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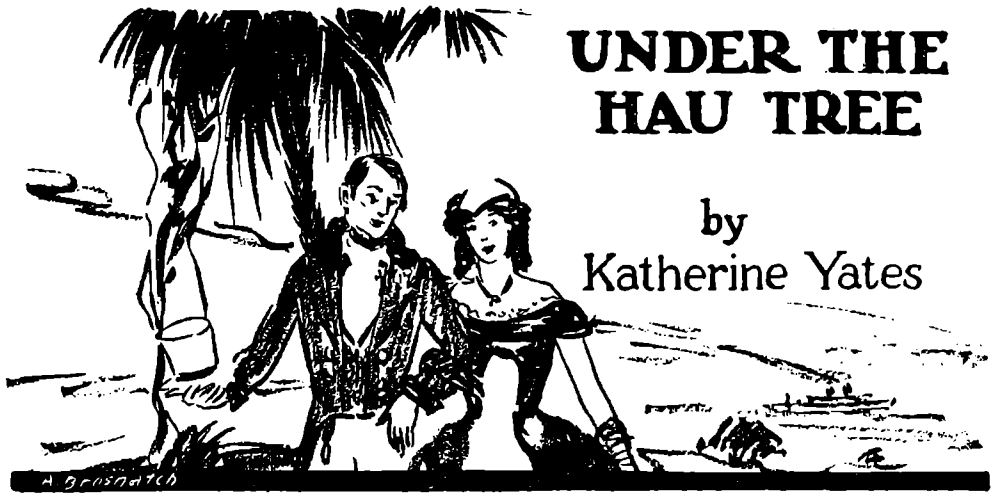
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# UNDER THE HAU TREE

by  
Katherine Yates

**T**HE woman was stringing scarlet wili-wili seeds into a barbaric necklace. The man was tossing over a basket of unmounted kodak prints, with now and then a perfunctory comment. The drooping branches of the hau tree shut out the glare of the late afternoon sun, and the fluttering leaves were backgrounded by a purple-blue horizon from which long lines of white surf came rolling in, curling nearer and nearer until they washed softly up the sand to the very foot of the hau tree, and then slid silently back beneath the oncoming white edge just behind. Four or five wee, tawny Hawaiian children had gathered under the shoreward end of the pier where, with much giggling and splashing, they had discarded their holokus and overalls and were paddling joyously in the clear water, carefully out of range of the hotel office.

The man continued to toss over the prints idly. Suddenly he stopped and bent forward over one of them with a gasp of astonishment. "Where did you get that?" he exclaimed, turning quickly upon the woman.

She glanced up from her beads. "I took it," she said carelessly.

"No, no, I mean this one!" and he thrust the picture almost into her face.

"Certainly. I see," she said, still carelessly. "I said that I took it—photographed it."

"You couldn't have." The man's eyes, full of incredulity, stared at her and then at the picture, and then back at her again.

She nodded her head. "I *did*," she said.

"When did you take it?" he asked harshly.

"When? Oh, about three weeks ago, the morning they went away." The woman tied the thread of the necklace and then wrapped the long line of red around and around her white throat like three scarlet gashes.

The man leaned nearer. "Here? They were here?"

"Yes. See, they posed under that coconut tree over there, the one with the monstera vine swinging down."

The man turned and gazed at the tree and at the great leaves of the swinging, swaying vine, and his finger touched the picture where the same giant spray swayed over the heads of the two. His face showed utter incredulity.

Again he turned to his companion, trying to curb his excitement. "What was their name?" he asked.

The woman opened her lips to speak, then stopped. "That is odd," she said. "I supposed that I always thought of them by name; I was just going to speak it and then," with a light laugh, "it didn't come. I shall think of it in a moment. Wait. It was—. It was—. Let me see. It began with an A. No—. Yes—. I think it began with an A. Oh, well, I can't recall it now. I'll tell you when it comes to me. There's no hurry, is there?"

"Yes, there is, there is!" said the man vehemently. "I want to know the name."

The woman put up her head. "Then you will have to go to the office and ask; I can't remember. What in the world is there so exciting about them, anyway?" The woman was not accustomed to sharing attention with anyone, least of all with a mere photograph.

The man got up, dumped the basket of prints into the chair, and started across the lawn, under the banyan tree, toward the hotel entrance.

