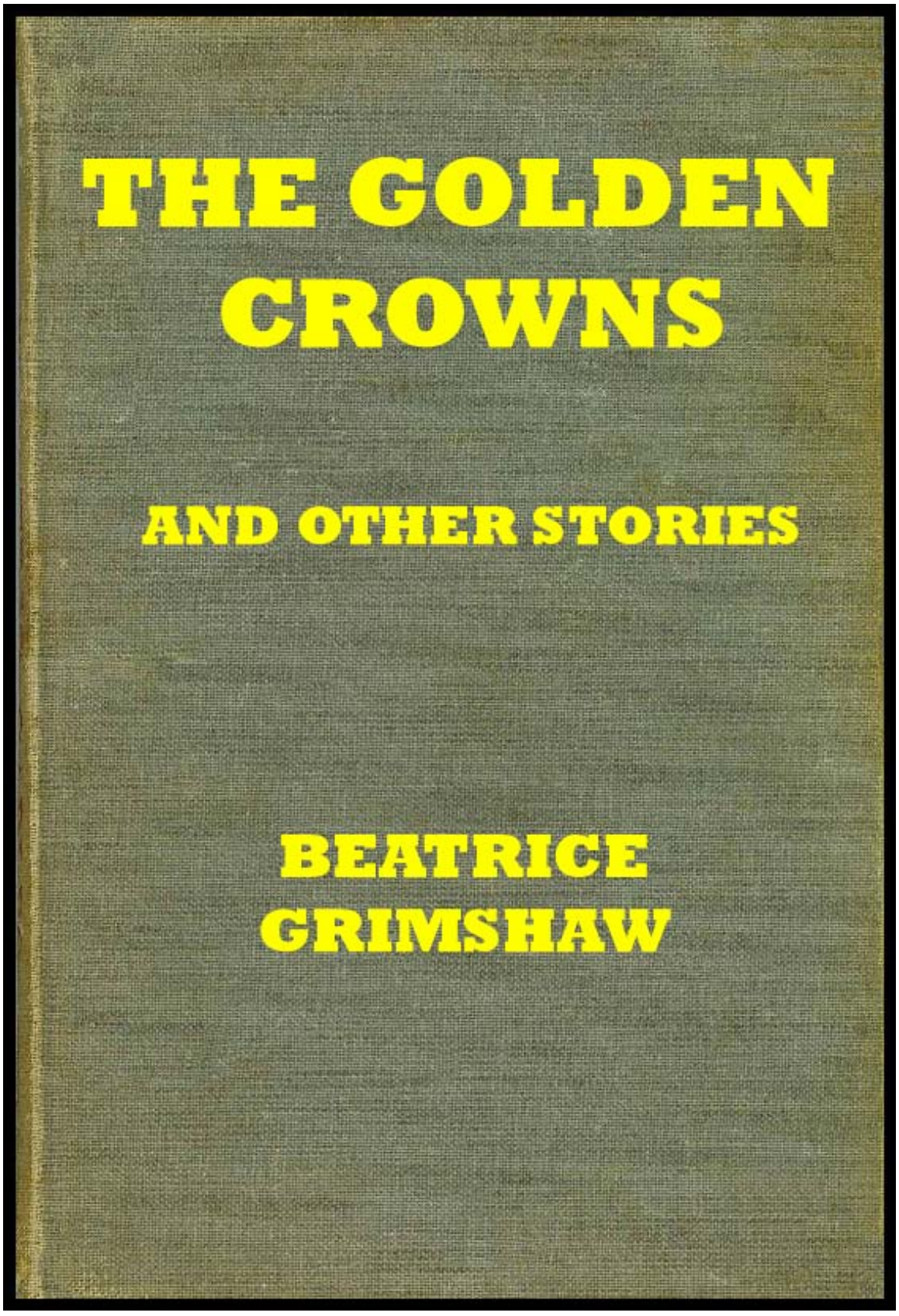
THE GOLDEN CROWNS
AND OTHER STORIES
BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

# THE GOLDEN CROWNS

## *and other stories*

**1928-1941**

# Beatrice Grimshaw

Edited and produced by Terry Walker, January 2025

An new collection of best selling novelist and short story writer Beatrice Grimshaw's short stories. In her lifetime some 5 volumes of short stories were published from her prolific output. Of these, only "The Valley of Never-Come-Back", 1923, is readily available as an e-book. While "Valley" had some lightly supernatural stories, this volume is mainly romance and adventure.

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# Beatrice Grimshaw
## 1870-1953

BORN in County Antrim, Ireland, Beatric Ethel Grimshaw became a journalist in London, and in 1903 was assigned to write a series of travelogues on the remote South Pacific islands. She later settled in New Guinea on a plantation with her brother. By the 1920s she had become a best-selling novelist, producing over 40 books, most of her novels romantically set in the South Seas, which she knew so well. She also wrote numerous short stories, often for the high-paying "slick"magazines. She retired from New Guinea to New South Wales in the mid-1930s, continuing her writing for several more years.

## 1: Maid of Niu-Niu

*Australian Women's Weekly*, 8 June 1935

JAMES COOPER had left the island of Niu-Niu in the year of King Edward's coronation. Now it was thirty years after, and he was coming back again, at the end of a South Sea tour with his son, Harry, who had been to the Varsity and knew everything. Cooper had been to no University save that of Life. Mate on an island schooner, he might have stayed in the islands, lived and worked with companions who were (he would have told you) twice the men their successors were; tough, careless, pull-the-devil-by-the-tail sort of fellows. There lived no more such, now.

He had not stayed. He had gone into steam; married, rather unexpectedly, an owner's daughter; gone out of steam and into a shipping office, pushed always by Gladys and her people, kept, by them, with his nose to the desk and his eyes well blinkered. He had helped to build up a big ship-broking business, carried it on ably; retired, after Gladys' death. Successful man, James Cooper. Made good; done well. Yes.

And here, off the remote unprofitable island of Niu-Niu, where ships seldom came, where nothing, he supposed, could have altered since he sailed away in nineteen one, he found himself wishing that he had never gone at all; never stepped into the waiting whaleboat that clear night of stars, unclasped a girl's soft hands from about his arm, kissed her and kissed her and turned away to sea.

LILY GREENLEES was her name; a mission girl prettier than most mission women and quite as good. If she hadn't been so good he might not have remembered her, gone on wanting her for thirty years. He had wanted her badly, then, but he didn't wish to marry at one-and-twenty, and there was nothing but marriage to be thought of where she was concerned.

So, he had left her; left the lily on its stem and, like a thousand other sailor men, had sailed away.

To what? Sea first; shipbroking, marriage. The E. C. district. Villa in Putney; Gladys and Gladys' parties. Life that somehow wasn't exactly life, just an excellent imitation.

Even his son, Harry, who had been such a jolly little chap in the nursery—Harry, more or less, escaped him. Cooper, in spite of Gladys, had re-mained rough and tough. He could hardly understand this fine gentleman whom he had sired; this Harry, who knew so much that he didn't, was so kind and patient and uncomprehending with his bear of a father, who had agreed

without murmur to go on a world tour with Cooper, and "see a bit of things in general," as the elder man phrased it, before settling down to London and marriage. He was engaged to a "swell," a girl with a courtesy title, that deeply impressed and unspeakably worried Cooper, even as the aspect of the Honorable Elizabeth Lockhart, slim and boyish and shingled, worried him; not his idea at all of the sort of girl a man ought to want for a wife... She was like all the rest of it; she wasn't real— quite.

Well, here was Niu-Niu that he had longed to see again, and was seeing; Niu-Niu, that couldn't have changed a bit, whatever else had changed. The high, lone island, nine hundred miles from anywhere; the tall coconuts that plumed the top of it; the boat-landing, blasted in sheer coral rock. Some-where out in the living green of the lagoon a log canoe and a native in it, fishing. Ah! Nineteen hundred, and the stars bright in the water, and the young, young schooner mate without a care in the world.

"You going ashore?" asked Harry, cigarette in mouth. He seemed a fine figure, standing there by the ship's rail, inches taller than his tough, shell-backed father, fair-haired like Gladys, like her regular of feature; well trained and exercised as any racehorse; fit and complete and somehow miles away.

"Of course we're going," Cooper answered. Did the lad think he had paid through the nose for this side trip not to take advantage of it? Other places had been disappointing; other islands tourist haunted, civilised out of all recognition. Niu-Niu would be different; there, things never changed.

"We'll trot along up to the Mission," he said, cheerfully. "Have a look round, and send for our suitcases later. Stop maybe till the *Donald Cameron* calls; she's due on her annual trip in a few weeks, I understand."

"Yes, sir," Harry dutifully agreed. "I suppose this is one of the local celebrities?"

A small, dried up old man, who had come out to pilot the ship, seemed to be listening to the conversation with intelligent interest. "I, Orao," he in-troduced himself. "I talk Engliss." He stared very hard at Harry.

"Bring our baggage by and by, if we don't come back," Cooper directed. "We're going ashore." And to the purser, "Likely we'll put up at the Mission for a while."

The purser nodded. "Old man says we may have to get away in a hurry," he warned. This trip was a novelty, and not an agreeable one, to the trading steamer.

HARRY, following his father up the steep stairway that led to the top of the island, watched him with increasing wonder. What an evergreen the Dad was! He never seemed to tire, he always wanted to see everything. He was

breasting the steep climb, now, like a two-year-old. Harry remembered a girl in Samoa, a pretty one, who had run after the Dad, thrown a wreath of flowers around his neck, and called him— "Big man, big chief!" She was ready to throw herself after the flowers, Harry thought, but the Dad had said something to her in island Maori that had sent her skipping away.

As for Jim Cooper, on the top of Niu-Niu, treading once more the enchanted ways of youth, after thirty years, he had, for the moment, forgotten Harry's existence. Yes, it was all the same. Here were the enormous palms, naked-white, swinging their crests up eighty feet in the blue. Here

was the coral roadway, with the thatched coral-concrete cottages along one side, and the high plain of sea on the other. And the beach-lilies, Lily's name-flower, heavy, sweet and pale, trailing among the flat-palmed castor-oil plants and the wine-colored coleus leaves. And the—

HE stopped, staring down the roadway. "Jeez!" he said.

"My sacred aunt!" ejaculated Harry. Along the road, in the full sun, was approaching a procession that Harry mentally described as something like the Bacchic rout in "Endymion," and that Cooper, seeing, classified as a "proper old Ratcliff Highway sort of spree." In any part of the world it would have been an amazing sight, but here!

Thirty years ago, this big isolated island with the bad approach had been famed for its almost blatant type of Christianity. The Niu-Niu people were among the greatest triumphs of Pacific Mission work. In one generation they had turned from savagery to a strict brand of Methodism. The women wore long Mother Hubbard frocks, the men confronted the blazing sun in heavy dungarees. Pious they were, even to excess; they new few pleasures save Sunday-school picnics, few entertainments save the singing of hymns. Under the hand of a famous and masterful missionary they had become the shining light of the South Sea world. They may have been happy; certainly they were very good.

Cooper, young and pleasure-loving, had sometimes found the mission rule oppressive. But he had never seriously questioned its rightness, and he hadn't supposed it could ever come to an end, any more than the long trade winds of the south-east season, the bluster-ing gales of the north-west. Always, in after years, he had pictured Niu-Niu and the coral-stone church, the coralconcrete mission house, standing for ever in these lonely seas unchanged.

Well, there was the church—gutted, turned into a sort of savage palace, all one big room, with a dais at the end, and carved ceremonial chairs— and there was the mission house, empty, with the sea wind blowing through its eyeglass windows, and the forest vines creeping over it. And here, here, coming down

the roadway, were the children of the old pious folk of his day; with a few of the old folk themselves coming after.

First came a crowd of young men, respectably but not excessively dressed in a bunch of leaves apiece. They carried old-time clubs in their hands, lovely clubs set with sawfish teeth and swordfish beaks; they danced, and whirled the clubs round their heads, and sang. After them came drummers beating drums that, like the clubs, had been museum antiques in Cooper's day. Girls with food baskets followed, doing a kind of shuffle, and shaking their short grass skirts. They had beautiful figures, carefully oiled to bring up all the highlights; their gold-bronze bodies, naked to the waist, flashed back the sun as they went. Boys came behind, carrying woody roots for the brewing of kava drink; some of them bore huge bowls of orange beer, and some had bamboos corked with a twist of palmleaf and full of new palm wine.... In Niu-Niu of old days a man who brewed or tasted drink had six months' work upon the roads handed out to him as punishment. Cooper re-membered that.

LAST came a band of grey old men, their faces smeared with ash. It seemed that they, and the women, were mourning somebody, for every now and then they broke forth into a howling lament, which ended with a dancing step or two, and then began again. Obviously they took note of the newcomers, but the dance and the singing held them; they passed by without pause.

"Jeez!" said Cooper again, watching the rout go by. "They'd 've told you, thirty years ago, that you was— were— dreamin', if you'd have prophesied the like of this happening."

Harry, who looked suddenly brighter (for, really, this was interesting, was something like), replied: "No great mystery about it, sir." He stared hard at the retreating forms of the girls. "One hears that the war, and the general decline in religious feeling that followed it, hit the missions pretty hard. Lots of them have closed down. This must have been a costly place to run, so far from anywhere. I'd imagine it may have gone back quite a long while ago."

Cooper said dreamily, "The old chaps used to say— those who remembered fighting days— that if the Lord was to think maybe that He wanted the good missionaries somewhere else, and was to take 'm away, there'd be all the old doin's again in two shakes of a lizard's tail. You see, they remembered the days, before I came when it was noth-ing but fighting and feasting and the king was a real king, and they had 'taupos'— sort of sacred maids, like them in Samoa; and they fair wor-shipped them, too, I heard tell. I never saw one myself, they were gone before I came, but—"

HE stopped, speechless, and pointed with one rugged hand to the last, the very last, figure in the long procession. A girl, walking sedately by herself. A girl dressed like the others in swinging grass skirts, but robed as well in a tabard and train of creamy tappa cloth. She wore a white shell round her neck. Her hair fell down her back a long way; it was yellow hair, and her skin, though kissed by the sun to a golden color, was clearly the skin of a white woman.

"Son," said Cooper, swearing a long sea oath, "if that's not Lily Greenlees it's the devil!"

Harry said, looking appreciatively at the girl as she passed by, eyes fixed ahead (but she seemed to see him and Cooper, all the same), "Who is Lily Greenlees?"

"She was a mission lassie," answered Cooper. "Thirty years ago. And none the better— nor the worse— for me." He sighed, and Harry wondered, irreverently, which part of the Dad's sentence was answerable for the sigh....

But Cooper, volunteering nothing further, followed the procession, in silence, to the door of the great hall that once had been a church. The people were massing themselves inside the building now, joining their voices together in a fierce, wailing song. "It'll be the old king they're crying for," Cooper said. "The purser told me he'd died some days ago. I reckon he's buried, and they're having the funeral spree."

"That would be it," agreed Harry. But he was not listening closely; his eyes, deserting the crowd of armed young men and dancing, shuffling girls, had strayed to the far end of the hall, whither the elders, slowly pacing, now led the girl in the tappa robe.

"Look, Dad!" he said. "Look— they're putting her into that big carved chair!"

"She's a taupo, by that frock of hers," answered Cooper. "A sacred sort of virgin. They almost used to worship 'm, in old times, I've heard say." He, too, stared hard at the girl, who was sitting easily on the throne-like chair. Her knees were crossed, one bare foot swinging— a beautiful foot, bronzed on the instep, white beneath the toes. Her thigh, where the tappa tunic fell aside, showed flower-pale, contrasting vividly with the sun-bronze of face and arms.

YES, she was white; white as tall Harry, staring his heart out at her; white as Harry's stocky, sturdy father with the sea-blue eyes, and the red stain of the sea on his cheeks.

And, certainly, she was Lily Greenlees or the devil— yet, how could it be, after all these years?

Cooper had never been one to balk his fences. He left Harry, standing there at gaze, and marched alone right up to the carved chair. To the gold-and-white

girl who sat on it, he said curtly— "I'm James Cooper; who in God's name are you?"

"I am Lily," she answered, fixing him hard, with the eyes of a stranger — Lily's very eyes, that didn't know him.

"Not Lily Greenlees," he said, with growing certainty, as he saw, at close quarters, the flawless beauty, the untouched, unworn youth of her. Miracles were past....

"Lily Greenlees was my mother. She died a great many years ago. When the Mission left, she stayed here because she had married my father."

"And who was your father?" he asked, uncomfortably, conscious of a certain cold hostility in her manner.

She did not immediately reply. The shuffling and dancing had ceased; the singers were silent. The hall full of people hardly seemed to breathe, watching the pair. Now and then the heads of the old men turned from Lily to the tall form of Harry Cooper; to Lily, back again.

"William Johnston," answered Lily, at last.

"The trader? Is he alive?"

"He is dead last year."

"And left you— alone— among the—"

"Among my friends," she answered proudly. "They have made me their Maid. They will make me their Queen."

She spoke with a certain clipped accent, but her English was good.

Johnston, Trooper thought, must have educated the girl. Lord, how like Lily she was! save for the flash of savagery, or something like it, that shot out now and then from her deep-lidded eyes, showed in her full, cruelly scarlet mouth. Not in her blood, that, not in her upbringing. Where? Cooper couldn't say. Harry the highly educated might have given the word he wanted— "environment."

If he had more to ask, Lily did not give him time. "Why did you leave my mother, break her heart?" she demanded. "I have had no mother, because of you." That was pretty thick, Cooper thought; why, she had married the trader chap.... well, maybe she had to live; well, maybe, like the little girl in the book by Stevenson, "she couldn't make out to live," after all. Anyhow, she hadn't.

He answered, meekly, "Because I wanted to go and make my fortune."

"Did you make it?"

"Yes."

"Did you marry someone?"

"Yes. That's my son."

She threw a swift glance at Harry. About him, the young warriors were beginning to gather, to mass themselves as if by accident. Harry didn't notice; he was looking at her.

"So you have got all you wanted," the girl said, a little more swiftly. "So you have been very happy!"

"By God, no!" burst out Cooper. He knew now that he hadn't. That he had left the happiness that was meant for him, the life he should have had, behind him the night he kissed Lily Greenlees and sailed and sailed away. Gladys and her people had held him fast; Harry was keeping him now, holding him half-awake, half-asleep, in the long dream that had been his life.

The girl was softening; she glanced at him almost kindly, but now, there was something strange in her glance— excitement? Fear?

"They were never bad folk," he reminded himself. "They wouldn't do you in." But he turned from Lily; stared about the hall.

The young men had surrounded Harry. They were edging himself away from Lily. Something was going to happen....

Lily said, suddenly, "You should not have come back," slipped out of her carved chair, and melted into the crowd of girls, vanishing he didn't know where.

Frightened she was, yet laughing, too— grinning, you might almost have called it, if she hadn't been so pretty.

What did it mean?

The answer to that came immediately, with a blaring blast from the steamer. One long call, three short. She was going! And right on the sound, as if it had been the signal for which they were waiting, the young men, armed, closed about Cooper and his son, sweeping them together, and barring their way. At the same instant all the doors were closed.

"Shanghaied, by God!" cried Cooper.

IT was late in the afternoon. Long since the steamer must have seen the last of Niu-Niu, glad to be clear of the reefs and shoals of that notorious island. Westering through lemon-green leaves of palm, the sun shone low upon the white walls of the cottage assigned by the old men's council to Cooper and his son. They had been escorted there as soon as the steamer was safe out of signalling distance. The old man Orao had made things quite clear; and if he was feeble, if he resembled a Japanese bronze monkey more than anything else, his following of a hundred youths armed with clubs and spears gave weight to his orders.

These were that the white men should keep to their cottage, and to the roadway immediately before it, and that they should refrain from putting up

signals for ships. Food would be given them; beds had been provided. They would be well treated, and if they made no trouble of any kind Cooper would be allowed to leave by the *Donald Cameron* trading boat when she called in a few weeks' time.

"What about me?" demanded Harry, fairly smoking with wrath. He had disregarded his father's advice to "take things quiet: you can't fight a hundred to one," and had, in consequence, been somewhat knocked about on the way. The youths had refrained from touching his face, but his ribs were sore with the pokes of spear-butts and the smacks of wooden club-heads; and on some of the noses of Orao's young men there were marks of a good British fist.

If Orao heard the question he did not answer it. Instead, he beckoned Cooper with one withered finger, and half in broken English, half in island Maori, began to make a speech.

AS he spoke he turned from one white man to the other, pointing his remarks with further pokes of the finger, now on Cooper's arm, now against Harry's chest. That Harry glared at him, only restrained from violence by the Councillor's feebleness and age, did not seem to trouble Orao in the least.

The king, he said, was just dead. An old, old man, too old to govern well of recent years. Johnston the trader had largely taken his place, and after Johnston's death the Council. The Council, Orao suggested, had done very well; but it was necessary to have a permanent head. Niu-Niu never, in the memory of man, had been without its King— or Queen.

"Or Queen," he repeated, shoving his finger-end into Harry's shirt. "Like Makea Takau of the Cook Islands, or Saloti of Tonga. Queens were very well. Better than Kings in some ways," Orao explained. 'Tn others, they were— troublesome."

He went on to explain further. The girl Lily was their Maid. True, she was not of island blood, but in everything else she was a real Niu-Niu girl. To see her dance! To see her swim the breakers! To see her spear fish, and kill sharks! not afraid to dive under, give the swift fatal stab! Oh, she was Island at heart.

They had made her Maid of Niu Niu, given her the Maid's dress, the Maid's chaperons and hangers-on. Al-most a goddess she was, after the fashion of the Islands.

But in the Islands— as Cooper doubt-less knew— a Maid was not always a maid. It was the custom, when she grew rather old, as Lily was growing— Lily was twenty-two— to have her married. With marriage her power, almost divine, left her. No longer was she sacred, a thing to be worshipped. Another maid took her place, and she stepped down.

Now Lily had been very troublesome about this. She would not marry. They, brought her all the finest young men of the island— and Cooper could judge how fine they were; just look at them!— and told her she could have her choice of any one; of any two or three, if she liked. But the girl was obstinate; went so far as to say that she'd throw herself over the cliffs if they persisted. Then they said, thinking that she did not wish to lose her glory, that they would make her Queen; it was quite in the order of things for a Maid to take that place, after she married. Of course, an unmarried sovereign was a thing unheard of. Still she held out. Then the wisest of the old men— of whom he, Orao, was one— had consulted together, and they had come and told her that they would find her a white man. She said, "A white man broke my mother's heart; I am Niu-Niu in everything but color; I will not marry a white man any more than a brown man. I will not marry at all." But she blushed and looked sidewise when she said it, so the old men, who were very wise— especially himself, Orao— made magic to cause a ship to come.

And behold, a ship did come, and as soon as they saw Harry—

At this point Harry broke in, violently, addressing his father:—

"Damn it all, does the old monkey think I'm going to be married to any girl by force? Or to any girl anyhow, except Elizabeth?"

Cooper said, "Hold your horses, son. A lot of things may happen before the Donald Cameron comes."

"Only one thing's going to happen that I know of, and that is that I'm going back to Elizabeth. She and I are going to stand up in St. Margaret's in exactly four months' time, if I have to knock off Orao's head and blow up the island to do it."

"T-t, t-t!" said Cooper pacifically. "Take things easy. You've got me with you, and I know the Islands. There's ways," he said. And he added (inconsequently, as it seemed), "A lot better than it used to be, Niu-Niu is. Ah a grand place! I'd never 'a left it if—" He broke off short.

Harry, staring indignantly at Orao, at the youths, at the little white cot-tage before which they stood the cottage that, it seemed, was to be his prison— Harry didn't listen. He was not in the habit of listening to James Cooper. It was quite enough to be kind to your father without that. And after all, it was the Dad, with his absurd and romantic fancies— romance at fifty!— who had let him in for all this. But Orao was going on; he must listen. Pity the Dad had to translate most of it. He would have liked to listen and answer, unhelped.

ORAO, it seemed had not much more to say. The white men were to keep within bounds, and all would be well. If stray ships came— though that was not likely— and if, or when, the *Donald Cameron* called the doors would be shut

upon the two, and guards put outside. Unless, of course, the Maid gave orders otherwise. And she would only give such orders— advised by her council— after the title of Maid was hers no longer; after she had been wedded, by all the island ceremonies, to Harry.

For years no white man like Harry, young and handsome and unwedded, had been seen in lonely Niu-Niu. It might be years before such a one was seen again. The council, in the person of Orao, gave it as its opinion that Harry might as well consent at once, to save trouble. There would be no opposition from the girl; she knew better. And he, Orao, couldn't imagine a young man with blood in his body— an unmarried young man, too—doing anything at all but accept his luck, and sing over it. Or words to that effect.

"Tell him," said Harry, rather white about the lips, "that I'm as good as married. To— to the finest girl in the world. A very great chief's daughter. A— a girl I love. Tell him—" He paused, swallowed, and abruptly ended— "Tell him to go to blazes!"

James Cooper, in the island Maori that came back so easily to his tongue, explained that the young chief wished to thank Orao and the council, and above all, the Maid, for their kind offer, but regretted that he did not see his way to consent.

Orao, with a good deal of dignity for one so small and naked, bowed his head, collected his young men, and disappeared.

And the two white men, seeing nothing else for it, went into the cottage.

Lily was sitting on the coral pathway, outside the cottage door. She sat cross-legged, "taupo" fashion, with her limbs folded as a man folds his arms, a pose impossible to most Europeans. She had a fan in her hand, and fanned herself with it, gracefully, while she made conversation, discoursing exactly like a society woman paying a call.

BEHIND her, six old women, sleepily chewing betel nut, kept guard, as they were bound to keep guard over the sacred person of the Maid, day and night, until her wedding.

In the past ten days she had called three times, each time taking her place outside the cottage, and talking pleasantly, non-committally, about the weather, and the fishing, and the prospect of the island crop of yams. It seemed that, in the politest manner, she was showing off the goods to a possible buyer. No importunity, no sales pressure; simply a shop-window display. Neither Harry nor his father could help admiring her perfect command of a somewhat difficult situation. It was impossible to guess, from her manner, what she herself might feel.

As for the two men, they enjoyed her company, uneasily in the one case, wholeheartedly in the other. Cooper found himself, more than once, wishing that Elizabeth, "that two yards of "pump-water" (for so he described her much admired slight figure), had been drowned before she came along and captured Harry— and Harry's prospective fortune. This was the sort of daughter-in-law he'd have liked; this creature of white and tan and burning gold, with the cool, self-contained way of speech, and the hot flash that, now and then, showed up so intriguingly in her blue-green, brilliant eyes.

"Cripes, Harry!'' he said, when for the third time Lily came pacing down the road, before her women— "Cripes, that's a girl that is a girl. She's pepper, she's ginger, for all her hair is gold."

Harry looked hard at her, and for a minute kept silence. Then he said, with something of an effort, "All one to me if she's garlic and onions, and if her hair's brass or pewter, or anything you like. She's— she's not a patch on Elizabeth.''

"Son," said Cooper suddenly (they had talked much during those days of semi-imprisonment, but, manlike, shirked certain vital issues), "Son, do you want the Honorable Elizabeth or not?"

Harry forbore to wince at the use of the title. "Dad," he said, "if I were in my right senses, I do. But— who does keep his senses in the islands? There's something gets hold of you, makes you wonder what all the rest of it's about, anyhow, why people can't just live instead of scratching about for money, doing things they don't

want to all the time. I think like that sometimes, and then I look at— her—"

Lily was within hearing now, and perforce he ceased. His mind was a battleground. He could almost see Elizabeth—Elizabeth, cool as a prim-rose, shiny-pale as the last snows of spring; tall, distinguished, calm, with something in her character that met and matched with the conventional spirit of his own; Elizabeth, who'd run his house, himself, his children, exactly as houses, husbands and child-ren ought to be run. Elizabeth, of whom one was sure....

And Lily, now offered to him as a sweet is offered to a child. Lily, with the tang of savagery in her burning loveliness; daring as any of Orao's wild young men. Lily, incalculable, wonderful, a consecrated Maid, a Queen. Whom to love would be the maddest adventure a man could con-ceive. His— if he chose.

Something in Harry that was all of

his father cried out "Yes!" Something, cooler and harder, inherited from Gladys, bade him hold back. He was almost visibly trembling when the girl, who had taken her seat as usual, and as usual began to talk, turned and addressed herself directly to him. Had she seen his emotion? Did she, per-

haps, misinterpret it? He did not know, could not guess just how Lily regarded him— and that was half her charm.

What was she saying now? What was the meaning of the impish light that glittered in her eyes? She was rising to her feet. She was going. And before she went she looked straight at James and Harry and said, with a graceful bow, "I invite you to my party!"

"What party? When?" asked Cooper.

"The day before the *Donald Cameron* comes; that will be in four more days. The party," she said, "for the wedding." And on that she went, with the six old women scuttling, crab-wise, behind her.

Cooper swore a strange sea oath. "The cutty!" he ended. "The cutty! So she'd take an unwilling husband, soon as not. I told you there was ginger in Lily."

Fires seemed to be dancing before the eyes of Harry Cooper. "Dad," he said in a voice not like his own, "what can I do? What can a fellow do against a hundred men?"

"Depends," Cooper told him, "on what the fellow wants to do. Son, you shall have what you want, whatever—" He broke off and corrected himself— "whichever it is."

Harry did not answer.

"They done me out of it," said Cooper darkly. Not to Gladys' son could he tell how he had been jockeyed, into marrying Gladys, held to her apron-strings for half his life. It was his own fault; it had all followed, logically, from that night on which he had deserted Lily's mother, and left the island world.

"No one," he went on, "is going to do you out of what you want— if you know," he smiled hastily, "what it is."

There was silence, for so long as it might take three waves to tumble, creaming, on the coral beach below. Then Harry, with an effort, jerked out the one word— "Elizabeth!" Cooper said nothing in reply; he waited. Harry went on, collecting himself— "They're taking my honor from me, if they don't let me go. They're making me feel a swine."

Briskly Cooper spoke.

"We can't let you feel like a swine, son. Leave it to me."

Harry said. "The days of miracles are past," and turned away to the cottage. Cooper could not see his face.

IN the days that followed no miracle seemed imminent; nothing was done. The Dad went off walking by himself now and then; oc-casionally vanished for some few hours after dark, eluding the guards with an ingenuity that would have been quite beyond Harry. Harry wondered, occasionally, whether it was

possible that, in the sudden outflare of youth that comes to most men at fifty, the Dad mightn't have gone chasing after native girls. They were attractive enough, heaven knew. As for himself, haunted as he was by the double images of Lily and Elizabeth, super-imposed like a twice-exposed negative, he had no thought to spare for any of the handsome young hussies who from time to time passed his door, laughing and looking. They did not look so much or so often as they had done at first. Anxiety and strain were beginning to tell upon Harry; his face was pale, his shoulders stooped. He was not now the splendid youth who had landed so light-heartedly on Niu-Niu only a few weeks back.

As for James Cooper, worry had left no mark on him. You might have taken him for a model ready to stand for the jolly sea-god Neptune beside a somewhat weary, over-travelled Mercury. To use Cooper's own expression, Harry seemed a bit under the weather, while he himself was, and intended to remain, as fit as a flea....

The visits of Lily had ceased. Once or twice, moodily lounging by the cottage door, Harry Cooper thought to have seen her white trailing robes flash through the neighboring groves of banana and palm; but that one couldn't be sure of; it might have been a party of girls carrying flowers. Miracle or no miracle, the wedding preparations went on. Dances were being practised, pigs and fowls collected for the killing, breadfruit baked, prawns, pigeons, oysters, turtle steaks prepared.

THERE was no count of kumaras, yarns and taro, or mangoes, oranges, custard apples, pineapples, "wi" apples, coconuts. Days before the wedding the feast would begin, continuing for days after. There'd be dancing and dancing, feasting and dancing, and dancing and drinking and dancing again. Kava and pine-apple and orange beer would run free for all, and there would be, for the chiefs, strong ti root, and palm wine as well. The nights were moonlight. Day and night, until it wore itself and everyone else to an end, the festival would go on. After that the whole island, tired, would rest, as only in the islands one could rest, for idle days and days. There'd be no dragon called "business" waiting, claws outstretched at the end of the fun; no desks and ledgers over which tired heads would have to bend; no deathtraps set in roaring streets, for hands a little unsure of the steering wheel, eyes not swift to follow flashing signals.

Instead, there would be the cool, undisturbed twilight of the coral houses, with the sea wind blowing through; the day sleep that restored; the singing of the reef that soothed and healed.

Savage? Yes— as London and New York are savage, too. Surely, if Nature needs an outbreak now and then; if enough is not indeed a feast, and too

much sometimes good, as certain we men say— then, the way of Niu-Niu's the best.

COOPER and Harry, outside it all, watched the preparations. It was pleasant enough in the coral cottage, up on the top of the cliff, if one had one's mind free; if quite untouched by trouble one could have seen the processions of dancers and food-gatherers go by; with he... at ease, watched the splendid pageant of the tides, the dawn, the blossoming and fruiting of Niu-Niu's eternal summer. To see, and delight in, the picture of a perfect star painted a shadow about the foot of every palm-tree at high noon; to listen to the mourning sound of the casuarina tree, like the sad, sleepy voices of sea-shells; to mark, each day, the mar... of the Aaron's rods of emerald trans-formed, among the bananas, into flaunting banners of huge leaf— this would have delighted the sensitive soul of Harry, if only he had felt free to look and wonder.

As it was he could feel, like a flood tide flowing in the charm of the islands softly invading his mind. Life here was simple as spring water, and as sweet. In England, "the world was so full of a number of things," im-portant and unimportant, that a man, if not as happy, was at all events as busy as kings— English kings, w... understood! A man, it seemed, was too busy with the mere mechanics of living simply to live.

Sometimes one wondered— almost— what all these complications really and truly were for. Hadn't one at Niu-Niu, at the stretching of a hand, everything for which men toiled and toiled, in the grey countries, till they themselves were grey?

So he would think; then, suddenly the picture of London would unroll itself before his eyes. London grey and cold, stinging, stimulating. London, and the sight of it, the thick-piled houses, the pavements, thronged and glassy-wet. The smell of it, tar and petrol and a million meals of food. The streets— Bond Street, where Elizabeth went shopping; Elizabeth coming down that narrow, haughty thorough-fare, her small hat swept aside over her grey eyes, her waist, so long, so neat, clipped in a furred coat. Elizabeth who was competence, capability, charm. Who was sure of everything in the world. Who knew for a certain that England was life, and that the South Seas— if anyone ever spared thought to that wild place— we... death-in-life: only Elizabeth, who was even now buying her wedding clothes in Bond Street, and in vain.

For the Dad, after all, had doner nothing; the miracle hadn't take place. Questioned, he merely advised Harry, as before, to hold his horses and to keep his hair on. Once he had declared, in a burst of confidence, that what you didn't know wouldn't do you any harm, nor yet anyone else. Harry paid small

attention. The Dad, in his opinion, loved cheap mysteries. And nothing could alter the hard facts, they stood.

Now at last the feast began in a its fury; the island went dancing, drumming, eating, drinking and kiss-ing mad; the great hall was decorated, the old men, too old for dancing and kissing, were gathering together to watch the rest. A small but formid-able group they made, a handful of human dust and ashes, even such as would suffice to represent, in the end, all the flame and the splendor of then island's burning youth, to-day.

LILY, among her tirewomen, was decking herself for the wedding. That misnamed handful of audacity and mischief, that spice blossom, that freaked hot ginger flower, was giving trouble to the old ladies whose task was so nearly done. She had slapped several of them severely; she had refused to wear most of the robes they brought her, and thrown away the wreaths they made for her hair, capriciously demanding others. She had made faces at them when they hung the taupo's white shell about her neck on a new light string, and had fidgeted till they could hardly comb her amazing yellow hair and set the comb in it, ready for her lover to raise the long locks and secure them on the top of her head. Only the maidens wore their hair loose; the upraising of the hair, the snatching and throwing away of the white shell, and the drinking of a ceremonial cup of kava, half by the bridegroom and half by the bride, constituted a NiuNiu marriage ceremony.

To quiet her, the old women began their eternal gossip; gossip was their joy, their chief excitement. "The young chief looks pale," they said. "He is terribly in love with you, so terribly that he is nearly ill of it." And they added remarks such as can be found, by the curious, in the earlier scenes of "Romeo and Juliet."

Lily tossed her head, giggled, and seemed to have some private joke of her own.

"He will be a good husband for the Queen," they said. "He won't anger the old men. Young men are beautiful, old men are wise. His time for wisdom has not come."

Lily looked at herself in a hand glass. "I am very beautiful," she observed. "I am beautiful enough for two."

"Yes, yes," they said uncomprehend-ingly, and combed away at the spark-ling hair. Lily was anxious, they could see, upset almost. Well, it was enough to upset any girl, to have a bridegroom given her, who didn't know whether he wanted her or not (for that the old women, who were wise, well knew). But Lily would handle him. She was a little devil. He would know his master, before long, and she'd like that.

Did the old women, who were so wise, for this once make a mistake? Did they forget the fact that all women, at heart, are alike? It seems they did; for no one, not the oldest and ugliest, and thereby the wisest of the lot, seems to have known, or guessed, at what was coming.

The wedding was not up to time; there had been a question of pigs, a perplexity about turtles, that had thrown back the ceremony for days, brought it, as things happened, right on to the time of the arrival of the Donald Cameron. In fact, she was signalled that very morning. But the council, with Orao at their head, re-mained unperturbed. A hundred armed young men could keep the white men away from the ship people as long as might be necessary. And, after all, it would be handy to have the boat there on the spot, to take away Cooper Senior, prevent his making trouble. He knew too much about the islands; he was too strong in character; he'd have a finger in everybody's pie, if they didn't get him away. The Island wed-ding, for island folk, was irrevocable. Once the bridegroom had cast away the shell, raised the bride's tresses of hair and drunk the kava cup, he was hers and she was his, for as long as their lives might last. And Orao had planned— later on— to have a white man's wedding as well, down at Suva or Nukualofa. Just to drive the last nail safely home.

Now, the festivity was nearing its crown and climax; the feast was spread ready; the bucks and belles were gathered in the great hall. Frizzed they were, and painted, decked with beads and shells, with necklaces of scarlet berries, with striped grass crinolettes and loin-cloths of painted tappa. They were plump and shining, they had eaten nobly, and meant to eat again. They giggled, pinched, and slapped one an-other, and kicked with bare brown toes. A wedding was fun...

The bridegroom! the white man who was to marry their white Queen! Here he came, slowly walking with his father. The girls looked knowingly at James Cooper, and whispered to one another. That day, he seemed ageless; his fifty years were neither here nor there; he held himself as nobly as any of the young bucks whose heads had never bent to the desk and pen. There wasn't a strand of grey in his black hair; his neck, in the loose collar, showed thick and sturdy as a threeyear-old bull's. Gaily he was dressed, coatless, silk-shirted, with crimson cummerbund and white trousers and a gardenia in his breast pocket. You might have taken him for the bride-groom if there had been no Harrywalking beside. Harry, very tall and slim and pale, in white tailored suit and perfect boots. Harry, anxious-looking, uncertain, and wondering what on earth the Dad had meant by telling him, ten minutes ago, to keep up his pecker; he'd get him through all right.

All right? When he saw Lily come into the hall, a dream in snowy tappa cloth and flower crown, floods of sparkling hair adrift down her back, a light of mischief, excitement. Heaven knew what, in her blue-green eyes, he wondered what was all right, and what, at the bottom of his soul, he really wanted. The Donald Cameron had whistled, down below, a quarter of an hour ago. If by some miracle the way was opened, if he could go this minute—what then?

THERE was to be no miracle, it seemed. Lily was slowly pacing with the dignity of a Maid, the majesty of a Queen, up to the dais where he and James Cooper stood. The old men and the warriors waited below. On a table stood the carved coconut cup of kava. Let him remem-ber what Orao had said. ... He had to lift that mass of hair, twist it and fasten it on the top of Lily's head with Lily's own pearlshell comb. He had to break the string that held the white shell, and throw the shell on the floor. He had to take the cup, drink half of it at a draught (he hoped to heaven it wouldn't make him sick) and hand the rest to Lily. If he didn't do all this there would be the father and mother of a row, and the Dad would never be allowed to go back home, whatever happened to him. And the Donald Cameron, the trading steamer bound for Sydney town, had whistled down below. She'd go without her passenger— unless he did his job at once, with-out fumbling. After all, one must stand by one's father, even if he had got one into the mess.

Lily was between the two; so close that one could scent the perfume of her delightful hair, see the dilated pupils of her deep-sea-colored eyes. She was clearly very much excited. And she was looking— by Gad!— not at him, but at James Cooper.

Harry, half dreaming, stretched forth an uncertain hand towards her hair. She kicked him away. Instantly Cooper's hands were in her hair, had twisted it, swept it up and fastened it; had snapped the cord of the shell and flung it down. Quicker than a man might tell, Cooper had seized the kava cup, tossed half of it down his throat, and given the cup to Lily, who almost choked upon it as she gulped the rest.

ORAO, who had seemed, for the moment, petrified with astonishment, now sprang forward screaming, a shrill old man's scream. But the girls, unconsciously, barred his way. Shrieking with laughter, they had flung themselves in one solid mass upon the shell, and fought one another for its possession. There were auguries to be gleaned from that shell; strange secrets to be read from the manner of its fall.... And he had seen no hesitancy in Lily's drinking her share of the kava.

And Orao, in one bitter moment, saw himself defeated. It was too late. Cooper, the sailor, the strong man, had married the Maid. Cooper would lead her, to-night, to the flower-decked bridal room. No undeveloped youth, easy to influence, would sit on the Prince Consort's throne of Niu-Niu. The island and the Maid would know a master.

"Here," said Cooper, giving Harry an enormous dig in the ribs, "wake up and scoot, son, scoot! Kiss your step-mother and be off, before any of these jokers with the spears quit laughing." (For the young men, aware now of the enormous jest that had been played, were roaring like jackasses.) "You can reckon on an islander for just five minutes at a time and no longer. Your hand, boy— don't forget your old Dad— be off!"

There were tears in his eyes as he grasped the white hand of Harry, and crushed it in his own brown paw. A son was a son Even if—maybe by and by—

HARRY recovering his wits, smacked down a hurried, stepsonly kiss on the cheek of Lily (not thus had he thought to kiss her!) and, edging through the crowd almost unnoticed, fled. Down the coral road-way, where the wind swept up from the anchorage below, where, now, the angry whistle of the Donald Cameron demanded, for the second time, attention, he went hotfoot. One couldn't think of refusing the Dad's fine sacrifice, so cleverly managed as it had been; so ably as that young puss, Lily, had played her part! How Lily and his father could have planned it was beyond his imagination.

Sacrifice? Was it anything of the kind? Was it not, for James Cooper, something quite other; a coming home, at last, to the life that he had missed and wanted— all the time? Harry, little accustomed to think of James Cooper save as a mere background to his own hopes and plans, accepted the idea with amazement. Yes, the Dad had never been really happy. He'd always had a sort of hunger in his eyes. As if he were looking at something that he wanted, a long, long, long way off...

And with that came the recollection of Elizabeth, a long way off, whom— Harry was quite sure about it now— he wanted.

The Niu-Niu lilies, heavy-headed, swept past his face as he went down the stairs. He thought he would remember the scent of them always.

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## 2: The Keys of Bluebeard

*The Home*, (Sydney) 1 June 1940

BIRDS had been known to dash themselves against the tall cliffs of Takau, wildly, inexplicably, falling to their death. There were native tales about ghosts that haunted the island and did a mischief, sometimes, to unwary men.

Yet it was beautiful; loveliest, perhaps, of the twin islands, set in the blue Pacific, that belonged to Leo Gamble. Tinomana, across the strait, was lower and more accessible than Takau; it was feathered with tall palms, planted with fruit trees; it had a bungalow, and a boat-jetty, running down the wide white shore. Takau, tall and steep, broke off short above the sea in precipices masked by uncleared bush; its coral beaches were narrow as the sides of a saucer too small for the cup; on the summit stood, open to all winds, a shack that was weatherproof and little more.

There were no other islands near to these. The port of entry for the Laka group, Meitaki, could just be seen on the horizon, serrated, pale and purple, like a hyacinth flower afloat. From Meitaki, you travelled to Leo's islands by occasional launch, and your stores and your mails and your visitors— if any— went by the same route.

On the day that Leo and Cecily came to Tinomana— Cecily drugged with happiness, chloroformed by sun and sea-airs, so that she no longer felt the sting of the Puritan conscience that had tormented her all along the cold New Zealand coasts and up from Australia: Leo Gamble, dark, inscrutable, calm as he had always been calm, even in those moments of fierce danger that had been common in his explorer's career they stood together on the top of the island, looking towards the illimitable sea-line that lay before them, clear as the rim of a lens, or as the ring that Leo held in his hand, and showed to Cecily.

"Two rings of eternity," he said to her, and set the gold ring on her hand. He had kept it for this hour.

"What is the inscription?" she said, looking at it closely. It was an Egyptian scarab ring, of great age and value.

"Translated," he said, "it's this— 'I found thee, I keep thee, The gods give thee to me forever .' "

Cecily drew a long breath of delight. It was not the moment to remember— but she could not help remembering— George Grant, her husband, away down in Dunwoodie, at the cold Antarctic end of New Zealand. George, twenty years older than herself, a solicitor with no interests beyond his practice, had been "sensible about the engagement ring. It was a standard pattern half hoop of very small diamonds, like —except as to size— every ring that every girl in Dunwoodie had ever been given. He had said, as he put it on her hand: "Now

don't go dropping it down the wash basin, or losing it along the beach, for you won't get another..."

That ring was at the bottom of the Antarctic Ocean, where Leo Gamble, adventurer, explorer and famous man, had thrown it, with her wedding ring, the night they ran away to the steamer.

It had been a whirlwind courtship: Leo, coming back from the Antarctic, had met the little yellow-haired wife of his solicitor at a dinner given in honour of the exploring party; had been told by interested friends that Grant kept her shut up in a box, and wouldn't even let her go to the pictures, because he was jealous of everything and everybody: jealous even of Gary Cooper and Clark Gable; had felt, the moment he saw her, that she was too good for such a fool.... Leo Gamble, lover of many women, knew, if Grant did not, that no woman, married or single, can be cheated forever of the one thing that matters more to her than anything on earth— her dream.

On that dream has Hollywood been founded; have the innumerable picture palaces been built; have the colossal fortunes of producing firms been made, and the names and faces of dream lovers, dream projections of unsatisfactory selves, gone flying round the world.

Leo knew well how the screen slaked the thirsts of frustrated people; how pictures took the place of opium and hashish, with unsatisfied wives; and here was an unsatisfied wife, pretty as the frail pink Arctic poppies in her garden, without so much as the shadow of an Adolphe Menjou "to content herself withal." She told him, moreover, in the first of their stolen talks, that George wouldn't even let her read anything he hadn't censored, and that she had been enjoying so much, the life of Sir Richard Burton, the lover of beautiful Isabel, the great explorer, "with the brow of a god and the jaw of a devil," when George took the book away and sent it back to the library. Also that he had gone about whistling the day T. E. Lawrence died, because Cecily had seen the Arab pictures of Lawrence, and liked them, so that, of course, she cried a little over the news.

Leo, who was considered to be, and considered himself, not unlike the Burton and Lawrence type, saw his chance, and seized it, with the dash and determination that had already carried him through the adventures, amatory and geographical, of thirty stormy years. This golden Cecily, with her New Zealand clove-pink bloom, and the wasted, defeated youth of her, like the spilled scent of the clove-pink, crying out, "Take me, take!" was clearly meant for him.

The day they came to Tinomana, he said to her, after he had put the priceless scarab on her hand, and kissed it, This is our home, for as long as you

like, but, remember, that other island, Takau, isn't for you. You must never go on to it, for any reason or any excuse."

"Why, my Lord Bluebeard?" she asked him, and he said,

"No matter. Call me Bluebeard if you like—"

"You're dark enough." she said, looking again at the dusky, deep-set eyes, the black-dotted jaw of a devil, that likened him, in the opinion of many, to his nineteenth-century prototype, Richard Burton.

"Call me anything; call Takau Bluebeard's chamber, if you choose, but let the keys alone." His eye wandered to the native canoe that lay on the low beach of Tinomana.

Cecily would have given him, on demand, her head upon a charger, if such a gift had been anatomically possible. "I promise," she said.

It had been hard to keep the promise, when she saw that Bluebeard was in the habit of visiting his own secret chamber, almost daily; that he picked up things on the beach, brought them back, wrapped in bagging, and stored them carefully underneath the living room floor. For a good while he had tested her patience, her obedience, by saying nothing at all about this treasure trove, whatever it might be.

But one day, when she had come upon him unexpectedly, as he was storing away a bag of some yellow-brown substance that spilled out and fell upon the floor, he had said, cocking a mischievous eye at her— "What is it, Madam B?"

Cecily sniffed fastidiously. "It's ugly, she said, "and it smells like— like something toasted— toast gone a little bad and spread with baddish butter. If you ask me."

"That," said Leo, "is ambergris."

"What! the thing they make the perfumes of?

"The thing that's used in perfumery. Yes. Less of it in the world every year, as the big whales are killed off. Nobody knows much about the big sperm whales that and how and why they produce ambergris— it's really a disease— but I've picked up some information most people haven't got; worked out for myself their routes. Between two of the Solomons is one, east coast of New Caledonia is another, *and* that last is a sick whales bay. Nobody knows why, but they get lots of ambergris, and being French and practical, say mighty little about it. Well, this is another. Between these islands, at certain times of the year, you II see the flukes and the black backs of them coming up as they go through. And when they're sick they come. Must be so, because it s a real mine of ambergris; that s why I took up the islands. The currents seem to land it mostly on Takau. But here's the catch." (He was stowing away treasure as he spoke; rough lumps the size of a fist, worth as much as a motor car; lumps as

big as a man's head, worth a fine town house.) I couldn't keep it, if anyone found out. Law of flotsam and jetsam. Thrown up on the beach or floating about— anyone's. He put by the last of the greasy, burnt-smelling stuff, and clamped down the movable floorboards over it.

"So that's the Bluebeard secret?" Cecily demanded, eagerly.

She did not care much about the treasure-trove, but very much about being in Leo's confidence.

Leo didn't answer her at first, and then, as he walked out on to the verandah, sending his keen-sighted glance up and down the quiet seas— a thing he always did, when he had finished working in the cache— he said: "What I told you about Takau still holds— Madam Bluebeard."

It's nothing that matters, she thought. The dear likes his little secrets. Men must have toys, and secrets are Leo's.... But she was astonished at his keenness, his almost greediness, over this treasure-trove of the seas. She hadn't thought him so very fond of money.

Gamble was not fonder of it than, perhaps, you or I. But neither you nor I, maybe, has ever had the special reason for wanting money, money in large heaps, that Leo Gamble had— after he stole away the wife of George Grant, solicitor. After he realised that Cecily's Puritan conscience might be scotched, but could not, altogether, be killed. After he guessed that she couldn't be kept, for always, unless Grant divorced her— which was the last thing a man of Grant's type was likely to do.

Money was the only chance. Money that would buy them both a position in some sort of society, after the islands of the blest had palled, as even blest islands do. If you have money enough, you can get away with murder, Leo thought. Or without money— sometimes.... He passed his hand across his cat-moustache. and smiled. Only the earth's waste places knew what Leo Gamble had got away with, in the buried years.

Beside him, clove-pink Cecily stood, like a coloured angel off a birthday cake, wishing from her heart that she could sufficiently thank Heaven for the priceless gift of Leo's love. But she did not, honestly, suppose that she could. It would be too like a pickpocket going down on his knees to render thanks for a good day among the rings and watches....

Every day, when Leo had paddled himself across from the Bluebeard island, and put away his catch, little or large, he had been wont to cast a glance here and there, a mechanical look, like that of a coastguard sweeping the bare horizon with his glass. This day, being occupied with his own thoughts, he hardly knew that he was looking; did not know that, for once, he had missed the object of that daily search— until Cecily, seizing his arm, cried out: "Leo, there's someone coming!"

In a moment they knew who it was.

Even though the launch, a black pin point stuck in a black pencil, took an hour or more to creep across the satin of the still Pacific, near enough for those two on the island to see what it carried-even though they could only tell, at first, that there was a native engineer on board, and two white men— Leo and Cecily knew, from the instant the launch sighted, that Cecily s husband

was on board.

Cecily held on to Leo's arm with a drowning grip. "You won't let him take me away?" she said, breathless and trembling. He could feel the chill of her fingers through his cotton sleeve.

Leo was not pitiful, but he was struck with sudden pity now for this Iceland poppy of a girl, shaken by the winds of cruel chance (strange how one always likened her to a flower!) He felt himself, beside her, stark, strong as one of the giant kauri pines of her own country.

With his warm hands he pressed her chilly fingers.

"You shall always have what you like, and do what you like— except one thing." he said to her. "If that's Grant— and I think it is— you needn't see or speak to him.

"Oh, if I needn't!"

"You shan't. Go into the bungalow and stop there. He and I will meet each other on Takau."

Cecily had given over being afraid of Takau by this time. Whatever its ghostly, deathly history might be (and it was hard to believe dark legends, when you looked at that unmysterious shape, covered with flowers and bushes, and open to all the winds of heaven) it was plain that Leo wasn't troubled by it. The prohibition that kept herself away didn't matter: Leo was a bit of a tyrant; had to have something, she supposed, about which to be tyrannical. I like tyrants, she thought, with the warm blood rushing to her cheeks.... She wasn't thinking of Takau Island now, but of the men upon it. What were they talking about, shut up in the tin bungalow, among the weeds and flowers that crowned Takau?

After what seemed to be a long while, with the sun beginning to sink in a brazen sea, and the man-of-war birds whistling as they flew overhead towards home, one of the men came out. Cecily's heart stopped beating... but no, it wasn't George. George was fat and tall; this was the other, this thin, smallish fellow, walking with Leo.

They took the canoe and began paddling back to Tinomana. On the top of the island, as the sun went down, Cecily could see a black, massive figure standing outside the doorway of the hut. That would be George. George, it seemed, was going to stay the night on the other island: Leo must have had

some trouble to persuade or bully him into it, but it had been done. There was bedding and furniture on Takau, and food as well: Leo had always kept the hut prepared, in case of stormy weather detaining him overnight.

Very black the motionless figure looked against the geranium sunset. The wind was getting up; it cried among the cliffs of Takau; it wailed like the ghosts that were said to haunt the island. Shivers went over Cecily. She turned away from the evening and the sea. The bungalow was bright, with lit lamps and a table whitely covered. Cecily thought of the little poem by Mallock that Leo loved; the verses ending— . . .

*Hold me fast by your true hand,*
*Turn away from the changed sea,*
*Daylight forsakes the forlorn land,*
*Never forsake me.*

Maybe I'm "fey," she thought. I feel as if there was something coming. But I don't think— no, I don't think, whatever happened— I would. Here was Leo now, gay and unconcerned as ever; no one would think he had been holding what Cecily knew must have been an extremely stormy interview with her husband. He was introducing the other man; someone called Winder, who didn't need to be introduced; Cecily remembered him, a friend of George's. He has brought him along for a witness, she thought. He's on George's side. I wish they had left him over on Takau. Nevertheless, she was civil to Winder, even when the little attorney's clerk told her right out that Grant had come to bring her home again, and wouldn't be satisfied with anything less.

"Your husband doesn't believe in divorce," Winder said, fixing her with grey, disapproving eyes, that seemed to Cecily to embody and express the opinions of far-away Dunwoodie upon her conduct. The worst of it was that she agreed with Dunwoodie; she knew she was bad, as bad, no doubt, as the woman in *The Scarlet Letter*; she ought to wear a red cloth initial upon the breast of her linen frock, like wicked Hester in the story— if justice were done.

She could see herself, some day— but not too soon; like St. Augustine, she could have petitioned Heaven— "not yet!"— leaving Leo, spending the rest of her life in regrets and penitence.

(If Leo would let her.)...

But she couldn't see herself going back to Grant and to Dunwoodie. The tall black island across the strait took on a sinister aspect as she thought of that. She had never liked the place; she hated it now; it was slimed all over with Grant.

After dinner, they played a stupid game of dummy bridge, and Winder smoked the good cigars that Leo gave him, and they all went early to bed. In

the middle of the night. Cecily waked, alone in her room. Leo was sharing the room of the attorney's clerk; she could not hear him breathing, but the snores of the clerk sounded loudly. What had she heard? Not those snores only. There was something else; it might have been the cry of a seabird, or it might have been a shriek.

