chinese lanterns. Kitchen to the right, sun coming through the window, suffusing the room with pale yellow light. From inside the stove he takes cereal and from the icebox milk, around which lie strange, adult reminders – tiny jar of caviar, mint jelly, a slice of lemon on a plate. Who or how someone could eat mint jelly was beyond him. Eating at the table he still can hear the sea.

The bells sound again. He sits down in front of the harpsichord, lifts the cover, and holding one finger over the keyboard, plays a note.

At dusk he stands at the railing of the open porch looking out over the bay. The island is now strung with hundreds of lanterns glowing red in the dark. The Romance Promenade, an arched path curving along the beach, is strung with gold and white lights. He watches, then walks down the mountain to join with the crowds, which are stately, in groups of two or three, choppy seas slapping against the black breakers like enormous ice cubes, and every now and then a car travels along the mountain road beside them, nosing along with copper headlamps.

He follows the trail until the dance-hall comes into view, milky columns circling the spool-shaped building, rising to a domed roof covered in tile, cars stopped, doors opening, men in top hats and coats lifting weightless hands.

He is among the crowd, he is inside with the rush, past uniformed ticket takers, huge as giants, and now the rage of jazz comes through the walls. Feet pad silently on red carpet following a slow curve, soft lights go up the walls from sconces – black shoes on carpet, white stoles and diadems, cigarette holders issuing plumes of intricate smoke.

The room opens with a flash of silver and for a moment he is blinded by the placard with sparkling letters. Then he sees bows rising and falling, now a white baton, until he can finally make out the letters on the board: “Avalon Orchestra.”

The air glistens with sunspots, seafire. Pyramids of glasses overflow with ginger ale, hundred of couples dancing and gathering at bars – and men in black suits performing. His eyes dart from one to the next, unable to take it in: the darkly gleaming instruments, impossibly strange, coming together in an explosion, a hurricane of unbelievable sound. Sheets of it, washing down, transforming everything, transforming him.

The island newspaper would write about it the following day, read to him

by the old man obscured behind his paper, only a two-toned shoe visible:

Saturday night was a gala time at our little town, the occasion of a grand pyrotechnic display. The homes, hotels, and shops were decorated with Chinese lanterns; red, blue, and green lights illumined the surroundings cliffs; a white light burned on the summit of Sugar Loaf, like a signal-fire of the ancients. Bombs and rockets darted from the surrounding mountains and beach; bonfires dotted the pebbly shores, and some vast spectacular scene seemed to have been staged in the little bay, into which, from the outer darkness, the Hermosa slowly glided into view, ablaze with lights and rockets...

He stands before the picture windows of the enormous room, gazing over the streets and infinite ocean, glimmering with stars on this August afternoon.