

# THE THOUGHT FARTHEST OUT

by  
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## Chapter 1: The Island Farthest Out

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### THE ISLAND FARTHEST OUT

I had been watching the oily gleam of the ocean with the sun shining upon it, and listening to the steady lapping of the waves against the sides of the boat, when suddenly my eye was arrested by a spot of green that seemed suspended between sky and water. I looked at it with curiosity and wonder. Gradually its outlines grew more distinct. The pines that seemed floating in the air gradually connected themselves with the ocean by means of an irregular and jagged shore line of gray rock.

"It is the island farthest out," said someone behind me.

So I was going to the island farthest out of all the islands off the mainland of the coast of Maine. The thought thrilled me. Mayhap I might catch the thought that was farthest out. The highest apple on the tree was always the sweetest and reddest. The dream of my heart that was farthest out from immediate realization was always the dream that was most alluring and enchanting.

When we reached the island all the inhabitants were down at the landing to welcome us. Another thrill! There surely must be some good thing about this island, I thought, where there is such unity, such integration, such sense of fellowship as this.

A tall, rather elderly man sought me out. He moved with the restful glide of a young panther, and led me up the hillside with the ease of one who was used to climbing.

We stopped and looked around us.

"What do you think of the island?" he asked.

"It is farther from the mainland that I thought," I replied. I was puffing after the steep slope. He was standing unwinded beside me, looking off across the ocean.

"There is something about an island," he said, "which you won't find on the mainland. You are completely surrounded by water, cut off by water from everything that has been binding you — from old worries and cares — from the League of Nations and the neighbor's gossip — from the United States Senate and the Ku Klux Klan."

I stared at my guide. Perhaps he was the thought farthest out.

Suddenly he paused and turned around and looked at me.

"Pardon me, but you are not a millionaire, are you?"

"No," I replied. "What made you ask me?"

"Oh, nothing," he answered. "Only I rather dread a millionaire — on an island. There is hardly room enough for them now, even on the mainland."

"Of course, if I could be the millionaire myself I would not mind. I would go about the island, buy up the skylines on it everywhere, and after I felt I had protected the sea, here, and the heavens and the hills, there, from carpenters and from gardeners, I would build a few carefully tucked-in houses, here and there in discreet spots, and invite my friends."

"All the flocks of rich people who are allowed to go blundering around nowadays through all the beautiful places of the earth (nearly every one of them perching up a big house that gets in everybody's way, even in God's way), would find one old hill at last that had been fixed so they could not get on it. They and their houses (if I stood guard) and their menservants and maidservants, their sweeping drives, their stone posts with nasturtiums, their lawn-mowers and pergolas would roll off this wild old island, year after year, like water off a duck's back. They would try to come and would flourish about faintly at first with their dollars, but I should always be here standing by my little shack (in any coat I liked) and I should tell them that heaven was my own, and that it could not be bought, that it could only be looked at. And then these still and bleak and mighty hills, this home of stars and snows, of winds playing in the grass, with its great sea around it day and night, tolling...tolling, at its doors, would be held for God. It would be held for people who love it a little, who worship it, and who come here every summer to go to church to it. I should keep it year after year as it was built — as a temple in the great waters. It should be kept for pure joy, one little island of it off Boston and New York, balanced up against the dusty continent. And I should have the island guarded as with a flaming sword by the Four Seasons, and over the island I should have the sea sing — to millionaires, to everybody, as they sailed up — these words: 'Except ye be as little children, ye shall not enter here.'"

"I hope I come as a little child," I replied humbly.

"You will do," he said. "The very fact that you got here at all, that you made the effort to get here, proves a good deal. For this place isn't like most places exposed to a Railway Station. It is not one of a long string of places, loosely arranged on a time table, where any man can happen off as he goes by. Probably this is what makes the island hold together socially. The people have all been sorted out to get to it. People who over and over again, summer after summer, are seasick

to get to it, know why. Perhaps we ought not to be blamed for feeling, at times, that we are a peculiar and chosen people. Eighteen miles in the open sea, in a very little open boat, makes people peculiar. And when we get here and look each other in the face after a few days, we feel chosen; we feel that our sense of the beautiful has been tested, that it is the real thing.

