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*by Henry De Vere Stacpoole* [Chapter 2>](#)  
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#### CHAPTER III

##### THE LITTLE SHIPS

THE primitive canoe of the Pacific is a dugout—the trunk of a tree hollowed and shaped into the form of a boat, so narrow in proportion to its length as to be absolutely unstable but for the outrigger.

The outrigger, a long skate-shaped piece of wood fixed to port—always to port—by poles on a central bridge, is an apology to the sea for want of beam, and the sea accepts it—on conditions. But for the outrigger, no canoe of any size would dare the sea, but for it the islands would have been sealed as between themselves, war made impossible, and the drift of people between island and island and between island and continent.

Far away in the remote past some man once stood, the father of this daring invention; little dreaming of the vast consequences of the work to which he had put his hand.

Dick at the steering paddle saw a figure on the northern beach as they drew near. It was Katafa, waiting for him, the wind blowing her girdle of dracæna leaves and her hand sheltering her eyes against the sun. Standing just as Le Moan was standing on the southern beach sheltering her eyes and watching the canoe that carried the first man who had ever made her turn her head.

Some children were playing near Katafa and a fishing canoe was putting out near by, but he saw only Katafa.

"Katafa," said Aioma, who was crouched by the after outrigger pole. "It is she sure enough, and they said she was dead and that her ghost had returned bringing you with her, Taori, but the dead do not return. Katafa, she was the girl under the taboo of Taminan, the girl no man or woman might touch, and then one day she went fishing beyond the reef and a storm took her and she was drowned, so they said."

"She was not drowned," replied Dick. "The wind blew her to Marua where I was—I and another whose face I have near forgotten, Kearney, he was called, and he made canoes but not like these, then one day he went among the trees and did not return. Then the god Nan came to the island and after him the men of Karolin who fought together so that all were killed, and then came the bad men as I have told you and would have killed us but we left Marua in the night.... Look, there is the canoe we came in." He pointed to the dinghy hauled up on the beach.

"O hei Taori!" It was Katafa's voice hailing them from the shore, glad, sweet, clear as a bell, yet far-carrying as the voice of a gull.

As Dick sprang out on the sands he seized her in his arms; parted only a few hours, it seemed to them that they had been weeks apart.

In the old days, even before he was born, his mother Emmeline had never been at ease when separated from his father even by the breadth of the lagoon, the demon that hints of mischance seemed always at her ear.

Dick seemed to have inherited with his power of love for Katafa, something of the dread of mischance for the beloved.

He embraced her, heedless of onlookers, though the only eyes to see were the eyes of the children and of Aioma who had eyes for nothing but the dinghy.

As soon as his foot touched sand, the canoe-builder made for it running like a boy, clapped his hand on the gunnel and then ran it over the planking.

The boats of the Spanish ship of long ago had been clinker-built and had been destroyed in the fight, but he had seen bits of them washed ashore on the southern beach. The dinghy was carvel-built and entire, a perfect specimen of eastern boat-building over which the canoe designer brooded forgetful of Dick and Katafa, the beach he stood on and the sun that lit it.

The idea of a boat built of planking and not hollowed out of a tree trunk had been presented to him by the charred and shattered fragments of the Spanish boats, but how to get planking and how to bend it to the form he desired was beyond his imagination and beyond his means. He saw vaguely that these boats of the papalagi were made somewhat after the fashion of a man, with a backbone and ribs and a covering for the ribs, he saw that by this means enough beam could be obtained to enable the builder to dispense with the outrigger—but then speed, where was there sign of speed in this thing squat and ugly?

In the early ages of the world in which Aioma still dwelt, ugliness had only two expressions, the lines that indicated want of speed and the lines that indicated want of strength.

Dick, though brown as the canoe-builder and almost to be mistaken for a true islander, was perhaps a million years younger than Aioma, just as the dinghy was a million years younger than the fishing canoe that had just brought him across the lagoon. In Dick, Aioma saw the lines that indicated speed and strength, nothing more—he was blind to the nobility of type expressed by that daring face, to the far sight of the eyes and the breadth of the brow; in the dinghy Aioma saw want of speed—he was blind to the nobility of type that made this bud the sister of a battleship, made it a vertebrate as against the dugout which has neither keel nor ribs.

Then Aioma, standing in the sun, a plain canoe-builder and workman in the sight of God and a critic as every true workman is, began to deride the dinghy, at first with chuckles deep down in his throat, then with a sound like the clacking of a hen, then with laughter long and loud and words of derision.

"Which end is which of this pig fish?" inquired Aioma of heaven and Dick, "and he who made her, how many more did he make like her?"

Dick, who had always connected the dinghy with Kearney, and who had a sort of faith that Kearney had made her just as he had made

Appearance [hide](#)

Text

☐ Small  
☒ Standard  
☐ Large

Width

☒ Standard  
☐ Wide

Le Moan, who was called, was a sailor.