The woman looked after him and then at the basket. Then she arose quietly, placed the box of red seeds upon her own chair, picked up the photograph from the basket and followed him into the hotel. At the desk she found him sputtering. The quiet, efficient, Chinese clerk was unable to recall the persons whom he described. "There are so many coming and going all the time," he explained, shaking his head and spreading his hands deprecatingly.

The man began to sputter again, whereat the woman approached and laid the print upon the desk. "What was their name, Ah Fat?" she asked.

"Ooh—oh, yes!" The clerk smiled with recognition. "Why, that was Mr. and Mrs. — ah-h-h—" tapping the desk impatiently with his pencil;

"Mr. and Mrs.—. Wait, it's here on the register. They came here about—let me see—about the middle of March. Let—me—see—" fluttering the leaves of the register and running his finger down the columns.

The man fidgeted, the woman wrinkled her brow in thought, pressing a loop of the wili-wili seeds against her lips. The man glanced at her and turned his face away.

"That's queer," said the clerk; "I don't find the name. I'd know it if I saw it," and he turned the pages back again, doubtfully. "I wonder what boat they came on."

"They came from the Orient," said the woman.

"Yes. Then they came in on the —on the—" and he turned to the schedule of the March boats from the Orient. "They must have come on the *Korea*." And then to the register again: "Here are the *Korea* people: Foster, Martin, Cudahy, Abercrombie—. Now what is this name?" bending closer, "I can't make out the writing."

The woman leaned forward. "Tourtilotte. No, those were not the ones; I remember the Tourtilottes."

The clerk's finger continued on down the column, to no purpose; then he called the Number One bell-boy. "Ming, what was the name of these people?" holding up the photograph.

The boy shook his head. "Don't remember."

The man turned upon him. "Then think. Try." He rattled the silver in his pocket and the China boy's face took on an expression of real effort—vain effort, it was evident.

"What room did they have?" asked the clerk.

Again the boy shook his head. "I think second floor—no, third floor—312 maybe. I don't know."

"You remember them, don't you?" asked the woman, impatiently.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes! Don't know what room. I think third floor somewhere."

The man turned angrily back to the desk. "Where's the manager?" he asked.

In a moment the manager stepped smilingly from the private office. The woman, at last finding the man's eagerness infectious, bent forward, holding out the print. "I can't, for the life of me, remember the name of these people," she said. "Who were they?"

The manager took the print and nodded his recognition. "Oh, yes, that was Mr. and Mrs.—. Well, that's funny. Ah Fát, what was the name of these people?"

The quiet clerk smiled and shook his head with a little protesting movement of his slender yellow hands.

The manager snapped his fingers. "Oh, I know the name just as well as I know my own; but I just can't speak it for the moment;" and he began to flutter the leaves of the register. "They came by way of the Orient and were here for three or four weeks;—why, they just went away a short time ago. Well, isn't that strange, that I can't think of their name? The woman had a white scar on her neck. A queer, old-fashioned little thing, she was, and sort of sweet-pretty, too. Let me see, we must have passed that name a half dozen times here, and I was sure that I would recognize it at a glance."

The man turned and looked at the woman strangely, then he faced the desk again. "You can't any of you remember their names nor where they roomed, nor find it on your books; and they gone only three weeks!" he said with exasperated incredulity.

The manager began to speak, but the woman broke in: "But I can't remember, either," she said; "and I don't have nearly so much to think of as they do—not nearly."

The strange look remained in the man's face; it was a whiteness, almost a grayness, and his eyes looked curiously dusky. He turned to the woman and took hold of her arm. "Never mind," he said, in a strained voice; "Let us go back to the hau tree."

PRESENTLY the woman's white fingers were playing with the scarlet seeds again; raising them and dropping them in red drops into a white fold of her dress, with a little drip, drip, drip—over and over and over. The man, leaning far back in the low chair, his eyes away beyond the purple-blue horizon, shielded them from the shimmer of the red drops and was silent. After a long time he spoke, and his voice had returned to its habitual level calmness. "Tell me about those people," he said.

She raised a handful of the seeds and let them fall in a slow stream from her fingers. "There isn't much to tell," she said; "only they were queer people. They came from the Orient, as I said; had been around the world, and reached here about the middle of March. They saw everything and 'did' everything, just as all of the tourists do: went to Haleiwa for a few days, and to Hauula to see the sacred gorge, and to the volcano; and then they went away, just as the rest do."