"I hold to the doctrine that the trouble with most summer resorts is that people do not pass entrance examinations to be admitted. Their steamers are too comfortable. If a summer resort wants to be the real thing, it is best saved not by putting up its prices but by putting in a rim of uncomfortableness all around it. And so as cottagers and real estate owners and lovers of nature we have doted on the little sailboat that brought us here — all the beauty and misery. It was a part of the scheme of protection, and of entrance examinations, and it gave the island an air, a certain low, quiet tone of its own.

"The arrivals and departures when we used the sailboat were little, stately ceremonies. When the boat came, low, furtive, mysterious, up out of the sea to us, its hull hidden in its sail, it seemed a kind of spirit, the spirit or the angel of the island, and we were being waited on by it day after day in this still, heavenly little port way out here in the sky and water. One came to gather about the sailboat troops of pleasant thoughts. It came to be the bearer of memories and reveries and hopes. In the early morning one wanted to wake up in the early light and see it sail. Often one would think of it suddenly in the early light and wonder if it had gone, and would go over to the window to see, and one would watch it down in the little harbor half asleep in the mist, slipping out to the world.

"It was very different from the boat that comes to us now. The sleek, sturdy steamer looks efficient and unsentimental, and it whistles a good deal, and you see at a glance that it is comfortable and that the knell has sounded and the island is protected no longer. The Philistines look at her and feel relieved. They walk about the deck before she starts and note how big and orthodox and stout and capable she is. But—

'She starts, she moves! She seems to feel the thrill of life along her keel.'

Then one by one they go down below, without saying anything. Any weather will do, apparently. She will get a nice, neat little roll out of it...So with our new steamboat the island is protected after all. ...We are no longer beautiful in coming to our little island, but we are miserable and thankful."

We climbed up the remainder of the slope to the little hamlet of fishermen's cottages, one of which, worked over in a workmanlike and artistic way, was his dwelling.

"I bought this off a fisherman," he said, "and have kept it as much like what it originally was as I could." One side of the low house was all window. "It's all open, you see. I can sit here and watch the fishermen coming up from the sea," he said, "coming out of the sky. I love to watch a fisherman coming out of the sky."

"One certainly likes to come to a place," I replied, "where a man seems to be allowed to go about the world with some of the mystery and vastness that belong to him."

"That's it," he continued, "one does not go about here seeing a man on the outside. One sees him with a picture of his soul lying out all around him. His aspirations and his awes and fears sculptured in the hills, always his thoughts painted on the heaven — that fair country of what he might be and of what he is, and everywhere that background of God following and of the night and the day. We all have to slip out of New York to believe that a man is really infinite. It is very helpful, almost religious to be in a country for awhile where man is not merely immortal but immortal-looking.

"The first few days after I have arrived on the island, when I have just broken away from civilization, from the sense of too many people, whole Boston suburbs of them, and am roaming about on the cliffs with just a few immortal-looking beings about me, each with the furnished world of his own soul beside him, or carrying it around with him, I suspect that just at first if I were suddenly asked to make a world, I would make it mostly of islands, each island with its one man upon it, up against heaven. A few days later I would allow two, perhaps, gradually more, and finally, no doubt, each island would be allowed its little group or hamlet, all the people it had room for. But there should be enough heaven apiece, each should have his own bit of skyline to go with him, and except at boat-landing-time or at church, there should never be crowds, or long, cheap-looking rows of people."

Together we strolled out of the hamlet, up over Lighthouse Hill, through the Cathedral Woods until we came upon a huge pile of cliffs frowning down upon the sea. My guide climbed upon the highest rock and I climbed up beside him. Neither of us spoke for quite a while. Only the sea spoke. And then after a long while he began to speak very softly. It was almost as though the sunshine falling upon the rock beside me had found voice and utterance.

