

COME AWAY...COME AWAY

LORETTA ABLES SAYRE

by Beverly Creamer

As Loretta Ables Sayre steps onto a New York stage eight times a week and takes her place on a make-believe tropical beach, she can close her eyes and imagine being home in Hawai'i. "I sit there and look out at that ocean—you can hear the waves crashing," she says, "And I feel as if I'm sitting out in Hale'iwa, on that wide expanse of sand."

Though Ables Sayre (her Filipino maiden name is pronounced Ah-bless) has gained recognition—and a coveted Tony nomination—for her role as Bloody Mary in the hit revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific," the glamour of the big city can't make up for the simple pleasures of O'ahu: cooling trade winds and the scent of plumeria; "shave ice" from Matsumoto's landmark roadside store; the sound of the surf at Pounders Beach on the North Shore, its swells turning gold in the late afternoon sun.

The ocean has both a hypnotic and a humbling power in her life. At Sandy Beach, where the rollers break over the reef in a constant cadence, she and a crowd of friends greeted the new millennium by wading waist-deep into the sea, chanting in Hawaiian, cheering the rising sun.

"How do you explain this to people," she wonders. "There's something about those beaches that calms my soul. I close my eyes and I'm there."

Ables Sayre grew up playing on those wide sand beaches of Hawai'i in a neighborhood of Navy families and a house filled with kids and music. As a youngster she'd sneak downstairs when everyone else was sleeping, put on the big black headphones, and listen to Mario Lanza and Ella Fitzgerald records till she fell asleep on the living-room floor.

By high school, she was soloing in the school choir; at twenty-one, performing in a Waikiki showroom act; at thirty, headlining with some of Hawai'i's best. And now she's a principal in a Broadway megahit at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater.

But she's also a star longing to be home. Hawaiian music plays constantly in her apartment and she has convinced the rest of the cast to like Spam *musubi*, an Island favorite. On the day she left Hawai'i, she ran around her yard snapping photos of great green monstera leaves, red ti, and torch ginger, wet from a morning rain shower. In Manhattan, they're now up on the walls.

"If I'm going to live here," she says, "I have to have Hawai'i with me."

