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SOUTH OF THE LINE

South of the Line

By
Ralph Stock



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
SIRJOHNNIE OF THE GREEN HOUSES	1
THE RULES OF THE GAME	25
THE PRETENDERS	46
THE COMPLETE BEACHCOMBER	69
THE PEEP SHOW	92
THE LONELY LADY	106
MALUA	123
THEIR TROUBLES	141
MOTHER-OF-PEARL	151
HIT OR MISS	167
ROO OF THE ATOLLS	183
WE OF MALITA	194
THE PREPOSTEROUS PARTNER	217
"—HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES"	230
THE MASCOT	240
THE HABIT OF THE SEA	254
BARTER	271
THE LAUGH	289
THE INEVITABLE INGRAM	306
THE SPELL	320

SOUTH OF THE LINE

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SIRJOHNNIE OF THE GREEN HOUSES

THE launch swung gracefully into the cove, and, churning the indigo water into a white lather with its reversed propeller, came to rest like a great hurricane bird poised on the gently heaving bosom of the Pacific.

Out of the world it had come, the great world of Levuka, and perhaps beyond, into this little coral beach of Luana, for what purpose only the Great Spirit knew. Felisi squatted at the edge of the family *taro* patch, the handle of the heavy hoeing knife resting in her listless hand, watching wide-eyed.

“This is it,” came a voice, clear as a bell, over the water. “Yes, I’m sure this is it; I marked it by the forked palm yonder.”



Now, Felisi understood this, or, at any rate, the drift of it. Had she not sold imitation pink coral on the wharf at Levuka? And was not Levuka the centre of the world, where, when the steamer came in, people were so many that the wharf, the street, and the giant houses swarmed with them like fish in the rock pools at low tide? Strange people they were, especially the

women, covered with unnecessary clothes and trailing brightly hued veils in their wake. They spoke in harsh, high-pitched voices, too, and seemed for ever restless; but their money—ah, their money flowed from them like a stream of quicksilver, that only needed diverting into the right channels, by means of pink coral or necklaces of seed, to make one wealthy beyond belief.

“What a darling!” one of these women had said on the wharf, catching sight of Felisi in her modest blue wrapper. “My dear, look at the child’s hair! And such eyes!” Felisi had suffered the mauling that followed—the stroking of her hair and velvety skin—with becoming modesty, but she had learnt that she was a “darling,” that she possessed hair and eyes, and that they and a reed basket of worthless coral netted her *matiquali* (tribe) five shillings. Oh, it was wonderful what could be learnt in Levuka! After it, Luana was a tomb.

People had begun to move under the wide awning of the launch, and presently a native dived cleanly from the bows. The water was up to his neck, and he slowly dragged the launch nearer shore. When he had waded waist deep, he backed against the gunwale, and a man in white ducks, with his trousers rolled to the knee, climbed on his shoulders and was carried ashore. Another white man followed in like manner, and they both stood on the wet sand, directing the natives as they landed bundles of all shapes and sizes neatly sewn in green rot-proof canvas. It seemed to Felisi that the entire merchandise of Levuka had been shipped to Luana for some inscrutable reason.

“I think that’s the lot,” said the taller of the two visitors, a gaunt man with remarkably thin legs and large feet, and a kind though careworn face.

“Yes, Sir John, that is all,” replied the other. He was short and pink, and perspiring freely.

“Then you may as well get on with it.”

The tall man turned and strolled along the beach, stopping now and then to burrow into the wet sand with his toes, and unearth the queer live things that lived there. Every now and then, too, he would fling his arms wide above his head, and let them fall to his sides with a sigh of deep satisfaction. It was as though he had been cramped, and was now rejoicing in his freedom. He was doing just what Felisi had seen her brother do—the one who stole the canoe—when he came out of Levuka gaol into the sunlight. Her heart went out to the tall man with thin legs and big feet.

And the other? Undoubtedly he was mad. He trotted this way and that in the hot sand, until his pink face turned to red and then to purple. He was trying to make the natives hurry, which, of course, was not only impossible, but ridiculous. Were there not three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, each one of which was equally suitable for unpacking green bundles? Nevertheless, he continued to hurry himself, and to such purpose that, before the sun had sunk into the sea, a green village had sprung into being on the edge of the beach under the palms—nothing less. It appeared that each bundle contained a house, or something appertaining to a house, and now it was all in place.

The miracle-worker, mopping his solar topee as he

went, crossed the beach to his companion, who was sitting dabbling his large feet in a rock pool.

"All is now ready, Sir John," he said.

"Ah, good!" answered the tall man, leaning forward and picking up a soldier crab between finger and thumb.

"I think you will find everything in order, Sir John," the other continued, standing in the sand with his fat calves pressed together, so that one bulged over the other. "The sparklets are——"

"You have shown Mandri where everything is?" interrupted the other, watching the soldier crab's ineffectual little pincer waving in the air.

"He has arranged his own necessities himself, Sir John. The rest is as you ordered."

"Then that will do, thank you, Saunders."

"Next Wednesday, I think you said, Sir John?"

"Yes, yes." The tall man seemed irritable. He was obviously more interested in the soldier crab than his companion of the bulging calves. "Once a week will be enough. What's to-day?"

"Tuesday, the eighteenth of February, Sir John," the other answered, with extraordinary promptitude.

"Then Wednesday. Yes, each Wednesday will do admirably. And don't forget the spirits."

The tall man carefully replaced the soldier crab in the rock pool and stood up. The other backed away slightly.

"I thought I might mention, Sir John, that there will be green vegetables. I see a native girl in a small garden on the edge of the beach behind us. No doubt——"

“Ah, to be sure, to be sure,” muttered the tall man, strolling across the beach toward the launch, with the other following. “Mandri will see to all that. Good afternoon, Saunders!”

In a dignified but forceful way he herded the pink man and the natives into the launch, which was soon a glittering speck against the blue. For a while he stood with his thin legs apart and his hands behind his back, watching it go. Then he, too, went mad, or so it seemed to Felisi. He raised both skinny arms to the sunset, as though in worship, dropped them suddenly, and, turning, dashed along the beach through the ripple of a wave, sending the water flying in all directions, including over himself. Then he rolled in the sand like a dog, and rose, plastered and breathless and laughing.

“That’s better,” he bellowed, “much better! Ma-a-ndri!”

A gray-haired Tongan appeared in the doorway of the smallest green house.

“I want grilled *saqa* for dinner,” shouted the tall man, “and grated cocoanut and pineapple-fool!”

The Tongan made a *tama* (obeisance) and withdrew.

Presently he came out and crossed the beach to Felisi.

“The *Turaga* (gentleman) wishes for *saqa*,” he said. “Where are the fish-traps?”

Felisi rose from her heels as though propelled by some evenly working mechanism and led the way round the rocks at the end of the beach.

“Hi! Where are you going?” bawled the tall man.

“To get the *saqa*, *saka* (sir).”

“Good! I’m coming.” The tall man walked behind, whistling.

Felisi, in her trim white *sulu* (kilt), swung on in front, with her natural grace of movement slightly enhanced by the knowledge that she was being noticed. At the fish-trap—a simple affair of volcanic rock boulders built in a square, so that, when the tide receded, fish were left behind—she picked up a spear from the rocks and waded waist-deep, holding it aloft. The tall man watched her, entranced, and Felisi knew it, and took care that the poise of her arms and head and shoulders were all that could be desired. Had she not the reputation of “a darling” to live up to?

Suddenly the spear flashed from her hand, there was a splash, a swirling of waters, and the long bamboo shaft sped round and round the trap, with Felisi splashing after it. She caught it and raised it aloft, with a two-foot *saqa* on its barbs flashing green in the waning light.

“Splendid!” roared the tall man. “I say——” The rest of whatever he was going to say was drowned by the splash that he made as he jumped down into the trap and waded over to Felisi.

“I must have a try,” he mumbled excitedly, taking the spear from Felisi. “*Vinaka* (thank you), little girl.” And he was off, stalking round the trap as though walking barefoot on broken glass. What followed caused Felisi to put her hand to her mouth and snatch it away whenever the tall man turned her way. One is not supposed to laugh at a white chief but, oh, it was funny! He kept jabbing at the water as though

prodding a snake. Or he would throw the spear with tremendous force, so that it would stick into the sand. Then he would flounder after it and hold it up, with a piece of seaweed on the end and a look of pained surprise on his gaunt face that sent Felisi into silent hysterics. But best of all was when he caught his toe on a rock. Then he dropped the spear and sank into the water, hugging his foot and saying things that Felisi did not quite understand, but which she seemed to remember having heard in Levuka.

She went to him, but he brushed her aside and continued his stalking. "I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it," he kept muttering, as he wallowed round the trap. The determination of the man! "It's the reflection," he told himself aloud, "of course, it's the reflection. When you think a fish is there, it isn't. It's——Let me see, where's the light! Ah, yes, to the left—no, the right—er—or——"

The spear left his hand. The shaft was racing round the trap. The tall man stood staring after it, spell-bound. But only for a moment; the next he was after it, yelping like a dog after a rat.

Felisi could contain herself no longer—she was after it, too. The white chief's first *saqa*! It *must* be caught and, unless he knew the way, he might flounder round the trap until he dropped.

"Go away—vamosé! Savvy?" he bellowed savagely as she came near him. He floundered on like a grampus, but always the shaft of the spear avoided his snatching fingers. Then Felisi dived. She held the *saqa* just long enough under water for the tall man to

catch the spear shaft on the surface, then she stood before him, dripping and triumphant as he.

"*You* catch him, Sirjohnnie!" she panted, in an access of enthusiasm.

The tall man took an abrupt seat in the water, and remained there gasping. His head was just clear of the surface, and his mouth opened and shut precisely like the *saqa's*.

"Good heavens!" he panted at last. Then: "What did you say?"

"I say *you* catch him," repeated Felisi diffidently.

The tall man seemed to have thoroughly noticed her for the first time.

"But what else? You said something else."

"I say Sirjohnnie," said Felisi, giggling.

The tall man flung back his head, so that it was half submerged, and laughed. By the Great Spirit, what a laugh he had!

"Oh, that's great!" he roared, then looked at Felisi again. He had the kindest gray eyes imaginable.

"But how did you come to know my name?"

"I hear 'em talk him *ongo* (over there)," Felisi explained, pointing toward the beach.

"Sirjohnnie!" repeated the tall man, and burst into another hurricane of laughter.

"Who are you?" he asked, when it had subsided into occasional chuckles.

"Felisi," answered that individual, leaning gracefully on the spear.

"And you talk English?"

"Some." Felisi had learnt this remarkably useful

word from a woman who she had afterward heard came from *Americania*, wherever that might be.

Sirjohnnie laughed again and scrambled to his feet.

"Some, eh?" he repeated, as though it were a great joke. "Well, Felisi, you've given me the best afternoon's sport I've had in years." He felt in his soaking duck trousers pocket and brought out a handful of silver. "What's your *saga* worth?"

Felisi shook her head.

"You catch him, Sirjohnnie," she insisted.

Sirjohnnie regarded her quizzically for a moment, then smiled and returned the money to his pocket.

"Very well," he said, "you must come and help me eat it, that's all."

Nothing could have pleased Felisi more. She was longing, with a child's curiosity, to see the interior of the green houses. Moreover, she felt toward Sirjohnnie as she had never felt toward a *Turaga* in her life. What was he but a great child? She, Felisi, had taught him how to spear *saga*. She could teach him many things. Principally owing to Sirjohnnie's ludicrous performance of the afternoon, Felisi took a motherly as well as a childlike interest in him. They are not incompatible.

They waded ashore together, the *saga* suspended by the gills from the spear held between them. The Tongan squatted on the rocks, smoking a *saluka*, as he had squatted and smoked since the beginning of the performance. If a *Turaga* chose to catch his own dinner in the presence of his servant and a native girl, who was he, Mandri, to interfere? There was never any telling what they might do.

At the door of the largest of the green houses the party broke up. Sirjohnnie, who seemed to have gone into a trance—he had a knack of doing this, Felisi noticed—turned aside and disappeared into the dim interior. Felisi followed Mandri to the kitchen, and squatted outside, as a woman should. The Tongan naturally treated her as non-existent. Nevertheless, a scullery maid has her uses, and he allowed Felisi to cook the *saga*, wrapped in banana leaf, Island fashion. For one thing, he knew that it would be cooked better that way than in the *Turaga's* elaborate stove, and, for another, that it gave him the opportunity of sitting in the doorway and smoking one of Sirjohnnie's superlative cigars. The only fly in the ointment was that the pest spoke English with uncanny glibness.

“Mandri,” said Sirjohnnie, an hour later—he had begun dinner with a book propped against the lamp, but in the end the dinner claimed most of his attention—“I must congratulate you on the *saga*. Perhaps it's because I caught it myself, but it certainly tastes remarkably good.”

“*Eo, saka,*” grunted Mandri, with a self-satisfied smile.

“The new stove is a success, then?”

“The new stove is a success, *saka.*” Mandri shuffled his horny feet on the matting of the floor.

“By the way”—Sirjohnnie was leaning back, smoking one of the excellent cigars—“where is that little native girl—Felisi, that's it?” He actually remembered the name, Mandri noticed.

“She is outside, *saka.*”

“Outside? Then send her in, will you?”

“The *Turaga* wishes to see you,” Mandri told Felisi, and gave her a warning scowl as she slipped past him into the living room.

She sank on to the mats inside the doorway. From somewhere she had secured a red hibiscus blossom, and it now flamed against her blue-black hair.

“Well, Felisi,” said Sirjohnnie, tilting back his camp chair, “the *saqa* was a huge success.”

“Suchthess,” lisped Felisi.

“Yes. What do you think of our new stove?”

Much clearing of the throat and clashing of pans proceeded from the kitchen.

Felisi allowed an agonized pause to ensue. Mandri needed a lesson.

“Stove—him all right,” she conceded at last. “By an’ by plenty more *saqa*?”

Sirjohnnie shook his head. “Not for me, I’m afraid. By an’ by plenty work.”

“Work?”

“Yes. I’ve got so much work to do, and so little time to do it in, that it almost frightens me.”

Felisi found herself on the verge of solving a problem that had always puzzled her.

“Plenty work, plenty time?” she suggested.

“Yes, for you lucky people,” sighed Sirjohnnie.

“Why no plenty time for-you-lucky-people?” mimicked Felisi.

“We have other things that must be done. We’re not lucky. We can’t do what we want to do always, you know.”

“Why?”

Sirjohnnie chuckled, then frowned.

“Oh, just because.”

“Jus’ becos.”

“Yes. I admit it’s not much of a reason, Felisi, but——” He smiled whimsically and crossed one thin leg over the other. “We’ve gone past ourselves ‘over there’—that’s about the truth of the matter.” He was speaking more to himself than Felisi. “We want to progress.”

“Pro-gress,” repeated Felisi solemnly.

“Yes, go ahead—improve, know more and live more comfortably.” Suddenly Sirjohnnie laughed. “Anyway, we call it progress. So we make law, plenty law—law written down for us by other people, and law we make for ourselves—and sometimes we obey it, because we think that is the way to progress, and sometimes we disobey it so that we can get ahead of the other fellah. That’s our life. Funny, Felisi, isn’t it?”

Felisi admitted that it was.

“Law,” she echoed. “Law make no plenty by an’ by?”

Sirjohnnie changed the position of his legs.

“Yes,” he said, “it does rather limit one’s time. It is made to make us do things that we don’t want to. And even you have your law, Felisi,” he added quickly. “You know that you mustn’t steal——”

“A canoe,” supplied Felisi.

“Yes, a canoe or anything. That you must work in the *taro* patch, and—marry some day.”

He did not add that these were natural laws, although it occurred to him that they were.

“Law for no plenty by an’ by, no good,” pronounced Felisi firmly.

Sirjohnnie laughed.

“Perhaps you’re right,” he said, and fell idly to turning the pages of the book that had been propped against the lamp during dinner.

“Look here, you’re something of an ichthyologist, Felisi,” he said suddenly. “Do you recognize any of these fellahs?”

She was at his side in an instant, clucking with wonder at the brightly coloured picture of fish—fish of all shapes and sizes and colours. They hung there on the white paper as though in some clear pool.

Suddenly a brown finger descended on the page.

“*Eo*,” she cried excitedly, “him, an’ him, an’ him!”

“A compliment for the lithographer,” muttered Sirjohnnie, smiling. “Wilkinson and Pratt are good people.”

“An’ him, an’ him,” continued Felisi. “*Him* no good,” she added with a pout, indicating a rather washy representation of sea and coral at the foot of the page.

Sirjohnnie laughed.

“You’re right,” he said; “that part of it is very, very poor. But, you see, the people who made these pictures have never been here. They don’t know, poor devils.”

“Poor devils,” repeated Felisi, with faithful intonation.

At this point Mandri entered with the coffee. Ap-

parently he saw nothing, and placed the cup on the camp-table and withdrew. But he carried into the kitchen a mental picture of Sir John Truscott, R. Z. S., leaning over a lamp-lit table, his grizzled head close to a cascade of blue-black hair relieved by a flaming hibiscus blossom.

He clucked loudly twice and helped himself from the whisky tantalus.

But the next day Sirjohnnie was a changed man. He wore nothing but a *sulu*, a shirt, and pith helmet. He carried an extremely fine-meshed shrimp net and a tin creel of water, and wandered from rock pool to rock pool in a trance that effectually excluded Felisi. She spoke to him twice, but he took not the faintest notice.

He would kneel over a pool by the hour, with his shrimp net lying on the bottom, while the fish—some of them not more than half an inch long, but striped or mottled with every imaginable colour and shade of colour—hovered in the crystal-clear water like butterflies suspended on invisible wire, or darted in and out of their homes in the coral.

Each pool was a marine garden, great or small, but complete with swaying trees of tinted weed, coral bridges, and paths of sand, and Sirjohnnie's soul lived in them, that was plain. Then would come an upward jerk of the net, a hasty examination of its contents, and a slip-slop as the fish were dropped into the creel of water.

This went on all day, and Felisi found it boring. She had ideas of her own on the subject, and presently proceeded to put them into execution. Some time in

the afternoon—Sirjohnnie had had no lunch, in spite of Mandri's importunities—she went to the bush and returned to one of the pools with an armful of green vine. This she tossed into the water and squatted back on the sand. Presently a fish appeared, then another and another, until the pool was alive with scintillating colour; but there was no movement—every fish in that pool, from the remotest cranny of coral, floated inert close to the surface.

Sirjohnnie, when at last Felisi succeeded in enticing him away from the net for an inspection, was overcome. He uttered little yelps of excitement as he pounced on fish that he knew to be rare specimens, and some that he had never seen before.

“But this is wonderful!” he cried. “Some more of that vine, Felisi, quick!”

Felisi obeyed instructions in every respect except speed. Sirjohnnie was capering round the pool like a madman when she returned.

“This is nothing short of a discovery,” he told her, in a shaking voice. “What is it, Felisi? But of course, you don't know.” He clucked impatiently.

And that was where he was wrong, Felisi told herself, squatting in the sand, triumphant. She knew—the whole of Luana knew—that it was a vine that grew in the bush, and when flung into a pool, stupefied fish. What more did any one want to know? The ignorance of these white chiefs was beyond belief.

Sirjohnnie was breaking the vine into lengths now, and carefully wrapping them in a square of oiled silk.

“Crothers must see this,” he muttered aloud, even as he had muttered in the fish-trap.

The evening was undoubtedly the most pleasant time for Felisi. Mandri had come to regard her as a harmless, and occasionally useful, adjunct to the green houses; and Sirjohnnie, when he was not in a trance, seemed to derive considerable amusement from talking with, or rather at, her on a variety of subjects, ranging from ichthyology to theosophy. Also, and what was far more important, he had discovered that the girl had extraordinarily nimble fingers. As she had threaded seeds for sale on Levuka wharf, so she mounted and varnished the minutest fish. Some were delicately stuffed with preservative cotton-wool and packed carefully in labelled departments of tin-lined chests. Others were preserved in jars of spirit. But whatever was done with them, Sirjohnnie knew that he was on the way to making the finest collection of tropical fish in existence.

Why the girl did all this, he never stopped to ask himself. He was too busy. He had come to accept her as part of the furniture of the green houses—a very essential part. If he had ever guessed the true reason, he would have received the shock of his life.

On one Wednesday visitation of the launch, the pink man brought Sirjohnnie a letter. It lay on the table until evening, unopened, and when at last he had read it, he sat staring straight before him for so long that Felisi thought the trance had taken hold of him for good. But there was trouble in his eyes, and there was never that when he was in a trance. Felisi knew the cause by instinct.

“You go *ongo*” (over there) she said, nodding her head seaward.

Sirjohnnie looked down at her with unseeing eyes. Then suddenly he laughed.

“How the mischief did you know that?” he said.

Felisi wagged her head sagely.

“Law?” she suggested presently.

Again Sirjohnnie laughed, a short laugh this time, and looked at her with his whimsical smile puckering the corners of his eyes.

“I believe you know a lot more than you pretend, Felisi,” he said. “You’re right. It’s a law that takes me away from Luana. One of our self-imposed laws, but an uncommonly strict one.” He sighed. “What a time I’ve had!” And again, presently: “Was there ever such a time?”

There was no need for him to say any more. “Laws are made to make us do things that we don’t want to.” Felisi had been at some pains to understand those words, but their meaning was quite clear to her now. Sirjohnnie did not want to leave Luana! She hugged her feet closer under her small body, and rearranged the hibiscus blossom in her hair.

That evening, when work was done, she danced a *meke* for him. It was the history of a great war with Tonga, done in pose and gesture to a droned accompaniment, and Sirjohnnie smoked and watched with evident pleasure.

“*Vinaka* (very good)!” he cried, when she had done. “I wonder how you would take at—at the Hippodrome, Felisi?” he suggested, and fell silent again, with the

same troubled look in his eyes. So Felisi danced him the love-story of the two wood-pigeons.

Then came the evening of the Emerald Drop. Felisi half suspected it from the utter stillness and stifling heat. The glow on the western horizon—a green glow with angry slashes of black cloud across it—increased her suspicions. And as the sun sank, blood red, into the sea—just as its upper edge came level with the horizon—an emerald green ball of light shone for a moment and was gone.

Sirjohnnie was away up the coast, fishing by torch-light. Mandri was in the kitchen, quietly drunk and smoking one of Sirjohnnie's cigars. Felisi pondered what she should do. There might be time, and there might be none. It might strike the beach of the green houses, and it might not. She rose without haste.

The task that she had set herself took, perhaps, an hour. Then she squatted on the edge of the cliff overlooking the beach and waited as only an Islander can wait.

Darkness closed down, and such darkness! One half of the sky was star-pricked, the other black and substantial as a pall. And the pall slowly encroached on the stars. Nearer and nearer it crept. There was a puff of wind, hot as the night, then another. Felisi held her breath.

Somewhere in the distance there was a mighty roaring; the whole world seemed full of it, trembling with it. The boom of the surf on the reef, changing to thunder, joined the demoniac chorus. Then the hur-

ricane burst on Luana with the force of a giant sledgehammer.

Something flew at Felisi out of the turmoil and wrapped itself about her as she clung to a rock. It was one of the green houses from the beach a hundred feet below. She tore it from her, and it whirled off into the night. Palms were snapping like muffled pistol-shots, and crashing to ground with the dull thud of a falling body. The very turf was ripped from the earth and rolled into balls.

Yet it was not a really bad hurricane. It lasted half an hour at most, and cut a half-mile swathe through Luana as cleanly as a mower cuts wheat. Felisi listened to it charging madly into the distance, then leapt to her feet and ran along the edge of the cliff.

The pall had passed on, and the stars shone again. The night was cooler now, and the wind came only in gusts. Felisi ran. It was the first time she had hurried in her life. She called, and kept calling: "Sirjohnnie! Sirjohnnie!" And presently there was an answer. Sirjohnnie was snugly ensconced with his back to a rock, the tin creel carefully guarded in his lap.

Felisi flung herself on the ground beside him and buried her face in her arms.

"Poor little girl!" murmured Sirjohnnie, putting his hand on her hair. "Frightened, eh?"

Felisi had been frightened, but not in the way Sirjohnnie thought.

"Never mind; it's all over now," he went on cheerfully. "Whew! Come along—let's go back."

It was Sirjohnnie's first hurricane, that was clear.

Go back! To what? Felisi led the way along the edge of the cliff.

"Gad!" said Sirjohnnie, looking over at the starlit water thrashing the foot of the cliff. "It's driven the sea clean over the beach. I wonder——"

His voice trailed away, and he hurried on in silence.

At the edge of the cove they stopped and stood side by side, looking down on where the beach had been. There was none. The green village had been wiped from the face of Luana as cleanly as a drawing from a slate. The beach was now a bay of foaming water.

Sirjohnnie sat down on the edge of the cliff, still with the tin creel clasped in his hands, and stared stonily before him.

"Village, him go pouf!" Felisi explained, squatting at his side.

"Village? What do I care about a village?" he muttered, after a pause.

"Fish, him all right," said Felisi, looking anxiously into his face. She hated to see that troubled look in his eyes.

Sirjohnnie did not hear. He still sat staring before him.

"And only a week more!" came from him in a sort of groan.

"Fish, him all right," repeated Felisi eagerly, searching for an answering light in his face.

Sirjohnnie turned his head and laughed in her face, a bitter, mirthless laugh.

"Fish, him all right," he mimicked, with ironic cheer-

fulness. "They're back where they belong now, aren't they, Felisi?"

It was some time before Sirjohinnie suffered himself to be led farther along the cliff. Never had Felisi found him so hard of understanding. Presently, however, he stood looking down on a hole in the volcanic rock, where were neatly packed the tin-lined cases and the glass jars—every one of them—and unscathed.

He stared at them in dumb wonderment for a moment, then turned to Felisi, who stood looking up into his face with anxious inquiry.

"Felisi," he said gravely, "you're a wonder, child!" He lifted her off her feet and hugged her.

The next day the beach of Luana reappeared. Save for the fallen palms, torn earth, and battered reed brakes, it was as it had been before the advent of the green houses.

"It just didn't like me, that's all," Sirjohinnie told Felisi, with one of his old-time laughs. "But I'm still here." He shook his fist at the Pacific.

About noon the launch arrived, and there was unusual commotion in the landing. The pink man seemed exercised, and the cause of it all was soon apparent when a stalwart native waded ashore, bearing very gingerly the slight form of a woman. She wore the same streaming coloured veil and carried the same kind of sunshade as those on the wharf at Levuka.

"Great Scott!" cried Sirjohinnie, and hurried across the beach. He was hatless, unshaven, and his ducks were bespattered with the good red earth of Luana.

"My dear John," wailed the woman, when she had been set on her feet, "*what are you doing?*"

Sirjohnnie proceeded to explain, with many gestures and pointings in the direction of where the green houses had stood.

Presently another white man joined them.

"Crothers," bellowed Sirjohnnie, "I've got something for you!"

"We arrived last Tuesday," the woman continued wearily. "Another week of Levuka is simply impossible."

"But you gave me until the twentieth," protested Sirjohnnie. "This place is a perfect Mecca. I've got every species——"

"And this is the twenty-fifth," sighed the woman.

"Good gracious, no, is it? Half a minute, Crothers!" Sirjohnnie was looking from one to the other of his visitors in the same nervous way that he had speared fish in the trap.

"Look here, my dear——"

"What I came to find out definitely," proceeded the inexorable woman, "was if you are coming home on the *Moultan* in time for the season, or if you intend to stay here for the rest of your life."

Felisi, lying prone in the sand, buried her face in her hair. Through it she heard Sirjohnnie's answer.

