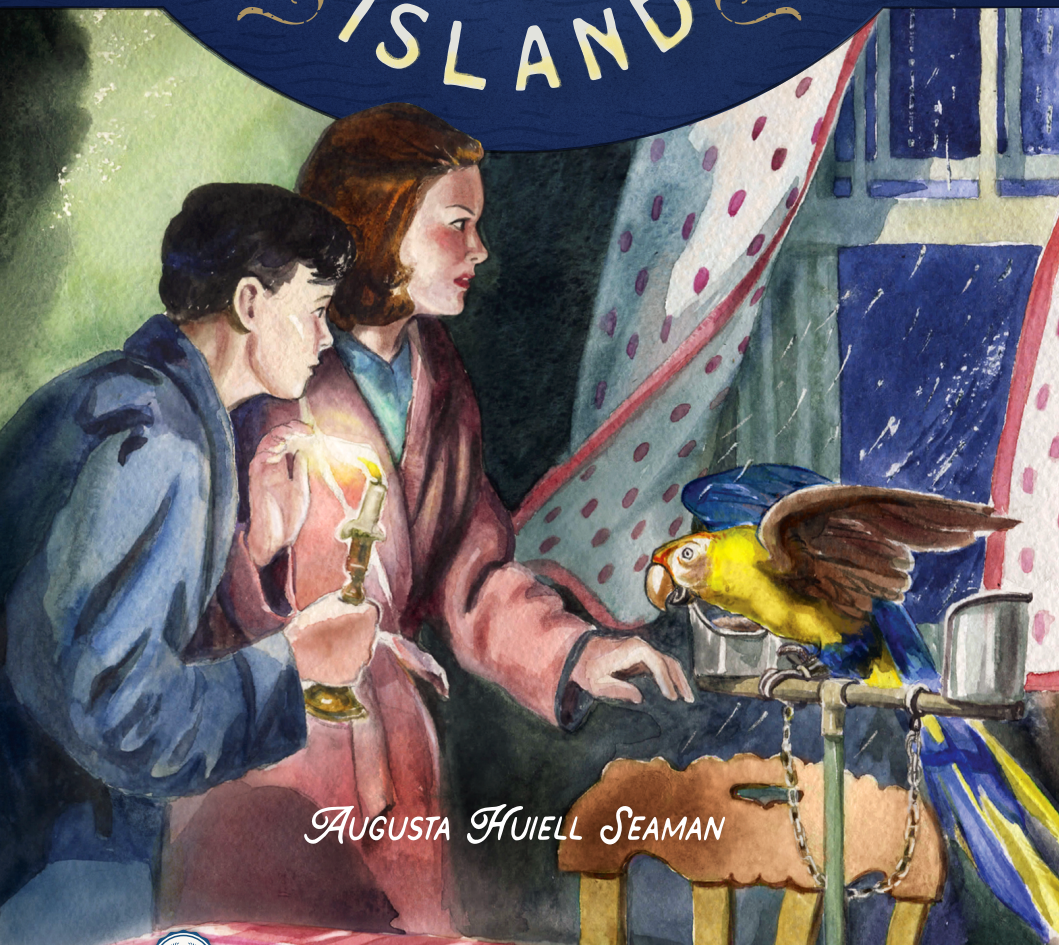


# Mystery ON Heron Shoals ISLAND



AUGUSTA HUIELL SEAMAN



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY



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## INTRODUCING METHUSELAH

**T**HE BIG, DIM KITCHEN WAS very warm and smelled of hot biscuits and baking gingerbread. The late September afternoon sun slanted through a west window, intensifying the velvety green of the tall cedars outside. Within the kitchen it caused the red-checked tablecloth to glow with a burning brilliance. Little old Mrs. Greene bustled about the room, opening and shutting the oven door and putting a shovel or two of coal in the range. Suddenly the rays of sunlight were gone from the west window. The swift, late September twilight had begun. It left the old kitchen dimmer than ever.

“I wonder where Marty can be?” Mrs. Greene muttered aloud, glancing uneasily at the loud-ticking wooden clock on the mantel. (She often thought aloud when she was quite by herself.) “It’s half past five now—and the school bus came down at four. She should’ve been in long ago. I s’pose she’s over to the station, as usual, though I told her—”

“Just a minute!—Just a minute!—Just a—” squawked a great blue parrot with a brilliant yellow breast, shuffling about on his high T-perch in a warm corner near the range.

“Oh, hush!” exclaimed Mrs. Greene irritably. “You’ve been squawking all afternoon, Methuselah. You’ve got on my nerves!”

“Don’t get excited!—Don’t get excited!—Don’t get—” shrieked the bird, as his mistress lit a big oil lamp and placed it on the table near the window. At that moment the kitchen door burst open, and a bronze-haired girl of fifteen rushed in. Her great brown eyes were dancing with excitement.