Maybe there were ghosts on Takau after all. George would not care; he'd tackle a ghost just as he'd go for a witness in court. George could take care of himself. And when the launch went back to the port of entry to-morrow she wouldn't be in it. Leo would see to that.

George— could— take— care of himself— on that thought, strangely repeated, she went to sleep.

Leo said, next morning: "You've been crying." They were out on the verandah, in the freshness of the early day. It was autumn on Tinomana and Takau; autumn marked only, in those tropic latitudes, by a little more gold in the gilded sunshine, a dreaming mist upon the seas of lupin blue. Pineapples were bearing for the second time that year; bananas bowed themselves towards earth, weighed down by the richness of their fruit; male pawpaws dangled streamers of lacy flowers beside the sturdy female trees, that bore big clusters of green and yellow melons. There were no fruit trees on Takau which had not been cultivated: only the tangle of tropic bush, brightened with stray flowers and berries, that spread itself gaily under the early sun.

Cecily said: "I've not,— or only a little. I— I can't help it."

"I suppose it's because that dog-in-the-manger wouldn t give you your freedom."

"Is it sure he won't?" They had used different tenses of the same verb: but Cecily saw nothing in that.

Leo said, shifting the cigarette between his lips: "Yes." Then, after a moment's silence: "Do you mean to let that matter?"

She could only answer: "It must!"

"Money," said Leo. "will carry off most things, in most places."

"I don't care about money," she told him. "You do— but you said you couldn't be sure of keeping— what you had— to yourself."

Leo did not reply for another long minute. The cigarette was done; he threw it down.

I can be sure, he said.

She looked at him, her breath coming quickly with the desire of finding out at last what the real secret of Takau might be. She knew that it was held, like a kernel, in the shell of that last sentence. But the shell remained shut. Winder joined them, and immediately recommenced his arguments of the previous night. Why didn't Leo leave him over on Takau with George, thought Cecily. It

was surely inconsiderate to let me be troubled by him, when it could so easily have been arranged; this man is like a fly, one can't shake him off or stop him buzzing.

To all that he said she opposed her unconquerable resolution. She would not go back to Grant. She would not see him, or speak to him.

"Then what, if I may ask, are your— plans?" the little man inquired. His tone was chilly, superior. Just the tone of the people in Dunwoodie, Cecily thought, just the way they would speak to me— if they spoke at all—

But it was hard to answer, with Winder staring at her, waiting, and Leo, her lover, still more narrowly watching her. It seemed that she had a vital decision to make, there in the garden of Paradise that belonged to Leo and to her, above the quiet sea that had never, until now, carried trouble to them from the world of struggling men. She had to declare immediately what she was going to do. These were men, hostile in the hearts of them to women, even though one of them loved her. Men were like that when they came to sit in judgment....

Her throat was dry; she had to swallow once or twice before she could speak. But she knew, now, what she was going to say.

"I— I— I'm going away," she said. She hadn't known it, ten minutes before. She knew now. Leo would give her money, and she would make him release her, and she would go and break her heart somewhere, alone. She couldn't, couldn't go on being the— the— (no, not that word) of a man. Even Leo. The answer was something that she had not expected. Leo laughed. In a satisfied way. as if something pleased him. And he told her: "I knew you'd say that," and right before little Winder, he stooped down (he had a long way to stoop)— and kissed her. Then he walked away, whistling.

Winder said, with unexpected kindness: "If you really won't go back to Grant, Mrs. Grant, I think you're doing the next best thing. May I inform him that you and Mr. Gamble have decided to part?"

"You can tell him," Cecily said with some spirit, "that I have decided."

It seemed as if Winder were about to speak; he looked questioningly at Leo, who was calmly walking up and down on the stretch of ground that overlooked the ghostly island, and taking no notice of anyone. But whatever he was going to say remained unspoken. He merely bowed to Cecily and took his way down to the beach, where the canoe lay waiting.

"I can't work this craft of yours," he called to Leo, "I shall have to trouble you."

"Grant knows how to paddle, I believe," Leo called in answer.

"I— it's odd, but he doesn't seem to have got up yet; can't see him anywhere.

"Well,  I'll take you over."Leo came down to the shore.

Cecily watched them crossing the strait; saw them land, and make their way up to the hut.

Silence Fell on Tinomana; the little wild bees buzzed like flies among the lacy flowers of the pawpaws; over the top of the island gulls went crying. One didn't mind the gulls; they didn't frighten you as they went cruising about after fishy prey in the straits; but Cecily remembered the little land birds once and again seen upon Takau, how they had alarmed her, going crazy, as it seemed, flying madly about and dashing themselves to death against the cliffs. Their small fluffy bodies had lain upon the stones below, suddenly still and by and by the tide had swept them away; some of them, even, had been cast on their own island of Tinomana.

More than ever she hated to see Leo go over to Takau that morning. There was no logic in it; simply, she felt so.

To keep herself from thinking— above all, from thinking about that decision of hers, that lay cold in her warm heart like a snake coiled up in a dove's nest— she set to work getting things ready for Leo's dinner. Curry she would make; there was no fresh meat, and tinned stuff wanted dressing. Salt meat, she knew, was kept upon Takau, maybe he'd bring a bit back with him; they didn't use it as a rule, in that thirsty climate.

Meantime, she got to work upon her curry, gathering fresh herbs to flavour it, and not forgetting the red peppers that Leo loved; he had learned to like strong spices in his Eastern travels. The peppers were nearly done, but she found a bush of good ones right down on the beach, finest and biggest she had seen. You didn t put them into the curry, you squeezed their juice through a cloth. She didn't mind the trouble, though for herself she preferred the plainest food. Men must be humoured. No sound, as yet, had come from the other island, and she could not see Leo or Winder. They must have gone down to the beach, she thought, and that was odd, for the beach was the last place where Leo desired to see strangers.

Lunch was finished, cooked, set ready to warm up when wanted, and still there was no sign of the men. Cecily was growing uneasy. Like Malbrouk's wife, she went up to the top of the island, looked out to see where Leo and Winder had gone.... There, there, at last! They were coming slowly round the corner of the cliffs; they must have walked the whole way round Takau. What could have kept them, and what was it they were carrying?

She asked herself, but she knew. It was George Grant.

A long way off, across the empty sea, a pencil streak of black began to show. The launch was on its way. So quiet was the place that you could hear,

miles off, the faint put-put of the engine. Who was going back again by that launch, and who would never go?

She ran to the beach. No Bluebeard's chamber terrors would have kept her from Takau if the canoe had been there for her use. But it was on the opposite shore, and she had to wait until, slowly, loaded with a burden that was almost too much for the small craft, the canoe, paddled by Leo Gamble, with Winder as passenger, came to land. Across the outrigger they had laid the body of Grant. Just as he looked when she left him in Dunwoodie he looked now, the fair, reddish face that she hated, the thick lips, the light hair fringing the half bald, round head. But the eyes were closed, and she was sure in that moment that they would never open upon her again.

"Go up to the house,' Leo told her.

"What is it? " she asked him, before she

went. She was shaking all over; her voice sounded strange in her ears; but Leo was perfectly calm.

"Grant has fallen; killed himself, it seems," he answered.

Winder cut in: "We found him at the bottom of the cliffs. He appears to have gone wandering in the night and fallen over. Winder seemed to be disturbed and puzzled. "It was a fine night,"he said. "Moonlight, too. I— l can't understand. I— l— But of course, no suspicion can possibly attach—"

"What does he mean?" Cecily asked,staring.

"I should suppose what he says, Cecily, you heard me."

Obedience had become part of her nature. She left the two, and went to her own room. George was dead. No one could do anything for him. And she was free. She fell upon her bed.

Late in the afternoon she woke from a sleep of exhaustion. The house was very still. A long way off the put-put of the launch sounded faintly across the sea, as she had heard it in the morning. Then it had been approaching, now it was dying away. She did not need to ask who, and what, had gone away with it.

Leo came into the room; he looked strangely, she thought, pale and feverish.

Was he going to be ill, out here on lonely Tinomana? The worst fear that can grip at the lonely settler's heart, the terror that is the price of pioneering, held her in its clutches.

"Are you all right?" she asked. It was not what she had expected to say to him in this, the first moment of their freedom; this day that made it possible for her to become at last an "honest woman."

Leo passed a hand over his eyes. "I think so," he said. Then; "You've had no lunch."

"I didn't want any. I'll make a cup of tea."

"Give me some when you do. I believe I've got a touch of that confounded Egyptian malaria." He went into the sitting room and lay down on the couch.

There was a flagstaff on the island. Cecily looked at Leo once, twice, with her heart beating in her temples, and her fingers turning cold. Then she went to the top of Tinomana and ran the flag up, half-mast high. They mightn't see it from Meitaki, and then again, they might, if anyone was looking at the island through a glass. She could only hope.

When she came back to the sitting-room he was flinging himself about like a mad beast, falling against the furniture, striking his head upon the walls. Just as the little land-birds had done, against the cruel cliffs of Takau, when the evil spirit of that island had seized upon them, and driven them to their death, as the devils in Holy Writ seized the swine and sent them rushing violently down a steep place into the sea. Into the sea! One thought only held Cecily in that moment. George had gone rushing out from the hut upon Takau, like the birds, like the swine, and flung himself over the cliffs. She knew it now. If she could not prevent him, Leo would do the same. The devils of Takau had hold of him.

He seemed to be blind. He did not see her come in. He went on flinging himself about, crying strange and dreadful things. Cecily darted to the door, locked it, and put the key down the front of her dress. Then she backed behind the sofa, and stood there staring. Was he possessed. Was he mad?

The fit went over. He had groped, sightlessly, to the door; had fought with the handle, and found it locked. Just for a moment she feared he might use his terrible strength to break the door; but suddenly the madness seemed to pass, and he sank down upon a chair.

"Cecily," he said, in a voice not unlike his own.

"Dear," she answered him, coming forth fearlessly, and laying her hand in his. "What is it? Are you ill?"

He said: "What was in the food you gave me?"

He's still out of his senses, she thought. "Nothing, love," she answered. "Just curry."

"Was there fruit in the curry?"

"No. Only peppers."

"What peppers? Bring them." ill

She saw that he must be humoured. She went down to the beach and picked some of the peppers, the large long ones, that she had squeezed for lunch. "They're very hard," she cold him, returning. "Maybe not quite ripe; but they were all I could get."

He took the fruit in his hands and felt it. She heard him give a groan. "Are you feeling ill?" she asked, anxiously. He did not answer but presently he said:

"You've always obeyed me. Break off that bush and throw it into the sea. Go now."

Again she did his bidding, and came back.

"Was it bad? Was there anything wrong?" she asked, almost unable

Leo drew himself erect, and spoke the bravest words of all his life.

"Nothing," he said. "I'm just a little— ill. Give me your hand back to the house."

He stumbled; she helped him into the bedroom, and led him (for he could not find his way) to the bed. He lay down upon it, and turned his face towards the wall.

Disturbed, she left him there, and went out, once more like Malbrouk's wife, to look forth and see if anyone was coming. A long way off the launch from Meitaki could be seen, beginning to cross. It would be there in an hour, she thought, and it would— she hoped— bring help.

When the launch appeared, there were two men in it. Winder and another man, whom she recognised as the doctor from the port of entry.

"Anything wrong?" the doctor asked briskly.

"It's my —my husband," Cecily said, faltering a little over the word.

"He's got an attack of some sort of fever— I don't understand it— he went crazy for about a minute, and he doesn't seem to see very well—"

The doctor exchanged a significant glance with Winder.

"Two in one day," he said. "Lucky my last job was in Queensland. You might take me to the patient."

They walked together up the hill, and the doctor kept glancing sharply about him as they went. He seemed to be on the lookout for something that he did not find.

Leo would not let her come into the room. He spoke to the doctor by himself; she heard their voices murmuring, but could not guess at what they said. Winder stood in the outer room, whistling uneasily, and did not look at her.

By and by the doctor came out. "You can go in now," he said.

Leo was sitting on the side of the bed. "You'd better know," he said. "I'm blind."

She felt as if she had been struck on the heart. "It isn't true!"

"It is true. There's a—" he hesitated, "a fever on Takau, and I got it. I shall never see again. You'd better pack up and go back to New Zealand. You don't want to be a blind man's dog the rest of your life."

She was kneeling beside him, her arms round him. "But I do, I do. I'll be your dog— your wife— anything. I'll send for the missionary to marry us to-morrow."

"You would do that?"

"A hundred times, yes."

He was going to speak, but Winder had come into the room, noisily. Cecily thought she heard him more and more; always he seemed to be in the way always meddling. He said now, in his clipped, pompous manner: "I think this lady ought to know the real state of affairs before she binds herself to do anything of the sort. She isn't free."

Cecily said: "What!"

"Perhaps she was not informed that Mr. George Grant is recovering."

"She would have been informed in a minute," Leo said coolly.

Mr. Winder looked at him as if he did not believe him. Cecily said: "Was my—was Mr. Grant badly hurt?"

Pretty badly, Winder answered, "and there seems to be an injury to his eyes."

"Will he be—" She could not finish.

Winder said: "Doctor says no one can tell that."

And now," said Leo, "you can damned well go."

Winder hesitated, turned and left the room.

Outside the doctor stood with him on the crest of the island and looked across at Takau. "A clear case, from what Grant was able to tell me he said. "The finger-cherry of North Queensland; classified by the Government as a noxious weed; probably brought over to Takau by some accident— Queensland's the next land— but what the devil set Grant to eating it?"

"He said there was nothing but salt meat in the hut, and hardly any water. He saw the finger-cherries at the door of the hut, and he was thirsty.

"And of course he ate some; they're tempting things, curse them! Look a bit like peppers, but taste very well. In Queensland I've had a whole family of children brought in to me, blind as bats, and most of them for life; it gets the optic nerve. Birds, too; the fruit-eaters peck at them, and go mad and blind and fall into the sea; and I daresay that'show some of the seeds have been carried to these islands, where people know nothing about them I'll see to having them rooted out of Takau. I wonder Gamble didn t do it; he can't have known. Poor chap, he'll suffer enough for his carelessness."

"I wonder, too," said Winder. "About quite a lot of things... Do you think Grant'll get back his sight?"

Quite possible; I judge he didn't have near as much of the poison as the other fellow. Gamble might never see that pretty girl again "

"Do you mean that she'll return to her husband?"

"I do not mean anything of the kind. But with women— one never knows. Anyhow, if Grant does get better, and if he's a soul anywhere in that big carcase of his, he'll let her go."

Winder said; "He might. What are Gamble's chances of recovery?"

"One can only say— perhaps."

In the bedroom, Cecily sat beside her lover.

"What about it?" he asked her, holding on to her hand. She did not pretend to misunderstand him. "I'm going to stay," she said. "I know I'm wicked, but I don't care— now— how wicked I am."

Leo laughed. He could actually laugh!—as he put his arms about her. "There'll be a pair of us, then," he said.

She was never to know what he meant.

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## 3: That Tall Girl Belle

*Blue Book*, Nov 1932

IN the days when cotton was still king— about the beginning of this century— one remembers Mrs. Drumgold, a little gingery frightened woman with a cap worn always on one side; she was the wife of Matthew Drumgold, the cotton millionaire. One also remembers Matthew: tall, sandy and bitter— bad-tempered as the lordly fathers of big families frequently were in those Victorian days. Nobody minded it; everyone expected it of them.... But one wonders how, in Matthew's case, everyone could have been so blind.

About the neighborhood of Manchester, far into Yorkshire and the surrounding counties, the Drumgolds were well thought of. They were rich. They were respectable— of course; that was a matter of course, then. They entertained neighbors, as one ought to do; attended church, as everyone did. The girls, as they grew up, married promptly and well. The boys went into the factory; one or two into professions. Nobody was more prosperous, in those prosperous days— nobody more happy than the family of the house of Drumgold.

And all the time, Lucy lived in hell. She was meek and milk-and-watery, to look at; faded now like a reddish autumn leaf. No one, in those Edwardian days, would have suspected her of having been the beauty of Lancashire, ten years before. No one would have supposed that the little frightened creature with cap askew had thrown that cap over the windmills, in the very year of her triumphant espousal with Matthew Drumgold, millionaire.

There were private affairs then. Secrets could be kept, and were. It was understood that Lucy Drumgold was eccentric— certainly she looked it— and that she had taken a jealous dislike to her eldest child, Isabel, who from birth was extraordinarily pretty and forward. Isabel had reddish hair, but otherwise was dark as an Italian, with black diamond eyes, and limbs sturdy as a little boy's; at nine months she walked; she began to talk soon after. And in the week following the birth of her brother, Isabel was sent away to pay a visit to an old personal maid of Mrs. Drumgold's, who lived at the other side of Yorkshire. She did not come back. Whether it had been intended that she should, or not, no one can now say.

But the whole of England rang, not long after her departure, with the kidnaping of a little girl by a gypsy man, and with the hue and cry that was raised to find him. He was not found.

Mrs. Drumgold, when she heard, gave a scream, clapped her hands to her head, on which the matronly cap even then was beginning to sit askew, and said, before the nurse could stop her, "I knew he would; I knew he would 1"

The nurse begged her not to excite herself. Ladies in her condition should be careful. And talking nonsense, the nurse thought privately, was a sure sign of temperatures going up!

So Mrs. Drumgold held her peace, had many more children, lived respected— and in hell— all her life, and near the start of the Great War she was found floating face downward in the mill dam of the Drumgold cotton works. "Driven crazy by this terrible war," was the unofficial verdict. Matthew, it was noticed, spent very little money on her funeral.

And so, no more of poor little Lucy Drumgold.

It was in the twenties, before the thirties were touched; before the price of copra had gone down, melting dividends as snow melts in the fire, and making beggars of island millionaires.

Sam Hoppner of the Sheba Islands was rich in those days, and never, since first the coconut began to be called "consols of the Pacific" did anyone spend coconut money so picturesquely. He had an island of his own on Diamantina Lagoon; but that was nothing— plenty of men had islands. Sam had one of the biggest; he had plantations on the mainland too; he had wild natives from the outer islands working for him by the hundred, and kept them in order with stick and gun, with a fine disregard of the far-away District Officer. To say that Sam was hospitable is to understate grossly. Everything in his rambling, ramshackle palace of a bungalow, from beds to boots, to beer, to launches, literature, and what you would, was at your service when you called. Only the fact that Diamantina Lagoon was sparsely inhabited kept Sam from being swamped by callers. Always you put up at Sam's when traveling from island to island. If you didn't, he was quite capable of following Scriptural precedent by sending to fetch you in.

DICK AUDAYNE of Amber Island, on that evening when dark overtook him near the Diamantina passage, would have chosen to camp in the cabin of his launch; he knew, however, that if he did there would be trouble with Sam— probably a row; and he hated rows.

Everyone in the Shebas had heard that. Some of them had also heard that if you dragged him into a row against his will, it was likely to be bad for the man who did the dragging. That was the sort of pacifist Audayne was.

Sam's house, built near the beach, blared light and noise that night. Incandescent oil lamps, the brightest money could buy, glowed like small moons on the veranda. Hurricane-lamps were set in glittering rows on either side of the pathway. Two phonographs were going at once; a player-piano, madly driven, roared like a runaway train. A barrel of beer, set up on the lawn, was surrounded by prostrate, inert worshipers.

Upon the broad veranda eight or ten Sheba girls, dressed in grass kilts and necklaces of scented flowers, danced halfheartedly ; they were Sam's slaves, more or less, and had to do as they were told; but this was not dancing, as they knew it in the hill villages from which they had been carried or sold away; this was not the magnificent stamping rush of warriors, with maidens meekly shuffling and stepping in the background, and the great feast, and the tingling horror of human slaughter waiting.... Stupidly they danced, bemused with beer. The white men cheered them, and caught at them rudely as they passed. "Put ginger in it, girls!" they cried; "—More beer!" In the islands, where beer is three and four shillings a bottle, incredibly costly in cask, he who gives or drinks most beer is the greatest man.

SAM sat in the midst of it, looking as kingly as he could; it is probable that in those days the royalty complex held him, as it has held greater men and less. He was bloated to the shape of a spider; his enormous belly, covered by a patterned island "lava-lava" that fell to his huge bare knees, seemed to dwarf the rest of his person; his shoulders looked small beneath the rich silk shirt; his head, behind, was a mere button. Reddish hair covered it thinly, but grew thick as rushes upon his bared chest and his huge legs and arms. The coronal garland of frangipanni, worn askew; the dancing-stick, carved and covered with jingling shells, which he held loosely in one hand, suggested vaguely— perhaps not unintentionally— pictures of decadent Roman emperors. He was half drunk, not more; he had been half drunk for days and nights, and would not go beyond that point for a day or two to come— not till the guests had left his lagoon, and Diamantina settled down to quiet and loneliness again. Sam had his own code of hospitality, and this was part of it.

Audayne had seen it all before, but the sight never failed to irk him. No saint himself, he despised Sam almost as much as he envied him. The fellow was so rich, and made such a mean use of his riches. "If I had half of it," Audayne thought for the fiftieth time, as he went up the lighted pathway in the dead heat of the windless night, with Sam leaning forward from his high armchair, dancing-stick in hand, to wave a beerbottle and shout a tipsy welcome, "if I had half— a quarter— a tenth of what he wastes— I'd see Sydney Heads as quick as steam could take me; I'd smell the wet woods about Plymouth Sound again. I'd— Ah!" For he knew it was all nonsense. He would never see as much as Sydney Heads again of the civilized world.... That door was closed for Audayne.

Sam got to his feet, and with the frangipanni garland falling still more crookedly above his eye, shouted out, "Come along, you— come along! We've got new visitors this time. Sit yourself; there's a lady waiting for you."

Audayne, quite sure that the "King of Diamantina" was talking nonsense—for who ever heard of a lady on that notorious lagoon?—noticed, nevertheless, that the familiar anchored schooner and cutters were not the only boats in. A new small craft, ketch-rigged, with engine and little cabin, showed dim and ghostly some way out from shore. He wondered a little, as he walked up the pathway, a slim active figure in white ducks, with helmet on his head, and nothing to be seen of his face but shadow and a chin jutting out.

So it was that Belle first saw him; the look of him pleased her, but it was not until the biggest incandescent lamp caught his features that she sat up straight in her chair, and sent a second glance that cut like a knife toward the stranger.

"This man," she said to herself, "has done something." For Audayne's was a desperate face. The eyes, caverned deep beneath thick eyelids, told little; they were well trained. The Mephistophelean eyebrows, running fiercely up and sharply down, told something; the mouth, a cut across a scraggy chin, had more to say, even though it was silent. The poise of the head, snakelike, ready to strike, upon a sinewy neck, told most of all to Belle, who knew the ugly side of life. And silently, watching the man as he came nearer into the lamplight, as the shine of it caught his ice-blue eyes and showed them hard like winter lakes, Belle said to herself, "I wonder what it was?"

Audayne's thought, in the same instant, was: "What the hell is this woman doing here?"

AT the moment Belle was sitting in a long chair, very gracefully doing nothing. Audayne could see that she was taller than himself, that she had lovely thin hands, long thighs like a racer, the breast of a young Diana; hair reddish, smooth and heavily coiled; her skin was brown as a Sheba half-caste—but she was no "breed" of any kind, not with those coin-cut features, and those well-bred hands. Lips smooth, unpainted red; eyes black, with golden lights. A lovely innocent fiery thing, she made him think of some racing filly, still unbroken; the long fine neck of her, her glancing eyes, her proudly lifted head, all carried on the simile.... Audayne had been a horseman in the days when Plymouth Sound was not as far away as heaven. "Who'll put the bridle on her?" he wondered, with a curious pang. "Who'll own her, pace her, spoil her, maybe? She'd be easy spoiled." Then he came back to himself— realized that here was a girl of breeding and distinction, let loose in one of the worst island hells of the Pacific, and he would have to do something about it. She must have come off some boat one hadn't heard of, up from the settlements. Well, the sooner she went back, the better. He'd try to get her away before the actual rioting of the night began. Sam's was no place for her!

Sam came forward. He had dropped his dancing-stick, and the frangipanni crown lay on the floor. He looked more like a Twentieth Century trader, less like a decadent emperor of old Rome. Audayne saw that he was fairly sober. "C'mon and have a drink," bs said, as always, and then, "Got visitors; gypsy king and queen come to visit the King of Diamantina. What d'ye think of that?"

"Gypsy?" countered Audayne. "That's English talk. There are no gypsies on this side of the world! What do you—" And then he saw.

OUT of the house, into the veranda lights, came lounging an unmistakable gypsy man. He was tall, dark as a Spaniard, with a good deal of Spanish fire in his deep-set eyes; hair black as crow-feathers; lips, for all his age— and he was well on in years— vitally red. He had a faithless merry look about him, as if he found life more or less of a jest; as if he refused, indeed, to look at it otherwise. Roughly dressed in sailor dungarees, the gypsy mark was not lacking in him; he had rings in his long ears, and a red scarf about his waist with a knife ostentatiously stuck into the folds.

"Is this her husband?" thought Audayne, amazed; he would have sworn the girl was unmarried. Then he saw, by the resemblance between the two dark faces, that the man and the girl were father and daughter. "But here, in the Shebas— gypsies!" he thought, puzzled. "And looking as she looks!"

Sam Hoppner explained. "Them two," he said exultingly, "is the king and queen of the English gypsies. But they don't live there now, because Berners he pinched a launch from S'thampton Water and got away with it— thought he was drowned, did the pillice. It's as good a yarn as ever you 'eard. It would do for them movin' pickshers that they have in Sydney. Berners, he stole 'is own daughter—" The look on Audayne's face arrested Sam. "What're y' gawpin' at?" he demanded; then instantly, drunkenly, forgot and rambled on. "You tell 'im, Berners— tell 'im 'ow you pinched y'r own kid, and rim off with 'er— and all England full of it, and rewards, and the pillice and the pypers, and nobody never found anything, only they reckoned you was drownded."

Isaac Berners, smoking one of Sam's cigars, nodded silently. His eyes were very bright; he seemed to be laughing silently at the recital of these ancient misdeeds. Belle sat quite still in her chair, but Audayne could see that the gay silk dress she wore was rising and falling swiftly over her breast.

"Carried her down the Meddyterranean and put her in an Italian convent," Sam went on impressively. "Learned her everything, they did, but she up and run away when she was fifteen, and the two of 'em's been trampin' in tramp steamers ever since. That's what I call a proper gypsy, up to the mark, nineteen-twenty-five! Why, there'll be flyin' gypsies next. You tell 'im all the countries you've seen, Belle. You wouldn't believe!"

Belle, throwing him a glance of quiet contempt, remained silent. Sam went on without heeding her.

"Berners, he's got the old original boat, yet, that he pinched from S'thampton Water, and he took her down to Cadiz, and them Spanish gypsies they helped him to camouflage her so that the jawndarmes shouldn't spot what she was— and they got him the papers of a boat that had been sunk, only the captain got ashore with 'is box, and he was glad to sell them to Berners. So Berners, he's been gypsyin' it proper from port to port ever since; an' when Belle there joined him they went right acrost the Injin Ocean to New York and the Canal, an' they've been workin' the hislands ever since. Belle she dances a bit, and Berners sings, and they both cross yer hand with silver like they do on race-courses, and they been having a time you wouldn't believe— and Berners he got in this mornin' and he's been tellin' me about it ever since; so I says, s'l, 'Why not stop here till further orders?' s'l. 'There's always plenty to eat and drink here! ' s'l. Wal, Berners he says, 'Yes, I'll come to anchor for a bit,' s'e, 'and Belle she can have a house to herself, which I see there's some to spare,' s'e; that's what you said, wasn't it, Berners? And I says—"

THE long dark man broke in: "Cut it short, brother; you're tiring our friend here." He stood in the light of a hanging lamp, crumbling a sailor's chew on the palm of his hand; an odd, exotic figure, but not out of place here where all was exotic and odd. Sam was going on, but the long dark man broke in again, "Cut it short, brother!" He had moved forward into the range of the hanging lamps; their light shone on his brown face and glistening earrings, deepened the time-marks— "parentheses of age"— on each side of his merry, cruel mouth.

Audayne found himself wondering, as if he'd always known all about it, what sort of impression this fellow must have made on Lancashire twenty years ago. What impression he had made on Lancashire lasses, Audayne didn't need to ask. There was Belle Berners before him, as like the lounging man as a filly is like her sire— descended from the "Isopel" after whom she had been named, if all was true that had been said of Berners— a gypsy of the gypsies, and yet, with the very trick of head and hand, the shape of feature, even the voice, of his mother's family. Tales about Lucy Drumgold— born Lucy Audayne—that had been whispered here and there since her death, came into his mind. He didn't remember seeing poor little Lucy, who had made such a wreck of her life and everyone else's, but she had been a typical Audayne, he knew, and so was this— Cousin— this tall girl Belle, in the long chair; the beauty who roamed the world with her wild father, the Diana who looked as fierce as she was pure, and as tameless as she was lovely— the old man would see to that, since she was his chief source of income— this creature was his cousin!

Upon that, a turmoil of emotion began to rise in the breast of Audayne the island outcast. If he had had any standing anywhere— if he had mattered to the authorities— if he had even been free to take ship and go down to the great cities of the south, like other men— he'd have been able to remonstrate with effect against the criminal folly of bringing a girl like Belle to Sam's notorious island. What! Did old Berners think this place was comparable even to the slums of Panama or Colon, or the "Broom Road" of Tahiti— which without doubt he knew? Did he think he could safely settle that raving beauty Belle in a reed-and-thatch house with Sam and his crew of low whites and head-hunting savages drinking and rioting a hundred feet away— with a score of ship's firemen making hell of the island on every steamer call ? It was only two days to steamer-time now— and bad as the place was, it was bound to be worse then.

His cousin! A girl was a girl in any case, but when she was of the family, no matter how come into it, it was trebly incumbent on one to take up her cause. And the first thing was to see that Berners took her back to the boat.

Somehow or other, Audayne got the gypsy away from Sam, and stood out with him beneath the pouring moonlight, on the white coral path before the house. One does not, in the islands, talk secrets within doors, or upon verandas. Interviews that must be private are held as much in the open as possible. People may look, as long as they do not hear.

"I want to tell you," Audayne said briefly, "that Sam's is no place for your daughter. They haven't begun yet. Wait till the dance warms up." He paused; a sudden twinkle had come into Berners' eye. Though distrusting him profoundly, Audayne made another effort. "She is a handsome girl," he said, "and it seems you had her brought up like— like—" "Like a lady," he meant to say, but his thought, "Like one of her mother's family," tangled with the words, and choked them.

Berners laughed, a deep throaty laugh. "The Romany chal," he said, "know how to look after their women." Audayne wanted to tell him to stop putting on the gypsy; he was as modern as a motorcar, and needn't pretend to be— What was he saying? "All the same, I'm obliged to you; you didn't tell me anything I didn't know, brother, but you meant well. I'll take Belle on board, and then amuse myself a bit. If you don't mind, that is."

The sarcasm cut. Audayne had many reasons for being sensitive to sarcasm. But he held his peace. That was one thing that Berners couldn't do, evidently— by the slack red mouth of him!

He waited there in the moonlight until he saw Berners and Belle step into the little dinghy and row aboard the launch. Then, somewhat quieter in mind, he went back to Sam's, had a drink or two, and slipped away, when Sam wasn't

looking, to the little shed at the back that Sam had offered as a house for Belle. It was the regular guestroom, and fitting enough for a man, with its roughly carpaitered bed and its tin basin set on a box, its door that wasn't a door, only a couple of caselids nailed together to keep out wandering pigs— but it would never have done for a girl. Audayne was tired; he was almost always tired, as men are who tread the path of life, unhopeful and alone. He slept heavily.

IN the morning, he was wakened by shouts and screams. There had been a good deal of drunken noise during the night, which had not aroused him— but the quality of these screams pierced through his heavy sleep, and waked him instantly. Pajama-clad, he rushed out of the hut. At first he could see nothing to account for the noise. The platinumbright lagoon lay still and empty in the early daylight; die ivory beach was bare. Little of it showed this morning. There was always a big run of tide opposite Sam's place— made by the bottle-neck entrance to the lagoon— and in the night the water had risen, covering most of the beach. There was a bit of something black, like a drowned tree, sticking up a little way out from shore. Audayne saw with surprise that it was this that drew the attention of the slave-girls whose screams had wakened him. They stood in a huddled group before the house; they pointed and cried....

Following the direction of their hands, he saw with a shock of horror that the tree was no tree— it was the stern of a launch! Instantly he guessed what had happened. Berners, not knowing the lagoon, had come in at night, chosen a place too shallow for safety, and moored short. With the rising of the tide, he had been pulled under. Doubtless he had been drunk and had not realized what was happening until the cabin filled with water—he had been drowned like a rat in a trap.... And Belle?

THE morning was warm, as all mornings are, in the Shebas, but Audayne felt shivers pass down his back as he realized that in all probability Belle was lying at the bottom of the lagoon with her rascally father. Belle— that splendid creature, with the face of the Audaynes and the fine body of her gypsy ancestors! Dick Audayne was sinewy and active, but he didn't touch five feet seven; few of his people did. Belle, his cousin— even if it was on the wrong side of the blanket; worth any six of the cousins at home, to look at— and, Dick judged, as brainy and brave as she looked— dead!

A clutch of sulphur-crested cockatoos, flying out of the palm-tree tops on their early way inland, screeched at the sight of strangers as only cockatoos can screech. Audayne was grateful to them. They expressed his feelings as no words could have done. . . .

Then he saw that one of the girls— a thin, bronzed creature in a grass skirt, with sad eyes under her shock of hair— was coming toward him. She wanted to speak.... Dick had always been kind to Sam's wretched dancing-girls; never more than kind. Perhaps that was why little Kalona took the opportunity of creeping up to him,—nervously, lest some of the sodden creatures lying on the veranda should wake up and shout to her, —and said, in a half whisper, "Marster, you look for dass w'ite girl? She no go finish."

"What!" exclaimed Audayne, his face lighting up. Belle not dead!

The little thing shook her head. With one slim hand she pointed to Sam's ironbuilt store— and then, as if fearful at what she had done, fell silent.

"Is she there?" Audayne demanded. "What— who—"

Kalona flung a scared word or two over her shoulder. "Dass w'ite girl's fader he go back an' get drunk; come on board again, w'ite girl she go long bush... Go 'way. I fright' to tell you!"

"I'll go when you've told me!" Audayne caught her and held her by one thin arm. "Is she in the store? Who put her there?"

"Sam."

The girl twisted away, and fled. But Audayne had heard enough.

It was now sunrise. The sea, applegreen in shade, apple-blossom pink where light struck the shallows, was crisping into restlessness beneath the early breeze. Smells of sandalwood and of dew came from the forest. The reef sang multitudinously. The island day was fair. Within the fence of Sam's enclosure broken bottles lay strewn; newspapers, straw and litter scattered the grass. In the midst, the beer-barrel towered like some shapeless heathen god. Men, or what passed as such, were waking upon the veranda, stretching themselves, and calling for more drink.

Sam— dressed, and apparently less affected by the orgies of the night than anyone— came out of the house, and began waddling among his guests, with a whisky decanter in his hand, and a Sheba boy laden with soda-water following behind. To Audayne, watching from the lawn, he looked like some crazy caricature of a rescue worker on a battlefield.

BUT this was no time for fancies. Audayne crossed the lawn, faced the huge figure in dirty singlet and trousers, and asked sharply: "Where is Miss Berners? Do you know her father's launch is sunk ?"

"I do," grinned Sam, showing yellow teeth. "Damn' lucky for her she'd gone ashore and took to the bush! And damn' lucky for me."

"Is it true she's in your store?" Dick glanced at the iron building, the only structure of any strength on the island. "What business—"

"Who put her there?"

"She went herself, Mr. Paul Pry. Locked herself in, she did. Just at daybreak, when she was takin' a little walk." Sam grinned again, rendered aid to another of the casualties, and helped himself liberally after.

Audayne understood. Belle had been driven ashore by her father's violence; in the morning she had ventured out of hiding, and seeing the disaster to the launch had wasted no time in vain regrets, but promptly had taken refuge in the only safe place available. How long she could stay there was another question. As to what was going to happen when she got out, there was no question at all— unless Dick could help. But Sam and his "boys"— those half-tamed, yet obedient savages from the mainland mountains— were fifty to one against him. Sam's guests were not likely to take part against their host, and if Sam thought they were, he could easily get rid of them. What chance was there for Audayne? One chance.... But there were reasons— reasons which came swiftly, bumingly, to his mind— why that chance was repugnant to him. Nevertheless—

"You'll let the girl out at once," he said, keeping his eye on Sam. "What do you mean by making her shut herself up?"

"I mean," said Sam, drawing himself up to his full height, which was greater than his globular figure suggested, "I mean to do the h-honorable thing. As soon as I can get a missionary over from the next group of hislands, we'll be married and live on the square. I mean to settle down, I do."

"You don't suppose—you don't dare to suppose—that she would marry you, if you were the last man on earth ?"

Sam looked at him with one eye half shut. "She will," he said.

For a moment the day turned black before Audayne. Then things cleared. He cast one glance out toward his launch, lying safely in deep water— toward the dinghy drawn up on the sand. He went round the corner of the house and disappeared.

Sam, rather uneasily, continued succoring his guests. "Bring the sodawater, you black swine," he told the boy. "Open another.... I wonder what that la-de-da chap means. He can't do anything. He can't." Sam tossed three fingers of whisky into a glass, and held it to be filled. "That'll do," he said hurriedly; he wanted to go and see what Audayne was really up to.

He was not left long in doubt. After a brief silence, Audayne's voice made itself heard on the far side of the house, close to the store.

"Miss Berners I" he said. "Belle!" Somebody answered inside the store. Sam couldn't hear what was said. Audayne went on, "When I give the word, unlock yourself, take my dinghy and row out to the launch. Can you run a Kelvin engine?" Again came an inaudible reply. Sam stood staring. How dared

the fellow! "Very well," Audayne continued. "Start her, and keep her ready. Understand? Wait till I give the word."

"The hell you'll give words!" shouted Sam, waddling round the corner of the house. "Who are you, to—" But he stopped, aghast.

Audayne had gone to the kitchen, and come back again with two flaming brands. Swinging them up and down to keep the blaze going, he said coolly: "Miss Berners will unlock herself, come out and go to my boat. Nobody will interfere with her. If anyone does, I'll fling these into the roof before you can touch me." He backed away as he spoke; he was well within throw of the house, but out of everyone's reach.

Sam's house, the pride and glory of his life, had, like every home on the lan, a roof of sago thatch; there had n no rain for weeks, and the leaves were crackling dry; the southeast trade, that blew all day, was rising, strong and furious.

Sam knew himself caught. "Fire-bug Audayne!" he yelled furiously. "At your old tricks I 'Oo burned 'is wife alive to get the crimson insurance? 'Oo was jailed for doing it? Fire-bug!"

Audayne took no notice. In the yellow morning light, his face was sallow pale. He shouted to the girl, "Open the door. Come out. Get her going, and go out of the passage!" He was afraid of only one thing—that Belle would argue, deprecate, want to know what and why.... Most girls were like that. And a second lost might lose this deadly game. He did not know Belle, nor the training she had received from the man who lay dead at the bottom of the lagoon. No daughter of Berners' could have been slow on the uptake, given to useless argument.

Belle had the door open almost before he knew; she crossed the beach as quickly as a ruhning sandpiper, leaped into the dinghy and pushed it off with one swift motion. It was barely a minute before he heard the engine champing its teeth, and saw the launch heading out toward the passage.

"Ah, fire-bug, dirty convict!" raged Sam, with a flaming crackle of adjectives, hotter than the dying brands Audayne still held. "Ah, wait I get yeh!"

BUT Audayne had no intention of waiting. Before the flames had died, he dropped the brands, and started running hard toward the far side of the neck of land that lay beyond the passage. He could catch the launch there, swim out to her, and get away. He hadn't any firearms, and they would have been little use against Sam's regiment if he had; he trusted to his own swiftness of foot, and the surprise he had given them all.

It held— just. Belle saw him swimming, followed by half a dozen black heads. She steered the launch in, dragged him on board, and promptly bashed the head of the nearest Sheba boy with a boat-hook. The boy turned back. The launch went on.

Until they were well clear of the shore, neither spoke. Then Audayne went into his cabin and shifted to dry clothes, took the wheel and set the bow of the launch toward his own island, lying dim and delicate blue on the horizon, a score of miles away. Holding the wheel in one hand while he lit a cigarette with his lighter, he said, between puffs:

"Thanks, Cousin Belle; you did splendidly."

She did not accept or deny the relationship. She gave him one long look— what eyes she had! True Romany, black and sweet as black honey; no trace of poor little Lucy's pale-blue eyes there! —and said surprisingly: "What did he mean by calling you—the thing he did?"

Audayne grew slowly red. "All the world knows," he told her curtly.

The long green shore of Sam's island slid past. The blue sea opened beyond. On its wide swell the launch began to dummy-shake and sway.

Slowly Belle said: "I remember; I read the newspapers."

There was silence for a minute or two. Audayne thought despairingly, "It has come again. It always comes." Before his eyes passed, in swift painting, Sydney Heads, Southampton and the ships— the wide, wet English meadows where he would never ride again. Then, his island. Beautiful, lonely— a paradise that might be— a desert that was. For how could he companion with black Sheba girls, or with the only sort of woman who would—

Belle was speaking. "I suppose," she said, "your wife must have been very badly in debt."

Audayne almost let go the wheel. The launch yawed. He swung her back; met her. He turned to Belle, still holding the wheel, and said. "In heaven's name, how did you know?''

"You aren't the kind of man," said Belle, "who would burn his home and risk his wife, for insurance."

"My good cousin Isopel," Audayne said incisively, "twelve good men and true, not to speak of the whole British Isles, believed that I was. And it wouldn't have been a bit of good telling them that she—"

"Was she careless, or only mad ?" asked Isopel.

Audayne replied, "She drank. She was caught. And— I was in debt horribly. I didn't find out till afterward, that she had debts of her own— blackmail. No one ever believed anything but that I did it. And I don't suppose anyone ever will."

"We are hopeless vagabonds both, Cousin Audayne," Belle said. "We've got nobody to believe in us, except—"

The launch was heading out toward open sea. The distant island began to show up, long and dusky-blue. There was a brief silence. Belle broke it.

"As long as my father lived," she began,

"I thought I owed him— duty." She was silent again for a while. The launch clanked on. "He did your family— the family— a great deal of harm," she said. Then her lips closed; she looked as if she could, if she would, remain silent for evermore.

Audayne understood. He reached out one hand, and caught hers.

"If it's a sacrifice," he said, "I take it."

"It's— not," said Belle.

"Then I'll take it just the same," Audayne told her. "And maybe you know there's a mission on the island beyond mine."

If ghosts exist, they take no count of time and place. Maybe the pale little ghost of unlucky Lucy hovered above that lonely tropic sea, and— smiled.

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## 4: Away From it All

*Blue Book*, Jan 1935

THERE comes a time in the life of every man when he feels that he simply cannot keep on with it for one more minute— whatever it is.

Nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every ten thousand discover this just five minutes before they discover that they have got to keep on, whether or no. The ten-thousandth misses that discovery, and blows his brains out.

The ten-thousand-and-first finds a way. But not once in ten million, in a hundred million, does any other man find the way that Seagoe found....

Seagoe and Cooke encountered each other in the Bondi surf on a blazing December Sunday. There were perhaps fifteen hundred other young men of fine physique, sharing the matchless waters with them. There were more than fifteen hundred girls,— much better formed, on an average, than any short-waisted, suety-hipped Greek statue,— sun-bathing and swimming with the young men. The glory that was Greece never saw such girls; the grandeur that was Rome knew no such men. They were second-quarter Twentieth Century, and the earth had not seen their like.

Seagoe missed his wave, riding it without a board, as they do in Bondi. He tumbled all over Cooke; and Cooke, getting up half drowned, cursed him, looked at him, liked the looks of him, and asked him to come out and have a sun-bake and a smoke.

Seagoe came, apologizing for what he sincerely felt was not his fault. They bought cigarettes, and lay down on the hot sand.

A girl lolling near by— a glorious creature in a breech-clout and a brassiere— said to her friend:

"Viola, d'you see those two blokes that just knocked each other down? They're the dead spit of one another."

Viola (who liked to be pronounced as if she rhymed to pianola) disagreed.

"No, Irene," she said, "the near one is the handsomest."

"Well, it's the other that's looking at us."

"They're not looking at us; they're looking at each other. Come and have an icecream, and don't waste your time," advised Irene.

Being piqued, they went away, and so, for the mere lick of a spoon, passed out of the story.

SEAGOE and Cooke, baking on the sands, each thought that he liked the looks of the other; and neither yet knew that it was because the other resembled himself.

In fair complexion, in gray eyes, good build, and similarity of age, they were, as Irene had said, almost "the dead spit" of each other. As Viola herself had said, one was slightly better-looking. Seagoe had the fresh complexion of a man who lives in a good climate. He had also an intriguing little tooth-brush mustache, and his hair was brushed flat back, instead of being parted. Otherwise they were much alike. And what was most remarkable in the likeness was a strange effect of weariness, a shadow of age flung back upon brilliant youth, that distinguished both these young men lying side by side on Bondi sands.

They told each other who they were, and what. Seagoe, for some years an assistant in a colossal Sydney store, was, so he said, fed up with it to the last degree. Yes, the salary was good, and the work not hard. Yes, Sydney had lots of amusement, and plenty of girls.... Nevertheless, he was fed up. To the teeth. And Cooke?

COOKE had come down from the Islands for a holiday, and now he was due back again.

His job was plantation manager, on a small far-out island. Yes, it was beautiful. Yes, there was a good deal of adventure— if you wanted that. Cooke didn't. He wanted Sydney, golden glorious Sydney, with its picture-shows and its theaters, and its boxing nights at the stadium, everything foreseen, everything the same and safe and pleasant, forever and ever.

Seagoe was not listening now. A steamer had just made her way through Sydney Heads, was beginning to lift and scend in the long Pacific swell. She was black, with a checkered funnel.

"That's an Island boat," he said. "The Islands! " And again, with a sigh as long as the sigh of the breakers on the beach: "The Islands I"

"Sydney!" countered Cooke. "Oh, gosh, Sydney! "

"You can have it," jerked Seagoe as the checker-funneled steamer set her course northward to the Islands that are, for Sydney's youth—

*The Hesperides*
*Of all their boyish dreams.*

Cooke said suddenly, sharply: "Do you mean that?"

"Mean what?"

"That you'd change with me if you could."

"Oh, if fairy tales came true— yes." Seagoe kicked up the sand with his brown toes.

There was silence between them for a minute, silence filled with the creaming of the breakers, and the silvery cries of surf-riding girls. Then Cooke

said: "Could you manage a holiday? You could stay with me, and I'd show you all round."

"Well— the sub-manager's a sort of relation of mine— not that he ever looks my way. I reckon I could get a month or maybe six weeks, if I paid my own substitute part of the time. Haven't had a holiday this year. And I won a bit in the Golden Casket last week, and some of it's left. Yes, I could, thanks very much; but— what's the good? It would only make me sick because I couldn't stay."

"Lord, you do talk! Me, I'm sick of the Islands, long ago; I was never meant for them. Offered the job, after a row at home— I'm English— and took it to get away. You're the lucky one."

Seagoe stared in amazement at him,

"What, in the gents' hats— a job that doesn't need any more brains than a rabbit's ?"

"The gents' hats— and Sydney— sounds like Paradise to me. People live, in Sydney."

"Now, I think they live, in the Islands. Something doing— some adventure! Your own master, too. I wish I dared chuck my job, and go. Anything available there ?"

Cooke shook his head.

"No chance. Not any more than there is here in Sydney, in these days, I suppose."

"That's right," Seagoe agreed mournfully. "If you came here looking for work, you might wear the soles off your boots, and find nothing. I suppose we're both lucky, but I don't feel so."

"The natives of the Shebas, where J am," Cooke said irrelevantly, "know gome funny things. Most savages could teach us a bit— if one didn't have to live white-man fashion. I sometimes wonder if they aren't laughing at us for a pack of fools. Do you know,— only you wouldn't believe,— when a Sheba headhunter chap gets fed up with things in general, he just goes off and is some one else."

"Sounds ratty," commented Seagoe. "But all sorts of queer starts happen in the Shebas, I believe. Do you know, I think I'll do it. I'm due for a holiday— and if you'd really show me round, it would be bonzer. I expect you know a thing or two."

Cooke, lying with his arms under his head, and staring up at the pale-blue Sydney sky, answered slowly, almost absently: "Yes— a thing or two."

IT seemed to Seagoe, lounging on the veranda of the hotel, that he must have arrived in the port of the Shebas quite a week ago. But it was only on that

morning that he had landed. The beat of time was slow here; hours were like days, days like weeks and months. Slow and gentle, many things in the Shebas. Swift and violent, others.

Everything here seemed to burn and sparkle.

The tops of the coconut palms shone like polished silver; all the little leaves of other trees seemed varnished; the waves were full of broken diamonds, and the white trunks of the palms, the white sands of the beach, dung back the furious light of three o'clock, like glass on a western wall. A good way off, across the flat china blues of the harbor, blackpurple peaks lifted up their sinister horns. Froin one of the horns, volcanic smoke came out. There was a war-canoe on the water, making for those mountain islands. It sped like a launch; the four-and-twenty islanders who paddled it screamed as they went, and rattled their paddle-blades in a curious angry rhythm.

Seagoe looked at it all, and found it good. Even the mad contrasts, the lazy loafing and the wild speeding, the peace of the harbor and the fury of the smoking hills, pleased him, piqued him like some of the costly combinations of strange flavor he rarely had tried— icecream and burning brandy, mixed sweets and sours. The Shebas, he thought vaguely, were like that.

Cooke said, yawning: "We won't stay in this shack; they've no use for anyone but boozers from the bush. We'll get away in our schooner by sunup tomorrow. And I'll show you the real Shebas, as much as you want.... I wonder what's on at the Picture Palace in Sydney, this week?"

"Damn Sydney!" said Seagoe pleasantly.

"Oh, yes, damn anything and everybody I can't have."

"Everybody?" queried Seagoe.

"I said everything, didn't I ?" He rose, and strolled toward the bar. "Since they expect you to drink—" he said.

A ship's boy came up the pathway. He looked for Seagoe, called his name, and handed him a radio from the steamer. Seagoe signed for the message, and tore it open.

COOKE, coming back again, pleasantly mellowed, saw his companion standing with a paper in his hand.

"Read it," said Seagoe, his face tallow-white.

The radio ran:

RETURN AT ONCE STOP FREDERICKS KILLED STOP WILL HOLD JOB TILL STEAMER RETURNS — JEVONS

"When does this boat go back?" Seagoe demanded.

"Tomorrow night."

"No time to see anything?"

"Hardly. The local boats won't move till she's gone. You could— you could— " He stopped, and looked at Seagoe thoughtfully. "You could go over to the big island across the harbor, if you liked. Hard luck on you. I suppose Fredericks is your substitute, and Jevons the Lord God manager?"

"Yes." Seagoe's tone was bitter.

"I remember your place. I bought a hat in the Castle Emporium once. Gents' hats— quiet corner of the big floor, partitioned off, with windows— "

"Windows that don't open, looking out on the traffic," supplied Seagoe.

"That's right. Windows that keep out the noise, and show you all that's going on. And the light— "

"Half dark on a summer day, with a dark carpet, and a roof— "

"Yes. Nice brown arched roof like a church or something, and green carpet like moss. Glass cases with hats, and boxes, and one or two quiet fellows selling— "

"They're in boxes and glass cases too, if they only knew it. And I'm going back into the box. Me!"

The look he cast at the harbor was like the look a lover sends his maid, when the paper streamers are beginning to break on the ship's rail, and the stream of water widens.

"Maybe," said Cooke, staring at the blues and greens of the Shebas as a man stares, unseeingly, at a wife of whom he has long grown weary: "Maybe— not. Come with me to the big island tonight, and don't tell anyone you are going."

IT seemed to Dick Seagoe that he must have been watching the Sheba dancers for hours and hours. He had no idea how long it was since they had landed on a coral beach, ivory-pale in moonlight, and made their way, guided by the thrumming heartbeats of gigantic drums, to the cluster of tall brown houses, crazily roofed, and the square of beaten earth, where the dance was going on. He remembered that Cooke had shown a sort of pass— a crescent and circle cut in orange-colored shell— and said, half laughing: "Without this, you and I would maybe go home short of a head. Means safety for a day and a night— sun and moon— see ? Now you keep quiet, and ask me about anything you don't understand; but don't talk more than you can help, because they're touchy brutes, and the Government don't count, outside the ports."

The dancers were all young fighting men, naked save for their decorations of bead and shell and dangling croton leaves. They had feathers on their heads; the feathers nodded to a prearranged rhythm, as the men danced, danced ceaselessly, rank with rank, brown skins shining with sweat in the torch-light,

beads and boar-tusks jingling on broad chests. They were splendid people, curiously alike, standardized almost as a regiment is standardized; their arms were long like gorillas' arms, and their shoulders made you think of bisons ready for a charge. Their eyes were bisons' eyes too, small, dark and flaming, deepset beneath mats of black curling hair. Tirelessly they went on to the sound of the heart-beating drums, the drums that never ceased, that kept you from thinking, left you a sodden rag of mere sensation, hypnotized by that unending thrum — thrum — thrum. . ..

Of a sudden it ceased, and the silence hit Seagoe in the face like splashed water.

"What are they going to do?" he whispered.

"They are going into the big men's house, that sort of temple with the tower on it. You may come. They're going to exchange two men."

"What?"

"I told you before. It's a custom. When two men are tired of their lives, they pass through certain ceremonies, taking on each other's lives. Everyone is bound to recognize it; A is B, and B is A, thenceforth. Property— gardens— everything goes with the change. They die to their own lives. And the odd thing is— you won't believe it, you don't know how many secrets of personality these primitive people keep— that they really do become each other, in a way. Their faces grow different, and their manners, and mind you, there's something in these ceremonies that white men don't understand ; no words to express lots of things they can do. For example, there's a thunderstorm coming up—"

Yes, Seagoe had noticed that; they were going to have a "snorter," he thought.

"Well, that's not accidental; they knew it was coming, and they wouldn't have held the dance without. The dance, they say, calls spirit powers into action. The lightning and thunder— well, if you ask me, it looks uncommonly like some way of getting at electric power from the very source.... But wait. Come in."

WITH the carved "pass" well in view, the two white men entered the dark temple house where the ceremony was to take place. Torches of coconut stump, held by young boys who were prisoners of the temple for the year of their initiation, lighted up the strangest, wildest sight that Seagoe had ever witnessed.

The dancers, forming in two long lines, stood underneath a rack filled with human heads, that stared down from white eyes of cowrie shell, of gleaming mothero'-pearl. The torches threw a smoky glaring light upon two men who

stood between the lines of dancers; men of middle age, with strong brown limbs and the tremendous chests of Sheba savages.

"Keep back," warned Cooke, as a crashing peal of thunder spilled itself over the roof of the temple house, simultaneously with a flare of blue-mauve light. "They will begin now. Say nothing. You and I are going to be the next."

NOW it was morning; and Seagoe, running down the bay in a little schooner sped by engine and by sail, wondered if the things that he remembered were real— if he had only dreamed them, perhaps, and was still entangled by the dream.

Last night? Last night was incredible, even now. He recalled it as one recalls things seen and undergone in a fit of intoxication.

Some of it had been ugly— the bloodletting and blood-drinking of the ceremony. But it was nothing worse than transfusion, if you looked at it in that light.

Then there had been dancing and drumming and singing, and drumming and drumming. A man who was a sorcerer had gone into a trance. Other men had gone into trances. Spirits, they said, had spoken. It was all frightfully like the Sunday-night "seances" in Sydney's less reputable streets, but like with a difference. This thing had a punch to it that was lacking from the blitherings and scribblings of fat women in djibbah frocks. This thing had death in it somewhere, if you went far enough. Seagoe knew that, but didn't know how he knew — unless it was from the glittering eyes of the heads that swung above the dancers and the drummers.

At one period there were electric shocks, or something so like them that you couldn't tell the difference. The two men who had been first done were almost knocked down. They picked themselves up trembling, and went out by opposite doors of the temple, without looking at or speaking to each other. Henceforward, to all the Shebas, black A was black B, and black B was black A. People were waiting for them— greeted them by each other's names.

Then it was the turn of Cooke and Seagoe....

