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# SECRETS AND FRIENDS

*HEATHER, AN ADVENTIST GIRL*

~ BOOK ONE ~

JEAN BOONSTRA



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## CHAPTER 1

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# The *Moana*

Heather Gibson gripped her hands tightly around the ship's railing. She threw her head back and let the cool ocean breeze tousle her mousy-blond hair. "Oh, Aunt Rachel," she said, "I feel as if we've been stuck on this ship forever!"

"I do, too," Rachel Nash agreed with a laugh.

Heather pushed herself away from the railing and looped her arm through her

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aunt's arm. "When will we be in Australia?" she asked excitedly.

Aunt Rachel patted Heather's hand. "We've been on the *Moana* for how many days?" she asked, her soft blue eyes sparkling.

The breeze blew Heather's cotton skirt against her legs as they walked across the wooden deck. "This is day number twenty-six," Heather answered quickly. She had been counting the days in her diary.

"So, we should sail into the harbor at Sydney in four more days," Aunt Rachel replied.

Heather and Aunt Rachel sat down in a quiet corner of the deck. The salty ocean air tickled Heather's cheeks. She tucked her knees under her chin and hugged her legs. "I'm so glad you're coming to Australia with us," she said, smiling at Aunt Rachel, her mother's youngest sister.

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Aunt Rachel turned her kind face towards Heather, and a lock of blonde hair blew across her cheek in the breeze. “You know that I’ll be right here with all of you,” she said, “as long as your mother is ill.”

Heather smiled up at her aunt’s pretty face. *Mother must have been just as beautiful when she was young and healthy*, she thought. Then she frowned and ran her fingers through her hair. *Of course, I got Father’s looks*, she thought. She turned her round, hazel eyes up to her aunt. “Sometimes I still can’t believe we’re really moving to Australia,” she said.

“Yes, everything will be new and different,” Aunt Rachel answered thoughtfully.

Heather twisted the tie on her dress around and around. “What if it’s dreadfully awful there?” Heather spoke quickly, the words bubbling up all at

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once. “Everything already feels all mixed up. It’s hot here, when at home in California it’s cool. What will our house be like? And,” Heather hesitated for a moment, “what if I don’t make any friends?”

Aunt Rachel nuzzled close to her. “My dear Heather, it’s scary for all of us to make such a big move. But among all the colporteurs—the men and women who make their living selling books door to door—the General Conference has asked your father to go to Australia. They must believe he can do a good work there to teach people about Jesus.” Aunt Rachel smoothed her skirt as she spoke. “If your father didn’t feel God was calling him to work in Australia, surely he wouldn’t have accepted the call. I think God has a great work for all of us to do there.”

“I hope you’re right,” Heather said, looking thoughtfully at the wispy,

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gray clouds that were gathering in the sky.

“We have to trust Him,” Aunt Rachel said, pulling out her book and resting it on her lap. “You’re a friendly girl, and you’ve always had lots of friends.”

Heather grinned. “I know,” she said, blushing a little. She felt better. Heather sat up straight. “Thanks, Aunt Rachel,” she said and reached deep into the pocket of her lilac-colored cotton dress. Gently, she pulled out her diary and pencil. Lovingly, she ran her fingers over the soft green cover.

*February 26, 1898, she penciled. Day 26. Heather swept her hair off her shoulder. We are almost in Australia, and I am still very excited and very nervous. I pray that I will find a friend.*

Someone poked her toes. She stopped writing and looked up to see her brother, Nathan, standing in front

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of her with his arms crossed over his short brown coat. Nathan was twelve years old.

“What do you want, Nathan?” Heather asked, pulling her feet closer to herself to protect them.

“I want to know if you’re going to come and explore the ship with me,” Nathan demanded.

Heather carefully slipped her diary back into the pocket of her skirt. She looked thoughtfully into her brother’s pale blue eyes for a moment. “I don’t really feel like it,” she said, straightening the sleeves on her blouse.

“Humph,” said Nathan as he shoved his hands into his pockets. “You never feel like it.” His eyes narrowed. “Maybe its because you’re just a short little eight-year-old baby.”

“Nathan!” Aunt Rachel admonished. “That isn’t a very kind way to talk to your sister.”

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“No, it isn’t,” Heather agreed. She stretched to her full height of exactly 4 feet, 2 1/2 inches. “Besides, I am *not* a baby.” She glared up at Nathan. “I am practically nine years old, and I am not short. I’m petite.”

Nathan bent down and glared back at his sister. “Prove you’re not a baby. Come and explore the ship with me.”

Heather crossed her arms and turned her back to her brother.

“Please, Heather,” Nathan pleaded. He glanced over at Aunt Rachel and spoke a little more kindly. “I’m so bored, and there’s no one else to play with.”

“Well,” Heather said, grinning. She turned and then sprinted past her brother. “Only if you can catch me first,” she called over her shoulder.

“The weather looks like rain, so don’t go far,” Aunt Rachel called. “And stay above deck!”

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“We will,” Heather heard Nathan shout as he ran after her.

Heather’s feet pounded the wooden deck. She turned past the dining hall and around the cabins. Suddenly, the ship lurched to one side. Heather fell with a thud against the wall. “Ow!” she said and rubbed her arm.

“Are you all right?” Nathan asked as he caught up to her.

Heather rubbed her arm again. “I think so,” she said.