“Nana!” she cried. “What in the world is going on over at the station?” Mrs. Greene surveyed her granddaughter with a slightly inscrutable look but merely replied:

“So that’s where you’ve been this past hour or so! I thought as much! When you’ve been away from home overnight, like you was last night to play in some silly basketball contest, you know I worry about you till you get home.”

“Well, good gracious, Nana!” replied her granddaughter, Marty Greene. “You knew I was staying with Aunt Martha and couldn’t possibly come to any harm. Aunt Martha and Uncle Dick came to see the game, and I went home with them right afterward. And we beat the Draketown team to a frazzle!” she ended proudly, then added, “But what’s going on over at the station?”

“Why should anything be going on?” countered Mrs. Greene. “It’s all closed up by the government and empty now, ain’t it? So why should anything be going on? You’ve been over to your uncle Cy’s house—I know that. How are they today? I haven’t had time to go over.”

“They’re all right,” declared Marty impatiently. “But something strange is going on. I haven’t told you what I saw coming home—after I left the bus where it stops and started to walk home. That’s what’s got us all guessing!”

“Well, my patience—what did you see!” cried Mrs. Greene, herself now roused to some curiosity.

Marty sat down at the table after throwing aside her beret and sweater. She found some secret satisfaction in keeping her grandmother on tenterhooks, when she could, because Mrs. Greene



was of a singularly secretive nature and continually kept Marty in a state of guessing and conjecture. In all other ways, Marty found her grandmother loving, devoted, and self-sacrificing to a degree. Therefore, she sniffed the air now and remarked:

“Ah-h! I smell fresh gingerbread. Give me a slice, Nana, before supper, and then I’ll tell you all about it. I’m starving!” Mrs. Greene, who could refuse her most beloved granddaughter nothing, sniffed in pretended indignation, but nevertheless drew a pan of hot gingerbread from the oven and cut Marty a generous slice. The girl ecstatically sank her white, even teeth into it. At that moment the parrot, who had, since Marty’s entrance, been quietly resting on his perch, suddenly came to life and squawked:

“Thusy wants a cracker!—Thusy wants a cracker!—Thusy wants—” Marty chuckled and held a bit of gingerbread out to him.

“Don’t you give him that, Marty!” commanded Mrs. Greene. “You know as well as I do, it’ll make him sick.”

“Oh, just a mite, Nana!” begged Marty. “It won’t hurt him just once.” Methuselah was hopping up and down on his perch in great excitement, but Mrs. Greene sternly answered:

“No! He’s been sick before from you feeding him such things—and I have to nurse him through it. I’ll give him a soda biscuit and stop his noise.” She handed him one from a tin. He took it in his claw, bit into it suspiciously, and threw it contemptuously on the floor of his perch. Then he began the uproar afresh.

“Sometimes he makes me so mad!” sighed Mrs. Greene. “But, tell me now, what was so strange going on over at the station?” Before Marty answered, she finished her gingerbread and waited for the parrot to stop his racket, against which it was impossible to talk. Methuselah, perceiving that no one was paying him any attention, hopped down to the floor of his perch and retrieved his cracker. After that the kitchen grew quiet. When the last crumb of her gingerbread had disappeared, and Mrs. Greene was almost frantic with hidden curiosity, Marty began.

“Funniest thing you ever heard of, Nana. I was walking down the

road from where the bus stops at the end of the concrete, and about halfway here there was a great, enormous van, right in the road, and dug in so deep in the sand that it simply couldn't move. You know how terrible our road is from the end of the concrete on to here. Nothing but two sand ruts, and even an ordinary car has trouble getting through it, most times. Well, that van was stuck—and stuck good and proper! I couldn't think why it ever tried it, anyway. There were three men on it, and they were trying their hardest to get out. One was at the wheel, and the other two were pushing at the back, and the wheels were digging in deeper every minute!

“I couldn't get by at all except by going around through the bushes, and when I had, I asked one of the men where the van was goin'. He said 'to the Heron Shoals Coast Guard Station,' and I asked whatever for, as it had been closed up by the government a couple of months ago and all the coast guards had gone. He said he didn't know about that, but those were their orders, and how far away was it? I told him it was about half a mile farther on—same kind of road—and advised them to get some old boards or logs to put under the front tires and that would help them get out of the mess they were in. I told them they could probably find plenty over on the beach just across the dunes, and they started out to hunt for some. But before they left, I asked them what they were bringing down to the station in that big van, and, Nana, what do you think they said?—Two grand pianos!—Did you ever hear of such an absurd thing?”

Mrs. Greene only grunted in reply, but her eyes were veiled in an inscrutable look that was not lost on Marty, who went on:

“They said they'd had orders from the big department store up the coast, where they came from, to bring them down and set them up in the station. That former Captain Greene—that's Uncle Cy—who lived close by, had been informed about it and would see that they were received. That's all they knew about it, and they left me while they walked over the dunes to get some boards.