"In what way were they 'queer'?" asked the man.

"Well—they were sort of Rip Van Winkles," said the woman. "That is the only way that I can describe them. They had been asleep for exactly twenty years."

"Twenty years?" said the man, sharply.

"Yes, just twenty years. I know, because her clothes were exactly like my aunt's wedding clothes; and Auntie was married just twenty years ago, and kept her whole trousseau for sentiment's sake. She let us take some dresses once, for an 'old

times party', and they were exactly like this woman's clothes; the same sleeves, shirred in two places and with a wide lace ruffle at the elbow, and the skirts gathered all the way around the waist, and the same bolero jacket effects, and little ruffy things; and she wore her hair in the same little smooth waves like Auntie's pictures; and her face was small and sweet, and she spoke in a soft, thin, rustly little voice; and little things were so important. I remember she had some spots on the shoulder of her gray traveling suit—there, you can see them in the picture, that carnation lei doesn't quite cover them;—and she wouldn't send it to the cleaner's for fear he would spoil the dress; but she must wait until she got home, so that she could take them out with some sort of a cleaning fluid that her grandmother had given her the recipe for. And the spots worried her so; she kept dabbing at them with her handkerchief as if she could wipe them off."

The man shifted his position. The woman was again dropping scarlet seeds one by one, through her fingers into the scarlet pool on her dress. The man watched them, strangely. Then he covered his eyes with his hand. "Go on," he said.

"She wasn't young—thirty-four or thirty-five, I should think; and for all that her face was sweet and happy, yet she always had an expression of—of—." The woman hesitated.

"Of waiting!" said the man.

"Yes," said the woman; "that was it, always an expression of waiting—patiently, not anxiously,—just waiting, as if it had grown to be a habit. I think that is all there is to tell. I talked to her now and then, and she was always ready to talk, in her quiet, quaint little way; and sometimes she would be a bit embarrassed and her thin, white little hand would go up to her coral necklace; such an odd, old-fashioned necklace made of festoons

of tiny red coral blocks caught together here and there to hold the many strands in place, and a curious large pendant of overlapping coral leaves. It must have been very old. She said it had belonged to her grandmother."

"You talked to her often?" asked the man. "What did she talk about?"

"Oh, I don't remember. She was the kind of woman who never says anything to be remembered. We just talked."

"And the man?"

The woman tossed a handful of scarlet seeds into the air, to fall back and slide down among the others. "Of just the same period," she said. "Twenty years back. He had a sort of drooping mustache and wore his hair brushed up like Uncle's when he was married. And his trousers were too short and too tight, and the toes of his shoes were thin, and his neckties were—funny."

"Did they tell you where they came from?" asked the man.

"Why, yes, from the Orient, I told you. They had been around the world."

"I mean, what was their home town?"

"Oh, I don't remember. I don't know that they ever said;—but I think that it was a small Middle West town somewhere in—Ohio—Illinois—I don't know."

The man sat still with his eyes shaded. The woman arranged the scarlet seeds in patterns on her dress where it drew smoothly over the knee. The surf washed softly up the sand and slid silently back. The little children had gone away and the shadows of the coconut fronds were long and very quiet.

Presently the woman spoke. "Well?" she said.

The man was silent for a few minutes longer; then, without lifting his shading fingers, he began.

“THEY lived in my town. He was my uncle, my mother’s brother. His father kept a small bookstore—books, pictures and plush goods—you know the sort.”

The woman nodded her head reminiscently.

“He took charge of the store when his father died; he was sixteen then. His mother died two years after. He was the only one of the family left. He had always intended to marry Jennie. She was his sweetheart when they were mere babies, before he was eight years old. When he was eight, his uncle had come back from around the world and the boy sat on the stiff black haircloth sofa and listened. When his uncle caught the look in his big eyes, he drew him over and stood him between his knees and asked him what he was going to do when he was a man. ‘Marry Jennie and go round the world on our wedding tour,’ he answered.

“And that was his one end and aim from that time on. He and Jennie discussed the trip then with gravity and eagerness and perfect confidence; for they *knew* that they were going, when Joseph was grown up. No one ever called him Joe; he was too earnest. He was my Uncle Joseph.

“When the store was all his, he began putting away every possible cent toward the tour; for he and Jennie had made up their minds that no matter how long they had to wait, they would not marry until they had saved enough for the journey.