“Good,” Nathan said, “because now you have to chase me.”

Heather giggled and jumped up. “You won’t get away from me,” she yelled. She stumbled a little as the ship lurched and rocked again. Suddenly, the wind began to whistle all around her.

A bell rang, and one of the deck hands called out, “Attention! Attention! Everyone please return below deck or to your cabin. A storm is coming.”

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Nathan disappeared around a corner, and Heather ran after him. As she turned the corner, she heard a loud *smack!* She gasped and stumbled to a stop. Nathan had just run straight into someone, and that someone was their father, Mr. Gibson.

“Nathan!” Mr. Gibson said, a startled look on his face. “Watch where you’re going, son.”

“I’m sorry, Father,” Nathan answered, looking down at his feet. Heather crept up behind him.

Mr. Gibson straightened his hat and adjusted his coat on his stout frame. “There is a storm coming,” he said, taking Heather by the hand. “Let’s get you back to our cabin.” Mr. Gibson pulled his hat down over his eyes as the rain began to fall. “Your poor Aunt Rachel is still looking for you two,” he said rather sternly.

“Oh dear,” said Heather. Her stomach felt queasy, and it flipped and

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flopped. She peered through the rain for her aunt.

“I see her,” Nathan answered, pointing.

Aunt Rachel ran across the wooden deck and through the rain. “Oh good, Harvey, you found them,” she said to Mr. Gibson. She took Heather’s hand, and they began to walk toward the cabin.

“Let’s hurry,” said Mr. Gibson, and he dashed across the slippery deck.

Heather, Nathan, and Aunt Rachel walked quickly behind Mr. Gibson. Eagerly they turned down the corridor to their cabin. The rain fell harder now. The boat rocked up and down. Heather’s stomach flipped and flopped. “I think I’m going to be sick,” she said, clutching her stomach.

“We’re almost to the cabin,” said Aunt Rachel. “Can you make it a little bit farther?” she asked.

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Heather nodded. They ran around the corner and burst into their tiny cabin.

“Oh my,” said Mrs. Gibson, looking up and nearly dropping her book. “You almost frightened me to death.” She clasped her shawl around her shoulders.

“Sorry, Aileen,” said Aunt Rachel. She pulled Heather’s shoes off her feet for her and gently laid her down on her little bunk. The ship swayed violently back and forth.

Heather curled up and suddenly felt very cold. She wrapped herself in her blanket and shivered. Her stomach still felt very queasy. “I hope I never have to sail on a ship again,” she said.

“Rest a while,” Aunt Rachel said soothingly. “This storm will pass soon, I pray.”

Nathan hoisted himself onto the bunk above Heather’s. Everyone else settled in to wait out the storm. The rain pounded

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against the porthole, and the wind whined.

Heather buried her face in her pillow and tried to ignore the aching in her stomach. She tucked her blanket under her chin and pinched her eyes shut. She must have fallen asleep because the next thing she knew, she was sitting up with a start.

*Where am I?* Heather wondered. The ship was calm, and a soft golden twilight filled the cabin.

“It’s all right, dear. The storm is over.” Mrs. Gibson leaned out from her rocking chair and gently stroked Heather’s hand.

Heather blinked a few times and then curled back up in her blankets.

“Are you feeling better?” Mrs. Gibson asked, stroking Heather’s hair.

Heather smiled up at her mother’s kind, yet sad-looking, eyes. “Yes, much better, Mother,” she answered.

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“Good, my dear,” Mrs. Gibson answered gently. The silver streaks in her golden hair glistened in the twilight.

“Look who’s awake,” said Mr. Gibson. “You’re just in time to join us for worship. Do you feel well enough?”

“I think so, Father,” Heather answered. She sat up cross-legged and wrapped her blanket around her legs.

Nathan slid off his bunk and plunked himself down next to Heather.

“Please hand me my Bible, Rachel,” Mr. Gibson asked.

“Certainly,” said Aunt Rachel, handing Father his tattered and well-loved leather Bible from the shelf. She slid her chair beside Mrs. Gibson’s rocking chair.

Mr. Gibson sat on the edge of the bunk across from Heather and Nathan. He opened the Bible and then smiled at his family.

Nathan bounced his left leg up and down, making the whole bunk shake.

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Heather scowled at him. He scowled back, but then he stopped.

“It’s been a long trip, so far,” Mr. Gibson said, “but in just four more days we’ll be in Australia—in Sydney harbor.” His kind hazel eyes met Heather’s. “I know that we’re all still homesick, but I believe God has a special purpose for us all in Australia. There are so many who haven’t heard the message of Jesus’ soon return.” His whole face seemed to glow with excitement. “I can’t wait to tell them about the blessed hope.”

Heather smiled weakly at her father. She felt for her diary in her dress pocket. It was still there.

As the sun set peacefully over the ocean, Mr. Gibson opened his Bible and read several passages. Except for Mrs. Gibson, they all knelt quietly on the hard, wooden floor. Each prayed, with Mr. Gibson closing. “Dear heavenly Father,” he prayed. “Thank You for the privilege

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of being Your workers. Thank You for letting us travel to this new land. We ask You to please keep us safe on this journey to our new home. Amen.”

Heather climbed back up into her bunk. She turned her face away from the rest of her family as the hot tears tumbled down her cheeks. *Dear Jesus*, she prayed quietly to herself, *Please help me to be happy in Australia.*