

# A SAD CASE OF WHIMSY

## HIGH BARBAREE

(M.G.M.)



Q: Who or what is High Barbaree?

A: High Barbaree is an island situated off the coast of New Guinea—1 North, 160 East to be precise—where the surf thunders everlastingly on a long white beach, backed by cool palm trees, that stretches between twin, cloud-capped mountain peaks.

Q: It sounds most enticing. How does one get there?

A: One doesn't. This island exists only in the imaginations of Van Johnson, June Allyson, Thomas Mitchell, Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall (the authors), and the M.G.M. property-department. They dream it up for our special benefit.

Q: Sounds a lot of people to be having the same dream. How come?

A: Well, actually it originates with Mr. Mitchell, a shaggy old sea-dog very prone to flights of fancy, who talks about it so persuasively and with such a wealth of factual embellishment that he convinces nearly everybody

who hears him—particularly his young nephew and the little girl next door. When these two grow up they become Van Johnson and June Allyson. By that time the former has almost forgotten that as a boy he always intended to become a doctor and has become a Big Business Executive instead, with the result that the vision of High Barbaree is beginning to grow a little dim (symbolism). But the girl hasn't ever forgotten, and thanks to her the young man becomes suitably high-minded and imaginative again. Therefore, when forced down in a seaplane after killing Japs, he isn't enormously surprised—though, of course, greatly relieved—to discover that they are on exactly the right parallel of latitude and are drifting straight for High Barbaree.

Q: They?

A: The young man and his companion, the only other survivor of the seaplane's crew, who provides a long-suffering audience for the young man's reminiscences of his childhood.

Q: Do we share them, too?

A: Of course. It's a wonderful opportunity for the Flash-back Department.

There's first of all a flash-back about the G-Note Road. . . .

Q: The what?

A: Just whimsy. When the hero as a little boy heard his mother play the piano he said the G-note sounded like a road that went on and on and on. And when eventually he landed on High Barbaree, there was the very road. But I anticipate. Well, before that there was the flash-back about the field of flowers (more whimsy), and the flash-back about the water-tower (that was a good one), and the flash-back about Uncle Thomas Mitchell, who had a bad habit of becoming too familiar with his Scotch friends. . . .

Q: Can you tell us more about that one?

A: Not much—it was just a whimsical way of saying that Uncle was too fond of whisky. After a while, this habit caused Uncle to drop out of sight, following a particularly whimsical episode in which he took the children out looking for High Barbaree in a canoe on the river and they landed up in a circus. Uncle remained out of sight, searching for High Barbaree one presumes, during adolescence, young

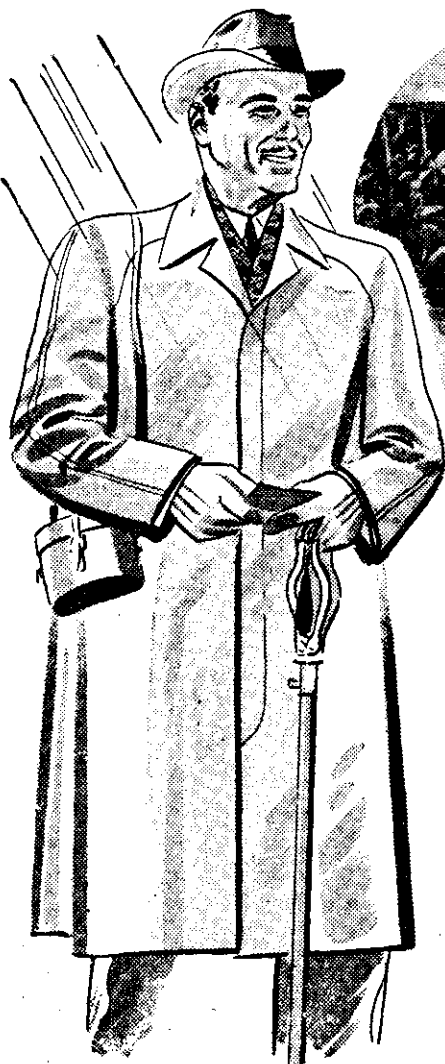
manhood, the tornado sequence (realism), and the dawn of romance; but he popped up conveniently covered with gold braid and whimsy in order to bring the two young lovers (as by then they were) together for a brief encounter on his battleship in the Pacific. Immediately after this the hero took off in his seaplane to bomb Japs and the rest you know.

Q: But I don't. After all this build-up does anybody ever actually arrive at High Barbaree?

A: Well there would seem to be reasonable doubt as to whether anybody actually could: since the place is entirely imaginary. I personally think it would have been better left to the imagination. But M.G.M. leave us in no doubt at all about anything. Just when the hero, in the last stages of exhaustion, is about to be rescued by Uncle and his battleship (with heroine aboard in role of nurse), a great gong sounds across the water, the Heavenly Choir give tongue, and as the hero wades ashore on High Barbaree, there is Tongaroa awaiting him in an attitude of welcome. . . .

Q: Who did you say?

A: Tongaroa, a whimsical native chief. I should have mentioned him and the gong before. Both were an integral part of the childhood vision. One can't help wishing, though, that—as with the vision which Jennifer Jones had as St. Bernadette—Tongaroa had



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