Not till the last day of his life could Seagoe have told just how the thing was done. The drumming seemed to sear your mind; the reek of torches choked you; the smell of some sort of incense made you half drunk, so that you hardly understood the spirit-raising and general kicking up of hell that went on. When it was over, when the unseen force — maybe an electric shock, maybe not— had struck them both, and shaken them on their already shaky legs; when they were going out, as the others had gone, by opposite doors— then Seagoe saw something pass from the fingers of Cooke to the chief sorcerer's brown paw. Sovereigns, bright gold, such as hadn't been seen in Sydney for years and

years.... He had heard that the Sheba savages hoarded gold, valued it above their own treasures, and now he knew it was true.

It put the cap on the climax of the whole queer, incredible thing.

Then he was outside, in the dark and the hot rain, and the thunderstorm was grumbling away toward the burning mountain. He was coming back to himself. His mind was clear and he knew that something in it had changed during the night. He was still Seagoe— though the boatmen who were to take them back addressed him as "Mistah Cooke." But he had new knowledge; he had looked, a little way, into the huge reservoir from which all human personality is drawn; he had carried something off.

It would be easy, strangely easy, now, if he wished, to play the part of Cooke— Cooke, who had all the world of wonder and adventure at his feet, and thought the gents' hats department in the Castle Emporium a better place.

That night, in the hotel, Cooke changed clothes with him, cut his hair for him, parted it on one side, and saw him shave off his tooth-brush mustache. Cooke had been growing a mustache during the two weeks' voyage, and his hair was sleeked back now as Seagoe's had been. It all made an amazing difference.

"The schooner and crew will be ready for you in the morning," he said. "I'll sail by the steamer for Sydney, and you'll hear no more of your Lord God manager; he'll be satisfied, maybe better than he was before. Yes, I know what you want to ask: you want to know why one couldn't just exchange jobs, and let it go at that, if employers were game? Well, first place, employers wouldn't be, and second, it wouldn't be a real getting away from yourself. I tell you, for all practical purposes, we've done that. I've no past but yours; and you— " He paused a moment, looked at Seagoe a little oddly. "Well," he went on, "so far as the islands are concerned, my past is yours, now. And I tell you— I tell you, even if we hadn't happened to be a common type, a good deal alike, the thing might have been done all the same. Only it wouldn't have been so simple. You believe me now; you wouldn't have — before."

Seagoe did believe; he knew there were depths he had not sounded. But he had no wish to sound them.

When they parted, publicly, next morning, Cooke said to him: "Good-by, Cooke— glad to have met you." And Seagoe, burning his boats, said before all the loafers and the lodgers, on the hotel veranda: "Good-by, Seagoe— pleasant voyage." And nobody looked surprised.

LATER the little white-sailed schooner carried him away, over seas bluer, greener, than any seas by the gate of Sydney Heads. He knew that it was beginning, that he had got his wish at last.

The island plantation was reached in a couple of days. It was solitary to the last degree, lovely beyond telling. The long points plumed with coconuts, that ran out over grape-blue bays; the enclosed lagoons, secret and still, with clusters of pale orchids hanging above their stretches of silver glass; the reefs, the beaches, burning white, were the embodiment of all that he had dreamed as a boy. The plantation had a house— a good little timbered bungalow, with cane furniture. The labor force, of headhunting savages, proved easier to manage than he had expected; but he wouldn't have troubled, if it had been hard. It was all in the adventure.

He found the work surprisingly simple. He had only to call over in the morning, give out food and medicine, tie up wounds, and see that the day's tally of nuts was collected, the weeding done, and the nuts split and dried. He knew that the salary was small; that did not astonish him, in view of the work exected. But he expected in the end to nd it large; so much of it was paid by the realization of his dream.

They had told him that life in the outer islands was unbearably lonely. He didn't find it so, at first; he was too deeply intrigued by the delights of being so utterly his own master, of shooting a bit and fishing a bit, and sailing a great deal, of doing every darned thing when he pleased and how he liked. And by and by, neighboring planters began to call— from a neighborhood forty or fifty miles away. He thought they had not known Cooke very well, perhaps; they seemed to accept him without question. So did the labor. So, amazingly, did the traveling inspector, on his one hurried call. He seemed a bit surprised to find the books in such excellent order— told Seagoe that he was improving, and would get a good report; and hurried away in the steamer almost immediately.

Gents' hats! The dark, carpeted room with the windows that didn't open! The safe, sure existence, everything forseen, everything known! Had he ever lived like that ? He played with the idea that he never had, that he had always been Cooke and lived in the islands at the end of the world; captained his schooner, commanded his boys, got nearly wrecked and drowned now and then, quelled mutinies among the labor, knocked down a bison-faced head-hunter who went for him with a clearing-knife, and jollied the brute afterward till he gave in and laughed, and became a model worker. All these things, he liked to tell himself, he had always done. And it was all good.

Or nearly all....

There were women on the island. Some of the "boys" had been permitted to bring their wives with them, and this was the main cause of the troubles and fights that Seagoe, every now and then, had to suppress at the risk of his own life. There was other trouble too. Seagoe himself was troubled when he passed

the boys' quarters after knock-off— saw the fires lit and smelled the suppers that were cooked by the little brown women, and not eaten alone. All his meals were managed by a huge cannibal who flung things on the table, and burned everything he didn't serve raw. The men were no good as cooks. But Seagoe didn't want to establish the usual colored housekeeper. He was Australian, and strongly "white Australian." The mixture of races had always seemed blasphemous to him.

Nevertheless, the sight of the brown girls and the little brown babies who rolled laughing in the dust before the doors, made his heart ache. He thought of the girls on Sydney beaches. He thought of Irene in the scanty bathingsuit. He wished—

WEEKS went on. And now it was as if the curious preconceived knowledge won from the sorceries of the temple had begun to melt away. Real knowledge was taking its place. He was no longer a planter by the grace of some sort of spirit-control; he was a planter who had learned his job beneath rain and sun, in a common, wholesome way; he was a Sheba settler who knew the affairs of the neighbors and the islands, not through some sort of devilish second sight, but as a result of visiting and gossiping within a radius of a hundred miles. And the other fellows liked him. He liked them. It was most of it very good. Only when he met one of the rare white wives of the plantation world did his content crack suddenly across, like a mirror struck by a stone. He wondered that Cooke, during all the years of island life, had never thought of marrying. And he remembered Cooke's significant phrase (he saw it significant now) about damning anything and "everybody" he could not have.

"Some girl turned him down," he thought. "I don't much wonder. You might like him well enough for a start, but at bottom he's as hard as flint. He seemed soppy on those girls we saw at Bondi, the whole lot of 'em. Bit of a Turk, eh? I'm sorry for the one he picks." He could not say that Cooke was not good-looking— hadn't he himself been called "the Hermes of Bondi Beach" by a lady professor from whom he had fled as from the plague, and was not Cooke the "dead spit" of him? Well, good-looking or not, Cooke was a "hard case," and Seagoe thought that if he had had a sister, he wouldn't have wanted her to marry Cooke. But he had no sister, and no people at all; he was in some ways the most solitary fellow in the world.

THE hot season had gone, and the cool season come; there was very little difference between the two in the burning Shebas, but at least, nights were milder, and it didn't rain every day. Seagoe planned an excursion to the far side of the island, where he seldom went. He wanted to try for swordfish in the big

lagoon. There was a boat due that day from the main port of the Shebas, but he wasn't going to trouble about that; the boys would take and tally any cargo there might be for him, and he would escape the bother of entertaining unknown and undesired guests, if he kept away till night.

When he came back, it was quite dark, and the lights of the bungalow seemed to welcome him as he tramped up the path. On the veranda, Wakaka had laid the dinner-table; he could see the shine of the white cloth, the twinkle of silver. "Coming home's not so bad after all," he thought. There was no discontent in him that night; he was pleasantly tired; he had had good sport; and he wanted nothing but food and sleep....

What! He hadn't escaped the visitors, after all: there was some one on the veranda, sitting in a long chair, with his back to the steps. Seagoe could see the fellow's body bagging down the canvas, his dark head topping the chair-rail. "Curse it," he thought, feeling for his cigarettes, feeling suddenly more tired than he had thought he was. To have to entertain strangers, keep this man maybe for weeks—

The man rose, turned around and faced him. But it was not a man. It was a woman, short-skirted, slim, shingled— a woman of some seven-and-twenty years, with very beautiful dark eyes, with an egg-shaped face, and a pointed little chin. With hands— you couldn't help noticing them— like ivory flowers. Rings on the hands. Diamonds. And one ring more.

IT may have been the remnants of the temple sorcery— hypnotism, whatever had been— that whispered the truth to Seagoe. Certainly he knew, before the woman spoke, that she was Cooke's wife.

"Charley!" she said, coming toward him with her hands out. "Charley— you mustn't be angry. I never meant to see you again; but the baby died, Charley, and I was so lonely; and I hoped— I thought maybe— you hadn't taken to anyone else. I— "

She was embarrassed; she seemed to be pleading for mercy, this flowerlike thing, this woman like a velvet pansy. She seemed afraid of him. And yet Seagoe was as sure that she had done no wrong, as he was sure that he stood on his own feet. But somebody must have done wrong, to separate these two. Charles Cooke— the fellow who was a bit of a Turk, the handsome hard chap, keen on all girls, maybe cruel to some— had he been the sinner? And had she, with a woman's divine kindness, forgiven him? But why was she embarrassed, awkward ? She was not the awkward kind. She was a little gentlewoman every inch. "More fit for me," ran the thought of Seagoe, "than for Cooke." For he could not but remember that he was the first of his people to serve in a shop or take a wage. There was family history behind the Seagoes.

Then came upon him the greatest temptation of his life. He was alone on the island, with a beautiful woman, who thought him to be her husband. They must have parted at least seven years ago, Seagoe knew, from what Cooke had said about his affairs. Any slight difference would be accounted for by those years; and after all, the sorcery of the temple— or the hypnotism of it— seemed to count. There was no doubt in Mrs. Cooke's eyes, as she lifted them to his. She had loved the man whom she thought was Charley Cooke. She was ready, more from duty than from passion, he thought, but still ready— to take him back again;

He stammered, choked. He did not know what to say. Some sort of phrases came at last. He heard himself telling Cooke's wife that he was glad to see her, mumbling about journey and tiredness, explaining that he would get the cookboy to prepare her room, and that they would have dinner by and by; would she like to go and tidy up?

She slipped away silently as a bird. He thought, but was not sure, that she cast him a look over her shoulder, and that it was a look of reproach.

She did not join him at dinner. From the spare bedroom he heard her voice, gently asking if something could be sent in to her. She was tired, she said.

That night Seagoe, word out as he was, could not sleep a wink. His life had crashed about him. Who would have thought of this? Cooke he excused of all complicity— plainly the fellow had thought himself separated for good, and probably he'd deserved it. But into what a hole he had flung the innocent Seagoe!

Seagoe was no fool; he realized that in actual life, things didn't fall out as they did in plays: that Cooke's wife was bound to find him out very soon. But she mightn't find him out just at once. He had heard of men coming home from the war to find their places taken by some impostor who, after four years' parting, had been unsuspiciously accepted by the wife. These things had happened, and happened not once or twice. But Seagoe couldn't believe, no matter how hard he tried, that the wives didn't really know, after a while. That they had not simply accepted things as they were— liking, maybe, the impostor better!

He flung himself about on his hot bed. The moon looked mistily through the mosquito-net upon him, tossing there. He hoped the woman in the next room couldn't hear. She had not made a sound — except once, when he thought he heard a half-suppressed sob. It might have been a ghost-pigeon, mourning in the woods outside. Again it might not. He supposed he hadn't given her a very kindly greeting, for a husband.

Curse this sorcery! It must have done something after all. The woman did think he was Charley.

She was too good for Charley, a thousand times. She was probably too good for him. But if he allowed the delusion to go on until familiarity shattered it, it might be that she wouldn't care to go back to Charley after all. It might be that, like the deserted wives of the war, she would come to like the impostor better than the real man.

And the loneliness of the island (yes, he knew that it was lonely now— as Eve and Adam, once their eyes were opened, knew that they were naked), and the sight of those cooking-fires, with the fat brown children rolling in the dust, the women waiting for their lords to come home— all that wouldn't sting any more.

He was certain, lying there on his creaking bed, trying to keep quiet, so that he could hear whether the little soul in the next room was really crying or not— he was as certain that he could love her, loved her already, as he was of the heartbeat in his own hot side. And he had only to stretch out a hand—

But that he could not do. It was too damned tricky. The sort of thing that Cooke would have done without a moment's hesitation. But he wasn't Cooke— in spite of all the bedevilments, the sorcery and the spirit-controlling of the Sheba temple. He was glad he wasn't. He would have scrubbed Cooke out of his soul, as he would have scrubbed dirt off a floor, if he hadn't been sure that the strange possession was almost at an end.

It was late now:' the ghost-pigeon wailed no longer; the owls had ceased lamenting in the bush beyond the lagoon. It was the dead hush of the night, when men, awake, see clearly— listen, in the silence, to the speech of their own souls.

Seagoe knew at last what he was to do. The certitude calmed him; he turned over and went to sleep.

BY noon next day Seagoe and this wife of Cooke's were far down the island coast, in Seagoe's schooner. He had told her that he was obliged to visit the port on sudden and important business; and she had agreed, with a hurt, puzzled look that went to his heart. Just once she had lingered beside him on the veranda, and said tremulously: "Don't you want me back, Charley?" And he, not answering directly, had said: "We'll talk everything out in Port Absolom, when we get there."

"I've been sorry I did it," she said. "I was angry, and you know you gave me cause. But a woman alone, Charley— the world's hard. I've been teaching in a school in London ever since, and when I saw in a Sydney paper that you were

managing a plantation in these islands, I couldn't help longing for the loveliness and the peace of them. London! The school! You don't know what it's been."

"Oh, yes, I do," thought Seagoe, suddenly seeing a vision of the Gents' Hats. "I know, much better than you think."

They went down the coast together in the little schooner; stormy weather met them halfway, and to Seagoe's great relief, there was no chance of talking things out, as Cooke's wife evidently intended. He could see by now that she was puzzled, that she thought him considerably changed. But his ready acceptance of the situation, in words if no more, had kept her from suspecting the actual, amazing truth.

As for himself, he was so busy running the ship and avoiding the numberless uncharted reefs of the Shebas, that he had little chance of picking up any further information about her. One thing he did learn: her name. She was called Beth— probably Elizabeth. She said to him once: "You haven't called me Beth since I came." And after that, holding the wheel through fierce and sudden squalls, warning her, as they jibbed, to avoid the swinging boom, lending her his oilskin to keep her dry when she came up from the stifling cabin for a breath of air, he addressed her always by the little pretty name of Beth.

There was time for thinking, if little chance of talk, during those long tricks at the wheel, and Seagoe found himself fighting bitterly against what he could not but call the mean close-fistedness of Fate.

"Never let a man have what he wants, and enjoy it," he mused, putting the wheel down and "meeting her" as the schooner answered. "Give him a lump of cake, and there's stones instead of currants in it. Give him money when he's too old to have fun, and public dinners when his digestion's gone to hell. Fate! Gives me the islands I've always wanted, and then makes them so lonely I could talk to my hat set up on a stick; gives me a woman like a pansy-flower, and marks her off married to some one else, and b'gosh, looking for him. That's you!" He didn't know whom exactly he was addressing— his classical education had been cut short; but he did remember that there was a fate, or fates, and that they were a pack of nasty spiteful old women. Also that there was a Latin tag about "*amari aliquid*" — something those same cursed fates dropped into your drink, he thought, to make it bitter, when there was any danger of your liking it too well.

"The old chaps who wrote the Greek and Latin books knew a thing or two," he told himself.... "Here, you beggars, ready about!"

IN this manner they made their way to the port, came to the little hotel— and as a matter of course were assigned by the half-drunken host to one room.

Seagoe had meant to talk things over with Beth, tell her the truth, or not tell it, as seemed best— anyhow, pack her away again on the calling steamer. What else could you do, if you didn't mean to be a thorough cad?

But the steamer, like all island steamers, was running late— would not coine back for a day or two. Seagoe swore when he saw how he had been caught. He did not know what was going to happen next. He would get his letters from the mail,— not that he expected any,— go for a long walk, and turn up at the hotel in the evening so late that he'd have to camp on the veranda. And tomorrow— well, sufficient unto the day was the worry thereof.

There were letters, after all; one anyhow, addressed to Charles Cooke, and carrying the private mark that he and Cooke had agreed upon.

Seagoe opened it.

It spoke, cautiously enough, of the Castle Emporium and the Gents' Hats. It insinuated that Cooke was doing far better there than ever Seagoe had done; that he was up from promotion, and making his mark, in the Hats. ("He would say that," commented Seagoe.) It chattered a bit about Sydney, about the "fun of the fair," the fine food, the good drinks, the picture-shows, the theaters, the stadium, the beaches. It came by degrees to something that made Seagoe spring from the seat he had taken on a fallen palm, wave the letter above his head, and shout.

YOU may recall Irene, who with her friend Viola (pronounced to rhyme with pianola) ice-creamed herself out of the story at an early date. Irene was not the sort of girl you could keep down, or out of anything; and she didn't know she had walked out of a story, so she simply walked back into it.

Cooke had "picked up with" Irene, whom he had admired exceedingly when he saw her on Bondi Beach. He was engaged to her, and would be married before the letter reached Seagoe.

"I was married before," he Wrote, "and my first wife chucked me— divorced me by English law, for all the usual causes. I suppose she was too good for me. Irene isn't; I reckon she and I eill hit it off all right, better thah Elizabeth and I did.

"You'd better not tell anybody anything. Let things stop as they are. If you're content, I am."

He ended the letter there.

"Am I content?" thought Seagoe. He laughed, thinking of that dusky shingled hair, those pansy eyes, in the hotel. "Am I? Have I got the better of the vile old fates at last?"

He knew that he had ndt; that no man can, in the end. But When you are still in the blessed twenties, who thinks of ends?

"I wonder," he mused, "how long it takes one to get married, in this place? For I'm not going back to the plantation alone."

TWO days later Elizabeth was married, under her maiden surname, to the man commonly known in the Shebas as Charles Cooke, but entered privately on the register as Richard Seagoe. It was supposed by the officials that the bridegroom, like a good many other island settlers, had reasons for changing his name— reasons not good, but doubtless sufficient. They asked no questions. They had known him for years, and he seemed to be a good deal improved, of late.

To Beth, however, on the evening of their wedding-day, Seagoe told the whole truth.

"Do you think you can forgive me?" he asked her. "I wanted to make sure of you. And you did say that you were ready to remarry me— him— whatever you like to call it. And I was afraid to say anything, because I thought it would seem like nonsense to you— not knowing this queer place."

"It does," said Beth briskly. "It's the most absurd nonsense that ever was dreamed of, and I don't believe anything of it from beginning to end, and no woman would. My dear— do you think I didn't know?"

"Know? When?"

"I don't know when, any more than I know how. But I was sure, almost from the first. And I was afraid— "

"What?"

"That I might miss you," she said, with her arms about his neck.

"RICHARD Seagoe" of the Castle Emporium is very happy ih the Hats. He is going to be moved to the Coats soon. Irene is his master, but that is good for "Richard," who is getting on well, but not so much liked in the Emporium as he used to be, years ago.

"Charles Cooke" of Naruna Island, on the contrary, is better liked by everybody, every year.

Both men have done what maybe you and I would like to do, but never, never shall. And because no one, almost, believes in these queer tricks of the Shebas, nobody is likely to do it again.

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## 5: Red Sunset Land

*Blue Book* Feb 1933

MITCHELL said: "That's Ted Willis in the corner— the one with the straw hat. He had a millet plantation. He went to Papua; got lost up the Mambare River. The chap with the big mustache is Greenhowe— a fine prospector; when the Waria broke out, he was among the first three to get on good gold. He died in 1913— blackwater, I think. The handsome kid next him was Alf Ridgwell; he was about twenty then. The head-hunters of the Hydrographers' Range got his head three years after that was taken. Jimmy Blake — that one— shot himself. He was one of the best, but he couldn't keep off it. Fortescue, this chap in the middle, got a Kuku-kuku spear through him, about the same time, I think, or maybe it was later. Wheeler, in the drill coat, was accidentally drowned off East Cape, they say, but I always thought his boys took him by the legs and held him under. Harvey, the one next the last, was lost with all hands in the Gulf, about Christmas in 1905; the natives said, and maybe they were right, that there were too many cases of 'good luck' on board—"

"What—" I began.

Somebody kicked me. "Native name for whisky. Don't head him off!"

Mitchell went on, holding the faded group photograph in his hand: "Fellow in the corner? That's me; I hadn't shaved off my beard when it was taken. Well, that's the lot. What do you want to know?"

We were three newspaper-men; we had bailed up Fergus Mitchell in the lounge of the Sydney Metropole, anxious to ask him about the old times in the Western Pacific. Mitchell had struck good gold somewhere on Edie Creek, and was down in Sydney spending it. They said he was a mine of stories....

I can see him now: a huge man, hard as teak, with small, pin-point brown eyes that bored through you, and a bloodhound jowl; oldish, but with deep-cut lines in his face that weren't all age; un-selfconscious as a forest tree, primitive as water and as wind. Well-dressed, but you hardly noticed that. Something attractive about him, something terrifying, something— I can only use one word for it— innocent. He had been drinking. He had been seen buying jewelry for lights-o'-love. I knew this; it seemed entirely incidental. Fergus Mitchell was — Other. You couldn't have classed him, socially. The Red Sunset Land had long since wiped out any distinguishing brands. It has a way of doing this. Fergus Mitchell had been living in the western island world— Solomons, Now Hebrides, New Guinea— for half of a long lifetime, and the Red Sunset had claimed him for its own....

There were women in the lounge; I noticed how they followed him with their eyes; I saw how Bob Bradley, my mate, pulled up his collar, and pulled

down his tie; how Wilmington bristled with hurt sex-pride; knew how I felt myself. To see one's self, twenty-odd, smart and sharp and good-looking, neglected for an old, nut-crackery fellow of fifty!

"Women!" I thought scornfully, and then: "But they know." And an idea came to me. We hadn't been successful drawing him out. He had produced an old group photograph, some uninteresting pictures of palms and beaches. He was willing to oblige— bored but goodnatured. The other fellows were putting up their copy-paper. I stayed. When they were gone, and I had Mitchell to myself, I asked him, right out, who the eighth man in the photograph was. He'd skipped that one— a dark-eyed, slender fellow, half hidden behind the others. I had a wild idea—

"No, not all dead," said Mitchell to my question. "Will you have another drink? Coffee? So will I. I'm not dead; that's one. And that other—"

Greatly daring, I pushed my chair closer, glanced once more at the bookstall girl, who was eating him with her eyes; at the station-owner's daughters, who were talking to each other and watching him all the time. And I said: "That other— tell me about her."

I expected I don't know what— maybe a punch on the jaw, maybe a cool refusal. ... Mitchell put more sugar in his coffee, and said easily: "Oh, yes. Zita Lomond. I killed a man for her."

And there, in the lounge, with Sydney society coming and going on its way to dinner, to dance, to theater, Mitchell drank his coffee in sips, and told me how he had done murder. I am telling it much as he told me. There were interruptions; we had a drink or two, and Mitchell had more coffee after, black as ink and full of sugar— he must have had the stomach of a bear; and people came sidling past and listened, and slipped away when I glared at them. And Mitchell, smoking and drinking, talked.

I DON'T know (said Mitchell) if you know how those islands get at you. (I did not; I don't now). Tahiti, and the Marquesas, and Samoa— all very well, and the girls near as pretty as they say, and healthy places, and not a snake or a fever mosquito, or a wild cannibal in 'em all. But the West— brandy after tea! Give me the brandy.

There were six passengers on the old *Tamboro* that trip. They didn't run to tourists then. Nineteen-five, it was. You remember that.

(I, said I would remember. He took no notice, and went on.)

We'd left Norfolk Island behind— pretty, gardeny, tea-party kind of place; and things were warming up toward the New Hebrides. When I feel the sun slapping me on the back, when the ship's officers come out in whites and brass buttons, and the wind-shoots are stuck in the cabins, or used to be before they

had fans— looking for all the world like big gun-cartridges,— and the sea hits you in the eye, sparkling furiously, and there's a light-hearted sort of blue in the water, and at night green fire about the bows— well, that's the tropics: another world. Kipling said something about laws of God and man north of fifty-three. He might have said north and south of ten. About the equator— men and things slacken. As if the big bulge of the earth there had stretched 'em, and they must go south, or north, again, to get back.... There were two missionaries, and a Government bloke, and the three of us.

(I wanted to ask a question, but didn't dare.)

I was out on a prospecting trip; and you take it from me, in those big islands which no one's crossed yet,— damn their incompetence and the white livers of 'em, — there's stuff worth prospecting. The missionaries were mishing according to their trade. But he and she, they were just out for thrills. Now, mind you, even now you can get thrills, if you're fool enough to want 'em, all over the western groups. But in nineteen-five, you didn't have to look. The thrills went looking for you.

What do you think ? One of the first ports we came to, when they anchored for the night in a bay that was just like a stage backcloth in a pantomime, and the residents— eleven altogether— came along for a dance and a shivoo— what do you think, but Zita and her husband went off for the afternoon, fishing, and they came upon a native village where the people were friendly; didn't poke any poisoned arrow at you, or bash you with stone clubs, and Lomond found out that they'd been pearling on their own, and he had bought the makings of a bonzer necklace for her, and paid for it in sporting cartridges which he happened to have, and which would buy anything, pigs or wives or— Well, they came back with the pearls; you never saw such a fistful, big as peas, and Lomond didn't show them to anyone on board for fear he'd never get such a bargain again.

(Another unspoken question burned within me. It was answered. Mitchell, smoothing down the short mustache on his upper lip with a magnificent, unconscious gesture, went on:)

I COULD see, even in the moonlight, they were wonderful. (There was a blank, in the story and in his speech. He continued calmly, leaving me to catch up as I could.) I said, "Keep the bag round your neck night and day; there's a queer fish aboard." And she said, "What queer fish? I haven't seen anyone but the passengers." "Yes," says I. And she thought a bit, and said: "If you mean the recruiter we took on at Mermaid Bay, he's a very civil decent man, and I don't think you ought to—" "No," I said, "oughtn't I? And did you ever hear that he

tied a native girl behind his sulky with a rope, and galloped the horse till she was almost dead?" "It's a lie," she said, sharp as mustard.

So I left her there, with that wavy light hair of hers shining something wonderful in the moonlight, like that "white" gold it was, and her eyes— you can't see 'em in the photo; a man could drown in her eyes, black seas with no bottom to 'em, like her heart. There's some women, a man might run out all the line in the world, and the lead would never touch ground, never bring up so much as a grain of sand or gold to show you what was really there. . . .

Lomond came along, smoking a cigar. He was English, about a hundred and fifty per cent— accent you could hang your hat on, wooden face red and shiny with all the good living they used to have in those days; way of half shutting his eyes and looking at you under the lids; I believe it was a touch of short-sight; but it looked like the devil. He was of good family, and knew it. Zita— well, they said things about the time she was on the stage, but not one of them was true, not a damned one; he'd no call to be as jealous as he was.

Well, it was heaven and hell mixed that night, as it mostly is in the Red West, which is what I call that lot of islands past Fiji. Moonlight,— you never saw the like, pouring through you like a waterfall,— all the palms shining as if they'd been dipped in silver paint; the beaches white, and the iron roofs of the settlement just as if snow was piled on every one, and shadows black like black fur rugs, under the walls, and blue ink-like, about the trees.... Have you seen the star a coconut makes under itself on the sand, nights of full moon? Ah— till you have, don't talk.

(I was not talking. He went on:)

There was that feeling in the air that you get; it's part of it the drum-drumming that comes from the villages, like your heart when you hear it in the night; and part of it's knowing that anything may happen anywhere, and part of it's the gorgeous painting of the whole don't-care place, colors splashed....

Well, Lomond had had one too many that night, I think; not too much, that's another thing, but— he started rousting on her. And before me. Fie told her she wasn't on the music-hall stage now, and she would please remember she belonged to a decent family. And some more like that. I would have pasted him one, but she got hold of my arm, and that made him worse. So I saw the only thing I could do was to go for a walk, and I went. Anyhow, I wanted to feel the pepper and ginger of that place in my mouth again; Tahiti's treacle compared— but I said that before.

I went to the native village; I wanted to watch them dance; it was full moon, y'see, and they always reckon full moon puts the ginger into things.... Who, me? Yes, I do believe it. They say nowadays that the moon's radio-active; that accounts for a lot.... When I came down to the village, they were hard at

it; not what you're thinking— native dances aren't all sex-stuff, though of course some of it is, same as the foxtrot you dance with your girl, and maybe not so much. But a lot of it's stuff you could give no name to, something that goes deep, roots down to the wind and the sea and the storms, touches the big power-house that runs the world, whatever it is. That's what catches and holds. I tell you, the Stone Age men that live in those places know a sight of things that you and I forgot a million years ago. Well, I was watching it all, sitting on a log as peaceful as you please, with the feeling of the islands running through me like water through a weir, when all of a sudden the whole thing breaks off; the dancing stops, and the drums give one big roar, and then they're silent. I looked round, and there was Zita coming along in the moonlight, with that rapscallion young recruiter— come to see the dance.

"You get home as quick as you can!" says I. "The natives haven't any love to spare for you, Willis, and you know it; and anyhow, what the blazes do you mean bringing a lady down into this shivoo?"

Willis was looking a bit nervous, grinning and showing his teeth, which he was proud of, and fidgeting with his hands;

But I could see, I don't know how, that he wasn't surprised at the ending of the dance, nor at the way the natives were beginning to mill about, like cattle when they start swimmin' round and round one another in a stream. He must have known, before he brought her along, that they'd shut up the dancing. Then, what the deuce did he bring her for, thinks I.

Zita was half laughing, half scared; she'd come out for a thrill, and begad, she'd got it! They were beginning to start that ugly woof-woofing they do when they're working themselves up deliberately for mischief, and nobody can mistake what that means when they hear it. "What's the matter?" she says to Willis, very quick; and he says: "Why, I reckon they want back the stuff they sold to your husband." "What'll they do if they don't get it?" she says; and he says: "Take our heads to pay."

Now, there was just a grain of truth in all that; natives do go back on a bargain pretty often, or rather, they try to get back the goods they've sold, and keep the price— if they can. I heard afterward that Willis had been trying to get pearls out of them for some time, but they wouldn't have sold him one the size of a pinhead. How he found out about the lot Lomond had secured was simple enough; he'd seen Zita with one— sneaking, I've no doubt.

I said to Willis: "Clear out of it; maybe I can keep them quiet till you're well away; and don't you go bringing—" He didn't hear the rest, because he was legging it up the pathway, with her hand in his, dragging her along.

I saw Willis take something from her, and stick it in his trousers pocket as they ran; but, you'll understand, I only half saw it; I had my hands full at the moment, quieting down the dancers, who weren't at all pleased at having a woman brought down to look on at them. You see, there's dances that's spoiled by a woman's presence, just as a Masonic meeting would be, and they have to start the whole dashed thing over again, as I suppose the Masons would— I'm not one myself.

WELL, when I had them quieted, I got back to the ship, and I said to the captain, who knew me:

"You'd best make some excuse, and take the ship out before morning, because they're liable to try and rush you just before dawn, if they get worked up."

"What about taking away the local whites?" he asks, but I told him: "They're all right; it's only some of your passengers the head-hunter crowd may have got a down on; better get away quietly."

So he took my advice, and we cleared for next port before midnight.

Willis came on with us, and he looked, to my mind, much too like a cat that's got at the cream. I didn't say anything; I thought things would clear up by and by. And at the next port, begad, they did. It was one of the quiet islands, where the natives didn't bother much about the whites— sort of reconciled to let 'em go their way, since they couldn't get rid of 'em, and just keeping on in their own villages, working the gardens and pig-hunting and fishing, and living as peaceable as they could, though I reckon they found things a bit dull, since the head-hunting'd gone out of fashion.

(He stopped to finish his whisky and beckoned to the waiter for another— two more, rather; he seemed to expect me to keep level with him, as a pure matter of courtesy, and any faint attempt I made at paying for drinks was simply swept aside. By this time I hardly knew what he was ordering; the big lounge, full of people, was growing curiously bright and distant to me, as I sat trying to make my glass last out, while Mitchell steadily got through his. It did not seem to affect him any more than the poisonous ink-black coffee he had been drinking a little earlier. "I wonder would anything affect him?" I thought, a little vaguely. "I wonder if I hit him with an ax—" But he was going on:)

We had a lot of cargo to land and take on there; the captain said we'd stay a couple of days. It was a pretty place, that island; green grass like tennis-lawns running right down to the beach, with woods behind, black woods like something in a fairy tale; anything might have come out of 'em, and the smell of the orange trees hit you as you came in, and there were scads of the fruit bobbing about in the water, and windrows of 'em on the sand. I wanted Zita to

come ashore and see it all, so I went to her cabin, and knocked on the door. It was very quiet for a minute; there was no answer, so I reckoned she'd gone out, and I was just going to turn away, when—

(He paused for a moment. "You got a girl ?" he asked, setting down his empty glass. "Well, what d'you think?" I answered indignantly. "I can tell you that—" He hadn't been listening; the question was purely rhetorical.) Just you picture to yourself, (he went on,) her crying. Crying like a little drowned cat that's been left out in the rain.

(There seemed to be a plum in my throat, a plum that swelled and ached. My hand shut itself tightly round the glass. I pictured myself doing terrible things. He went on:) I said through the door, "Zita I " She didn't answer. The door was locked. I went to the steward and said: "Where's the key of Number Ten?"

"Mr. Lomond has it, sir," he told me. "Mr. Lomond's gone ashore."

"You open that cabin," I told him, and I gave him a quid. He opened it, and cut.

Zita was lying in her bunk; she'd a white wrapper on, with lace sleeves, and I could see her arms. I took one look at 'em— and at her neck. "Do you want me to kill him for you?" I says. "No," she says, "no— he thinks he had an excuse. He thinks—" And with that she began to cry again. I said: "What excuse? Sit up and tell me; he's gone ashore, but there isn't too much time." And she said, "Willis—" And I was glad to hear that, because—

(Another of his expressive pauses. He beckoned to the waiter, and went on:)

She told me I was right about Willis. Said he was an infernal humbug, and a cursed brute— or rather, that was what she meant by what she did say. — Yes, of course, two; my friend's having another. — Yes, of course, you are. She said that Willis had been after the pearls all along, that he knew she was carrying them around her neck, and got her down to the village just to scare her and make her give them up, knowing as he did that the natives were sure to go to market about her being there—"

("Excuse me," I put in, "what do you think's the origin—" He did not let me finish.) Good Australian. Ever heard anyone taking pigs to market ? She said that was what he meant all along, and she only found it out when he went ashore with the pearls, and wouldn't give 'em up again. She told me that, sitting up in her berth, with that lacy rag on her, and her hair— women did have hair then— all down and over her; and there were blue shadows under her eyes where she'd been crying; and by God, I swore he'd pay for every tear in good time. Her husband, I mean. Then she told me more, and I forgot all about Lomond. It seems she had gone for a walk with Willis, before she found

out about the earls— I think she was a little attracted y his poisonous sort of good looks; not much, however; she was just amusing herself— and Willis.... Well, her husband came up, and he was only just in time.

Of course, after that, she was scared of her life he would find out Willis had got the pearls from her; nothing'd have convinced him then she wasn't guilty; as it was, he'd knocked her about on the mere suspicion.

"What d'you think he'd do if he found out about the pearls?" I asked.

"He wouldn't believe a word I said, and he'd divorce me for certain. And I don't want to go back to the halls, or worse," she said. "It makes my heart come up in my throat to think of it."

"You're in love with him still," I said.

"In a way I am," she says. "But I'm more afraid of him, and those pearls— if he gets to know I gave them to Willis—" She was scared, and got the wind up properly; silly of her, maybe, but you think of your girl with the wind up about something, and looking at you with eyes

So I said: "Put some powder on your face, and get into your frock, and look like something ; it's going to be all right if you don't give it away." And then I heard the scroop, scroop of the oars of the ship's whaleboat coming back, so I went.... Better have a cigar. They have some here that aren't quite poisonous.

("No, no," I protested feebly, with my head singing, but he did not pay any attention. "Matches," he said, and handed me his box; I don't know how he knew that I could not get mine out.... He went on:)

You want to know why I didn't go to the police? I'll tell you that by and by.... Well, I landed, and went up that grass road that runs off from the sea; like a ride in an English wood it is— except for the oranges; they were rolling about underfoot, and the air was like a perfumer's shop, and hot— hot's a greenhouse when they take you through on Sunday afternoons. I went to a pub.

(He stopped, cut the end off a cigar, and lighted it. I wondered if it was as strong as mine. But I was almost past wondering; a cloud, not all smoke, was gathering between myself and the big room; I could just see the bookstall girl straining her ears to hear, and the squatter's two daughters watching him in a mirror, and laughing unconcernedly with each other, the way girls do when they're trying to attract attention. But they seemed unreal, figures in a dream. Much more real was the scene that Mitchell had painted for me: the hot green alley, with the oranges tumbling down it, and the palms above; the island and the little town and the hotel.)

It was a fair sort of pub— considering. They used to shut some time in the night, sooner or later; and Brock, who was owner and barman, never allowed knifing on the premises. And the gin they sold to the natives— kind that goes

whiff when you put a match to it— was never served to whites unless they were past caring.... Willis was there, with his gear dumped on the floor, getting ready to make a night of it; he hadn't a feather to fly with, but he was setting them up all round, and you should have seen the way Brock shoveled up the pearls he was chucking on the counter; only the small ones, though; the rest—

("Didn't anybody know?" I broke in desperately. He answered: "Everyone knew they were stolen." And I asked:

"Then why did this Brock— wasn't he an honest—")

The bar was in an uproar; Willis was setting them up all around— and you should have seen the pearls he was chucking on the counter.

"As honest as you or me. You don't understand— yet. Well, there were a lot of Frenchmen in the bar; the place is mostly French, y'know, and they were lapping up the champagne, and cursing it at the same time; I'll allow it wasn't first cousin to Pommery. The bar was in an uproar, what with quarreling and singing, and there was an old engine of sorts outside, which Brock kept for his electric light; it went cough, cough, for all the world like a dying man, right through everything; and when the row let up for a minute, as it sometimes did, you could hear the waves bursting on the reef outside, and what they said as plain as anything was, " Don't care. Don't care." Only nobody listened.

I went up to Willis, where he stood like a king in the middle of them, treating and drinking; he wasn't drunk himself— yet, or I'd have had to wait. I was glad about that. When the Frenchies saw me, they stood back, and Brock put one hand under the counter. "You needn't," says I. "It's going to be all right and proper." And with that he took his hand out, and watched me; he looked like a man in a box at the theater who thinks he's a bit too near the stage for comfort...

They were all quiet now, and some of them seemed to be sober who weren't before. You could hear the old engine go cough, cough, and the reef was loud.

I said to Willis: "You're going to fight me."

And he says, "When?" And I says, "Now."

And he says: "I'm game, but you're half as heavy again as me."

"Too right," I says, "but you can choose your weapons."

"Weapons?" says he.

"Yes," says I. "This is going to be a duel; not a murder."

"I can't shoot for nuts," he says, looking at me nastily. He wasn't afraid, but he was beginning not to like it. "You needn't," I said. "Choose your weapon — anything from boathooks to cannon." And the Frenchmen raised their glasses at that, and cheered; it did them more good than you could believe, to think that there was going to be a proper duel on the island, and they could all go.

So Willis said: "I choose the only thing I know anything about, and that's a three-foot clearing-knife."

"Correct," I says. So we all went off to the store to pick the weapons and get them sharpened.

("What is a—" I began. "It's like the thing they call a machete in South America. Blade like the blade of an oar, three feet of it, and a big wooden handle," he explained; and I started to ask, "And had you—" But he went on:)

No, never. But I had done a bit of broadsword, in my time. Not that that was very much good, with the different balance and all. You never saw brighter moonlight; it was just right for the duel. We fixed up to have it down on the beach, where it was as light as broad day, what with the reflection of the sea and the white sand; you never saw white sand like that. The Frenchmen were in heaven. I could have had fifty seconds, and so could he, though neither of us would bother with that kind of truck. But I said he could have a doctor if he liked; and he told me— both of us being very hot about Zita underneath, though we were talking coolly— that it would be a gravedigger would be wanted and not a doctor. And so we went down to the beach.

The Frenchmen made a ring all round us, to look on, and four of them stood inside the ring; I reckon they thought they were seconds, whether we liked it or not; you see, that kind of thing was just strawberry jam to them. They put us into fencing attitudes, and one of them dropped a handkerchief, and called out, "Engage 1" And six of the rest started arguing right away if it had been done properly or not; but Willis and I didn't mind; we were too busy trying to slice one another into bits.

I saw at once he didn't know a great deal about fencing, but the weapons were so odd that I reckoned he had his fair whack at me in any case. Perhaps I put too much of the broadsword into it; anyhow, he got me across the left arm, and drew blood, and the Frenchies wanted to strike up our swords, as they called it, but I cursed them some, and we went on.

They'd all stopped their barracking by now; I think they saw it wasn't going to be a French sort of duel. They were watching us hard, and very quiet. I remembered afterward I'd heard some one breathing pretty loud, and thought it was Willis, until I found out it was me. He gave me some trouble. I reckon he knew he was fighting for his life. There was a good deal of blood on the sand— black it looked in that light— before I saw my chance had come; and then I took it.... Feel my arm.

(I did. It was like ironwood. Mitchell went on:)

I got my chance at last, and struck through his collarbone, and sliced him pretty near in two. If you don't like that whisky, tell me; they have another just as good. Well, drink it then.

The Frenchies raised a cheer, French sort of cheer, rather more like howling of wolves than a good hurrah. They began dribbling away; I reckon they wanted to see whether Brock mightn't stand treat a bit. . . .

WELL, they left me alone with him.

I stood wiping my clearing-knife on a bit of buffalo grass, and somehow it seemed as if a train that'd been carrying me along with all the rattle and banging that trains do kick up, you know— as if it had stopped, and gone on, and left me all alone in the middle of a dead quiet, with the row dying out on the horizon, and me beginning to hear the rustle of the trees again, and the birds singing, and a sort of peaceful feeling getting hold. So I stuck the knife in the sand, and I was starting to go away, when I saw a thing that made my blood creep.

(I was anxious to know what it was that made Mitchell's blood creep. It seemed impossible.)

A half-caste girl, with shoes on, shoes with high heels. And she had come up unknown, and she was stamping with her high-heeled shoe right on Willis' face as he lay there dead in the moonlight. "Stop it, you!" I says. "Stop it be hanged!" she says, for she could speak English as well as you or I. "That man deserted me, and when I came and begged of him, he tied me behind his sulky, and dragged me over the road."

"Stop it," I told her. "I've wiped out all scores." She was sensible enough; she left off, and came away.

("Queen Matilda of England," I began, "trod with her heels on the face of the man who had refused her, when he was lying dead. Did you ever—" And he answered: "Of course I did; but I'm not making it up. I suppose human nature's the same all over the world." He was lighting a fresh cigar; there seemed to be a pause— almost a gap— in the tale. He got his cigar alight, and went on:)

I TOOK the bag of pearls off his body.

I went back to the ship; everybody was asleep, and we sailed at sunup. I didn't see Zita till after breakfast next morning; she was sitting up in the bows, alongside the anchor-chains, well out of earshot of everyone. I reckoned she had heard something, and was waiting for me. So I went up to her, and keeping myself between her and the rest of the ship, I handed her the bag of pearls.

"All there," I said. And they were, because I'd bought the small ones back from Brock, the night before; he was very decent, and made me wholesale prices on the drinks. Zita took the pearls, and slipped them back into her dress,

and I could see her breast heaving up and down, just the way the silver-white seas were heaving round the bow; it was one of those silver tropic days— but you wouldn't know.... And she said: "Thank God!"

But I said: "What about thanking me?"

She said: "How did you get them back?" And I knew by the flicker of her eyelids that she knew; it was all over the island, all over the New Hebrides group, as fast as the steamer went round.

So I said: "You needn't ask that, now or any time; only I'll say this: he didn't deserve to live."

She shook a little at that, and she said: "I can never— never thank you enough." And then she seemed to forget about herself for a minute, which women rarely do, and she said, suddenly: "But you— what'll happen to you?" She was seeing things then; the jail at Long Bay, and a man walking with his arms tied and his eyes bandaged, three steps to eternity. I didn't answer her. Lomond came up to the bow just at that minute, and he said:

"So this is another of your lovers."

Like cold steel his voice was; and yet it was glad, inside. And I think he was seeing the same picture that she did, only he liked it. He didn't know about the pearls, nor just what Willis had so nearly done; he only knew there was jealousy between me and Willis, and I reckon he thought he was going to be rid of both in the best possible way.

I said nothing then, and I said nothing to him all the way back to Sydney. Zita and I saw something of each other, and I made up my mind that she was just the one woman, the one I'd been looking for— looking a bit too industriously, perhaps, all my life, which was twenty-eight years then, and it seemed older than I am now. She used to meet me after dinner, abaft the funnel, and we'd talk, in a hurry, with the wind shouting in the funnel-stays about us, and the engines stamping away below— champity, champity; I can hear 'em now. And see the stars, with the trucks of the masts going penciling through. Zita'd look at them with me, and I'd say: "I'll show you the stars in daylight, when we get to the gold-fields together." And she'd shake her head, but she'd come a bit closer, and say: "Tell me more." And once in a way, I'd see her eyes grow bigger and darker— though you'd think it was impossible— when she thought of what she wouldn't ever speak about: the chance of Long Bay and the little door in the morning.

BUT Lomond was thinking of the same thing, and sometimes he'd catch me alone, and say something that was meant to have a bite in it, or jerk the tie round his neck when he passed me in an alleyway, and grin. And so we got to Sydney, and came in through the Heads. You know how the harbor looks on a

November morning, spring painting everything blue that isn't silver, and silver that isn't gold. And it was spring for me that day.

Lomond came up to me, when we were docking, with the ugliest grin you ever saw on a human countenance. They'd no wireless then, but he says: "I've had you signaled; the police will be on board as soon as the Customs or sooner, and there'll be an end," he says, "to your lovemaking with my wife." He said it right where she could hear, and half the passengers too. Some of them looked scared— that was the few tourists we had; the others, why, they just burst out laughing. It's queer what things people will laugh at.

Now, that saying of his was just the last drop that filled the glass and overflowed it, or the last flake that started the avalanche; you can have it either way you like. Zita had been falling out of love with him ever since we left the islands, and to hear him call her down in public like that— and for something she hadn't done— finished the job. She looked at me, and I knew she was mine for the taking, only she was still a bit afraid— for me. The little door at eight o'clock in the morning, and the cap over the face. . . .

I wouldn't have missed the rest of it for anything; no, not even to have saved her some trouble. You'll see.

The gangway was out, but nobody could go ashore. "Captain's orders," was what the quartermaster said, sticking out his arm. We waited. And in about ten minutes, not hurrying themselves, came two police.

"What's this about?" one of 'em said, as they came up on deck. The captain said nothing. I don't know how much he — anyhow, he left it to Lomond, who was swelling out like something in a picture-show; and he says: "I charge this man"— meaning me—"with willful murder of Sydney Willis."

The two police got a little nearer to me. "Where did this alleged murder occur?" says one of 'em.

"In the New Hebrides, at Dugong Island," says Lomond.

"What have you to say about it?" the policeman asks me; but I noticed he was what you'd call a bit perfunctory, and the other man, who'd opened his notebook, quietly shut it up. "I don't need to say anything," I told him; "but if you want to know, I did kill a man who deserved to be killed about six times over, and I did it on territory that's outside the British Empire."

"You won't get off that way," Lomond said, with a kind of howl. "There's such a thing as law— foreign law. You can be—"

"The only law that runs in the New Hebrides," says I, "is the law of the headhunters themselves. The French are squatting there, and so are we, but nobody owns the place; it's about the last native-owned country in the world, and if you want to make a charge against me, you'd better do it through the cannibal chiefs of Dugong— if they don't eat you first. I think you'd be pretty

safe, though," I said. "Even a Dugong cannibal might hesitate about swallowing you"

The second man put up his notebook. "We'll have it seen to," he said, but he looked just as a dog looks when you show him a bone, and then take it away. They knew there was going to be no sergeant's stripes for them, over that business.

I told Lomond where he could go, and how soon, and that he might get a divorce as quick as he liked, and say anything he chose; we wouldn't contradict him. So she went ashore without him, and I said good-by to her, for the time.

THE big cigar was out. Mitchell held it in two fingers, and looked at it thoughtfully, stroking the cold ash from its tip.

"She was with me," he said slowly, "on the Waria, and when the Lakekamu broke out. She went everywhere, and there never was a better-plucked one since God made women."

The story seemed to have ended. I sat up, and found words.

"But what happened? Did he die?"

"No."

"And she?"

He dived into another pocket, and pulled out a small photograph set in a case. "That's her," he said.

I looked, and saw a small group of men and women, standing under a palm tree: Two doctors in white coats, two assistants of sorts, two nurses, in linen frocks and veils. You couldn't have told one woman from the other, and neither was beautiful.

"Nursing Sister Zita," Mitchell said. "Died on Bokolo, the leper island, four years ago."

"What, of—"

"No— heart-disease, they said." He looked at the dead tip of his cigar, and laid it down. "She wouldn't stick it, when she knew he'd do nothing."

He was yawning; he had suddenly tired of me. I found myself, I do not know how, out on the steps of the hotel.

The lights of Sydney splashed the sky. Trams were roaring past the Metropole down Bent Street; motors squawked. I plunged into the traffic; it seemed safe and homely; it seemed to welcome me.

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## 6: The Devil's Smithy

*Liberty* 2 July 1932

*As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's smithy—*
*Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?*
Browning.

IN the Sheba Islands there was no cool season. There was only hot and hotter.

It was hot in the lounge of the City of Manchester Mission. The Mission folk, resting after their day's labor, panted for breath.

Between the sun blinds the sea showed, flaming blue. Red poinciana trees burned fierily. The dark skins of the native servants glittered with sweat as they carried round tea. Beyond the range of the punkah no air stirred.

At the far end of the lounge rose the voice of Arthur Peveril, second in command of Port Absalom station. He was reading *The Eve of St. Mark*:

*"The city streets were clean and fair*
*From wholesome drench of April rains;*
*And, on the western window panes,*
*The chilly sunset faintly told*
*Of unmatured green, vallies cold,*
*Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,*
*And rivers new with spring-tide sedge,*
*Of primroses by sheltered rills,*
*And daisies on the aguish hills."*

"Oh, stop!" called a beseeching voice. " I can't bear it; it makes one feel so much worse."

"Oh, go on!" begged another. "I can actually fancy I see the chilly sunset!"

Another woman, sitting beside the two "lady teachers," said nothing. She was watching the reader.

Peveril did not appear to have heard either of the teachers. He seemed to be occupying himself exclusively with the Mission nurse. Mrs. Glenn was a new arrival, a young widow out from "home." She was not at all like the lady teachers, who were exactly like almost every other female missionary in the Shebas— which is to say that they were extremely worthy women, hard workers, deserving of every consideration and esteem.

But they had mousy hair and shiny faces, and they wore what Easter Glenn had been heard to describe, in a satirical moment, as "Christian clothes." Easter herself was tall, blonde as a Norse princess, and beautifully dressed in white silk hospital frock and white lawn veil.

In spite of the marrow-melting heat, she managed to look cool.

Arthur Peveril, the good-looking redhead who sat beside her, had been five years without a furlough. To him, as to most other members of the Mission, England, chilly sunsets, unmatured green, valleys, thorny bloomless hedges, and the rest, were part of an impossible paradise seen only in longing dreams.

There was only one member of the Mission staff who loved the Shebas for their own fierce sake, and that was Lydia Cookson, the "lady in charge" of the next station.

But Lydia had been on the field since she was twenty-two, eleven years ago. Lydia was clever (and a missionary is none the better for that). Lydia, in the opinion of everyone but her fiancé, was really a little mad....

Lydia was the woman sitting silent beside the lady teachers. And her fiance was Arthur Peveril, just now reading poetry aloud to the nurse.

Peveril, a passionate enthusiast, a man with a touch of the saint about him and a flavor of the possible sinner, had deliberately chosen out Lydia, as the least unattractive of the various unmarried women on the field, some months before. They were to be married in March.

In January Nurse Glenn came out. No missionary; just a young woman who wanted a job and liked the idea of travel. Recommended, of course, and highly qualified. Somewhat of a disturbing element in the Mission as weeks went on. Because "everyone" (which meant the two teachers and the lay readers and the entirely missionary wives of the two married missionaries) could see from the very first what was going to happen. Arthur Peveril did not seem to see it. He said that a true friendship between a man and a woman was a precious thing.

"You know," he was saying in a low voice (yet not so low but that the teachers, and the dark woman beside them, could hear), " from the very moment when I first heard your name, you made me think of that poem. You are the poem! Easter Glenn— why, it actually means the green valleys and the primroses and the—"

"Funny thing," said the nurse in her calm voice. "I thought I'd heard you were to be married at Easter."

PEVERIL looked at her with the air of a man suddenly awakened from a dream.

"Why, yes," he answered. "Oh, yes. That is, Miss Cookson and I— we were to have been married in March, but circumstances have arisen— the fact is—"

Easter, looking at him under heavy eyelids, saw him flush, noticed his hesitation.

"The fact is that I'm getting furlough a little later, somewhere about September, and we thought—"

He did not say what he and Lydia thought. He broke off short, turned the leaves of his volume of Keats, and said: "Now listen to this. This is the Eve of St. Agnes:

*"St Agnes' Eve— Ah, bitter chill it was!*
*The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold."*

In her corner, Lydia quietly arose and slipped away from the lounge. The two lady teachers, avidly watching, broke into sudden talk. They did not gossip; it was "not allowed." Loyally they tried to speak of something else:

"Isn't it hotter than ever?"

"Did you hear what happened in the hospital?"

The first said, "No— yes. I believe there was trouble with Aikora."

"Yes. The sorcerer from Kari-Kari village. He came in to beg for some quinine, and they gave it to him— he is a true son of Satan, but one mustn't— And he saw Nurse Glenn, and stared at her, and said something insulting in native— admiring, you know; no other native would dare— and the native helper translated it, and she just took the basin of dirty water beside her and flung it right in his face!"

"Dear me! Well! No doubt she did what she thought right— and one can't for a moment allow— But Aikora, you know! And just when Miss Cookson was doing such magnificent work for the gospel cause! "

"Don't you worry about Lydia. She can handle him."

"Oh, she's wonderful! A real heroine. Do you remember how she broke in upon that cannibal feast, and went to the village where they were all fighting, and ran in among them, and struck up the spears and—"

"Oh, yes. She deserves to have a station all to herself— though no woman ever before— It's so lonely!"

There was a moment's silence, and then the first teacher broke forth determinedly: "Nurse Glenn— has wonderful hair."

It was a noble effort of Christian charity, but it damned Nurse Glenn as completely as Peveril, five minutes before, had deified her.

Both women felt better.

A long way off, the pattering hoofs of Lydia Cookson's mule sounded upon the path, upon the hollow bridge, and died....

It was night in Kari-Kari, and the Missi had come back.

The natives had seen her ride away that morning, pale and heavy-eyed. They knew— all things are known in a native village— that she had hardly slept for two nights. Not since the letter came from Port Absalom, brought by Peveril's boy.

No one had expected to see her back within twelve hours; but she was there in her house, behind shut doors.

ON the floor she lay, like a native, with her face hidden in her folded arms. She was not crying now. She had cried for two nights and a day, and then she had gone to Port Absalom, unsummoned. Arthur had been quite kind, entirely reasonable. He had pointed out the advisability of waiting till furlough time, and Lydia had agreed.

He had said everything that was nice, and he hadn't kissed her, and he had gone away.

An hour after, he was reading poetry to the white creature from the hospital.

Lydia, from that moment, knew. And she was terrified. Not by the knowledge itself, but by what it had done to her.

It had seized her and cast her, for the time being, into the dark flood that flows always too near the feet of dwellers in savage lands. To Lydia's feet it flowed very near— now. She had bought her empire over the savages with a price. She knew that these eleven years spent among head-hunting fiends, living through the furious seasons, the fiery beauty of Kari-Kari, through dangers that irresistibly beckoned, solitudes that burned like ice, had changed something in her nature, brought her too near the people over whom she ruled.

She loved Arthur Peveril. Not as he loved her, or had loved her: in a good, kind, Christian way— the best possible way, of course. No. She loved him with the flame and fury of a heathen.

At that she writhed upon the floor and sent out a sudden cry.

Someone had opened one of the closed shutters and was looking in upon her. "Missi," the person said.

"Go away," answered Lydia. "I am ill."