“It is slow saving much money in a little store in a little back-number town; but they never faltered. Jennie did ‘hand-painted china’ which sold in the store at Christmas time; and hot-poker work; and taught classes to do prim little water-colors with green woolly trees and white woolly waves, and gray woolly rocks, and wooden sheep and cattle and Noah’s ark sort of people. I have some of them at home.”

The woman tossed the beads together in her lap. “And then?” she said.

“And between times they studied maps and itineraries, and read history and travels, so as to be prepared to get the most out of the trip. There were years and years of this; good years, when quite a lot was added to the little hoard in the bank; bad years, when there were floods and fires and the need of new roofs, when the hoard was drawn upon. When Jennie was thirty she began making her trousseau. They thought that it would be only about two years more; and I used to go and sit with her and watch her work upon the dainty challis and summer-silk and lawn dresses. She made them all herself and—and gathered the sleeves in little lines of gathers with puffs between, and gathers in the skirts all around, and little ruffles for the trimmings on the shoulders.”

The woman stopped playing with the beads and leaned forward. “And then?”

“Well, it wasn’t just *two* years, it was five. Uncle Joseph was sick for three months and had to hire a clerk and pay doctors’ bills and—it was five years. I helped Jennie pick out the gray alpaca for her traveling dress. I was fourteen then; I am thirty-four now; and she and Uncle Joseph were my dearest friends. I had spent hours with them over maps and railroad guides and steamship schedules, ever since I could remember; and now to be really helping to pick out the traveling dress for that wonderful journey—wedding dress and traveling dress in one—it was marvelous.”

“And they went then?”

“They were married one morning in May; Uncle Joseph gave me Grandfather’s watch that morning; and I bade them good-bye at the church door;—I didn’t dare to go to the station with them, but I ran home and hid in the orchard for hours,—

long, long after I heard their train whistle for the crossing. By and by I heard a horse come galloping wildly down the road. I sat up in the grass."

The man straightened in his chair. The sun was setting out by the point of the Waianae Range and the water had turned to orange and crimson, and there were orange and crimson flecks in the clear sky above the gray-black streak on the horizon, and on the woman's white dress, and in her eyes as she bent forward.

"The rider said that there had been an accident to the morning train. Some of the cars were burned. They were sending a wrecking train.

"I ran to the station and flung myself aboard just as the train pulled out. There was no time to stop to put me off." The man waited a moment. "There had been a collision with a freight train. The cars had all burned but one, the passenger car, and that had been wrecked. Those who had been taken out were lying on the smooth grass along the side of the right-of-way. I found Uncle Joseph propped against a big rock and Jennie was half leaning, half lying against him. There were three red gashes across her throat, and she was trying to wipe the spots from the shoulder of her traveling frock, with her handkerchief—weak, ineffectual, artificial little movements,—with no expression in her eyes."

The sun had gone down, and the early gray twilight lent to the scarlet hibiscus blossoms behind the hau tree that strange, innate red glow of scarlet at early twilight, lent it to them, and to the lines of scarlet wili-wili beads across the white throat, dripping down into the pool of scarlet in the folds of her white dress. The

man's eyes rested upon them, fascinated. "She made only a few movements after I came, such poor little useless movements—and then—it was over."

"You mean that she died?" said the woman, in a strained voice.

"Yes, she died then."

"And the man?"

"Uncle Joseph was leaning back against the rock and breathing only once in a great while, and looking at her—just looking at her. And when the little movements stopped, he looked up at me; he hadn't looked at me before, but he knew that I was there. He spoke just once before he died."

The woman leaned nearer and the loop of red beads dripped from her neck. "And he said?"

"He said, with a little half smile and a movement of his finger against her cheek:—'It—it isn't the end. I—I've got to begin all over again somewhere—somehow—but—I'm going to take Jennie around the world yet'."

The woman shivered. The man drew out his watch and opened the back of the case. "The picture was taken on the way to the station on their wedding day," he said. "The photographer turned it over to me."

The woman bent forward and took the watch and turned it to the last gleam of the afterglow. The loop of cold scarlet beads fell against his hand and he drew it away sharply.

Presently the woman laid the watch on the arm of the chair and glanced about quickly at the gathering shadows in the twisted trunk of the hau tree and along the wet sand. "Let us go in," she said, breathlessly; "let us go in where the lights are."