"Some people seem to think of the sea a little disrespectfully, as just the left-over part of the earth that could not be made into land. Others of us may think of it in somewhat the same way but we keep respectful and interested. Its look of having been left over is the thing about the sea that makes us like it best. We wanted something left over. I come up on this rock every morning, because I have always wondered how things looked during the first half-week of creation. The sea seems to be about all we have left of the original chaos from which the continents were slowly thought out. It is the best and nearest peep we have into that old unfinished place which was so roughly sketched in Genesis when everything was still teeming and stewing and seemed to be guessing in a vague way at what it was going to be."

He was silent, and when I turned I saw that he had left me — left me alone with the sea. I could still see and feel the abandon and relaxation of his walk; I could still hear the abandon and relaxation of his talk. And then as I turned and looked at the sea I could feel and hear his walk and talk merge themselves into the sea...as though he were a part of the sea.

How perfectly relaxed the waves were as they rolled in, and how perfectly irresistible! Completely obedient to the law of gravity and the law of the tides, they tossed and threw themselves with enormous might at the cliffs, then melted and merged themselves back into themselves as quietly as they had been loud and mighty before.

Everything belongs to the sea, I thought. Everything ultimately comes down to the sea. The sea does not need to strive — does not need to worry. All it needs to do is to wait. It holds the whole round earth in the hollow of its hand. Whoever can catch the rhythm of the sea in his life, also holds the world in the hollow of his hand. Hours quietly slipped by as I sat there. Then I heard a quiet rustle beside me, and I turned to find that my guide had returned.

"Would you like to be like the sea?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"As relaxed and irresistible as the sea?" he continued.

"Yes, if you know the secret."

"I know the secret," he replied. "Come with me."

So I went with him to his fisherman's hut and there began a series of lessons in growing like the sea, that strange and foolish and whimsical thing that men call the sea. And as I gave myself to the teachings of this imitator of the sea, I found that the more whimsical and utterly foolish I became the more powerful and irresistible my physical self became.

What can be more foolish — and more wise — than to imitate the stretching of a dog, the falling of a cat, the flying of a bird? As day after day went by, I found myself unwrapping sheath after sheath of imbedded, contracted muscles and tightly girt nerves, and learning over and over again the simple homely lessons of living like a dog, a cat, a bird...and finally...for this was what it all was leading up to...living like the sea.

And so one day I came forth and sat alone upon the rock and looked again upon the sea. But this time, not as a stranger looks upon a stranger, or as a worshipper upon a God, but as a comrade upon a comrade. If the sea was a God — I, too, was a God.

I watched the sea whip and pound forward against the ledges, with a leisurely, effortless motion, a motion grounded in gravity and governed by the law of the tides. Before me lay four huge rocks and the waves rolled through their crevices like five huge white fingers. The fingers seemed to have power enough to clasp and hold the rocks had they cared to do so; to bend and destroy them, but they did not deign to do so. Their gesture of power turned into a caress as they withdrew. They seemed to say: "Why destroy or cling to that which is already mine?"

Here and there cliffs towered up high, too lofty to be reached by the sea — even to caress. "I don't belong to you — I am above you," they seemed to say. "You shall never possess me."

To this the sea merely unsheathed its white teeth in a smile that rippled along the whole shore line of the island.

And that afternoon the sun sent a rainbow ribbon of light and carried a river of water to the clouds, and the next day the sea fell in a torrent upon the cliffs, sweeping their faces, caressing

their stiff necks and patting them tenderly upon their heads as though it were saying: "You cannot escape me, O Land!"

Yes, the whole round earth is held in the hollow of the hand of the mighty sea. The land, rigid and firm, is possessed, ruled, controlled, and given life by the sea, because the sea knows how to relax utterly and be completely obedient to the laws of the tide and of the sun and of the universe.

And little Man, as he gives himself utterly to the great laws of the spirit and of life, and relaxes himself completely to the laws of the tides and of the sun — perhaps he, too, holds the world in the hollow of his hand. Perhaps the teachings and the wisdom were true that I learned from the whimsical, foolish man on the island farthest out.

See the following Chapters to complete this booklet. Available at:  
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Chapter 2: The River Farthest Out  
Chapter 3: The Thought Farthest Out  
Chapter 4: The Thought in the Balanced Body  
Chapter 5: The Thought in the Balanced Mind  
Chapter 6: The Thought in the Balanced Soul  
One Thought More