"Missi," the voice persisted in native. "Let me in. I am Aikora."

SORCERERS in the Sheba Islands ranked as princes. Lydia knew that no light thing had brought Aikora to her door. She sat up and looked at him as he entered.

He was a young man, physically perfect, as were all the sorcerers of the islands; picked men, every one. Naked save for a strip of bark cloth, he wore none of the usual savage decorations— no beads, tusks, or shells. His bronze skin glittered; his eyes, beneath the huge bar that marks the savage, shone fiery black. The man was a human dynamo; you could almost hear him crackle.

Lydia rose and seated herself. "Well?" she said curtly. "What do you want? Have you come to say you are sorry for carrying off my girls and corrupting my young men?"

"No," said Aikora, standing cool and perfectly poised beside her. "I have come to take you to the sorcerers' college."

Lydia caught her breath. For years she, and all the Mission, had been trying to locate the sorcerers' college, hidden with cunning skill in the deepest forests and surrounded by a maze of misleading tracks. Every year a few of the finest youths of the villages were carried off, by ones and twos, to be educated as wizards; to terrorize the surrounding country, commit murder wholesale, carry out and perpetuate all the horrors of worship that the Mission was trying to eradicate. No one had ever succeeded in finding the place.

And now Aikora was offering to take her there.

Lydia was shrewd. She asked immediately: "What do you want?"

"Nothing," said Aikora. Then, watching her, he added: "A charm, maybe. Something to make a charm."

And, as Lydia opened her mouth to refuse, he added quietly: "A charm— to make a woman grow cold to a man.

"I— I can't help you in any heathen rubbish," she told him feebly. The temptation was almost beyond her. Lydia believed fully in the power of the sorcerers, as did many other white people. "Satan himself helps them," she used to say.

"Never mind," Aikora said. "But you can come— and see. No harm there."

"I will come," Lydia said, taking down her electric torch from the shelf.

But Aikora shook his head. "No light," he said. "You must bring no light, and you must ride.your mule, and your eyes must be bandaged."

"What!"

"No other way." He waited.

Lydia thought quickly. "Go out," she said, "and I will come in a minute. Get me my mule."

She closed the door behind him, then hurriedly opened her store of small trade beads and filled her pocket with them. They were fine as oatmeal, but brightly colored.

"I'll mark the way with those," she said, and laughed.

Aikora knocked on the door. "Mule here," he said.

Before she mounted, in the warm dark outside, he tied a handkerchief tightly about her eyes. In the forest there would not be so much as a ray of starlight; but nevertheless she was to ride quite blind. Aikora took no risks.

FOR hours they seemed to twist and turn among innu" merable forest tracks. Sometimes the mule climbed, grunting, over rocks, and sometimes it splashed clumsily through the bed of a stream. The heat impended like a heavy blanket over Lydia's head; she could hardly breathe; her arms and neck streamed sweat as they went. But Aikora, leading the mule, stepped as lightly as a bird, and once or twice, when he touched her hand, his hand was as cool as spring water.

At last they left the mule tied to a tree. Lydia was led for some distance afoot. A door was opened; her shoes trod over soft mats on a bamboo floor.

"Take the bandage off," said the sorcerer.

Lydia took it off, and found herself standing in a huge dusky room lit only by the flames of a fire that burned in the middle. The roof was smoky, indistinct. The pillars upholding it, thick forest trunks stripped of bark, were curiously carved and painted. Drums, also carved, and wooden monsters were hung about these pillars; and on stands there were many human heads which had been cured into leather and painted bjack and red. Also there were skulls, adorned with pig snouts and set with pearlshell eyes that glimmered in the firelight.

Strange— and horrible! Lydia in that moment felt herself akin to the wizards of Scripture: to Saul when he called upon the demons.... Were not these things true?

THERE were three or four young boys sitting in a corner. They took no notice of Lydia. They seemed to be drugged, half conscious. One of them was drumming, drumming, with limp fingers that never ceased. Aikora spoke to him in native; told him to fetch "the love charm." The boy got up. He was naked save for his little fur sporran. He was curiously painted. He went on drumming as he moved; it seemed as if he could not stop. He was a mere shell of a human being, no soul left.

Lydia's lips were dry; she licked them unconsciously. She had heard about the youths. A lad who had never touched woman could be used to help with sorceries. This was part of the education.

The boy came back, still drumming. His eyes were turned up till one could see almost nothing save the whites, but he seemed to know what he was about. Drumming with one hand, he reached out to Aikora with the other, and went backward to his seat again.

Aikora showed Lydia the charm. It was a queer small carving of black wood, like a pig, like a nut, like a little yowling fiend—she did not know what to call it. It seemed to have no definite shape, but to take on different shapes as she moved it about.

"This is the great charm," the sorcerer said. "It cannot fail."

"What do you want to do with it?" asked Lydia.

"The same as you do," he told her. "This white woman has annoyed me. She is not to marry the red chief. It will be bad for all of us if she does. It will be bad for the Mission."

Lydia wanted to say, " A lot you care about the Mission!" but somehow the words would not come. Aikora went on. He told her that she must get him a piece of the white woman's underclothing— some that she had worn and that had not been washed since. She must cut it in two, give him one half and keep the other. The half she kept was to be wrapped round the charm, and the charm put away in the dark.

"In three days," Aikora told her, "she will grow cold— cold to the red chief. And he will never marry her."

For a moment Lydia hesitated. Then she stretched out her hand. "Give me the charm," she said.

The little soulless boy kept on drumming, drumming, and never looked at her. The high, dusk room was full of strange odors: dust and mildewed thatch, and perfumed gums from the forest, and the sharp scent of the herb that native men use for adornment, and smoke and sweat, and above all the leathery, sickening smell of the dried heads. There was another smell, too. Lydia wondered if she knew what it was.... Yes. Snakes!

AT the far end of the room stood rows of clay cooking pots, each with its cover on. Aikora had not spoken; but a youth at some sign, rose from the floor and, while the drumming still went on, took off a pot lid and stood watching. Almost immediately, out of the pot rose a glittering head with tongue that flickered like black flame, and a huge tiger snake began to pour itself over the pot edge.

Aikora nodded, and the lad took the snake as if it had been an eel, and twisted it back.

"These are our watchdogs," the sorcerer told Lydia. "It would be very bad for anyone who came looking about the place. They have their teeth, and the covers are not always on."

She knew that he was warning her. She did not care. "I will use the beads," she thought.

Aikora tied the handkerchief over her eyes again, and led her out. For quite a long while after she was mounted on her mule she could hear the dull, unceasing, hypnotizing sound of the drum. "He's going roundabout," she thought. "But I can beat him."

It was pitch dark, and Aikora was walking on ahead of the mule. Screened by the night, Lydia dropped one fingerful of beads after another all the way back.

They reached the village, came to her house. Aikora plucked the bandage off her eyes. "You must get me the garment tomorrow!" he said. "Leave it beneath the corner stone of the wall. Here is something that belongs to you. Good night."

Into her hand he poured a mass of beads, all that she had painstakingly strewn upon the dark way. There was a screaming laugh as he disappeared into the forest.

Late next day Lydia was sitting in her house with a pile of wash before her. The clothes from Port Absalom headquarters were sent to Kari-Kari every week, since it was known that Lydia's girls were the best laundresses in the Mission. Lydia trained her converts excellently, and for the most part they did not (in Mission parlance) "fall away." One of them, Deira by name, had gone off to the bush lately, but it was said that she had gone far from willingly; Aikora's name was whispered....

The clothes of Arthur Peveril were Lydia's first care. He was something of a beau for a missionary. His mother, down south, kept him supplied with fine silk vests, and Lydia loved to mend them, to count and darn his socks, sew buttons on the white suits when they came back from ironing. Easter Glenn had not taken that pleasure from her— yet.

When she had counted Peveril's clothes, she turned to Easter's. There was a huge pile of fine underthings, mostly silk and lace. Lydia wrinkled her nose at them. "Nets to catch fools," she said.

She chose a silk chemise, and was about to cut it in two with her working scissors, when suddenly she paused, struck by a new thought.

Aikora had said that she was to keep one half of Easter's undergarment and wrap it round the charm. With the other he would work spells, and in three days— no more— the woman would have grown cold to the man.

All very well, as far as it went. But would it be enough, if Peveril remained in love with Easter? Easter might refuse him, send him away. Would that give him back to Lydia if Easter was still there, still temptingly hanging like a bright fruit on a low bough? She did not think it would.

Laying down her scissors, she thought. The very air of the house seemed to stand still. Pencils of sunlight slid through the walls of basketwork, wrote runes upon the floor, and passed away. Lydia sat on, unmoving. In the tall cottonwoods "six-o'clock" locusts struck up their wooden chirring. A crocodile, somewhere in the lagoon, sent out its mournful sunset bellow, sounding like a bull in death agony. Night was near.

Lydia got up and lit the lamp. "Why not?" she said aloud.

She took one of Peveril's silken vests and slit it in half. Aikora would never know the difference.

One half she wrapped about the charm, hiding the little parcel on a high shelf. The other half, folded in a green banana leaf, she left beneath the corner stone of the wall.

Then, calmly, she returned to her neglected tasks.

THAT night she slept as she had not slept for weeks. Once only she dreamed. She saw, for a moment, Peveril, tall and winsome, with a laugh in his eyes. She saw Easter Glenn. And Peveril had an icicle as long as a spear, and with it he was driving Easter Glenn away.

The native girls nudged one another and giggled when Lydia came into school next morning.

"The chieftainess is happy," said one. "Maybe she brought poison from the house in the forest, to kill the white woman who has cast spells on the red chief."

"Maybe," agreed the others.

On the following day Lydia rode her mule into Port Absalom. She had business there.

Deira, the lost girl, ran by her stirrup as she went. She had not escaped from Aikora; the sorcerer had sent her back with a curt message: " Payment."

Deira did not understand. "Him say him no want me," she explained, trotting beside the mule. "Him say me cly too much, cly all-a-time. Cly all-a-same one piggypig, him say. True, Missi, me cly. Me no like Aikora." She was crying now, a pretty little figure in her short grass petticoat that swung like the kilt of a Highlander as she ran; with her bushy brown-gold hair, unadorned, and her red-painted breast bare of flowers or beads. Last week Deira had been decked with all the many ornaments of a village maiden. Now she went plainly, like a married woman. Only, no bride price had been paid for her, no cooking pots carried home; nor was there any slim brown youth with blackened teeth awaiting her where the village smoke went up.

She would marry, but it must be an old man now, and she would go cheap; no boasting among the matrons over the number of pigs that had changed hands at her marrying. Life was shorn of prestige for little Deira.

But Lydia was glad to have her back, though she did not care for the tone of Aikora's message. She was taking Deira in to headquarters now, in order to leave her with a colored teacher's wife. There she would be safe even if Aikora changed his mind. The fate of the sorcerer's cast-off loves was terrifying, even

in thought. There had been women's heads among those sinister trophies in the "college."

After leaving the girl in the native quarters she went up to the Mission. "Deira is all right now," she thought. " 'But can thim that helps others help thimselves? Answer me that, Sorr.' "

AS if in mockery, as if her evil spirits had replied, there came a peal of laughter from the house. She could see into the lounge. Easter and Peveril were there, sitting on a sofa together, sharing some careless jest.

Lydia looked at them. She felt her heart go down like a stone sinking into deep seas.

"O God," she began to say— and then remembered that she had no right to call on God any more. She had sold herself to the devil, had she not? And now she was beginning to wonder whether Satan (as people said he did) was not going to cheat her of the price. What had Aikora meant when he assured her that one of those two would, within three days, grow cold to the other? This was the third day, and they were sitting side by side, looking in each other's eyes.

She went to her own room on the women's side of the sleeping corridor, and saw no one else that night. She rested badly. Hour after hour she sat upright in bed, listening to the faint sounds of quiet breathing from Nurse Glenn's room beside hers, noting the silence that told of Peveril's heavy slumber opposite. The men's rooms opened into another corridor, but they backed on to the women's; every sound could be heard.

Outside the night was quiet, save for the faint chipchipping of a woodcutter bird a long way off, and at intervals the noise of flying foxes quarreling among the mango trees. Down on the beach the suck and draw of waves and sent out a sudden cry. steadily sounded. The tidewas coming in.

Late, toward morning, the stillness of the night was splintered by a cry—a shout in a man's voice. Trampling of feet and blows immediately followed.

About Port Absalom, the Mission lived in constant expectation of native attack. Everyone was out of bed in an instant. The corridors filled with men and women in night clothes; torches flashed. People asked one another, with determined calm: " Did you see? Where are they? Have they come? "

Some of the women, white-faced, saw the gates of heaven near; most of the men felt the thrill of fighting blood, and thanked the same heaven that they were going to have some fun....

Then it all collapsed. Arthur Peveril came out of his room with a handkerchief tightly tied about his hand, and said: "There was a tiger snake in my room. Where's the ax? Quick! "

Nurse Glenn, in a becoming wrapper, ran forward. "Let me see," she begged, taking hold of his hand.

He pulled it away. "Leggo!" he said. "You can't— Ah, Lydia, good!"

Lydia had run to the kitchen and fetched the cook boy's ax. She asked no questions. She gave him the ax, as she would have given him her head, had he asked for it.

"Stand back," Peveril warned. He pulled the bandage from his little finger.

Lydia saw two blue marks on the middle joint, and her heart turned over, for she knew the power and venom of a tiger snake in the hot season's heart.

One of the married missionary women screamed as Peveril laid his hand upon the veranda rail and raised the ax. It was all over in a second. The finger fell bleeding on the floor, and Peveril, letting the severed stump drip over the rail, said coolly: "That's done it. Now we'll go and have nurse tie it up."

Easter was sobbing. "Why did you?" she asked through tears. "I've plenty of snake serum at the hospital."

"Yes, down the beach—and before you could have got it— Why, this was the biggest tiger snake I ever saw! He escaped, worse luck."

"We'll kill him for you," promised one of the men. "Where do you think he went?"

A small brown face, unheeded, peered through the veranda rails. "No good you looking for dem snake," Deira said. "Him b'long Aikora. Him go home."

NOBODY listened. The men went out to engage in a fruitless hunt for the snake. Peveril went down to the hospital with Easter. Lydia, un-noticed, followed them. She heard Peveril consoling Easter, telling her not to be upset.

"You don't know our snakes," he said, "especially such a monster as that was. Why, if I'd waited for you and your serums, I'd have been as cold as freezer beef by now!"

As cold as freezer beef!

Lydia stopped dead beneath the palms, her hand upon her heart. Before her, pale in the starlight dusk, the figures of Peveril and the nurse went on.

Lydia said slowly: "I ought not to be allowed to live!"

She had understood.

Aikora indeed had spoken nothing but truth when he said that Easter Glenn would be "cold" to Peveril if she, Lydia, gave him that undergarment of Easter's wherewith to make his spells.

Cold! Yes, cold in death. And she had given him Arthur's shirt instead.

It was not her fault that Peveril was alive. She— with her tamperings and her spells! She— who hadn't believed the current tales about sorcerers and trained snakes, who had thought Aikora's tigers were neither more nor less

than he described them, watchdogs, meant to keep strangers away from the "college." They were that, no doubt; but she knew now that they were more.

Deira— she must ask Deira! She could hear her, somewhere among the mango trees, where the great fruit bats had ceased their quarreling and quieted down to sleep, where now the first stir of the dawn wind was beginning.

The girl who " cried all the time " was crying still. Well, she had something to cry about. And she could tell something, surely; she had lived a week in the sorcerer's own house.

Lydia found her, crouched upon the ground. "Me no do it," she explained, sniffling.

"No one said you did," countered Lydia, who was beginning to understand just why Aikora had tired of this creature; almost feeling ready to sympathize with him. "Stop howling, if you can," she ordered, "and tell me what you meant about the snake."

Deira sat back on her heels and, still sobbing at intervals, told what she knew.

It was quite true that the sorcerers, especially Aikora, could train their snakes to bite anyone they liked. It was done in this way:

You procured a piece of the intended victim's clothes, an unwashed piece, and for some days you teased the snake with it, making him strike his fangs in, and dragging it away, hitting him with it, and so forth.

By and by the snake came to associate the odor with the annoyance.

Then you took him by night to the victim's house, slipped him under the bed, and waited results.

Of course there were spells as well— very powerful spells. But that was the way of it.

Aikora had been very angry with the white woman because she had insulted him and made little of him before the other natives. And Aikora would be very angry indeed when he found that his snake had played him false. No doubt he would kill it.

But she, Deira, had not done anything; Missi must believe her.

"Oh, shut your head!" Lydia impatiently told her. "You could never do anything— but cry."

The nurse was coming back in the pale dawnlight, alone. Lydia went to meet her. "How is he?" she asked.

"I gave him a shot of serum for safety, and made him go to bed," Easter replied. "He'll do all right. But his hand— his beautiful hand—"

She turned her head aside; she did not want to talk. She had been crying, too.

LYDIA, with dry, burning eyes, glanced scornfully at her. How contemptible they were, these women who sobbed and cried! She felt herself harder, infinitely stronger, than any of them. None of Nurse Easter's breed would have sinned, as she had darkly sinned, for her lover.

Not one would have had the strength, if she had sinned, to keep silent about it. Their sort of sinning ran another way— an easier way....

And none of them all would have done what she was now going to do.

It would be very simple. There were herbs in the forest that would give her ease. She would find them tomorrow— no, today; it was morning now. Her last morning.

Before she died she would pray very hard, and perhaps she might be forgiven. Perhaps she might be allowed the least and lowest seat among the "many mansions" where Arthur, surely, would have the highest place.

And there, where there was no marrying or giving in marriage, where she could never know kiss or embrace of his, her consolation would lie in knowing that Easter at least would be no wife of his, either.

Live on and see their happiness here she could not.

That afternoon, with the herbs plucked and the brew in a cup beside her, she sat alone and quiet in her house at Kari-Kari. Away in the port it was steamer day, she knew.

There would be bustle and excitement— mails arriving, passengers leaving the ship. Here, already, was the stillness of death.

She twined her long ivory fingers round the cup, caressing it. In the looking-glass that hung on the wall she could see her face. For the first time it struck her that she had beauty. Not the kind of beauty most people understood or appreciated, but a bizarre charm, an almost decadent attraction, with her deep eyes, and tilted faunlike eyebrows, and the sharp corners to her long red mouth.

Well, all that would be clay, and soon. Cold— as Peveril would have been cold today, through her, but for his own swift courage. Her fingers closed round the cup. All her senses were tight strung. She could hear the noise of beetles moving in the thatch, the sound of land crabs walking among dead leaves outside. She could hear— No, no!

But it was. It was the sound of hoofs— somebody riding toward Kari-Kari.

A LADY teacher drew rein before her door. She was one who liked Lydia, and had been feeling uneasy about her these few days. She had made an excuse to call at the KariKari station, being " moved," as she said, to go and see

what Lydia might be about. Also—and this may have had something to do with the " moving "— she had a piece of news to impart.

"Do you know," she said, dis mounting and tossing her reins to the boy— "do you know we're losing Nurse Glenn?"

"Yes?" queried Lydia, with a face of stone.

"Truly. It's very unexpected, and so— so— Well, one can't call it scandal, can one, when it's really news? She— her husband has turned up."

Not a muscle moved in Lydia's face. Standing in the doorway, she reached forward and stroked the neck of the panting horse.

"Indeed?" she said.

"It seems she was not a widow, after all. She ran away with another man, and was actually living in sin with him, when he deserted her. So then she got this appointment to keep out of her husband's way, and he followed her here, and they had a dreadful quarrel, but in the end he decided to take her back, instead of divorcing her as he said he would, because— can you believe it?— he's fond of her, after all. And the steamer leaves tonight, and she's going."

Lydia said, "A very bad example to our converts."

"Shocking," agreed the teacher. Then, recollecting herself: "But, after all, which of us can say that he or she is perfect? "

Lydia made no answer to that. She had gone into the house and was busy washing up china. "I'll give you some tea," she said. "Just let me throw the slops out of this cup."

Deira the "Blubberer" (for so the village had named her, and the name was to stick) had come back to her family, from the Mission of Port Absalom, after only two days.

"I don't mind if you sell me to one of the old men," she told them. "I would rather have that than the talk of the native teachers' wives; they do nothing but scold. And I want to stay in Missi's village.

"She is a good sort. She isn't really down on sorcery, for all she tells us that it is bad. What do you think she is doing now? "

The family leaned forward, eager to know.

"She has locked her door (but I peeped through a hole) and she is making spells by burning papers in the fire."

"Ma!" chuckled the family, delighted.

Lydia, having finished her burning, put back on the shelf a little volume of Keats, from which two pages now were gone.

In the fireplace, glowing embers showed white on red, two fragmentary lines:

*...green, vallies cold,*
*... primroses... sheltered rills.*

Lydia turned on her heel and left the fire.

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*AUTHOR'S NOTE: This use of snakes by sorcerers is well known to many residents of the western Pacific. Recently a government tax collector was attacked by a sorcerer's trained snake, and nearly killed.*

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## 7: January Girl

***Beatrice Grimshaw***

1870-1953

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DARU, in the Far West of Papua, which lies in the Coral Sea above the loneliest side of Australia, which is at the end of the world— Daru never changes.

I would go back to Daru. I would see again the flaming woods of claret and gilt and amber croton trees, afire like a spilled sunset against the parrot-green of sago and mango. I would hear the black waves of the wicked Gulf of Papua, grave of noble men, hissing on dark sands below the two-three houses of the tiny town. I would feel the enormous loneliness of the place, the silent menace of its untamed hinterlands, press on me like a cloud; I would sip, dangerously, the burning ichor that is there distilled from utter freedom; from the sense that no one lives, no one knows, no one cares. For two steps beyond Daru, the wild begins; and after the wild, the unknown.

And Daru does not change. World troubles do not touch it. World news does not come to it. It sits alone.

January, in Papua, is the hot month of the year. Will Perry, the planter who had come down from the Fly Estuary to the little station of Daru, with a tail of native laborers to "sign off," was as well accustomed to the searing climate of New Guinea as any man might be who had lived there seven years without change. Stan Salter, the young patrol officer, member of a service as romantic and as famous as the Northwest Mounties or the Cape Police, was tough by nature and by training. But even they found themselves obliged to complain of this particular summer day.

In the store, where one bought tinned meats and fruits, tinned bacon and eggs, tinned cabbages,and puddings, they met, each man with his sleeves cut short and his shirt open to the waist, dashing the streams of perspiration from wet foreheads with the flat of dripping arms.

"Never knew it worse in January," tall Will Perry, worn too thin by fever and by heat, said, staring with sun-paled blue eyes at the hot waves bursting on the sand below the house. Salter, four and twenty to Perry's thirty, lately from Melbourne, sophisticated and educated and trained in the anthropological lore that Will despised, answered obliquely: "It takes a few hundred years of this environment to adapt oneself like the natives."

Will was drinking a bottle of beer out of the neck. It was not much cooler than hot tea, but beer is always beer.... He finished it before he replied, wiping his mouth: "There's where you new chums full of university rot are wrong. There's men who can live like natives. And like it. There was Cook— no relation to James— who went up the Turama and stayed there for fifteen years. And

brought a wife. And she had a baby and died, because she was what the natives call ' 'nother kind.' And anyhow the Turama's no place to have kids in. Cook was drowned in the river bore. And now there's Jan Cook."

"Never met him," Salter said, screwing the neck of a bottle. "A lump of ice would be just *it*," he regretfully told the storekeeper; and then, because a patrol officer must be hard, laughed and added: "One of the little things you learn not to want."

"*Her*," corrected Perry. "Man alive, if you weren't so new to the country, you'd know all about Jan. Even though she doesn't advertise— like Bobs."

"Who was Bobs?" carelessly inquired the younger man, and then without waiting for an answer: "Who's this?"

PERRY set down the emptied bottle, looked out for a moment into the fiery dazzle of the coral roadway, drew back his head and said: "January Cook."

"What did they call her that for?" Salter asked curiously. The girl who was swinging lightly, barefoot, toward the store, was handsome, he thought, rather than pretty; something strange and wild about her; face, hands and feet burned to darkish copper, hair black, thick, short and outstanding; eyes so definitely blue, and mouth so sharply cut, that you couldn't give her a drop of native blood; and yet— yet she did remind you, somehow, of the dark girls in the village at the other side of Daru; those slim, half-naked girls who dance on moonlight nights, dance with the very heart of passionate savagery in them. Queer... She was dressed in the sort of cotton frock that white women wear; she had no shoes, but every finger- and toe-nail was smoothed and tended; she came into the store, nodded to Perry, and asked the storekeeper, in perfect English and with a cultivated accent, for some tea.... Not a native by so much as one sixteenth; and yet—

Salter saw, suddenly, that Perry was staring hard at Jan. Why, he thought, the chap's in love with this young savage! He looked hard at January Cook again. And she seemed to him, now, more than handsome. It might be because he had sensed the passion for January of the other man; it might be because he saw the girl nearer. But she was on the moment, beautiful, desirable. And she did not care whether he was alive or dead. You could see that.

You didn't much like it— if you were a young patrol officer, with a good opinion of yourself.

The girl took her parcel away with her, passing so near to Perry as she went out that the starched folds of her short cotton frock brushed against him. Salter heard Perry catch his breath. But neither he nor January spoke.

WHEN the girl was gone, Salter demanded: "What's she called that for? Where does she come from? Why's she knocking about Daru by herself?"

"If it's any business of yours," the other told him, "she was called January by Cook because she was born in January, in the hottest weather, and it killed her mother, as I said; but she's always been a sort of hot-weather kid—loves it when the thermometer goes to a hundred with rain in the air, seems to sort of blossom out— it would finish her if you took her to Australia, but she's never been; when Cook was drowned by the Turama bore, and she was only three months old, the natives took her and nursed her; and when she was eleven, the Mission began making a fuss about it, and they took her over. She's twenty-one now, and her own mistress, but she lives more or less with a retired Mission Lady who looks after her— and you might as well set a white rabbit to look after a wildcat. Any more questions?"

"One more," the patrol officer coolly answered. "Are you going to marry her?"

THE elderly storekeeper leaned bare elbows on his counter, and grinned. This was pepper; this was fun. Two white men almost at each other's throats because of Jan Cook—a decent girl (there's never any doubt, pro or con, about that, in tropical houses, with walls almost open and native servants silently prowling night and day) but who was certainly— odd.

Who had a Papuan sorcerer for a fosterbrother, and used to go off to the bush with him, God-knows-what queer business— nothing scandalous, of course ; brothers were brothers, among the natives— but she'd be away half the night sometimes, and come back with her face all shut up, and not a word to throw to a dog, or a deserving trader. And she knew the drum-talk, which no white person, you might say, knows. And the old Mission Lady was worried about her—because, she said, she didn't see how Jan Cook was ever to get decently married; which the old Mission Lady, being an old maid herself, seemed to think a good deal more important than in the view of the (sometime married) trader, it was.

Perry, the thin, tall man with the sun-faded eyes, was in love with her, of course; but nobody knew what she thought about it; and here was the new patrol officer, asking him was he engaged to her! As like as not Perry would paste him one on the snoot— Government or no Government— for his trouble...

But there was to be no such lightening of the weight of the long island day for a deserving trader, after all. Because, into the very midst of that tense situation, into the dusky store with its clinking billy-cans and oily-smelling tobacco, and piles of calicoes and strings of beads, into the out-back solitude of

Daru where no one ever came, Thora Cummings erupted : Pencil-slim, perfectly clad, with the newest sandal and the newest eye-veil, the latest make-up and a mass of cleverly coiffed light curls, this epitome of civilization, and of Sydney, and of lands beyond the Coral Sea— Thora, poised, sophisticated, perfect, came in and took possession of Daru, A crackling fire of questions and answers put Perry abreast of the situation. Thora, the sister of the Assistant Resident Magistrate, had been expected in a month or so, on a visit to Daru station. She had changed her mind and come earlier. The schooner that brought her across from Thursday Island lay at the jetty; and the A.R.M., greeting her, had asked her to go on to his house and on the way, tell the storekeeper to hurry up certain goods.

That was that. The storekeeper became busy. Thora swept the bnilding and the men with one comprehensive smile, and said she'd be going. And Perry, who had hardly shut his astonished mouth since she came in, waked up and said he'd show her the way. Salter had meant to do it; Salter, with the swift decision that comes to men in girl-starved surroundings, had already told himself that this was his bit of skirt; that there wasn't another white man in the place outside of the storekeeper and the (married) "Customs" and the A.R.M. and Perry— that the coast was clear, and he was in luck.

And then Perry, that mad hatter from the back of beyond, Jan's admirer too, for what that might mean— Perry had jumped at her like a dog at a bone, and gone off down the blazing coral walk among the flaming croton trees, with this bit of Sydney in its white frock and its cobweb stockings. And they were out of sight; and in the store and beyond it, there was no sound save the creaming hiss of waves falling upon black sand.

Salter swung away from the store. Cripps, the storekeeper, left alone, looked after him and grinned. An old man, out of things and set away in the top gallery of life for the rest of his days, he might yet, he thought to himself, see something. entertaining on the stage below, before very long.

JAN, going home, passed like a splash of light thrown up from the sea; she had the native knack of moving as natural objects move, swiftly and almost unnoticed. But Cripps saw her; there was little he did not see. He shouted after her, "Hi, Jan, your fancy man's gone off with the other girl!" and watched for the result. There was none. The girl did not even turn her head. She went by with the sunlight playing in her hair, striking lights of red and amber into its dense black mass. Cripps took his eyes off her for a moment; in that moment she was gone. "Like the natives," he thought. "I'll lay she has their trick of runnin' backward when she likes!"

He wondered for a minute or so whether she really fancied Perry or not. Until the present moment, he had supposed it to be all the other way. But now—

"Well," he thought. "I might as well go down and tally my stuff ashore, as sit here chewin' the rag about people who don't know whether I'm dead or alive, and don't care."

There was a dance that night on the black-sand beach. Perry had seen it all a hundred times, but he wasn't tired of it; he liked, as ever, to stand by the sidelines and let the thrum-thrumming of the lizard-skin drums, the rhythmic bobbing and swaying of paradise headdresses under the flare of torches, the sensuous rapt faces of the dancers, invade him like a stupefying drink. You lost your personality, listening and looking; you shed your sense of place and time. You were sucked into something that led out beyond plain sensuality, never absent; you knew the influence of the nameless forces that lived in the Out Back, up the lonesome rivers and in the enormous forests where no man dwelt; where silence was a thing that did not merely exist; that was kept...

The girl from Sydney was beside the planter; she watched the dancers with complete incomprehension; she compared their steps, audibly, with the Black Bottom and the Big Apple, and said she could do better herself. Perry thought her a little fool, and longed at the same moment to kiss her till she couldn't think or speak.

He had stood within touch of January Cook, when the maddening native dance was going on; he had seen her bosom, under its muslin smock, heave with the desire to join in (and she could do it, he thought). No white man had ever seen the girl dancing; even as no white knew what she did, and where she went, when she disappeared for a day and a night into the wilds. But Perry knew that she'd understand the things he understood; that the wilderness had set its brand on her as on him. He had known for some while that she would make, for him, the ideal mate. And he had guessed that she wouldn't say no, when, in due time— there was never any hurry in Daru, Daru at the end of the world— he found voice to put the question.

BUT now the tempo of the outside world had suddenly invaded Daru, along with and surrounding the personality of Thora. She was full of hurry and curiosity; she wanted to see everything, to go everywhere. She had asked a thousand questions, many of which Perry found himself unable to answer, although he understood their subjects as a man understands his own face in the mirror. She was going to look on at the native dance; she was going out in canoes; she was going to see a dugong hunt; she wanted to watch turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs, and see them intercepted and turned by

native watchers on the beach. And she had already decided, it seemed, that Perry— tall slim Perry with the blue sun-faded eyes and sun-battered skin— was to be her cavalier for the time being; she had turned the full blaze of her charm upon him, and he had instantly gone down. He didn't approve of her one bit; he thought her silly and restless and conceited— and he was, all the same and suddenly, deep-drowned in love.

Under the Prussian-blue night sky that was beaded with sparkling stars, they stood together, fought mosquitoes, and watched the dancing. Perry wasn't drunk with the dance now; it was a headier draught that held him. Things were moving; he was wide awake. Already he was beginning to plan a journey south, and a parson.

SALTER, looking as romantic as he knew how, in his khaki bush outfit with cartridge-belt and service revolver, was posing not very far away. He was there more or less on duty; there had been times when these dances, growing too strenuous, had ended in the snatching of parked spears, stabbing and blood. But he wasn't thinking of that; he felt rather like something in a Western film; hoped he looked it, hoped Thora saw him.

He never saw what Cripps, who was lurking near him, saw. Jan Cook, tall and still now, not a strand of her heavy hair stirring, not a finger or a fold of her dress that wasn't stone-quiet. Jan, looking steadily at something out of the corners of her long gray eyes. Cripps didn't need to turn round in order to know what she was watching. The back of his neck prickled. He had been long in Daru.

He edged away, inconspicuously, to the spot where Salter was standing. "Bit lonely?" he asked the young man, not without spite.

Salter said: "Do you want anything?" He wasn't going to discuss his defeat.

The trader said: "Yes. What do you suppose Kalipa's doing here tonight? If you've any attention left over from that little piece of Sydney goods opposite."

"What? Kalipa? That handsome chap who's dancing so well? I reckon he came to show the others how to do it."

"Kalipa's the biggest sorcerer in the West— and Jan's foster-brother!"

"That so?" The young officer stared. He saw a Papuan man, splendidly made, all but naked, decked out in native jewelry of boar-tusks and dogs' teeth, with a necklace of human finger-bones about his throat. He saw that the man was dancing, as if by accident nearer and nearer to the spot where Perry and Thora stood; that the strange gray eyes of January Cook caught Kalipa's black eyes, every now and again. That the foster-brother and sister seemed, without words, to be communicating.

Salter immediately snapped into the character of Government officer. It was his by no means secret pride to belong to this famous, perilous service. And every man in the service knew that sorcery was mostly murder.

"If there's any nonsense going," he said sharply, "I'll be on the fellow."

"If there's any nonsense going," Cripps mockingly repeated, "you probably won't. Things will happen— as they happen. Just naturally."

Salter hadn't time to express his contempt for such a point of view, because January, whom he really admired when he wasn't looking at Thora, had started to slip away. Quite quietly, quite naturally. As if she were a little tired of the dance and wanted to go home to the Mission Lady's and have a cup of tea. Coolly, too— her face and arms and her bare ankles were dry as ivory, when everyone else, Salter included, was sweating like meat in the frying-pan. She was not natural, he thought, this girl born in the heat of the year; she was a salamander.... But the salamander, that fabled beast, didn't even feel flame. And January, unless her gray eyes lied, knew the scorch of one kind of flame, at least.

Before he knew what had happened to her, she was gone. And he remembered Cripps' odd saying— that Jan had all the native tricks, that she could disappear when you took your eye off her, like a snake. And—

Kalipa was gone too. But Salter, with the corner of his eye, had caught a glimpse of that departure. The sorcerer had danced lightly backward until he neared the tangle of surrounding croton bush; then he simply ran back like a reversing engine, and vanished.

"VERY well," thought Salter, detaching his interest from Thora and Perry. "Very well. I mayn't be able to do that, but I reckon I know where to find the Mission Lady's house. And I must find it, because this is business, This is a job."

Thunder, never far away in the wet season, bumbled and thumped above the black-sand beach as he turned away, A river of lightning poured. In its sudden sheen, you could see the white teeth, the glittering eyeballs of the dancers; then you could see almost nothing at all. Rubbing his eyes, the patrol officer walked away.

The Mission Lady's house, a small building of iron, stood among clustered palms. Wind was getting up now; the palm fronds thrashed upon the roof with angry hands, extinguishing the sound of Salter's footsteps on the coral walk. There wasn't much sound, in any case; the young man had done detective work "down South" in Sydney, and when he wasn't thinking of girls or grog or dinner, he could do an excellent Sherlock Holmes job yet.

QUIETLY he circled the house. There was a veranda— nobody there; there was a lit bedroom window, modestly covered with thick calico; that would be the Mission Lady's. There was another window, curtained with the sort of gaudy colored stuff that looks opaque in the daytime, and by night proves itself, sometimes, to be nothing of the kind. To this window Salter turned his attention. He wanted to know, simply, whether Jan was in. The stuff was, as he had guessed, transparent. Light inside, turned low. No one there.

He drew aside into the clump of palms, and quite patiently waited. He waited two hours. It was nothing to the vigils he'd had down Sydney Harbor, on freezing August nights. He could wait all night, if necessary, in this heavy warmth.

There! The light had suddenly gone up. It was a hurricane-lamp; somebody had come in and turned up the wick. Salter waited a minute, slipped to the window—and almost immediately staggered back against the veranda wall, gasping. "I'm not mad," he said to himself. "I'm not drunk. I did see it."

His thick fair hair felt strange. Did hair ever really stand on end? He ran his fingers through it... The scalp was sweating, but the hair lay flat.

That reassured him, and he ventured to look again.

Yes. Jan was standing in the middle of her room, staring at a length of carved bamboo, which was actually bobbing and shuffling about on end, like the dancers who had been bobbing and shuffling down on the black-sand beach, hours ago. They were long since asleep in the village, but here was this infernal thing, the very sight of which his blood run cold, carrying on the dance as if it were alive. And Jan was looking at it, speaking to it. He couldn't catch what she said. Somehow, he didn't want to. He swallowed a great many times in a throat that had suddenly gone dry, and wondered what in the name of all the fiends he ought to do. There was nothing, the Regulations told him. If he jumped into the room, why, that hellish thing would assuredly be found lying on the floor, just a bit of bamboo a few feet long, and Jan would be wanting to know, in no very courteous terms, what on earth he meant by breaking into her bedroom.

He thought of spiritualistic tales he had read— about people who had gained power to make pencils stand on end, yards away. To order a tangle of muslin to untangle itself, and float free, without touching it. Things like that happened; and people said, when they did, that it was either fraud, or the Powers of Evil.

Well, it wasn't fraud here, unless he was crazy. And he didn't believe in Powers of Evil. And— there! He had made a slight noise—and the whole scene was changed. Jan was sitting on her bed pulling off her dress, and the bamboo was lying flat on the floor in a shadowy corner. Had he dreamed it all?

It was a considerably chastened patrol officer who slipped away from the Mission Lady's house, and silently went to bed in the quarters, taking his problem with him. He hadn't spoken to the R.M.— yet. It seemed a bit too personal.

THE hot weather continued; the flaming stillness of the days, torn at times by thunder and by furious rain; the purple breathless nights, men lying sleepless on stripped beds could hear, in the stillness, the moan of crocodiles and the deep sighing of dugongs, along the beach. In spite of the incredible thing that had occurred on the night of the dance, Salter found himself haunting Jan's footsteps as if he had been her dog; watching her for reasons quite other than those that still seemed to move him professionally. As a government employee and an ex-cub detective of Sydney, he was on the alert for possible mischief. As a man, he would have given up his very heart for that mythical dog of Jan's to eat, if she had asked for it.

On an afternoon when the distant tops of the mangrove forests lay like smokeblue clouds against the glass-blue sky, and the sea was cruel indigo, and the whole landscape, alive with coming storm, seemed to sneer at the feeble insects who ventured to call themselves masters of its colossal solitudes— Salter, tramping down the beach, met suddenly with Jan.

SHE was dressed in a smock of scarlet figured with daffodil, that exactly reproduced the flaming colors of the croton avenues behind her. She was, as usual, barefoot, and walking very quickly.

"Where are you going?" he asked her, He had had little converse with her lately; when he met her, she was either absent or hurried, and not inclined to talk. This time he was determined to get an answer out of her. What, was not he a patrol officer of the finest service in the world, and wasn't she a potential criminal under observation? That she, or Kalipa, meant a mischief either to Perry or Perry's love, he had never doubted since the evening of the dance, now nearly a week gone. It was his duty to observe her. He did it by quickening his pace, and walking beside her as she hurried on. He continued it by noticing the extraordinary blackness and thickness of her eyelashes, the way they stood about and shaded her gray eyes like rushes standing round a mountain tarn.

She said, in that deep curious voice of hers, a voice that somehow managed to suggest that its owner had all the time there was in the world to play with, that there was no hurry, never would be any hurry: "I'm not going anywhere."

"Where have you been, then?"

"For a walk."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing." In her eyes, he caught a passing flicker of something like satisfaction. He had seen a beautiful snake, basking on warm stone, that flickered its forked tongue in and out— just like that— because it was happy.

The patrol officer clamped his hand about the girl's sun-coppered arm. "What have you been up to?" he demanded.

Now she met him, full, with her head carried high on its brown-marble neck (no woman brought up from babyhood among white folk had a neck, a carriage like January's), and her mouth curled into a scornful smile.

"Policeman," she said, again with that hint of scorn, "what business is it of yours?"

"I'm not a policeman," he hotly replied. "I'm a Government officer in con trol of native police, and the R.M. and I have to keep order. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing, Government officer."

"Are you telling me lies?"

"The Mission Lady," she told him, looking at him with eyes that said absolutely nothing, "taught me that the Good Book says all liars go to hell."

"So—" he said, suddenly remembering half-forgotten Sunday-school experiences, "So do dogs and— sorcerers."

"And whoremongers, and murderers," she calmly added. "I am January Cook. I'm not a dog or a sorcerer, and I'm good girl; certainly I have never murdered anyone."

"What about that foster-brother of yours? He's the whole lot, if I don't mistake. What does he teach you, when you go away with him into the big bush? I've heard he keeps a sort of sorcerers'university, out there. We'll get him some day, and give him five years' jail, when we catch him."

"*When* you catch him," she softly said. "Now, Government officer, I want to go home to my tea."

She said it so nicely— she was so well-behaved, so entirely girlish and ordinary— that Salter felt his head spinning round. Was this his potential criminal ?

One side of his mind coolly desired to prove that she was. The other side was burning up with love, irrational, unwilling to listen, ("Jan— Jan— is there a girl in all the world like you? There can't be.. There never will be again.")

She was gone, and he hadn't seen where she went. Home to tea? Maybe.

ALL the way to his house the two halves of Salter's nature squabbled. One side recalled Cripps' saying: "Things will happen— just naturally." The other side maintained that his nerves were tricking him. He believed the girl when

she said that she hadn't done any harm. How long would that be true? And how far some was he fitted to judge of the case, after what he thought he'd seen the other night? Had he been hypnotized? Temporarily mad? Witness of a conjuring trick? No! Whatever a piece of stick might be made to do in the hands of a clever conjurer, even a conjurer couldn't have made it get up and dance in the middle of the room all by itself. And why? Why?

He found himself thinking, oddly— that girl of Perry's had missed something; with her appetite for strange things, she'd have simply been thrilled. That is, if it ever happened.

But a storm was brewing, He had to hurry home.

AFTER the storm, the night was singularly calm. Stars hung like Christmas-tree fruit, glittering among the crotons and the mangoes and the palmtree tops, all now alike in undistinguished black. Stars made long silver stitches in the quiet sea. They didn't do that, south. Not large enough. So many things were different in this strange Papua; even the heavens were changed; even love was not the same. A mountain torrent, plunging furiously to its destined end was not the same as a full, smooth river. Better? Worse? Notelling. But no doubt which took you swiftest, held you strongest.

Salter, half asleep on his camp stretcher, was struck to wakefulness by a tap on the side of the bed.

"It's me," whispered the voice of Cripps. "Don't shoot."

The officer's hand stole back from the roughened grip of the .45 that lay beside his waist. He sat up under his mosquito net. "What's wrong, Cripps?"

"I don't know that anything is," the other whispered. "But January's just come back from the R.M.'s house— and he's away tonight."

"What!" Salter was up, and into his shoes; pajamas were clothing enough. He wanted to say what he thought of his superior officer for leaving a white girl— sister too!— alone in a native country. But loyalty held him back. "Are we all mad?" he thought, "It isn't like Cummings."

Cripps following, he ran, as silently as he could, toward the magistrate's house. On the way, taking a sudden turn, he collided violently with something that was soft and warm and scented with frangipanni flowers— January's favorite. He flung his arms about it. "Where've you been? What've you been up to? By God, January, if you've been in mischief, I'll clap the handcuffs on you, if it breaks my heart."

She stood quite still. She laughed.

"Thora," she said, in her low, lazy voice, "Thora will never marry him now, I think."

"Keep hold of the little hellion," he told Cripps, letting go. "Stay there." January wasn't little, and he didn't think her a hellion, but he was professional, in that moment. ... There was the house. There was the window of the spare room— the big spare room that he knew, with its handsome furniture and huge walnut bed. No light inside. No sound. Or was there? Didn't he hear something like the rolling out of pastry on a hard board; a queer, faintly rumbling noise that he couldn't at all account for? Thora was certainly there, and certainly not dead, whatever had happened; he could hear her breathing— and even in that moment, he was vaguely conscious of a pricking disappointment. Lord, how the girl snored!

Leaning through the window, he snapped on his torch. The rolling sound had stopped; had given way to a tapping noise, vaguely reminiscent. Where had he heard that before?

Thora was awake. Sitting up, in an extremely ornate sleeping-outfit, she stared at him— and made snorting pig-like noises. Surely he must be mad— or she!

Then he saw. And Thora saw. And screamed. And the pig-like noises continued through the scream.

He saw that the hellish bamboo was there, dancing in the middle of the floor. He made a wild leap into the room at it— whatever it was, he was going to know, this time! But he missed it—and came into sharp contact with a man's fair, ruffled head.... Perry's.

THE snoring had ceased; Perry was wide awake. He seized the bamboo in his hand, and pitched it out of the window. Someone outside, apparently did not dodge it. There was a smashing, cracking sound, and a yell.

Salter was out again through the window; first this time. The light of his torch fell on someone who, as he instantly, horrifiedly saw, would not long need either punishment or hell. Kalipa! Kalipa, fighting madly with a furious tiger snake that, wreathed with the fragments of the bamboo in which it had been imprisoned, was hanging with deadly fangs on to his neck.

They could see that he was wildly endeavoring to regain control of the creature, which no doubt had been one of his trained familiars— but even a trained snake will revolt, if its prison is violently smashed on someone's person. And the tiger snake was tame no more. Perry and Salter, together, struck at the writhing body, that shone tortoise-shell and amber and jetty black in the light of the torch. It fell to the ground, Kalipa still calling and addressing it, as if it could hear. Salter seized a stick and killed it. Perry, neglecting the snake, turned his attention to Kalipa, who had fallen on the ground, and was

panting for breath. In no more than a couple of minutes, his eyes turned up, he flung his arms out once and lay still.

"Got him in a vein; no chance," the planter said, letting the dead hand fall. "Thora, Thora darling, don't be frightened. It's all right."

Thora was not frightened. She was shocked. She leaned out of the window, ignoring both the corpse of the man and the body of the snake. The light of Salter's torch shone on her left hand. It bore a ring.

"I— I— we were married yesterday. My brother knew," she said explanatorily, holding her hand a little farther toward the light.

"Good night," said Salter, and left them, to summon a couple of constables and have the body carried away. Thora didn't know the chap was dead, he supposed. Or else she didn't care. A native was a native, to her.

But if Perry, bushman, quick mover, sturdy fellow, hadn't been there— if she had awakened in the pale dawn, and seen that mysterious carved bamboo rolling and dancing on the floor (simple enough when you understood it, wasn't it? As simple as time and death), why, she'd have picked it up, being what she was, avidly curious; she'd have opened it, and then— two yards of glittering fury, and a dead girl on the floor. There is no poison worse than that of the tiger snake, in the hot days and nights of the New Year.

Jan had dropped it in. Jan had had it in her own room— how long? She had got it, and the knowledge to use it, from her foster-brother, the sorcerer who lay dead. And as Cripps had told him, the thing would have happened just as things happen— naturally.

DAWN had begun to light the croton trees to flame when Salter reached the spot where Cripps was waiting with Jan— the girl's wrists and ankles tied up with bush rope. It might have been the faint chill that goes with coming day, or it might have been the sickness that overcame him when he thought of what Jan had done; but Salter was shivering a little as he loosed her bonds. Briefly he told Cripps what had occurred. "She'll come quietly," he said. "You go home." And Cripps went.

JAN was quiet. "What do you want me for?" she said. Her eyes looked straight into his, and for the first time— torture!— he saw in them that which he had desired to see.

"For attempted murder," was his curt reply.

Jan said, quietly, but stressing each word: "I shall not ever go to hell. I am not a liar. Ora sorcerer. Or a dog. Or a whoremonger— I do not know what that is, but I am not it. And not a murderer."

"Who is, then?"

"Kalipa. When I told him I could not do it, and gave him back the bamboo, he threw me away and cursed me. And he said: 'The girl has hurt you, my sister of the breast, and she shall pay; hurting you, she has hurt all my tribe.' He said that in our language, and he frightened me so that I couldn't move. But at last I ran, and ran, And then when I met Cripps, I said: 'She will not marry him'— because I thought I wouldn't be in time— but I was coming— to you."

"You were?"

"May the crocodiles tear my head from my body, if I was not."

He said: "I believe you. But I shall look at all the footsteps when it grows lighter, and then—"

"Then you'll believe me more."

"I couldn't," he said, and suddenly took her in his arms. Standing there, breathless, she yet found breath to say: "She has taken him. And me, I do not want another's bread. I'd rather starve."

"You sha'n't starve," he said— and he kissed her to silence...

A little while after, when Perry had sold his plantation, and sailed away south, and the Service had lost a good man in Salter, who had bought Perry's plantation, and gone up-river to live, Cripps, sitting in his doorway, remarked to his dog Nipper: "An upside-down place, and always was. But it takes a hold of you somehow, Nipper, doesn't it?

Nipper, who wanted his supper, faintly whined.

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## 8: Beyond the Last League

*Sun* (Sydney), 7 April 1940

IT was very quiet there on the beach of Nor'-West Island. Planes, cars, wireless sets were a thousand miles away. People, who talked and fussed about, beat things with hammers, called to dogs and to each other, were nearly as far away. It was very quiet.

On the beach the small waves of the lagoon went creaming like, spilled soda water, with a tiny hiss. Across the lake of green and opal shallows slowly, rhythmically came the bursting fall of breakers on the reef.

The solitary person who was sitting on the beach was quietest of all. She did not move; She did not speak. If you or I had carelessly passed by her (but we should not have done, that) she would not have looked at us. She seemed to be content to stay there where she was, in sight of the lagoon and the wool-white reef and the blue sea beyond. She had not stirred, while moons came up and set, while they grew dark and waxed, and waned again. Her shining bones, held fast in the net of climbing convolvulus, grew while week by week; the round small head that lay on her knees, as if set there for a jest, shone like an ivory hall. On her fingers there had been rings; they lay in the sand beside her, sparkling to the sky. She seemed to be waiting.

ACROSS a sea of platinum and pale blue the ketch came slowly in, her out-of-date little engine painfully throbbing, threatening each moment to slop. They had been a long time coming up from Samurai— Harry Kane, George Filson, Dorothy, Filson's wife, and Lind, who was Dorothy's sister. The ketch was old; she was run by a native crew. She was a cheap charter, but even so she had cost almost more than they could afford, after paying their fares from Sydney to Papua.

Because it happened that George and Dorothy and Lind and Harry were all practically "broke."

The place to which they were going, a deserted coconut plantation on Nor-West, belonged to Harry, for what that might be worth. It had made no money for the past few years; it had been rented on speculation by a couple from the mainland, but when they both died of fever within a few months nobody took their place.

HARRY. out of a job in Sydney, longing, as he had longed for years, to get back to the islands, even if there was nothing more than a bare living in it, made a sporting proposal to his three friends. Let them pool their small funds, take passage to Samarai and thence to Nor-West. They could live in the old

house. They could grow their food and catch fish. They wouldn't be cold or hungry, and they could wear any sort of clothes that covered them— the less the better.

After the port of entry, they had travelled for days on days through wonders unheard; through groups and constellations of islands that seemed to be on no known map, figured in no book or story— thousands of them, hundreds of miles of them. Nobody to see you, nobody to talk about you, nobody to say it was all your fault and why hadn't you provided against the depression before it came; a world of beauty, culminating in one of the loveliest of all the far-out islands— Nor-West, where they were to take refuge, stay unlit the storm was past.

But Papua.

Papua cannot be trusted.

Even in the endless archipelago of her islands, so like the famous Samoas, Cooks, Fijis, where fever does not come, where the people are small and simple and kindly, unlike the roaring cannibals of the mainland— where life seems easy, and beautiful as a dream— the mocking spirit of black New Guinea hovers. Things happen. Things at which you could not have guessed.

LIKE the swarm of devil fish that rose from deep water in the Cape Nelson fiords, and dragged a boat and its screaming passengers down. Like the water-spout that sprang from a calm sea, and hit the schooner of Dinny Lawton, leaving none to tell the tale.

Kane, remembering, hour by hour, more of the life that he had left behind; understanding, as none of his passengers could understand, the sinister side of all this New Guinea beauty and wonder, was the first to see the little white figure sitting on the beach, and recognise it for what it was. And that was something more than George and Dorothy and Lind recognised, even while they cried out in amazement and horror at the sight, landing from the ketch's dinghy and stopping to stare, with wide dismayed eyes, at the sole occupant of Nor-West beach.

"What is it? What's happened? Shall we be killed if we go ashore?" Dorothy, demanded, more in anger than fear. You would, have thought that Kane was her Cook's conductor and she a discontented tourist. Dorothy was a beauty— what former generations, used to call a "raving, tearing beauty," though she neither raved nor tore; only caused most men she knew to rave and to tear their hair over her, if not their hearts. And like most beauties, she knew her value.

George had had a hard time with her since he lost his accountant's place.

Now she was addressing in cool anger— Dorothy never grew hot— she left that to her admirers— Harry Kane, this long, thin, herringy fellow who hadn't a good point about, him except his extremely blue, small eyes set like turquoise beads in the brown of his face. Clearly she thought that he might have managed things better. The "we are not amused" expression sat blackly upon her handsome face like a crow on a marble temple.

Lind, smallish, dark, vital, silent, stood in her flannel slacks, with feet apart as if she were still on the plunging ketch, and smoked a cigarette. She said nothing.

George Filson said, "I say, you know— look here— this really isn't— "

They are all blaming me, thought Kane; all but that little sport of a Lind. And maybe she is too. You never know what she thinks. She is unnaturally silent for a girl most of the time. Inferiority complex or something...

He did not know Lind very well; the others were older friends.

Taking command of the situation, he told them:

"Don't worry. It's only that poor little Mrs. Finch. What brought her to the beach? Well, when people, have fever very badly they sometimes go off their heads, jump out of bed and try to get into the nearest water."

And that's true, he thought; only— only— I don't believe it...

"Leave her there," he said, "and I'll see to burying it by and by."

Dorothy suggested: "Hadn't I better take care of the rings?" and scraped them towards her with the point of her shoe.

Rather silently, for all their pleasure in touching land at last, they made their way together up the avenue that led, or had led, to the bungalow. It was all overgrown, thick with kuru-kuru grass, and sopping underfoot with decayed windfalls of mangoes, oranges, limes from the trees above.

The path went steeply upward; every now and then they paused to rest and look about them; and in the silence that suddenly fell, the voice of the Pacific, the long reveille of the reef, spoke heavily, monotonously below.

"It doesn't care," said Lind, halting to look and listen.

"Care?" Dorothy repealed. "What queer things you do say sometimes!"

Filson said: "Somehow, you know, I feel as if something had been chasing us, and as if we'd got away from it at last, if you know what I mean."

THEN they came in sight of the bungalow, red-roofed, drowned in flowers, a wreck, but a wreck that could with very little care be made habitable again. And it was cool and pleasant there, with the southeast blowing and the whole sky filled with the splendor of the sea, as the air was filled with the salt taste and the sound of it. And everywhere there was the sense of a great peace.

It seemed to Filson, sore with a hundred humiliations, to Dorothy, anxious to hide her head where no rich acquaintances could find her until the world came right side up again, that here at last, there would be refuge and escape. But Lind looked at the face of Harry Kane and wondered.

Kane, glancing sidewise. caught her eye. She had long eyes, amber-brown, shaded by heavy lashes; her mouth was firm and small.

"Long eyes— sees everything," he thought. "Little mouth; keeps quiet about what she sees."

He was not sure, even yet, that there was anything to keep quiet about. It was so long since he had been in this world of New Guinean islands; it was quite possible that he might be mistaken in what he thought. And anyhow, the ketch would be leaving again with its native crew to-night; the die was cast.

It was astonishing, even to Kane himself; how quickly he slipped back into the island life. Within a week he felt as if he had never left it. A fellow felt so safe..... Even if the place had gone to the devil because of the copra slump, nothing, not even another war, could take away one's food and one's roof, out here upon Nor-West.