"Why, of course, yes—that is—yes. Just one moment, my dear. Crothers!"

Still through her hair Felisi saw him lead the white man to a tiny pool, unwrap the square of oiled silk, and toss in a piece of vine. She heard the distant murmur

of Sirjohnnie's voice discoursing gleefully on the result, and saw the white man examining the vine through a glass. The natives and the pink man were already carrying the tin-lined cases and the jars down from the cliff to the launch. Then she became aware that the woman had taken a seat on a rock, and was beckoning to her.

Felisi went and squatted in the sand before her. She very much wanted to see the woman at close quarters.

"Well, my dear," she said pleasantly, "do you speak any English?"

Felisi shook her head.

The woman was extraordinarily beautiful. Her skin was like milk, and her hair was the colour of gold. Could anything be more alluring? Yet Sirjohnnie did not want to leave Luana! Felisi knew it as surely as that the sun shone, and Lady Truscott wondered what made the child smile.

To Felisi this woman represented "law"—"the law that makes people do what they don't want to." Looking into the woman's face, she recalled to mind a fish—a fish which may be handled in a certain way, but which, if applied roughly to human flesh, caused the victim to die in agony within an hour. What if she flung such a fish in the face of this "law" and freed Sirjohnnie for ever?

This was what Felisi was thinking as she squatted in the sand before Lady Truscott. So perhaps it was as well that at that moment Sirjohnnie returned to escort her to the launch, thus sparing to Society a charming hostess and the much-tried wife of a truly

exasperating man. Sirjohnnie obeyed his "law" with commendable fortitude. He forgot to say good-bye to Felisi, and was borne out to the launch, expostulating wildly with a native who had inadvertently stepped on one of the tin-lined cases. But Felisi has never forgotten him.

THE RULES OF THE GAME

FELISI was hoeing in the family *taro* patch, when the white man crawled out of the green cavern of the bush on to the beach at Luana.

There was blood on his face, his ducks were tattered and besmeared, and his left hand trailed lifelessly in the sand at his side. For a moment he stared along the stretch of glistening beach, then quite suddenly he collapsed in a little heap and lay still.

Now, the way of the white man is beyond belief. Felisi, who for many months had lived among him and his women, while selling imitation pink coral on the wharf at Levuka, had learned this great truth from the bitter-sweet experience that goes to make up life—even the life of a South Sea Islander. She had studied the white man in his love and in his hate, in prosperity and poverty, peace and war, and at the end of an eventful fourteen years, found herself no nearer discovering the cause of his ineffable conceit, colossal ignorance, monumental selfishness, and undoubted greatness, than she had been as a tiny bronze infant, playing under the breadfruit trees of her native village.

Wherefore the genus white man claimed a good deal of Felisi's attention. His antics interested her in the same way that her own life and habits interested some white men, though, of course, it never occurred to the

latter that while they were studying "the quaint customs of a quaint people," they themselves were being studied.

For instance, when the dear old gentleman on the wharf at Levuka had patted Felisi's head and bought a shilling's worth of spurious coral for the sake of studying the texture of her hair, he had not the faintest idea that the soft brown eyes that wandered languorously over his superannuated person had noted that tufts of hair grew out of his ears in a most comical manner, that his false teeth moved when he talked, and that, save for his red skin, he was the living image of a doddering lunatic that Felisi knew of in a certain village up the coast.

But there it was.

And here was another case—a white man lying in a limp heap on the beach at Luana. He was quite young, as white men went, and when Felisi had climbed a palm and given him a drink from a green cocoanut, he sat up with startling abruptness.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

"Luana," Felisi answered, squatting in the sand and watching with interest the contortions of his pink face as he tried to lift his arm.

"Luana! Ouch! Yes, I seem to have been on Luana for the last twenty years. But what part? Ouch!"

"Senai Keba," said Felisi.

The white man whistled.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "The north end! I must have——"

But Felisi was thinking of this gentleman Scott. He was so universal, and always so great. Who was he? She determined to find out at the first opportunity. At the moment she became aware that the white man was staring at her with suddenly awakened interest.

“You speak English?” he exclaimed, as though this accomplishment of Felisi’s had just reached his notice.

“Some,” she answered glibly, using the word she had learned on the wharf at Levuka, and always found so useful.

“Thank heaven!” muttered the white man. “Have you seen any one—a white man, I mean, a large white man who limps when he walks and carries a rifle under his arm?” He was looking over his shoulder now, and when he turned, there was a furtive look in his eyes.

Felisi shook her head.

“Then you soon will,” snapped the white man. “Get me out of here, kid, somewhere safe, and—and you shall have all I’ve got. He’s after me—they’re all after me. I haven’t slept for three nights—the bush—I can’t stand it any more!” He moaned and pitched face forward into the sand.

It was an interesting phenomenon that, when the white man is strong and well, he is a god in his own estimation, infinitely removed above the Polynesian race; but when he is sick or frightened, he is as humble as a child. It was as a child that Felisi saw this white man. She knew of a place, a perfectly safe place, and when she had brought him round for the second time, she guided him to it. The *Buli* of Senai Keba had built a new look-out on the edge of the beach, but the old one

still remained up amongst the branches of a giant *dilo* tree. It was a big business getting the white man up the broken ladder of *liana*, and he had no sooner crawled on to the platform of woven branches than he collapsed again.

He was very humble.

Felisi brought him green cocoanuts and cooked *taro* root, and while he ate, in great hungry mouthfuls, she examined his arm. There was a clean hole on one side, just above the elbow, and a rather larger one on the other.

“So long as it hasn’t got the bone it’s nothing,” mumbled the white man, with his mouth full; “but I rather fancy it has—ouch!” He leant back against the *dilo* trunk while Felisi bound the wound with a strip torn from her *sulu*. “It was a good shot,” he continued to mumble reminiscently, between munches at the *taro* root—“five hundred yards, if it was an inch. I was crawling up the other side of the valley, the only bit of open country we’d seen for—how long was it?—four—five days. . . .” His voice trailed off into silence. He was asleep—asleep with the half-eaten *taro* root in a hand lying limply palm upward on the platform.

He slept for a day and a night and nearly half a day, and when he awoke he ate until Felisi thought he would burst. He seemed to swell with the food, just like a *Buli* at a feast; his eyes grew brighter, and he was not so humble. He laughed.

“We’ve diddled ’em, kid,” he said, yawning and stretching luxuriously. “This is great!”

Felisi squatted on the platform and watched him in

silence. Suddenly his hand went to his hip pocket, and he drew out a joint of bamboo corked at one end. He extracted the cork with his teeth and poured out on to the platform a stream of pearls. He hummed a little air as he sat looking at them.

“Worth a bit of trouble, aren’t they?” he suggested.

Felisi nodded, though personally she preferred imitation pink coral. It was easier to come by, and more colourful.

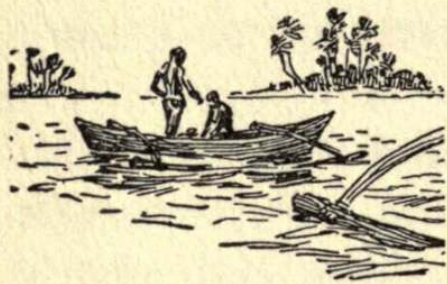
“And there *was* trouble,” he added reminiscently. “Crane didn’t play the game by me. Partnerships again! Never did believe in partnerships, but what’s a fellow to do when he’s got the will, and the knowledge, and the muscle, and no dibs to back ’em up?”

Felisi shook her head and looked sympathetic. Amongst her many other accomplishments she was probably the best listener in the world. Her attitude appeared to encourage the white man.

“Such a time!” he breathed. “First chance I’ve had of thinking about it or having a look at them,” he added, rolling the pearls to and fro under his lean brown fingers. “First of all in the cutter. You get to hate the way a man hangs up his hat if you’re alone with him long enough. Heavens, how I came to hate that man! He was mean—dirty mean in thought and action—and he was one of your oily sort until something went wrong, then he was peevish as a sick child, and with as much to back it up. You couldn’t hit him. You felt you were up against a man-woman, or a woman-man, whichever way you like to put it—worst of both, you know, like a half-caste.”

“Me know ’um,” Felisi thought fit to interpolate.

“It was after we got to the lagoon,” the white man went on—“after the third pearl, to be exact. The whole lot weren’t worth fifty pounds, but we were gloating over them on the cabin table. Crane would pick ’em up, then I would. We were talking some bosh



about the biggest being worth a possible fifty pounds. Fifty pounds, when it was as deformed as a hunchback! But we liked to talk big. It kept our pecker up. I looked at Crane suddenly, and I

saw his eyes by lamp-light. They were fastened on me, and they hated me. They hated me as much as I hated him, but for a different reason. The pearls were the reason for his case. I laughed—I couldn’t help it. It struck me as so darned funny, us two sitting in a cabin twelve feet by ten, hating one another.”

Felisi laughed, too. It was a white man’s joke.

“I think Crane must have mistaken my laugh. Anyway, we both knew what we thought of each other as surely as though we had spoken. It got worse. We did quite well, and Crane’s hate increased with the quantity and size of the pearls. Mine couldn’t get any worse than it had been at the beginning, so I was out of the running. But do you suppose we said nasty things to one another? Not a bit of it. For sheer politeness you couldn’t have equalled us south of the Line. It was ‘An uncommonly good day, Jim,’ from Crane, and ‘Good enough,’ and ‘Right-oh,’ from me. ‘If we go on like this—’ from Crane, and ‘Touch wood!’ from me.

It came to being polite at meals in the end, and I didn't laugh. I must have lost my sense of humour those days."

Felisi nodded her head understandingly. The white man might have been talking to the lady with the gold hair behind the bar in Levuka for all the difference he seemed to find in his audience. Felisi took it as an unconscious compliment, which indeed it was.

"Then came what I'd been expecting. But I'd hidden the dinghy oars, and hadn't given him credit for the pluck of swimming a hundred yards through sharks. He did it. It's wonderful what fifty first-grade pearls will do with a man-woman. Luckily it was a mangrove country we were anchored off, and there were three miles of it before you could get to real solid earth. I tracked him as easily as you would an elephant, and just before nightfall something white moved on the other side of a gully. I fired, and went over. It was Crane, lying on his face, with his fat legs sprawled, dead as meat; and the pearls were in the corner of his beastly bandana handkerchief, that hadn't been washed for months."

The white man sat propped against the *dilo* trunk, staring out to sea with a disgusted expression still lingering on his face, presumably at the thought of the bandana handkerchief.

Felisi neither moved nor spoke. She knew by instinct when to do either, and presently the white man went on, though more slowly:

"It's the first man I've killed. I'm not used to shooting at men, much less killing them. But I wasn't sorry.

It rather surprised me how I took it when I found him dead. Somehow it never struck me that I couldn't go out into the world and get on with life as I had before. It seemed to me that I had rid the world of something dirty mean, and that was all there was to it. The other came later—in the bush, and especially at night, when the mist rises and the tree fungus glows through it like a lamp in a London fog. I came to know what it is to have killed a man—even a man-woman—and what it is to be the pet of a man-hunt. Heavens"—he glanced over his shoulder, then laughed nervously—"it's worse than playing spooks with the lights out! They haunt you all right. You think you're done with them—thrown them off—but you haven't; they bob up again and come creeping on through the bush. I don't know, but I think it must be Hanson that's got my track. He's a good shot—that was a classy shot, five hundred yards, and I was moving—the only man of them worth thinking about, middling tall and chunky, with a toothbrush moustache. You're sure you haven't seen him?"

"Sure," mimicked Felisi.

"I got him, though, through the leg—waited behind a lantana bush until he was on top of me, and then hadn't the pluck to shoot him anywhere but in the leg. I'm glad I didn't, too; he's all right, and he's got to do his work. It's queer, but you positively get to like a man that sticks to you the way he's stuck to me. It becomes a sort of ghastly game, with unwritten rules to it—through mangrove swamps and mazes of underbrush, up over volcanic rocks and across rivers with the

worst sort of shark in them. I was lost, properly lost, and I know *he* was, but we kept on. He never left me—day and night he never—left—me——!”

The white man's eyes were suddenly alert and staring fixedly at the reed brake on the far side of the beach. His voice had dropped, then ceased altogether. His jaw hung down. Out of the reed brake on to the beach limped a man with a rifle under his arm.

He was a hundred yards away, and looking out to sea, but the man up on the look-out seemed to shrivel into himself on the far side of the *dilo* trunk. Felisi was wearing a red hibiscus blossom, but the white man snatched it out of her hair.

“S-sh! Lie down!” he breathed.

“You all right,” whispered Felisi reassuringly.

The white man seized her roughly by the wrist and jerked her down beside him.

“Lie there!” he hissed. “It *is* Hanson! How's the beach?”

“Beach, him all right,” quavered Felisi, looking out through the branches. The white man forced her down to the platform.

“You little fool! I mean, is it dry where we came over it—powdery? Will it show the difference—*difference*, savvy?—between a naked foot—your foot and mine?” The white man indicated his long-legged boots with a slight movement.

“Beach, him all right,” pouted Felisi with the air of one defending her personal property against unfair aspersion. “Him no show diff'rence.”

“What's he doing now?”

Felisi could feel the white man's body trembling against her own. She peeped out and saw the man on the beach bending over the disturbance in the sand where the white man had fallen. Felisi was at a loss. The very humble child lying beside her needed soothing.

"What's he doing?" it repeated peevishly.

"Him go so," said Felisi, dropping her head with the pantomimic art of the *meke* dancer. "Him very tired."

"Ah!" muttered the white man, and smiled grimly.

Felisi knew that she was committed beyond recall. She had taken sides, and she did not regret her choice. The heart of a woman instinctively goes out to the fugitive—he is the weaker—and when once the Polynesian has taken sides, there is no turning back.

Presently she had to tell him—

"Him come close up."

The man on the beach was limping along its edge, peering into the reed brake. He would come directly under the *dilo* tree.

The white man at Felisi's side lay as still as stone. His jaw was set, his muscles tense. Felisi's hand went out as stealthily as a snake, drew the revolver from its holster, and placed it in his hand. The white man seemed not to notice it, and still lay motionless, staring into the twisted branches of the *dilo* tree, but listening—listening with every nerve to the soft crunch of approaching footsteps in sand. They ceased directly under the platform. Felisi could hear the beating of her own heart. A *minah* bird squawked shrilly in the branches overhead, and she felt her wrist crushed in a

wise-like grip. There was the click of an opening lid. A match was struck. The pleasant smell of good tobacco smoke floated up to them on the still air; then the footsteps passed on.

“Wonder he didn’t smell me,” grinned the white man. “It’s Hanson all right; he smokes Heraldic—Heraldic in a good airtight box, and a woody briar.” He smacked his lips.

“Why you no shoot?” demanded Felisi. “Pouf, bang—him finish!”

“Not till I’m cornered,” answered the white man. “I don’t want to kill Hanson. He’s a good fellow. I’ve got nothing against him.”

Felisi scrambled into a squatting position to think this out. Her small bronze face was puckered with bewilderment. Here was one man chasing another man to catch him and have him killed, yet the pursued “had nothing against” the pursuer! Was there ever such an amazing state of affairs? “A sort of ghastly game with unwritten rules in it.” Then there was no need to make the suggestion that had been in her mind—namely, that she should dispatch the man on the beach herself in one of the many ways that she had at her command.

“Besides,” the white man went on, with a hint of apology in his tone, “it wouldn’t make any difference. Have you ever heard of the law?”

Felisi nodded vigorously. She happened to know something about this thing called “law.”

“Well, there it is. It never stops. The law says that I shall be strung up by the neck until I’m dead,

and Hanson is the law. If I kill him, another man takes his place, and so on for ever. The law never stops."

"Him big fellah, law," mused Felisi.

"I should just say he is," muttered the white man, leaning limply against the *dilo* trunk and looking out to sea with melancholy eyes. "He's a bad fellah to bunt up against, too, but sometimes—sometimes he can be given the slip. Look here," he added, with sudden eagerness, "Hanson may have gone on, and he may not; I wouldn't trust him a yard. There's only one way out of this thing. You be fishing in a canoe—a canoe with a sail in it, mind you—off the beach to-night. I'll swim out . . . all I've got," he ended abruptly.

Felisi nodded.

"Bless you, kid!" said the white man, and fell to collecting the scattered pearls.

On her way to the village she met "the law." He was sitting on a fallen palm beside the track that commanded a view of the beach and the village.

"Sayadra," was his cheerful greeting, though his brown face was haggard with exhaustion.

Felisi giggled and squirmed in the approved fashion of Island girls who have never had the opportunity of studying white human nature in Levuka.

But "the law" did not smile. His steady gray eyes seemed to burn holes in Felisi's face, and he spoke sharply, with the air of a man who is used to receiving prompt answers.

"Have you seen a white man about here?" he demanded, in her own tongue.

Felisi continued to giggle and shuffle her feet in the red earth of the track.

"Answer me!" snapped "the law."

"No, sir," faltered Felisi.

"Where have you just come from?"

The question came so quickly that the answer was out of Felisi's mouth before she could properly form it.

"The beach, sir."

"Then why didn't I see you on the beach just now?"

But Felisi's mind was nimble enough when it was alert. She giggled, though it was an effort, with the awful eyes of "the law" upon her.

"Answer me," he barked.

"I was bathing, sir," she simpered, with long, blue-black lashes sweeping her cheeks.

"Well, what of that?"

"I hid myself, sir."

"The law" laughed—he actually laughed, though it was a mirthless sort of sound.

"There, run along to the village, my girl, and tell the *Buli* that *Beritania Levu* (Great Britain) wants him here at once. And tell him to send down something to eat and drink in the meantime."

"The village is quite close," suggested Felisi diffidently, "and the guest-house is cool." A wild scheme flitted through her mind of launching the canoe while "the law" was in the village.

"Thank you," he answered, and his eyes resumed the burning process, "but I shall stay here."

As Felisi turned to go, these same eyes were sweeping the beach. They seemed to see all things,

She felt them at her back as she swung on toward the village. "The law" was certainly a "big fellah."

Not long before sunset Felisi was fishing in the canoe perhaps fifty yards out from the beach of Luana. It was very simple, very unexhilarating. If you dropped an old boot on the end of a string over the side, you would catch something off the beach of Luana; but Felisi's hand trembled as she continued to land fish after fish. The sun kissed the sea and went to bed, and Felisi continued to fish, with her eyes on the shore. There was no moon, and there were few stars, but there was the vague half-light that never deserts a tropical night, and presently a shadow flitted across the beach and dissolved into the sea, but not entirely. A still smaller shadow, and round, was gliding on the surface of the water. Nearer and nearer it came, until it was possible to see the spreading fan of ripples in its wake and something on its summit that gleamed even in the half-light.

Then the silence of the night was split asunder by the crack of a rifle, and a bullet splashed into the water a foot from the moving shadow. It vanished, and silence closed down, but only for a moment. It was clear that the eyes of "the law" saw all things. The next bullet was nearer, and each time the shadow vanished it was for a shorter time, and there was a shorter silence. Felisi strained her eyes into the darkness, and at last there was a long silence—a very long silence. Her clasped hands were pressed down over her heart. And still the silence continued. She paddled swiftly in its direction, and as the canoe slid gently on to the sand,

shots came muffled from the bush. The shadow had missed the canoe, then, and returned to the shore.

They were fighting in a palm grove now—the shadow and “the law”—still fighting. Would it ever cease? Felisi wondered, as she followed up the sounds of conflict. Truly “the law” never stops. From palm trunk to lantana bush they flitted, the shadow always retreating, “the law” always advancing. A tongue of flame would be answered with a tongue of flame, report with report. It was an argument in flame and lead. Then quite suddenly there fell a silence—a silence that lasted an unconscionable time, and out of it came a voice in breathless jerks—

“What’s—the use—Lucas?”

And an answering voice replied—

“That’s—my business. You’d—have—shot him yourself—Hanson.”

“I dare say; but—I must warn you—that anything you may say—will——”

A breathless laugh came from somewhere.

“You can get all that—off your chest—when you’ve got me.”

“You’re out of ammunition.”

“Don’t be too sure. *You* are. I know the Government ration, and I’ve counted.”

There was a short silence, then—

“What’s more, I’ll prove it.”

The shadow emerged from behind a lantana bush, resolving into the form of the white man. He stood quite still out there in the open, his white ducks loom-

ing clear against the inky background of the underbrush. The revolver was levelled from his hip in his right hand. The other hung inert by his side.

“Now,” he said, “will you let me go without killing you, Hanson? I don’t want to.”

“Let you go!” snapped the voice of “the law,” and a glint of white showed behind a palm trunk not forty paces distant.

“Don’t come out!” cried the white man, as though afraid. “Don’t come out without your hands up, Hanson!”

For answer, “the law” came out from behind the palm trunk. He carried his rifle clubbed, and, though he limped painfully, he came straight on.

“You’re out of ammunition, Lucas,” he said, as he advanced, and he said it as though trying to convince himself that it was true. You know you’re out of ammunition.” The revolver was pointing directly at his chest, and still he came on. “It’ll save no end of trouble, both for you and me——”

He was not more than five paces distant now, and he was staring at the muzzle of the revolver as though fascinated. Just so had Felisi seen fish come up out of the depths of the rock pools to see the light of the torch and be speared. The white man stood quite still as though thinking what he would do. Then, in a flash, he raised the revolver to fling it in the face of “the law,” and the butt of the clubbed rifle fell. Both missed their mark.

“Didn’t I say——” grunted “the law,” and the rest was lost in the impact of their bodies. The white man

had but one arm, the other could scarce stand for lameness, yet they rocked in one another's embrace for what seemed minutes to Felisi, before crashing to earth in a writhing heap. They were on the bank of a stream that ran through the grove, and Felisi caught her breath as they rolled nearer and nearer the edge. It was a four-foot drop at most, and the water was shallow, trickling slowly over the bed of powdered coral sand. But Felisi knew that stream. There were many like it on Luana.

Here, on the ground, "the law" had the upper hand, for he had the use of both arms, and his lame leg was not such a handicap. He was strong, too—stronger than the white man, though both were pitifully weak from their exertions. Would it never end? They jerked and strained.

Suddenly the white man lay still staring up into the roof of palm leaves with agony written on every line of his haggard face. It was as though he had been seized with sudden paralysis. It *was* paralysis, for "the law" had a hold on his arm—a *certain* hold. Surely this was the end. But Felisi had taken sides, and the Polynesian never turns back. "The law" uttered a stifled cry as her teeth sank into the back of his hand. The hold was lost, the arm free. The white man kicked out with all his strength, and "the law" tottered for a moment before rolling down the bank into the stream.

The water was not two inches in depth, yet when he struggled to rise he sank knee-deep. Another supreme effort, and the glistening white sand was about his waist. After that he sank by inches, his stern gray eyes turned

toward firm ground, not three yards distant, but uttering no sound.

The white man had fainted, and when his eyes opened Felisi was bending over him.

“Come quick!” she said. “*You* all right. Come quick! Canoe, him——”

“Where’s Hanson?” muttered the white man.

Felisi pointed toward the river bank.

The white man’s eyes opened wide.

“In the river—drowned?”

Felisi shook her head.

“Him go long road, all the same, pretty quick,” she told him reassuringly. But for some strange reason it failed to reassure. The white man crawled to the edge of the bank and lay there in the grass. Felisi could hear his voice.

“What about it, Hanson?”

There was no answer.

“It’ll get you in less than an hour. Don’t be a fool.”

Still no answer, and a long pause, during which the white man could have reached the canoe. Felisi could have shaken him.

“I must get out of here, Hanson. I shall get clean away. The girl has a canoe. Whatever difference will it make?”

Another pause.

“What about it, Hanson?”

There was actually a pleading note in the voice.

Was this one of the rules of the game? Felisi gave it up. Her white teeth snapped together in sheer exasperation.

“Good-bye, Hanson!”

The white man staggered to his feet and stood upright, swaying for a moment, then lurched off toward the beach, leaning on Felisi's shoulder.

Twice he stopped dead in his tracks and listened intently, but no sound came to them except the soft breath of the wind amongst the palm leaves.

They launched the canoe in silence. Felisi hoisted the sail, and presently the ripple of water past the canoe's side told them they were under way. The dark line of the shore grew slowly fainter. The white man sat in the stern, steering with the paddle, and staring straight before him. He was heading for the open sea and freedom, yet his face was a grim mask, and there was no joy in his eyes.

Felisi did not speak; she sat watching him from the main thwart and noticing many things. A frown had come to his forehead and his eyes were restless, casting this way and that at nothing save the dark waters slipping past the canoe. Sometimes, too, he would hold the paddle under his arm and pass his hand over his eyes as though trying to brush aside some vision that haunted them. But slowly she saw a change steal over him. Set purpose came into his eyes, the grim mask of his face gave way to animation—eagerness. He muttered a curse at the failing wind, and Felisi became aware that their course had changed, with his mind. The canoe no longer headed for the open sea, and a little later she saw the well-known coastline of Luana looming over the bows. He had put back.

The canoe had no sooner grounded than the white

man leapt ashore and ran up the beach. Felisi found him at the bank of the stream—the sand had risen to the chin of “the law”—tugging and straining with his one hand.

It took them fully half an hour of such work to extricate “the law,” and at the end of it the two men lay side by side on the river bank, too exhausted to move or speak.

Then at last the silence was broken, it was “the law” who spoke.

“Edward Lucas,” he said, rolling on to his side, “I arrest you, in the name of the King, for the murder of Walter Crane.”

The white man lay on his back with closed eyes.

“Give me a fill of your Heraldic, Hanson,” he said.

Even this was not all. Felisi was despatched to the village by “the law,” but before going she waited for confirmation of the order. The white man gave it by opening his eyes and nodding wearily. The two men were carried to the guest-house on litters, and a guard of native police—very smart in their blue tunics and fluted *sulus*—stationed itself outside the door.

It was two days before the white man could walk. And when he crossed the room, trailing Heraldic tobacco smoke in his wake, he caught sight of the guard and turned back.

“Hanson,” he said, “won’t you get rid of this pantomime?”

The guard was dismissed—very smartly.

“The law” was undoubtedly the stronger man. In one night his vitality returned, and, when the white

man was up and about, he sat talking with him in the guest-house. Felisi heard the white man tell the story of the cutter and the pearls and the hate. And when it was done, "the law" nodded slowly and said: "Yes, I knew Crane."

That was all.

Later that evening he went to the door and stood looking out over the green hills that tumbled to the sea.

"It's going to be a dark night," he said absently.

The white man was lying on a pile of mats, and did not answer.

"A deuced dark night," repeated "the law"—"one of those nights when things happen."

The white man lifted himself on to his elbow, but still remained silent.

"And there's a fair northerly breeze," added the other irrelevantly.

The white man was staring fixedly at the broad back of "the law," silhouetted in the doorway. An eager light flashed into his eyes and was gone.

"Yes," he said slowly, and lay back on the mats.

In the morning he was gone.

So was Felisi's canoe. But "the law" made that good, even as he scowled his displeasure at the escape.

In the *taro* patch Felisi often puckers her brow over the problems of an eventful life, but in this particular case she can get no further in her deductions than that "the law" is a "big fellah," and the way of the white man beyond belief.

THE PRETENDERS

FELISI squatted on the beach of Luana, the centre of a group of chattering female relatives watching the men launch the big canoe with many cries and much unnecessary puffing and straining.

They were showing off in front of their women folk, a weakness not uncommon in other places than the beach of Luana, as Felisi knew; and, while the female relatives clucked their admiration, her own wise eyes took in the scene with no other emotion than pleasurable excitement at the prospect of leaving the *taro* patch and the fish-trap for the mysterious lures of the outside world that she had glimpsed while selling imitation pink coral on the wharf at Levuka.