“I didn't waste a minute after that but hustled down to Uncle

Cy's to hear all about it. Only Gwen was there—and Aunt Emmeline, of course—and they said Uncle Cy was over at the station doing something or other—they didn't know what. Gwen had tried to go out and scout around to find out—she's the most curious little rascal! But Uncle Cy had shooed her back into the house and told her to stay there. So, they didn't know anything about what I'd seen, but you'd better believe they were just about wild when I told them! Gwen was all for flying up the road to see the van, but Aunt Emmeline asked all sorts of questions, too, but I just couldn't make her understand—she's so deaf!

"I knew I ought to come right home, but I just couldn't budge till I'd seen that van get down here—and after a long time, it did. They got it up as near as they could to the station through the sand, and then they opened it and began to unload the pianos. But I'd never have known they were pianos—grand or otherwise—if I hadn't heard it before! They were just two great humpy things all covered with blankets and then a lot of legs, all separate, and a couple of benches. Uncle Cy was superintending getting them in, and when they were all in—and the doors closed—and there wasn't any more excitement, I knew I'd better come on home, so I did. But what do you suppose it's all about?"

Mrs. Greene fussed about the stove a bit with the supper that was cooking before she answered, with her back turned to Marty, "Mebbe they're just going to store them there."

Marty snorted impatiently. "That's impossible, Nana! If they were storing them, they wouldn't take all the wrappings off and set them up, side by side, in the big messroom. And that's just what they were doing. I peeked in the windows when I came away and saw it. No, unless someone's coming down to play on them—or give a concert—I can't imagine what they're for. And, Nana," she ended accusingly, "I do believe you know all about it and won't tell—you act as if you had a secret!"

Mrs. Greene, still stirring things on the stove, shrugged her shoulders, as if giving up the battle, and remarked, "Well, mebbe I

do—but I got to get supper on the table, and you'd best go out and fetch in another scuttle of coal. We'll need it. While we're eating, I'll tell you what I know—but not before!"

Marty seized the empty scuttle and, sighing impatiently, went outside to the coal-and-woodshed to fill it up. A purple-colored afterglow still lit the sky in the west, and the air was sweet with the scent of cedars and the pungent odor of fallen leaves. Marty stood still a moment to sniff the air, but the beauty of the outdoors did not afford her the usual keen pleasure, for her mind was disturbed by the foreboding that something unwelcome was coming when her grandmother should disclose what this curious affair was all about. That it was something that might affect their own peaceful daily lives, Marty was pretty well convinced. She shoveled the scuttle full of coal and returned to the house to wait with what patience she could muster till Mrs. Greene had decided to reveal the secret.

Presently they sat down to their simple but appetizing supper of clam chowder, creamed oysters, hot biscuits, and gingerbread, and while they were eating, Marty demanded:

"Now, Nana, go ahead with your story. You promised to tell me while we were having supper. What's been happening while I was away?"

Mrs. Greene took a sip of her tea and remarked, "Well, I don't suppose you're going to like it, but it was something I couldn't very well let go by. You know Professor Sedgwick who always comes here and stays with us while he's doing that surf fishing in the summer and fall. He broke a leg this summer and couldn't get down at all—can't till next year, he wrote—and I missed him a lot. Missed the money he always paid us, too. It went a good way toward helping with the winter."

"I missed him, too," added Marty. "He's such a nice man, so jolly and kind, and no trouble at all about the place. But what about him?"

"Only this about him," went on Mrs. Greene. "About a week ago, he wrote to ask me would I be willing to take in a friend of



his for about six weeks, beginning tomorrow. He said this man was very much interested in surf fishing, too, and would like to try it down here. But the main reason was about this man's son—a boy of twelve, I think he said. The boy has been rather ailing lately—not real sick, but just not up to the mark—and he thought it would do the little feller good to be down here for a while. So he wants to bring him, too. And the boy has a sort of teacher that goes around with him, a man, and he's to come along, too. That'll be three of 'em, but Professor Sedgwick wrote that the boy's father was a wealthy man and would be willing to pay anything in reason I'd charge. It was too good a chance to miss, so I didn't feel I ought to refuse. It'll set us up for a good winter, and we won't have to scrimp too much. Now you know!"

Marty put down her fork and groaned. This was worse than anything she had imagined.

"Nana!" she cried despairingly. "How ever are we going to manage it all? This will mean an awful lot of work, and you aren't any too strong, and I have to be away at high school most of the day and ought to study when I get home. I'll have to stay home entirely if you're going to do this—and then I probably won't be able to pass my examinations—and I can't graduate next year!" She pushed her plate away from her and got up to ease her annoyance by striding about the room. At the same moment, the parrot awoke from a nap on his perch and began to shriek, "Don't get excited!—Don't get excited!—Don't—"

"Oh, hush, Methuselah!" cried Marty in complete exasperation.