And what else was there that really mattered?

Girls? He had never married, in Sydney. They wanted too much. It took such years and years of toil, all a man's time, all his freedom just to secure a roof and a place to sleep. Here on Nor-West it was different. Was Lind the girl, at last?

He did not know.

Dorothy, the beauty, seemed to be temperamental— sulked, because there was housework to do, because none of the few surviving natives of Nor-West cared to come over to the bungalow and cook and sweep them. Kane did the gardening; that was what he liked; the women did the housework; George did nothing at all that he could help. They had potatoes, fish, fruit in plenty. They were safe.

And the days went by.

KANE woke up. It was not the middle of the night, that hour, by civilised tradition consecrate to robbers, ghosts, and murder. It was the danger hour of savage countries; the moment that comes when "dawn's left hand is in the sky," night not dead and day not born. Kane knew it well; he was too good an islander to sleep quite soundly at that hour, even after many years away.

There was nothing. Nothing whatever. He told himself this, sat up on his mat, and listened again. No sound. Not even the slight vibration of the verandah boards that tells the watcher someone is about in the darkness.

"Go to sleep again, you fool," Kane told himself; and immediately got up, and slipped, noiseless, barefoot, into Lind's room.

He listened. She was breathing quietly; she slept.

Out again; down the verandah— blast those boards, how they creaked I He was a fool to think that anyone could Into the room of Dorothy and Filson.

Still. Listen.

That's Dorothy; she snores a little. One can't hear Filson for the rustling sound of it. Now she's quiet. Filson— can't hear him yet; he must have got up, gone out. Whisper: "George!" No answer. Quiet, quiet; up to the bed; just put your hand out and make sure he isn't there; she's sleeping like the dead.

If Filson woke and caught him, what'd he think? Dorothy is a devil; she would make any man look at her once too often, with those half-shut eyes of hers. If he found Filson's place warm, empty. Fool, to get the wind up about nothing; put oneself into a compromising position. It's just this sort of thing, playing with fire, that—

He is there. He is lying quite still, and one can't hear him breathe. He doesn't feel one's exploring hand. He is not— very— warm.

Kane found himself, hardly knowing how he had got there, at the threshold of Lind's room; beside her bed. He flashed the torch on her face. She woke instantly, and did not scream!

"Come with me," he whispered. "There's something wrong. I want you to help me to get Filson out of his bed and carry him away without making a noise."

"Yes," she said; and that was all. In her pyjamas, barefoot, she followed. Kane had put out the light. He said: "Does she sleep soundly?"

"Like a pig," Lind answered him; the first time he had heard her say anything sharp about her sister, whom he thought she did not much love.

"Take the feet," he said, "and move as quietly as you can."

Filson was— not warm. Growing colder. They laid him on the living-room floor, and Kane turned on the torch. Filson was dead, and there were marks about his neck showing that he had been strangled in his sleep; strangled so efficiently and quietly, that Dorothy, by his side, had simply gone on sleeping.

LIND shivered a little and caught back a sob.

"Harry," she whispered, "is he dead? What is it?"

Kane was staring hard at the bruised throat. "They can take the pigeons off the trees at night," she heard him say, as if to himself. "They can strangle one by the side of its mate, and take the mate after. They can—"

"Who? Why?" she asked, beating him on the arm. He was conscious of her now; looked at her, as if he saw for the first time the firm slimness of her in her night attire, the orange glow of the torch on her fancied curls.

He did not answer her.

"You're prettier than Dorothy, but not so beautiful," he said. He seemed to be thinking....

She did not understand; but something in his tone seemed to have offended her. She drew away.

"I must go to Dorothy," she said. "It will break her heart, poor darling."

"Tell her," he said, "that George died in a fit in his sleep. I'll go and bury him before she has a chance of asking to see him."

It was strange how little difference the death of Filson seemed to make only week or so after he had been laid beneath the flowering mango trees. He had never, Kane told himself, been a fellow of strong character; he had slipped through life— and out of it— like a knotless thread.

There were other things to think of, however. The peace of the island was flawed like a broken mirror; the safety of it was a dream. If Dorothy really had not chosen to rid herself of her husband, as Kane almost thought she had (and the morbid interest lent to her by that idea seemed to add. somehow, to her unholy charm), then someone else had done it, and that someone might do the same thing again.

Nobody knew for certain that the Pinches had died of fever— it had been so reported a long time after, when the houseboys made Samarai in a sailing canoe and told the magistrate of the deaths. Nobody, again, knew that they hadn't; the use that had been made of Mrs. Pinch's skeleton was no proof.

"Keep away," it had warned all and sundry in native language— if it had been put there, and if the woman hadn't really made for the salt water when she felt herself burning, dying of fever.

It was all a puzzle; but this much stood out, that one had better be careful. So Kane advised the women to sleep together, and close their room at night, regardless of beat.

FOR himself, he was content to follow the old island way of constantly changing his sleeping place, like a dog that couches in the bush, and defeats its enemies by shifting from lair to lair.

"After all," he asked himself, "why— why? There's no reason. There's no damned reason at all."

Just to make sure, he visited the small native village on the far side of the island, where a score or so of Nor-West people lived by fishing and by gardening. He was kindly received, with perhaps a little reserve; but that might

be due, he thought, to the presence of half a dozen boys who were certainly runaways— not Nor-West people, they looked like Tagulas, and he'd make a bet they had run from some of the Misima or Woodlark mines and were afraid to go home. The natives hated mine work.

Well, that was no business of his; those five beggars who edged away from him seemed to like the shade better than the sun when he approached, were welcome to stop as long as they liked. Five... What was there in that number that woke up a warning bell in his brain? He couldn't tell. It was so long since he had been a boy in the islands. Some foolish superstition, no doubt, like the feeling against lighting three cigarettes with one match. Not worth thinking about.

With the help of Lind, he conducted an intensive search of the grounds and gardens near the house. He had an idea that some wandering native who had a grudge against Finch might have landed in the night and, attacked the man whom he thought to be the plantation manager. But there were difficulties about that idea. There were difficulties about any possible solution of the mystery.

Meantime, Lind, it seemed, began to grow shy of him and Dorothy.

No mistake about it; Dorothy, all of a sudden, had turned about and was making love to him. And excellently she did it. This woman, when she chose, could swing her whole personality into a word, a trivial act; with a single look or touch she could make you forget the rest of the world, see nothing, think of nothing but Dorothy, Dorothy.

Sitting in a long chair and hardly speaking, she overcame you as if she had her arms about your neck. And all the time there was the constant doubt in Kane's mind— did she do it? She hardly spoke of George and of his death; it seemed that she had accepted the lie that Kane told her— or that she knew all about it without need of asking.

Lind came to him one evening, as she seldom came now, and bluntly asked him if he knew where Dorothy was.

"No," he answered her. "Neither do I. I wonder is it safe for her to go off wandering alone every afternoon as she does?" Kane was alert. "Where does she go?"

"Down into that valley where she and George used to walk when we first came. If I offer to go with her, she says she'd rather be by herself."

"Is she— fretting, or anything, after George?"

"I do not think," Lind said drily, "that she's fretting— after George. But she does seem to have something on her mind."

"How do you know?"

"Well, she laughs and talks — in her sleep."

Kane would ask and Lind would not say what it was that Dorothy talked about. But a sudden flush on the cheek of the girl set him guessing.

"I wonder— if she does?" he thought, and felt the red steal into his own face. Lind went on:

"She comes back tired out and sometimes all muddy, as if she'd been walking in the stream. It's a long way from the house. I think, maybe—"

Kane understood. "Yes, I think so, too. I'll see to it. Thanks, Lind. You're a darling girl."

She did not flush at that; she just looked at him with level eyes, before silently she turned and left the room.

Dorothy wandering by herself half a mile from the house. Dorothy with something on her mind. Talking...

IT was late afternoon; he might find her there if he went. Of course, he would have to warn her. He and Lind had managed to keep her from the actual manner of her husband's death; it was done to spare her, but maybe they had been wrong, after all. If Kane had hoped for a romantic rendezvous, he was disappointed. Dorothy, as he approached from one side of the valley, was already climbing the other, on her way home. Whatever the attraction might be that linked her to the thickets and the stream, it was over for the day, and he none the wiser.

He would have caught her up, but for an incident that seized on his attention and made him, for the moment, almost forget her altogether. There were five native men down in the valley, they were walking together, with a creeping, soundless step, and they seemed to have only that moment emerged from one of the thickets of pandanus and huge lalang grass.

One of them had a small bow and arrow in his hand, and seemed to be intent on stalking. The others, Kane judged, were acting as beaters. No harm in it. No harm at all. "Black peril," in these islands, was unknown.

Nevertheless, the thought of that significant number— five— leaped into his mind again, as he saw the natives unconcernedly pass. It tortured him; he could not remember what it stood for, and yet he felt sure that he ought to remember; that the matter was, somehow or other, vital.

"I'll talk to her to-night," he thought. "I'll put it straight to her. We shouldn't have kept things back."

But when he reached the bungalow, Dorothy was not visible; and later Lind told him that her sister was alone in the bedroom, with the door locked, and wouldn't come out.

"She takes odd fits sometimes," Lind commented. "I would leave her alone, if I were you, till she comes round."

"You'll stay with her to-night?"

"Of course. And lock the door, as you told us to do."

Again that night, near dawn, Kane suddenly awakened, with a sense of impending trouble strong upon him. This time he wasted no moments arguing with himself; he got up at once and went to the girls' room. The door was locked, and everything seemed quiet. He had heard no noise across the partition that, island fashion, divided the rooms, leaving the roof open over all; and nobody had called.

But now he did hear a noise; a sound as of something sliding, very lightly, down the wall into his own room. Resisting an impulse to rush back into his room, he battered on the door. Lind came to open it.

"What's the matter?" she asked, and then cried suddenly, "Oh!"

The light of his torch had fallen on the big double bed, where Dorothy lay, writhing in apparent agony, her hands about her throat. On her wrists and on her ankles were red, angry marks. The bedclothes had been little disturbed, but the pillow had fallen to the floor, carrying with it a paper packet that seemed to have been hidden underneath. The packet was broken, and its shining contents scattered across the boards.

Kane, in that moment, was not openly aware of anything but Dorothy; nevertheless, some hidden part of his brain took note, and whispered sub-consciously, "Good Lord!" while the conscious part of him was busy in the room. "Get her out into the air," he said, dashing water from the bedroom jug upon her face.

"She's only fainted. They haven't done for her. Do you mean to say you never heard or felt—"

"I got up," Lind said. "I— I thought I heard a very little noise, like something sliding down the wall, and I. thought it might be a snake, but the torch had fallen down somewhere, and I— I—"

They were half carrying, half supporting Dorothy into the fresher air of the verandah. Kane swiftly slipped into his own room; found it, as he expected, empty; took a loaded Colt from the drawer of the table, and rejoined the women.

"I'll tell you," he said to Lind, "what you heard sliding down the wall. It wasn't a snake. It was five men. Five Yela men. A strangling team. I ought to know. I ought to be hanged for not remembering before."George George — he remembered that he hadn't seen George's wrists and ankles; they were covered by the pyjama sleeves and legs. But he would have sworn now that they had been bruised, like Dorothy's. Oh, he remembered! The Yela strangling teams, from the island where the three hundred shipwrecked Chinamen had been captured and devoured in the fifties of last century. The runaway boys—

from the gold mine islands of Misima and Wood-lark— they hadn't been Tagulas; they were from Tagula's famous, infamous neighbor, Rossel, otherwise known as Yela. And one by one they had been picking off the whites of Nor-West Island, as they picked off pigeons for a feast from the boughs of a midnight tree. Finch— Mrs. Finch— George Filson— now Dorothy. Well, they hadn't got her after all, thanks to him, though he had been only just in time. She was better; sitting up on the floor, sobbing and staring about her.

"What was it?" she demanded. "Something caught me—"

Lind knelt beside her, soothing. "You're all right, dear. You're safe. It was a native who tried to kill you, but we'll take good care—"

She paused. Kane was hone. No sign of him on the verandah, in the house. But from far off, away down in the valley, came the sound of a shot and a scream. Another shot; no cry. And another. When he came back, he put away the revolver, said nothing. But the women knew that henceforth they would be safe.

LIND was still puzzled; she could not understand what had happened. The day that followed did little to enlighten her. Kane, who had been ready to kiss the very ground on which Dorothy walked, now seemed to avoid her. And Dorothy, after one or two efforts to attract his attention, lapsed into sulkiness. The mirror of peace was shattered indeed: the lovely island was paradise no more. And yet— It could have been so perfect, for two who loved each other! Lind knew now that she cared for the Island life, even as Kane cared for it.

But Dorothy—

Dorothy, in one of her sudden furious outbreaks, told everybody what she liked, and didn't like. A schooner had been unexpectedly sighted, and Kane and Lind were busy writing letters and making preparation for possible guests when Dorothy burst out of her room.

"I've been packing up," she said. "I'm going. I wouldn't stay in this horrible place for a ton of gold— or for any cold-blooded fish of a man that owns it!"

"Gold?" cried Lind, amazed. Kane, putting down his pen, remarked: "I didn't want you to tell—"

"Tell whom? What?" she demanded, breathing hard. "Tell Lind that Finch discovered gold here— I found that out when you spilled the parcel of nuggets on the floor. And that the Nor-West people didn't like it, and that they employed the Yela men to get rid of Finch and Mrs. Finch and your unlucky husband, and anyone else they could get hold of, who came to settle here. Wanted the island to themselves, I reckon; knew, poor cows, what gold mining would do to it; had been on Woodlark and Misima, you see. One could almost sympathise with them."

"Why," she demanded, "did you not want me to tell Lind?"

"Because," he said straightly, "I've a prejudice against being married. if there's marrying going on, for what I'm supposed to have."

She did not flush. "What do you mean by 'supposed'?"

"The laws," he said evenly, "don't happen to give the gold to the owner of the land. They give the discoverer a reward claim, ten times that of anyone else. To me they give just what I can find in the area of one ordinary claim. And Nor-West generally they give to the devil. So that's that."

"I have ten times what you have?" she asked, eyes glittering.

"You have."

"Then," she said cheerfully, "you may go to the devil yourself. Where's Lind? I want her to help me with my packing."

LlND was in the sitting-room, looking very hard at something on the wall. How much she had heard— when she had slipped away— Kane did not know; nor did she ever tell him. Her hand was on the huge map of the New Guinea Territories, where, spread like stars in the Milky Way of heaven, lay islands upon islands, hundreds, thousands; all about the long tail of Papua and the indented coasts of the Mandated Territory and the great block of the unknown Dutch side.

"Look," she said, "there's no end to them. One could go on and on."

"We could," he said, his chin bent down, touching her shoulder.

And, as if unconsciously, her hand slipped into his.

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## 9: The Golden Crowns

*Blue Book March* 1926

THERE was Captain Clarity, little, gray, and full of scorn for treasure and treasure-seekers; there was Rutland Stewart-Ellis, big and fattish, restless as a dog that noses meat somewhere near; there was Jerry Dawson, spruce in his clean suit, and cool as the ice that was thousands of miles away from us, looking as if he didn't know, or care, that his reputation as a discoverer of hidden things hung that day in the balance. There was Ysabel, the Captain's daughter, with her black bobbed curls blowing in the sea-wind that swept from south, with her long Spanish eyes fixed, as the eyes of some of her explorer ancestors may have been fixed, in Balboa's day, upon the huge Pacific, looking, looking...

There was myself, too. And I was looking where Ysabel looked; where Jerry Dawson, and Clarity— despite his scorn— and Ellis all were looking: eastward, to a point of blue that in the last ten minutes had begun to prick up from the deep. For that point of blue was Bosun Island; and Dawson, breaking at last the long reserve he had kept inviolate throughout our wanderings, had told us that here, or nowhere, were the gold crowns of our seeking to be found.

We were east and north of Ducie, veering into that enormous three-thousand-mile gap that is broken only by Easter Island, and a few small unmarked islets, reefs and atolls. Easter itself lay about four hundred miles away. We did not purpose to call there, Jerry, who was leader in all but name, having informed us that Easter was outside our plans. Personally I should have thought— but it didn't matter what I might choose to think. Everyone on board the schooner would have told you that; and so I suppose it must have been true.

I cannot describe the tenseness, the feeling of things about to be fulfilled, that held the ship and its adventurers that windy blue South Sea morning. Gone was the indolence that for months had hung about the schooner like a magic mist through which we saw all things pleasantly, dreamily. It was as if a breeze had blown down from the far North, bringing with it a hint of the cold, the fierceness, the hard industry, born of iron skies, that was more or less in the blood of all of us. Dawson tramped the deck as if he had been on watch; Ellis had stopped smoking, for about the first time in three months, and was busy casting up accounts of the trip. I felt— also for the first time in three months— that it was absolutely wrong to lie in a deck-chair and read novels at nine in the morning; a newly-awakened Puritan conscience drove me to open "*Norrie on Navigation*" (which I had always intended to study) and glance at its tiresome diagrams, in the intervals of watching Bosun Island.

ONLY Captain Clarity, detached as usual from the spirit of the trip, seemed to have the South Sea feeling about him that morning. He was rather conspicuously laid out in a deck-chair, with a Niué hat over his eyes, and he was to all appearance doing nothing, and doing it very hard. I don't know whether anyone else caught— as I did— a keen glance or two from the small gray eyes beneath the hat-brim, that boded ill for any Kanaka of the crew who should venture to presume upon that apparent quiet. Anyhow, the work of the ship was being done, and the black quartermaster, hands on the wheel, shifted a spoke or two, once or twice, in obedience to a barely perceptible nod.

I was not much surprised, therefore though I think the others were,— when Clarity suddenly burst out:

"I thought you was chaps had some sense somewhere in your skulls. I did."

"Oh?" was Dawson's comment.

"Well, and last night you tell me that I'm to believe a pack of sailors came and left God knows what of gold on that island, instead of taking it with them when they sailed away. It's not in reason, man. It's plain blank foolery."

"All the same, Captain," said Jerry, pausing in his eternal walk, "If anything's true about the treasure, that's true."

"What, sailors of two hundred years ago, who wasn't responsible to God or man or Board of Trade— left a fortune behind them, and went without it to South America, where all the fun must 'a' been, in those days, same as it is now?"

"That's so."

The Captain rose, spat once, forcefully, over the side of the ship, and returned to his deck-chair.

"I wouldn't have done it," he said, "if I was drunk— if I was dead— if the Day of Judgment was comin' up out of the sea in front of us, and the last trump was beginnin' to tootle. What kind of men was they, since you know all about it?"

"I wish I did know. I have a guess that they were Dutch, and that they visited these parts some time before Roggeveen did, two hundred years ago."

"Dutch!" said the Captain. "I never had any use for Dutch, but I'll think even less of them after that."

"Well, Roggeveen was a great man, Captain, and left his mark over a good deal of this side of the world. And I'm inclined to think his contemporaries knew what they were about, when they left their treasure behind them. I'm inclined to think they couldn't well do anything else."

"Why?"

"I hope to tell you that before very long."

"I don't believe a word of it, anyhow. Treasure cruises and treasure cruises— there's just two sorts: what the knowing ones gets up to skin the fools of their money with, and what the fools gets up to skin themselves with. Meaning nothing uncomplimentary to you, Mr. Dawson!" He put his pipe back in the corner of his mouth, drew his hat over his eyes, and seemed to doze again. But nevertheless that unsleeping glance from time to time raked the ship and the horizon, regularly as a beam from an intermitting lighthouse. The island was drawing near.

WHAT one saw, first of all, was an immense plaque of brilliant milky-green set down in the blue sea like a meadow fallen from fairyland. The island in the middle hardly caught your eye at first; it was dull and insignificant, compared with that arresting shout of color. When one did look at it, one saw it to be tallish, perhaps ninety feet, steeple-shaped, and covered with brush and trees. Inevitably, from its dusky outline, the eye fled back to the nameless, marvelous green of the surrounding lagoon, and the crumbling foam-wreath that surrounded it in a perfect circle.

"Marooner's Ring!" I exclaimed.

"If it is not," said Jerry, his eyes fixed on it as the eyes of Moses may have been fixed on the Promised Land, "there is no such place."

"Your limit," I ventured, "seems to have been a circle drawn round a point not very far from here." Jerry had told me much, but not everything; he had seized on my vague ideas and given them substance, and then— with his irritating, inevitable reserve— kept the heart of the matter from me.

It seemed that the reserve was not broken yet. He did not answer me, but by and by turned to Ysabel, who was standing on the poop beside him— always, unconsciously, those two seemed to gravitate together as needles floating in water, or ships in a calm at sea, will slowly, surely find one another.

"What has the Señorita to say?" he asked her. I had noticed that for some time now he had avoided using her own name. Ellis fidgeted like a restive horse if Jerry called the girl "Ysabel," and with "Miss Clarity" he would have nothing to do.

Ysabel surprised me by her reply— or would have, if I had not known how the two read each other's minds:

"The other expeditions," she said, "looked only at plain atolls, just as you did in the beginning. After we'd been to Wicked Island, you knew there was an island in the middle. Of course, Eighteenth Century people, who knew very little about coral islands, thought this reef and the lagoon most awfully remarkable, and they called the place 'Marooner's Ring' when it ought to have been 'Marooner's Island.' Do I get a mark, Teacher?"

"You get all the marks," said Jerry, looking not at her but at the growing bulk of the island. "All the marks there are or ever will be."

"How many million marks for sixpence?" japed Ellis; he was the sort of man who can never resist the chance of any childish play on words. Nobody answered him. The island was growing near; we could see a narrow beach, backed by bare cliffs; birds flying over sunstruck starveling woods. Not a house, not a human being.

Clarity, with consummate skill, picked out the one opening in the reef, and sent his ship spinning through it, on the sweep of the high tide. The passage sucked us in as a man sucks in an oyster, and immediately we were gliding on the still, malachite surface of the lagoon.

"It's uninhabited," said Ysabel delightedly. "Do you think that we are the first who ever burst into it?"

SHE looked more than ever like a gallant mischievous lad this morning, dressed as she was for landing, in one of the cotton suits with patrol collar that are worn all over the tropics. Clarity answered her, a little acidly:

"Not the first by about fifty fools, I dare reckon. All these islands and atolls have been raked over with a small-tooth comb by people with the treasure-hunting bug. And if your mother," he continued without a break, "could 'a' seen you in that rig, she'd 'a' died. She was one with a figure," he went on. "You girls nowadays is like a fathom of pump-water; I don't know how you do it, nor where you put your dinners. As slick as weasels, you all are. I suppose the young chaps like it, or you wouldn't be it. In my time we liked girls with some shape to 'em, and they supplied the market according. I reckon your boys"— he suddenly attacked Jerry, as if the latter were responsible,— "will fancy 'em three-cornered, and her girls will have three corners exact to specification. It's a wonderful world we live in."

Ysabel, quite unconcerned by these terrific prophecies, was examining the land through a glass. When the roar of the anchor-chains had died away, she remarked:

"There's a round white thing lying on the beach. It couldn't be a life-buoy of course; but it— "

Clarity's eye was trained to his own glass before she had done speaking.

"It is a life-buoy," he remarked, and began humming to hide his dismay.

*"Whisky for my Johnny— "'*

he sang, under his breath, as if some one on the distant island might hear him, and come forth.

"Mr. Dawson, I reckon some one's been here before you."

Dead silence followed his remark. The two glasses were handed round; I looked, and Jerry looked, and Rutland Stewart-Ellis looked, and each of us saw what Clarity had seen— a life-buoy, new and clean, lying on the narrow beach of the island. A raging tiger would have been, to most of us, a pleasanter sight.

Jerry was the first to speak. He was smiling; men of his kind do smile when hurt or hit, so I took small comfort from that.

"It may have drifted in from outside," he said. '"There's no use worrying before one must."

"Of course it's drifted in," said Clarity. "But it has drifted off of something that was pretty near the island, I reckon, to make the passage the way it done. It's about a million times as likely that a ship has been close in here, and dropped it, as that the buoy has drifted in on its own from somewhere thousands of miles off, and just got into that current of the passage by sheer luck."

WE could all see this, and it did not cheer us up. Interest in the island itself had suddenly flagged. What everyone wanted to know was the name on the buoy, and the condition it was in. On those circumstances might depend the success of our quest.

Clarity did not keep us long waiting. He came with the boat himself, and leaped off the bow before she had touched ground. Jerry and he raced up the beach together, and made a dead heat to the buoy.

"*Anaconda*," shouted Jerry to us. "Quite new and clean. Can't have been here more than a day or so."

"What's the *Anaconda*?" shouted Ellis.

"Chilean gunboat." They were walking back to us. "What do you think of your treasure-trip now?" demanded Clarity, scorn in his voice. I took it that he was anxious to cover up his recent uncalculated display of interest.

"I'll have to take a look round before I can answer that," replied Jerry. He looked so cheerful that my heart sank to my "sneaker" shoes. 'There's something I haven't seen, and Clarity hasn't seen, and he has," I thought to myself. "And it's something perfectly rotten." Because when Jerry was succeeding, and things going well, he always carried a face as long as your arm.

"Where are you going to look round?" asked Ellis sneeringly. He seemed to have swelled up like a toad; his face was bloated with anger and disappointment. "I don't see any dashed thing on the dashed island but a lump of rock."

He had spoken truly; the whole of Bosun Island, except the little beach, was comprehended in the steeple of stone, thinly feathered with trees, that

stood out above our heads. It was on this that Jerry's attention seemed to be focused. Not that there was any place upon it where treasure could be concealed— as well try to hide it on Nelson's Column or Cleopatra's Needle. No, something else seemed to attract him, and not slightly.

"I wish," he said to me, still with that pleasant smile on his face, "that you'd try to get Ysabel and her father between the pinnacle and the beach, and keep them there."

"Why?"

"Of all the why-birds! Because, since you must have it, I don't like the look of the splintered rocks on top there."

I could not say "Why?" again quite so soon, though I wanted to. I could only collect Ysabel and her father— nobody seemed troubling about Ellis— and keep them in the area indicated, by wild guesses as to the best places for digging operations. The Captain was obviously interested, as obviously determined not to show it. Ysabel, however, drank my words like honey; for about the second or third time on our long voyage, she seemed to know that I was really there, an existent human being.... I fancy now— though I did not then— that my supposed possession of Jerry's confidence was the true magnet.

JERRY, meanwhile, had gone up to the top of the high rocks, and was standing there, looking far off through a glass, as if he expected to see the crowns of Marooner's Ring floating about in the Pacific Ocean. I heard him whistling, a thin, gay whistle that I didn't like.

He came down again, and said we ought to get together and hold a council. I noticed that he collected the party on the sunny side of the pinnacle, where we had landed, instead of going round to the shadier part. Also that he tactfully shepherded in anyone who wandered off to the wide plateau of sand, where you could see all round you.

"Is there something he doesn't want us to see— and what on earth did he mean about splintered rocks?" I asked myself. I was puzzled. Jerry was secretive enough in his way, as are most men of his type, but it was not his way to keep any of the facts of his investigations back. On the contrary, he flung them in your face, and laughed to see how little you could make of them. No, I never said he was a prize book hero; he had as much conceit as you have, any day.

There was nothing for it but to sit down on the beach with my suspicions and my sun-umbrella, and wait to see what might be going to happen. I didn't like the way things had been happening, so far. I had never thought to land on the veritable island of our dreams, in an atmosphere of fears and warnings; I

had thought to leap on shore pick in hand, and start madly digging, cheering and singing the while— or something similar.

Jerry lit a cigarette— I think to gain time,— and presently said: 'Well, we're on the island, all right, and no one has been before us."

It was as if an electric shock had run through the party— missing myself; I was insulated by that gnawing little doubt. Up went their heads as if moved by a string; two eyes of sunlit black, two of staring blue, and two of hard gray (Clarity's pretense of unbelief was wearing very thin by now) fixed themselves on Jerry's.

"How do you know?"

"What are you going to— "

"Where are the crowns?"

The exclamations burst out all together, from Clarity, Ysabel and Ellis.

"I know," said Jerry, nursing his cigarette, which seemed to be damp, "because the descriptions all fit, and everything matches. The *Beulah* must have been wrecked hereabouts— "

"Ay," broke in Clarity. "It was always reckoned so, but nobody knew till that paper turned up."

"And the man on the Ghost Island— you remember, Joe."

I said I remembered.

"He told me he had found the gold bowl he wanted to pay us with, under the white rock. There's the rock."

All of us knew about the rock; three heads were turned to look at it. It was a small subsidiary pinnacle, white with the droppings of seabirds.

"This place is not a pure atoll," went on Jerry, indicating with the point of one sea-browned finger the circular sweep of lagoon that surrounded, like a shield of malachite, the central boss of the dark green islet and narrow ivory beach. "But it would have passed for one, with people who weren't particular over names— and the very doubtfulness of it would cause confusion about which and where. An atoll, of course, is just a plain ring-shaped reef or island, with nothing in the middle. Well, as you know, about half the atolls in the Eastern Pacific have been marked down as Marooner's, one time and another."

"If we have found the place," cut in Ellis, "I don't see that you have much to be proud of; you got two jolly good hints. I wonder where you'd have been without them?"

"Just where I am, only a bit later," retorted Jerry. 'Because I had something to guide me that the others hadn't. It was only a question of time. Time's money, I grant, in a job like this, and the hints, as you call 'em, helped. But— "

WE were all craning and staring now; even I had forgotten the uncomfortable presentiments that assailed me earlier; even Clarity had laid aside his pose of skepticism. I think we all had our mouths open like frogs, literally gaping to hear the rest. For it was plain, from Jerry's tone, that the great secret, the golden secret, kept from us so long, was about to be revealed.

Surprisingly, just there, he stopped, and seemed to listen.

"I say," he said, "do you hear anything?"

I did not, and said so. I was wild to get at the rest of the tale. More than all the others, I knew that Jerry had a big card up his sleeve.

But he would not go on for a minute. He asked Ellis if he had heard anything, and made him listen. Ellis listened, and shook his head, and the Captain said he thought we'd have some weather by and by; and there was a silence, during which we all listened hard, for we knew not what. I heard the Captain breathing through his nose, and a faint tinkle of corals afloat on the outgoing tide, and up above, the thin whistling and mewing of gulls. Nothing more.

Jerry appeared to put some preoccupation or other definitely aside. He rose to his feet, and said:

"If we don't get it here, it's nowhere in the world. This is by far the likeliest place within a thousand miles of— Easter Island."

I jumped to my feet with a yell. I knew now.

"Say it again!" I cried. 'The crowns of the giant stone images— they were gold!"

"You have it," said Jerry.

"And the men who got there before Roggeveen— of course they did! And of course no boat— smallish boat— could make a long voyage with— that— on board. Jerry— Jerry! Oh, Lord!"

"What're you all talkin' about?" demanded Stewart-Ellis. "What's the tosh about Roggeveen and Easter? Where's our treasure?"'

"I know about Easter Island," burst in Ysabel, her eyes two dark moons of wonder. "It was in 'General Information' at school. Easter Island has stone images fifty feet high, with enormous red tufa crowns on them, and nobody knows who made them or when. Some people suppose they had something to do with the Aztecs— Incas and all that. The people who filled a room with gold to rescue the Inca. And they didn't rescue him, because Pizarro cheated," she added for our information.

"Fifty feet high!" repeated Ellis, his face lighting up with sudden greed. "I saw— by Jove, what size would their crowns be?'

"The size of a big sponge bath."

"Gold?"

"A sort of gold sheeting. Like the Tutankhamen things. You know there's been some connection suggested between Central America and Egypt. I figure the tufa crowns were sheeted with gold, in some cases at any rate, and that the sheeting was easily detachable. I was pretty near certain of it even before I saw the bob from the top of one of them on Ghost Island."

"Was that what the bowl was?" I cried.

"Yes. I'd gamble my life on it."

Now why, I wondered, should pretty Ysabel turn suddenly pale, at that word, and turn her face away? I was to know before long— to remember also. For the moment I could not keep my attention on anything but the vision of the gold. Clear before my eyes rose pictures, such as almost everyone has seen, of the mysterious, stately images of Easter— the giants sitting through a thousand years with faces turned to sea— crowns, cap-shaped, of red tufa, on their enormous heads.

Incas and conquistadores and rooms filled with gold— Tutankhamen and his chairs and chests and coffin, gold-sheeted— the immemorial pagoda of Burma, with its golden casing from earth to four hundred feet up in the air: things like this chased themselves through my brain. It was possible— with Jerry as sponsor, it was more than possible; it was true.

Some of the links in the chain of evidence were missing— have always been missing, since. Jerry has never been able to tell me whence and why the idea came to him of the Easter Island images. All that I had guessed at was Inca gold of some sort, Inca crowns and jewelry, perhaps, concealed on an unidentified atoll that must lie within a couple of weeks' sail of South America. Jerry Dawson, who had a sense (I always suspect) that other people do not possess, jumped the vacant places, and arrived at the certainty of the richer, infinitely more wonderful treasure. But even Jerry could not tell me how.

In that moment, nobody asked questions. We wanted to get our hands on the gold, instantly. We had brought picks and spades with us, and a cartridge or two of dynamite, also fuse. But nobody knew, even on that tiny islet, where to begin the search,

"Let's have your view of the matter," Jerry asked Ysabel. I was sure that his own mind was already made up; still, it was clear he took pleasure in drawing out her opinions.

Ysabel, standing in the sun and the wind beside us, made a strangely charming picture in her male attire, and one that suited well with the place. There was always something of the sea-breeze about Ysabel; the tossing of her dark silky curls, the sway of her light body upward from the ankles seemed to surround her with an aura of gay winds, wherever she went. If you have ever

been in love with a Spanish, or half-Spanish girl, you will know more of what I mean than books could tell you.

Her eyes had to pass Rutland Stewart-Ellis and myself, on the way to meet with Jerry's. As homing birds speed over an empty landscape, the light of her glance swept us, went by, and rested.

Ellis never saw it; his eyes were dimmed with the shine of those gold crowns; what I saw, and felt, matters to none.

I was sure then, and am sure now, that her reply was drawn from Jerry's mind, as the sky takes dew from the sea. Still, it startled me a little, it was so sure.

"I am to imagine," she said, "that I'm a sailor of two hundred years ago. And I've landed with other sailors. And we've carried off the gold crowns of some of the images. And we've probably mutinied to get a chance to do it, and maybe killed people. It's been hard going; the ship we stole was probably very, very small, and there's been bad weather, and the gold weighs her down. So we must land anywhere, get rid of the gold, and sail again to South America for a larger boat."

She paused a minute, still looking at Jerry. I don't know to this day whether she was hypnotized by him. I think not. I think it was something simpler, much older— something that has been told over and over again in trampled, handled verses like:

*Two souls with but a single thought*
*Two hearts that beat as one.*

Just while one wave had time to burst in creaming foam on the shore of the lagoon, she stood silent. Nobody interrupted. Then she went on:

"We wanted a big hole, and something to mark it by. And not too near low tide, for fear of storms. But we weren't careful enough after all, because you see the top of one of the crowns got washed out!"

"I say, did the rest?" asked Ellis eagerly.

"Ysabel's talkin' nonsense, and you oughtn't to be upholding her," commented the little skipper, severely. "What she ought to be doin' this minute is to be gettin' the tea ready out of them thermal bottles, and layin' the cloth, not yarnin' away there in trousers like an old shellback passin' the dogwatches."

Ysabel had been in the habit of serving us, prettily and simply, with our afternoon tea, more to please her father than anyone else. But this was no time for thermoses and tablecloths.

"Let her be, Cap," said Ellis sulkily. "We want to hear."

"Oh, if you want to," said Clarity, and sat himself down again, humming, with an air of detachment, the old, old chantey that we had not heard for long:

*Farewell and adieu to you, fair Spanish ladies!*

Not at all disturbed, she continued, through the windy sounding of Clarity's tune:

"We saw where the ground under the hill had been split a little; by an earthquake maybe, and we thought that would do. We were very tired. We rolled away all the rocks we could, and then we rigged a block and tackle—"

"Ysabel, how do you—"

"Stop!" I said sharply, to Ellis.

"And we hauled the crowns up one by one, pushing as well. It was dreadful work. We lay down on our backs, and some of us cried, and said we should never see Holland again. We got the crowns in, and we couldn't cover them that day, but next day we were better, and we threw rocks and rocks, and then we cut down a sort of cliff, of sand, on the top of it, and we sailed away."

She stopped again.

"That's all," she added suddenly, lifting up her head, and staring about her.

"Plain 'istirricks," said Clarity. "You'd ought to have a jug of water thrown over you. I always did it to your mother."

But Jerry Dawson looked at her, and in his eyes I saw the light that never was on sea or land.... Long after, he told me that she had read, almost word for word, what was in his mind— what he had gathered, and guessed, and caught with his own invisible aerials; what, I think now, was in all probability the true story of the place.

In the same minute (he told me) he had known for certain that even if Ysabel held to her strange obstinacy about Ellis, it would not separate her and himself— in the end.

"When you've got a woman's soul as fast as that," he said, "the rest is bound to follow; the greater will bring the less along after it."

"What if she had been married?" I asked out of curiosity.

"She couldn't have been," was his answer. "All nations know it's only a girl's white soul that can show the invisible writing."

I don't know that I understood him. I never understood Jerry altogether. As I've said, he belongs to the next generation; his own children and grandchildren will be more his contemporaries than I.

But to return.

THE significant moment passed; some of us had not even noticed it. Once more the treasure was in the foreground.

Now that Ysabel had said so, we could all see that the filled-in crevasse must be the spot, if any. It is impossible for anyone who has not hunted gold, to know the lust, the hunger that possessed us, once we had realized that almost under our feet, in all probability, lay treasure beyond reckoning. We almost fought each other for the picks— Jerry, Ellis, myself and the skeptical Clarity. We had a couple of native sailors with us, but we wouldn't even allow them a chance; we wanted under that sun, in the breathless heat of the brazen rocks— to do the work ourselves. I still remember how the pick-handle blistered my useless palms almost immediately; how it grew slippery with sweat and twisted; how soon, very soon, I found myself panting like a man who has run a long race, and felt the iron turn to ponderous lead.

When I dropped the pick, some one else seized it; in a moment Ysabel was swinging away with the best. And if you have never seen a beautiful girl, dressed as she was dressed, working with a common long-handle pick, you do not know what the poetry of motion can be.

Pick-work is graceful enough in itself; the commonest rock-chopper becomes a model for statuaries, once he begins that fine backward swing from the hips. But when Hebe herself takes the pick—

I have a little drawing of it; I am not much of an artist as a rule, but just then, for five minutes, while I stood back and watched, my hand was inspired. That bit of an envelope, sketched on with red pencil, is the most precious thing I have.

NEVER, as long as life remains in this body of mine, shall I forget the moment that came soon after— when the picks had been changed for the shovels, and the shovels, in their turn, laid aside for picks again. You would have thought the opening crevasse held some dangerous monster, so fast and hard were the blows rained down into it. I would have taken a pick now if I could have got one— I was rested enough to begin again; but you might as well have asked for the eye out of anyone's head, as the tool he— or she— was swinging.

I don't know how long it was— it may have been half an hour, or twice that time — before I heard an unforgettable sound: the glorious ring of iron upon gold. Take a gold cup from some one's race trophies, if he will let you, hit it with a hammer, and you will hear the live, splendid note that we heard. But you will hear it in miniature only. I think no one now living, save the little band who stood on the atoll that day, has listened to the ringing boom of an iron pick-head on a hollow mass of gold as big as a barrel.

I am not quite sure what I did after that, or what anyone did, for a few minutes. I remember kicking Ellis' shins, as if I had been ten, and getting my head punched, as if he had been fifteen, because I had got in the way, and wanted to get in the way some more. I recall, too, that there was a great deal of scrabbling with hands, and gravel and sand flying, till somebody shouted for the shovels, and everyone began digging again— inside the incredible gold cap that had been unearthed. I remember, too, that I was just a little disappointed; I had somehow pictured the crowns on the lines of those worn by chess kings, splendidly battlemented— and this colossal thing was a sheer tub. Thin, too — it looked like dented paper.....

But when the sand and gravel and loose stones were out of it, and the whole party began to heave, then we saw what we had got. One might just as well have heaved at the foundations of St. Paul's. Not a stir came out of the battered, blackened mass; not the smallest response to the fully exerted strength of four whites and two native boys. It did not need the sparkles that showed where picks had struck, to tell us that this was indeed none but the royal, the glorious metal.

"Avast heaving," ordered Clarity by and by. "Boys, get me that length of chain from the locker, and be sharp about it!"

I dare say they were sharp— being Clarity's crew; but it seemed a very long time before they came back from the ship with the chain. A long time, too, before they had it slung under the mass of gold, and secured above. Time, in such moments, is reckoned by feeling and thought; and we were living a year a minute. The thoughts that chased through my head in that half-hour or so would have filled volumes: dreams of my share, and what I was going to do with it; calculations, badly mauled for want of a bit of paper, about ounces, pounds, pounds Troy, and values taken at four guineas or so the ounce; strange shots of fear, like toothache pains of the mind, when I recalled Jerry's earlier uneasiness; over all, a dim cloud that dulled the splendor of our victory, as years and rains had dimmed the shine of the gold, because— because I had no one who might share it.

Well, they got the chain underneath at last; and then, Clarity directing, everybody, myself included, tailed on and began to haul. For the first and last time, I learned the true use of those eternal chanties. I don't think we should ever have got the mass out of the hole, but for Clarity and his

*"Haul the bowline— the vessel she's a-rollin',*
*Haul the bowline, the bowline haul!"*
*"Heave, bullies— heave and wake the dead!*
*Put your back into it, you Ellis."*
*"Haul the bowline— the skipper he's a-growlin',*

*Haul the bowline, the bowline haul!"*

And more verses that I like to remember, years after the ache has left my knees and shoulders.

Out she came at last, with a bumping ring that drowned the chantey. Clarity stopped, and wiped his forehead; he had been sweating almost as much as the rest of us. There was an immense silence; in the midst of it the small, careless waves of the lagoon sounded on the beach, and yellow-footed gulls took wing from the rocks above, crying.

I had got back strength, and was standing upright once more, opening my mouth to say I do not know what, when the words were stopped by an extraordinary sensation of impending disaster. So strong was it that breath stopped too, for a moment, as it stops in the teeth of a furious blast. Before I had time to catch my wind again, the terror was upon us.

THERE came from far away behind the rocky pyramid, a dull rending boom. As if it had been a signal, the top of the island almost immediately, bowed itself over and fell into the sea, with a terrific splash. The whole place seemed to rock; the landscape dissolved. Spires of stone toppled; fountains burst up in the lagoon. There was a terrible screaming in the air, mingled with crash on crash from the impending peak of the island.

Over and over, the rending boom burst out, shaking the heart with that dread sound that so many of us knew in the red years 'fourteen to 'eighteen—the sound of great guns firing.

Nobody needed explanations. We all— I suppose— guessed that the *Anaconda* had chosen this supposed solitary, unvisited island for gun-practice, after visiting it to see that everything was safe, and that, over the horizon, she was busy blowing it to bits.

Whether any one of us lived for another five minutes was a matter of the extremest chance.

Many brave things were done in the war by Jerry Dawson, but I think his bravest act was done on that afternoon. As coolly as if it had been raining merely drops of water and hailstones, he walked round the shelter of the rock, looked to sea, and came back, dodging two or three fragments of flying rock that might have smashed up a cottage. I saw that he was white as the foam on the far verge of the reef, but I knew that it was not fear that paled him—remorse, rather, for having taken the chance that turned out so disastrously,

He had guessed from the first (if guess is the word) that the place was being used for gun-practice by the Chilean navy. There was, however, nothing to tell that the practice was not for the present finished, and there was every

chance of our being too late to secure the treasure, if a crowd of man-of-war's men were to get into the habit of overrunning the narrow little island. Therefore he kept his discovery to himself— knowing that the facts would not have had the slightest influence on any of our party— and decided to make one swift attempt to secure the gold.

I suppose I guessed this, but at the time I was not conscious of guessing or thinking, or of anything at all but trying to get Ysabel out of the range of falling fragments. I remember that she shouted things I could not hear, and seemed to struggle; but it was a minute or so before I realized that the struggles were not hers. Absurdly, we had all rushed upon her, like a football team rushing on the ball, and were all fighting against each other to drag her out of range. Nothing more dangerous or futile could have been imagined. Clarity was the first to find that out; he loosed his daughter, and shouted down her ear.

JERRY had let go, seeing he was merely making a tug-of-war rope of the girl; I was hanging on, and so was Ellis. When I loosed hold, Ellis went backward, stumbled over himself, and fell. I don't know how Ysabel had managed to keep her head, but she did; she twisted out of the mess, eel-wise, flung her hand into Jerry's waiting palm, and ran with him to the big rock where Clarity was beckoning. Half under it she crouched, and the Captain, arching himself over her like a cat with its kitten, placed his body between her and harm. "But it isn't any good," I heard myself saying. "Bodies are no use; they're only bits of soft meat." The thunder of the big guns had stopped; the island had ceased dissolving around us. Everything might begin again tomorrow, in two minutes, or never. There was no knowing. The *Anaconda* was far out of sight. Doubtless she would steam up and check the hits when she had done; but that was small consolation, considering that we, by that time, might be done also. And if we were not, the gold was as good as lost, once anyone saw it. For what right, after all, could we put up to a treasure taken from Easter Island natives by Dutch sailors, and left on an islet that geographically belonged— in all probability— to the very nation that owned the *Anaconda*?

IN the calm that followed the storm, there was a chance to think these things. I make no doubt we all thought much on the same lines. But— naturally enough— no one wanted, much, to go out into the open and begin hauling the gold down to the whaleboat. The native sailors, crouched beneath a neighboring rock, were shedding tears of dismay. Ellis, rolling a cigarette with unsteady fingers, shouted: 'Who's game to go?" and made no move to leave his own bit of shelter.

Jerry turned and walked to the dirty, glittering mass of the great crown. On the way he kicked the Raratongan boys out of their funk-hole, and they came with him, not stopping to ask questions. He said something to Ellis— something I didn't hear, for I was down beside the crown myself— that jerked Ysabel's future husband out of his retirement as quickly as Jerry's boot had brought out the boys. Clarity started to come out, but Jerry called to him: "Stay where you are, man; she must have some one." And the Captain, nodding, seemed to agree. "It's all down-beach to the boat now," he shouted.

It might have been down, but it felt extremely like "up," as we tailed on and hauled the frightful thing. I do not know whether we should ever have succeeded in getting the crown to the whaleboat or not. As things turned out, there was no need. We had not been straining and tugging with our teeth set and our heels dug into the sand, for half a minute, before the horrible thunder began again, and another pinnacle flew off the top of the island, and smashed down into the lagoon. I let go and ran as hard as I could, back to shelter. So did the Raratongans. I expected to be overtaken by Jerry, but when I flung myself down under a ledge of the pinnacle, wondering, while I licked my dry sandy lips, how long it would be before the whole place crashed round us, I saw that neither Jerry nor Ellis was with me.

The thunder came again, and I flung my head down, and saw nothing for a moment or two, fully expecting to die, for this time I had heard the scream of a shell. When the rending explosion passed, and I dared to look up, I saw three things:

Half the summit of the island gone.

Jerry, standing by the crown, hacking it up with an ax, which bit into the soft pure gold as into cheese.

Rutland Stewart-Ellis, lying in a lake of blood, dead.

It was a minute or so before I thought — so dazed was I— of looking for Ysabel. She was still where I had seen her last. Clarity had left her, and was coasting cautiously along under the rocks.

"The ship's all right," he bawled when he reached me. There was no noise at the moment, but I bawled loudly too, when I replied:

"Sooner we get to her the better."

"What about the gold?" he shouted. "Can't leave it, but can't take it."

I saw that. We should have to make a run for our lives, as if we were playing a ghastly sort of prisoner's base— and maybe lose the game, into the bargain.

"Must be mad," said Clarity, pointing to Jerry, who was still hacking away at the crown. He had bitten deep into it now. An immense thin hollow segment of it was almost detached; you could see the yellow glitter of untarnished metal

about the raw edges. In the strange blank silence that followed the thunder of the guns, the live ring of steel on gold sounded bell-like, marvelous. We stood under our poor shelter of rock, that might at any time be blown away, and watched him, wondering.

Jerry shouted, without stopping work:

"Make a run for the boat. I'll come at the last minute."

Clarity slapped his thigh.

"By Jings," he cried, "I see it." And I saw, too. Jerry was calmly risking— more than risking— his poor chance, by staying out there under possible fire, cutting up the one crown we had secured into portable fragments, which we were to transport if opportunity allowed us.

"I'll go and help," I cried. But Clarity, with his usual cold common sense, held me back.

"Not till it's time," he said.

TIME! Would there be any time for any of us, in half an hour? Or should we have gone where Ellis had gone, over eternity's edge? I thought this, even as I wondered how it was that none of us seemed shocked or moved at that barely perceived tragedy.

Left to myself, I don't know what I should have done. But when you were with Clarity, you usually had to do what he did. I waited, therefore, an interminable fifteen minutes or so. And the guns kept off. And Jerry hacked, and the glittering fragments flew.

Suddenly he stood up, shouting:

"They'll begin again soon."

To this day, I don't know upon what intervals or observations— when all observation seemed impossible— his calculations were based. But I knew Jerry. I followed the Captain at a run down the beach, and the boys came too. And Ysabel started from her refuge, as if to join us, until a shout from her father drove her back:

"You dare, and I'll skelp ye!"

After that, it was a madness of work, lifting bits of dirty, bright-bordered metal that felt incredibly huger than they looked, panting down to the whaleboat with them, casting them in, and laboring back for more. And above us the sky was delicate blue, and the wind hummed over the reef, and the bosun birds and the red-legged gulls wheeled, crying, wondering at the strange ways of men. And still the guns held off.

A strong man, hard driven, can carry two hundred pounds at once. A weak man can raise fifty or so. Among us, we had transported much more than a

thousand pounds weight to the big double-ender boat, before Jerry cried to us to stop, to bring Ysabel and go.

We were blindly obeying him now— among the blind, the one-eyed is king; and Jerry's unnamed sense, that had sometimes helped him and sometimes failed him, through those long wanderings of ours, was our only hope. You cannot imagine, till you have tried, how hard it is to stop in the harvesting of gold; leave off, with desire unsated, while you might yet gather more and more. But we did leave off; we let the lumps we held drop from our scarred fingers to the sand, and ran to: take our seats in the boat— long since shoved down— while Clarity called Ysabel, and went to meet her. Jerry went too, there was no keeping him back from that.

They had to pass the ghastly figure of Ellis. Jerry tried to kick the sand over it as he passed, and in so doing moved the body. Something rolled out from under— a couple of tiny, black-and-white objects. I don't think Jerry knew what they were at first; he picked them up mechanically and carried them in his hand Ysabel saw them, and her mouth parted in a sort of choked cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry, looking at the things. "They're dice— I'll throw them away."

"No, no," said Ysabel, trembling as I had not seen her tremble before the bombardment itself. "Give them to me."

She turned them in her fingers,— all as we hurried down to the beach,— shook them up and down inside her palms, and then, with an exclamation, cast them far into the green still waters of the lagoon.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jerry.

"Get on board!' ordered Clarity. I really think those two might have stopped to discuss matters, if the Captain had not hustled them, sharply ordering, into the whaleboat, and set them, with myself, and the boys, to row. No sailing was possible now; the wind had died, and oars were our only chance. What that boat felt like, with over half a ton of gold, and six passengers under a tropic sun, I cannot tell you, any more than the galley slave of past ages— for whom I have ever since cherished a deep sympathy— could, probably, have told of similar experiences.

The one thing wanting to make our passage a hell was supplied when that damnable *Anaconda* opened out again, and began to smash the reef up with bad shots. Still, the farther we got from her target the safer we were, and it began to look before long, as if we should reach the schooner alive. By great luck she had been anchored far enough away from the island to escape destruction, though there was no knowing how long such luck might last.

IF you ask me what happened after we got on board, I cannot tell you at first hand. I found my berth, and lay three quarters dead all afternoon. I heard the guns stop, felt the schooner get under way and glide forth again— saw, dimly, by and by, green palm trees pass the port, blue empty seas take their place, dusk come with a burning of red fires against the west.

It was late when I stumbled out and lay upon the hatch. And the first thing I saw was a lady in a flowered, lace and silken gown, with ribbons in her hair, sitting unashamed and happy on the knee of Jerry Dawson.

I said the first thing that came into my head, and that was, idiotically:

"Where's your other clothes?"

"Kept for special occasions," answered Jerry. "We're going to lay in glad rags by the million in Callao."

I sat down and did not think at all for a minute or two.

Then I looked up and asked:

"Oh— what about the dice?"

The answer to that was long. But I daresay you will want to know.

YSABEL had gambled herself upon a throw of the dice, led on to it by Ellis, who saw her foolish, schoolgirl fancy for the toys, and made the most of it. And she had lost. But a certain fierce pride in playing the game had held her to her word. How far it would have held her in the very end, I do not know. For Ellis had been clever enough to include, in the throw, a promise not to marry anyone save himself.

But the dice we found on the beach under Ellis' body, the dice he had used, were not his own. They were a trick pair of Ysabel's, which she had made at school, for a wager, in keeping with her pose of being "the wickedest girl in the school." They had never been used except for innocent jests; even her dicing against herself had been carried out with the ordinary pair she also possessed. Ellis had seen the trick pair, and stolen them, days before he made his proposal; and he had substituted the false dice for the true ones at the moment when she had agreed to his crafty plan— taken as in a net by the snare of her own solitary fault.

Well, if it was a fault, he had cured her, for she never touched card or dice again.

You will not find Marooner's Ring if you look for it, on the map or on the seas. It was never rightly charted on the first, and as to the latter, the *Anaconda* started trying new explosives at short range, a few days later, with results entirely pleasing to the Republic of Chile.

As for us— half a ton of gold, we found, was as good for all practical purposes as twenty times the amount. Do your own summing, and see.

Captain Clarity's only comment, so far as report goes, was: 'Now, I suppose, I shall be allowed, at last, to wear my own trousers."

But for days after we left, he sang almost continuously:

*"What shall we do with a drunken sailor?"*

Which, being a sober man, was always his song of joy.

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## 10: Blue Jim Takes a Hand

*Blue Book,* July 1928

THE whole side of the open veranda was a sheet of stars. Out on the beach, not twenty yards away, small waves were breaking in Roman candles of sparkling green; there was sea-fire that night. Without a moon, you could yet see clearly enough to mark the cool emptiness of the coral strand that stretched out invitingly below the '"quarters;" you could trace the line of the gray path leading away among the palms.....

One could not be expected to stand what was going on in the house. No. Not with that quiet strand, that peaceful path, and the stars, to call one out of it. I had not had a minute's sleep since the wretched Roy came in. I could not bear it any more. We were alone in the quarters, and I had heard him crying right along since twelve o'clock— it was now, by my luminous-dial watch, a quarter to three.

If we had been women, I suppose one would have gone to his room, and patted him on the shoulder, and said: "There, there!" or something equivalent. And it might have done somebody some good. I don't know— I've never been very much of a woman's man.

But one doesn't go and look at another fellow crying, blubbering like a child, if one can help it. He wouldn't like it, and you wouldn't like yourself. So there was nothing for me but the empty coral strand with the sea-fires breaking on it, and the reef, miles out, talking as reefs do talk, late in the night.

The reef sounded, and the palms made papery noises, and the loose coral clinked like china underneath my feet. It was not so very silent out there, after all, and that was well, for if everything had been still, as it is on some of the scorching northwest season nights, I should have fancied that I heard, yet, the sounds that seemed branded into my ears, the sounds of Arthur Roy, almost twenty-one, strong and handsome, about to be married, crying through the night before his wedding day. No, I know that the classical situation— in stories— is otherwise. It is the young beautiful girl who weeps the night through, before the day that is to see the last of her single life. But— I have seen the world; I know that the tragic bridegroom is not very much less common than the tragic bride. He doesn't feature so well in a film; he is perhaps the least bit ridiculous; he is bitterly ashamed of his woes, while the tragic bride— sometimes— gets consolation and capital out of parading hers. But, take it from me, his position is rather the worse of the two.

Knowing this; with those terrible, harsh male sobs still in my ears; with the thought in my mind of the boy lying there, his life spoiled, his future mortgaged, his children cursed before their birth— I went along the quiet

strand as if the devil himself had driven me. I found myself talking before long, alone with the night and the sea. "It ought to be stopped," I said; and then: "I— I— for twopence I'd—"

Crazy thoughts entered my mind of fighting Roy, knocking him out, putting him in a hospital for a week or so. The worst of it all was that I knew a week might save him. Just to see the monthly steamer in; just to get communication by means of her radio with the outer was years older, and inches shorter. I might think of knocking out the young giant; thought was as far as such a scheme was likely to go.