Felisi was going away. She was dressed in her most modest blue wrapper, and beside her on the sand reposed her simple but effective trunk, a kerosene tin cut neatly in half and lashed together with sinnet.

The whole family was going away; it was an upheaval, a cataclysm, and the cause of it all was ambition, nothing less. Amongst other fatal maladies that the ubiquitous white man in his wisdom had seen fit to inflict on the inhabitants of "The Islands of the Blest," this thing ambition had seized on Felisi's family like a plague. Money had come to Luana—copper and silver

and gold—and it was discovered that these unlovely discs of metal were not without their uses. For instance, in sufficient quantities they could be exchanged for articles that it was beyond the power of Luana to produce. Had not Felisi brought back from her historic pilgrimage to Levuka a sewing-machine from *Americania*, and a mouth-organ?

And now it was a boat. Nothing would satisfy Felisi's father but a boat that he had seen in Levuka. Apparently it could do anything but talk, and he was not altogether certain it was not capable of that. It would carry five times as much produce to market as the big canoe, and in half the time. It—but Felisi had forgotten the category of its virtues. The fact remained that it was necessary to collect sufficient gold discs to buy the boat—fifty in all—and, as usual, the women-folk were called upon to do the collecting. Felisi's mother was going to be scullery maid in a boarding-house where she happened to know the cook, her aunt was to lend local colour to a native curio dealer's shop on the parade, and various female cousins were going to help in a Samoan laundry. Even a male cousin had condescended to become a wharf porter for a month or two. The remainder of the male element was going to be busily engaged in "keeping the home fires burning," or its equivalent, and the result of their combined efforts was to be—the boat.

It *had* occurred to one of Felisi's aunts—a woman with far too much to say, as her husband had often remarked—to ask why it was necessary to carry five times as much produce to market in half the time, and the

answer accorded her by Felisi's father was unusually tolerant—"To make still more gold discs, of course."

She then actually had the temerity to inquire why it was necessary to make more gold discs, when for countless generations they had succeeded in living quite comfortably without any discs at all. But this was too much. Felisi's father had snorted violently and changed the subject.

And Felisi, silent, wise-eyed? As well as a sewing-machine from *Americania* and a mouth organ, she had brought back from Levuka an unrivalled knowledge of the white man and his tongue. Everyone prophesied a great future for Felisi of Luana.

Meanwhile, and not so very far away, a certain Mrs. Caton leant over a certain breakfast table on the Rena River and said: "Jack!"

It was the second time she had addressed her husband without being noticed, but she was used to it.

"Wake up, old boy," she added, without resentment. "I have something really startling to say."

Mr. Caton—an old-young man, with sparse sandy hair and a preoccupied air—lifted his red-ochre face from a plate of toast and honey, and blinked. Also he smiled, the kindest possible smile.

"I beg your pardon, my dear. Say on."

"I don't like house-boys," announced Mrs. Caton.

"You don't like house-boys," repeated her husband dazedly. Then, after wiping his mouth and drawing his coffee-cup a trifle nearer: "What do you intend to do about it?"

"They're all right for waiting, and that sort of thing,"

continued Mrs. Caton, "but as personal servants they're—ugh!—too creepy, crawly. They remind me of a snake. Besides, I want some sort of female companionship in the house, something in the nature of a lady's maid."

"Something in the nature of a lady's maid," murmured Mr. Caton. If his wife had said she wanted a rhinoceros and two antimacassars in the house, he would have repeated the suggestion in exactly the same way. Mrs. Caton knew this husband of hers, and she still loved him, which is, of course, part of the miracle.

"My dear Jack," she cried, "do please try and show some interest, just for a minute, in something besides the *Corona Catoni!* I know it's going to be the most wonderful thing that ever happened, but I'm afraid you've got *me* at present."

For answer, Mr. Caton rose, leaving a slice of thickly buttered toast to be inundated by the slowly encroaching honey on his plate; and, deliberately placing his chair beside his wife's, sat down. Her hand—white as the tablecloth—was resting beside the sugar basin, and her husband's strong brown one closed over it.

"Joan," he said gently, "please don't say things like that. They hurt, and you know they're not true."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Caton laughed softly, "but you take such a lot of rousing, Jack. I have to start like a penny dreadful, 'The duchess lay on the divan, stabbed to the heart,' or something like that, before you take any interest."

"My dear child, I *am* interested," protested Mr. Ca-

ton earnestly, "and here I am to prove it. Let me see, what was it you wanted?"

His wife's laughter rang out, and she withdrew her hand and placed it on his.

"You funny old thing! I said I didn't like a house-boy as a personal servant, and I want something in the nature of a lady's maid—something feminine about the house, you know."

"Ah, to be sure!" Mr. Caton thought deeply. "How about Mrs. Herbert? She might——"

"My dear, I said a lady's maid. Mrs. Herbert would like to hear you say that."

"Then it will have to be a native of some sort. How about an Indian woman?"

"Too much like a house-boy. No, I think I should like an Islander—a country girl, for preference. I don't like those town-bred natives—they're sly."

"But she won't be able to speak English."

Mrs. Caton toyed with the sugar-tongs. "No, there is that." Then she looked up. "Never mind," she added brightly, "I'll teach her; it will be something to do."

Mr. Caton leant forward in his chair. He was aware, and not for the first time, that his wife was not looking as she had looked during the early days on the Rena River, a short three years ago. It troubled him vaguely.

"Joan," he said, his kind gray eyes searching her pale face, "you're not looking well."

Mrs. Caton rose slowly and went over to the veranda doorway, looking out on the vivid green banks of the Rena River.

"No?" she queried lightly.

"No," repeated her husband. "How about a run home?"

Mrs. Caton turned with an eager light in her eyes.

"Let's see, how long is it——"

"Three years," she supplied.

"Three years!" Her husband looked positively alarmed. "Good gracious, I had no idea!"

"Hadn't you?" said Mrs. Caton.

"Not the faintest. You must go, Joan—that's all there is to it—you *must* go. And you know how you'll enjoy it."

The light had faded from Mrs. Caton's eyes. She leant listlessly against the door jamb.

"How about you, Jack?" she suggested lightly.

"I?" Her husband laughed his deep-toned laugh. "Oh, I'm as strong as a horse, and there's still something that must be done."

"*Still* something?"

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it some time, if it doesn't bore you, but I *must* stay a bit longer—everything hangs on it—then we'll go home for good."

Mrs. Caton had turned again to the river, to hide her longing.

"Roll on the day," she said briskly.

"You're not unhappy here, Joan?"

She came over and put one white hand on her husband's shoulder.

"Unhappy!" she repeated, and laughed. It was a splendid laugh—a laugh for an actress to be proud of.

"You know what they said, Joan."

“Yes, I know what they said. And they were wrong. Hasn’t three years proved it?”

Her husband pushed back his chair and got up. He took her two hands in his and kissed her.

“And you’ll go?” he pleaded, holding her from him.

“No,” answered Mrs. Caton, “I don’t want to go—yet.”

“It’s foolish of you,” he told her, and turned toward the door.

“I shall have my ‘lady’s maid’ to play with,” laughed Mrs. Caton.

“I’ll see about it this afternoon, when I go to town,” her husband called back to her from the veranda.

He stepped out into the blinding sunlight and passed up the pathway toward the bush-house. Mrs. Caton noticed a piece of bass hanging out of his duck jacket pocket. He was going to “tinker with the orchids.” She sighed and turned back into the living room.

And that was why, three days later, Felisi of Luana came to the bungalow on the banks of the Rena River.

“Something in the nature of a lady’s-maid” appeared in a neat blue wrapper, and accompanied by a kerosene tin trunk lashed with sinnet. Mrs. Caton fell in love with her on the instant, and though Felisi’s regard for Missus Catoni was less emotional, it was none the less sincere. She thought this white woman the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, with her coral-white skin, dark eyes, and hair of an indescribable colour. As a matter of fact, it was auburn, and it was Felisi’s chief delight to comb it morning and evening. She found her duties extraordinarily light. Missus Catoni

treated her as a companion rather than a servant, and Felisi was earning five shillings a week—two large silver discs toward the fifty gold ones needed for the wonderful boat.

“Felisi,” said her mistress one evening, during the hair-combing rites, “do you know you have beautiful hair, and still more beautiful eyes, perfect teeth, and an almost perfect figure?”

“Yes,” Felisi answered with refreshing candour.

Missus Catoni laughed.

“Then that’s all right,” she said. “I thought perhaps you didn’t.” She looked into the reflection of Felisi’s soft brown eyes in the glass. “I believe you know a good deal more than you pretend,” she added thoughtfully.

“Me know some,” admitted Felisi modestly.

“And do you have to pretend much, Felisi?”

“Sometimes.”

“Why?” Missus Catoni was never tired of plumbing the depths—or as near the depths as she could get—of this quaint child-woman. It was like fishing in deep water—one never knew what strange thing would be brought to light. But, like all white folk, she had not the faintest idea that in the process she herself was being plumbed, and to greater depths.

The indescribable hair was finished, and Felisi squatted on the matting of the floor to await further instructions. But Missus Catoni was in a communicative mood.

“Why?” she repeated with quiet insistence.

Felisi shrugged her shoulders, a trick she had learnt

from watching a French lady on the wharf at Levuka, and one she had found effective.

“Pretend, him all right,” she pronounced sagely. “Pretend him pink coral, no white coral, plenty more money. Pretend me very, very poor, an’ tired, an’ know nothing, plenty heap more money.”

Each one of these distressful symptoms was illustrated in tone and gesture with the instinctive faithfulness of a *meke* dancer. Missus Catoni was deeply interested.

“Yes, we all have to pretend sometimes, don’t we?” she mused. “Most of us are actors. We have to be. Some are better at it than others, but most of us act.”

“Act,” repeated Felisi, with faithful intonation. It was a new word. She was learning many new words on the Rena River.

“Yes, pretend. I used to pretend a lot at one time, Felisi. It was my living.” Missus Catoni lit one of her toy cigarettes and leant back in the chair. She was altogether beautiful, Felisi thought, with her white hands clasped behind her head, the folds of a softly tinted kimono falling about her, and the toy cigarette moving up and down between her lips as she talked. She was like white coral draped with tinted weed, deep down in a rock pool.

“I’ve pretended such a lot,” she went on presently, more to herself than to the girl squatting at her feet, “that I’m positively frightened when I have to do something real.”

She turned in her chair and seemed to see Felisi for the first time.

“Do you know,” she said slowly, with a reminiscent light in her dark eyes, “I once had to pretend to be somebody else every evening for two whole years. It was a wonderful run, Felisi, and all because I pretended so well.”

Missus Catoni smiled, as though at some pleasant memory, while Felisi remained silent and still. She knew how to listen. And presently the other went on—

“Every evening it was the same. All sorts of carriages drove up to a very big house that was covered with coloured lights, and people went inside—hundreds of them. They had to sit for a little time listening to music or talking—most of them talked—in front of a big curtain. Then the curtain went up, and there was I on the stage, dressed up like somebody else. All the time they had been coming into the house and sitting listening to the music, I had been in a little room downstairs, putting on clothes, and painting myself to look like somebody else, and now, there I was.”

It was as though the footlights shone again on Missus Catoni. There was a light in her eyes that Felisi had never seen before.

“All alone?” prompted the audience.

“No, there were others there, all pretending. We pretended that we were afraid, and that we were brave, that we were poor and rich, that we hated, and we loved, and we pretended so well that the people sitting in front laughed with us and cried with us, sometimes forgot that they were sitting in a big house covered with lights, and that we were only pretending. There

would be quite a long silence after the curtain came down, and then the big house would ring with the clapping of hands, and we knew that we had pretended well."

Missus Catoni leant back in the chair and sent thin ribbons of smoke to hover on the still air above her head. She was looking through and beyond the ribbons of smoke.

"It is the most wonderful thing in the world, Felisi," she said slowly, and added a moment later, "except one."

"An' him?" Felisi inquired.

Missus Catoni looked down at her and smiled.

"You don't miss much, do you, child?" she said in a changed voice. "I can't tell you about 'him' easily, and, besides, you'll know all about him one day, I expect."

But Felisi was not appeased. Something was troubling her, as Missus Catoni saw by her puckered forehead, and at last it found utterance.

"Why you no go on plenty more big house, plenty more pretend?"

"I met Mr. Caton," said his wife, a whimsical smile hovering about her mouth and eyes as she looked down on Felisi.

"An' Missi Catoni, him no like pretend?"

Missus Catoni laughed outright.

"If you're not the quaintest thing, Felisi!" she said. "And you've hit the nail right on the very head. 'Missi Catoni, him no like pretend!'" She laughed again. "You see," she explained, "people who can't pretend

themselves, and don't understand it, are often very nice—the nicest sort of people sometimes, I think—but they don't like others who can pretend—especially their wives—to do it for a living. It—oh, dear, oh, dear, what am I talking to you about, Felisi? That will do now; you may go.”

Felisi went, but still with a puckered brow. At the door she turned back.

“You no *scotty*?”¹ she said, with drooping head.

Missus Catoni was lying on the bed. “Good gracious, no, child! What ever makes you think that? It's only that I find myself telling you things that I don't always tell myself. It's your eyes, I think.

“Me pretend!” she announced eagerly, and commenced to sway and gesture and drone the *meke* of the two wood-pigeons, while Missus Catoni watched and applauded from the bed.

They had much in common, these two.

A few days later Missus Catoni opened a letter at the breakfast table, and when she had read, the colour surged to her face. She waited until it had subsided, then spoke in her usual subdued tone of voice.

“Jack, Tony Redgrave is in Suva.”

Missi Catoni looked up and blinked as usual.

“Tony Redgrave?” he repeated dully.

“Yes, you remember—he was leading man with me at the Olympic.”

Missi Catoni winced, then smiled his kindly smile.

“Really?” he said. “What on earth is he doing in this part of the world?”

¹Native parlance for angry.

“He’s just finished his Australian tour, and stopped off at Suva on his way to San Francisco.”

“Jove!” exclaimed Missi Catoni, with the first show of enthusiasm Felisi had seen him display. “That’ll brighten things up for you a bit, Joan. I’ll fetch him out this afternoon.”

“To stay?”

Missus Catoni was playing with the sugar-tongs.

“That’s as you like, dear. How long is he stopping over for?”

“Until the next boat—about two weeks.”

“Then he must stop here,” said Missi Catoni with finality.

A room was prepared at once. A new mosquito bar was hung, and the most beautiful sheets spread on the bed. Missus Catoni flitted about the place like a white butterfly, giving a touch here and there. A what-not with ten shelves was placed in a corner, and Felisi longed to ask what it was for, until Missus Catoni told her without asking.

“He is very fond of nice boots,” she told Felisi; “you will see the most beautiful boots in the world presently.”

“Missi Redgravie, him big fellah?” Felisi inquired, and Missus Catoni went off into peals of laughter.

“Oh, I must tell him that!” she cried. “Felisi, you’re a gem! Yes, Missi Redgravie is a big fellah in his own way.”

And that was all Felisi heard about him until he appeared—or, rather, made his entry—at three o’clock that afternoon. He was tall and slim, and wore a more

beautiful white flannel suit and white felt hat than Felisi had ever seen, even on the wharf at Levuka. His hair shone like a calm sea at night. There was a knife-like crease down his trousers, which terminated in the wonderful boots. These were long and square-toed, and the rich brown colour of the sitting-room table.

Felisi saw him coming down the path from the launch, followed by Missi Catoni's ungainly figure and a couple of house-boys carrying suitcases that were the same colour as his boots. She saw him between the window curtains of Missus Catoni's bedroom, and when she turned from the enchanting vision, her mistress was standing at the dressing table, with the little top left-hand drawer open, and her hand hovering over it. In that drawer Felisi had once seen a pot of red stuff, and wondered what it was for, as Missus Catoni had never used it. Was the mystery to be solved? Evidently not, for she laughed—a little nervous laugh—and shut the drawer with a snap.

A moment later she was on the veranda.

“Joan,” said a well-modulated voice, “this is most awfully good of you!”

After that the voices mingled, and Felisi busied herself with other matters.

They had tea on the veranda—a very pleasant tea, by the sounds that floated in through the open windows. Even Missi Catoni laughed as Felisi had never heard him laugh, and the well-modulated voice droned on. Between the laughs came scraps of conversation that fascinated Felisi. It was like a puzzle that needed fitting together.

“You may as well know your *nom de Rena River*, Tony; it’s Redgravie, nothing less—you see, their own words all end with a vowel. I am Missus Catoni, so you mustn’t mind. . . . The quaintest thing; I’ll show you her later on.”

“I hope you won’t spoil her, Joan”—this from Missi Catoni.

“Spoil her, my dear! She knows more than you or I, or Tony, here, will ever learn. Sometimes her wisdom almost frightens me.”

A little later Missi Catoni went away. Felisi conjured a mental picture of his ungainly figure going up the path to the bush-house, with a piece of bass hanging out of one pocket.

“Oh, yes,” Missus Catoni laughed softly. “There’s going to be a *Corona Catoni* before long.”

“And you? I hope you don’t mind my saying it, Joan, but you’re looking most awfully ill.”

“Sorry I don’t suit.”

“No, but honestly, how long is it?”

“Three years.”

“Three years—*here*?”

“Yes. We’re going home for good soon.”

“But—well, the sooner the better. Do you know, I hardly recognized you this afternoon; it was the shock of my life.”

“You’ve had so many shocks, haven’t you, Tony? You hid your emotions very well.”

“But you at the Olympic, and you here—good heavens!”

“You needn’t be tragic, Tony; I assure you there’s

no need. Besides, you hardly ever saw me out of my make-up."

"It was a great time." The well-modulated voice became reminiscent. "There's never been anything like it since."

"How did Nina Trueman turn out?"

A cane chair scraped on the floor.

"Frost! Hard and nipping. Fell to pieces . . . petered out after you left."

"And I can't help feeling glad, even here. Isn't it horrid?"

"Not a bit. Oh, lor, Joan!"

"Tell me about yourself. How did you find Australia?"

"Top-hole. Big houses everywhere, but they're mighty hard to please. I rather like it; it means when you *have* got them, you've done something. Nothing will induce them to book in advance, though. Empty house one minute and crammed to the ceiling the next. It's rather wearing . . . 'Richard Wentworth' fetched 'em, though, and Fred Walton in 'The Permit.' Never worked so hard in my life."

"This will rest you . . . Boy, whisky and sparklet."

"Yes, *this* will rest me, if nothing would. By the way, Caton doesn't approve, does he?"

"Not for me. Otherwise he simply takes no interest, that's all."

"Funny," mused the well-modulated voice.

"Oh, I don't know. Why should he?"

"Well——"

“We do rather insist on it—I mean our profession—don’t we?”

“Ha, ha! So you’re going over?”

“Not a bit. I love it as much as ever; it’s part of me.”

“The bigger part?”

“No, not the bigger part. I’m sorry. Let’s go for a stroll. You haven’t seen the orchids.”

“Orchids!” The well-modulated voice grew fainter as it moved down the veranda steps and out on to the pathway. “Tell me a few, for Heaven’s sake—the *Corello Misterioso* or *Glorioso*, or something. I must appear intelligent.”

Missus Catoni laughed.

“There’s no need whatever——”

Then their voices passed out of range, and Felisi was left to fit her puzzle together.

For the next week she had little to do. Missus Catoni spent nearly all her time with Missi Redgravie. Occasionally Felisi used to go into the guest’s bedroom and stand enthralled before the what-not of boots. There were ten pairs of them, each perfect in its own way.

One evening—Missus Catoni had been playing the piano under the subdued pink light of the standard lamp, and Missi Redgravie was standing in the open doorway, looking out on the moonlit river—he turned and looked at her for a long time with a frown on his forehead. Suddenly an eager light came into his eyes, and he strode into the middle of the room.

“Drawing-room scene—second act,” he said. “I

come down O. P.” He strolled toward the piano, and a pleading note came into his well-modulated voice. “Won’t you sing, Di?”

And although Missus Catoni’s name was not “Di,” she looked up as she played, and said very softly, “For you, or the others?”

“For me.”

She sang, but in the middle of it Missi Redgravie held up his hand. The music ceased, and they stood side by side, a look of terrible fear on their faces, and their eyes turned toward the door. So great was their fear that Felisi, who had been squatting on the veranda, sewing, looked about her into the moonlit night to see who was there.

“He’s coming!” said Missi Redgravie, in an awestruck voice.

“Who—Paul?” whispered Missus Catoni. Her hand was on his sleeve.

“No, Desmond. I can hear him limping—limping!”

“You’re dreaming.” She had clutched his arm now, and her face was piteously upturned to his. Felisi longed to go and comfort her. “You must be dreaming. He——”

“No, I am not dreaming.” Missi Redgravie pronounced this in a firm voice. He seemed to have pulled himself together for a supreme effort. He looked brave, wonderfully brave. “I shall go and meet him.”

“No, no!” Missus Catoni held him fast. “You cannot go, Tom!”

Now, Felisi knew that Missi Redgravie’s name was not Tom, and for her the spell was broken. They were

pretending, even as Missus Catoni had said. But what pretending! This, then, was what they did in the big house covered with lights. As a matter of fact, Felisi was seeing what the world would have given a fortune to see—Joan Trevor acting.

And they went on to the very end, to where the man called Tom took her in his arms. Then Missus Catoni flung away from him with a happy little laugh and subsided on to the sofa.

“Isn’t it extraordinary how it all comes back?” she said, in a changed voice.

“Comes back!” Missi Redgravie stood looking down on her. “It’s never left you,” he said gravely.

“But every word, like that. I never fluffed once. It must be part of one. Oh, it’s queer!” She passed her hand over her eyes with a weary little gesture.

“Yes,” said the man, “the bigger part.”

She smiled wistfully, and shook her head slowly but firmly.

It was on just such an evening as this, with the tropical moonlight flooding the Rena River, that they pretended again.

Missi Catoni had gone on an orchid-hunting expedition into the interior the day before, and Felisi was squatting on the veranda mats, sewing. They were just as they had been—Missus Catoni playing the piano, and Missi Redgravie looking out at the moonlit river. The stage was set. Felisi longed for them to pretend, and they did, but it was all much more subdued than it had been before, and somehow it made it all the more natural.

Presently Missi Redgravie crossed the room and stood beside Missus Catoni as she played. They talked so quietly that Felisi could not hear them for a time. Then the music trailed away and left a voice, a well-modulated voice, talking quite clearly.

“. . . This can't go on, Joan!" They called each other by their proper names this time.

"It's my life, Tony," Missus Catoni answered him quietly.

"But you can't tell me that it is going on."

She turned on the piano stool and looked at him, and kept looking.

"It's the life I chose," she said.

"It's death," he told her; "you're dying on your feet, Joan. This is no country for a white woman. You know it. *He* knows it," he added bitterly. "Why, people don't bring their dogs here, for fear of losing them! I—I can't stand by and see it!"

"You needn't. I made my choice. I don't regret it."

"You can't tell me that you're happy—here?"

"I can."

"You're making yourself say that. You don't believe it. Of all the ingrained, blind selfishness——"

"Hush!"

"No, I mean it."

"I know you mean it, but you don't understand."

"Understand! The pity of it—the waste of it! Oh, Joan, Joan!" His hands had seized hers. She sat quite still, looking at him with her dark eyes. It was wonderful.

“And you left in the middle of it all! There’s the other half—the better half—waiting for you, if you will only come back.”

Missus Catoni’s hands were suddenly snatched from his, and she stood up. Her breath was coming fast. The man stood before her.

“It can all be arranged. This is madness—pure madness! No one would ask it of you!”

She stared at him as though fascinated.

“You—don’t—understand,” she said, like one in a trance; “you could never—understand.”

“There’s only one thing I understand,” he answered.

They stood quite still for a moment; then Missus Catoni, who faced the veranda door, gave a low cry. Missi Catoni stood on the threshold, looking in, but he saw nothing. A native boy led him by the hand. They had come so quietly that Felisi, engrossed in the pretending, had not heard them. The native boy led him forward into the room, and his disengaged hand swept the air until it met the back of a chair, and he sank into it.

“Joan,” he called, “Joan,” and laughed his deep laugh.

Missus Catoni crossed the room and sank on her knees, looking up into his face.

“Jack,” she said, in a strange voice, “Jack, what has happened? Tell me!”

Again he laughed, and his hand caressed her hair.

“Bit of moon blindness, my dear,” he said in his slow, cheerful voice. “Don’t you worry. I shall be all right in a few days—a week at most. Often hap-

pens here, you know, but only to fools. I slept last night in the bush, without cover, and it must have worked round until it fell on me. In the shade when I fell asleep. Those confounded boys never woke me, and—and here I am. Most extraordinary sensation. Just hand me a cigar, will you? . . . Thanks, my dear. Where's Redgrave?"

Missi Redgravie came round in front of the chair.

"Here I am," he said.

"Ah, good! Here's a pretty pickle, Redgrave. Nice sort of host, eh? Leaves his guest for two days and comes back blind! Ha, ha!"

"Whisky and sparklet?" suggested Missi Redgravie.

"Ah, thanks. But I've got it, Joan!" He leant forward, and his sightless eyes gleamed. "I've got it!"

"The *Corona Catoni*?" Missus Catoni's face lit up on the instant.

"Nothing less, my dear. And it's—it's—— But I won't bore you about that. What will interest you most is that we're going home. Yes, I've been thinking things over while—while I've been like this, and this is an infernal country; there's no doubt about it. How you've stood it, I don't know. Do you, Redgrave?"

"No," said Missi Redgravie.

"Besides, there's the *Corona Catoni*." Missi Catoni's tongue lingered over the words as though he loved them. "So we're going home—for good. Hope you'll come and see us, Redgrave."

"Thanks," said Missi Redgravie, "I should be charmed."

"And now I've got to get to bed somehow." Missus

Catoni led him toward his bedroom door. "Steady, old girl—that's better! Good-night, Redgrave! Hope you'll excuse me."

"Certainly! Good-night!" said Missi Redgravie.

He left that evening.

There would be no more pretending. Felisi was sorry. It had been so wonderful that it was almost impossible to tell where the pretending ended and the reality began.

Felisi often puckers her brow over it.

THE COMPLETE BEACHCOMBER

THE imitation pink coral factory was situated high up on a cliff about a mile along the coast from Levuka.

Those who associate the word "factory" with a mental picture of towering chimneys belching black smoke, the hum of machinery, and streams of pale-faced men and women hurrying to work with *papier mâché* dispatch cases of lunch in their hands, will be grievously disappointed, because in this particular instance the factory belonged to Felisi of Luana, and, like its inventor, the process of production was as simple as it was effective.

You merely go out to the reef at low tide, collect as many of the myriad white coral fronds from the rock pools as you can comfortably carry in a reed basket, and take it on your head up to the factory. There you will find a miniature waterfall gushing down the rocks behind Jimmie's house, and after placing the coral fronds under the fresh water—which, of course, kills the poor little coral polyp and turns his limy, grayish-green house into a snow-white thing of beauty—you squat in the sun, smoking and listening to Jimmie's latest effusion, declaimed in rolling accents to the four winds of the Pacific Ocean before he trades it at the nearest store for a tin of kerosene or bottle of whisky.

This may take an hour, and it may take longer, but at the end of it you mix a packet of a popular dye in a bucket of water and allow the snow-white coral to soak in it. This turns it pink—pink all through, because coral is absorbent—and you sell it to tourists on Levuka wharf in very small quantities and for fabulous sums, because pink coral is scarce.