But Mrs. Greene intervened. "Now you just come and set down, Marty—and listen to me! You ain't heard it all yet. No need to go off like a firecracker that way!" Marty rather sulkily resumed her seat, and Mrs. Greene went on:

"This ain't going to interfere with you at all. I'm going to get enough from it so I can hire Hettie Boscom uptown to come in by the day and do all the heavy work—and you won't have to raise a finger—more'n you do now. And I'll still make a good profit

besides. So just calm down! After all, it's only for six weeks." At this news Marty's expressive face cleared, and she began to take more interest in the event.

"Well, maybe it won't be so bad," she conceded, "only I do hate so many strange people about the house and—" A sudden thought occurred to her, and she demanded, "But what's all this got to do with those two grand pianos over at the station?"

Old Mrs. Greene's serious face relaxed, and she almost chuckled as she replied, "Funny thing about that, too! The professor tells me this here little boy, he's a regular musical wonder! Plays so beautiful it's just like a grown person. The teacher that's coming with them—he's a music teacher—and he's training this boy for a big concert he's going to play in this winter. That's what them two pianos are for—so that they can both practice on 'em at once. Funniest idea; I can't see why one wouldn't do."

"But why are they over there at the station?" again demanded Marty, and added, "I suppose there wouldn't be room for them both here."

"That's it, I guess," acknowledged her grandmother. "Seems this boy's father knows the commander of the coast guards very well, and they got permission from Washington to let him use the place this way for the six weeks. I thank the Lord the practicing'll be done over there! I could never abide banging away on pianos in this house all day!"

They rose to clear away the dishes and wash them at the sink. And when this was over, they both sat down at the table again, which was cleared except for the big kerosene lamp. Marty got out her school books for study, and Mrs. Greene had before her a large, fat, and gaily decorated mail-order catalog that she proceeded to thumb over.

"I've got to order me some more dish toweling and pillow slips," she murmured apologetically. But Marty knew that, incidentally, she was also slyly gloating over the provocative illustration of an elaborate oil burner stove, whose picture in the catalog resembled

an overgrown radio cabinet. Her grandmother had had her heart set on a heater like this for several years but had never been able to afford one. It would make all the difference in the world during the winters in this big, chilly old house.

“Maybe she’ll be able to afford one now,” thought Marty as she wrestled with her algebra. “If she gets enough money for that, I oughtn’t to mind all the bother this business is going to be!”

There was little more said between them that evening. Marty had a very heavy schedule of schoolwork to finish, and the old clock on the mantel was striking nine when she finally put her books away, yawned, stretched, and announced that she thought she’d better go to bed early, as she’d been out late the night before. Mrs. Greene was already nodding, half asleep over her catalog. Marty went over to tease the equally sleepy parrot a bit before departing upstairs.

“Wake up, Thusy!” she laughed, poking at his gaudy plumage. He tried to nip her finger and screeched crossly:

“Go away!—Go away!—I’ll never tell!—I’ll never tell!—I’ll—”

“Where’d he ever get that expression, Nana? ‘I’ll never tell.’ He doesn’t say it much, but it always makes me wonder who taught it to him.” Mrs. Greene’s back was turned. She was busy banking the kitchen fire for the night.

“I dunno!” she said. “You better hurry on up to bed.”

Marty kissed her goodnight, but as she ascended to her room above, she thought, “Nana certainly does act odd about that parrot, sometimes! I wonder what the secret is about him!”

Snuggling down, later, between the rather chilly sheets, she found it impossible to drop off to sleep at once, as was her usual custom. The excitement and upset of the evening’s revelations kept her eyes wide open and her thoughts racing wildly, about the strangers that were soon to invade her peaceful home and all that their sojourn might involve. “I’m certain I’m going to dislike that boy!” she mused resentfully. “Little musical prodigies are always pretty awful, I guess—think the whole world revolves around them! I expect this

one's father and teacher'll just sit around adoring him all the time. Well, it'll be interesting to watch, anyhow. What a strange six weeks it's going to be!"

But she little dreamed, as she sank at last to sleep, what an exceedingly curious adventure those six weeks were about to introduce!



# Mystery ON Heron Shoals ISLAND

Fifteen-year-old Marty, her grandmother, and their macaw, Methuselah, live in a big old family house on Heron Shoals Island. When they're asked to board a young musical prodigy, his father, and his professor for the next couple of months, Marty senses disaster on the horizon. The group soon becomes friends, though, as they find themselves working together to solve a thrilling and complicated mystery. If they can solve it, life at the old home on Heron Shoals Island will never be the same again.



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