"Hell!" I said, and kicked out at a sack of rubbish left by some of the native prison gang in a hollow of the beach. It was duskish there, under the shade of the seaward-growing palms. I was as much astonished as a man may be, when the bag rolled over, sat up, and threw my own ejaculation back in my face, adding indistinctly: 'What d'ye mean by it?"

"Is that you, Blue Jim?" was my answer. "Too bad— I thought it was a sack."

"Granted," came his reply, lofty but confused. Then, gravely: "Are you drunk, too "No. Came out for a walk."

"What about?"

I remembered that Jim, drunk or sober, had always had the knack of shooting uncommonly straight. This was surely a sample. I temporized. There was no use giving away Roy's troubles to this insouciant gold-miner, known all over Papua as Blue Jim, on account of an early accident that had stained one cheek of his good-looking dare-devil face the color of the sea. I had known Jim was "in;" the island generally knew all about that. About two o'clock he had hailed me from the steps of the hotel, where he was sitting with a boot in his hand. The other boot was in its natural place. "Look at the holes in me sock," he had complained. "Been walking up and down the town since eleven o'clock, trying to put on other boot. Can't stan' on one leg. Not a st—a stork. Eve'y time, tummle over. Never get that boot on." He looked at me angrily, and I withdrew, lest he should make a personal matter of it. When Blue Jim "came in with a shammy" (of gold), he seldom Jeft the island town without a fight.

And here he was, apparently sobered off, sitting on the beach at three o'clock in the morning, probing, with the very first of his recovered senses, for my secret. That was jim. .... I had often wondered why a man of such sharp intellect should choose to bury himself among the all but inaccessible gold-fields of the mainland; but I had never discovered any reason.

"I— just came," was my lame reply, now.

BLUE JIM stretched out his legs, regarded, with some dismay, the still unshod left foot, and asked me irrelevantly:

"See a wild boot running about anywhere? Lasso it for me if you do..... Spit it out, mate,"

"What, the boot?" Jim and I had been "mates" once, on the occasion of my sole, disastrous venture to the gold-fields. Since then he had kept the sort of liking for me that a competent man (Blue Jim was most competent, at his chosen job) keeps for a pleasant bungler. That I didn't bungle my new work of Government hospital assistant, was nothing to Jim. I think he mixed that up, inevitably, with ideas of caps and aprons. Whereas gold-mining, as the world knows, is above all a man-sized job.

"You know I don't mean the boot," he said pleasantly, but in the moonlight, I could see a wicked twinkle in his eye. Jim was as mischievous as a goat, on occasion. I feared he would simply add to Roy's troubles by laughing at them, but I supposed he was bound to know in any case. So, briefly, I told the story—more than I have told here.

The effect astonished me as much as I have ever been astonished in my life. Jim, regardless of his unbooted foot, sprang erect on the coral gravel, and cursed the wedding, the bride, her relations, the island, the minister, and everything else connected with the ceremony that was to take place next day, as if it had been his own.

"Hold hard," I said, amazedly. '"What's it to you?"

"Nothing. Only that I— I can't stand— You say he got left a couple of days alone with her when the launch broke down, at the plantation— and her brothers got at him, and threatened to have. him thrown out of his job; and the girl said she'd tell the manager herself?"

"Yes. I think he'd have better lost a dozen jobs than marry such a catamaran."

"What did they mean to do if he refused?"

"Bring the usual action— down South. Jim, it's a put-up job if ever there was one. She's ages older; she's knocked about the island bars for donkey's years; what she doesn't know isn't worth— Anyhow, he treated her as he'd have treated his own sister, all along. And they talked about innocence, and lost character and betraying. Betraying! It's the lad that has been betrayed, and is paying for it. Why, the very peacock voice of her—"

Under the light of a warped, late-rising moon, Jim looked extraordinarily sober.

"Island bars," he said, musingly, and then: "Voice like a peacock— How long's she been here? Never saw her."

"Some months. Came up from Australia shortly after the last time you were in. Do you know her? Jones is her name."

"Common as dirt. Common as my own name— near as many Joneses as Smiths knocking about. Doesn't tell me much— but— Has she reddish kinky hair, fat figure, big red mouth half round her head?"

"That's she. Do you—"

Blue Jim slapped his leg, suddenly and violently; and the empty beach rang with his wild, not-quite-sobered laughter.

"If you're up to any of your games," I told him, suspiciously, "call it off. Call it off before you begin. This lad is a mate of mine. We've shared the quarters for six weeks, and a nicer fellow never stepped —if that red-haired Satanella had left him alone. I wont stand any funny business where he's concerned."

Not without reason did I speak; Blue Jim was known all over Eastern Papua as the most incorrigible practical joker in the Territory.

The warning seemed to sober him. He looked at me curiously. 'Yes, it is damned funny," he said. "It must be funny to hear him yelping in there like a pup. And you without the ghost of a notion what he's yelping about. That's the funniest thing of all."

I felt the prick of Jim's renowned tilting-lance. ''What—" I began indignantly. But he was going on.

"Funny— funny! Funny the way he rolls over on his bed and curses her and himself, and looks to see if the dawn's in the sky, and thanks his God when he finds it isn't— yet. Funniest thing of all is to hear him say about a hundred thousand times: 'My wedding day— it wasn't to be like this.' And then he says the girl's name another hundred thousand times—"

"Whose— Judy Jones'?"

"No, owl! I don't know whose. How should I know? I know there is one. Seen her? No. Have I seen the toes inside your boots? I haven't. But I know you have toes, because people do have them invariably, whether you can see them or not. Think that out, turn round three times, and curtsey to the new moon for luck and wisdom."

"She's an old moon," I corrected.

He was not listening. "Have you got, or can you get, a *bagi-bagi*?" he demanded.

"What on earth do you want with one?"

"Never mind. Have you?"

"One of those red shell-money belts the natives wear— the sort they're so dead keen on getting? Well, *dagi-bagis* are growing very scarce, since the boys stopped making them. I don't know that I could—"

"You are the blazing limit. Isn't the window of your quarters next the Government Museum, where they have lots, and doesn't the roof run right up? Well, then, let me have your room for half an hour, and we'll see about the *bagi-bagi*."

"Are you asking me to become an accessory before the fact to a robbery of Government property?" I demanded severely. One is not Civil Service for nothing.

Blue Jim simply winked. "Come off it," he said. "You're going to be accessory to murder tonight, if I tell you."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because young Roy is your friend, and you want to help him."

"Nobody can help him," I answered with some sharpness. "I told you that already. That's the particular hell of it— that, and the fact that it would be all right if the thing could only be put off till the steamer's in."

"Do you mean to say the tigress would let go her prey just because a B. P. boat came whistling round the corner?"

"Yes. The truth is he made a false declaration when he said he was twenty-one— wanted to be sure of basic wage from the Company—and if anyone could get his father on the wireless, the old man could stop it like a shot. He's not twenty-one by two months. But the brothers say his signed declaration of age, made six months ago, is good enough, and they'd like to see him trying to lie out of it, now. They have him all right. The parson don't dare to go back of that."

"What, parson! Has she the cheek—"

"You bet. Parson, Anglican church, bridesmaids, orange-blossoms, veil, and the whole bag of tricks. Honeymoon on Wheeler's plantation; the happy pair depart by launch! It's a crime."

"Couldn't he break the marriage, after?"

"No. Lots of similar cases. The courts don't break 'em. Against public morality, they say."

Blue Jim made several blistering comments on public morality and suddenly sat down on the coral strand.

"Head bad again?" I asked him. I was almost sure of it; the whole of his conversation, during the last few minutes, had seemed to me either crazy or half-intoxicated. But he astonished me by replying gravely: "No. Never clearer. I'm going to put on that boot."

He had found it, and with some difficulty, rejecting all help, got his foot inside. "It's swelled,' he remarked briefly. "Tf ever you get drunk and go without your boots—"

"Pardon me; I shouldn't be likely to— as a civil servant."

"No. Not enough of you for the whisky to stick to anyhow. But if ever you did, I hope you'd remember to put them on before they got too small for you. It's a bad thing to be too big for your boots."

HE was cocking one eye at me now, like a humorous parrot; and once more I had to remember that Jim was famed for seeming-innocent satire. Hurriedly I changed the conversation.

"You didn't tell me yet what you wanted the *bagi-bagi* for."

"Nor won't. What you don't know'll do you no harm. The *bagi-bagi* can wait a little. I'm going to find Bwalé-uta."

"Who?"

"Oh, you know the name, do you?"

"I— can't say. I've only heard of one Bwalé-uta— the chap who was had up before the magistrate for sorcery. He did time for it, and now he's loafing about, getting into mischief, I suppose. I suppose it wouldn't be him you're looking for."

"I shouldn't be likely to— as a civil servant." Jim was walking away down the crashing gravel— quite steady now, so far as I could see.

"But you're not a civil servant," I could not help adding.

"That's just the point," was his last remark, as he went. I thought it over, and concluded that Jim might really be looking for the native criminal.

"They'll raise a scandal among them, somehow," I said despairingly. 'I only hope to heaven I'm not in it."

It seemed to me indecent to return to that house. I found a bed on the veranda of the hotel— you can always slip in and take a bed there, without hindrance, provided there's no one in it before you. And after the disturbed first half of the night, I was glad to sleep.

Morning came, and I woke, conscious of a tangled dream wherein Blue Jim, criminals, bagi-bagis, and museums, were absurdly mingled. And then I recollected that it was Roy's wedding morning, and that nothing could save him now.

THEY were decorating the church— a mockery of mockeries. Miss Jones' energetic family had cut down innumerable palm-leaves, and were making them into arches and sprays. Through the tall windows one could see the matchless blue of the island straits. A canoe like a big brown dragonfly floated lazily past. I don't know what there was of peacefulness, of careless warm content, about the scene, that made me, by contrast, angry. How could the whole world look like that, when a lad's heart was breaking?

Only island folk know how bitter island sorrows are; how the certainty that every trouble has to be lived through in public, adds keenness to its smart; how love troubles, money troubles, health troubles, all alike are worsened by the impossibility of looking for help outside the one tiny community of souls. But worst of all it is, to know that help could certainly be had, in a few, only a few more days— when by nothing short of a miracle can those few days be given. What the steamer means to the islands, only the people of the islands know. On her they depend as nestlings depend on their mother; just so long can they live without her, and no longer. For her black wing of smoke in the distance, they watch from dawn to sunset; when they see her, the heaven rings with their happy cries. In the long interval of her flight, a bird or two may have come to grief for want of her— fallen over the edge of the nest into nothingness; starved; been snatched by some marauding hawk that she could have driven away. Safety comes with her— often leaves the port and island when she goes.

The hawk had snatched my friend; and there was nothing to be done about it. I could see the bird at that moment. Judy Jones— no one ever remembered that she had been christened Julia— was visible on the veranda of her brothers' house, prematurely attired in white. I took a good look at her as I went past. If she was not thirty, I decided, I was doing her grave injustice. She was grossly fat, red in face and hair, with a certain coarsé comeliness about her, and a black eye that called. I had heard her talking; she dropped an "h" now and then, said "Go on!" at every second sentence, and when crossed, could swear like any of her brothers. As for them, when I say that they were the typical Jukes family of the colony, students of heredity will understand— and pity.....

I went on to the quarters. If I had shirked last night, it was no time for shirking now. I could picture Roy, just as clearly as if I had already seen him. The boy had pluck. He would be dressing, making the best of himself, shaving with an uncertain hand, tying a white tie. He'd try to bluff it out, pretend that he was doing this thing of his own free will. Handsome Roy, Roy with his life all before him, and only this one piece of ill-luck behind— to be paid for so much too heavily! If all had been known that was merely guessed at, there were probably half a dozen men who ought to have been in his place today. I cpuld picture their relief; could understand, only too well, why Roy, who had good connections, and might have money coming to him, had been chosen out for victim. I had no belief in the "accidental" breakdown of that launch. I recalled how he had spoken the day before, when sunlight kept his spirits up, and the sacrifice was not quite so near:

"No, old chap, I reckon I'll have to go through with it. She says her name's disgraced, says everyone believes the worst, and her family will turn her out to starve. I— I can't leave her like that. Who said I was being forced into it? Rot. I'm doing the only decent thing."

He had laughed then— laughed as soldiers used to do in the war, with a cigarette half falling from white lips, and pain tearing their bodies. .... He did not know how thin the walls of his room were, how much they had told— last night.

Remembering that, I felt half crazy when I went through early sun between the flowering hedges of frangipanni and hibiscus, back to the quarters where Roy was breaking his heart.

I can recall the strange shadowy look of it all as I came in— the blinds of green cane still down on the veranda, making a dim light like the light of forests; Roy's door wide open, one shaft of sun striking through; the mosquito-netted bed within, tall and ghostly. Why! The lad hadn't got up!

Making as much noise as I could, I tramped across the floor, and pulled the net from under the mattress of the bed. He wasn't even awake. "Roy!" I called, and again "Roy! You'll be late." After all, I was best man, and had my duties.

THE bar of sunlight struck across the pillow, right on his face. For an instant a wild thought had possession of me, "He's dead," and with it came almost a wilder: 'Better that way." I saw, then, that I was wrong. He was merely sleeping— but what a sleep!

There was almost no color in his face. His eyes were not quite closed; one could see the shine of the unmoving balls between the thick black lashes. His lips were parted, but I could not be sure that breath was coming through, until I had felt his chest. That seemed to be heaving steadily.

Ill? Yes, he seemed to be ill. But what kind of illness was it?

The cooky-boy, who had crept up shivering with fright, seemed to think himself better informed. "This one bad sick my masser have," he whispered, staring at the motionless head. "Me savvy him too much."

Of course, as a member of the Chief Medical Officer's Department, I could not tolerate that. I told the boy not to talk nonsense, and to go for the doctor.

"Dokita no good belong this sick,' he demurred.

"Get out and do what you're told," I ordered. He slipped away, muttering to himself some rubbish or other concerning *bagi-bagis*. That was nothing— the natives are always talking about such gear— but it reminded me of something I had forgotten: Blue Jim. I had not seen him since the previous night, but I felt it in my bones that he was up to mischief somewhere. "Lord send he wont drag me into it," I thought, the while I felt Roy's forehead, took

his pulse, and as a last resort, slipped my clinical thermometer under his arm. . "Temperature tells," I thought. "If fever's in it, and fever mostly is in everything, he'll be a degree or two above normal. Anyhow, thank the gods of luck, it's beginning to seem as if that damned wedding might have to be put off after all."

I took the thermometer out— and it was nearly two degrees below normal!

While I was looking, some one came to the doorway, and peeped in: a tall, naked native man, splendidly made and muscled. He had the woolliest head I ever remember seeing on any Papuan— a veritable fleece. He had dog-tooth necklaces, mother-ofpearl lockets, bead chains, armlets of white clamshell, anklets and bracelets of trembling scented grasses. He had at least a dozen scarlet hibiscus flowers from the garden of the quarters, disposed about his head and body. His face was painted in stripes of white, black and annatto red. A more magnificent-looking personage I had never seen among Papuans; and there was, with it all, a certain deliberate importance that showed him to be a man of standing.

I am bound to say that he did not display any respect for myself or for my position as a Government officer. He merely walked over to the bed, looked down at the unconscious Roy, remarked as if to himself "*Ja namu*!" (''That's well"), and left.

"Here, you, stop!" I called after him. "What do you mean? Who are you?"

He paused on the veranda. "I Bwaléuta," he answered proudly. And I knew that I was looking on the famous, or infamous, sorcerer who had terrorized a whole district, committed the devil knew how many murders, and, just come out of jail, yet as full of pride and cheek as if he had been presented with the D.S.O. Nothing could down Bwalé-uta.

"If this was a damn theater show, they'd say there was no unity about it," I muttered, mopping my brow. Bwalé-uta had disappeared; the doctor hadn't come; Blue Jim's madness was still unexplained; the cook-boy had seemed crazy; nothing seemed connected with anything, and everything nevertheless mixed up with everything else. "It's enough to drive any sober respectable body out of his mind," I thought; and while the words were forming, the whole Jones family came in.

There were two brothers, tall, rangy brutes, like wolfhounds, but for the expression; no decent dog ever had such a look on his face. There was a grandmother, near as broad as they were tall, with a wreathing smile on her unholy old lips, and an eye that looked too many ways in too few minutes. There was some sort of a kid sister; I only remember her hair, a burning bush, and her legs, long.and stalky, like grasshoppers' legs. And right in the middle of

the bunch, with her veil half off her head, and her Number Eight white satin shoes soiled with island mud, came the bride.

JULIA was set for battle. Breathing hard through her nostrils, and standing in the midst of the room, she faced me and demanded: 'Where's me husband?"

"Have him ou' o' that," advised Granny, nudging one of the wolfhounds. "He's shammin'. Ou' o' that with him."

"I beg your pardon," I intervened, as the bigger brother made a hostile move towards the legs of Roy. "Mr. Roy is ill: I've taken his pulse and temperature, and there's something seriously wrong."

"He's dronk!" bellowed Granny. The whole scene was revolting to me: I could have wished the entire Jones family dead with pleasure, if wishes ever had a chance of being fulfilled.

"I'm a Government official," I said.. "I forbid you to touch this sick person. The Chief Medical Officer will—"

"The Chief Medical oyster be damned," interrupted the elder Jones. 'Here's at him." He was actually starting to pull the unconscious Roy out of bed— Julia, meantime, weeping noisily and artificially in a corner— when the entrance of Dr. Griffin, with orderlies and a litter, altered affairs.

"Where's my case?" demanded the big doctor, in a thunderous voice. "What the devil are you doing with that man's leg? Since when've you undertaken to treat my patients for me? Clear the room, there, till I see if this disease is infectious, or you'll find yourselves on the quarantine island for three weeks, every man jack of you."

Griffin had chosen his words well. "Disease"— "infection"— promptly emptied the room; and the halo of mystery and power that hangs about a doctor's verdict, kept the Jones family from pressing further inquiry, though they still remained hanging about the road. Being, as one may say, an augur myself, I was not so deeply impressed. I thought I had seen the shadow of a wink.....

But when Griffin had made his examination, there was not the ghost of a wink left. "Queer," he muttered, tapping his long chin abstractedly. "Queer. I've seen something like this— in West Africa. Curious sort of coma— very." He touched the half-seen eyeballs with the corner of a handkerchief. They never moved.

"Take him to the hospital," said Griffin. The orderlies lifted their burden, laid it, covered, in the waiting ambulance; and so began that melancholy journey from the beach, up and up, among the palms and the custard-and-crimson croton trees, that has been taken by so many men of the islands.

Always, in my hospital work, when I saw the ambulance winding up to the red roof on the hill, I used to wonder: "Which way will he come down?" For there were only two ways— feet planted on the shining coral gravel, or feet lying in the ambulance once more, on the way to the funeral launch.

"Collect his things and follow," the Doctor told me. I turned down the bed, and began looking for money and such like. I found what I was seeking—Roy's poor little pocketbook, with a thin wad of notes in it, ready for the sacrifice that had seemed likely to merge itself in a greater' sacrifice yet. I also found something I had not been looking for, but was in no degree surprised to find, one of those fine leather cases with a glassine panel in the front of it, covering a photograph.

I took a good look at the picture. It was signed simply with the sweetest of all women's names, "Mary." The face caught one by the heart, so young, so gallant and gay it was, with all the courage and fun of the dear "flapper" of these days, shining out of its big straightforward eyes. "Mary" expected the best from life; didn't mean to have any worst of it; but if worst came, would face it like a gallant little gentleThat was what I read.

Then I remembered Jim: "Funniest thing of all to hear him say: '*My wedding day— it wasn't meant to be like this*,'

"Why, my God!" I said, "Jim must have been right; he must have known. How on this blessed earth did he—"

IT WAS very quiet in that dusk room, with the green blinds hanging motionless against the sun outside, and the ghostly mosquito-net draperies trailing, dead and white as snow, upon the polished floor. Nothing moved, nothing sounded, except one hurried, droning fly. Somehow, in the stillness, understanding came to me of the history of Blue Jim, more than he had ever vouchsafed to any. man.

"It was the same with himself," I thought, amazedly. "He spent a night like that one— and maybe he didn't get off. No wonder."

I saw the squat form of Mother Jones roll past the doorway.

"Hey," I called, gathering things rapidly into a suitcase, and preparing to leave, "do you know where Blue Jim is?"

"He's dronk," she said. "He was dronk last night, and he's dronk again this morning."

She cursed him with curious particularity. I think she had somehow guessed at Jim's opposition to the marriage, and was resenting it, after her own fashion.

Gathering Roy's gear together, and handing it to the cook-boy, I started for the hospital. I had been sorry to hear Jim was "off" again. Vaguely, I had been

hoping more from him than I cared to acknowledge. If this swoon of Roy's broke up— and there was no reason to suppose it would not— within the next three days, the case would be no better than before.

It was growing very hot. I toiled, panting, up the long height, down which men come sometimes so easily, on a longer journey still. Halfway I stopped to breathe. I could see the palm tops glittering in the sun, and the beach outspread below, a belt of blinding white.

"Jim," I said to myself, "oughtn't to have gone off like that again. How am I to know if he meant to do anything, or what he meant? And what did that discreditable nigger pal of his mean, bumping in? And what—"

Consecutive thought, for a moment, deserted me. I had seen on the beach below, a tall, brown figure stalking: a figure unclad, but hung all over with as many gauds as a Christmas tree— Bwalé-uta! And proudly disposed across the wide chest of Bwalé-uta, worn like a bandolier, was the largest, brightest bagi-bagi I had ever seen.

I remembered, then, that I had found the looking-glass in my bedroom at the quarters overthrown, when I came in that morning. The glass stood in the window—the window that gave on the roof joining that of the Government Museum.

"Well, whoever did it," I thought desperately, "it wont be found out for a bit— nobody ever goes in there. And perhaps Jim will sober up first. If he doesn't, they'll say I took it. I'm damned if they wont—my room and all. And a bagi-bagi like that is worth every penny of ten pounds!" And I went on up the hill.

WHEN I got there, Roy was lying in the deadest coma I ever saw in a man, temperature down another point or two, pulse slow. The doctor was beginning to call him an "interesting case," which, as all hospital workers know, bodes ill for a patient.

"Four days to steamer day, isn't it?" I said, looking at the bridegroom who was to have been. You could see better than ever what a handsome fellow he was, with his thick hair brushed high off his dead white forehead, and black fine bars of eyebrows and eyelashes showing up against closed lids.

"If Mary could see him now," I thought, "she'd love him more than ever." For I was convinced— without much evidence to go on— that the gallant little flapper of the photograph loved Roy as heartily as he deserved to be loved.

Thinking of Mary, I was moved to speak; and I told the Doctor everything. Most of it was old news to him; but he caught like a bird at the idea of Roy senior forbidding the banns.

"I see, I see," he exclaimed. "Most fortunate incident, from one point of view; but I tell you frankly I don't like some of the symptoms. If he stays four days in that state, it'll go hard with him to come out."

My heart gave a jump. I had not expected— that. You may think a man is better dead, even say it; but when some one in authority begins to suggest the idea may have a solid foundation, things look different. To die, at twenty—

I don't know how I got through my work that morning; if I did not dress wounds with beef-tea, and coax bad cases to eat with cups of corrosive sublimate, it was more owing to good luck and set habit than anything else. Lunch-time came, and I went off into the windy hot sunlight again, glad to get the smell of disinfectants out of my nostrils for a while. Descending the hill, I met that Bwalé-uta again.

He was loafing about in the palm clump halfway down; a quiet place, hid alike from hospital above and town below. He had his betel-nut gourd and spatula at work, and was munching steadily in a sort of ecstatic peace, just like a cow chewing her cud. As I made to pass him, he barred my way.

"How is the *ibitoe* (marriageable at young man)?" he asked.

"Do you mean Mr. Roy?" I queried coldly. It seemed to me that Bwalé-uta,. like other sorcerers, really did not know his place.

Bwalé-uta nodded, licking his spatula.

"He is very ill."

The sorcerer looked at me inscrutably.

"How is Jim Smith?" he asked. As usual, he spoke excellent English, in contradistinction to the common native jargon. I must say I thought it cheek. I like a native to be a native.

"He is— ill."

"That's a pity," commented Bwalé-uta. "I should have like to talk to him. No matter."

He was barring my way—insolently, I thought. I am a small man, but I hope I am dignified. I motioned the Papuan aside.

Instead of moving, he burst out into sudden sinister laughter, hooked one leg inside of mine, and threw me to the ground. I hadn't time to shout. Bwalé-uta's hand was over my mouth, and in a minute he had forced a gag of rolled grass into it, nearly suffocating me. He tied this on with my own handkerchief. Then he knotted a piece of cord round my ankles, lashed my hands together, and swung me into—what?

The Government ambulance.

THERE it was, brought down from the hospital by one of my own orderlies, at the bidding of this unspeakable villain, kept, no doubt, in waiting, till the

proper minute. They pulled down the hood, started off, and in a moment, gagged, helpless, trussed like a fowl, and, I was on my way—whither? I could not even guess. Bwalé-uta was the terror of his village, the lord (it seemed) of every native he encountered, not excluding my own Government orderlies. He had a bitter grudge against the Government and its works, due to his late imprisonment. Probably he would not dare to kill me, but that he planned some form of revenge seemed almost certain.

"Disrespectful in the last degree," I muttered to myself, half choked by the gag. And then I saw something that had escaped my notice at first—something that made me angrier than ever. Disrespectful! Why, Bwalé-uta had dared to abduct me, not even in the decent ambulance used for white people, but in one of the rickety, rackety old vehicles kept for and used exclusively by natives! If I had been near choking before, I all but swallowed the gag, when, by and by, I heard a white man's voice, close to the ambulance.

"Hallo, where you go alonga that one?"

The Government ambulance. It was one of the storekeepers, a friend of my own. If I could have spoken! I moaned through my nose, and Bwale-uta, hearing, instantly covered the noise with a careless burst of native song. He didn't stop, either; he went on humming and wailing, as they do, not preventing my friend from speaking with the orderly, but quite covering any little noise I was able to make.

"This one New Guinea boy he go finish," explained the orderly glibly.

"Dead nigger, eh? Who's the other?"

I could not catch the orderly's reply. "Other?" I wondered. "Then I did really hear two ambulances." For it had seemed to me, going down the hill, that once or twice I caught the sound of wheels behind me.

The storekeeper made no further inquiry; clearly, he was not interested. No one troubles over dead natives. I heard my friend's slow footsteps dying away, and then indeed I knew that I was deserted.

We were on the level now, wheeling across a narrow stretch of sand. I cannot describe the horror that took possession of me, when I realized that the ambulance was being lifted across a gunwale, into a boat. For the cemetery was on another island, distant some two or three miles across the straits, and no ambulance was ever taken over there save for the purpose of burying the corpse that it contained.

WHEN I felt the motion of the boat, heard the strokes of the oars, and realized that I was in all probability on my way to be buried alive, I made so much noise, moaning and choking through my gag, that Bwalé-uta raised the hood of the ambulance, and put his handsome, wicked face inside.

"Wassa matter?" he demanded. "Nobody going to hurt you."

It was almost dark now, but I could see the glassy stare of his eyes, and realized that he was half drunk with the potent betel-nut.

I did not quite believe him, but somehow I felt better. After all, I reflected, I had the British Government, the Empire, the Crown itself protecting me; why should I be afraid?

It was nearly half an hour before the gunwale slid up on to soft sand, and the boat stopped. They lifted the hood now, and I saw, dimly outlined beneath a moonless sky, the long pale beach and leaning palms of the cemetery island. Bwalé-uta pulled my gag out as one uncorks a bottle, and the rage and abuse that had been choking me throughout the journey burst forth.

It was "moonlight unto sunlight, and water unto wine," however, compared to the explosion that took place a yard or two away. I leaped in my seat when I heard. "Hold still, can't you?" complained the sorcerer. "What way I cut you loose?"

With difficulty I restrained myself until he had loosened my feet and hands, and then I jumped out of the ambulance, and forthwith tumbled very nearly into the arms of— Judy Jones!

SHE was still in her bridal dress. She was, at the moment when I caught sight of her, engaged in tearing the veil from her head, rending it in pieces, and trampling on the remains. And the torrent of bad language that flowed from her lips made me realize once for all what Roy was— possibly— escaping.

There was not much time for thought. Judy turned on me like an angry dog. I was Roy's friend, was I? I had done this, she supposed— had her kidnaped when she was taking a sleep in her granny's own garden. Well, she would have me to learn that she, and her family, were not to be put off by such tricks. Who did I think I was speaking to? (A mere figure of speech— I had not dared to open my mouth, any more than I would have opened it beneath the downdrop of Niagara.) What did I think I was? She would tell me (she did, with embroideries, footnotes, and addenda). For two pins she would assault me. (The exact phrase, I think, was that she would "smack my chops."')

They say that I ran into the sea and tried to drown myself. That is entirely inaccurate. I merely retired waist-deep, and awaited a lulling of the storm. Judy, I knew, was no lover of cold water.

When she had got to the stage of sitting down on the sand, and crying, I came out— partly. I stood fairly near, and told her that she was laboring under a misapprehension, that I was, in fact, as much a sufferer as herself. She seemed to grasp this fact after a while, wept rather more, and asked me if I had "anything to keep the cold out, on me." As it happened, I had— overproof

alcohol, meant for other uses than internal; but I was glad to produce it, and offer it to her, laying it on the sand at some distance from her person, and instantly retiring. She drank all there was, and went to sleep.

DURING the course of our dispute, Bwalé-uta had taken away the boat, so we were abandoned on the cemetery island, and, in fact, were exactly in that position so often celebrated in the short story of today— a man and a woman alone on a desert isle. I have never, since then, been able to understand why such a situation is pictured as agreeable.

I spent the greater part of the night walking up and down to dry my clothes, cursing my bad luck, and wondering what on earth the whole silly business might be supposed to mean. In between times, I found leisure to reflect on Roy, and to feel exceedingly uneasy about him. I could not suppose that the mysterious coma would persist until the arrival of the steamer, four days ahead, without death ensuing. And if it did not persist, we were all exactly where we had been. And why Blue Jim, at such a time, could not have. managed to keep sober— at least, to keep sober a little more, or a little longer— was hard to understand. I was convinced that Jim was the key, the hope of the whole situation.

I had plenty of time to muse upon these, and other matters, during the passing of the longest night I ever remember. It seemed at least a week before the eastern sky, over the township island, began to turn from gray to dusky orange, from orange to sunrise red; before the houses of the town, across a plain of brightening rose, showed out like beads strung along the white thread of the shore; before the groves of frangipanni flowers, death-pale and deadly sweet, began to shine like trees covered in newly fallen snow among the long grasses of the neglected cemetery. But day did come; and with it came a surprise that made me, for the moment, forget even Judy Jones, just waking out of her chilled uneasy sleep upon the shore, and beginning anew her angry complaints.

For I saw, with eyes almost unbelieving, a steamer anchored alongside the town.

It was nothing to Judy. She did not know, as I did, what a steamer, fitted with wireless, and able to send messages to the magic land of "South," meant to Roy and his forced marriage. Nevertheless, she handled the situation with a certain ability. "You'd better start signaling straight off," she said, handing me the torn remnants of her veil. "Tie it on to a stick, climb up on that high rock, and keep shakin' it about till somebody sees you. If it's true what you say, that they been havin' the loan of you too, I reckon you want to get back and get even with them, same as me."

"I can't imagine," I said, "what induced Bwalé-uta to behave in such an extraordinary manner."

"Too right," she agreed. "He's a fair cow. Now you get up and shake that rag."

"There's no need," I told her; "something's coming."

Something was coming— a small but fast launch, and in it— as the speed of the boat soon allowed me to see— Blue Jim.

Blue Jim entirely sober, and rather sorry. Blue Jim driving the launch hard, and anxious— apparently— to get in as soon as possible. Nevertheless he stopped his engine in several feet of water, and letting the boat drift slowly with the tide, hailed me cautiously, before attempting to land.

"What sort of a night have you had?" he demanded; and I was not in any way placated by the twinkle that I fancied I caught in his eye.

"You can imagine for yourself," I replied, with some dignity.

Julia began to weep. "I don't know what crool vile man set that nigger on to leave me here among the dead corpses on me weddin' night that should have been," she complained. "But if it hadn't been for this kind gentleman he left too" (I could scarcely believe my ears, remembering the names she had called me,), "I'd 'a' had me death of cold. And now you can bring us both back again as quick as you like."

"How's Roy?" I asked anxiously.

"All right and walking round. He got better," said Jim, choosing his words carefully, "about half an hour after the boat came in. Soon after Bwalé-uta got back with the Government whaleboat and ambulances."

"What about the wedding?" I cried.

"Yes, what about it?" languishingly demanded Julia.

Somehow she tertified me, when she began to languish. I could understand how she had terrified— almost fascinated— the wretched, captured Roy. I could— What was Jim saying?

"Somebody," he cocked a wicked eye as he said it, "somebody sent a radio last night, after the steamer got in, to old Roy in Sydney. And he radioed back that his son was under age, and he refused consent. So that's that."

I expected hysterics from Julia. I got nothing of the kind. She was not made of such poor clay as to waste a fit where it could be of no conceivable use.

"Come ashore and tell me about it. It's true I was 'ropable' yesterday," she said, still with that languishing tone in her voice. "But I can forgive the boy; I know he's been misled."

Blue Jim ran the launch in, dropped anchor, and sprang ashore off the bow. He swaggered up the beach with his hands in his pockets. He had both boots on today, and looked reasonably tidy. He was shaved, even, and in spite of the

blastingpowder mark that had given him his name, one saw that he had been a personable, even an attractive man at a time not very long past.

"I owe you an apology," he said to me with a side glance, which I found hard to translate, toward Julia. "Bwalé-uta's a good lad, and knows his friends, but when he gets chewing too much betel-nut, as he did yesterday, he's apt to mix up names. Nothing more. Somebody— I wonder who it could have been?— advised him to kidnap Roy in an ambulance, and drop him in the cemetery for the night. And the same bad lot was wicked enough to suggest he should 'puri-puri' "(enchant) "this lady here, so that she'd stop quiet at home for the first time in her life, until the steamer came in—"

"How—" I interrupted. Jim flowed on.

"Seems Bwalé-uta had had news by 'native wireless' that an extra boat was to call; all the natives knew. Well, he got a nice present given him, and went to work hard to earn it, being an honest gentleman on the whole. But he couldn't find his— his boss, let's say— to tell him who was what, when he got a bit confused. So he had Julia here kidnaped instead of Roy, and put Roy to sleep instead of the lady. And he rounded it off by kidnaping Roy's chum, you, to make everything all even. Good lad— only a bit apt to mix things up. I know what it is myself, sometimes."

Jim stopped, and began to feel in his pockets for his pipe. He looked entirely satisfied.

Not so, Julia Jones.

"I'll have my rights!" she began. "If this gentleman has taken away my good name before the township, by staying all night on the island with me, I'm sure 'e'll act as a gentleman, and make amends." She gave me one of her terrible, languishing glances. I shuddered, as a man may shudder who sees a snake strike at him, safely separated from him by barriers of a strong plate glass.

"My wife's coming up next mail," I said quickly. "She was only waiting till I got a good job with the Government."

Julia turned her eyes, her large, dusky, wicked eyes, on Jim.

"You can spare that," he commented coolly, lighting his pipe, "because your mother isn't dead; and anyhow, a man can't marry his stepdaughter."

"It was you who dusurted my mum?" cried Julia. 'You left her the day after you married her, when I was just a baby?"

"A baby of fourteen— yes," agreed Jim. "Old enough to remember me, I reckon, only in those days I hadn't been fooling about with blasting-powder." He took a long, satisfactory draw at his pipe. "And your old granny never met me," he went on. "Else I don't suppose I'd have had the chance to—"

"What?" demanded Judy, dangerously quiet. 'What, if you please?"

"Fetch you back in my launch," ended Jim, with one of his wicked winks. 'Are you coming quietly, or would you rather stop here among the dead men?"

Judy said no word, but she gathered herself together and went.

I SAW Blue Jim depart again for the gold-fields, which are according to his own somewhat fanciful description, "at the back of nowhere, and the end of Godspeed," I saw him leave with his money all spent, his health just a little further broken than the last time, his future a little deeper mortgaged. He laughed as he went. There was a tall, dignified, clever-looking native in his boat; and the native, Bwalé-uta, wore a splendid *bagi-bagi*, very like one that the Government still is looking for.

Roy went "South," got another job— and is married, I hear.

When I was looking over one of my Kiplings the other night, I came upon a passage opposite which certain initials had been lightly written since last I saw the book— it had been extensively lent about the town, and I had only just recovered it.

The passage was Mulvaney's:

*"Can him that helps others help himself, sorr? Answer me that."*

And the initials were "J. S." Almost the commonest initials anyone can have, but somehow I could not help fancying they stood for Jim Smith—Blue Jim.

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## 11: The Flaming Sword

*Blue Book* May 1933

ROBERT NIVEN, hard and thin and thirty, watched his fellow tourists start to pile into the seven cars in which they were covering the island of Bali. He had had plenty of time to look at them already during this world voyage, but somehow he had not really seen them until now.

They had just finished lunch at this rest-house on a Bali mountain-top. After having collectively paid their organized tips, and collectively looked at the view, they were ready to be off.

"I'm not going," Niven said suddenly. The forty-six companions of his journey cackled. The cars honked. The procession swept away, and silence fell.

Niven brought a chair out from the rest-house, and sat down to smoke and think. Far below him were forests, blue and green as a peacock's breast; ricefields of aquamarine and silver; the huge sinister cone of the volcano, smoking a little today; misty clouds drifting by.

Bullock carts went by. A Bali man or two passed, leading little cows beautiful as deer. The men were handsome; they wore richly colored sarongs and bright turbans. He had heard that they did no work save the cultivation of the ricefields; hard enough, but by no means constant. They danced every night, listened ecstatically to the strange complicated music of the gamelan gong bands. They had fighting cocks, and bet furiously on the matches. They had horses, rode them, petted them, built showerbaths for them along the road. They smoked, indulged agreeably in the agreeable drug of betel nut; and they and the beautiful girls always seemed to be eating; Niven wondered how they kept their statuesque figures.

As for love, no wonder the men went proudly and held high their handsome heads, knowing themselves so precious to the lovely, innumerable girls. Every man could have a beautiful wife or two; and so amiable were these Bali folk that even the rival wives did not quarrel.

Robert Niven could not help thinking that it was somehow wrong that these people should be so happy. They didn't work enough. They hadn't earned it. Here was he, a successful Ulsterman, taking this world tour not because he was extravagant (Lord forbid!), but because he had become thin and run-down from overwork as manager of the Dalriada Weaving Mills. Here was he almost a third through life, and he didn't expect for another ten years to be as far on as every one of these Bali men was now.

There was something wrong. What?

Two people came out of the rest-house behind him and walked across the gravel. Niven was annoyed. He had wanted the place to himself.

Then he saw the face of the girl, and decided she wouldn't be in the way. She was almost as graceful as a Bali girl. Not quite. No clothed white woman could be. But she had beauty of an unusual and distinguished kind. Bronze-gold hair and blue-green eyes, white satin skin and a red, delicate faun-like mouth. And with all these, something else. She had the almost regal bearing of one used to homage.

Where had he seen her before? The elderly man with her was her father, Niven decided. They walked on; and the young man, baffled by his half-recognition, went in and looked in the register. Under his own bold signature, he found the new ones. Nationality, British. Address, London. Names, J. J. Laverty and Miss G. Laverty. A common enough name in the North of Ireland.

"Perhaps they're traveling incognito," he thought. Well, he wouldn't bother them. But one wouldn't be in a hurry to leave this quiet lovely rest-house.

He returned to his chair and his view. Again peace possessed him. Was it possible, Niven mused, to find a way through the invisible wall separating these calm and beautiful and happy people of Bali from the restless, dissatisfied race to which he belonged? He had money enough to give up business now, live almost anywhere in a modest way, with maybe just a little house, sun and flowers and good food, and sport (they shot tigers in Bali), and a horse to ride, a fine little Timor stallion costing no more than a pound. With— with— why not? They were lovely; and you could, if you wanted, marry one— or two, or more.

There the magic glass of his dream shivered. Since he had seen the girl with the bronze hair and blue-green eyes, he hadn't wanted any one of these Bali sweethearts who walked with golden basins on their heads and carried so beautifully their bare lovely figures, supple as flowers. Perhaps it was the beauty, the golden climate, the magic and mystery of Bali; but he almost thought he was in love—after one glimpse—with this unknown girl.

Then he lifted his eyes, saw her coming back from her walk, and knew immediately who she was. Genevieve Lavelle, the singer!

Lavelle! Here in the farthest East at the height of the musical season! What could have happened? Lavelle, who had taken the musical world by storm with her marvelous voice; a daring, amazing girl who rode wild horses, flew her own plane, continually astonished her public. Not for publicity but for the sheer enjoyment of it.

He remembered now that she had changed her name from Laverty to Lavelle for stage purposes. So the older man was her father!

She seemed a spirit of flame. In her the hidden romance of the North had fully flowered. Luck, incredible luck, to be alone with her, or almost alone, on

this mountain-top of Bali, with the bond of a common nationality to draw them together!

Before night came down with wind and misty stars, the distant glow of the Batoer volcano lending a false warmth to the cold sky, Genevieve Lavelle and Niven had made acquaintance. After dark, sitting wrapped in steamer-rugs, they found themselves becoming friends.

But first of all, he had to find out why she was in Bali in the midst of the musical season. She told him quite simply. She had had diphtheria, lost her voice— it was thought, irrevocably. Yes, she felt frightfully about it, but one could get over anything if one only made up one's mind. And Bali was the place to do it. Why ? Oh, because it was such a wonderful end of the world, where nothing seemed to matter. Yet there was always a new thrill or two....

As if the word had been the chime of an alarm-clock, Laverty, dozing in a corner of the lounge, raised his head.

"What's that you say, Jinny?" he demanded.

"I was saying," she answered smoothly, "that Bali is the end of the world."

"I heard ye. I heard more than ye think. And I can tell ye that ye're not going to go makin' a silly show of yourself before the natives."

"What is it she wants to do?" Niven asked.

Genevieve, lying draped in her rug like a Tanagra figurine in a classic shawl, turned toward him with a swift impatient movement. The rug caught and held her; she flung it off.

Niven had a curious vision of the spirit of the girl, held by circumstance even as her limbs were held by the heavy wrap. Talk of thrills! Had she not lost the finest thrill of all, the singer's great moment, sweeping Valkyrie-like above the world on the winged steed of her voice? In that nightly apotheosis, passion, feeling, had found release that was now denied. No wonder she struggled, sought for excitement, wherever she could find it.

Her father answered Niven curtly: "She wants to go and spend the night in one of those native temples."

"But I don't understand—"

The girl broke in. "Surely you've heard about the native women who defied the law, and went and passed a night in an unconsecrated new temple, down at the little port beyond Boeleleng? They won't let a woman do that, or anyone, if they can help it, but a woman most of all. And, of course, she wanted to find out why."

"Did she?"

"Maybe she did. She never said. She was found dead in the morning."

"You want to try it? Why?" Niven asked.

"I want to find out." She was lying on the floor again, swathed in her tawny wrap, long and supple as a young pantheress. Her eyes, as she looked up at Niven, seemed to shoot sparks of gold.

"If I could make her look at me, for me, like that," he wished, knowing that in truth she was not looking at him, but through him, at some strange picture in her mind.

"I shall go," she said. "I shall go and stay the night in the inner court of this new temple they're putting up halfway to Singharadja. There are two almost together. People say you see wonderful and awful things—"

"Ye were simply taken in," put in Laverty.

"If you don't believe there's anything, you can't mind my trying. And if you cross me too much, and keep forbidding— well, you know what might happen."

The old man turned dark red. "Has he had the impudence to come after ye?"

"As to that, I don't know. I heard they were in Java, sometime ago, he and she, and that they were getting on as badly as ever."

Niven felt slightly embarrassed; the conversation was becoming intimate. He could guess what remained unsaid— a married admirer, a girl, restless, desperate... What a fool her father was to keep her from seeking sensations in her own way!

THERE was a momentary silence. The wind, cold as an English wind, battered about the bungalow; in the chilly lounge, pictures swung on walls, papers rattled, and "the long carpets rose upon the gusty floor." Tonight, at this very moment, black heat brooded on the pains below, among the palms and the anana groves, where Bali maidens walked, laughing and fanning, and *legong* dancers sweated, in their jeweled silks, posturing to the silver clang of the *gamelan* band. A climate within a climate; one more count in favor of marvelous Bali. These people had all— even to heat or cold at will. Country of a fairytale, if ever there was one.

Well, he would be mad. He would capitalize what he possessed. He would buy a little land, have a little bungalow, somewhere among the banyan forests and the rice. Leave civilization behind him. Ride and swim, and shoot Bali tigers, keep fighting cocks, race spirited Timor stallions. Live on palm-wine and Malay *hors d'oeuvres*, like the Bali people. Sleep the hot days, travel and dance the moonlight nights through. Share it all with a blue-green-eyed girl who wanted excitement and who, by Jove, if she joined her life with his, should have it.

As for the married suitor, he'd crush him under his heel like a cockroach. So far had Bali brought him in a day and half a night— Bali, where all life ran slowly and softly, except the life of love.

All this he thought in a moment. The next, he said: "But, Mr. Laverty, there can hardly be any objection— if your daughter takes precautions."

"Ay so? And what pree-cautions would ye suggest ?"

"Well, you know how these temples are built— no roof, just open courts with carved walls and shrines. She wouldn't be shut up. She could make her experiment if she liked, with you and myself staying outside the walls, ready to come in if called upon."

"And me with chronic lumbago ? No, thenk ye."

"Well, then, myself, if you trust me."

"I trust Jinny," Laverty dryly answered. "But I tell the both of ye, I don't like it."

Followed a week or two of uncertain weather, heavy rain at night, and high winds during the day. Genevieve's project was postponed for the time being. Some travel was done by the three, some quiet sight-seeing, away from the larger parties. The rain passed over; weather of gold set in. Temples and altars stood out in the pure light, lovely beyond telling, for the most part quiet, with now and then a Bali maiden coming to kneel before a shrine, hold up high her offering of fruit and flowers; with, once in a way, a brief eruption of tourists shouting, snap-shotting, storming about the place and trampling underfoot its loveliness; then, in a few minutes, storming on again, with laughter and loud honking of many cars.

In between, often for days together, there would be such silence as Niven had never dreamed of; silence that did not merely exist, but was kept by something unnamed and unknown. Then the temples, with their flowering trees standing stately within grass courts, their strange and terrifying faces grinning down from walls and columns among stone bird wings that seemed about to rise and flutter; the temples, with their dreaming stillness, their gray beauty, and their rare, amazing outburst of pure sensuality, springing up here and there among the lovely carvings like flames among flowers— all this seemed to symbolize, as nothing else could have done, the very spirit of Bali.

IN these days, it seemed to Niven, Genevieve was feeling the spirit of the place as he felt it. Love, he knew, if it came to her here, would come swiftly. And there were little things that encouraged him. Her voice, that lovely speaking voice (how, he wondered, could she speak so like a singer if her voice was gone forever?) softened exquisitely when she used his name; her thoughts

seemed to lean toward him. It was as if she caught and read what he was thinking, without need of speech.

"To have a home here," she said one day. "To live among these people who are so happy— it would be like heaven. And I'd study their music. You don't know how much there is in it—"

"I know they simply live for it."

"I could find things in these *gamelan* orchestras that no one else has found. They shake you so. They are wicked sometimes. But they're— great."

They were standing alone in one of the innumerable temples; a frangipani tree shed falling stars upon her bead; the wind went ruffling under dark-arched gateways; a long way down, below the temple courts, from among the fields of rice that shone like emerald and gold, came faintly the tingle-tangle of a native band.

"It's as if the whole country sang," she said. "And the people— they sing even when they are silent. Let's never, never go back!"

She had come to it herself. He took one quick step nearer; he was about to say the words that should bind them both to Bali forever, when they were struck from his lips.

A TALL stranger had come into the temple court, was advancing with a smile toward Genevieve. Niven instantly guessed who it was, summed up, in a quick second glance, the appearance of his rival. The man was about forty; he wore whites and a solar topee, like most of the tourists; he was massively made and had a penetrating, commanding black eye. Sallow he seemed, like one who spends much time indoors, and there was something of the scholar's stoop about his wide shoulders; but he had good looks of a certain stony kind.

One could not tell how much, or how little, Genevieve was pleased by the interruption. With the perfect self-possession of the actress, she turned to the newcomer and met him smilingly.

"This is quite a pleasant surprise," she said. "I thought that you and Mrs. Messervy were still in Java."

The man said, looking hard at her: "Mrs. Messervy is still in Java." Then he added: "We buried her in the cemetery at Batavia, six weeks ago. Java fever."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

"You understood the unfortunate circumstances, I believe. In such cases—"

"Yes, exactly. May I introduce Mr. Niven ? Professor Messervy, of Camelot University. The Professor is frightfully clever; they actually pay him to run round studying colored people and so on. I'm not clever; I don't understand his work, but you must listen reverently to everything he says."

Niven saw that she was chattering to hide her embarrassment. Somehow, that pleased him.

The Professor threw a coolly estimating glance in Niven's direction. He saw a sandy fellow with a very blue pair of eyes, and a toothbrush mustache; a tall, tough, ordinary young man who didn't look as if he owned any sort of degree.... Niven had taken his B. A. at Trinity College, Dublin, but that would not have saved him in Messervy's eyes.

Ignoring Niven, he spoke to the girl.

"You mustn't undervalue yourself," he said. "You understand, I'm sure, that marriage customs are my specialty— primitive marriage customs, as compared with those of later origin, in especial. I believe there will be great scope for observation here in Bali, where they have so happily solved the serious problems of unsatisfactory marital relationship which continue to embarrass nations supposed to be higher in the scale of civilization. —Have you got a match?"

The last sentence was addressed to Niven, and for the moment it made him jump. Then he realized what was wanted and produced his box.

Messervy gave it back, started a large cigar, and continued his talk with Genevieve.

"This," thought Niven, "is a new sort of professor— not much like the kind in books, in spite of his long-winded chat." Messervy, he thought indignantly, had taken the girl away from him as coolly as he would have taken the last piece of bread in a shipwreck, and for the same reason— because he thought himself more worthy to have her, and it, than anyone else.

"But we'll see," Niven told himself. "We'll see."

NEVERTHELESS, things changed from that time on.

Professor Messervy attached himself to the party, and it seemed that Laverty, at least, was inclined to like his company. Niven thought he understood. If Genevieve was not going to make money by singing, it might be well for her, from Laverty's point of view, to marry a man who evidently had resources above and beyond any furnished by the university. Messervy was a free spender when his work or his pleasure seemed to require it. His clothes were impeccable ; he hired the best of cars, and his purchases of Bali gold and silverwork, so Niven enviously noted, must have made a big hole in a hundred pounds.

He didn't give away any of the stuff, but he recommended himself to Genevieve by taking up the question of the proposed night visit to an unconsecrated temple. All the facts about the end of the lovely native girl who had been found dead in the temple beyond Boeleleng, he industriously

collated, and compared with similar incidents elsewhere, letting loose so deep a flood of comparative anthropology upon the heads of the two men and the girl, that in the end nobody quite knew what he was talking about. They did gather, however, that he took the question seriously, and that he was by no means opposed to Genevieve's experiment.

"He's told us nothing we didn't know before," Niven somewhat bitterly commented to old Laverty.

"I d'knaw," the other said. "The fella did say that thur's a tradition that Bali doesn't like the white people—"

"Exactly. Some of them, anyhow. They call the tourists wild beasts."

"Ay, but before thur were towrists. There's been a gey wheen of fellas took the notion they'd like to stay here, but nawn of them has, except maybe a two-three, and they're naw lucky.... It's not the natives themselves, though. Maybe I could find ye a reason or two again it, though I'm naw professor."

"What do you make of it?" Niven inquired.

"I make this," the other answered. "The like of us were cowped intil the wilderness, owa the Garden of Eden, long ago. Maybe we were the better for it. But anyhow, ye can't be goin' back, once ye're out— the angels with the flamin' swords keeps the gate."

"Do you believe all that?"

"Spur'tully, ay; acshully, I d'knaw. No matter. The swords are thur. And thur's no luck for annyone tries to lep over them."

"It sounds like nonsense to me," Niven commented. "But I dare say it isn't. Anyhow, it won't affect you— by the look of things."

GENEVIEVE and Messervy were walking up and down the shady avenue of waringin trees that ran outside the hotel. They had been constantly together during the past few days, and Niven had seen almost nothing of the girl. He was beginning to feel unhappy about his chances. Genevieve had been somewhat attracted by this man, even before the death of his wife. Was the fascination returning? Niven could not tell. He did not believe that Genevieve would choose Messervy before himself, simply as man to man— the fellow must be as unscrupulous as they make them, to have made love to her when he wasn't free; and anyhow his talk, disguised as it was in the garments of science, showed him to have not as much decent sense of morality as would lie heaped up on a thruppenny piece— so the Ulsterman indignantly put it to himself.

But Messervy had personality, fascination beyond common; one could not mistake that. Genevieve— had she been caught in the net?

FULL MOON came and passed, and dry weather came with it. Genevieve's experiment was fixed for a night when moonrise was due about twelve o'clock. That would give time to reach the unconsecrated temples in the dark, secretly, so that neither the Dutch Government nor the natives should know what was afoot, and it would make sure of light later on, when perhaps light might be wanted.

Messervy, who as a matter of course took everything into his hands, had declared his intention of spending the night in the temple adjacent to that chosen by Genevieve. There was not a stone's throw between the two; and he would, he said, be quite near in case she wanted him. Niven, wishing uselessly that he had thought of this idea himself, was left to make his own plans. "It won't be necessary for you to bother at all," Messervy told him, addressing him much as if he were a tiresome undergraduate. Niven made no reply— there was no use talking.

When Messervy and Genevieve, about eleven o'clock, started afoot for the temples, Niven silently followed them. Hidden, he watched the girl run lightly up the steps of the nearer court, flashing her electric torch to see the way. She carried a wrap over her arm; she was whispering and laughing with Messervy. The professor, encumbered with rug, pillow, sandwich-case and flask, as well as a torch and a revolver, had clearly taken no chances where he himself was concerned.

They had a long whispered talk at the top of the stairs. Niven noted, with relief, that Messervy was not pleased by the substance of it. He seemed to remonstrate with Genevieve; once he came so close to her, snatched her hand so eagerly, that Niven was on the point of coming forward.

But Genevieve smilingly withdrew from him; she seemed to bid him an amiable good-night, and went up the steps, under the great carved archway, into the temple courtyard. Messervy went down the road to the gateway of the second temple and, ascending the steps, disappeared.

Niven, during the daytime, had found a hiding-place for himself— a clump of young bamboo, just outside the wall of the nearer temple. There he settled down to wait. He didn't know just what he feared. The Bali people were kind; even if Genevieve should be discovered in the very act of desecrating their holy places, violence was not to be apprehended. And the Professor, whatever his ideas of morality might be, would surely not annoy a young girl whom he confidently hoped to marry.

No. There was something else. Of course, one did not believe in such things; but Genevieve had been drinking in stories about Bali ghosts and devils: About the evil spirits that haunted every native temple until the sacred ceremonies had driven them away, and set the carved stone guardians at the

gates upon the watch for wicked things. About the special risk run by women, who were more obnoxious to evil spirits than men. Genevieve was sensitive, like all artists; if she saw a shadow, she might be frightened. He must be near. As for Messervy, Niven placed no confidence in him. He would be making anthropological notes by the light of a torch; maybe he'd even be sleeping...

It was very quiet there in the little grove. Only the stars looked down upon the new pale loveliness of the temples; only the coco-palms, outside, whispered; and the scent of lotus from the sacred ponds lay on the air. In the temples not a sound was heard. Messervy must be sleeping. As for Genevieve—

WHAT was that? Niven sat suddenly upright. He had been conscious, ashamedly, for some little time, of a curious sensation of fear, a mounting dread that seemed to come in waves, as though something unnamed, not to be understood, now and then sent forth a cautious tentacle toward himself, and then drew back into dark. Yet there had been no sound; only the faint gossiping of coco-palms, and the drip-drip of water from the temple ponds. There had been nothing to see, although the moon was up at last, and everything clear as on an English winter's day.