Yes, Felisi had returned to coral selling on the wharf. The white people on the Rena River, where she had been “something in the nature of a lady’s maid,” had gone “home,” and there was still a goodly number of gold discs to be collected by Felisi and her female relations before a certain wonderful boat became her father’s property.

Felisi was far from pleased at the change of employment. For an ardent student of the white man and his ways, the tourists on the wharf, not to mention a nagging aunt at home, offered a poor substitute for the freedom of movement and observation in a white household. To be sure, there was Jimmie. But then there was always Jimmie; he was as much a part of Levuka as the beach itself, and he offered no new problem to puzzle and enthrall.

To Felisi, as to all natives of “The Islands of the Blessed,” there are only two kinds of white men—those who belong and those who do not belong. The former variety wears soiled ducks and a battered pith helmet, drinks rather more than the climate allows, understands the natives, and seems as happy and contented as the day is long, provided he has tobacco, whisky, bed, and friends. The other wears clean starched ducks with a

knife-like crease down the front of the trousers—which, by the way, are always turned up at the bottom—a magnificent solar topee, and an art-coloured tie. He knows nothing of the native, and cares less, and he carries his troubles with him out of the world into the Islands, which results in his having a careworn appearance and always being in a hurry.

Then there is the super white man—he of speckless white flannel and white felt hat—but Felisi knew little of him, except that on the wharf he and his women folk were the easiest prey to imitation pink coral.

Jimmie belonged to the first of this category, and for this reason Felisi understood and loved the old man, as she understood and loved the rainbow-tinted fish in a rock pool. Moreover, his tin bucket and miniature waterfall were exceedingly useful.

The dyeing process was in full swing when he caught sight of her this morning, on her return from the Rena River, and he welcomed her as though she had never been absent.

“Hi, Felisi!” he bellowed, advancing on her with a sheet of crumpled paper fluttering from his hand, and the light of inspiration flashing in his eye. “If this doesn’t get ’em, nothing will. It’s a peach, a rip-snorter, a—— Listen to this!”

Jimmie had been a large man. His frame was still large, especially the feet, but he had lost flesh. He occasionally ate, but what he really lived on was tobacco and whisky, and perhaps this had something to do with his woeful skinniness. He still had a well-shaped head

and remarkable hands. Felisi had often watched these hands of Jimmie's and marvelled at their shapeliness. Apart from them and his head, he was a scarecrow. His hair and beard were like gray birds' nests, and his clothes—scanty enough, in all conscience—seemed to touch him nowhere but at the shoulders.

He was sitting now on the edge of the cliff—his favourite seat—with his enormous feet dangling over the edge, and one shapely hand upraised as though in exhortation, as he gave a gentle southeast Trade the benefit of the following in a rolling baritone—

“Oh, wondrous Isle of Ovalau,
How oft I ponder on thy charms!
Naught can compare with thee, I vow,
Thy green, green hills and nodding palms!

Beautiful, you know,” he added, with an air of pardonable pride, “really, beautiful that. You notice, it rolls—literally rolls off the tongue, and the sentiment's sound—perfectly sound.”

He was not addressing Felisi, but the proprietress of the imitation pink coral factory knew this perfectly well, and did not resent it in the least. It was a way of Jimmie's. She represented a figure-head at which he could hurl his rhetoric without fear of criticism—a useful article for a poet to have on occasions. But this morning he was not aware that Felisi had only just relinquished a position in a white household, where her English vocabulary had been greatly augmented.

“Why you say ‘green, green’?” she demanded, lifting

a frond of coral out of the dye and placing it in the sun to dry.

Jimmie started visibly, then remembered he was on the cliff, and swung himself into safety. The figure-head had spoken!

"Aha," he warned, when he had recovered from the shock, and wagging an attenuated finger at Felisi, "the little knowledge that is a dangerous thing! And not so slow, either," he added reflectively "I'm not sure that I like 'green, green' myself. Permissible, entirely permissible, but cheap." He looked up with distress written plainly on the yellow parchment of his face. "You have put your finger on the weak spot, my dear."

He looked so unlike his usual cheerful self at that moment that, although Felisi appreciated the compliment, she was sorry she had spoken.

"There *have* to be two words there," he mused; "one feels that—metre, but suitable adjectives were always my weak point. Vivid! No, two syllables. Pale! No, that would not be painting a true picture. Pure! Rotten!" Jimmie squirmed in the grass and cast appealing eyes to heaven.

"Big," suggested Felisi.

Jimmy became suddenly still, and frowned, then smiled.

"Tall," he said, lingering over the word as if it pleased him.

"Thy tall green hills and nodding palms."

"*You* did that, Felisi," he told her, as though acquainting her of a self-accomplished miracle. "And now we come to the point—a fall from Pegasus, I

admit, but a necessary fall." The hand was again up-
raised.

"Yet stop——

(And here is where the attention is at once arrested.
Parsons can't help seeing that)

"Yet stop! There is one other feast
Afforded by this isle afar,
And that is Boulton's store down East,
Where dwells the only real cigar.

So mild it is, so succulent
It wafts——"

Entirely by accident Felisi dropped a frond of coral into the dye. It made a sickening splash, and Jimmie stopped like a clock with a broken mainspring. He said nothing—what was there to say?—but his pained look went to Felisi's heart.

"Me sorry, Jimmie," she pleaded, squatting in the grass before him; "you no stop, please."

"If you're ready," said Jimmie, with dignity, "we'll go down and sell our produce."

They descended the red earth track together, Felisi with a light step and a basket of coral on her head, Jimmie with his loose-jointed shuffle and a scrap of paper neatly folded in his pocket. This scrap of paper was the only thing in life that Jimmie was neat about.

He chuckled as they crossed the bridge and turned on to the beach.

"We're a couple of impostors, Felisi," he told her, in a confidential undertone.

"Impostors," mimicked Felisi.

"Yes, pretenders. Your coral isn't real. My poem isn't real."

"Poem no real?" she queried, in genuine surprise.

"No, it can't be. It's too easy. You just put down a word—coral, anything—then think of a word that rhymes with it—moral, anything—and fill in the rest how you like. It's too easy; but I mustn't let 'em know it," he chuckled. "Oh, dear, no—any more than you must let 'em know how you make pink coral."

They laughed together in the sunlight, a laugh of mutual understanding.

Felisi felt a certain sense of proprietorship in Jimmie's poem. Had she not helped to supply a word—a very vital word? She determined to see it sold. The basket of coral was left with the nagging aunt, and Felisi followed Jimmie into Parsons's store. She wondered, as she threaded her way through the stacks of kerosene, tins, rope, leaf tobacco, and coloured shirts, why he had come to Parsons's when the poem distinctly said "Boulton's," but it was soon made apparent.

"Good morning, Mr. Parsons," was Jimmie's greeting, and he said it as though he meant it, as though it were an entirely original remark.

"Morning, Jim."

Missi Parsonie was a busy man. At eighty degrees in the shade, without a customer in sight, and as much chance of doing business as a derelict whaler, he was always busy. He had learnt his methods in America, and they had answered, if the prosperity of his store went for anything. With garters on his sleeves, and an

intent expression on his hatchet face, he was sorting shirts at the moment; but there was an open tin of mixed biscuits on the counter, and from this Jimmie daintily extracted samples from time to time, and ate them with the air of a connoisseur.

“An uncommonly fine morning, for the hurricane season,” remarked Jimmie. “This is a much-maligned country, Mr. Parsons. Hurricane season, indeed!” His indignation had the effect of accelerating the consumption of biscuits. “They should go to the Malay States if they want to see hurricanes. Ours are a mere zephyr—zephyr, sir, in comparison.” At the end of the counter were stacked packets of safety matches and tins of tobacco. Jimmie sidled along the counter, talking as he went, and appropriated one of each with the utmost delicacy and frankness. Missi Parsonie had disapproved, but slowly he had given way, finding it better to conform to old-established institutions than to get himself disliked—even by Jimmie.

His “shopping” completed, and the two pockets of his disreputable jacket bulging generously, Jimmie took a half seat by the side of the counter, and produced the neatly folded paper. He cleared his throat.

“I have here,” he said impressively, tapping the paper with his attenuated forefinger, “I have here something that will interest you, Mr. Parsons”—Missi Parsonie regarded Jimmie without emotion—“a little thing that I must confess gave me considerable trouble. But I think it’s worth it. It will look well in the *Herald*—in

block type, you know, with good spacing—well, like Boulton's of last week."

"Boulton's?" queried Missi Parsonie, with a faint frown.

"Yes, I think he'll like this one, don't you—as a man of judgment—Mr. Parsons?"

He read the poem from beginning to end, still in the rolling baritone, still with the shapely hand upraised. But Missi Parsonie seemed quite unimpressed. As a matter of fact, this thing was beginning to annoy him. Each week—for a month, now—his rival Boulton had actually bought this trash from Jim and printed it over the signature of "James" in the *Herald*. And it was catching on—that was the absurdity and the exasperation of it. Everyone—even up country—knew Jim, and they had come to look for his weekly effusion.

"That's all right, Jim, I guess," he admitted, "though I'm not much of a judge of that sort of thing. Boulton ought to like it. He handles cigars; we don't."

"And what is your specialty, Mr. Parsons?"

"Well, just at present we're handling a line of zephyr vest that's going to show folks how to dress in the tropics."

"Vests!" cried Jimmie, with sudden animation. "Vest, you said. I like it better—positively, I like it better! More opportunities with 'vest.' How's this? The first verse can stand, then—

"Yet stop! There is one other feast
Upon this Island of the Blest,
And that is Parsons's store down East,
Where dwells the only zephyr vest.

“So cool it is, so feather-light,
It sits with such an easy grace,
That you may walk with all your might
And not a bead will beck your face.”

Jimmie stopped, expectant. Missi Parsonie had resumed his task of sorting shirts.

“Y-e-s,” he said, “something like that, and I’ll take it. I want five verses, each bringing in ‘Parsons’s Zephyr Vest,’ just like that. I shan’t want the first verse. What do you charge?”

Jimmie leant over the counter and whispered into Missi Parsonie’s ear. The latter looked up doubtfully, then nodded.

“And in advance,” added Jimmie, with unlooked-for firmness. “It takes a lot out of one, though you might not think it, Mr. Parsons. It is doubtful if I shall sleep to-night. You shall have it first thing in the morning.”

Missi Parsonie hesitated.

“Mr. Boulton always pays in advance. One must live, you know,” added Jimmie, with quiet dignity.

Missi Parsonie disappeared behind a stack of kerosene cases, and to Felisi it was a curious thing that, while he was gone, Jimmie helped himself to nothing, not even a biscuit.

A few minutes later he shuffled out on to the beach, carrying a parcel packed to look like anything but what it was, and failing utterly.

There were discreet sounds of revelry issuing from Jimmie’s house when Felisi visited the factory that evening. She knew there would be, and she entered without knocking.

The old man was sitting at the packing case which did service for a table, with a litter of paper at his elbows, talking quietly to himself. He took no notice of her entrance, and she sat and listened. These self-communings of Jimmie's always interested her.

"Parsons's zephyr vest," he said, three times and very distinctly. "Vest—west—best—blest—test—messed—jest. . . ." His voice trailed away as rain commenced to patter on the corrugated iron roof. A wistful look came into Jimmie's eyes; then he seemed to notice Felisi for the first time. He looked at her, and commenced to speak.

"Rain! I never hear rain, never see it sloping down—rain, rain, rain—without thinking of Watlington, and then it all comes back—*all* of it—ugh!" He shuddered convulsively. "Fancy thinking of Watlington, after all I've seen—Watlington!"

He laughed quietly, and Felisi joined in. She was a born listener.

"Queer, isn't it? But there it is. Most impressionable age, I suppose—eighteen to twenty-two—Watlington! Rows and rows of little gray houses, all the same, and all full of the same sort of people." Again Jimmie shuddered. "Suburbans, that's what they call 'em—and the rain—a cold, dreary rain. It makes no difference. Every morning, alarm clock six-thirty—breakfast seven o'clock, porridge, egg, marmalade. Train eight o'clock—with a black bag. Underground—crowded—have to stand. Nine o'clock—sign book and climb on to a stool——"

Jimmie was still looking at Felisi, but he did not see her. He was listening to the rain, and his voice had become a dreary monotone.

Felisi was thoroughly enjoying it. It was another puzzle that only needed to be put together, and she was becoming an expert at the game.

“Stay on stool adding up figures . . . One o’clock lunch—one shilling—stool, stool, stool—six o’clock train—underground—crowded—have to stand—Watlington—Rain—dinner—read, talk, drivel—listen to someone torturing the piano—every day—all day, for days, and weeks, and months, and years!” Jimmie’s voice rose in a harsh crescendo. “Are they mad? Or am I?” His eyes came to rest on Felisi in a challenging glare, and she knew that he saw her now.

“Queer, isn’t it?” he said, with sudden quietness. “People are doing that now—over there. And they think it so fine that they want everybody to do it. They wanted me to do it. I did it for four years. Then I came home to Watlington one night and told them I wasn’t going to do it any more. They said I was mad. Perhaps I was, but I didn’t do it any more. I did something else, and I’m still doing something else. Listen to the rain! Watlington!” Jimmie’s head sank down on to his arms. “Parsons’s—zephyr—vests!” he muttered drowsily. “Cool—pool—rule——” He was asleep.

He was really still asleep when Felisi led him to his bed in the corner and left him with the mosquito curtain well tucked in under the mats. She fitted together the puzzle as she went down the red earth track leading to

her aunt's grass house on the outskirts of Levuka, and she found it entertaining. The way of the white man had always interested her.

The next day a steamer came in, and she was busy. It was not until the following morning that she visited the factory, and was met by Jimmie in rather low spirits.

"What d'you think?" he demanded indignantly, while Felisi was setting fronds under the waterfall. "That little rat Parsons won't buy my work unless it's exclusive."

"Exclusive," mimicked Felisi.

"Yes, you know—unless he is the only man to have it. Swears that I promised that. Did I?"

"No," said Felisi.

"I should think not. It means I couldn't do anything for Boulton, and he was the first to publish me. I shall give up Parsons."

The ultimatum was delivered in all gravity. It meant that Jimmy would never again patronize Parsons for biscuits or matches or tobacco. Felisi felt quite sorry for the erring tradesman.

"Him pay you already," she suggested.

Jimmie hung his head.

"I know," he said, "and it's all gone. Most awkward. But perhaps Boulton will settle the matter. I have the very thing for next week—

"Why do we all return in time,
As though by magnet swiftly drawn,
To Ovalau's voluptuous clime,
Where——"

But Felisi heard no more. She was gazing spell-bound past the upraised shapely hand to where the track breasted the hill. Her quick eyes had detected two white objects appearing over the crest. They were solar topees that rapidly evolved themselves into men—white men. One was short and plump and pink, the other tall and dark. Felisi had seen them both before, and knew one to be a well-known Levuka solicitor. The other she had seen coming down the gangway of the steamer the previous day. She remembered him partly because of his vague resemblance to Jimmie, and partly because he had brushed her aside when she offered the imitation pink coral.

They stood in full view now, pausing for breath, then the pink man turned and disappeared down the track, and the other came striding toward them.

The first thing that caused Jimmie to pause in the midst of a particularly flowing stanza was the expression of Felisi's face. He wheeled, quicker than Felisi could have dreamed it possible, and stood stone still, staring into the other's face, and not seeming to notice his outstretched hand.

"Jim," said the stranger, "don't you know me? Your brother, Charles."

Jimmie spoke, but it was like a mechanical figure speaking out of waxen lips:

"There's some mistake, I'm afraid."

"No, there's no mistake. You *must* know me, Jim. Why, man, I——"

Jimmie was swaying gently where he stood. His

yellow face had turned a waxen gray. Then he crumpled forward into the stranger's arms.

There were strange happenings on the cliff for the next few hours. Felisi watched them, enthralled, whilst Jimmie lay in the grass, staring stonily up into the branches of a breadfruit tree, with a rapidly rising temperature.

The stranger performed miracles quietly and rapidly. The murmur of native voices came over the crest of the hill, but no one appeared. Every now and then the stranger vanished, too, to reappear dragging or carrying some bulky, queer-shaped bundle. A speckless white tent sprang into being, beds, a table, and chairs unfolded themselves from green parcels of miraculously small proportions, and by noon the transformation scene was complete. Jimmie, in a suit of striped pink-and-white pyjamas, lay on a camp-bed in the tent, tossing and muttering with fever. The stranger sat at the bedside, alternately watching him with his stern eyes, and dosing him with quinine.

Presently, when Jimmie had fallen into a doze, the stranger came outside and looked about him. His glance went like an arrow to the tumbledown house of weather boards and corrugated iron that had been Jimmie's home for so long. His hand went to his pocket and drew out a box of matches. His long legs carried him to the building in ten strides, and a moment later it was a crackling yellow flame. It burnt merrily until there was nothing left but glowing embers and a few blackened sheets of corrugated iron. These the stranger pried into a neat pile with the aid of a stick,

and stood back to view, with every appearance of satisfaction, the damage he had wrought.

Then his glance fell on Felisi, squatting motionless in the factory. She shrank from him as he approached.

“Don’t run away,” he pleaded, in a wheedling voice. “Do you speak English, little girl?”

Felisi nodded sullenly.

“You do? Then let me make it quite clear. I have bought this piece of land. Do you understand?”

Again Felisi nodded.

“So now it belongs to me, and you mustn’t come here.”

“Jimmie belong you?” demanded Felisi, with a hint of truculence.

The stranger laughed softly.

“Yes,” he said, “Jimmie belongs to me. He is my brother. He is very ill, and when he gets better I don’t want anything to remind him of what he was.”

“*You* make him ill!” flashed Felisi. “Him all right before.”

“Yes,” said the stranger, “Jimmie has to be ill before he will be well. Now run along, there’s a good girl. What is this?” he added, pointing to the factory.

“Pink coral,” said Felisi glibly. “*You* no want.”

“No, I don’t want any. But here”—the stranger produced a silver coin and held it out—“then you can run along.”

Felisi rose slowly to her feet and turned toward the track. But she did not run, and she left the silver coin in the still outstretched hand of the astonished donor.

She heard his short laugh as she went down the track, and her white teeth closed with a snap like an ivory trap.

There was now plenty of puzzle to put together, and Felisi entered into the game with a new zest. That evening she hid in a lantana bush a few yards from the tent, and, as well as witnessing a most interesting shadowgraph on the white canvas wall, heard the following:

“Jim, are you better?”

“Who the devil are you?”

“Your brother Charles. You *must* remember me. Have you forgotten Watlington—the old days?”

A short pause.

“Never heard of it. What do you want, anyway?”

“I want *you*, Jim.”

“What for?”

“Because you’re my brother.”

“Haven’t got a brother. Some mistake. Got a drink there?”

There was the shadowgraph of a hand going out and filling a glass very carefully from a bottle and a syphon.

“Call that a drink?”

“We’re going to fight it out, Jim, up here alone. A little less each time; you won’t notice it.”

“What’s all this?”

“Pyjamas. Don’t they feel nice and cool and—and clean? Lie still, Jim; you’re not strong yet, you know.”

“If I didn’t know it, I’d choke you, you—you supercilious, domineering——”

“Ah, the same old Jim!”

“Get out of here! Who gave you permission to come on to my—my property, and——”

“It was never your property, Jim. They let you live here, but it’s not yours. It’s mine now—I’ve bought it.”

A long silence, then—

“It’s no good, Jim. Be reasonable. I don’t want much—only that you’ll come back with me and live like a civilized human being. You owe it to us.”

“I owe nothing to any one except Parsons.”

“You owe it to us. I came fifteen thousand miles to find you, to bring you back. I left my wife and two children for that, and I shall not return until you come with me. Why, just now, in your fever, you mentioned Watlington over and over again. When you first came to Levuka, you signed your name in the hotel register; there it is, in your own handwriting—J. Crothers. There aren’t many Crotherses, you know, Jim. What’s the use of pretending? It isn’t as if you left anything to be ashamed of in Watlington. You just went and never came back, that’s all. It was a tremendous business to trace you, but I did it. The world’s very small, really. Won’t you even admit——”

“Never heard of you. Get out!”

“Very well. You know me, and I know you. I shall stay with you until you do come back. My wife and children can wait.”

There was the shadowgraph, slightly marred by the billowing tent wall, of an attenuated figure rearing itself up and falling upon something out of the range of vision. There were the sounds of a brief struggle, the indefinite picture of something being gently laid down, and silence.

“You always hated me, didn’t you, Jim?” a voice

droned on presently. "I think you hated all of us; I could never make out why."

"For Heaven's sake, go away and leave me in peace!" It was the cry of a tortured soul. "What harm have I done any one—any one—to be interfered with like this?"

"You have only harmed yourself, Jim."

"Then what business is it of yours to—to——"

"It is the business of every brother——"

"But I tell you it's a mistake! I have no brother. Do you want to drive me mad?"

"No; but I must finish, now that I have begun. You want to know why I came all this way, now, to find you and bring you back?"

"I don't! I never said I did. I——"

"Well, Uncle Fred died five years ago." The droning voice became more hesitant. "He left some money to be equally divided between us. I spent it all—for the children's sake." The voice stopped. It had evidently been a tremendous effort to say as much. But there was no answer, and it went on: "Then I began to think about you, Jim. You became a sort of ghost to haunt me. I just *had* to tell you what I'd done. I'm built like that, as you know. I just had to find out where you were—what you were doing. You might have been out in the world starving, and there was I in Watlington. I had wife and children, but your ghost rose up between them and me. I left them, and swore I would not come back until I brought you with me. You might have been ill—wanted help for years. I hunted for you and found you—*like this*. We'll fight it out together, Jim, up here alone."

There were indistinct mumblings.

Felisi listened intently, but all she could catch was something that sounded like “vest—blest—west——”

Jimmie was in the grip of fever again.

For three days this went on, and when Felisi saw him one day sitting outside the tent, he had changed from a happy child into a miserable old man.

It took Felisi some time to come to a decision, but when once it had been arrived at, the result was usually pretty thorough.

Shortly after midnight she crawled out from the lantana bush and pushed the tent wall so that it also pushed Jimmie, at the same time making a queer little noise of her own. There was an agonizing pause, then an elongated form crawled from the tent, seized her by the hand, and stumbled after her into the bush.

They progressed in this fashion—Jimmie called it running—for perhaps an hour, before he was allowed to sink on to the musty mats of a disused hut deep in the recesses of the bush. He lay as one dead, until Felisi produced from somewhere—with the air of a conjurer producing rabbits from a hat—a bottle of amber liquid. Then Jimmie sat up.

“Felisi, you’re a gem,” he said, with something of his old-time spirit.

“You all right,” chirped the conjurer. “Him go away plenty quick.”

But Jimmie shook his head.

“You don’t know my brother Charles,” he said. “Watlington!” And he buried his face in his hands and sobbed like the child he was.

“You all right, you all right,” soothed Felisi, but it was of no avail. Jimmie was very weak, and the amber liquid had gone to his head.

“He’s right—I always did hate him!” he said. “We were so different, somehow, and he always dominated me. He can dominate me now, after all these years. It’s queer, but there it is. I feel all crumpled up when he’s about. But I won’t go back. He’s too late. Any one would be too late now. I was happy. I wasn’t doing anybody any harm. And I won’t go back! I’d kill myself first!”

Felisi crept close.

“Why you no kill *him*?” she said.

Jimmie regarded her with horror-struck eyes.

“*Me* kill him,” she added very quietly.

“No, you mustn’t do that. You shan’t do that. I won’t let you do that.” Jimmie had seized her hand as though it held a dagger upraised. “No!” Jimmie suddenly became dignified. “I will speak to him as a man, not as—as the worm he thinks me. After all, I have the law. But the law is queer; it does strange things—it might uphold him. No, I shall say: ‘Pardon me, I haven’t the pleasure of your acquaintance.’” Jimmie’s manner was that of Parsons’s store when he took a biscuit. “I shall say——But then there are his wife and children. He has said that he won’t go back without me, and he means it. Charles always meant what he said. Different to me—poles apart. Nevertheless, my life is my own, and I shall say to him ‘Go!’ like that, I shall——”

When, however, about ten minutes later, there was

the sound of running feet, followed by the appearance of the panting stranger, Jimmie said nothing of the sort. In a surprisingly short space of time he was back in the tent and in bed, with a string tied securely round his waist at one end, and round the stranger's wrist at the other.

The puzzle became more and more involved, but Felisi struggled with it manfully.

Jimmie became very docile after that ignominious night of freedom, but the string was still in use, and a few nights later the stranger woke with a start. He pulled on the string gently, and it came toward him over the ground. He got up and examined Jimmie's bed. It was empty. He went outside and watched the sun climb out of the sea.

What a nuisance that fellow was! No, it was that infernal native girl. It would be necessary, after all, then, to have recourse to the police.

The stranger turned wearily from the sea, and was entering the tent, when his glance happened on a huddled heap of cheap patterned calico close to the waterfall. It was the "infernal native girl." She took no heed of his approach, and when he raised her head, silent tears were streaming down her face.

"Where is he?" demanded the stranger peremptorily.

Felisi did not answer. She merely rocked gently from side to side, kneeling in the grass.

"Where is he?" repeated the stranger, with quiet insistence but with an anxious look in his eyes.

Felisi pointed to the cliff.

“*You* kill him,” she said.

The stranger strode to the edge and looked over. Below, the blue waters of the Pacific lashed themselves into white fury against the needles of volcanic rock at the foot of the cliff. Half-way down, where it was impossible for a goat to have found foothold, there was a little bush, and fluttering from it a tattered strip of pink-and-white flannel.



There was no mistaking it for anything but a shred of Jimmie’s wonderful pyjamas.

The stranger looked out over the sea. The white wings of a hurricane bird fanned his face, and he moved. He took Felisi by the shoulders and shook her.

“*You* lie!” he said fiercely. “Where is he?”

“*You* kill him!” sobbed Felisi, and he could get nothing else out of her.

The very best of search parties scoured the little island of Ovalau for a fortnight. Then the stranger went home in a big steamer.

Felisi and Jimmie watched it, from the cliff, slowly dissolving into the heat haze. Then the work of the factory was resumed, and Jimmie sat in his favourite seat, declaiming to the sunshine—

“Thrice—blessed Isle of Ovalau,
Thou art my mother, father, friend

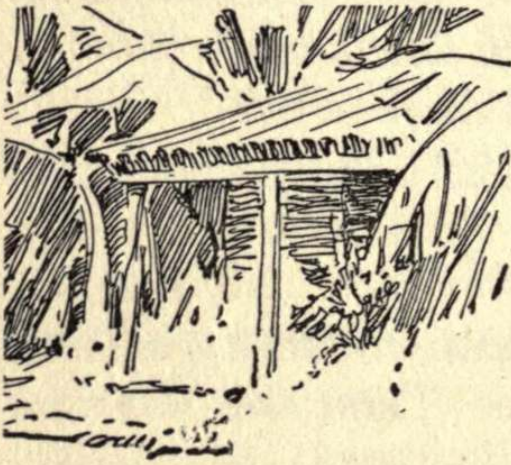
. . . trow, plow, cow, now, how . . . ”

THE PEEP SHOW

THE two men broke from the bush and stood blinking in the sudden glare of beach, and sea, and sky, like owls strayed from their cranny in the light of day.

One was tall and very thin, the other short and thin also. Both were ragged, unspeakably begrimed, and so weary that they could scarce stand.

“Gaw!” said the shorter man, and, as though this strange utterance were some sort of signal, collapsed on the spot.



The other said nothing, but carefully lowered a round, compact bundle from his shoulder to the ground, and sat upon it.

At this juncture Felisi, who had watched their advent from the doorway of her father's house, saw fit to make her presence known; and a very engaging presence it was, consisting of five feet two inches and fifteen years of bronze femininity, lithe and upstanding like a boy, clad in her best *sulu*, a red hibiscus blossom, and a dazzling smile. But what would you? It is not for nothing that one is the eldest daughter of the chief of a

village like Luana. The position has its responsibilities, and Felisi was duly aware of them.

"You want 'im guest house?" she suggested amiably.

The tall man surveyed her for a moment with infinitely tired gray eyes before a flicker of light came into them and a smile puckered the corners of his month.

"Are you a Kanaka kid or an angel out of heaven?" he demanded irrelevantly.

"Me Kanaka kid," replied Felisi, whereat the tall man chuckled weakly.

"Guest house?" he echoed. "I should just say we do want a guest house. Lead on, Macduff!"

"Me Felisi, no Macduff," corrected the "presence."
"All along this way, please."

The tall man plucked his prone companion by the arm. "Morgan!" he shouted. "Hi, Morgan! We're being offered a guest house by the head of the department."

"Go t' 'ell!" muttered Morgan.

With an alacrity evidently born of habit, the tall man jerked the other to his feet and half carried, half dragged him along the grass-grown village path. The bundle he treated with infinitely more respect, and when Felisi offered to relieve him of it, merely smiled and shook his head.

The cool, dim spaciousness of the guest house had no sooner received its visitors than Felisi withdrew, to continue her observations from outside through a hole of her own making in the reed wall. It was not precisely the thing to do, but Felisi had no notion of that. All she did know was that the advent of these two dilapidated white men was the first occurrence of interest

that had taken place in Luana for three months, and she intended to make the most of it. They came from the world that she knew and loved so well, throbbing centre of civilization such as Levuka and Suva, where governors and their ladies drove in glittering carriages, where immense ships unloaded impossible freights of passengers and cargo on to the groaning wharves, and where, incidentally, it was possible to amass a fortune by merely looking as charming as one happened to be, and selling imitation pink coral to credulous tourists. Already by this means she (Felisi) had been instrumental in securing to her family a sewing-machine, a boat, and a typewriter, and she had no doubt, when the novelty of this last acquisition had worn off, she would be hurled again into the vortex. She only prayed that it might be soon.

With this boundless experience of the white man and his ways at her finger tips, Felisi was in no way surprised at what she saw through the hole in the guest house wall. Morgan lay as he had fallen on the mats, a sprawling, heavily breathing heap of unclean humanity. The other looked about him, found a bamboo of water, and washed, took off his boots and, squatting on the floor, drew from his bundle a pair of faded pyjamas and a toothbrush.

The rites that followed interested Felisi not at all; her attention was for the moment centred on the bundle. Other things came out of it, yet its dimensions remained miraculously the same. It was still heavy, and round, and about the size of a ripe mummy apple. It——

The tall man placed it under his head, and on the instant, so it seemed, fell into a trance-like sleep. The curtain was rung down on the first act of Felisi's peep show. But there was still the bundle.

Within five minutes she knew what it contained, and like a dutiful daughter, made a report to her father.

"They have come far and are very tired," she told him, squatting in her proper place at the doorway.

The Chief of Luana looked up from a litter of meaningless papers, and fixed Felisi with his official frown. He was a quaint little man, who, under pretence of being eternally busy, did nothing whatever. As a newly elected member of the local native district council, he had been inordinately impressed at the first assembly by the importance of anything in the nature of a printed form. Whatever its shape or colour or size, it was apparent to him that all things had their inception, their proper conduct, and ultimate fruition in "forms," so he had brought away a kerosene tin full of them for his own use. The typewriter followed as a second and culminating stroke of originality. He would send in the returns of Luana's health, population, and trade as they should be sent in. He intended to get on. Carefully selecting a faded blue document issued for the returns of cattle diseases in the year 1891, he slipped it into the machine and proceeded with two gnarled fingers to pound it with purple hieroglyphics.

"Are they *turagas* (gentlemen)?" he snapped during a pause in proceedings, and precisely in the manner of the local J. P.

"One of them is a *turaga*," replied his daughter, who

was the only member of his household he seemed unable to impress.

“And what is their business?”

“I do not know—yet. They have not spoken. They are asleep.”

“Have they many cigars and much wisiky?”

“They have nothing,” said Felisi, “except——”

The Chief of Luana had intended to smite the wicker table after the fashion of the Native Commissioner when exasperated, but, instead, his wrist caught the typewriter keys, causing several bars to rear on end and unite in a tangled mass.

“One is a *turaga*,” he scoffed, “yet they have nothing!”

“That is so,” returned his imperturbable daughter. “It is often so with *turagas*. This one has nothing but a lump of ambergris the size of my head, which he keeps ever by him.”

Her father’s eyes goggled at her over the typewriter.

“Ambergris!” he repeated in an awed undertone.

“Yes. It is one hundred pounds for a piece no bigger than a pigeon’s egg in Suva. I have seen.”

And the Chief of Luana knew this to be so. For a while his brow was creased by a myriad wrinkles, which signified that he was trying to think; then he waved Felisi from the presence.

“Go,” he ordered, “and tend these guests as you would others. I will make known the Government’s wishes when I have submitted my report.”

Felisi proceeded to carry out instructions with all the pleasure in life, so that when the visitors awoke, after

twenty-four hours of log-like slumber, they found the matting spread with delicacies, and their guide of the previous night in discreet attendance.

“This is a bit of all right,” quoth Morgan, ravenously attacking the prawns.

“Very kind,” said the tall man; “but I think we ought to tell you,” he added, turning to Felisi, “we can’t pay for anything. We have no money.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Morgan through a mouthful. “This is the way in the out-back villages—guest house and all the rest of it. I know down-and-outs who’ve lived like princes for three months and more in one of ’em for nothing but an old shirt. We’re on velvet, Slade, and about time, too, I reckon.”

The tall man waited until the other’s voice was entirely deadened by food, then turned again to their hostess.

“Where are we?” he asked, with his whimsical smile.

“Him Luana,” came the response out of the shadows.

“Luana, eh? Well, it sounds pretty, and is pretty, but how do we get out of here to where there are steamers—steamers, savvy?”

“Me savvy,” replied Felisi, with a pout at the reflection on her intelligence. “You wait maybe six, maybe thirty day, and cutter him take you outahere.”

“Maybe six, maybe thirty,” mused the tall man. “And whom do we thank for looking after us all that time?”

Felisi wriggled in delicious self-consciousness on the mats.

“Oh, cut it out, Slade,” interposed Morgan. “They

don't want thanks. Don't understand 'em. They look after us for the honour of the thing. Pleases the chief, and all that. As long as we are looked after, what does it matter who does it, or why? You make me tired. Hi, Mary, some more *taro*, lively!"

"Will you go to the Chief of Luana," continued the tall man, as though the other had not spoken, "and convey to him our thanks?"

Felisi nodded and retired, whereupon the tall man drew a battered pouch from his pocket and thoughtfully filled his pipe.

"Look here, Morgan," he said, "it's about time you and I understood one another."

"I'm on," agreed Morgan.

"We're partners," the other continued slowly, "until we sell and divide the proceeds; there's no avoiding that. But there's no need to hide the fact that we dislike each other pretty thoroughly, is there?"

Morgan drew his knees to his chin, and sat staring over them with his bright, furtive little eyes.

"All right," he said, "we'll let it go at that."

"And personally I don't see any need for us to rely solely on one another's company for perhaps thirty more days, either, do you?"

There was no answer.

"So, while we're waiting for a cutter, I suggest that either you or I get out of here. Which is it to be?"

"Who looks after the stuff?"

"I do," said Slade.

"I see," sneered Morgan.

"I do," Slade repeated, puffing meditatively at his pipe. "I don't trust you, Morgan."

"And why should I trust you?"

"Because I've never given you cause to distrust me," returned Slade. He turned slowly and looked full into the venomous eyes of his partner. "I found you out—that's why you hate me so, Morgan. I suppose you've forgotten all that happened back there in the mangroves. I haven't. Why, man, you wouldn't be here now if I hadn't dragged and carried and kicked you here! Yet ever since I ran across this stuff your one thought has been how to rob me of my share of it. Twice I caught you, Morgan, slinking off. The first time I believed the yarn you put up, instead of leaving you to rot. The second time you confessed and asked my forgiveness, grovelling there in the swamp——"

"Who'll believe that?"

"No one, because no one will be told of it; but I know it, and that's why you hate me, and that's why I distrust you, and why I'm going to look after our property until it's sold."

A glint came into Morgan's eyes.

"I'll toss you for the lot," he suggested magnanimously, "and that'll make an end of it. Come, be a sport, Slade; just the flick of a coin—your coin, if you like."

Slade shook his head wearily.

"If that's being a sport, I've finished with sport," he said. "I've had too many little fortunes within *cooee* and lost them, to do the same with this. I'm afraid to take the chance, if you like. I tell you, this last little

jaunt's taken it clean out of me. I'm getting old. I'm going to stick to what I've got this time, in spite of you or the devil, and make a clean breakaway for the cool rains and other things worth having." His hand rested on the bundle at his side. "This means more to me than I'd ever dream of telling you, or you'd understand," he added gravely. "It means—everything."

Morgan's glance travelled to the weather-worn sack-
ing that covered their joint fortune, and rested there a moment. The other smiled.

"You'll have to kill me to get it, Morgan," he said quietly, "and I don't think you'd do that."

"Why not?" The question came involuntarily.

"Because you haven't the pluck," said Slade. "You're a sneak thief, not a murderer."

Morgan sat motionless for a long moment, then got slowly to his feet.

"That's straight," he said.

"It's meant to be," returned Slade. "Why should we be anything else with one another? You know me, and I know you, or, if we don't, we ought to by now. What's the good of pretence between us two?"

Morgan shrugged his lean shoulders.

"And just what is it you want now?" he asked, after a pause.

"I want a rest," said Slade, "don't you? The length of the village apart will suit me, if it suits you."

"And what if it doesn't suit me?"

"The next month will have to be rather more trying for both of us than it need be, that's all," said Slade.

Morgan went over to the doorway and stood looking out at the glare.

"All right," he said suddenly, and passed outside, whistling.

Slade sat staring after him for a while, then drew the back of his hand across his forehead and sank back on to the mats.

"Now," he muttered. "Now, of all times!" and drew a mat over his already trembling body.

The second act of Felisi's peep show had been entertaining. Perhaps the acting was rather more subdued than a transpontine audience could have wished, but it gave promise of development. Felisi lowered the curtain by the simple expedient of allowing the reed wall to resume its normal contour, and went into the guest house to clear away.

The tall man lay watching her from under his mat with unnaturally bright eyes and compressed lips. Felisi recognized the symptoms: he was trying to keep his teeth from chattering. Why did they all do that? Because it was in their nature to make a fight? Perhaps. But the tall man was fighting something stronger than himself, and by nightfall he was in a raging fever.

"Another mat, and I shall be all right," he jerked out; "just one more. Ah, thank you, little girl! And keep everyone away. Don't let them know—any one, mind. I mustn't lose control—mustn't. . . ." The words came from him in convulsive jerks. It was terrible to watch. And all the while the bundle was clasped tight in his straining arms. "After all—and so near the end, so near Out of here, away home, start

afresh, go slow; it's the last chance, the last. . . . Hark! There he is!" But it was only a hurricane bird crying overhead, and Felisi told him so, and knelt beside him with a cocoanut shell of water. "Quite the little nurse, aren't you?" stuttered the tall man, his eyes blazing at her out of the darkness. "I shan't forget this. What was your name? Ah, Felisi! Felisi, no Macduff, eh? Well, I shan't forget it. There—there he is!"

The water spilled from his lips, his body remained rigid while a trickle of laughter filtered through the night. It was Morgan's over kava in the chief's house not fifty yards distant. He had a way with chiefs, had Morgan. If he heard! If he came—now! Felisi took the sick man's burning hand between her own and tried to soothe him to silence.

"Him no come," she crooned. "Him no——" But he was coming. A musical whistling drew nearer.

"Keep him away!" gasped the tall man in what he had intended for a whisper, but what was jerked from his throat in a raucous shout.

The whistling ceased abruptly. There was a pause, then the faint sound of naked feet on the wooden runway leading up to the guest house, and Morgan came in.

What he saw appeared to amuse him, for his mouth twisted into a smile.

"Got it, eh?" he observed, looking down on his stricken partner.

"Just a touch," said Slade between clenched teeth.

"Only a touch. Well, that's all right. Pity we haven't any quinine; but you'll be better after a bit."

And then he went. Felisi could scarcely bring herself to believe it, but it was so. He had gone. The other's ramblings provided the explanation.

"Hardly ripe . . . might put up a fight . . . wait till I'm helpless. . . ." A defiant chuckle came from under the quaking pyramid of mats. "But that's where he makes the mistake—big mistake. I'm not going under. I'm better. D'you hear that, Felisi—no Macduff? Better—ah" And with that the tall man lost consciousness.

Morgan had returned to the chief's house, and was beguiling him with titbits of officialdom when Felisi found time to shift her sphere of activities.

". . . and I don't mind telling you, chief, I am favourably impressed with the conduct of affairs in Luana," he was saying in glib dialect, "very favourably impressed. It seems to me you are wasted here. What you want is influence, commonly called 'boost.'"

"Boost," repeated the chief, who was rapidly becoming impressed.

"Yes. Now, there's my dear old friend Bettington, the Commissioner—you may have heard of him?" The chief nodded with bulging eyes. "There's a man who could give you a lift, if any one could, and sometimes, over one of our little dinners, I can do a lot. You send in your report, and I'll see that it's noticed in the proper quarter. That's the way we do things."

With his customary expression of bemused anxiety when dealing with matters beyond his depth, the Chief of Luana sat fingering buff Form No. 21875, and won-

dering what this exceedingly pleasant person required. He was not long left in suspense.

“In the meantime,” proceeded the pleasant person, “my friend is too ill to travel, and I shall be obliged to go on alone at once. If you place a good sailing canoe and two men at my disposal for a week from to-night, and look after my friend until I return for him in the Government launch—probably with Bettington himself—I will simply hand you here and now what we call in official circles a promissory note——”

“A form,” muttered the chief uncertainly.

“Exactly, a form,” agreed Morgan, “duly signed, sealed, and delivered for any amount within reason. As you know, we of the Government are not sticklers as to cost. . . .”

He said a great deal more, but Felisi could wait no longer. Her services were in request elsewhere.

The third act of the peep show was eminently satisfactory. It opened on an empty stage save for a pile of mats in a far corner of the guest house and the flickering light of a candlenut that cast long shadows across the yellow matting of the floor.

It seemed a long time before it came, but at last another and more definite shadow joined the rest, moving swiftly across the guest house. At the pile of mats it paused, kneeling, peering, outstretching an arm. It was a hesitant shadow even now, and not without cause, for in its gropings under the mats its arm became suddenly transfixed, and in a moment the guest house was a chaos of struggling men.

But it did not last long. Morgan was infinitely the

stronger. With a wrench he was free and away, the bundle under his arm, his partner, a gaunt, dishevelled figure, stumbling impotently in his wake. Felisi watched them go—down through the moon-mottled fringes of the palm grove and out on to the beach.

There a canoe was waiting on a sea of inky shadows, and Morgan was soon lost to sight. The other stood for a moment, swaying gently, his long arms hanging nerveless at his sides until the last iota of his strength had ebbed, and he crumpled face downward on the sand.

Felisi smiled to herself in the shadow of the guest house. Undoubtedly the third act had been a success. It only remained to supply a fitting climax, which she proceeded to do by combing her hair, and taking from its hiding place a bundle wrapped in weather-worn sacking. This she carried down to the beach, that it might be the first thing her patient's eye should rest upon.

Unfortunately, the more telling phase of the climax was perforce enacted "off," when somewhere and at some time an exactly similar bundle was exultantly unwrapped, exposing to view a congealed mass of Luana's good red clay. But you cannot have it both ways, even in a peep show.

THE LONELY LADY

THE yacht, a graceful thing of slender spars and glinting white enamel, rounded the headland and dropped anchor a cable's length from shore.

All Luana, comprising sixty souls of respective age, sex, and volubility, a medley of nondescript dogs and chickens, several pigs, and a tethered turtle or two, was awakened from its customary torpor to witness the amazing spectacle. Even the broad leaves of the coconut palms, falling in green waves to the beach, seemed to quiver in sympathetic excitement. Never had Luana been treated to anything half as thrilling! Luana, that is, with the exception of Felisi.

She stood apart from her flustered and clucking relatives, silent, watchful, apparently unimpressed, though a certain tensity in her mien gave the lie to her pose of indifference. For it was a pose, or a form of self-control, which you will. Probably Felisi would have accorded a first glimpse of any of the world's great capitals precisely the same need of outward appreciation she now bestowed on Strode's yacht.

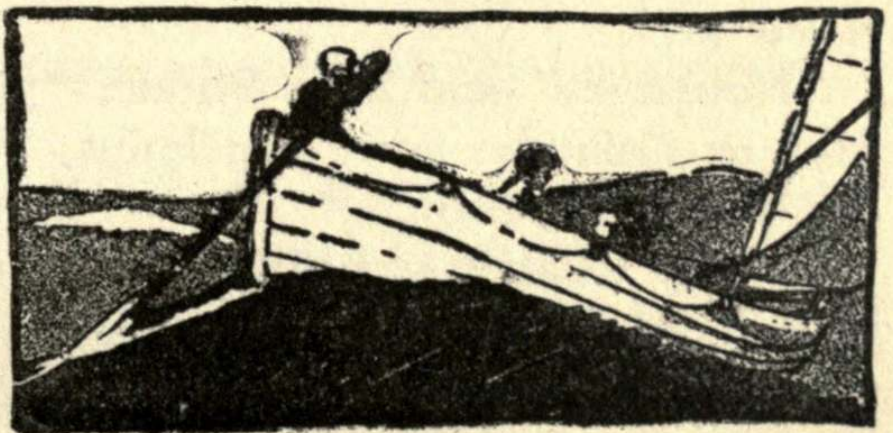
And why should it be otherwise, even in the fifteen-year-old daughter of an obscure chief in the South Pacific Islands? If you had moved in civilized circles for a space; if, that is, you had dispensed imitation pink coral on the wharves of Suva to every passenger with

a heart between San Francisco and Sydney, and observed the ways of the white man as had Felisi of Luana, you would know that the display of vulgar curiosity is detrimental to dignity.

You would know, also, that the correct thing to do is to saunter in leisurely fashion as far as the palm groves, only breaking into a run when they obscure you from the public gaze. Thereafter, it is permissible to race beachward with hair and *sulu* streaming in your wake, and load your canoe with the first mangoes and mummy apples to hand as a valid excuse for prying into other people's affairs. In any case, that is what Felisi did.

What it must be to have all the money in the world, and therefore all the happiness! That is what she tried to imagine squatting in the canoe amongst her wares, and staring wide-eyed at the beautiful lady who stood alone at the yacht's after rail looking out over the water. To own a floating palace of white and gold, and go drifting over the world to every scene of pleasure and excitement! To know nothing of *taro* patches tended in the heat of the day, and teeming fish traps, and exacting relatives requiring obedience and support! Felisi sighed.

And curiously enough Mrs. Strode chanced



to sigh at much the same moment as she leant over the yacht's rail watching an outrigger canoe and its diminu-

tive bronze occupant rising and falling on the gentle swell. What it must be to have nothing, and therefore happiness! To live in an earthly paradise and a *sulu*. To know nothing of the fetish of civilization. To be something more than an automaton to the man you love, even though he be your husband. . . .

Such was the trend of Mrs. Strode's conjectures until interrupted by unmistakable signals from the canoe: two arms upheld, a mango in the hand of each, and a small, clear voice coming over the water: "You want 'im mango, lady?"

"Good gracious," exclaimed Mrs. Strode, "the child speaks English! Yes," she called, "come alongside! Parks, have you any money?"

A steward, who seemed to have appeared noiselessly from nowhere, fumbled in his pocket amongst the sad remains of last night's poker, and with some diffidence produced sixpence.

"If you'll pardon me, madam," he warned in a note of deferential confidence, "the fruit brought horf in the bum-boats is 'igh as to price, and not to be relied on."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Strode, "you're not at Port Said or Colombo now, you know, Parks. Besides, I don't want the fruit."

Exactly what it was Mrs. Strode did want was hard to determine, so Parks retired gracefully. For some time she leant over the rail looking down into an up-turned elfin face, and noting the perfect teeth, the velvety skin, the brown wistful eyes, and above all the wealth of blue-black hair—assimilating, in short, all

those qualities in Felisi of Luana that helped so materially in the sale of imitation pink coral—or mangoes.

“You dear!” she cried suddenly. “Come aboard at once.”

And Felisi came.

Somewhere, and about an hour later, it struck two bells, and the mellow boom of a gong followed soon afterward announcing lunch aboard the *Ajax*, but Mrs. Strode was otherwise engaged. To be exact, she was undergoing a course of instruction in making cigarettes of dried banana leaf, and finding it absorbing. Somehow, this quaint little creature out of the world's end had taken hold of Mrs. Strode. Listening to its glib jargon, watching its deft, unconsciously graceful movements, and trying to plumb the admixture of crass ignorance and subtle wisdom that appeared to constitute its mind, gave this lonely woman keener pleasure than she had experienced for many a day.

“. . . and you must take me out to the reef,” she told Felisi; “just us two in the canoe, and show me how to do things—spear fish, and stay under water two minutes.”

Felisi appeared unimpressed with the possibilities in this direction.

“You no spear fish,” she retorted, surveying her luxurious surroundings as though in some manner they might be held responsible for their owner's inability to do anything. “You no stay under water *one* minute.”

“Indeed?” Mrs. Strode was piqued. It was not often of late she had been told there were things she could not do. It took her back to the days—not so

far distant—when, as the only sister of four unruly brothers she had seldom been proof against “the dare.” “We’ll see,” she added, with a touch of asperity. “There may be more in me than meets the eye—do you understand?”

Felisi nodded gravely, a method of response she had found effective when not understanding in the least.

“Then that’s settled,” said the beautiful lady. “You come alongside with the canoe early to-morrow morning, and we’ll make a day of it, you and I—oh, the mangoes,” she added, proffering Parks’s sixpence.

Felisi refused it bluntly.

“You no want ’em mangoes,” she affirmed.

“You seem to know more about me than I do myself,” said Mrs. Strode; “what makes you think I don’t want the mangoes?”

“Me hear you.”

“Oh, you heard me, did you? I expect you hear a good deal that you’re not supposed to.”

“Me hear plenty,” admitted Felisi non-committally.

“If you’re not the quaintest infant!” laughed Mrs. Strode. “But you’ll take the money, won’t you?”

Felisi shook her head.

“You no want ’em mangoes, me no want ’em money,” she explained lucidly.

“I see,” mused Mrs. Strode. “Parks,” she added, turning to the steward who had again materialized, “your good money has been spurned. I think I told you we were not at Port Said or Colombo.”

“Yes, madam. Luncheon has been served twenty

minutes, madam," recited Parks, studiously avoiding Felisi's childlike gaze.

"Is Mr. Strode down yet?"

"Not yet, madam."

"He has been told—as well as the gong?"

"Yes, madam."

Mrs. Strode sighed.

"Very well," she said. "I'll come directly."

But she did not.

"I suppose some day you'll have a husband," she said, turning to her guest.

Felisi nodded with every appearance of delight at the prospect.

"They're not all like that, you know," warned Mrs. Strode, with a whimsical half-smile. "But I expect you manage them differently. . . ."

"Husband all right," defended Felisi stoutly.

"Sometimes," said Mrs. Strode. A glint of mischief, never very far distant, came into her eyes. "Would you like to see mine?" she suggested suddenly.

There was apparently nothing in life Felisi preferred.

"You come along here," said Mrs. Strode, leading the way over the cocoanut matting of the deck, "and up these funny little stairs, and round here, and across this bridge, and at last you come to the hutch where Bunny lives."

Felisi beheld a white deck house, replete with highly varnished doors and glittering brass portholes.

"You see," continued Mrs. Strode, "he is right away from everyone here, and that is what Bunny likes."

“All the time?”

“Very nearly,” said Mrs. Strode cheerfully. “Go and see what you think of him.”

Felisi stood on tiptoe to peer through one of the portholes, a proceeding at which she was something of an adept. Within were books, seemingly thousands of them, filling three walls of the room from floor to ceiling. Along the fourth ran a bench littered with stones, lumps of coral, and inexplicable instruments; and under the skylight, at a desk equally littered with papers, sat a large blond man in a dressing gown writing assiduously. He looked kind. Felisi had studied various samples of the genus *turaga*, and this one appeared well up to standard. But—— She returned to Mrs. Strode for further enlightenment.

“Bunny all right,” she announced, by way of encouragement.

“I’m glad you like him,” said Mrs. Strode.

“An’ you?”

Mrs. Strode pursed her lips and looked out over the sea.

“As much as I see of him,” she confessed. “You see,” she went on in explanatory vein, “he is really a great man, and came all this way to find out things about the world—your world. You think it beautiful and pleasant to live in, and that’s enough for you—and me; but it isn’t enough for him. He likes to find out why it’s beautiful and pleasant, what it’s made of, and who lived in it before we did; then he goes into the hutch and puts it all into a book.”

Felisi listened enthralled. The beautiful lady was

surpassing herself; but nothing that she said disguised or clouded for one instant the main issue, which to the philosopher of Luana was as clear as day: the beautiful lady was also a lonely lady.

"Too much 'utch," she commiserated solemnly. Whereat Mrs. Strode was consumed with silent laughter, and hustled her toward the companion.

"You'd better run along now," she warned; "I'm going to fetch Bunny out, and he's rather fierce sometimes."

But Bunny proved unusually tractable that morning. He turned as his wife entered with a vaguely apologetic smile.

"Ah, yes, of course," he murmured, and proceeded to change his dressing gown for a duck jacket. "Of course," he added with emphasis, though *apropos* of nothing tangible.

Mrs. Strode stood looking out through an open port.

"You needn't hurry," she said. "We're only half an hour late."

"Ah, I'm sorry, my dear," Mr. Strode crossed to a cabinet washstand, "but I'm just beginning to see daylight—just beginning. We're now in the Lau Group, and if the formations tally my theory's proved—proved," he repeated, vigorously bespattering the carpet with soapsuds. "There's no end to this thing—no end. . . ."

Apparently there was not. Mrs. Strode had suffered it for a considerable period, tried to resign herself to it, and failed. To be ousted by a theory! Yet that was what it amounted to. To some women it would have

meant little more than an early boredom, followed by diversion sought, and probably found, elsewhere, but unfortunately Mrs. Strode was not of that type. She had made the mistake of marrying John Strode because she loved him.

This complete, almost fanatical subjugation to an idea was a disease, she had decided during her long self-communings, as much a disease as any other, but less susceptible to treatment in that the patient was unaware of its presence. No one would have been more surprised or distressed than John Strode had he guessed that he was causing his wife one moment's unhappiness; yet she lived in the knowledge that she was no more to this man of her choice than if she had never been . . .

The following morning, soon after a blood-red sun had climbed out of the sea, a canoe shot from the *Ajax's* lee and headed for the barrier reef.

To Mrs. Strode, paddling joyfully in the bows clad in a boy's bathing suit and a kimono, the world was young that morning and full of promise. Why was it ever necessary to do anything else than speed over blue water, with spindrift lashing the face, and the deep-toned roar of surf filling the universe and drowning all care like an opiate? This was life, she told herself exultantly, the rest a pitiable pretence.