Now, from the temple where Messervy watched, came a strange noise— a choking sound, the sound of a scramble and of a fall.

NIVEN was instantly on his feet, listening hard. Was there no noise from the court where Genevieve sought her perilous thrill? Yes. There was a sound,— impossible, yet not to be denied,— a sound as of low sweet singing.

"God!" said Niven. He vaulted the temple wall.

He did not know what he expected to see, but he had a loaded revolver in his pocket; he took it out before he looked about him after landing violently on the grass. Then he saw Genevieve standing in the middle of the court, under the pouring moon, just as she might have stood in days that were past beneath the limelight that falls on and follows the prima donna of opera. And she was singing!

Her voice had come back; there she stood, head raised and eyes half closed, singing just as a bird sings, exquisitely, clearly, some light operatic air.

Niven ran forward and caught her hand. "Are you all right?" he cried.

She did not answer him, did not seem to see him. She went on singing.

He tried to lead her away. She followed where he led her, stopped when he stopped, never looked at him or seemed to be conscious of his presence. And still she sang. The beauty, the horror of it, shook his heart. It seemed as if the

very spirit of her had fled in the night, leaving instead this mechanical singing bird caged in the body of a beautiful and soulless woman.

"She's had some fright," he thought. "Saw something that shook up her nervous system, brought back the voice, but left her— left her—"

No, he could not say it.

Staring about him in the vivid moonlight to see whether any trace of that which had alarmed her was left, he saw Professor Messervy. The man was lying across the low wall that divided the two temples, his head and arms trailing down on the grass of the court.

"What the devil does he think he's doing there?" Niven wondered. He went over and lifted the body. Messervy was dead, and his face was not good to see. The man had died in terror.

Hand on lip, Niven stood looking— looking. What had Messervy been doing on that wall, in the midst of the lonely night? Why had he started to come over to Genevieve, who (Niven was almost sure) had but just refused to marry him? It might have been that he was fleeing from something frightful, unbearable, that had pounced on and torn his scientific beliefs to shreds, there in the unconsecrated temple. It might have been— otherwise. In any case death, and an ugly death, had caught him.

Leaving him there till morning, when the Dutch officials should look after the matter, Niven took Genevieve by the hand and very gently led her home. She sang a little now and then along the way. She did not speak.

There was an inquest and an inquiry. Messervy, they said, had died of heart failure brought on by the effort of climbing the wall. His spirit-flask was found beside his rug and pillow— empty.

No more was to be known.

AFTER some months Genevieve Lavelle took up her singing again for a short time— on concert platforms only. But it was whispered that she had lost her mind; that she seldom if ever spoke, but could not keep from appearing in public and singing with all the former beauty of her voice.

Laverty was despondent, but Niven, going in day by day to the flourishing factory of which he was now part owner, never gave up his hope, his conviction that Genevieve would recover.

"She ran frightful dangers," he said to Laverty, "but the thing— whatever it was— did not get her. It couldn't."

"Why for no?" Laverty asked, and Niven explained:

"The Bali people tell you that evil spirits have little power, comparatively, over any pure young girl. The native woman who died had no such shield."

"Havers and nawnsence," was Laverty's acid comment....

But Niven's faith had its reward, apparently. For gradually a change came over Genevieve. And while public appearances grew distasteful to her, she became in speech and thought, seemingly, much like any normal woman. Never once, however, has she referred to that night in the Bali temple; it may be that those hours are mercifully gone from her memory.

And if Paradise has been denied to Niven and to her, even as it has been denied to you and me, their marriage has been, to all seeming, at least as happy as most marriages. One learns not to ask too much of this world.

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## 12: Sands of Coral

*Sun* (Sydney) 26 May 1940

SHADOWS of palm leaves, flickering like uneasy fingers, moved upon the outspread surface of the chart. It was three o'clock, the sleepy hour, in Samarai. It was the sleepy middle of the month, when no ships call. On the verandah, in the hotel, up and down the shaded, coral-sanded street, there seemed to be nobody about or waking, but Monty Freeman and the beautiful Martha, bending together over Monty's chart.

Monty was sitting very close to Martha. When he leaned across the chart to mark the place of an island, his sleeve brushed the skin of her bare arm. Under the table, his heavy foot touched hers. Martha, mechanically, moved away. She had hardly noticed. She was listening, as so many others had listened, to the siren song of Monty Freeman. Who was not making open love to her— yet. Who was merely explaining what he had done for her husband and herself.

"...Tell you, you're in luck. Nobody knows these islands as I do. There's nothing like them— anywhere. Hundreds, all sorts, off this long tail of New Guinea. Big as the Isle of Wight, and small as your bedroom. Flat as pancakes, and eight or nine thousand feet high. Like Goodenough— or Normanby, five thousand. Look at her there, beyond China Straits, forty miles away."

He pointed with raised hand, and again, as if accidentally, touched the girl's bare arm. He wasn't looking at Normanby, far and pale, a sun-faded sapphire floating in blue space. He was looking straight into sapphires bluer and nearer— Martha's eyes.

"All sorts of things in these islands," he went on, with the rich roll in his voice that, time and again, had lured notes from buttoned-up pockets, cheques from hesitant fountain pens.

"This is Papua, and anything happens in Papua. Gold there. Mica. Osmiridium. Pearlshell. Bêche de mer. Thermal country, beats the Yellowstone. Nobody living on most of 'em, except where something's been discovered. World in itself. And when I found out about Marie Celeste, just before that boat arrived in with you and Chip on tour, I said— 'Chip's in this with me. For the sake of old times and the good old school.' "

THERE was water in his eyes as he spoke. Monty, fattish, fortyish, handsome and well-tailored, with a heart as hard as a peach-stone underneath his superficial softness, was always able, at short notice, to work himself into a belief in his own essential generosity. He felt himself, just now, to be a benefactor of the human race in general, and his old schoolmate in particular.

Chip Carey, years younger, had in truth been at the same school, although their acquaintance, a slight one, dated long after Monty had left.

The pearl lagoon— unproved— which he had managed to unload on Chip and Chip's not-so-easily managed friend, Will Brander, became, in Monty's eyes, once he had parted with it, a veritable treasure house. Cheques in the hand, just then, were more important to Monty than any amount of mythical pearls in the bush. But there was really no reason—no reason at all—why Marie Celeste shouldn't have pearl shell. There was also no particular reason why it should...

CHIP had leapt at the bait like a trout leaping at a fly. Pearls and gold, in Monty's experience, blinded men's sober judgment, when you dangled one or other before their eyes. It was like saying "rats!" to a terrier. The terrier got all worked up about it, even if there wasn't a rat within a mile.

So there was Chip Carey, out on the hunt for diving boys, and here was he in the hotel, falling in love as hard as he could with Carey's new young bride. Monty, a connoisseur of women, hadn't for years seen anything like this girl. Nineteen, slender and tall as a reed, and white, he dared say, underneath her scrap of silk clothing, as any of the ivory-stemmed slim palm trees that stood balancing against the blue— hair a cap of gold; eyes so unbelievably blue, that you had to look at them again and yet again, to make sure that you hadn't imagined the color; eyelashes as long as the imitation lashes they stick on for a day in Hollywood— only Martha's had been stuck on nineteen years ago, for good, by Nature. No make-up almost; she didn't need it, save for that touch of geranium rose on her far too kissable lips. (Monty meant to know the taste of her lip-stick, very soon). Feet sandalled, slim and dainty as her hands, with coral nails you'd want to kiss— well, no wonder he had gone down before her. She was like nothing he had known. She was as fresh, as sweet and simple as a primrose, and at the same time, as taking as a—

Monty, even in his own mind, hesitated before the word "tart." But that was what he meant.

Carey had no right to have married her. He was far too young. Too frivolous. Too poor. He couldn't, like Monty Freeman, make fortunes as fast as they were lost and spent, give a woman the things she wanted— the things that Martha ought to know she needed. Jewels. Furs. Motor cars. Chip Carey gave her kisses, and she was crazy about him, but that couldn't last.

Martha said, intent upon the map, "Where's this Marie Celeste? It isn't marked?"

Monty, taking her hand in his, guided her slim forefinger, with its poppied nail, to a couple of black dots.

"I'll pencil the names by and by. One of these is Marie Celeste. The other is Napoleon. They have native names, too. A long way off from anywhere; near the mainland, but it's a wild coast; no whites there for a hundred miles."

MARTHA laughed. "I'm thrilled. The whole thing is so romantic—like living in an adventure book. What a lot you must know!" The look she threw him was one of simple schoolgirl admiration, but it went to Monty's head like wine. Wait till Carey's away, he thought; before he comes back again... The sentence broke off short in his mind. It was as if he could see it in the afternoon sky, written in letters of fire. But now it ran some-what differently; it ran: "If he comes back again."

One side of Monty's mind asked sharply of the other: "What are you thinking about?" The other answered: "Nothing; what d'you mean? This is a damned dangerous country, anyhow."

There was a gold pencil, a company promoter's pencil, in Monty's waistcoat pocket. He took it out, and carelessly played with it. Martha, absorbed, continued to hang over the chart.

SHADOWS lengthened; the leather-necks began to curse and quarrel in the palm-tree crowns; Government offices closed; and Carey came home. Martha tossed the chart across the table, leaped to her feet and ran. Freeman saw her flying down the street like a bird. Back she came with Carey's arm clipped fast about her waist; Charles Carey, known as Chip; a tall, wiry fellow, with a fair tousled head of hair, a laughing eye, and a merry way with him.... Such chaps were always poor, thought Monty, always would be poor. You couldn't keep a Monty down for long.

The honeymooning pair were absorbed in each other; they didn't even see Monty Freeman at first. Monty watched them for a minute, biting his thick lips. Then, swiftly, he picked up the chart, made a couple of marks upon it, and put it back on the table.

"I suppose that's right," the other Monty, at the bottom of his mind, demanded questioningly; and he answered carelessly— he was careful to be careless— "Of course!" Carey came up to him, with Brander in the rear.

"This the place?" he asked, picking up the chart and sending his glance roving among the constellation of islands, islets, atolls and reefs, about the long tail of Papua, until it rested on the pencilled marks that Monty Freeman had made.

"THAT'S it. Marie Celeste, known among the natives as Mate-Mate. The other, a mile or two away, is Napoleon, or Gigibori."

"Think we can make it all right?"

"Of course. I'll give you the correct bearings, and you'll strike it in a day or a day and a half. Get your boys? What kind?"

"We got six, Goodenough boys just in; can't speak a word of English, but the interpreter translated when we took them to sign on. I said we were going to Marie Celeste; they called it something else— can't remember what."

"Goodenough boys?" Monty seemed satisfied. "Don't let them rattle you into going wrong; they've probably never been there, and there's reefs about. Keep to your course. I wish I could go, too, but business, business, you know— can't get away just at the moment."

Martha put her arm round Carey's neck, and began to whisper into his ear.

"Could she go, too?" Chip asked, somewhat doubtfully. Freeman pondered.

"Not a hope. No, Mrs. Chip, you'll have to do without him for a little. Don't want to shock you, but these natives— they aren't exactly angels, and a charming lady let loose in a lot of men—"

So she could blush, and as prettily as her Victorian grandmother might have done. This girl was everything, had everything. It seemed that Carey, that paltry fellow, had run off with a Cullinan diamond....

Chip's new friend, Brander, commonly known as William the Silent, stood in the background and said nothing. Monty shot an unpleasant look at him. He didn't like silent men. And he seemed to remember something about this one....

Shadows were falling. The figures of the four holding council stood out in a silhouetted frieze against the angry evening blue. Papua's mainland, dusk and sinister, concealed itself in smoky clouds beyond. Jim Hoppner, magistrate and poet, passing by, saw the group, and felt its significance as, perhaps, no other would have done. One more sacrifice to Her, he thought, who knew Papua to his cost. They come, and they stay, and they go, broken men— or maybe, they never go at all...

But Martha, ruffling the hair of her Chip, said joyously— "Isn't it all perfectly priceless?" and Chip slapped Monty on the back, and said he didn't know how to thank him, and Monty said it was a marvellous country, and began his selling spiel all over again, for practice. William the Silent said nothing, but that might have been because he was drinking beer.

STARING, bright, un-friendly, the isle of Marie Celeste (so named, in the long ago, by pious French explorers) rose from coral seas. Carey and Brander had taken near two days to find the place, losing their way, crawling and breaking down in an underpowered launch, with a discontented native crew. The boys were a nuisance; they chattered all the time; didn't know anything

about the course, and seemed to disapprove mysteriously of everything that was being done.

"Queer looking place," Brander said, breaking a day's silence. "Hope we get something out of it. But—" he paused to light another cigarette; he was something of a chain-smoker, smoked as he breathed, smoked, it seemed, instead of speaking— "but— I don't much like men called Monty. In general and in particular."

"Why in general?" Carey asked, conning the launch through a threatening maze of shoals.

"Because it's because of someone called Monty that I'm a chartered accountant out of a job. Nothing meaner than a chartered accountant out of a job. Believe me."

"And," he added, after smoking for a minute in silence, "I have a sort of idea that this Monty was that Monty. Different surname. Some years ago. I wouldn't pass the accounts of their dud company; they got their knife into me. I wonder if he knows. Doesn't matter. Port, or you'll put us on that reef."

The island grew brighter and nearer.

"Mate-Mate," Carey said, swinging the tiller. "What does that mean, I wonder?"

Brander, unexpectedly answered— "Death or dying, or something of that kind. I've picked up half a dozen words of the lingo. Gigibori —Napoleon, over there, means hot. No accounting for these native names. This looks hot enough for anything."

They stared ahead. Mate-Mate, or Marie Celeste, was one of two islands breaking a long surface of plain sea. To the left of it, some five or six miles away, rose the darkly-furred, inhospitable peaks of the Papuan mainland. On the right, a good deal nearer, lay Napoleon, a pleasant place, high, purple-blue, with shores of ivory sand. Marie Celeste, Chip thought, looked poisonous; its colors were nasty bright, crude greens and sticky, shining blacks and greys; the sort of colors that would make you sick if you licked them....

It had a great deal of dirty-looking beach, and it was ringed all round by glittering green mangroves. Over the tops of the mangroves within the island, one could see a faint, nickel-colored shining.

"THAT'LL be the lagoon," Carey said. "What are those damn boys doing now?"

The question was rhetorical; it was quite plain what they were doing. They were crying. They were pointing to the fairy towers of Goodenough, faint in distance. They were viciously shaking their fists at Marie Celeste. One of the

boys, a fellow who fancied himself as an engine driver, tried to take the controls of the launch.

Brander knocked him flying.

"Don't know what's up, but we can't stand this," he said.

"I think they're mad," Charles commented. "Keep them quiet while I get her in."

The boys had ceased crying, as suddenly as they began. One of them now began to imitate the roar of an angry bull. He wanted Brander to listen to his efforts; he stopped, nudged the white man, and bellowed a second time. "No farmyard imitations required," Carey said; and Brander pushed the native out of the way.

"Hold your gab," he said. "Way 'nuff, Carey, this ought to do."

Once ashore the crew seemed to recover. Under Brander's orders, conveyed by signs, they busied themselves landing stores. The engine boy made signs expressive of a pearl-diver at work. He pointed to the inner lagoon.

"Yes, you'll get plenty of that," Carey told him. "What about having a look, Will, now we're here?"

William the Silent, despite his silence and his chartered-accountantship, was young, almost as young as Carey. The thought of pearls and pearling set him aflame. This was their island, no matter what it looked like. This was their adventure, beginning at last....

"Let's go," he said, striking in through the mangroves.

Carey followed, shouting; it became a race. Together they reached the shore of the inner lagoon. Long and mysterious, dull green, linked with the sea by a single narrow passage, it filled the heart of the island.

"THIS place is all beach," Carey commented, staring about him. "Sort of horseshoe shape. Sand and mud and sand."

"And stinks," added Brander.

"Scents," Chip contradicted. "Flowers of some sort somewhere. But I don't see them."

"Stinks. Perfumed stinks. Queer," Chip said, hands in his pockets, "Monty told us the island had a lagoon with coral horseheads sticking up. I remember that. When, we were bargaining with him over the price of the lease. Said there were shells lying on the beach. I see the lagoon, but I don't see anything else. Maybe it's the tide."

William the Silent said nothing, but a low, uncertain whistle escaped from his lips. It was answered, strangely, by the whistle of the launch. Carey, damning the boys, made for the belt of mangroves.

"It's that cursed engine boy," he panted, "playing the fool again. Hell rip the guts out of her and have us marooned on the island— nobody comes here in years— Hurry!"

He crashed through the mangroves, shouting. Grey-white, the outer beach rose before them. The sea shone blue beyond. There was a pile of stores upon the beach; nothing else. Against the blue of the sea the long, black line of the launch moved swiftly, setting towards Goodenough. "Toot, toot," went the whistle again, derisively, as the boat slipped round the corner of the island, and disappeared.

CAREY ran up and down the beach cursing. Brander ground the butt of his cigarette into the sand with one heel.

"But— why?" he said presently.

Carey halted. "The boys are scared," he said, panting. "Anyone can see that."

"I don't mean— I mean, I can't strike a balance. Figures wrong somewhere."

He kept on grinding the cigarette butt deeper and deeper into the sand as if it were the peccant figure.

"Let me think," he said. Through the silence came the sound of a hornbill's flight, low and vibrant like a distant aeroplane. The bird, cross-shaped and dark, flew overhead. That's the bird of death, thought Carey, craning his neck upwards. He remembered hearing that the natives of Papua associated hornbills with dark and violent deeps; that murderers wore the hornbill beak like a medal. Queer that it should come flying over an island called Mate-Mate. Unlucky, somehow. Now if the boys—

But it hadn't been there when they came. Brander stood thinking. He was a man who, in the course of his professional work, could hunt down a missing figure as a dog hunts rabbits. There were three figures in this account, he decided; at two of them he could make a guess, but the third—

Figure one. Monty was the man whose company he had smashed. Maybe Monty didn't know it. Maybe he did.

Figure two (and here the mind of Brander, unknowingly, ran parallel with that of Monty Freeman)— Chip Carey was in possession of a pearl bigger and finer than any pearl ever taken from the Pacific, perhaps he deserved it, perhaps he didn't. But anyhow it meant trouble. Probably big trouble—as things were going. William the Silent was not William the Blind; he had had his eyes about him, in the hotel.

Figure three. That was a teaser. Boys crying. Boys deserting. Something wrong— he could swear it— about this island of Marie Celeste. But the figure

wouldn't come out, the sum wouldn't add. And yet he could have sworn— before a court if need be— that the three figures were part of the same sum.

"What do you make of it?" Carey asked impatiently. Brander, who would have been boiled in oil rather than lie professionally, now fibbed with smoothest ease.

"Why, nothing, except that the labor has deserted. Getting too late to prospect the lagoon to-day. Let's put the tent up."

There was no timber for tent-poles. They had to stretch the canvas, as best they could, upon the tops of bushes, making their camp on the dirty sand beneath.

Brander lit a fire, boiled water for tea, and heated a tin of meat. Stolidly he ate his share of food, but Carey, more sensitive, put down his plate, and stared uncomfortably about.

"I can't eat," he said. "That scent makes me sick. It seems to come in waves. Thick and sweet and nasty, somehow. Damned nasty."

Brander said, reaching for a biscuit— "Smells to me like those waxy sickly sort of flowers people put all over a corpse before they nail it down in the coffin. To hide the smell. And it doesn't hide the smell, Like this."

Both men fell silent; a silence matched and surpassed by the stillness that had fallen upon Marie Celeste. It was now dark, a moonless night, with discouraged stars; a night of "king" tide, with the water swilling, full and noiseless, high up among the roots of the mangroves. Where the firelight penetrated, drifts of leaf and weed could be seen, moving slowly forward like a dark carpet drawn by an invisible hand.

"You know," said Carey presently, beneath his breath, "I feel as if somebody was looking at us, some where. I do feel those things; psychic, the wife calls me. She used to—"

Brander held up his hand. "Ss!"

They waited. The night was holding its breath. Coral twigs, floating on the carpet of dead leaves, tinkled like broken glass. The sea kept silence. Carey, all nerves, broke in again—

"I reckon it's this queer damned country. Hoppner, the magistrate, the fellow who writes poetry, says you can't help loving her in a crazy sort of way, but she hates you— hates you—blood on her lips when she kisses you—other men's blood— she'll get you if she can, one way if not another, and she has a hundred ways—"

His words were abolished by a burst of appalling sound, that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere; a bellow like the voice of some fierce bull broken loose and running wild at night, rage in his flying hoofs and death upon his horns. Both men sprang to their feet. Carey, breathing hard, but

steadied by the consciousness of actual danger at hand, snapped on his electric torch and swung it about. There was nothing to be seen.

Brander said— "Can't be a bull. Sounds like one, but there aren't any nearer than Gili-Gili plantation, hundred miles away, and it couldn't be hidden even if—"

Carey interrupted. His hand was steady on the five-celled torch; he was still looking about.

"Might very well be a bittern," he said. "I've heard of them. They hide themselves and boom like that, and you can't tell where they are."

The bellow came again. It shook the stems of the mangroves, and sent a quiver up the floating water carpet.

"Are there bitterns in—" both men began together.

They broke off.

Carey said, "The engine boy made a noise like that. Must have been imitating it. Clever mimic, ain't he?"

Brander's reply seemed hardly relevant. "They took the rifles with them."

He could see Carey's head plain in the torchlight; the high forehead, the ruffle of fair hair, the thick white neck. It came to him that, perhaps, a certain girl would never plunge her hands into that hair any more; never again clasp arms about the neck of Chip Carey.

Brander was just beginning, ignorantly and uncertainly, to guess....

Carey said, keeping his voice down— "I caught a word that the boys were using; one of their bits in pidgin English. They said this was a 'walk-about place'— whatever that is. It doesn't answer much to the description—all that mud."

"ANYHOW, we'll walk," Brander said, lighting his own torch. "Take a look at things."

"They'll miss us and send for us in a day or two, and then those brutes will catch it," Carey cheerfully declared. Brander thought— "But Monty must have known that." He said nothing.

It was Carey who found the nest. "Look, old chap," he joyfully shouted, "we were right about the bitterns after all. See, here are its eggs." He flashed his torch upon the ground. Eggs, dirty white, a score or so, eggs the size of goose eggs, laid and then abandoned in the midst of a raffle of sticks and mud. Eggs, apparently belonging to a bird of considerable size; a loud-voiced, careless bird that went booming about the island instead of attending to its duties.

Carey said, speaking quickly—

"All sorts of queer birds in this country. Some of them scratch up mounds ten feet high, and leave their eggs to be hatched by spontaneous combustion

or something. Some of them make ballrooms and dance in 'm, and there's one that shuts his wife up in a hollow tree and feeds her through a hole— great idea that— and some of them beat big drums at night, and— all sorts of games."

He picked up one of the eggs; it slipped from his hand, fell on the ground, bounced slightly, and remained unbroken. "And that's another stunt. Nothing here like anything else. Since we know all about it now, what about a spot of sleep?"

They crept beneath the tent-fly, and lay down, Carey with cheerful abandonment, Brander, saying nothing, but determined to keep awake. Nevertheless he dozed, and the thing, when it happened, found him, equally with Carey, unprepared.

HE was lying back half asleep, just beginning, against his will, to drift into unconsciousness, when something seized him by the sole of his heavy boot.

"Don't rag, old man," he murmured instinctively, sitting up. At once he was flung down again, on his back, and found himself, with horrifying swiftness, being dragged towards the sea. He couldn't kick; the thing that had him was going too fast, pulled far too powerfully, for that; it was like being towed by a tractor.

Lustily he shouted Carey's name, and the other awoke, flashed his torch, and with a yell, sprang straight for the enormous head of the crocodile that had seized Brander's boot, and was pulling him along. In the pale light, the creature glowed with streaks of phosphorescence; its eyes were lambent green, its teeth, clamped on Brander's boot sole, shone white in the appalling death-grin that is shared by crocodiles and human skulls alone.

Carey, cursing the boys and the stolen rifles, beat wildly at the monster with a club of mangrove wood. He might as well have tried conclusions with an armored tank.

Backwards went the beast, and Brander with it; Brander, not yelling or entreating, dead silent, fighting every inch of the way. Carey saw his eyes...

Holding up the torch, and still shouting at the crocodile as if it could hear and understand, Chip snatched a sheath-knife from his belt. No use attacking that iron-plated monster with such a weapon, but the boot— the boot—

IN a moment Brander's boot was slashed from his foot; the crocodile, still holding to its diminished prize, had turned, with a sweep of its steel-spring tail that sent Carey flying into the mangroves, and was making, in a spraddling gallop, for the sea. Before it had touched water, a challenging roar broke forth, and another monster dashed across the torchlight circle, heedless of man, in the face of its enemy and rival. Brander understood. Those eggs— not bird-

eggs, not deserted— told of the near presence of a mother crocodile; the scent of musk and rotting flesh that had been growing stronger all evening, meant that two male crocodiles, rivals for the female's favor, were haunting the mangrove swamp. Two— and how many more?...

Walk-about place— walk-about place— he could guess, now, what that meant.

This island of Marie Celeste was apparently the meeting ground of the armored dragons who swam between island and island, from the great river mouths of Papua's mainland. All animals have their breeding places; but the Lovers' Walk of a company of estuarine crocodiles was not, it seemed, the happiest spot for mere human beings to spend a night.

"Get back," said Brander briefly. He was standing bootless and pale, beside Carey, who had hastily picked himself out of the mangrove bushes. "Traction engines fighting and making love wouldn't be in it, once these birds get going. There's rocks, I saw 'm."

He swung his torch towards a pile of coral boulders, near the beach. The two made haste to climb the little cairn. It afforded no rest; one could not sit or lie upon its ragged pinnacles, but one could stand there in comparative safety, holding on and listening, with strained nerves, to the bellowing and charging of the infuriated monsters below.

Brander had put out the torches; Carey and he stood together in darkness and fear. There was no knowing what the beasts might do, or whither their mad charges might lead them.

Towards dawn the tumult lessened, the loathsome reptilian reek began to die down. Silence came. No sound betrayed the departure of the beasts; they were, and were not, and the dawn was breaking. On the sun-gilded sand, the two adventurers stood safe. The lagoon, lime-green, lay untroubled before them.

Brander, tying up his bruised foot in a piece of rice-bag, said— "Nice sort of place to do shelling in— if there's any shell."

Carey said—"Do you get shell in a place where the sand is mostly mud?"

"Shouldn't think it likely."

"What do you think?" Brander, twisting the knot, said— "I think he gave us the wrong island."

"What! On purpose?"

"ONLY he and the devil know about that. People can make mistakes. I don't doubt he could prove— Look over there at the place he called Napoleon. I lay, if you had any natives to ask, he'd say this place was Napoleon, and Marie

Celeste was the other. Look at it. Clean, fine island with white beaches, lagoon all round. If there's any shell anywhere— and I rather doubt it—"

Carey said—"Oh Lord, why haven't we the boat?"

"Couldn't we make a raft of drift-wood? Let's look for some."

It was not driftwood that they found, at last; it was a drifted canoe, swept by the tides into a belt of mangroves.

"Some Papuan beggar howling over the loss of this," said Chip exultantly. "His loss, our gain.... Brander! Monty may be twice as big, but once we're back in Samarai— where I suppose he hoped we'd never be back again—I'm going to break his neck for him, and knock out every tooth in his head."

Brander said, "Leave some of him, if you don't mind, for me."

Canoes go silently. The approach of Carey and Brander to the island miscalled Napoleon, was made without noise. They landed on an empty strand as white as bleached linen, with a big wind blowing along. Sound of wind, sound of water, filled the air; this was a live, bright island, as different as might be from the dark and poisonous place where they had passed the night. Shallow, blue-green, the lagoon of Marie Celeste ran like a moat about the island; coral "horseheads," springing from calm water, marked the places where the reef came near the surface, and shells— small, shining, lined with pearl— lay here and there on the beach.

"This is what that damned Monty described," Carey said. "But— these are small shells; the sort they get in the Trobriands, not much profit in them at any time, they say, and less now, with the Jap culture pearls shooting the market to pieces. The nigs eat them, and that's about all they're good for— now-a-days."

Brander said, "Monty seems to have won the trick again."

"Not when I get my hands on him," declared the husband of Martha, between set teeth. "D'you think," he said presently, "there's anything in this thermal business? Gigibori— that's the native name— hot— and I see a trail of steam somewhere; must have one or two of those hot springs."

"Not a hope, a thousand miles from Australia. Worse than useless. Spoil things. Even these small pearls, if there are any, would probably be influenced by the chemicals. Pearl oysters need pure water, and I daresay it drains in a bit from above."

"ONE more for Monty. I wish I believed in the devil. They used to say he took care of his own. Monty gets taken care of at every turn. But just let him wait. The devil will be out of a job when I land in Samarai."

"Are you hard hit financially?"

Carey swallowed. "Pretty well broke—"

"Same here.... We may as well look at the place— since we own it."

Dispiritedly they climbed the nearest slope. It led to a glacis of fallen rocks, over which the wind went shrieking.

"Spell," said Carey. They leaned against the rocks, and Brander, lighting a cigarette, stood still. What would Carey do, he wondered, if Martha had actually come to harm? Where was she now, and what might be happening to her?

The answer came sooner than he expected. Over the rocks, the wind was blowing towards Carey and Brander, as they stood in shelter. And clear on the wind, came a voice, drowned in tears— Martha's voice.

"Oh, Mr. Hoppner, I know you've done all you could; but where are they— what's happened to Chip? If those dreadful natives killed him when they took the boat, I'll die, too. If I could Just find his darling body and take it back with me, I'd be—I'd be satisfied to—"

JUST what would satisfy Martha, no one was to know. The leap that Carey made, vaulting across the wall of rock into her arms, knocked them both down and drove the breath from her lungs. She did not seem to mind; she was clinging to Charles, and kissing him wildly, when Brander climbed across the rocks more slowly.

"Now that you've found his darling body, suppose you do take it home— and mine along with it," he suggested.

The joke fell flat. Everyone was too busy questioning everyone else to listen.

William the Silent, filling his usual role, learned that the launch with the runaway boys had been seen and reported; and that Hoppner, the magistrate, had immediately set out, not towards Goodenough, but towards Marie Celeste, fearing for the safety of the two white men.

Often, in the history of Eastern Papua, a native crew had been known to slay their masters, for the sake of plunder; usually they fled with the stolen boat to their own island, and could be arrested at leisure, afterwards.

Martha, at the last moment, had insisted on coming, too. A swift Government launch conveyed them to the real Marie Celeste in a few hours.

When Carey and Brander found them, Hoppner and his police had just completed a useless survey of the island, and were beginning to feel very anxious about the fate of the two white men. Martha left under the guardian-ship of a constable, had not wasted her time while the men were searching.

"I did all I could for you, darling," she said, sitting by Chip's side, and clasping his recovered hand in her own.

"The constable is an island boy, and he went in and dived for me ever so often, and brought up some shells, and—"

Tears seemed to be coming again. Chip staunched their flow, after the most approved method.

"Don't mind, sweetheart," he told her. "Will and I had a look at the place, and guessed it was no good— just that common small stuff, and not much of it."

"Even if there'd been more," contributed Brander, "and even if the Japs hadn't spoiled the market, I reckon those hot springs they name the place after, would have done some mischief. Everything drains down towards the sea."

Martha said, holding out her hand, "These are what we got, too, but they're all wrong."

"Monty," muttered Brander. "Monty wins again."

One of the pearls was about as large as a birdshot, the other buck-shot sized.

"Aren't they queer, not white a bit," Martha said, rolling them in her palm.

Carey touched them, stared at them.

"I say," he said feebly, and again, "I say— I wonder—" Hoppner leaned over and looked at the little spheres in Martha's hand.

He said, "My God! Did you ever hear of blue pearls?"

Carey answered, with a puzzled look. "I don't know. I somehow think— Maybe I read—"

"Hardly anyone knows about them. They're rarer than pink. Rarer than black. Almost unknown— and they can't be imitated or cultured."

"The foxes, the little foxes that spoil our grapes!" murmured Brander. "The little Japanese foxes... Not this time."

Hoppner, stretching out a sun-coppered hand, solemnly shook hands with Martha, with Carey, with Brander. "Congrats. I reckon you're made," he said. Carey shouted. Martha gave a wild "Hurrah!"

Brander, the only cool one of the party, asked: "What causes them?"

Hoppner said, "Not exactly known. I think myself it may be something in the water."

Brander, looking up at the thin columns of steam rising inland, said, "Maybe."

"We've done the beast in the eye after all," Carey shouted. "Now, listen, you magistrate, listen to what he did to us."

In a flood of words, he poured forth the story of the map and the islands, and the crocodiles' "walk-about." Hoppner listened to him coolly.

"I'll make a note of it. Might be of some use." he said, when Carey had done. "Is that all you have to say? And— and— do you know what Martha's been telling me— too? That he wanted—he tried—"

Martha's foot kicked her husband into sudden silence.

Hoppner gravely said, "Best speak no ill of him."

Martha stared. She had just silenced her husband, but she didn't see why Monty shouldn't be spoken, ill of— as ill as possible— as long as one subject was left alone.

Carey was quicker, "You mean—?" he asked.

"Yes. Two of the launch crew slipped ashore on Samarai in a canoe, in the night. They managed to get him away to the back of the island— we think they lured him with a girl... The sea makes a lot of noise there; nobody heard the shot."

Brander, smoking in the back-ground, thought: "They took the rifles."

"Why—" began Carey. "I didn't understand till you told me about that other place—Napoleon. Seems they thought Monty meant to kill them, for honor and glory or something, same as they kill each other, only in a neater way. And they got even. As they do."

William the Silent took the cigarette from his mouth, and said: "So Monty lost the last trick— after all."

They made their way to the beach. Martha was babbling pleasantly about what she was going to do with her share, and Carey's. William the

Silent said nothing, but he looked at her, and looked away again. "What do you mean to do with yours?" Hoppner asked him.

"Who, me?" Brander turned his gaze from Carey's Cullinan diamond to the far peaks of Papua, shining against the sky in speedwell blue.

"There's places where nobody's been," he said. "I'll go to them. She's got me."

"Papua?" Hoppner asked.

The boys were carrying Martha to the launch. Brander's eyes followed her, as he slowly answered:

"Papua —yes."

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## 13: The Jasmine Balcony

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OF course she had not been christened Anita; nobody is. They call you Anna when you are too young to do anything about it, and afterwards you name yourself Ann if you think you are going to be a piquant, daring character like the Anns in the novels.

Anita, of course, connotes the pictures or the stage.

Calling yourself Anita, unhappily, does not mean that you are going to live up to the name. This girl had not done so. The stage (colonial) had cast her forth, and she was on her way to court fresh disaster in the cataracts and whirlpools of Hollywood, when she met Bob Kyle.

She had never seen anything like him before. He was tall, well made, and very thin; his clothes were good, and his manner was so completely devoid of manners that Anita thought at first he must be what she naively called a "lord." He spoke so seldom that everyone on the ship respected him; and once, when a quartermaster suddenly went mad, stole the captain's automatic, and invaded the promenade deck threatening to shoot the "sanguinary lot" of passengers, Kyle got him while the others were making up their minds what to do, and laid him out insensible on the deck, with the pistol skimming yards away.

It was then that Anita definitely fell in love with him. They were eight days from Sydney, and he had told her curtly that she was the best-looking girl on the ship; adding, with apparent irrelevance, that he himself was a persistent person. Anita understood.

The end was that, off Tahiti, the Anglican clergyman who was going to San Francisco for a holiday wedded them very quietly in a spare cabin, and ten minutes after they were going down the ship's gangway.

"They say that you can live on love and nothing in Tahiti." Bob told her. "Ought to suit us."

Anita knew by this time that he was almost penniless, despite the clothes and the luggage. He had not even told her his profession— if he had one. Bob parted with personal facts about as readily and cheerfully as a dog parts with a bone.

But any girl who has kept her end up on the colonial stage for three whole years knows men. Anita trusted.

The Anglican parson had kept them waiting most of the day. He had wanted to speak to the captain; he had wanted to see the British Consul; he had urgently required certain papers. The boat was leaving as they went ashore. It did not seem to matter....

"Gosh," said Anita, when they landed, "this is just like the scenery in a revue."

She paused on the wharf, enchanted by Papeete's one-side street, with its canopy of flaming poincianas, its smiling, brown-faced people, the Chinese stores and the cars and the buggies, the sea wall where white and pea-green schooners rocked at anchor, bright against the plumb-blue peaks of Moorea. The *Katara* whistled; whistled again; was gone.

"You sit on this seat while I go and look up some kind of a house," Bob told her. "One can get 'm for a pound or so a month, and food'll be half nothing."

She was willing to wait; the heat oppressed her, even here in the full current of the sea breeze. And there was plenty to look at. Beautiful native girls in gay little frocks walked past her, flirting with pale French officials; brown young men made like Bacchuses and Mercuries, but unromantically clad in cotton suits, with the "shimmying" movement of the barefoot islander.

SOMEBODY was getting a schooner under way. Anita watched it with delight; it was so like the ships in the films, a toylike pretty thing with pointed sails and the tiniest of cabins. Two men were throwing stores into the open hold as if the devil were after them: an odd sight on Papeete "beach," where no one else seemed to be hurrying. Anita idly watched the men. One of them intrigued her by his resemblance to her husband. She could not exactly place it, but he was like Bob. He moved and held himself in the same way; he had the same brand of iron self-possession; he spoke as Bob did, curtly and to the point.

"Hurry," she heard the man say to the Tahitian crew. "Lively with those cases." The other white man was be-ginning to cast off.

"They'll be away in a minute," she thought. "I wish Bob could see them."

Then, suddenly. Bob was there beside her. She could not read his face; it wore an expressionless mask that she had never seen. But the mask itself frightened her as a blank "false face" frightens a child at a masquerade party, and for the same reason she feared what might lie behind it.

"What's the matter?" She was on her feet, holding to his arm. What-ever had happened, she had that to cling to; nothing could hurt her while it stood between her and the world.

He did not immediately reply. "I got the house," he said. "No great shakes, but it's cheap as dirt. Pretty —got a balcony—"

"Yes?"

"And when I was paying the rent in advance for a month the owner said I'd have to see the police. So I went to the police. And they said—"

HE paused for a moment. Sail was being hoisted on the schooner. Creak, creak, went the blocks.

The sea water, green as grass, slapped noisily at the harbor wall.

"They said— we can't stay."

"What!"

"Yes. There are laws, it seems you can't stop if you haven't money to keep you. Damn it, we could have managed."

"We could! We could! I don't care if I starved, if I— you—" She was very near tears.

"The *Ville de Beuzeval* comes in this afternoon, due now, and sails for Panama to-morrow. They'll dump one of us on board. I can just raise the wind for a third-class ticket to the Canal zone, and I have a friend or two who'll look after you till I come along."

"But," she asked, "what'll happen to you— without money?"

"What, me? Oh, they'll let me work it out." He grinned.

Anita had had next to no time to become acquainted with this new husband of hers. Nevertheless, she did not like that grin.

"YOU mean something horrid," she declared. Her imagination figured him working on the roads as a common laborer; nothing worse. She did not know how easy it is for a stranger to slip into gaol in a French colony; how hardly he gets out again. "If you have to go shoveling dirt—" she began.

Bob suddenly roared with laughter. One of the men on the schooner ceased from loading stores; turned round and looked at him.

Bob said, returning to gravity, "I reckon I could do that if I had to." Then he pulled her aside. "Sit down," he told her, motioning her to a stone bench all spattered with blood-red petals of poinciana flowers. "Listen, sweetheart. We've got to see this through. It's not so bad. We'll go to the house with the balcony and stay there till to-morrow, and then I'll send you off on the *Ville de Beuzeval*, and my friend and his wife in Cristobal will look after you for a few weeks, till I can scratch up a bit of cash somehow and follow."

One of the men on the schooner was hailing him: "Hey, Bob! Bob Kyle!"

Anita felt his arm slacken on hers. Saw the familiar dancing lights in his eyes change suddenly to strange fires she had never seen. He swung round on the stone bench.

"Hallo, Alligator," was all he said; but in that instant Anita, high-strung to breaking point by the emotions of her great day, sensed the thing that had not been said; knew that fate was striking.

"Come on board," the man called out. It was the man whom Anita had stared at, thinking him like Bob. She saw now that he was about Bob's age,

lean and brown like Bob, and with Bob's own way of moving and speaking. Otherwise he was quite unlike.

Something seemed to pass between the two without words. "Wait a minute," Bob told her, and leaped on to the schooner. They went right up into the bow and talked.

It was hardly more than a minute before Bob came back. The mask was down upon his face again; she could not read it.

He answered with frightful directness:

"If I go with that man, we can be rich."

"But—" she said, and stopped. She could not have completed a sentence with the hand of those words clutching at her throat.

"I should be away maybe a month, maybe two. We'd have all we want. Be safe."

"What is it?" she managed to get out.

"I can't tell you."

"Wouldn't there be room—"

"Not a chance."

"You— you— would go to-morrow?"

"Now."

"What!"

"ANITA — I'm not going unless you say the word. It's the h— I mean, it's a pity they can't stop. But Alligator— that's Bill Corkery, old mate of mine— says he couldn't trust his native crew five minutes, now they know. Well— it's up to you. If you say the word, I'll get into that car with you, and we can go off to the house, and Alligator can go to blazes."

"You'd better— do what you want," she found breath to say. The blazing poinciana trees, the staring natives, the shops and the town were spinning about her, but she kept her head.

"It's for you to decide," he answered her impassively. She could not read him, but she knew that underneath that granite calm the man's whole being waited, shaken by passions mysterious, unknown.

And she had thought she held him in her hand!

She said, "You'd better go, Bob."

He did not answer her for quite five seconds, and then he told her curtly: "I was right when I married you."

THE poincianas, the grape-green sea, the shops, and the town ceased whirling. There was something in Bob's eyes that steadied them; steadied her.

On the little boat, the crew were loosing the moorings. The man called Alligator shouted.

Bob pulled her aside into the shade. He began to empty his pockets. A gold watch. A silver cigar-lighter. Fifteen pounds in cash. A seal ring from his finger. "There's six weeks good in these," he said, "maybe more— and I'll be back in a month or so. And you've got the balance of your ticket to Frisco if—"

She interrupted him: "I shan't want that."

"Good." He was beckoning to the chauffeur, a tea-brown, big-eyed Tahitian. "Drive this lady.... Take the suitcase." He hadn't called her love or sweetheart or anything. He slung the case into the car, lifted her in by one elbow, and leaned over the door. He got his arms round her; she lost breath and sight for a long moment.

"Go on," someone said to the chauffeur; maybe it was Bob. She was alone in the car, pressing her bruised lips with her hand, and the road was flying beneath her, and she hadn't seen him sail away because she could see nothing.

They were away from the town, under an arcade of palms.

"Madame wants?" said the chauffeur.

Anita knew what it was to pull herself together, run gaily out before the crowd, with throat burning and eyes wet. The crowd here was only one Tahitian, but the principle was the same.

"I want the house with the jasmine balcony." she said in halting French.

THE chauffeur got a fare back to town— more luck than he had expected. A white monsieur, who had been standing in the road when he drove up with *madame*.

"Who's the girl you drove?" asked the monsieur, who was a rich young gentleman and very *chic*.

"Do I know?" answered the Tahitian regretfully. "They say in town she was married this morning."

"Married to whom?"

"To an English or an Owstralian, who has sailed away on a boat."

"Sailed away?" The monsieur gave a sudden laugh. "They are all mad, the English, and the Owstralians more so," he said. Something seemed to have pleased him; he paid the chauffeur well.

But for the beauty of the place Anita thought she could not have lived. Yet sometimes she thought it was the beauty, nothing else, that put the sharpest edge on her pain. And the happiness, and the love.

Love. Tahiti was full of it. Island of Love, it had been called.

ANITA, bride left alone looked at the people from her jasmine balcony by day; listened to them at night. Sometimes she went swiftly in and closed the doors.

The monsieur who had seen her enter the house of the balcony went past one day when she was sitting, as usual, half hidden among the flowers, leaning on an arm as white as the blossoms above her, and looking through the leaves at the roadway that was her only book.

She had seen him pass a good many times; she was beginning to know all the people who went up and down that road. Most of them, in a manner typically French, minded their own business.

The monsieur stopped and spoke under the balcony, looking up at her and showing his fine teeth. He was young, not more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight and he had the slightly effeminate coloring, the red lips, ivory skin, that marks so many quite masculine and hardy Frenchmen. Anita thought him a very girlish-looking, a bit soft.

She was not angry when he addressed her in excellent English— the first she had heard for some time— and asked her whether he could have a few sprays of the jasmine to make a funeral wreath.

"YOU have the best in Papeete there " he explained, "and my servants want some of it to bury a little child with—they're afraid to come and ask.'' He looked as if he would have liked to smile, but, of course, you couldn't smile talking about funerals.

He had servants; a home. Probably he was married, also.

Anita said that of course he could have the flowers. She knew he was going to ask her if he might come up, and to forestall that she ran down the stairs with her arms full of blossoms, and offered them to him and to a withered-looking Tahitian woman who suddenly appeared from nowhere among the palms.

"Take them," he said. She knew what he was going to say next; she had heard that kind of thing so many times, and cared for it as little as any pretty girl could care. On the stage—

But what was he saying?

"Well, Mrs. Kyle, and may I ask when you expect your husband back?"

"You know him?" Anita demanded, her face lighting up.

"No, *madame*," said the young man, with a boyish grin that made her like him. "I was only feeling you out. I don't know Mr. Kyle, but a friend in the customs told me of the difficulty he was in, and so I came along to ask you — being left alone— if I could be any help. You see, *madame*. I've been in Owstralia, quite a lot, before I settled down here as a planter, and some of the

Owstralian girls broke my heart so many times that I've always been grateful to them for my being a single man. And so I thought, when my cook wanted the flowers, 'Why, here is the happy opportunity to help an Owstralian.' And so I'm come."

He looked so jolly, standing there in the long grass and laughing as if he had been a schoolboy out for a holiday, that the youth in Anita sprang happily up to meet him.

"IF you don't mind coming into the old boatshed—" she said. That was open. You could talk without setting other people talking in another way.

They went underneath the pillared second story to the boat slip. "I'm Maurice Lechesne," he told her, taking his seat on a broken staging. "And if you want anything, just ask me."

It was lovely out there, after so many days and days spent moping in the house, except when one went reluctantly out for a solitary walk.

"You are delightfully naive, *petite* Anita," he laughed, using her Christian name. Or was that when they met the second time? Not the third. He had come to calling her *cheri* then.

But it was all perfectly right. They never met except in the deserted boat-shed that ran underneath the long deserted house, an open place in full view from the road. And Anita, used to the life of the stage, couldn't see herself without at least one "boy." Her heart was so sore for Bob, all the time, that she could have burst out crying at any moment of the day or night by just letting herself go.

It must have been about the fourth meeting that he began to call her Jasmine. "I can't think of you as anything else.'' he told her. "You are a human jasmine flower in your color and grace and in the perfume of your mind."

He talked like a book, as Englishmen or Australians did not talk.

HE was always talking. He took pains to amuse and interest her. He was telling her that she must not let herself mope and grow lonely. She must take a run in his car and see the garden of a friend of his. "You may be a long time in Tahiti," he said. "You ought to begin to know the country beyond a walk."

It seemed as if a cold wind blew upon her.

"What do you mean, saying I'll be a long time here?" she cried suddenly. "How dare you talk like that? No. I don't want to come in your car. I don't go joy-riding with people I don't know."

She jumped up from the pile of planks where she had been sitting very contentedly beside Maurice, who looked so nice, who had such beautiful thick young hair, smoothed back like flowing honey; Maurice with the perfect

clothes and the well-tended hands. She ran up the stairs and into the long, empty, echoing rooms above.

She peered out through a rent in one of the broken walls. He was gone.

That night she asked herself for the first time, roundly, whither had Bob sailed, and why? She did not distrust him, but she had been conscious from the first of some weighty secret. Weighty, indeed, since it had made him leave her with the ring scarce warm upon her finger, and the sound of the heavy words, "till death us do part" yet ringing in her ears! Death hadn't parted them, but life had done it, perhaps more completely.

For the first time, she let herself believe that Bob might never come back. She knew him for a man who courted danger, if one could call his utter indifference courting. His faith she could trust, but could she trust the chances of a cruel world leagued against him? There were a thousand ways to die, and only one way of living. How did anyone ever reach middle age? She might indeed "be a long time in Tahiti." She might never go away again!

For she knew that as long as she did not hear of Bob's death or see his return, she was chained to the house of the jasmine balcony. Money might run out. It had a way of doing that. She would find more if she had to sew for her living, or scrub floors some-where in town. She would do anything —almost— to stay, and stay, and wait.

It was during the ninth week of her stay that she made her visit to the market.

She did not often go there. It was held in the middle of the town at five in the morning, a mile or more from the house of the jasmines.

YOU met very few white people, mostly natives and native servants, but still you did run the chance of seeing someone who would stare, wonder, whisper... Anita was bitterly sensitive to these partly imaginary, partly actual stares and comments. Not in Tahiti, she knew, could a young, pretty woman be deserted on her wedding day without setting tongues to clack.

But the food in the market was better and cheaper than anywhere else, and now her money was beginning to run low. She had counted on selling her steamer ticket back to the company, and they had told her she couldn't; the French authorities, they said, would come down on her like a ton of bricks if she didn't hold fast to that last life-saving spar. So now she had to count the francs that were twopence each, the very centimes, almost incalculably small. And in the market you got fish for a day, fruit and yams for two, at the price of an English sixpence.

In her eternal washed white frock, with her palm leaf basket on her arm, she went shyly through the warm, starry dark to the market house, a little

guilty thing, convicted in the eyes of the town, as well as in her own, of the unforgivable crime of poverty. Silver and blue and gold, scarlet and chrome-yellow, the marvellous fish of the lagoon lay heaped in sparkling piles; bananas spread green fingers; mangoes, oranges, melons, pawpaws, and a score of other wonderful tropic fruits were massed in jewel-bright pyramids. "It's like Goblin Market," thought Anita, who had read a great deal. "And almost as cheap!" She was glad. She began to price the cheaper fish and the commoner fruit. Five francs would go a long, long way—

Maurice!

There. Behind the big stand of bananas. She could not see him, but she could hear his voice. She did not want him to see her, in her tumbled frock, buying watermelon and flying fish. Quietly she slipped out of sight and waited. He couldn't be long. She knew quite well why he was there. She had heard that some of the French-men, after a gay night, going home were used to stop before dawn at the market building, hot and thirsty, to buy slices of rockmelon, or suck a mountain orange cool as snow. Maurice would make his purchases and go on.

BUT he did not go, and he was not buying fruit. Anita peered round the corner of a huge pile of pumpkins. He was standing with his back to her, talking quietly and earnestly with a man whom Anita recognised as one of the higher police officials.

Instinct, as much as innate fear of the French police, warned her to slip back out of sight. Curiosity urged her to listen. She could do that well enough. She had studied French at school, and even taken prizes. But, discovering here in Tahiti that her accent was quite appalling, she had remained mute, except when driven by necessity. She could not catch all that Maurice was saying, but enough came to her ears to set her heart leaping wildly and make her breath come short as if she had been running.

"What luck, meeting you— it'll save me a call at the bureau. You have the list of passengers for to-day's steamer?"

"Certainly. He is there. If he comes ashore, we have him."

"But, my friend, this man is too clever; he won't come ashore; and we can do nothing on a British ship."

The gendarme laughed. "Monsieur," he observed, "you of all people ought to know how he is likely to come. You are making fun of me."

Maurice laughed. Something in the laugh made Anita's cheeks and fingers tingle... What was he saying now?

"In effect, officer, you compliment me. But don't you think he may simply send a message, a summons, to the *petite belle*?"

"If he is a fool, that is what he will do," replied the gendarme. "We, we can attend to that part of it. Madame will make an excellent bait in the trap."

"You are having the house watched?"

"From the moment the boat comes in until she sails at ten to-night. *Merci*, monsieur. This is a cigar such as one seldom sees. Monsieur is very good."

"A brother official is always welcome."

"INDEED, that is hardly a jest, monsieur; without you, in many ways, we should be at a loss. What a pity monsieur is too rich to be in the force."

"The Sherlock Holmes was not in any force, my friend."

"Ah, well, duty calls. *Au revoir*, Monsieur Sherlock. My most devoted sentiments to the charming *madame*." He said something else in a low voice.

Maurice laughed and poked him in the ribs. "Now to get my oranges," he said. "My faith, officer, when the news breaks out, this town will be alive!"

The officer didn't seem pleased. He swore as he turned away. But not at Maurice. Anita almost thought he was swearing about Bob.

She seized her opportunity and fled, padding noiselessly in her cheap sand-shoes out of the market and by devious ways back to the jasmine balcony. She flung her purchases on a shelf, and in the rising dawn sat down to think. What had it all been about? What had Bob done that the French Government should be so anxious to get hold of him? Nothing wrong, she was sure. Something daring and illegal, likely enough. But the ship was coming in to-day, and Bob—Bob!— was on it. How could she think of anything else?

She must think. She must know. Biting the ends of her pink, pretty nails, she sat on the broken-down sofa, thinking, thinking, till her head went round. And the problem seemed no nearer of solution.

Until, with the sudden outbreak of noise, traffic, laughing and shouting along a road usually quiet, she found it.

Something was the matter with Papeete. Not thus did the sleepy town and its suburbs usually begin the day. Motors were whizzing into the port. Lorries were running. Men were galloping on horseback, trotting hard in buggies. Down in the bay white sails began to glide, launches to putter. This was steamer day, certainly, but the steamer was not due for hours, and never on any boat day that Anita yet had seen had the town behaved in such a crazy manner.

One of the strangest things about its craziness was that the Tahitians took no part. They, the emotional, the easily moved, kept the common tenor of their way, carrying bales of fruit into the town, washing their eternal clothes and taking their eternal baths in the river, breakfasting on the open verandahs of their little houses, without a trace of hurry or excitement. One could almost

have sworn they were laughing at the whites. What in heaven's name could it be all about?

Back to Anita's mind came a memory of touring days in West Australia. Of a town they had entered with their company, only to meet the whole of the inhabitants fleeing in cars, on horses, and afoot, as if the plague were in the place. She remembered that time well. It had almost left them stranded, flung penniless on a desolate shore by the outbreak of the famous Gum Flats goldfield.

"Gold!" cried Anita. Like the bursting of a dam, knowledge descended upon her. She understood everything. From the moment when Bob had left her to join the stern-faced men in the little boat, up to the dialogue in the market that morning, all became plain.

"And I— not to guess!" she thought. "I don't deserve to be an Australian."

For in Australia the prospector, the pioneer, is honored. Only Anita's town-bred life, that had brought her little in contact with the grand men of outback, could have excused her ignorance, to her own mind or to that of any fellow countryman.

Bob's "mates"— that potent word— had found gold on some island belonging to France. Were just off to exploit the discovery when they encountered him. Doubtless they needed one more man. Even if they hadn't the "mate" would not have been left out. As to his girl, sweetheart or wife— when did a gold miner ever put love before gold?

Oh, she knew, she knew now. Knew what she had wedded.

But there were other things to think of! Gold is not, in a French colony, the property of the discoverer. Very far from it. Without question. Bob had driven a coach and six through any number of laws. That he had got all he wanted, contrived to keep his secret and the secret of his mates, long enough to make a fortune, Anita, knowing him, was sure. All Tahiti was "on to it" now. That meant that Bob had done.

How he had come aboard the down boat from San Francisco she did not know, and it did not matter. What she feared was that he would go ashore in the darkness of the night, make straight for the house of the jasmine balcony, and fall into the hands of the watching police. He could not know that she had heard of his presence on the boat. He wouldn't expect her to come on board. Quietly he would come to her, intending quietly to smuggle her oft.

Like Rodin's Thinker, Anita sat behind the screen of jasmine flowers, head poised on delicate wrist. For the space of half an hour she hardly moved. Down the road went the hurrying stream of motors, buggies, and horses. Out in the bay, boat after boat spread silver wings and fled; launch engines chattered, faded, and were still. At last she rose. She knew what she was going to do.

An iron, the kerosene stove. Now, her worn dress off her back, washed, starched, dried, done-up. Combs tight in her hair setting the wave. Make-up box; rouge and lipstick and powder, plenty of each; black for the eyes. Scent. A flower over her ear. Good, all that.

It was Sunday. Maurice always came on Sundays. He was not likely to fail to-day.