Into the very heart of the green-bellied combers it seemed they were heading, until the laughing child of nature at the steering paddle swerved the canoe as by a miracle into a narrow pass, and through it to the open sea. Here, without pause, it turned in its own

length and, lifting to the swell of deep waters, bore down upon the reef. There was a momentary check, a soaring as through space, and the canoe, borne on a cascade of foam, shot to rest on the still waters of the Lagoon.

Mrs. Strode had leapt Luana reef.

“Again!” she cried.

But best of all she loved the quiet places, unfathomable rock pools immune from the busy surf, and beset with coral islets, archways, and caves. Here it was possible to plunge into an unknown world and, with Felisi’s hand tight clasped in hers, explore its mysterious labyrinths as long as breath would last. Then came the respite, prone at the water’s edge, looking down into the cool green depths with their swaying weed and rainbow-tinted fish:

“Why plan and strive and plan again
While all things earthly pall?
What goal at last will you attain?
Come down and end it all.”

chanted Mrs. Strode, in a low contralto, and Felisi called for more, but of a sudden the lonely lady had fallen silent.

“I wonder,” she mused, still staring downward with a strange fixity; “I wonder what he would do. . . .”

And Felisi wondered too. It was a weakness of hers.

About two o’clock that day John Strode became aware of a difference. There is no other way of put-

ting it—a vaguely disturbing element, if you will—in his usually preoccupied existence.

The hutch was hot; but it was not that. He tried to ignore the annoyance, but failed. He thrust it from him, but it returned with maddening persistence. Finally, and after a supreme effort at concentration, he turned abruptly in the swivel chair, crossed the room, and stood looking in bemused fashion through one of the ports.

A cloud of gannets flecked the intense blue of the sky, dropping now and again like stones upon their prey. The sea, slashed by the white ribbon of the barrier reef, rose and fell as though breathing in its sleep. The eternal sun shone down. Clearly the disturbing influence was not there.

Strode turned from the port with a frown of baffled annoyance.

Then, one by one, sluggishly, the small realities of life began to filter into his consciousness. He glanced at his watch. It had stopped—because he had forgotten to wind it. He was hungry. Why? Perhaps he had had nothing to eat. What about breakfast . . . and lunch? It must be after noon. Curious! He grunted, flung open the door of the hutch, and went on deck.

His train of thought had been derailed by hunger; that was what had happened to John Strode. But he was only aware of the accident's curious effect upon himself. It seemed, as he wandered over the yacht, that he had just returned from a long journey. Everything was familiar yet strangely new; and something

was lacking; he felt it, but his mind refused to supply the deficiency. In the saloon he mixed himself a stiff brandy and soda.

"Befuddled!" he muttered angrily. "Must have been at it longer than I thought."

Suddenly he caught sight of his face in a mirror, and went nearer to examine it more closely. There were shadows under the eyes that emphasized their already unnatural brilliance; the cheeks were hollow, and the beard disgracefully unkempt. Strode stretched his clenched fists above his head until his joints cracked with the unaccustomed tension, and as he did so, caught reflected in the glass a glimpse of the far corner of the saloon behind him—a standard lamp with a rose shade, a guitar standing propped against it, and an empty armchair.

The little picture conveyed nothing to Strode beyond the same aggravating impression of incompleteness. He turned and crossed the saloon. Lying on the arm of the chair was one of his own socks, a darning needle caught in the wool. He picked it up and examined it mechanically, then dropped it with a short laugh, for it had told him what was lacking aboard the *Ajax*, and to think that it had not occurred to him before was really rather amusing. He rang the bell.

"Parks," he demanded of the startled individual who appeared in the doorway slightly dishevelled from a hasty toilet. "Where is Mrs. Strode?"

"Mrs. Strode left early, sir."

"Did she leave any message?"

"No, sir."

"But—have you no idea where she has gone?"

"To the reef, I believe, sir, on a picnic."

"Alone?"

"With a young native person, sir."

Strode looked about him with an expression of vague bewilderment.

"And, Parks."

"Yes, sir."

"Why have I had no breakfast—or lunch?"

"We have strict instructions that on no account are you to be disturbed, sir."

"Yes, that's so," mused Strode. "Then do you mind telling me," he added with whimsical pathos, "how I ever chance to get anything to eat at all?"

"Mrs. Strode fetches you, sir."

"Oh." Strode appeared to ponder over the matter. "Well, supposing something's fetched to me this time by way of a change, Parks—cold, with salad."

"Yes, sir."

Parks withdrew, and on rousing the cook from his habitual and audible siesta to receive instructions, touched his forehead significantly. The cook heartily concurred.

To the accompaniment of cold chicken Strode communed with himself. So he was "fetched," was he? Somehow the word met with his disapproval. Rather ignominious, wasn't it? How long had it been going on, he wondered? Nice sort of occupation for Stella, too. By the way, what had she been doing with herself for the past few days—or was it weeks? He had no distinct recollection of her presence, yet, yes, he

seemed to remember her at meals, the same gracious figure at the end of his table, silent, unobtrusive, yet conveying a subtle air of sympathy for a dreamer's moods and abstractions. Curious that she should go away like that, without a word. Aggravating, too, considering that at that particular moment he rather needed her. Someone to talk to about one's work, you know. Necessary sometimes, or one became atrophied. To-day of all days—and for so long—it must be nearly three. Unusually thoughtless. Gad, wouldn't she be in a stew when she learnt that he had gone without his breakfast and lunch. . . . ?

An hour later Strode was pacing the deck with ill-concealed impatience. He was not used to being balked of anything, and in the present instance he was aware of an inordinate and unaccountable desire to set eyes on his wife.

Afternoon tea, served by the implacable Parks, proved a dreary affair, and by five o'clock impatience had given way to a senseless but none-the-less acute anxiety. He might go and meet her. It would be a pleasant surprise. He called for the sailing dinghy, and set out for the reef. After all, it was only about half a mile long, and Stella must be somewhere on it. . . .

The dinghy sailed like a witch. There was a sunset to dream of—pearl-gray islands of cloud floating in amethyst. The evening breeze was a cool caress—but there was no sign of Stella. This was absurd! He shouted lustily as he sailed, and presently from afar came a small, answering cry. His heart leapt to it in

the most ridiculous manner. What ailed him? He did not know; he did not care; he had found Stella.

She was lying beside a rock pool with Parks's "young native person", and waved a greeting as he came stumbling over the coral toward them.

"My dear John," she exclaimed, "what has happened? Ship on fire?"

It was hardly the reception he had expected. He sat down rather abruptly, and tried to regain his breath. Somehow he felt out of it, a lamentably gross and mundane figure puffing there on a rock in the presence of this sylph-like person who was his wife. It was in keeping with all the rest on this day of strange experiences that he seemed to behold her for the first time.

"No, nothing," he defended lamely, "but—do you know the time?"

"Time?" scoffed Mrs. Strode, with dancing eyes. "What have we to do with time?" She took Felisi's hand in hers. "Perhaps you didn't know you had married a mermaid. Behold, oh, Caliban, we are about to show off!"

The two figures slid beneath the water as silently as seals. The ripples expanded in ever-widening circles, and were still.

At the end of perhaps half a minute, which to Strode seemed more like half an hour, he went to the edge of the pool and looked down. There was nothing—nothing but a pale green abyss fringed with swaying weed. Stella had always been fearless where water was concerned, he remembered. All the same, he

wished she wouldn't do this sort of thing. It was disturbing, and he disliked being disturbed.

A minute *must* have passed, and a minute was a long time, a deuced long time. It could not be good. He must put his foot down . . . Strode dropped to his knees at the edge of the pool and found himself watching a minute fish, striped like a zebra, that darted out from a coral cranny, and hovered like a marine butterfly in the translucent water. A squid trailed by. . . . But this was preposterous! A prank? How could that be? Stella was down there somewhere—somehow. . . . A thought leapt to Strode's mind that caused his unruly heart to stand still. What if . . . Absurb! She would be the first to laugh at his fears afterward . . . but what if there were no afterward . . . if even now, while he stared down like a fool On the instant his mind was aflood with ghastly possibilities. He could not support them. . . . Three minutes, he would swear! The thing was impossible . . . ah! . . .

A shadow appeared in the pool, deep down, then shot to the surface like a meteor, resolving itself into a sleek head that turned on Strode its staring, terrified eyes. It was the native girl—*alone*. The fact smote Strode with the force of a physical blow. For a moment he crouched there, stunned into impotence; then without word or look, plunged into the pool.

As a dive it was a poor performance, Felisi decided, and it soon became evident that Bunny could not swim, either. For this reason it took them an uncon-

scionable time to get him out; and it seemed still longer before his eyes opened. But the most amazing thing to Felisi was the attitude of the Lonely Lady. With Bunny's head in her lap, and when it was apparent that he had suffered nothing more than the thorough shaking up that he needed, she turned on Felisi like a tigress.

"Go away, you hateful child!" she stormed.

And Felisi went.

What did it all mean? Paddling home in the canoe, she tried to unravel the mystery. The Lonely Lady had "wondered what he would do. . . ." Very well, she (Felisi), had taken the trouble to show her by the simple expedient of depositing her in safety on the far side of a submarine archway, and returning to note results. Were they not satisfactory? Was there ever any understanding the ways of this strange people?

Felisi of Luana was afraid not. And in the case of Lonely Ladies, she resolved never again to try.

MALUA

THE floor of the Royal Hotel, Malita, trembled, then sagged, heralding the approach of its proprietress, Mrs. Kemp.

For a moment she stood—or as much of her as was physically possible—in the bar doorway, leaning through the bead curtains to glance to right and left. On the one hand there was apparently nothing to engage her attention; on the other, a diminutive figure in a blue wrapper washing glasses as though its life depended on it.

“Will she do?” asked Mrs. Kemp.

“The best we’ve ever had,” replied the barmaid, without pause in her adroit manipulation of the cork extractor.

“Glory be, and let’s hope it lasts!” sighed Mrs. Kemp, and faded like an over-substantial dissolving view into the bead curtains.

So, in Miss Smith’s own words, she was “the best they had ever had.” Felisi paused in the process of glass washing to digest this satisfactory but unsurprising piece of information. It had not been intended for her ears, but then neither was a great deal more that came their way in the course of a day behind the Royal bar.

Would she do? That had been the question. But

it gave rise to another of far more importance in Felisi's estimation: would the Royal do? She rather fancied that it would. The somewhat menial nature of her employment was amply atoned for by the unrivalled facilities it afforded of prying into other people's business. And is there anything more fascinating? If so Felisi did not know of it. She blessed the happy concurrence of events—her father's desire for a little ready cash, and the Royal's urgent need of an assistant barmaid—that had resulted in her transference from the deathly dullness of her native village to this scene of brilliance and animation.

There were men, an intermittent stream of them, who had an obliging habit of discussing their private affairs, elbow on bar, within a few feet of Felisi's observation post. There was a piano which, in response to an inserted coin, dispensed enchanting noises, a "billiard room" (containing a decrepit bagatelle board) from whence came the staccato click of balls, and forceful expressions of approval or annoyance. In short, there was life.

Also, there was Miss Smith.

To Felisi, this dainty, tactful little lady was a never-ending source of wonder and interest. No one approached the Royal bar but was met with Miss Smith's own smile, gracious as it was impartial. No one in the access of the moment was guilty of an untoward remark but she was conveniently deaf, a doubtful action, but she was blind. Indeed, as Felisi soon discovered, there were two separate and distinct Miss Smiths, the one of business hours, an eminently efficient mechanism,

and the other of private life, a human creature of joy and sadness, laughter and tears. The first of these all Malita knew and respected, the second was a phase so jealously guarded that it is doubtful if any one dreamed of its existence—except Felisi.

“Come in!” this latter Miss Smith was wont to call in answer to a discreet cough outside her *bure* across the compound from the ramshackle hotel, and Felisi would enter another world.

Things were so different away here. There were delicately coloured draperies, and books, and photographs, and bowls of flowers that converted the outhouse (for such it was) into a temple of taste and luxury.

But of all the differences in this exceedingly different world, undoubtedly the most striking was Miss Smith herself. Gone were such insignia of office as a rolled-gold bangle above the left elbow, the slightly daring silk jumper, the high-heeled shoes and elaborate coiffure, to make way for the simplest of wrappers and loosely coiled masses of dark hair.

“Come,” she might say, “there’s just time for a walk before supper.” And they would leave the Royal Hotel, rearing its unlovely head above a tangle of convolvulus, and plunge into the cool green tunnel of the beach road. These “walks,” as Miss Smith called them, had become an institution. They led nowhere in particular, and had no definable purpose, but they pleased Miss Smith, which was the main point. And how she could walk! Felisi was often obliged to trot to keep pace with her. In quite

a short time they covered undreamed-of distances, exploring beach, palm grove, and jungle as fancy led.

On one occasion a narrow track leading from the beach road toward the sound of falling water attracted Miss Smith's attention. It led, as Felisi knew, to a gorge choked with tree ferns and underbrush, where some time ago a mistaken old man named Billy Andrews had attempted to grow vanilla, and failed. His bungalow, in a state of advanced decay, still clung to the hillside, held there for the most part by creeping vine.



Miss Smith came to a halt at the edge of the clearing, and gazed about her with evident relish. There was a waterfall high up the gorge, and down below the sea thrust a tenuous arm along the valley. But what riveted Felisi's attention was a thin ribbon of smoke rising from the lean-to behind the bungalow.

Was it possible that someone had been lured into relieving Billy Andrews of his white elephant? If so, it was one of the very few things Felisi had not heard about. What was more, she would dearly like to see that someone.

Her wish was fulfilled rather sooner than she expected. Miss Smith was still absorbing the view when, to the accompaniment of crackling underbrush, a man broke from the bush and came to an abrupt halt in the middle of the track.

“I beg your pardon,” he stammered; and that was all he seemed capable of saying at the moment.

Miss Smith’s own smile came to the rescue.

“Oughtn’t we to be doing that?” she said. “We must be trespassing.”

“Not a bit of it,” beamed the man.

“But isn’t this your property?”

“In a way, yes, but——”

“Well, then,” said Miss Smith, commencing a strategical retreat down the track; “I must apologize. Good evening.”

For a moment he stood watching her go, then burst into incoherent speech.

“Oh, but I say, won’t you—that is, what about a cup of tea?”

Miss Smith’s momentum slackened, then ceased. She glanced at Felisi and, seeming to find reassurance in that direction, turned and retraced her steps.

“You’re very kind,” she said; “it sounds too good to resist.”

“That’s right,” encouraged the man, and led the way through a wilderness of empty corned-beef tins and what-not to the bungalow.

“You must excuse all this,” he apologized, dragging the only sound chair procurable across the rat-gnawed veranda; “I—I’ve hardly got going yet.”

“But I think it’s wonderful,” said Miss Smith, gazing steadfastly over the corned-beef tins to where the slanting sun rays touched the rolling expanse of jungle.

“It is,” agreed the man, “until you try to do some-

thing with it; then it reduces you to, well, this. . . .” He indicated his rather disreputable appearance with an apologetic laugh, and leant on the veranda rail looking down at Miss Smith. “But what seems a good deal more wonderful to me, if you don’t mind my saying so, is meeting someone from ‘over there’ in the Malita bush. Have you been out long?”

“Three years,” said Miss Smith, with an unaccountable heightening of colour.

“Then perhaps,” suggested the man, “as an old timer you’d be so good as to tell me what I’m supposed to do with seventy acres of rock and creeping vine, a cook that can’t cook, and labour that falls asleep the minute my back’s turned.”

“I know it’s pretty hopeless at first,” laughed Miss Smith, “but you’ll have to do what we all try to do—keep on keeping on, that’s all.”

“I see,” said the man. “My name’s Wade,” he added abruptly.

“And mine’s Smith—Irene Smith.”

Their eyes met, and it was clear to any one of perception that in that brief exchange of formalities each recognized the other as a kindred denizen of another world—the world of “over there.” Felisi had seen such things happen before and, like the perfect chaperon that she was, stole from the presence to help a distraught cook in his efforts to find an uncracked tea cup.

“It is always so,” he wailed; “the guests come when least expected.”

“But are none the less welcome,” amended Felisi.

The cook grunted non-committally.

“As the daughter of my father, Chief of Luana,” Felisi continued serenely, “I have entertained very many guests, and know their ways.”

“Luana,” mused the cook, pouring boiling water upon the tea, “I do not seem to have heard of Luana.”

“That is quite possible. Nor Levuka, nor Suva perhaps?”

“I have passed through those places,” admitted the cook with masterly unconcern, “on my way to Sydney and Melbourne.”

Felisi did not so much as flicker an eyelash.

“Sydney and Melbourne are well enough,” she conceded, “but when one has been Overthere they are as naught. In Overthere the tea is served in cups of gold, and——”

“Enough!” cried the baffled cook. “Out of my way, infant!” and he hurried up the crazy steps to the veranda.

It was not so much tea that they needed up there.

Out of her boundless knowledge of human nature Felisi knew that, and left them to it. Besides, the cook had called her an infant, and such things could not be allowed to pass.

When she did return to the veranda, it was to discover with satisfaction that she might have been in the moon for all the notice that was taken of her.

“You mean,” the man was saying, as he gazed rather hopelessly over his primeval property, “that I’ve bitten off more than I can chew. I’ve been thinking that myself lately.”

“No, no,” cried Miss Smith with a vehemence that

was new to her; "I mean anything but that. You—you will chew it," she insisted with a nervous little laugh. "Of course you will if"

"Please go on," said the man quietly.

"If you make up your mind to."

The man nodded his head slowly.

"Yes," he said, "that's about it—a matter of will power; and will power depends on incentive. I haven't much of that, Miss Smith."

"There was enough to make you begin."

"The necessity of doing something," he admitted with a shrug of the shoulders, "to live."

"Then why isn't there enough to make you go on?"

"I don't know," muttered the man; "I don't know."

"Shall I tell you?" said Miss Smith.

He turned at that.

"I wish you would," he said.

For a moment Miss Smith seemed taken aback at her own temerity.

"Please," pleaded the man.

"Very well," said Miss Smith with an air of quiet determination. "But I warn you, I'm on my hobby."

"Good!" said the man.

"And you mustn't mind what I say."

He smiled encouragingly.

"I've seen such a lot of it," she went on, looking out over the valley, "and I can't let it pass when I see the symptoms. I suppose I ought to be going about with tracts and my hair scratched back——"

"I prefer this method," said the man.

“Wait before you say that,” warned Miss Smith, “this is much less excusable, really. You can crumple up a tract and throw it away, or light your pipe with it, and you can’t very well do that with me.”

“No,” said the man. “No, I couldn’t do that with you.”

“So really I’m taking advantage of your hospitality.”

“Is it as bad as that?”

“Quite. May I go on?”

He nodded. His eyes were fastened on Miss Smith.

“You’re in for a bout of what we call *malua*,” she said with a certain deliberation. “It means bye-and-bye. You feel you don’t want to—just yet; so you don’t. And that’s all it amounts to at first—a slackening. But it grows; it grows until you not only feel you don’t want to, but find you can’t. It leads to—to almost anything. There,” she ended abruptly, “is that enough?”

“Not quite,” said the man. “What causes it?”

Miss Smith leant back in her chair with the air of one who has passed dangerous ground.

“Ah,” she mused, “that’s difficult, difficult. There are things in these Islands that can’t be explained, and *malua*’s one of them. It *is* the Islands, that’s all. I don’t believe we were ever meant to come here. They didn’t want us. We just came because there was money in it, or because we were no good elsewhere, and *malua*’s their way of paying us back. Oh, yes,” she added quickly in answer to his unspoken question, “it attacks us as well as you.”

The man smiled down at her.

"I don't see much evidence of it," he said.

"No? Well, I can only tell you that it does."

"And the cure?" he suggested. "You mustn't diagnose without prescribing, you know."

"I won't," said Miss Smith. "There is none that I know of when it once takes hold; but there's prevention, and that is work—just keeping on keeping on until you've made enough to go away and give it the slip; then go just as quickly as you can. That's what I'm doing," she added thoughtfully, "and it seems to have answered, so far."

"You?" muttered the man.

She turned to him with a short laugh.

"You don't imagine I wander about the Malita bush for a living, do you?"

"No, but——"

"And such a living! When next you come to the settlement run into the Royal, and you'll see me in my war paint."

"The Royal?"

"Yes, I'm barmaid."

The man stood silent.

"I thought that would give you a shock," she said. "A nice sort of person to be proselytizing, am I not? But I'm a good barmaid, so they say, and I've nearly done—they pay well in these outlandish places; then hey for 'over there'!"

"Shock!" repeated the man, "I won't pretend that it isn't. It's the pluckiest thing I've met with in many a day."

"And not so plucky as you might think," said Miss

Smith. "There's always four feet of good solid bar between you and—and any one, besides, they're not like that 'out back.' It's in the cities. I tried most things before coming to the Royal, and I know where I've been shown the most respect. Girls are beginning to find that out."

"Yes, but they're real barmaids——"

"And pray what am I?" demanded Miss Smith.

The man seemed unable to reply. He shifted his position against the rail.

"Somehow I can't imagine you——" he began.

"Well, come and see," taunted Miss Smith.

"I'd rather not if you don't mind," he said slowly.

"I prefer you as you are. . . . You'll come again?" he said as she rose to go.

Miss Smith did not answer at the moment, but she came again, as Felisi knew that she would. Indeed, the "walks" took a natural trend in that direction, and their effect was magical. Within a month Billy Andrews's old place and its new owner were transformed, and as for Miss Smith, there was something in her eyes that had not been there before.

Felisi preened herself in the knowledge that there was only one end to it all, the eminently satisfactory end beloved of all good chaperons—so that the *dénouement* came as something of a shock.

It happened on an evening so still that only the whisper of the waterfall up the gorge and the low-toned voices on the veranda reached the ear. He put it very nicely, Felisi thought, and his large brown hands went out, covering Miss Smith's. For a moment

she sat quite still, then gently withdrew them, and stood looking out over the valley.

"I'm sorry," she said in a small, uneven voice. "I hoped—I thought—Oh, what does it matter what I thought?" she cried bitterly. "It's mean, mean, to have let it come to this."

"You couldn't help it," said the man quietly, "any more than I. We belong. You can't deny it."

Miss Smith did not try. She stood there a silent, forlorn little figure at the veranda rail.

Presently her lips moved.

"I should have known where it led—I *knew*, and did nothing. It's *malua*," she whispered, "*malua*. . ."

The dull, insistent note of a native drum floated up from the beach, reverberating through the gorge, so that for Felisi the rest was inaudible. But it was vital, there could be no doubt of that, for by the time the exasperating noise had ceased Miss Smith had ceased also, and was hurrying down the bush track, leaving the man, a figure of stone, staring after her.

What did it all mean? For once Felisi was at a loss. During the days that followed it meant little that one could detect. Miss Smith's smile was never more in evidence over the Royal bar. The rolled-gold bangle and other appurtenances appeared in their appointed time and place. The hand on the cork extractor had lost none of its cunning.

And the man? Felisi had visions on that score. Day by day she waited on tenterhooks for him to descend on the Royal bar, as she had learnt in her *meke*s (dances)

that the hillsmen of old descended on the beach dwellers, and carry off Miss Smith in spite of herself, in spite of all—whatever that might be. But nothing of the sort happened in modern Malita. Instead, he was seen emerging from a low-down rival of the Royal's and laughing a raucous farewell to his new-found friends as he mounted his Tongan pony unsteadily, and cantered off into the darkness.

So, that was the way of it. . . . Felisi sighed, and fell to glass wiping.

It was not until a week of speculation had passed that the threads of this disappointing affair could again be caught up and woven into anything tangible.

As threads, they came in curious guise—a man, prematurely old, with cunning eyes, a twitching mouth, and uncertain ways. He came during the slack morning hours, when it was Miss Smith's custom to sit and read or do needlework behind the bar, so that she did not see him at first. But Felisi did. His movements, his very appearance somehow suggested a bird of prey. For a while he hovered in the doorway, peering in, then, of a sudden, swooped down upon the bar.

At the sound of footsteps Miss Smith looked up. It was ghastly. The smile was there, but transfixed in the bloodless mask of her face.

The man spoke. His voice was low and ingratiating.

“Don't look like that, my dear; one would think you weren't glad to see me.” His mouth twitched. “And look here.” He leant across the bar, “Don't imagine that I'm going to be the smallest bit of trouble, because I'm not. Wouldn't interfere for the world.” He

looked about him with evident approval. "Who'd have thought, though—however, any port in a storm, and I expect it's all right—quite all right. By the way," his voice sank still lower, "What's the name?"

In little more than a whisper Miss Smith answered him.

"Smith—Miss Smith."

"Then that's all right," commented the man; "who am I to cavil at a name? I'll have just a suggestion, if you please—Miss Smith."

And she served him, though no money changed hands.

"That is distinctly better," said the man, setting down the glass, and smacking his loose lips. "What are you going to do about it?" he added. "Make another break for it?"

Miss Smith made answer like some mechanical instrument.

"I haven't thought. I haven't had time to think."

"No. Well, when you have you'll let me know, won't you? It saves a lot of trouble and—er, expense. In the meantime. . . ." He paused, gazing speculatively across the bar.

Miss Smith gave him money, and flinched from his outstretched hand.

He moved toward the door.

"Don't forget," he said in his soft voice, "no interference—no trouble of any sort—just me, where I belong, that's all." And he was gone.

But he returned, and kept returning. He haunted the Royal like an insidious wraith. One came upon

him at odd times, in unlikely places, doing nothing, saying little, but ever present. And at last Felisi saw him enter Miss Smith's *bure*.

For a time the low drone of voices came from within. Then the man's, raised in horrible anger, followed by a sudden silence, and presently his figure stealing out into the compound.

Without waiting for permission, Felisi thrust open the door and went in. The room was a chaos of disordered and broken chattels, and in the midst of it sat Miss Smith, vainly trying to hide a flaming wale across her cheek.

"You saw," she said.

Felisi nodded. She could do no more at the moment.

"It doesn't matter," said Miss Smith. "Nothing matters now, except—will you do something for me, Felisi?"

She crossed a little unsteadily to the table, and sat there writing for a few moments; then handed Felisi a note and a bulky package.

"Take these to the man——" she said, and paused.

"Man with no good cook," prompted Felisi.

Miss Smith smiled faintly.

"Yes, you uncanny child, to the man with the no good cook. . . ."

Felisi departed with all the pleasure in life. But her willingness to do anything in the world for Miss Smith in no way appeased her own burning curiosity. The nature of the package's contents was soon determined, but the note was another matter. They were wonderful, these thin bags of paper that contained so little yet

seemingly so much! She had seen people laugh over them, and weep, and ponder for hours on end. She wondered what would be the particular effect of the one she carried—which meant that she was determined to find out.

That was why, instead of following the beach road, she elected to go by canoe. The track to the landing led past the hut of Willie the half-caste, and as all the world allowed, there was nothing Willie did not know.

“There are certain matters, oh, my Willie,” said Felisi squatting in his doorway.

“You have been a good child,” admitted Willie. “What now?”

“I have these,” said Felisi, producing a handful of the Royal’s most poisonous cigars, “which shall be yours for one small favour.”

“Name it,” said Willie, his wise old eyes glinting in the lamplight.

“Speak this to me,” said Felisi, “that I may laugh or weep or ponder on it as others do.”

Willie twisted the note in his gnarled fingers, and leant nearer the light.

“But it is not yours,” he pointed out.

“That is so,” admitted Felisi, “but you will speak it to me because of these cigars, and because of other things that I know.”

“And if I open it all will know that it has been opened,” he protested.

“Are they like that?”

“How else?” demanded Willie. Nevertheless, his

glance wavered between the steam rising from a pot of *taro* and the cigars.

And that was how in the end Felisi came to watch the paper bag curl back and open of its own accord, and listened to the droning voice of Willie the half-caste who, it was clear, knew all things. The translation was free but adequate:

You will, I know, want to return what I am sending by the messenger who brings it. You will think the very sending of it an insult, but when you have read this note perhaps you will understand. That is what I pray.

“My small savings were for ‘over there,’ but all hope of that is gone. My husband has found me. He will always find me. There is no escape, and I am too tired to fight any more. . . .

If you have loved me, take this my present—he will have it if you do not—and go; go now, before it is too late. It would make me feel that my work has not been in vain. It would make me happy in spite of all. Do this for me, and cheat *malua*.

The effect of this effusion on Willie was negligible. He merely refastened the note, returned it, and lit a cigar. But with Felisi it was otherwise. This, then, was why people laughed, and wept, and pondered—and small wonder! She was pondering herself on the way to the landing, or she would have seen who followed.

As it was she had already boarded the canoe at the landing steps when a man’s figure—the same that had left Miss Smith’s *bure*—disengaged itself from the shadow of a bollard, and stumbled in after her. Taking an involuntary seat on the nearest thwart, it leered at her out of the darkness swaying gently.

“Now,” it said in soft, slurred accents; “now we can talk, eh?”

Felisi should have been alarmed. But she was not. She had seen men in this condition before, and feared them not at all.

“You want talk?” she responded brightly, and dipped her paddle, heading the canoe seaward.

Apparently the man did.

“I knew it was there . . . and she gave it you . . . I saw . . . She gave it you just to cheat me . . . Hand it over, kid, and you can have anything you fancy. . . . Hand it over and save yourself a lot of trouble, a whole lot. . . .”

He said a great deal more. His voice rose in threat, sank in persuasion, spluttered in sudden outbursts of passion, but nothing that he said had the slightest effect on the easy swing and dip of the paddle, nor on Felisi's thoughts that accompanied them. There was something radically wrong with all this—wrong and ugly in a world that should be right and beautiful. And it was so simple to rectify . . . so tantalizingly simple. . . .

Exactly what happened was hard to determine, and quite unnecessary. The man's voice had risen in a querulous crescendo. He was on his feet. His outstretched, grasping hands were descending on Felisi. She was sure of this—as sure as she was that they missed her by several inches; that the canoe turned neatly bottom up, and remained so for a considerable time. But then dugouts are deplorably unstable at the best of times.

Felisi was thinking that very thing—amongst others—as she paddled home, alone.

THEIR TROUBLES

TIME passes, even in the Islands. Felisi of Luana had now reached the mature age of sixteen.

And things had happened during the past year, drastic things that have a habit of changing the whole aspect of life. No longer was she called upon by her father to adventure forth from the family rooftree and wrest from a grudging world the wherewithal to purchase such luxuries as his advanced tastes demanded. Such excursions were no more, so that for Felisi the curtain was rung down on the thrilling drama of other people's business. Henceforth, she must attend to her own. That is why we come upon her engaged in nothing more romantic than turning the handle of a borrowed sewing machine.

It came hard at first. For the matter of that, and after eighteen months of eventless Luana, it still came hard at times, and she paused in her work to gaze wistfully through the doorway and across the stretch of sparkling Pacific that separated her from the great "outside."

What was happening over there, she wondered? Who was now dispensing imitation pink coral on Suva's crowded wharves, or lending a helping hand where it was needed—and sometimes where it was not—in the

multifarious and intricate problems of human existence? In short, how was the world continuing to survive without her? She was sorry for it, as sorry for the world in its bereavement as she occasionally was for herself. Then her glance would leave the horizon, and rest on the bundle at her side, and she would sigh and return to her sewing, persuaded that perhaps all was for the best. It was growing, that bundle, and from it she derived all the comforts that a nest-egg brings.

At the moment, however, unrest possessed her. A white man had come to live at Luana; nothing less! And what was more, a white man of an entirely new pattern—sparse as to hair at the temples, almost blind to judge by the size of tortoise-shell rimmed sun-glasses that he wore, thoughtful of countenance, and content to sit in a cane chair under a mango tree for longer than Felisi had ever seen a white man sit in any one place.

True, he occasionally wrote letters with a chewed pencil on flimsy paper, and as often tore them up when written; but for the most part he merely sat there in the little square of croton-bordered garden before the house he had acquired, staring into vacancy.

So much she knew from casual observation, but what of the rest? Who was he? Why was he? In fact, what about him? It was still a physical impossibility, then, for Felisi to live in the neighbourhood of a mystery without trying to solve it? It is to be feared so.

Toward evening she found herself ornamenting her hair with a red hibiscus blossom, donning her most striking *sulu*, and practising her smile. Why? Well,

such things play a more prominent part in the elucidation of mysteries than might be supposed. Besides, it was necessary to fill the bamboo with drinking water, and the path to the spring led past her new neighbour's abode, and—and is it not permissible to look as attractive as one can, anyway?

The precious bundle was relegated to the care of one of her numerous relatives, and Felisi set out. At the croton hedge she paused for breath, but was allowed to proceed without so much as a glance in her direction. It was strange, but not past remedy. On the return journey she came swinging down the hill, a truly devastating apparition. Precisely at the croton hedge the water bamboo needed readjustment to the accompaniment of a hummed *meke* air. But nothing happened—nothing whatsoever. . . .

That was why a few minutes later Garnet was brought back from a particularly promising flight of fancy to things practical by a mango dropping fair and square in the middle of his manuscript. It was a disturbing occurrence, but when he came to think of it the wonder was it had not happened before, considering the heavily laden state of the tree overhead and the litter of fruit about the garden. This last would have to be attended to. There were several things that needed attending to. . . . And that was as far as Garnet usually got in attending to them. But on this occasion it seemed providential that a native of some sort was staring at him over the hedge.

“Hi!” he called. “You want mango?” He indicated the untidy garden with a wave of the hand.

The "native of some sort" seemed unimpressed with the possibilities in mangoes; or was it that she failed to understand?

"Mango!" repeated Garnet, stabbing the air in their direction with the chewed pencil. "Plenty mango, savvy?"

Felisi pouted, then smiled. She was equally expert at either.

"Me get you," she said brightly, displaying her latest linguistic achievement fresh garnered from an American schooner.

It had the desired effect. Garnet removed his sunglasses, levered himself out of the chair, and strolled over to the hedge.

"Oh, so you get me, do you?" he observed, also and unconsciously observing those qualities in Felisi of Luana that he had been intended to. "Well, what about it?"

He looked considerably younger without the glasses, Felisi reflected, and he had kind eyes. There was a button missing from his shirt, and a hole in one of his socks. A freshly crumpled letter protruded from the left pocket of his duck jacket. His manner was of the bluff, playful order universally adopted by white folk in dealing with children, dogs, and natives, but it was assumed, she decided. He was not really like that. . . .

"Clear them up and you can have them," he continued. "How would that do?"

"You no like 'em mango?" suggested Felisi.

"Hate 'em," said Garnet.

"Me, too," admitted Felisi.

Garnet laughed. Refreshing little person, he told himself. Evidently had ideas of her own, and after all, why not? Wonderful eyes . . . and what hair, and skin, and carriage! But it was the possibilities of a mind that intrigued Garnet. What if she actually had one? And if she had, what did it harbour? Rather interesting, that—life through a Kanaka's eyes. Entirely new viewpoint. He wondered . . . That was his trade.

His wonder grew as the sun-drenched days passed by, and each evening Felisi appeared with a reed basket to relieve him of some mangoes—never all, because that would have ended the visitations—but sufficient to make a showing before she squatted at his feet, and they indulged in a sort of mango social. It was a quaint occasion, but they both enjoyed it.

“What about the Princess and the poor man?” suggested Garnet. “You might let me have that again, will you?”

“You like 'im, eh?” questioned Felisi.

“Very much,” said Garnet. “But there's something wrong with the end. They were drowned, weren't they?”

Felisi regarded him reproachfully.

“Them no drowned,” she said. “Them marry.”

“But how can that be if they dived together off a cliff higher than Suva church because the King wouldn't let them, and never came up again?”

“Me no say them never come up again,” protested Felisi in injured tones. “Me no finish.”

“Ah, I see,” murmured Garnet, leaning back in his

chair. "Another powerful instalment in our next, eh? Well, fire ahead."

"Them dive," proceeded Felisi dramatically, "down—down, an' never come up——"

"There you are," said Garnet.

"Never come up three—six days," continued Felisi, ignoring the interruption.

"Gad, they must have had a pair of lungs on them," came another that met with a like fate.

"King him think them finish, but——"

"Ah!" breathed Garnet.

"Poor man him hunt plenty turtle. Him see turtle go in cave under sea. Him take Princess in cave——"

"And I suppose when they did come out, the King was so pleased to see his daughter again that he made the poor man a chief, and let them marry?"

Felisi nodded gravely.

"How you know?" she demanded.

"I have an instinct in these things," said Garnet.

Felisi decided it was a disappointing process to recount Island history to people with instinct—whatever that might be. It robbed the narrator of a legitimate and hard-earned climax.

"*You* now," she announced, after sitting in silence while Garnet produced reflective smoke clouds that hung on the still air above his head.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, with the sudden dread of his species that something was expected of him.

"But—I don't know anything," he faltered. "Besides, I come from a cold, uninteresting place where

princesses don't dive off cliffs or—or do anything like that."

"You write plenty letters," accused Felisi with seeming irrelevance.

"Letters?—Yes, I suppose I do," admitted Garnet on reflection. "I must write quite a lot of letters, heaven help me!"

"What for you write 'em?"

Garnet pondered the matter, perceiving that it was in truth his turn now.

"Money, mostly," he stated truthfully.

"Plenty friend belong you, eh?"

"A fair number."

"An' you write 'em letter for money."

"In a way; that is—yes."

Felisi relapsed into silence. The mystery was solved. She had no idea that writing to one's friends for money was such a remunerative proceeding.

There followed further cursory conversation, possibly a cup of tea, and Felisi's departure, impeded by the laden reed basket.

Such were the mango socials, and they continued with marked success for nearly a month. Then Garnet's conscience got to work. There was a calendar in his house, an advertisement of the local shipping company, and more than once he found himself standing before it staring fixedly at a date whereon was printed in small blue letters:

"S.S. *Levu* arrives Malita." The announcement had the effect of making him feel supremely uncomfortable. It was absurd, but it was so.

“Poor little devil,” he muttered, and strolled out to the garden.

Felisi was diligently eradicating mangoes. Garnet watched her. What was he to say to her? How was he to say it? He was probably her world, and she would be an exile after to-night. That was what it amounted to.

A scene from “Madama Butterfly” flashed across his mind, and he found himself revising the cast of characters. He remembered how he had wanted to kick the hero of that opera, just as he was mentally kicking himself now. Yet what had he done? Nothing that could account for his present state of mind. Unintentionally, even unconsciously, he had won the affection of this child, and the realization of it filled him with pity. How was he to tell her that she must come no more? Garnet shrank from the ordeal with the repugnance of a deeply sympathetic nature.

What a deal of unnecessary suffering there was in the world, he mused. We trampled through life, crushing the hope and happiness of others like insects under foot. It was all an accident, of course, but the result was the same. We passed on our way unconscious murderers. Yet there were some in this whirlwind of a world who took time to notice and to think, and suffered in consequence. Garnet told himself that he was one of these. He sighed.

Whereupon Felisi, who had finished the mango harvest, looked up.

“Him sick?” she suggested, indicating the place where the lower half of Garnet’s waistcoat should have been.

"No," he said. "I was thinking about a story that I have to tell, and don't know how."

"You tell 'em all right," encouraged Felisi.

"Think so?" said Garnet. "Well, here goes!"

He could not bring himself to look at her as he spoke. Instead, he addressed the branches of the mango tree:

"There was once a garden, a little girl, and a man. The man liked the little girl, the little girl liked the man, and they both liked the garden, so for some time they had a very pleasant time all round. But outside this garden, and creeping nearer every day, there was a—a trouble, a she trouble that particularly disliked little girls. Of course the little girl knew nothing of this trouble, but the man knew it very well indeed—so well that when it was only a day's journey from the garden he thought it best to tell the little girl so that she could run away and not be troubled with the trouble. That was why one evening he made it all into a story and told it her while they were sitting in the garden."

It was some time before Garnet dared to steal a glance at his audience, but when he did there was something in Felisi's silence that told him she understood. Then, of a sudden, she was on her feet, her body swaying with excitement.

"Him all right," she said breathlessly. "*Me* now. All the same story—girl, garden, man, trouble—him *he* trouble, mine," and with that she turned and fled.

Perhaps it was as well, Garnet decided, fumbling for

his pipe; but the garden looked infernally empty . . .
and what on earth could the child mean . . . ?

Malita wharf was aswarm with its "steamer day" crowd when the *Levu* came alongside. Garnet saw his wife almost immediately, and waved a greeting with his hat over the head of the little native woman in front who had a bundle securely spliced to her side with a crimson *sulu*. This contained a minute object in the way of babies, but apparently in proper working order by the sounds it produced. It was its mother, though, that attracted Garnet's attention. Her head, though he could only see the back of it, was vaguely familiar. He looked again, and saw Felisi of Luana.

Before the gangway was out her husband, a bronze giant with a grin that threatened to interfere with his ears, had bounded onto the wharf and taken possession. He examined his wife, and she smiled radiantly; he examined her precious bundle, and she laughed ecstatically.

This, then, was the nature of Felisi's "trouble." Garnet smiled as he turned to meet his own.

MOTHER-OF-PEARL

IF THEY were as progressive as they are inventive," said the Professor, in his best lecture-room manner, "they would rule this earth to-day instead of in a few centuries to come. I have a great admiration for the Chinese," he added magnanimously.

His audience, consisting of a meagrely hirsute young man, an earnest lady in pink, and an elderly gentleman of funereal aspect, grouped about the great man's chair on the promenade deck of the *Mana*, wagged their heads in unison. They entirely agreed. They would have agreed to black being a light shade of puce, provided Doctor Wigmore had said so. Was he not head of the Manderville Bequest Research Party, that spent more in a month studying the antics of the coral polyp than would provide the normal human with a meal ticket for life?"

Yet a few yards distant Ah Fang smoked on unmoved.

"Fortunately for us," the Professor continued, "they have a knack of getting just so far with a thing, and leaving the rest for others to perfect and profit by. The mariner's compass and gunpowder are indisputably theirs, and now—it really is remarkably interesting—ah. . . ."

His audience waited in a state approaching suspended

animation while the Professor blinked thoughtfully at the Pacific.

“Yes?” ventured the earnest lady at length.

“Ah, yes,” boomed the Professor, “as I was saying, I saw some remarkable things on the upper reaches of the Tai Tung Kyang”—it will be noticed that the Professor had said nothing of the sort, but this was an engaging habit of his—“amongst others, the manufacture of half-pearls,” he ended with dramatic abruptness.

There fell a momentary silence, during which it might have been noticed that Ah Fang knocked out his pipe and moved nearer on the steerage hatch.

“Fish scale dust adhering to wafer glass,” suggested the funereal gentleman.

“Not at all,” snapped the Professor. “You may buy such trash on Fifth Avenue, in Regent Street, or the Rue de Rivoli. I am speaking of the genuine article. What is a pearl but layer upon layer of mother-of-pearl? And so on the Tai Tung Kyang they take the fresh-water mussel—it being a hardier species than the oyster—introduce a pilule of prepared wax—a delicate operation, by the way—and wait for it to be covered. In six months or less they have a half-pearl adhering to the shell that it is impossible to tell from the real thing, except for its foundation, which can easily be hidden in a skilful setting. There is a temple to the discoverer of the process on the Tai Tung, and those engaging in the industry pay tribute—ah. . . .”

Again the Professor lapsed into reverie, and again the earnest lady saw fit to resuscitate him.

“And what is the foundation of the true pearl?” she asked brightly.

“A cestoid,” he answered—“a cestoid that enters the digestive organs and sets up irritation.”

“And where does the cestoid originate?”

The Professor turned upon her his long-suffering gaze.

“My dear young lady,” he sighed, “the man who knows that, and could keep it to himself, would own the earth, or pearls would cease to be of value—one of the two. And now what about that return at deck golf?”

Ah Fang watched the party move for'ard and proceed with the utmost gravity to push blocks of wood with a stick. Their conversation, which he understood perfectly after his year's intensive study of their jaw-breaking language at Canton, had been entertaining and mildly instructive. It showed that others were on the trail—on the trail perhaps half a century behind Ah Fang. Undoubtedly the Professor was an intelligent man, but how he talked! How they all talked! And why? Ah Fang gave it up, as he had so often been forced to give up an explanation of this people's folly.

One thing, however, he thoroughly understood, and envied them, and that was the Manderville Bequest. With such a backing what could not he, Ah Fang, accomplish? But they did not do things like that in China. Instead, the temple on the banks of the Tai Tung Kyang had seen fit to send its savant steerage. Ah Fang edged still farther from the unclean Tamil at his elbow, and relit his pipe.

At Papeete, moored to the coral wall that forms the beach, her slender spars clear-cut against a dark green

background of shady trees, the Manderville auxiliary schooner-yacht *Phoenix* awaited her distinguished passenger. There was no delay. A trim launch came off to the *Mana*, the Professor stepped aboard, and half an hour later the yacht was heading for the reef passage, with the great man waving a genial farewell from the bows. He was conducting researches on an outlying atoll of the group. His wife would join him shortly.

For Ah Fang matters were rather more complicated, but when at last, and after a severe manhandling by over-zealous officials, he was allowed to betake himself and his little camphor-wood box ashore, there was no hesitation in his movements. As though acquainted with the place from infancy, he plunged into the town.

Papeete took no heed of his advent—Papeete has other things to do of an evening—and, if she had, it would only have been to note that another Chinaman had come to town—another of those inscrutable, industrious yellow men who are the finest plantation labour on the market, and the hardest but squarest nut to crack in a deal.

Past the club, with its inevitable veranda full of imbibing schooner skippers, past the more pretentious French and British stores, the markets—at this late hour deserted and forlorn—through the maze of tumble-down weatherboard hovels emitting the indescribable, unmistakable odour of a Chinese quarter, Ah Fang wended his way, emerging finally on the open spaces behind the town, where the palm groves rise in waves and rugged mountains loom against the stars.

Across a grass-grown avenue of flamboyants two

lights glimmered, a green and a yellow. Ah Fang made straight toward them, swung open the garden gate of a commodious house standing in its own grounds, and was about to ring the bell, when the door opened and he was ushered, camphor-wood box and all, into a brightly lighted room of strange aspect. The chairs and sofa were upholstered in red plush. A heavy pile carpet, that looked as if it had never suffered the pressure of human foot, covered the floor, and enlarged photographs of hideous people in gift frames bespattered the walls. Ah Fang had never before seen the home of a fellow countryman married to a Tahitian half-caste, but he saw it now. Also he saw the parties to this amazing but apparently happy union in the persons of an immensely fat man swathed in sweltering broadcloth and a dainty little lady in pink silk. They were Mr. Lee How, president of the Lee How Trading Co. Inc., and his wife; moreover, they were the first persons to show Ah Fang the slightest respect since he had left Canton.

"We are honoured, Professor," said Lee How, bowing thrice.

"That is so," replied Ah Fang, with new-found dignity, returning the salute. "Shall we go where we may talk?"

His eye traversed the gorgeous apartment, coming to rest on an enlarged photograph, helped out in crayon, of Mrs. Lee How's mother. A telegraphic glance passed from husband to wife, causing the latter to pout prettily and retire.

"It is the women," said Lee How, glancing apolo-

getically about him. "They have their notions, and it is best to humour them."

"Is that so?"

"It is so in this country," affirmed Lee How. "I fear we grow out of touch."

"A pity," mused Ah Fang, whose mind was already occupied with more important matters. "All is prepared?"

"All. I have lately opened a small store, under the name of Woy Tow, on the beach road fifteen miles out of Papeete. There will be little custom, but it will serve its purpose, and shall be attended to by a native boy I have engaged. There is ample living accommodation behind the store, and the backyard adjoins the beach."

"It sounds satisfactory," admitted Ah Fang. "I trust I shall be able to send a favourable report."

Lee How bowed.

The next day one of the motor monstrosities that infest Papeete conveyed a Chinaman and a camphor-wood box to the newly opened Woy Tow store on the beach road. A few scraggy chickens strutted and pecked about the veranda steps. A cat peered round a corner and fled. Against a variegated background of tinned foodstuffs and brightly hued prints a native youth, head on arms and arms on counter, slept the sleep of a Tahitian at two p. m.

Ah Fang deposited the camphor-wood box in the back room and passed out to the yard which, as Lee How had said, adjoined the beach. It is doubtful if there is anything more beautiful than the scene that

confronted him—the indescribable colouring of the shallows merging into the dark blue of deep water, the white ribbon of the barrier reef, with its thundering surf and far-flung spindrift, that floated and danced in miniature rainbows before the sun, and, back of all, the fantastic outline of Moorea. But Ah Fang saw none of these things. They were not the affair of a man of single purpose. Without haste or hesitation he waded into the lagoon, knee, waist, chest deep, minutely examining its floor. There were coral rocks and fronds reflecting a green, unearthly light, delicate weeds like a woman's hair flowing and rippling with the current, shells big and little, propelled at amazing speed by their hermit crab inhabitants, and that was all—all that interested Ah Fang.



A native girl waded by with a cast-net, flung it into deeper water and dived, appearing presently with a glittering fish between her teeth. She smiled at Ah Fang and passed on.

This would never do, he decided, and during the week that followed a gang of Lee How's minions was engaged in the prolongation of the backyard fence, so that it crossed the beach and embraced fifty square yards of the lagoon.

From that hour Ah Fang's private affairs became a matter of increasing interest to Miri of the cast-net. Unconsciously he had fenced off the girl's favourite fishing ground, and must put up with the consequences.

These consisted, for the present, in an eagle-like watch being kept on his every movement. Did he but sun himself on his strip of beach, then Miri knew of it. Did he sit at the window of his room behind the store, bending over an instrument of polished brass, then Miri saw him. What right had a Chinaman, or any one, to take unto himself the ocean? None. What was to be done about it? Nothing, because nothing much is done about anything on Tahiti. Miri waited and watched.

At dawn of a certain day, and floating upright but motionless in the still water, she saw a heavily laden canoe arrive at the hated fence and miraculously pass inside. There was evidently a door, but doors had little meaning for Miri. With a few effortless strokes she was at the seaward end and peering between the bamboos. Four men stood knee-deep about the canoe, unloading its contents into shallow water, while Ah Fang supervised from the beach. This done, the canoe returned by the way it had come, and Ah Fang proceeded to sort his cargo with extreme care. It was then that Miri saw what he was handling. They were oysters—more oysters and larger oysters than she had ever seen. Ah Fang took them in armfuls, waded waist-deep, and placed them in methodical rows on the floor of the lagoon. Was the man mad? Miri had seen many oysters taken out of the sea, but not put into it. She gave the matter her undivided attention until sunset, and, returning home empty handed, received a severe reprimand from her chronically peevish mother.

“It will be better to-morrow.” she assured her irate

parent; and it was. The next day they dined on oysters.

The process was repeated twice. It was supremely simple. You merely tied the canoe to a bamboo, insinuated your lithe little body between two others, and dived, remaining under water perhaps two minutes. During this time it was possible to collect an armful of edibles, which you dumped into the canoe, and paddled home singing.

But at the third venture things happened. The end of Miri's underwater tether was almost reached, and she had turned to the canoe, when something seized her by the hair, something that dragged her shrieking into the shallows, and she found herself staring wild-eyed into the face of an enraged Chinaman.

She had never seen such a thing before. It twisted into gruesome shapes, and emitted noises for all the world like a choking dog. In the heat of the moment Ah Fang was employing his native tongue. He checked himself with an effort.

"You steal my oysters," he accused in precise Canton College accents.

Miri was too frightened to notice that he spoke English—better English than the *bêche-de-mer* she herself had picked up on passing schooners. But the weight of his hand on her hair caused a glint to come into her mild brown eyes.

"You steal my fish!" she retorted, with heat.

Ah Fang pondered the matter. Anger had died out of his face, and presently his hand fell from the girl's hair.

"That is so," he said quietly. "Wait."

Out of mingled surprise and curiosity, Miri waited. Ah Fang ambled up the beach and into the store, returning shortly with three labelled tins that she recognized from afar. They were salmon, that doubtful delicacy for which, for some reason, your South Sea Islander will barter his immortal soul.

“There is more,” he told her, placing the tins in her outstretched hands, “if you do not steal the oysters. You swim well,” he added judicially. “Where do you live?”

Miri nodded up the beach.

“I will call on your father,” said Ah Fang.

“Papa belong me finish,” Miri answered, without emotion.

“Your mother then.”

“Mama belong me plenty sick.”

“All the same, I will call,” said Ah Fang, and watched his diminutive prisoner swim for the canoe with the tinned salmon clasped tightly to her breast.

The interview that ensued was short and to the point.

“I wish to buy your daughter,” Ah Fang informed a lady of ample proportions squatting on the mats of a dilapidated grass house.

Miri, being the linguist of the family, conducted the proceedings.

“Mama say what for you want buy?” she translated glibly.

“That is my affair,” said Ah Fang. “I need assistance in the house—and outside. I am willing to pay for it. My leflence is the Lee How Tlading Company Incorporlated.” He still had difficulty with his r’s.

Following this announcement, the lady on the mats commenced to sway and croon by way of displaying her grief at the prospect of parting with so valuable a daughter. Ah Fang moved toward the door, whereupon the swaying ceased.

"How much?" Miri translated, though her mother had not spoken.

"I will pay one hundred dollars down," replied Ah Fang, "and your mother shall be supplied with food and clothing from the store."

The swaying recommenced. There was a pause, during which the boom of the surf and the rattle of screw pine leaves held sway. Then Miri's mother spoke.

"Mama say you marry, all right," announced Miri, a business-like tang in her usually soft voice.

Ah Fang gazed straight before him for perhaps half a minute, then turned to her with the hint of a smile twisting the corners of his mouth.

"It shall be as your mother wish," he conceded blandly.

To Ah Fang the days immediately following this interview constituted an accumulative nightmare. Beginning with incomprehensible alarms and excursions that interfered abominably with one's work, they dragged their weary length through feastings, music, and dancing to a culminating ceremony that defies faithful description. Yet he suffered it all with outward calm. Such buffooneries were evidently as necessary to these people as Miri was to himself. He let

it go at that. It must be remembered that Ah Fang was a man of single purpose.

Miri found him so, and would not have had him otherwise. Provided she dedicated a certain portion of each day to the cultivation of oysters, her time was her own, as also were the contents of the Woy Tow store, where she revelled in tinned salmon and pink silk. Before a fortnight had passed, red plush began to make its appearance in the largest of the two rooms at her disposal. Miri was content.

So also was Ah Fang. The discomforts he had lately endured were amply atoned for by an amphibious wife. It was now possible to plant the oysters at greater depth, and retrieve them by means of a cunning brown hand instead of the clumsy net. Even in their treatment Miri came to have her uses. Her nimble fingers soon became no less deft than Ah Fang's at opening the shell in shallow water with a finely tapered wooden wedge, and by such minute degrees that the delicate fish remained unharmed. But beyond this stage in the proceedings she was not allowed to go. Thereafter Ah Fang took the shells one by one to his stuffy room behind the store, and conjured with them in strict privacy.

What it was all about, Miri had no notion, and at times she wondered—for instance, when the Lee How canoe arrived, towing a half-dead shark in its wake, to be incarcerated in a fish fence partition of its own, or when Ah Fang almost hurried up the beach with weird marine messes to be subjected to the brass instrument that for ever glittered at the back window.