He did not fail. Anita received him for the first time in the upper story of the house, on the balcony. Behind was her own room into which she saw him peeping curiously as they talked. Maurice was daring that afternoon, and Anita, for once, did not resent his daring. For once he was allowed to say what he liked and hint what he chose, make open love to "Jasmine."

Anita handled him expertly. When her venturesome experiment began to succeed a little too well she tried to think that it was just stage stuff; let him kiss her as much as he liked, and told him, cooing in his arms, in full view of a street that nothing could scandalise, how much she cared for him. how hard it had been for her to refuse his love. There was just enough truth in this to give it a convincing sound. In very deed, she had been somewhat tempted by Maurice's bright youth until to-day.

When he left reluctantly it was with a promise that he might come back at ten o'clock, after the early moon had sunk and darkness veiled the approach to the house of the jasmine balcony.

Maurice went away chuckling. The situation pleased him. Piquant! That neglectful husband hurrying to surprise his wife; being surprised himself by Maurice's police, planted all round the house, while Maurice himself, safe inside, made love to Mme. Jasmine. Yes, there was a tang to it that he liked. He walked quickly on his way down to the parked car, held himself very straight, and twirled the short hairs of his Chaplin moustache. After all, there was nobody like him.

Left alone in the growing dusk Anita did several things rapidly. She filled her limp lighted it and set it on the table. She had told Maurice that her signal would be the extinguishing of that lamp at ten o'clock. He would watch for it - how long? Perhaps twenty minutes before he became bold and made his way into the house, lamp or none. That would do.

Next she took out her make-up box, and swiftly covered her face, arms, legs, and feet with brown grease paint. She let down her hair, took off her dress, hunted for a gift that one of the Tahitian girls had made her. They made many little gifts, and asked for no return; they were not like the whites, who despised her poverty. This gift was quite valuable; it was an entire dancing dress such as those used in the hula-hulas: a cape and skirt of flowing grasses, and a woven grass hood to put over the head. You danced in this,

provocatively hidden, and in the latter stages of the revel dropped the garments one by one.

OVER her slip Anita put on the dress, pulling her fringed hood low down upon her forehead. She hung wreaths of flowers about her neck, and set flowers behind each ear. She was a clever dancer; the movement of the hula-hula was child's play to her. As she slipped down into the road, taking the back staircase that led through the boatshed, she paused now and then, in the moony twilight, to shimmy and shake like the hula dancers. No one who saw her could suppose she was anything but one of Papeete's many dancing girls, going to fulfil an engagement.

She reached the wharf without difficulty or delay. The town was mad that night. People who had not succeeded in getting boats were drinking and cursing in the hotels, fighting out-side on the pavement. Men who had boats, but did not intend to leave till daylight, were drinking and singing out on the water.

Nobody left his craft unguarded on such a night.

The liner, lying at the wharf, was comparatively deserted. Only a few white people had gone on board. A number of natives, not concerned with the gold rush and rather scornful of it. were ascending the gangway in a chattering crowd. Men and girls with guitars, accordions, ukuleles, girls clad in the same hula costume that Anita was wearing, ready to dance and shimmy and shake in the well-known way, afterwards to drop the enveloping fringes, bit by bit, for the wild orgy of the end.

Anita let them pass; waited until they had begun. The guitars were plunking, the accordions beginning to wail. She could hear the shuffle shuffle of bare feet on the decks; cries from the dancers. She went up the gangway and, in a feigned native accent, asked a steward for the number of Mr. Kyle's cabin. Twenty-two A. Now she would find him, hide till the ship sailed. Here was the open space of deck where the girls were advancing and retreating, weaving arms above heads in coy invitation. Here she must cross.... And here she came, without warning, upon Maurice.

He had been dining on the ship, and was now idling at the rail scanning the hula-hula with bored, experienced eyes. Anita could see that he had been drinking, but he had all his wits about him— she was sure. She did not dare to cross the deck right in front of him. What had brought him aboard? Something to do with Bob, no doubt. Did he mean to wait and shadow him off the ship?

IT was well after half-past nine o'clock. If something didn't happen, if she couldn't get to Bob's cabin somehow, all her plans would be of no avail. Bob would certainly go ashore.

Not till her man, or her child, is threatened, does any woman know how swift, how wily, she can be.

Anita did not dare to cross the electric-lighted deck, in her disguise, be-fore the critical stare of Maurice. But she thought she knew a way....

One of the wildest of the dancers she recognised as a friend of hers, little Talofa, the half Samoan. Anita, three-fourths hidden in the doorway, whispered to her as she passed: "Throw Maurice your flowers."

Imperceptibly the Samoan nodded; continued the dance. With tiniest heel and toe steps mincing up to Maurice, she tore the jasmine garland from her neck, tossed it over his, and, chuckling, fled. Anita looked to see him pursue her; it was almost etiquette. He did nothing of the kind. What was he doing with the necklace? Lifting it to his face, smelling it?

Yes. And now, careless of Talofa, he turned to face the ship's rail, whence he could see down the curving shore of the bay, past the ship lights and the town lights, to where, a long mile off, burned steadily the lamp in the jasmine balcony. And as he looked at it, and Anita from her hiding place craned forth and looked too, the lamp went out.

She was never to know what had done it— a gust of wind, the failing of the oil, a stray cat jumping on the table. But out it went, and Maurice, turning up his wrist to look at his watch, and seeing that it yet wanted twenty-five minutes of ten, burst into a laugh that made Anita draw back into her refuge, shuddering. In that moment she knew truly what he was.

He threw a ribald jest over his shoulder to the steamer passengers, shouted another to Talofa, and was gone. His motor whirred on the wharf immediately below.

Anita, mingling with the dancers, crossed the deck and faded like a shadow into the white warm alleyway beyond. Eighteen, twenty, twenty-two— Bob's cabin. Her fingers tapping tremulously on the door— her heart beating wildly— the sound of Bob's voice that said "Come in."

She tore the hood from her head, opened the door, and painted, disguised, flung herself into arms that knew her, and held her, as if they would never let her go.

Ten o'clock, and the last whistle gone, the steamer beginning to trample her way out. Anita, on the sofa beside Bob, was telling and hearing, hearing and telling ceaselessly. "You'll have to get clothes from the stewardess."

"Were you really going ashore? Oh, if you had—"

"And when we got right down to the wash, it ran a couple of ounces to the dish."

"But you'll never, never go after gold again will you?"

"Alligator says he knows of a show in—"

"Never any more!"

"We got across to Mexico when we'd cleaned everything out, and Alligator stayed, but I had to find you somehow, so I chanced it down from Frisco, on the way to good old Sydney. Awfully lonely all the time, poor little girl! But now— Hi, that's the purser; I'll go and see him about your ticket."

He came back in a few minutes. "All set. But do you know who was on the wharf, howling like a dog for them to stop the ship, just after we got under way?"

"That man?" She caught his arm.

"Don't go to market about it. They wouldn't stop— what do you think? One thing's clear: we can never go back there any more."

The sweet, clear rivers; the water-lilies, rose and blue; the long green valleys beyond; the happy, lazy, easy, carefree life that she had planned some day, went whirling behind her in the wake of the ship. She knew what she had married. There would be no peace, little rest, in the life that Bob would give her. But he was giving her— Bob.

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## 14: Eyes of Pearl

*Australian Women's Weekly*, 3 Aug 1935

THE men seemed troubled as they sat there on the counter of the deserted Chinese store, smoking their pipes and staring out into the emerald-green wet-season twilight.

But Thora could not find it in her heart to stare. What did anything matter, compared with the fact that she was two thousand miles away from her typist's job, here in the midst of a wonderful tropic island, with Franky, her father, that irresponsible and eternal adventurer; with Barry, whom she knew little, but liked a great deal, with the queer little, civil little fellow Tate?

And no other women!

That was glory. In Melbourne you lived smothered in your own sex, old, young, young-old, authoritative, sneaking, sugary, lemony; girls, girls, women, women. In the cheap boarding-house to which she had sunk after her happy schooldays (for dear old Frank couldn't manage money, especially after mother died, and Thora had had to "train," which she hated, and "go into business," which she hated more) there had been thirteen women to three old men. In the office, a largish copying firm, the staff and all the heads were female. They "spited" you sometimes; sometimes they made offer of treacly friendships, worse than the spite. Thora had thought that going into business would mean meeting of admirers; else where was the use of hair naturally curled like tips of hyacinths, and eyes of hyacinth blue, and legs as beautiful as the legs of the famous actress Mistralette?

All that, as good as wasted! For Thora, unlucky creature, couldn't come down. She was down; they had been people of position, and now were nobody; but the flashy youths who picked up girls at the tram stops, or coo-eed to them boldly from the night shadow of boulevard trees, were not attractive to her. In the class to which poor dead Franky, her father, had condemned her, you lived with women; and desperately you grabbed at men as they went flying by, and that was how you did it....

Not Thora!

When Franky, with his hat on one side of his grey head and a cigar in the corner of his mouth, his blue eyes, hyacinth-blue as Thora's own, half-shut, twinkling merrily— Franky, with his long, stooping stride, and his intriguing air of being just about to depart, on the spur of the moment, for the world's far ends— came into the copying office, a breeze from the South Pacific seemed to blow in with him dispersing the stuffy female atmosphere of the place just as the real wind that came flying through the left-open door scattered the carbons and the copied sheets. Everyone sat up; the girl next to Thora hastily

smoothed down her bob, and ran the tip of a finger over her lipstick. No-body scolded about the scattered papers: the manageress coming forward with the clipped walk that she reserved for customers smiled upon Franky as she seldom smiled on anyone, and said, "You would like to give an order?" in syrupy tones.

Franky said: "Yes— order for one girl, to be delivered to-day." And he seized Thora by her arms and swung her out of her seat, to the horror and delight of all the girls, who thought they were seeing a white-slaver in full action.

But the manageress was no fool. She had never seen Franky— Thora herself had not seen him for six months; nevertheless she caught the extraordinary likeness between the two, and guessed at once that she was going to lose one of the best of her typists. There was a brief conversation, in the course of which Franky was induced to part with a month's salary in lieu of notice, explaining the while, as he tossed notes and silver out of his pockets, that he had been offered a splendid job in the South Sea Islands (all Franky's jobs were splendid, while they lasted) and was leaving on Saturday afternoon, day after to-morrow; and Thora, of course, was to go with him.

Out they went into the wind and the sun, to an orgy of shopping at the impossible hour of eleven in the morning; to seas and ships waiting down at the end of the next street, to adventure and to the Islands and to bliss.

And the other girls stayed behind, typing in the dim office light, in the smell of carbons and oil and dust and talcum powder, typing, typing, for ever and ever.

Or at least, so far as Thora was concerned. For she never saw them again.

EVEN when Franky's luck, the wretched luck that always seemed to follow his best coups, pounced again, and delivered himself, Thora and their boys and baggage on the doorstep of a dead and disintegrating mine, instead of the live enterprise for which he had been engaged— even then Thora's spirits did not go down. It was certainly annoying to have almost no money, and only a limited amount of stores; it would have been depressing, had one been inclined that way, to see the last trains of loaded mules, the last file of carriers, leave Iareva, jingling bells, and shouting loud Motu greetings, on their way to the coast, while Thora and Franky and the two other engineers in similar plight stayed there marooned in the wilderness long out of work and penniless. They ought to have had their fares back to Sydney, and salary instead of notice, to boot; but the company had exploded with the suddenness that so often marks the end of mining ventures in the Islands, and all four knew that it would be a

matter of months, of letters to and from Australia, maybe of legal action, before they got anything at all.

Barry said, swinging his legs where he sat on the high counter: "Best thing we can do is to keep on camping here; there's lots of stuff in the houses, and stores for some months, and by that time we'll have shaken them up in Sydney."

Tate, the little quick fellow with eyes that made you think of shining beetles running about in the twilight, said: "We made a fair bargain with the Chink, for a Chink. These"— he threw a glance over the shelves piled up with tins, the mats of rice and bags of sugar and flour— "are good stores, and I tallied the lot."

Franky Hassall, cupping hands round his pipe as he drew at the stem, asked indistinctly: "Soo Sing gone, too?"

"The store-boy? Why, of course that is—"

"Well. I thought I saw him half an hour ago."

"Who, Soo Sing? No fear. What would keep him?"

"I don't know." Franky indifferently said. "Thought I saw him as I was passing the Chinese graveyard."

Barry, who had not spoken, now said. "I don't like Soo Sing," and immediately relapsed into silence.

"Mixed breeds?" questioned Tate. Barry took no notice. Tate went on, undiscouraged: "Half Chinese and half Papuan's a queer combination, but Soo Sing's a decent kid enough. What was he doing in the cemetery?"

"Don't know that he was there," indifferently answered Franky Hassall. "Thought I saw a blue coat whisking about some of those queer monuments of theirs, those concrete pillars and things stuck over with china saucers and what-you-like. May have been a blue jay or kingfisher."

"May have been." Tate agreed, and the subject was dropped. The whereabouts, the doings, of a Sino-Papuan servant concerned none of these white people.

Thora, taking up the reins of her position as only woman and house-keeper, collected the men with a snap of her fingers— all the prettier, now that they were no longer flattened and worn by the battering of typewriter keys.

"Come on, boys," she said. "You've been long enough tallying off the stuff, and your dinner's drying in the oven up at the manager's house, unless the fire's gone out on us. Come!"

They followed her like sheep, up the long stairway of adzed logs that mounted the clear hill, to the bungalow that had been left furnished, never to be used again, by the mine manager, three weeks ago. It was like a seaside

home at Bondi or Manly— tiled, cemented, pergolaed, verandahed; it was filled with pretty furniture that wasn't worth carrying away; all in all, set in the midst of that deserted wilderness of derricks, shafts, sheds, engine-houses and dumps, it fairly screamed of the wild extravagance that had brought the place— like so many others— to black ruin. A solitary Papuan native, last relic of thousands more, was stoking up the kitchen fire. About the brightly tiled and curtained lounge, bedrooms opened off, all handsomely furnished. From the windows of these bedrooms, under Venetian blinds, you looked straight down, across the mining field, to unbroken jungle, where in the burning nights the crocodiles belled, and cassowaries beat their giant drums; beyond that, to the swampy estuary of the Iari River, and the pale blue shining breast of the Pacific.

ALL the luxuries of the field had been brought in the roaring days of the rich, or said to be rich, silver-lead, when money ran like a millrace, and cost was of no account. Now it paid nobody to take the goods scores of miles to the roadstead, thousands of miles to Australia; and they might rot, or make meals for borers and white ants, for all that anybody cared.

Only the marooned engineers, who had at different times come up to the field dead broke from "depressed" Australia, were benefiting by the disaster; and they, and Thora, were by no means sure how much the benefit might be worth in the end. But Thora didn't care. Not so long as Wilfred Barry shared the house with her, ate the meals she prepared, and now and then talked to her in the long, bookless evenings.

Barry had not made open love to her, but she thought she knew....

As for Tate, the little live wire with the beetle-bright eyes, he made no gift of a charming girl to the woman-less wilderness. He was her servant, her flatterer, her dog always ready to fawn, wag tail, and lick hands. And Franky, delightful Franky, with his tales of mining adventures in Malaya, Africa, Patagonia, and where not, with his reminiscences of Thora's childhood (all creditable, all as if by accident, designed to raise her in the eyes of these two men) Franky was surely the dearest, least stuffy father in the world.

Instinct was teaching Thora very fast these days. It had caused her to put away, with a sigh, her delightfully comfortable and becoming shorts and shirt, keeping them for jungle wear only, and to go about the mine field and the bungalow in fluffy frocks. All the men loved these; they loved, too, Thora's untrimmed mass of curls, and her make-up, which was so clever that it deceived them into thinking she wore none at all. She had an adoring father, who would have given her anything he had; she had two lovers, ready (she hoped, in the case of one; knew, as to the other) to marry her it the first

possible chance; and the place was wonderful, romantic beyond all telling, and the scenery was like the brightly colored pictures in travel literature, that always seem— and usually are— too good to be true.

But—

There is always a but; Thora had not reached two-and-twenty years without finding that out. In this case it was a big one: the fact that the entire party was broke.

NOW as to Tate, he was the kind of fellow (Thora guessed) who would light-heartedly engage himself to a girl, without a ring to put on her hand, or a feather to fly with. But Barry—

Barry was a deep river. Thora did not know him as she knew the other. He was as bad as any crossword puzzle, this thin, tall, silent fellow, still under thirty, with the hard cheeks, the firm mouth, the clipped smooth head of an Englishman in a *Punch* illustration.

Time, perhaps, would show where the three of them stood. Mean- while it was like living in a dream, in a fairy story, to be alone with father and lovers in this few acres of space cut out of the enchanted forest of Iareva; prosaic daily life going on in the details of housekeeping and cooking and having meals, everything just as it might be in Sydney or Melbourne— and all around you, waiting for the moment when you chose to plunge into it, the marvel of up-country New Guinea. In the forest there were palms like maidenhair ferns forty feet high, palms like feathers as tall as a ship's mast; there were flowers like gobbets of red flesh, flowers like yellow flaming candles, like blue butterflies and like spotted toads. Standing still in a sunlit clearing, you might see great Gaura pigeons, garnet-eyed, silver crested, dancing to their mates; catch sight, for one moment, of the rocketing flame that was a bird-of-paradise; feel your heart stir and your knees weaken when the blue-helmeted head of a cassowary, higher than your own, looked out of the thick jungle, and silently vanished again. There were no native villages near, but sometimes you saw the brown naked figure of a forester slip by, armed with seven-foot bow and bunch of barbed arrows painted with blood; and then, though perhaps you were not really frightened (for the little head-hunters of the forest hunted few heads besides those of native tribes), you drew closer to Barry or to Tate, whichever one was there, and were glad to feel the hot clasp of a man's reassuring hand.

The forest made you alive. It was full of beauty and of wickedness, and the steamy heat of it melted your very bones; at times you felt as if you were flowing into it, as if the splendor and the heavy, drunken perfumes, the fierceness, the delight, were part of your very self.

Then, being wise beyond her years, the girl Thora would run away— from Thora. Also from Tate (commonly it was Tate), who was sure to have slipped his arm about her waist, protectively, and taken possession of a small, warm hand, sure to be reaching for the other hand as well— just for the sake of protecting pretty Thora.

On one such day Thora, walking briskly along the forest track ahead of Tate and his apologies and laments, thinking hardly at all of Tate, or even where she was going, but a great deal of Wilfred Barry, who seldom crossed the borders of the enchanted forest with her— Thora suddenly came unawares out into the sun and the long wind from the sea, to the open space given up to Chinese graves. There had been hundreds of them working on the mine at one time, and scores of them keeping store, running cheap boarding-houses, doing more or less open money-lending and more or less sly smuggling of grog and opium. Fortunes had been made on the field by many Chinese; but death, in the form of jungle fevers, had mown down scores before they could sail away with their loot.

Usually, Thora did not like the place— avoided it in her walks, and if she came on it by chance, fled as soon as possible from the enormous loneliness, the mocking sunshine of this city of strange dead. There was, to her mind, none of the dignity of death in the Chinese tombs, with their silly, painted plates and saucers stuck into blocks of cement, their ugly and sometimes in-decent Oriental pagodas: there was only the horror of it, the thought of hundreds of alien yellow men lying rotting there beneath the creeping Passiflora and the lalang grass.

BUT today she was over-glad to escape the love-making of little Tate, who was more than usually ardent, and therefore unacceptable, what hurt was the image of Barry always present; the thought that he might have been walking there with her in the magic forest, where everything was different, and all delightful things seemed possible and easy, just as they did after one had drunk a cocktail and before the effect began to fade away.... If Barry had been there, if it had been his arm that was round her, his hard cheek bending sideways to-wards hers— then the spell would have lacked no letter, the magic had been complete.

SHE broke into Tate's protestations ruthlessly.

"Don't you hate all this horrid sun-shine, shining on dead Chinese, and the feeling that there might be ghosts or anything about? Don't you think daylight ghosts are ever so much worse than the common kind that squeak and rattle chains in the dark?"

Said Tate, staring at her with his black beetle eyes: "Just you look round, and maybe you'll see a ghost."

Thora was too modern to scream, but she jumped. She had looked around and had seen—

Not a ghost, after all; not the spirit of some dead Chinese, revisiting the light of day. Only Soo Sing, wandering among the tombs.

"What do you suppose he's doing?" she asked.

Tate said: "I don't know— darling," he added irrelevantly.

"It would be better," Thora told him, angrily pulling a pink passion-flower to shreds, "if you'd realise that I'm not your darling."

"But I do!"

"And not going to be."

"Ah," he said, "I don't realise that. I'm stupid— sometimes."

"Do you mean to say you'd marry a girl who didn't want you?"

"Like a bird," he told her, with an agreeable smile that somehow had something not quite so agreeable at the back of it. It came then to Thora, aged twenty-two, and not very wise in the ways of men, though she was learning fast, that the mere size of a man didn't, perhaps, matter as much as she had thought. That small, even contemptibly small, men might be as capable of determined action, or perseverance in pursuit, as might any six-footer who— who wouldn't ask you to go walking in the forest.

Again she changed the conversation. "What is Soo Sing living on?" She did not care, but one had to say some-thing.

Tate said: "Oh, he's all right. More Papuan than Chink; he can feed himself from the bush, and a bit of fishing. By the way," he added, "don't go wandering alone where he's about; he's a bad little brute, and I don't know what he can be up to, hanging round the mines."

"Looking for treasure, maybe," Thora said carelessly. "Franky says the Chinese in Malaya used to have things buried with them."

Tate said nothing at all to that for quite a minute, and then remarked: "If you will stand out grilling in the sun, we might as well be getting back again."

IT was pleasant that night to sit on the verandah of the bungalow, lit only by Barry's shaded reading-lamp; enormous skies in front of them, broidered over with stars; below, the distant murmur and the shadow of the sea. Pleasant, obscurely, to know that there was no one else for many hundred miles, save a few unconsidered natives, and Soo Sing, and themselves. It was a bath of freedom; in the busy lives of the men, a long, deep draught of rest, all the more pleasant to them because they knew that it must, in the nature of things, soon come to an end.

No man alive but loves to taste the enormous leisure, live for once in the limitless and timeless day, of the savage who was so lately his ancestor. No man, now, may know that delight, unless he can build between himself and the speeding, unresting world a wall made up of thousands of slow miles.

On the deserted field of Iareva, with the virgin forests and the sea surrounding, the three engineers, the one girl, were content— or would have been had not trouble in the shape of unsatisfied love spread dusky bat-wings over three out of the four.

Franky may have had and regretted his loves, left behind, in Melbourne. If so, regret lay lightly on him; he was the most talkative of the party, leaning back in a long chair, with his boots up among the slanted jewels of the Southern Cross, and telling (so it happened; by what chance or leading, no one could have said) strange stories of days in outer islands of the Sundas, the ends of the Moluccas, and the top corners of Dutch New Guinea.

"THE Chinese are collaring all the trade," he said to Tate; to Barry, big and silent, inattentively reading in a cane armchair; to Thora, who knew all his stories, and maybe to himself. "And they don't spend anything to speak of, unless on deaths and burials. There was a man—"

And he told the story. "There was another— I re-member him in Lombok, in 'ninety-eight; he was pearl-dealing there, and he said to me: 'There's one thing I'd give a good bit to know.' And I said, 'What's that?' And he said, 'Just why all the old Chinese want to buy two pearls from me— two, no more, but they must be good; and they take 'em away with them, and I never hear any more about it.' For there weren't any resident Chinks there at the time; only some of them came trading; and my friend, being an honest pearl-dealer— which is about as common as a pea-green cow with purple spots— was a good bit liked by them. 'Well,' I said, 'I can tell you that,' for I've a memory of my own— pick up things like a pigeon picking up peas, and keep 'em in my crop till they're wanted. And did you ever notice than anything you learn or pick up, anything whatever—"

"I did," said Tate rather brusquely. Franky, striking a match, went on: "So I said to him, 'It's this,' I said. 'There's a big clan, tribe, I don't know what, of Chinks, but you're liable to meet some of them pretty well anywhere; well, they like to be buried with a pearl in one eye, and a pearl in the mouth; something to do with their religion, maybe, or maybe pure swank; but that's what it is, and you can take my word for it.' I said: 'That's where your pearls are going.' He didn't believe me, and maybe you won't, either, but it's a fact. Have any of you got a match? These are rotten."

Thora was not listening; she had heard the tale before. Under cover of the lampshade dusk, she was looking at Wilfred Barry, trying to make out whether, beneath the same shield, he was or was not looking at her. Almost, she hoped he was. She could feel his eyes, if she could not see them, and they felt like points of fire.

Barry did love her; she was sure of that. The very restraint he was putting upon himself proved it; the way he passed her on the low staircase, without a touch or a word, leaving behind him only the memory of looks that ran through her blood like wine.... Why hold himself in like that if there was nothing that needed holding?

Well, they were together, and they would go away together when the time came; and then, when Wilfred got a job, he would speak—or, said Thora to herself, setting her white teeth, "I'll know the reason why."

It was at this moment that Barry broke the silence.

"Hassall," he said, "I'm thinking of making a bolt of it."

"What? How? What d'ye mean?" demanded Franky, letting the match burn down to his fingers, and dropping it with an impatient, "Damn!... There's no boat likely to come along for weeks."

"I know. But I believe I could make it, along the coast, as far as the next settlement, and that would hurry up matters for the rest of you. I could send a radio, and wait for the answer."

"Risky, going through alone," Hassall said. He had relighted his pipe, and was puffing carelessly away.

Barry passed that.

"When d'you think of leaving?" Tate asked cheerfully.

"In a couple of days. Get some tucker together, write a letter or so, in case.... Wait till nearer full moon; the nights are—"

Thora never heard what the nights were. She had slipped off away, and ran down the verandah to her room. Face buried in pillows, she was trying to choke her sobs. Going!

If Franky hadn't run through all their money, if she'd even had any-thing of her own, something might have been done. They could have married and waited, maybe. Or she'd have— she'd have bribed somebody to do something for Wilfred. She'd have done anything. Committed any crime. She'd almost have killed someone, if money were the result— now that she knew, as in defiance of all probability she bitterly did know, that Barry was going away in order to avoid speaking.

"He couldn't have kept from it," she told her pillow. "I'd have made him. I'd have— oh, what's the use?"

Outside, on the verandah, she could hear them talking. It seemed that Franky— good, dear Franky!— was trying to keep Barry from starting at once. That Tate, on the other hand, was encouraging his departure.

"He would!" she thought angrily.

Silence came after a while; the men strolled off to their rooms; beds creaked; the house was still. In the stillness Thora lay, driving her mind to such an intensity of thought as most women know but once in their lives. Passion frustrated, the force before which kingdoms have fallen, held Thora in its grip that night; she, like others, would have sent thrones crashing, seen heads drop like apples in the wind, to gain her will.

Later she moved from the stiff position that unconsciously she had held for hours— sat up, passed a handkerchief over her wet cheeks, and looked out upon the night.

"Perhaps," she whispered to herself. "Perhaps." ...And then, quiet at last, she lay back on the pillow and slept.

TWO DAYS had passed, three days, and Wilfred had not gone. It was still uncertain when he might leave, but the moon rose early now, nearing the full, and the weather was set fair. Not long— it could not be long now. And Wilfred had not spoken.

It was not enough for Thora.

"They look like that," she thought, drawing from wells of experience not her own, dug deep by the sorrows of the women of a thousand years. "They look at you as if they could take you up and carry you off like Lochinvar— or the Sheik," her modern mind added. "And then they go, and the next thing you see is their marriage in the paper."

She set her teeth as she thought of it. But she was not suffering now, as she had suffered a few days ago. She had an idea.

Through her mind, that night of concentrated thought had passed, in wild dance, incidents, sights, seemingly unrelated, that at the last she had succeeded in gathering into one connected chain. The links drew firm. She knew.

Twice, since then, disregarding the warnings of little Tate, and daring her own fears, she had gone down alone to the Chinese cemetery after dark, hidden herself among surrounding trees, and watched the proceedings of Soo Sing. Soo Sing, who was only half Chinese by birth, and less than half by character. Who was covetous, dangerous, and didn't believe in Chinese gods— although it was certain that he must know all about them.

THORA was by no means timid, but she carried a small revolver in the belt of her dress, when she went down to spy upon Soo Sing. There was no knowing—

By the light of an electric torch, with pick, drill, and spade, he worked. Twice she had seen him now, caught glimpses of a face, young-old, cruel, clever; woolly hair above yellowish thin features, thick, savage mouth and slanting, Oriental eyes. When she saw that face her heart stirred uncomfortably; but she laid her fingers on the cool handle of her revolver, and felt safe.

Oddly, it was the cassowaries she feared more than Soo Sing. They were numerous about the field, now that all sound and disturbance there had ceased. She knew them to be shy in daytime, but fierce at night if disturbed; and one blow of their steam hammer beaks, one kick from a leg as strong as a horse's, was enough to kill the strongest man. They were ill-tempered, furious, and capricious as bulls. She hoped that none of them might stray her way when she was watching the Sino-Papuan.

On the second night, catching her breath for fear she might scream, she saw Soo Sing do things— terrible things. She saw, by the torch's glimmer, what it was that he had worked for, and found. She knew he must have been doing this for weeks, ever since the field closed up. Hidden away somewhere he had a king's ransom in pearls.

SPOILED? No. Thora remembered Franky's stories of pearl fisheries: gems left rotting for weeks in the mass of putrid fish. They wouldn't be spoiled. And when the time came she would make the savage go halves, or know the reason why— she and her little revolver. What did he want with a fortune? Whereas she—

Yes, but if Wilfred ever knew—Wilfred, who was so disconcertingly honorable and high-minded— would he ever speak to her again? Probably not. Robbing the dead— terrifying a savage into parting with his ghastly spoil: it wasn't just the sort of thing a man would like in his wife.

"What you don't know does you no harm," was her final verdict. "And I'll make him the best wife a man could have this side of heaven." That seemed to settle it, to condone things comfortably. Franky, she feared, had seen her coming in late, once or twice; but he, with his amazing liberality of ideas, would only suppose she had been flirting, and let her alone.

The night fell round her like a hot black cloak; from the forest came the curious scent of orchids, mingled with the odors of musk and carrion that mean the near presence of crocodiles. Not too far away, a cassowary beat his

drum— oomp-oomp! Thora, starting at the sound, barely repressed a scream when she felt herself touched on the shoulder.

It was neither cassowary nor crocodile. It was Tate. She knew that, as soon as she felt his fingers clipping her soft flesh beneath the muslin frock. They were drawing back. Very cautiously she followed. She knew he wanted to speak to her. And immediately she guessed why he was here— he, too!

Away from the burying-ground, sheltered by huge sago palms, he flashed his torch, and looked at her, with an unpleasant smile. "Two souls with but a single thought." he quoted. "Clearly, Thora, you and I are mates."

She felt herself immersed in dirty crime. She felt unclean, standing there in the forest with the other graveyard mole, the ghoul like herself. If they weren't doing the actual and horrible corpse-robbing, they were waiting to steal the fruits of it; they were no better than Soo Sing, the Sino-Papuan brute.

Not at first however, did she catch the full significance of what she had done. Tate, still holding her, said laughingly: "That's torn it, Thora; you can't afford to quarrel with me now. Killingly funny, if one thinks of it— you and I both on the same job, wanting a fortune to get married with! Well, we'll both get married with it after all. Not quite according to programme, but just as good, eh?"

She turned sick. She knew, in a moment, that he had her. He would certainly tell Wilfred if she refused.

Temporise? Pretend; That seemed to be the only thing left. A tiny hope, but better than nothing at all.

She said: "We'll talk it over in day-light. I— I— maybe I might. Let me go, now."

His fingers loosed their hold; but not altogether, she thought, out of consideration for her. In the cemetery the faint light of Soo Sing's torch was flashing and moving about.

"I mean to see where he keeps them— this time," Tate said; and in a moment he was gone, walking noiselessly on rubber shoes. Thora, waiting alone, heard sounds that she could not account for—a sharp crack, stamping, thumping, something like a cry. Terrified, she took the pathway leading to the hill, and never stopped till she was safe in her own room.

HER eyelids were purple with sleeplessness next day, and she felt foolishly inclined to start, or break into tears, at the slightest sound. But she made herself up discreetly, and appeared at the breakfast-table. Franky was there, tackling scrub-fowl eggs and tinned bacon; Wilfred was there; he didn't say much to her, but his smile was worth another man's long speeches. Another man!

At the thought of marrying Tate, while Wilfred was still in the world, she turned as cold as she had turned last night in the burying-ground, when she had seen horrors.

But Tate? Where was he?

Other people were asking that, too. It seemed, on inquiry, that he had not returned on the previous night. His bed was undisturbed; no one had seen him.

When this became clear. Barry and Hassall bolted the rest of their breakfast, told Thora, as one man, to stay where she was, away from possible danger, and went off down the hill.

Thora waited, uneasily, half the morning, and then followed. What-ever had happened, she wanted to know the worst. And—she knew more than anyone She might help.

But Tate, when they found him, had long been past helping. His body lay beyond the Chinese burying-ground. near the bark-and-wattle camp that Soo Sing had made for himself. There were marks on his head suggestive of an attack by a cassowary— traces of huge claws, a blue space over the temple. "Kicked to death by one of those brutes" Barry said. "What on earth was the poor chap doing, down there at night?"

HIS revolver lay on the ground, with one chamber discharged. Hassall looked at it, and said nothing. He had caught sight of something long and blue in the grass, not far away. Thora, coming up behind, had seen it, too. Also she had seen, and kicked away, something that the men had missed. A dried cassowary claw, lying beside one of the lumps of broken concrete of which the place was full.

Hassall went forward and pointed to the body of Soo Sing. "Two of 'em," he curtly said.

"Lord, a cassowary couldn't—" Barry began.

"A cassowary didn't," Franky said. "Soo Sing's been shot through the neck, went a little way, and bled to death."

Barry, one hand on his chin, seemed to ponder. "I suppose the poor chap was attacked by the brute, shot at it, missed it, and somehow got Soo Sing instead." he suggested. "And the cassowary got him, and bolted."

Hassall said: "Let's bury them; the sun's hot.... Thora, my dear, I thought I told you—"

He had not looked behind, but somehow he knew she was there.

"All right; I'm going," the girl said.

ALONE in the high bungalow, with the trade-wind singing below, she pulled herself together...

The thing had happened, and was over. Wilfred suspected nothing. Whether Franky guessed or not, it was impossible to say. He had amazing intuitions sometimes, but he always knew when to hold his tongue. "So do I," she thought. "I'm Franky's daughter."

She was quite clear in her mind as to what had really happened. Tate, her partner, her associate in a dirty crime, had tried to bully Soo Sing out of the hideously-acquired treasure. Soo Sing, probably, had agreed to go and get the stuff, had stolen upon Tate from one side, and struck him with a lump of concrete— to which, for the sake of saving himself, he had fastened a cassowary claw. It was well thought out; but Tate, before finally collapsing with a fractured skull, had managed to send one shot after the Sino-Papuan and that had done the business for Soo Sing.

Now both were dead, and Thora was freed from one great fear, at least. She would not have to marry Tate.

Nevertheless, from self-disgust and self-hatred, she did not look to be free. It seemed as if she had awakened from an evil dream. She could not believe that she had done, intended, all that she had done and meant to do.

"I wouldn't have, truly," she told herself. "I— I'm sorry for the poor little brute of a Chink. I wouldn't have made him give me— everything. I— I wouldn't have made him give me anything at all," she cried, in the extremity of her repentance.

"How could I?" she thought, as a million others have thought, waking from the fury of passion balked. It seemed to her now that she did not even care about Wilfred. He might go now, and she would not shed a tear.

The next day he did go; and Thora found herself very miserable— especially since he went in the highest spirits, almost as if he had heard good news. But what news could reach the field of Iareva, dead and buried in the New Guinea bush?

It was three weeks before he re-turned. He came back in a big motor launch, with a dozen other white men, plenty of new stores, and the best of news from Sydney. The field was to be reopened after all, worked by a new process, under a new directorate. They would all get back their jobs again; and Wilfred was to be head engineer.

The greatest surprise of Thora's life was to find, as she did, that Wilfred, after all, required no "making." He discovered her within an hour of his arrival, caught her and kissed her on the big log staircase, and proposed to her before she could draw breath.

"I've something to offer a girl now," he told her. "We'll be married as soon as I can get a parson sent up from port."

IN the evening, on the high verandah, with the electric lights lit and going, he brought to her, somewhat shyly, a little box. "Open it," he said. "There's something for you in it. I kept it till I could speak."

Thora, expecting a ring, opened it smilingly— and screamed, as if she had seen the cold eyes of a snake looking at her out of the silk-lined box. Instantly she dropped it, and over the verandah floor, rattling like hail, fell pearls and pearls and pearls.

"Careless!" Barry said, laughingly, as he bent down to retrieve the jewels. While he was picking them up Franky gave his daughter a look. "Don't be a fool," it plainly said. "Pull yourself together."

She was quite cool, quite herself, when Barry stood up again; she did not even wince when he poured the pearls into her hands— those gems that had lain underground in the eyes, the mouths, of dead Chinese, until Soo Sing retrieved them. She had no doubt at all whence they came. But she wondered.

Barry explained. He had been turning out the humpy of Soo Sing, and by sheer accident had come upon this cache of valuable pearls. Soo Sing, he supposed, must have been collecting them for years; probably somewhere in the Trobriand Islands, which were not so very far away. Of course, one would make inquiry for heirs; but it was not at all probable that a Sino-Papuan coolie would have any traceable relations; they might regard the pearls as almost certainly theirs.

He would have them properly strung just as soon as they reached Sydney on the honeymoon tour they were going to take by and by; and Thora, if she wished to please him, would wear them every day. Good pearls should be worn.

Thora had been well educated; at this point she ought to have recalled, and penitently thought on, the story of the bridal robe of Deianira, that burned the skin and flesh of its luckless wearer. Instead, being modern, she told herself:

"You had that coming to you; serves you damn' well right!"

———————

## 14: Flowers For the Bride

*Sunday Mail* (Brisbane) 29 Dec 1940

THE road of powdered coral, linen-white, grew narrower between the jungle and the sea. There were no motor tracks; the Model T that ran on steamer days needed room for turning; miles back its tyre prints ended.

'Now what?' said Lind to herself, looking between her horse's ears at the place, not far ahead, where the road seemed to die in a final smother of scarlet hibiscus and yellow allamanda.

She pulled the reins. It was very still when the horse had stopped. The tide was out; the almond-green lagoon scarcely breathed. The reef hummed drowsily, like a far-off swarm of bees. Sun lay splashed upon the track in round coins like fairy gold. There can be nothing, Lind thought, nothing in the land I'm going to, half as fair. They say the island gets you— eh, but I wish they could.

Lind was young, not youthful; the twenties were reluctantly leaving hold of her. the thirties reaching out cruel finger points towards the pearly flesh beneath her eyes, the corners of a mouth shaped like a heart, and like a heart, blood-red. Still, her hair was shining, thick. Black as a midnight sea; still, her figure was slim and firm, as if she had been fifteen; her eyes no time could touch— when Lind was 70 they would shine almost as they did today; saxe-blue between dark lashes, eyes of love.

Love— and Lind rode alone. Lind had ridden alone, walked alone, since she left her family at eighteen, by way of a wedding dress and an old, crippled bridegroom, married out of pity. She was widowed now, but scarcely more a widow than she had been on her wedding day. On the tourist ship she had neither encouraged nor discouraged attention, but attention came her way. It was not quite easy for her to be on the ship alone, find a horse and ride away from the motor road of the island, but she had managed ? it. Now she drew rein and said to herself: 'What next?'

She had spoken aloud. Embarrassment seized upon her when she saw that after all there was a hearer. Scott from the ship; Joel Scott, fellow passenger from Vancouver to Melbourne; Joel (she liked the quaint Victorian name), the Canadian with the funny, dimpling clefts in his hard young cheeks, and the sultry hazel eyes. A live wire, Joel; a furious player of games, a hot dancer, a youth who lived every moment of the voyage, and never seemed to go to bed; always he was the last on the ballroom floor, on the deck, in the smoke-room when the stewards came to warn 'lights out'; always when the men came forth at sunrise in their clean pyjamas, to take the early breeze, he was there before them, tramping along as it for a wager.

She'd asked him once— daring a good deal, for Joel was apter at a quick, sly kiss than a talk, and told you little of himself— why he never rested, and he had said without the laugh that ought to have followed on the sentence, 'Time to rest when you're dead— or married.'

She had wondered a good deal about that. She had not asked him what he meant by it. Lind had her reasons. When she saw him standing there, a little behind her horse, she had not time to speculate on what he might think of her exclamation. He answered it immediately, as if it had been put to himself.

'A hike next if you're up to it. I've got something to show you in there.'

He pointed to the forest generally.

'What?' she asked, and he answered her seriously.

'I don't know. That's what I came to see. Tie up your horse in the shade and he'll stay all day.'

He was already standing on the near side, offering his hand, but Lind sprang easily to the ground without aid.

They started, duck file, down a narrow foot track leading away from the road. The jungle smelled of spice and orchids and wet leaves. The silence of it daunted Lind. The height of the trees was frightening. Blue sky seemed shut away for ever. They moved in green gloom like fish at the bottom of the sea. Neither spoke. After a mile or two light thinly showed ahead, and Joel, taking Lind by the arm, began to run. He talked as he ran: he didn't seem to get out of breath as she did.

'It's a plantation.' he said. 'Left to me, worth nothing, I'm told, but I had to see it. Thought I could, maybe, use it as a—'

He stopped, fell into a walk. 'I'm tiring you,' he said in a different tone.

'You're not tiring me,' Lind answered. 'I suppose you mean you're going to have it for your honeymoon.'

She didn't know how she knew— there was such a thing as thought transference, perhaps, or perhaps she had just guessed— but his face told her she was right. It told her no more.

Coolly he changed the subject.

'Perhaps,' he said. 'Fellow had the place and tried to make money out of drugs— they use the juice for dyspeptics, I believe— but he went broke, and then he died, and as I'd lent him money and he couldn't pay back he left it to me. So because the ship was making this long stay...'

'What long stay?'

'You didn't hear? They fixed it up after you left, I reckon. All about strikes and cargo; wouldn't interest you, but she's stopping for three nights and two days. So I thought I'd come along and camp a bit, maybe— sent a lad ahead with my gear, and... there she is!'

Lind did not ask what he meant. They had passed through the half light of the approach and now they stood on the edge of the yellow-green-lit clearing, torn by axes from the thick fur of the forest. Joel's plantation was before them.

For a moment neither spoke. The clearing was covered, acre after acre, with palms about fifteen or sixteen feet in height, of two kinds only. On some gardenia-like flowers were closely clustering above a heavy weight of green and golden fruit. On others— taller, slighter trees— blossoms alone grew; blossoms fine as lace and pale as ivory, falling in strings yards long. It almost took her breath away— that and the sudden sight of these wonderful and beautiful trees, standing like dancers ready to begin their steps, on the wide stage of the clearing.

'Oh, Joel!' she breathed, not knowing she had used his name. He did not call her attention to the fact. This girl— this woman— had been hard to capture, might even now flit from his closing hand— evasive and uncertain as a butterfly. And that he meant to close his hand. Joel, in this last minute only, knew.

He said: 'Ever seen them before? They're the most sentimental trees in existence. They couldn't live anywhere outside of the Islands of Love. Those tall ones are the men, and the trees with the fruit are the women. Can't live without each other. Making love all the time. So full of life that people say you mustn't place them near your windows or they'll suck your strength away. Fellow who had the place evidently believed that. See what a clearing he's made about the house.'

She had not noticed the house until now. It stood a good way from the verge of the clearing; a simple, grass-thatched bungalow, with verandah screens of plaited cane. Joel, with his warm hand pressing on Lind's bare arm that felt suddenly, strangely cold, said softly, 'A house for lovers.'

There was a deep, singing quality in his voice that made her think of violins— and yet he was no singer; everyone on the ship knew that he could not tell one note from another. But he can use them all, she thought.

And again, she thought, 'I suppose he used that violin of a voice to win the girl who's going to share his honeymoon.' And she found strength to answer coolly.

'I hope you and she will find it so.'

Joel said, not looking at Lind. 'I hope you will.'

This is, she thought, what my Victorian ancestors would have called a proposal. Shall I blush and tell him 'It's so sudden!' Gosh! it certainly is!

Then, for she knew she must answer at once unless she wished to say things she must never say: 'I've nothing to do with the matter,' she clearly told him.

In the momentary silence that followed, filled only by the solitary pigeon's persistent complaint, Lind became conscious of the overpowering, drugging perfume of the papayas invading her, beating her down. He did well, she thought, to keep them away from his room— that dead man who once lived there. They are the livest plants on earth. They almost talk... But Joel was talking now.

'I understand you. I know all about you as if I'd known you for years. I thought— I love her and she loves me...'

'Oh!'

'But yes. Why shouldn't I say it, when I'm bursting with pride? There's another girl; you guessed that, but let's leave her out— cut the knot. She knows I don't care for her; she'll be glad to get rid of me once she realises what an unreliable brute I am. But you, you don't mind my being that or anything— you love me all the same. Lind, Lind! There's a parson only two miles off. Say the word and the boy'll bring; him.'

Through all the confusion of his hurried speech she clearly understood that the ghost woman, the fiancée, was being thrown aside for her. She did not mind— Joel was right when he said that she loved him, no matter what he was or did. If that had been all!

'You misunderstand.' she said hastily— it was so hard to do this thing! 'I won't— can't— marry anyone.'

'You re-married.' he said, with a sudden drop in his voice. She hated to see his face change.

'No, no,' she assured him. 'I'm not. But it isn't possible... I mustn't.'

Again she told herself, 'Mustn't! Mustn't!' as a child, tempted by a forbidden cake, tells himself that he must not touch it.

The clearing was filled with sun— sun that seeped through the arch of the skull and the strong shells of the vertebrae, invading brain and marrow. She heard herself saying in a voice that was not her own: 'If you wish... if you like...' and was instantly caught up by Joel's joyous shout: 'If I wish!... Boy, come here. I'll write a note. You find the horse that's down at the road and take it to the old parson who lives on the beach. Tell him I'll give him five pounds. And one for you, to keep your mouth shut, and I'll split your mouth into both your ears if you don't.'

THE brown house in the clearing became the honeymoon house after all. And all night, in the moonlight, the dancing trees stood away from the darkened windows and shook their ballet skirts of leaves and their lace shawls of blossom, and made their own strange love.

With the morning, Joel, who had gone down to the creek to swim, came back and found Lind in tears.

'You needn't tell me,' he said, 'you don't love me. or that you're sorry; I wouldn't believe ten thousand angels if they said it. Who's in your mind, Lind? What is it?'

But she dried her eyes and smoothed her hair at the tarnished glass where the dead man had seen his face grow daily paler, and would not tell him.

'I should have thought,' was all she said. 'I didn't think.'

'You've all your life and mine to think in now; think as much as you please,' he told her.

Later he went to the village with a laugh on his lips and in his long, dusk eyes. When he came back the laugh was gone.

'Look here, sweetheart,' he began, 'I've something to tell you.'

'You've found out,' she said, looking at him steadily.

'I don't know how you knew, but I have.' He did not see how white she had turned, nor how her colour came back when he spoke again.

'The old villain ... the greedy old... Well, he did offer me the money again, but I wouldn't take it! I told him to keep it and drink himself to hell with it a bit quicker than he was going— and that's not slow. He said he couldn't resist the cash; he said— and I nearly blacked his eye for him, old as he is— that he thought I was playing a game, that I knew...'

'What?'

'Didn't you understand then? But I wouldn't have kept it from you; anyhow; it can be set right... I ... we'll see to that...'

'What is it?'

'Why, that old skunk who married us last night has been disbarred— defrocked — whatever they call it— for drink and general games, and has no more right to marry people now than I have. Don't look like that, angel. It can be ...'

Lind was herself now, coiffed and bathed, and cool, certain— even with the sword piercing her heart— oh; what she must do?

She said, 'It can't. It mustn't. One of us must go on in the ship and the other stay for the next. We've got I to say good-bye.'

Joel's eyebrows come down over his eyes. 'The hell we have! Sorry, sweet, think of something else.'

'I suppose,' she said in a kind of desperation, 'you'll have to know.'

'You can tell me what you like.' he said, 'but I know it's something that doesn't matter— whatever it is.'

'It always matters,' she told him, 'when one's selfish and cruel. And that's what I am!'

'So?' he jested.

'I WAS married,' she began...

The arm about the waist tightened a little. Joel's eyes found hers.

She hurried on: 'Years ago, when I was twenty. I was secretary to James Kilburn. a crippled old man. He asked me to marry him, so that he could keen me to look after him. And so I did look after him for five years. And then he died and his will...'

She broke off; her voice was shaking. 'It wasn't a... kind... will after all. It left me money— lots of it. But was all— all— all to go away from me if I married.'

'Well? Think I want your money? Think I'm not worth whatever it was? If you do ...'

She liked his conceit, as she liked every bit of him, from his thick ruffled hair to his long springy feet. It was all Joel.

'That's not it. The— the point is that I've been keeping so many poor souls who couldn't live without my help; some of them my own people; others, people who are in terrible need. And if I married and lost it, it all goes to the hospitals of Melbourne. He was Australian, and so am I. And my dears would starve... Joel, I was mad, but I've been saved: my dears wont have to suffer. And I've done nothing wrong— we've done nothing wrong. We didn't know ... It wasn't wrong, was it?'

The violin note of Joel's voice was blurred for a moment. as he answered her hoarsely:

'No, little white sweetheart, no!' Almost too suddenly he was himself again.

'That slug you married knew you pretty well, I reckon. I can see him now sticking out his cursed dead hand. Blast him!"

He understood the world better than Lind, for all her travels. He had seen such arrangements before. Knew how often they were broken, through a secret marriage, or a succession of 'affairs'; knew how leniently the courts regarded such runaways from a cruel or unjust will.

But Kilburn, the old fox, had understood Lind. She would keep to her word. She couldn't imperil the 'dears' whom Joel, in his heart would gladly have consigned to the galleys. Kilburn hadn't had her himself. He was determined, grinning there in his grave, that no one else should.

But we tricked you, Joel thought. Even if she's going to stick to this— that we can't be married— we've tricked you, old fox! Turn there in your grave and know it!

Yes, but Kilburn, the rich man, had had the last word, as rich men do have it. He could part the lovers; he was going to do it.

The sun was high above the clearing before they finished their argument. It was no argument after all. Lind would discuss nothing. She only repeated again and again, 'I can't!'

'If I were only losing the money myself,' she said once, 'it wouldn't matter. I'd think anyhow that I ought to... you ought to...'

Joel wanted to say 'make an honest woman of you,' but he restrained himself not without difficulty. He said instead:

'Look here, just how much is this money of yours?'

'It comes to about three thousand pounds in a good year.'

'And how much do you spend on yourself?'

'Less than half. Why?'

'Never mind. I'm a lawyer. Lawyers have to ask questions, even on holiday, or they'd wither up and die.'

'My lawyers said the will would hold. They said...'

'No matter. I'm only asking for curiosity's sake. What happens to the money when you die?'

'It goes to those Melbourne hospitals.'

He asked no more. It seemed that his curiosity was exhausted. His young face— younger than hers, she realised with a pang— was down-drawn, dark beneath the eyes. She had never seen him so quiet. For a moment more he sat beside her, playing with the tassels of her belt, unconsciously, as if he did not know she was there. Then he sprang suddenly to his feet.

'What's to be, will be,' he said. 'Tell the steamer people you stayed at the sugar plantation; it's a long way off, and nobody on board's likely to have been there. I'll send for my luggage before the ship sails; I shan't go on board again.'

They stood there in the flooding sunlight of the clearing. Alone as Adam and Eve in Paradise. And, as in Paradise the snake was there to spoil it all.

Lind asked him: 'Are you going to be married to her?'

Joel said with violence: 'I'd cut my throat first. And hers. She only wanted me because another man turned her down. She's rich. I've had enough,' he spoke incisively, 'of rich women.'

Lind said shakily: 'I think you'd better say goodbye... after that.'

He didn't answer her; he went and got the horse which had been left near the house over night. He saddled it in fierce silence, put the reins in her hand, put his hand under her foot and lifted her. From the saddle she leaned down. She could not see him; she could only see a blurred shadow where he stood, and trees and flowers beyond him dancing in a mist of tears. She kissed his forehead: but he did not return the kiss. He stood like a statue until the horse had responded to the kick of her heel and broken into a slow, indifferent

canter. He was still standing there when she looked back, on the edge of- the*, forest.

A long strand of lacy papaya blossoms lay across the saddle, where it had caught and broken off crossing the glade. She lifted it to her lips and tossed it away as she left the clearing behind her.

The horse was glad to escape from the sun again; he hurried into the dark. Now and then he twitched his shiny hide uncomfortably, annoyed by the drops of water that fell upon it tickling him like flies. But the shower ended; by the time his hoofs had begun to rattle on the coral roadway Lind's rain of tears had ceased.

In the sunlight and the moonlight Joel's little plantation, his small, brown bungalow, lay untenanted and lone. About the verandah wild white lilies, wild coleus with claret-coloured leaves, grew and flourished. Jasmine and allamanda made a mat of blossoms on the roof, crept with long green fingers, and dangling flowers into the living room; lawyer vines made their way into the bedroom, lacing the mildewed pillows with wreaths of thorn. No one came. Outside the tall male trees and the sturdy women trees bore their loads of fruit and flower; loved and bore and scattered, bore and scattered again. There is a season for full fruiting, but fruit always hangs upon the papaya tree; never does it stand bare. Never does the tall male tree lose its scented garlands. As in the island where they grow there is no winter, so in the loves of the papayas there is no rest.

The glade kept silence. It was as if the trees and the house and the dark secret forest beyond were waiting, expectant of the lifting of a spell. It came when the silvery, warm 'winter' of the islands was due, with the sudden blooming of bare trees into scarlet winter flowers, the waking of the south-east trades to blowing, blusterous airs down the beach and the coral road.

A white man came riding to the house, with native boys following him. The natives cleared away the weeds and the encroaching flowers, brought new furniture, new linens, put food and fuel in the kitchen, loosened the rusty tap of the water tank. Then they departed and left the white man alone.

Joel stayed for two days; on the third he took his newest linen suit, slicked his unmanageable hair, and rode into the town to meet the liner from Sydney.

On the far, sunny side of the promenade deck, away from the town, under the searing sun that discouraged other travellers, Joel and Lind met again.

'It's no use,' she told him. 'I'm going back to England, just as I planned before... It's dear to see you, but you shouldn't have come. It only makes things harder for both of us.'

'I should have come,' he contradicted. 'It's the one important thing on earth for both of us. Sit here till I talk to you.'

There was nobody about but a steward arranging chairs. Joel looked ten-shilling notes at him, and ha melted away. Stewards know...

'Lind,' Joel began, 'if you'll marry me— again— there's a properly qualified parson waiting for us in the township. And there's no God's reason on earth or sea why we shouldn't marry. No, listen. I know all about the people you can't desert and the workhouses they'd have to go to if you did. I tell you I know everything— more than you, because I'm a lawyer— because it's my job to find ways out of things— or into them.'

'What have you been doing?' she asked him. She was pale under all her sea tan. Joel was so incalculable; one loved him for it, but...

He said, 'I've been to those hospitals. I've looked up everything. I said: This girl is under thirty and as sound as a bell. She'll live to eighty or more. Fifty years for you to wait for your money, and by that time there may be no money or hospital. If you can agree among you to take a sporting chance and accept half of the bequest, or about fifteen hundred a year— capital about forty thousand, I understand, gilt-edged securities— if you can agree. I said, she'll marry me and the other half can go to her pensioners... I'm afraid I said her damned pensioners.'

Lind, looking at him with new hope in her eyes, said nothing. She could not speak. After all ... after all.

He went on: 'They were real sports. They said, 'Bless you, my children! Hand over the cash as quick as you like.' I've worked like a nigger getting things into train for you. You've only to sign a few papers and the hospitals have to sign one or two, and it's done. That is ...'

He paused a minute, looked out over the blue, unruffled sea— the sea that surrounded the island with peace— 'If you feel that you could— give up — your money and just live on mine.'

Lind said — because she had to say something or cry, and one didn't do that — 'Where would we live?'

'My practice is in Sydney. But we can have holidays here— and one, to begin with, on my plantation where the flowers are.'

She said, half-laughing, because of that absurd tendency to cry. 'You'll never make anything out of that place.'

'Shan't I?' he asked her, taking both her hands and looking in her eyes of sea-blue.

'After that,' she said, 'I think you'd better say good-bye...'

From the saddle she leaned down. She could not see him for a mist of tears. She kissed his forehead; he did not return the kiss.

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