But something stayed her from inquiry, perhaps the knowledge that it would be futile, perhaps the memory of her husband's face when he dragged her from the sea by her hair. For the most part, Miri was content to add trophies to her parlour, or, with her strangely rejuvenated mother, parade Papeete beach of an evening in imitation silk stockings, to the lasting envy of relatives and friends. At such times the most that they could say was: "Where is your husband?" To which Miri would reply with a touch of hauteur and scathing emphasis on the pronoun: "My husband works."

And she spoke truth. None but a fanatic—or a Chinaman—could have laboured with the whole-souled concentration of Ah Fang. Yet he had his softer moments, when he would sit in state and extreme discomfort on the parlour sofa, and occasionally speak.

"You have done well," he told his wife on one of these rare occasions. "You will make holiday with your mother. There will be a motor car, and you will visit your friends for a week."

Now, if there is one thing calculated to elevate the aspiring Tahitian to the seventh heaven, it is sitting back in a bone-shaking machine and smothering less fortunate acquaintances with dust. Miri's eyes sparkled, as Ah Fang had known they would.

"An' you?" she suggested, when the first ecstasy had passed.

"I shall stay," said Ah Fang, and fell to filling his glass pipe, a sure indication that the matter was ended.

In due course the hour and the car arrived, and with equal precision departed, together with Miri and her mother, a bored half-caste chauffeur, a case of peach brandy, and twenty tins of tropically freckled cigarettes.

Miri found it pleasant to sit thus behind a purring monster that devoured the white ribbon of the beach road mile on mile . . . Ah Fang was kind. They would visit the Maevatuas and the Teahis, and show them life as it should be lived. . . . Or was it that Ah Fang wished to be rid of her? She had never thought of that. How the wind whistled, and the car rocked, and the lagoon streamed by. . . . What was this secret that stood between Ah Fang and herself? There, they had nearly accounted for a chicken! How it scuttled and clucked out of their all-conquering path! . . . And how long would it remain a secret? Just so long as she (Miri) allowed it. Why did she allow it? Because she was afraid. Of what was she afraid? She did not know—unless it was Ah Fang. She laughed and nodded to old Roo, who stood satisfactorily agape in a cloud of dust as they swept by.

Thus did the purring of the road devourer stimulate thought, so that by the time it had reached the first road house Miri had reached a conclusion. She could never rest until she *knew*. Things came to her like that, of a sudden, out of a clear sky, and with all-consuming force.

Leaving her mother to exchange confidences with the proprietress over peach brandy and cigarettes, Miri discarded her finery for the more serviceable

pareu, and sped by short cuts across the lagoon shallows toward the Woy Tow store.

It is a strange experience to approach one's home as a trespasser. Indeed, the thing is impossible. Miri assured herself of this as the canoe glided silently toward the seaward end of the fish fence. Who has better right of entry than the housewife? She asked herself the question while making fast the canoe, and answered it by peering cautiously through the bamboos.

Dusk had fallen, and there was no light in Ah Fang's room. The place was deserted. Yet Miri dived and swam under water to the beach, and, as she swam, her hands, out of habit, passed over the familiar floor of the lagoon. The oysters in the shallows, over a hundred of them, had gone—to the room! The door was locked, as usual, but the window was ill-fitting. Miri lowered herself to the floor and glanced about her. There was nothing—nothing but a litter of oyster shells, reflecting an unctuous sheen in the half-light, and the sickening stench of decayed fish.

It was then that a thought came to Miri—a thought so stupendous as to leave her numb. Presently it led her as in a trance through the window, which she closed with extreme care, and down to the lagoon, where she slid beneath the surface like a seal.

There were still some oysters in the deeper water. Miri took two to the canoe and opened them with a piece of hoop-iron. Out of each rolled a pearl the size of a healthy pea. She handled them in her hands reverently, as a mother would her child. She placed them at the lobes of her ears, and set her head at an

angle. Out there in the darkness she trembled at thought of what she knew. Ah Fang could make pearls! As others grew cocoanuts, so her husband could grow pearls. Where was the end of it? There was none. It was like trying to think of space. She sought relief in action on the floor of the lagoon. There were several oysters, but they were scattered. It was necessary to travel far and remain under a long time—a very long time. But there was a pearl in every one, and were they not her children, hers and Ah Fang's? A pearl in every one! The refrain sang in her ears. Her sleek body left trails of phosphorescent light as it darted here and there in the inky water. A pearl in every one! The refrain swelled to a roar as something dragged her down, down. . . .

Ah Fang ambled dripping up the beach, lighted the lamp in his odoriferous back room, and, sweeping a space amongst the litter of oyster shells, indited a letter. Here is the gist of it—

HONOURABLE SIRs:

I write this in case it is decreed that I shall not return. I have the honour to report that my experiments have proved successful. Given the ideal conditions which exist here in Tahiti, it is possible to do all that we had hoped. The cestoid is a common disease of the shark, and transmission by injection is simple and certain with ordinary care. I need say no more, except that an unforeseen obstacle at one time threatened the future success of the enterprise, and it is the removal of this obstacle, combined with the strange customs of the country, which necessitate the immediate departure of your obedient servant,

AH FANG.

HIT OR MISS

TO-MORROW daylight, then?"

"That's right."

"Good-night."

"Good-night, Frank."

When he had gone, Amery settled back on the cabin locker to smoke a disreputable pipe in slow, methodical puffs, and stare fixedly at the swinging lamp. He knew exactly where his partner was going. He would catch the two-thirty ferry across the harbour and climb the red earth path to the bungalow with the garden overlooking the sea. There he would be as charming as Frank Baird knew how to be. He would balance a tea cup on his knee with the ease of an expert, and talk trivialities until the old man fell asleep. Then he and Dorothy would go into the garden. There was an arbour at the bottom, right on the edge of the cliff, covered with passion-fruit vine. . . .

Here Amery checked the flow of his thoughts as though turning off a tap. He possessed the unusual strength of mind to do this and always did it at the same juncture. He considered it unwise to go further, because once, when he had allowed himself that privilege, he found himself entertaining disturbing and altogether foreign sentiments toward Frank. And that would never do. Better break with your partner than

hate him. Besides, the thing was childish. . . . Amery uncrossed his legs, stood up, and shook himself like a mastiff, then reached down a roll of charts from the rack in the cabin roof, and fell to studying them with knit brows.

So correct had he been in his estimate of Baird's movements, that at that moment his partner was balancing a blue-and-white china cup on his knee, the while he discussed party politics with the old man. An hour later he was sitting in the vine-clad arbour at the bottom of the garden, pretending to watch the ferry boats that scarred the fair face of the harbour, but in reality unconscious of anything save the woman at his side.

"The Islands are a lottery," he was telling her.

"Draw the right number, and you're made. That's why we stick to them."

"You and Tom have had a good many draws, haven't you?" said the girl, smiling.

"I suppose we have," he confessed, "but you never know your luck, and this time. . . ." He stopped abruptly, plucked a passion-fruit



leaf with a quick, nervous movement, and commenced tearing it to ribbons.

"Yes, this time?" prompted the girl.

"It's hit or miss. " He looked into her unwavering eyes. "Hit or miss—this time."

"And Tom told you not to let me know anything about it," suggested the girl, in her low, even voice.

Baird looked down at the shredded leaf in his hand,

then flicked it from him and settled back on the cushions.

"Tom doesn't 'tell' me to do things—like that," he said deliberately. "He's nominal skipper aboard, because someone's got to be, and he's the elder man, but we're partners. It was an understanding."

"I see," said the girl softly. "I like the way you and Tom understand one another."

"We ought to, after being shipmates seven years."

"And I envy you Tom."

Baird looked away over the harbour, the tan of his face slowly deepening.

"He's a good fellow," he said shortly.

A silence fell between them, one of those silences that a woman knows intuitively how long to sustain. It was inevitably Baird who broke it.

"We've bought the *Spindrifft*," he announced.

"The *Spindrifft*?"

"Yes, Tatham's auxiliary yacht," he went on hurriedly, as though pent-up thoughts had suddenly found vent. "She's only fifty feet over all, but a picture. The auxiliary motor drives her at six. I've been learning 'em up. I'm engineer." He laughed boyishly. "I tell you, we're all in with the *Spindrifft*."

"But isn't she very small for—for the Islands?"

"In tonnage, perhaps, but you should see her construction. She's a cruiser, fit to go anywhere, and two men can handle her; that's what we want."

"You two—alone?"

"As far as the Islands, yes. We'll pick up a Kanaka

crew there—if we want one.” Baird grinned mysteriously. “We’re on to something this time.”

Again there fell a silence, and again it was Baird who broke it.

“Copra and shell are dead,” he went on. “Companies with steamers are handling that sort of stuff these days. We’re after something better than copra and shell, and if we get it—if we get it——” His long, nervous fingers were interlocked and writhing between his knees. “But there’s always an ‘if,’ isn’t there?” he ended abruptly.

“You mustn’t look at it like that,” said the girl. “Of course you’ll get it, though I don’t know what the ‘it’ is—no,” she added quickly, as he turned to her with parted lips, “and I don’t want to know—if Tom would rather not.”

“It was only that we thought——”

“It was an understanding,” the girl reminded him. “Good luck to you both.”

“Thanks,” he said, staring over the harbour. “And whether it’s hit or miss, you’ll be the first to hear; but you know that.”

“Yes, I know that,” she answered.

A grim smile twisted Baird’s mouth, but his eyes never left the harbour.

“Sometimes,” he said, “I wonder just what will happen if we do hit.”

Across the water a clock boomed the hour of six. It seemed to break Baird’s train of thought. He stirred uneasily, then got up.

“I must be going,” he said; “we sail at daylight.”

And he went, leaving the girl, a dainty white figure against the all-pervading green of the garden, looking after him with thoughtful eyes.

Even then he only missed his partner by a few minutes. Once they had met on that red earth path leading up to the bungalow, and it had constituted a situation not to be repeated. Thereafter, through all the years that they had known Dorothy Fielding, it was tacitly agreed between them that Baird should go in the afternoon and Amery in the evening. Their understanding of one another was extraordinarily clear.

"I envy you Tom," the girl had said, and she spoke truth. There was that in Amery that inspired confidence, a quiet solidity that was infinitely restful, especially to a woman. She went on with her needlework when he came, and Amery sat smoking placidly, saying little, but absorbing her proximity with a thoroughness that converted her every word and movement into a memory.

And at daylight the next morning she stood on the edge of the cliff in a fluttering kimono, her hands at her breast, while a trim white yacht surged down the harbour fairway under power. As the vessel drew level with the bungalow, the helmsman raised an arm, and presently, above the sliding hatch aft, a head appeared and another arm was raised and lowered in farewell.

So the partners put to sea, and the woman they loved watched them from the cliff until their ship dissolved into the rose-tinted haze of dawn.

North-northeast they sailed, the southeast trade

serving them well. The *Spindrifft* proved a witch. Sometimes, with tiller lashed for hours on end, she surged through indigo waters, while the partners ate or slept or discussed their undertaking over charts outspread on the cabin table. The fittings of the *Spindrifft* had been reduced to bare necessities. Gone were Tatham's atrocious water colours in gilt frames that had bespattered the white walls of the saloon, flimsy door hangings, tapestry cushion covers, and all the senseless fripperies of an overdressed ship. And the partners were no less business-like. They spoke only when they had something to say. Small talk had long since passed out of their curriculum. They knew instinctively what there was to be done, and did it with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of fuss. Moreover, they had shed their shore-going clothes as effectively as their party manners. Baird wore a flimsy straw hat, an undervest, and a towel; Amery a battered solar topee, a sleeveless shirt, and a pair of well-beloved dungarees.

One thing only remained unchanged below deck on the *Spindrifft*, and that was the gorgeous mahogany chronometer case in the saloon. It contained, untouched and rated to the last minute of departure, three of the best instruments money could buy, and in another compartment, no less sacred, Amery's disreputable-looking pillar sextant.

After something like two weeks of almost monotonously perfect weather, the *Spindrifft* raised an atoll. It was the first of the Tau group, comprising over three hundred of these fairy rings of the sea. For the rest

of the day the yacht sailed along walls of surf-pounded coral enclosing lagoons of unbelievable colour.

At night she anchored to the reef, for no one ventures amongst the Taus when it is impossible to tell blue water from green, and Baird went ashore, returning in a few hours with three sturdy "boys." These had no idea where they were going, nor when, if ever, they would return; neither did they care, provided there was a ship to sail. Coast Kanakas are like that, and they worked the *Spindrift* to such purpose that in two days their home was well over the rim of the horizon and the yacht lay hove-to on an oily swell.

Amery lowered his binoculars.

"Piper's a bit out," he said, "but that's to be expected.

Baird nodded.

"Better charm her up and have a look round."

Exactly what the Tau "boys" thought of the *Spindrift's* subsequent antics it is hard to say. A machine was set in motion that had the amazing effect of propelling them through a stark calm at six knots for three days and in ever-widening circles, while the two white men ceaselessly scoured the horizon. What they expected to find, the great spirits alone knew, for it is well known that beyond Tau there is nothing.

It was equally evident that these two were capable of miracles, for at the end of a weary week two bo'sun birds, their long, thread-like tails streaming in their wake, appeared out of nowhere, after the fashion of sea birds, and circled above the ship's truck, swooping now and then to get a closer view of the intruders.

Others joined them, and presently, amid the babel of bird voices and the rush of wings, one of the white men, who had stood like a figurehead in the bows for the past hour, flung up an arm, and where he pointed a dull gray mass rose out of the sea. That is what the Tau "boys" claim to this day. It was interesting, too, to see the effect of this miracle upon its workers. The hands of one trembled visibly as he took the wheel and spun it over. The other showed no sign. By such trivialities do the unsophisticated tell the fibre of a man.

The land they were now rapidly nearing was shrouded in mist—a mist of birds that rose and hovered and shrieked. It was necessary to shout above the din. Wings fanned the face. The whale boat was lowered and rowed shoreward under a drumming roof of them.

Amery and Baird landed without difficulty, and trudged inland through an ankle-deep, grayish dust that rose about them in choking clouds. Neither spoke. All day, without food or drink, they scoured the island in a wilting heat that seemed to affect them not at all. From north to south, east to west, they plodded and paced, always through the same gray dust littered with the skeletons and feathers of birds, and always to the drumming accompaniment of wings.

Toward night they stumbled down to the beach like a pair of weary dustmen, rowed out to the ship, and sat staring at one another across the cabin table.

It was hard to realize even now. The island they had found, the same that old Piper, the consumptive schooner skipper swore he had seen, but was too sick at the time to alter his course and inspect, was a strag-

gler, a lost, uncharted child of the Taus. It was of upheaved coral formation, which means that it had been an atoll until some mighty convulsion of the earth's past had thrust it clear of the sea. What had once been its lagoon was now a bone-dry basin a mile by a mile and a half, filled to the brim with pure guano. And it was theirs.

"Well, that's that, and here's to it!" said Baird, with glass upraised and an excited catch in his voice.

Amery filled his pipe with customary deliberation.

"Piper was a degree out," he complained, "a degree. . . ."

Such was their respective fashion of hailing good fortune.

An hour later the auxiliary was propelling the *Spindrift* through an oily calm when a shudder ran through the ship, followed by the faint clang of metal and the crazy racing of the engine.

Amery sprang aft, and saw under a bare fathom of crystal-clear water a forest of coral fronds, and above them, protruding from the ship's quarter, the shattered remains of a propeller. They had barely grazed a submerged reef, another atoll in the making, but it was enough; the *Spindrift* lay helpless as a log. Thus the Islands kiss on one cheek and strike the other within an hour.

The days that followed were in the nature of an accumulative nightmare. For the first three the Tau "boys" squatted in the bows, whistling for a wind that never came, and the partners occupied their thoughts with a garden overlooking the sea and other things

worth having. On the fourth, gray clouds assembled, merged into a nondescript murk, and settled down on the face of the waters like a giant hand intent on crushing the breath out of life.

“Looks like a stayer,” commented Baird.

Amery nodded. He knew the signs of this pestiferous region on the Line. He could recall the name of a sailing ship that had had her insurance paid before getting clear of the Taus. But what troubled him was the knowledge that on the morrow they must begin to ration the water.

There came a night, as dead as the eternity of days and nights that had preceded it, when Amery woke from a fevered sleep and lay staring at the beams above his bunk. His throat ached abominably, his tongue felt like dry flannel in his mouth, but there was nothing new in this. The ship's company was long since down to half a point of water a day, and all that remained was a bare three gallons in a beaker carefully guarded in the saloon. What struck Amery as unusual was a sound, so faint as to be hardly discernible, but to his fever-sharpened ears maddeningly unmistakable—the gentle trickle of water. For an instant he ascribed it to his own delirium, the next he had moved his head sufficiently to catch a glimpse of the saloon. It was dark, but on the floor it seemed there was something in faint relief, something altogether too close to the water beaker. It moved.

“Swab!” croaked Amery and fired.

Yet, by the time he had sprung from his bunk and

switched on the light, there was nothing to be seen but the three startled faces of the Tau "boys," each on his mat in the fo'castle, and Baird raised on an elbow, peevishly demanding to know the cause of the racket.

"Either I'm a rotten bad shot, or I've got 'em," said Amery, flicking the perspiration from his forehead.

"Bit of both, I expect," grumbled Baird. "Finished the quinine?"

He was standing it better than his partner, but then he was a younger man, and fever had never taken a proper hold on him. Amery climbed back to his bunk alternately shivering under a pyramid of blankets and anathematizing himself for a back number.

The next day it rained, but a mile away. It has a knack of doing that on the Line. You may stand on a ship's deck and see the gray pall of the sky burst into a deluge on either hand, hear the maddening patter and splash of fresh water meeting salt, and never a drop come your way. Again the Islands, in whimsical mood.

And then, as though by magic, there came an evening when it was possible to breathe without effort, when one could lean over the rail, at first imagining, then convincing oneself of the blessed motion of air by the faint bellying of the mainsail. The *Spindrifft* was under way.

Baird took over, spinning the wheel with a flourish.

"West-sou'-west," Amery directed between clenched teeth, and staggered to his bunk.

The Kanakas capered in the bows at the sight of the

Taus a few days later, swam ashore before the anchor had touched bottom and returned with a canoe load of green cocoanuts.

Baird leant over his partner's bunk.

"It's all over, old man," he said, shaking him gently. "Tom, d'you hear?"

Amery heard, and opened his eyes on a brimming shell of cocoanut milk, that he drained at a draught. But he was weak, pitiably weak.

"You'd better get on with it," he whispered. "I'm no good for a bit."

Baird looked down on him, a strange expression in his eyes.

"What d'you take me for?" he demanded.

Amery struggled on to an elbow.

"You know what I've taken you for these seven years," he growled, "and if you're anything like it, you'll do what I say. Heave right ahead—register, and lease, and all the rest of it. Piper'll give you a hand. Amery, Baird, and Piper Incorporated, eh?" He chuckled raucously. "A thing like this doesn't want to be left a day longer than need be. I'll follow on the first chance.

Baird turned away and stared through a porthole. He could do that—the best possible for his partner. All his wit and energy must be centred on just that from now on—the best possible for Amery, and perhaps, in time. . . .

"What the devil's got you?" boomed Amery.

Baird started and turned.

"Nothing," he said. "I'll go."

He had not meant to go to the garden overlooking the sea, not until Amery was back. But the first evening, alone with his thoughts after a day of interviewing sleek gentlemen at roll-top desks with entirely satisfactory results, broke down his resolve. There could be no harm, and he must talk to someone or go mad, and wouldn't she think it strange. . . .? Of course she would, and she did, and said so in the arbour at the bottom of the garden. If she had not been the first to hear, as he had promised, she would never have forgiven him.

Baird told her all—or nearly all, and at the end sat staring before him with troubled eyes until the girl's hand touched his arm.

“What's the matter, Frank?” she questioned gently.

He started and stared at her.

“Nothing,” he said. “Why?”

“You can't tell me that,” she insisted, still very gently.

Baird moved uneasily.

“I was thinking of Tom,” he confessed.

The girl leant back on the cushions.

“Oh, you two!” she laughed, and was startled at the look in his eyes as he turned on her.

“I tell you this,” he jerked out; “nothing that I can do, nothing, you understand, will ever repay Tom for what I've—for what he's done for me. I . . .”

And that was probably why half an hour later Dorothy Fielding was in his arms.

“It was never any one else?” he demanded roughly.

“Never,” she told him.

“And nothing can make any difference—nothing?”
She looked into his eyes, and he had his answer.

Two months after they were married Amery came back, a trifle thinner, but otherwise his old self.

“And what do you think of an old crock who can’t hold his end up?” he asked Dorothy, on the afternoon of his first call.

“Now you’re fishing,” she bantered. “Frank says——”

“But you surely don’t take any notice of what Frank says—now?” laughed Amery.

They managed it very well, that first meeting, until Baird left them to afternoon tea, while he interviewed further gentlemen at roll-top desks. Then things seemed to drag. They had never dragged before, and Amery was at a loss until the girl took up her needle-work as of old.

“Tom,” she said presently, without looking up, “will you help us? But I needn’t have asked that,” she added, the colour suffusing her averted face. “Just listen, and don’t say anything till the end, like you always do. Frank has something to tell you—something that he has told me. If he didn’t tell you, I believe it would kill him; he is like that.” Her head bent lower over her work, her voice was a low monotone. “It is a thing that he—that we both think shameful. Nothing will make it right, but something—surely something that a man can say to a man will make it easier for him.” She lifted her head for the first time. “Promise me you’ll say it.”

“I promise,” said Amery. “Go on.”

She put down her work and went over to the window, standing with her back to the room, her eyes fastened on the little square of suburban garden outside.

“You shot Frank,” she said quietly.

For hours after that ghastly interview Amery paced his hotel bedroom. Curiously enough, he felt no resentment, only an overwhelming pity for his partner. Heavens, what a confession for a man to have to make! And he, Amery, must listen to it and say something at the end—“to make it easier for him.” He laughed in sheer hopelessness at the task none but a woman would set. Nothing would make it right, she had admitted that. . . . Amery paused in his stride. Two wrongs did not make a right, he told himself, yet they have been mighty comforting on occasion. The thought seized on him, held him. He was actually chuckling at his own cunning when the bell-boy announced Baird.

It was plain that he laboured under intense excitement.

“I shan’t keep you long,” he said, declining the chair Amery indicated. “I’ve only come to let you know that I’m the swab you once called me. Look at this.” He rolled up a trouser leg, exposing a clean flesh wound in the calf. “You did that, and you know when. I took water. What have you got to say to that?”

Amery slowly levered himself out of his chair.

“Nothing much,” he said, “except that I can’t see the necessity of all this song and dance about it.”

“Why don’t you say what you think?” Baird exploded. “I’ll take anything—glad to.”

Amery looked at him, a whimsical smile playing under his moustache.

“You fellows with superfine consciences make me sick,” he said. “You’re a pest. You took water. Well, for that matter, so did I.”

ROO OF THE ATOLLS

A MINUTE passed—two minutes. Down there Roo's sleek bronze body was no more than a flickering shadow on the pale green floor of the lagoon. He had gone deep, for it is in the depths and the less accessible crevices of the coral that the old shell is to be found, bigger than soup plates, gnarled and barnacle-encrusted without, but containing a lustre incomparable, and perhaps—— But one must not speculate. It is not done in the Paumotus, nor any other pearling grounds in the Pacific. Things happen or do not happen, according to one's own particular beliefs, and to think too much about them brings ill-fortune in its wake as surely as preparing the basket before the fish is caught.

Three minutes came and went. The canoe rode empty and inert on the silken surface of the lagoon. A bo'sun bird swooped out of the brazen sky and, alighting on an outrigger pole, preened himself undisturbed. The shadow on the sloping floor of the lagoon was no longer visible. Roo had gone still deeper, to fifteen fathoms, perhaps, and into a world of his own, where none but his kind could follow. Bubbles rose, tiny globules of light that flicked upward and were gone, followed at last by a dark form that shot from the depths like a meteor.

Roo shook the water from his hair, pushed the goggles

from his eyes on to his forehead, and wallowed to the canoe. About his neck hung a string bag filled with shell. This he flung aboard, and clambering after it, commenced opening operations with the same leisurely deliberation that marked all his movements.

His was killing work, and there is no object in hurrying over suicide. Already his eyes protruded ominously, a perpetual dirge resounded in one ear, and on occasion he had caught himself stumbling over an obstacle that did not exist. Inevitably he would go the way of all pearl-divers in the end unless—— Something fell from the half-opened shell in his hand, tinkled against the knife-blade and dropped between his feet.



In the breathless moments that followed he knew that the unmentioned dream haunting the thoughts of every diver had in his own case come true.

Unlike most people of the atolls, Roo was a man of set purpose—the gaining of the world for the most beautiful woman in it, nothing less. It was for this that his eyes bulged, his ear sang, and he stumbled as he walked. He placed the pearl reverently in his mouth, caressing it with his tongue, and paddled unhurriedly for the beach.

The omnivorous buyer, seated on his spine in a wicker chair, glowered contemptuously at Roo's meagre offering of shell.

“And they are *piqué* at that,” he complained languidly in native parlance. “You must do better than this, or there will be trouble.”

Roo appeared unimpressed, and shifted his weight from one enormous foot to the other, whereat the buyer

sighed, levered himself out of the chair, and went into the store, returning presently with a formidable-looking ledger.

“You now owe the Compagnie Maritime two thousand francs,” he droned, “and we can allow you nothing more until at least half this amount is paid in shell. If you dispose of it elsewhere, the Compagnie will take action.”

The tone was that of one who repeats a set piece. It *was* a set piece, composed by one of the bewhiskered directors of the Compagnie in Paris. The buyer recited it, according to instructions, not less than five times daily, and had long since ceased to derive amusement from the naïve idea of “taking action” against a grinning, mother-naked savage of the Paumotus.

“It shall be paid,” said Roo, still unmoved. “In the meantime, I desire a *pareu* and a silk shirt.”

“Take them, then,” snapped the buyer, subsiding hopelessly on to his spine, “but bring us *shell*.”

It was on the tip of Roo’s tongue to say that he had done with shell, and done with the Compagnie Maritime—a man is prone to such foolishness in the hour of triumph—but there was something of vastly more importance on the tip of his tongue at the moment, and he refrained.

Resplendent in his new *pareu* and silk shirt, he sought the most beautiful woman in the world, and found her ensconced in her superlative parlour, powdering her nose. Mata was beautiful—there was no denying that—and, what was perhaps equally desirable, she was the last word in Tahitian culture to reach the Paumotus.

Though merely the daughter of a local shell sorter afflicted with elephantiasis, she had stayed for more than a month with distant half-caste relatives in Papeete. Consequently, she knew precisely what to do and how to do it. Her surroundings reflected this knowledge. Externally her father's house might be no more than a battered and rusty corrugated iron shed set on a blazing strip of coral sand, but somewhere enshrined within that unworthy structure was Mata's parlour.

Here one sat on chairs instead of mats. The lamp was an intricate affair of dangling prisms and painted flowers. There were spindle-legged "occasional" tables supporting nothing of any practical use, a heavy pile carpet, a gramophone, framed photographs of wedding groups, and an overpowering stench of scent.

Then there was Mata herself, usually in pink silk, a gold bangle above the elbow of one shapely arm, a pear-shaped *pipi* dangling from either of her incomparable ears, and a pair of languorous but all-seeing brown eyes rolling assiduously in her well-poised little head.

Usually Roo entered the precincts with a considerable amount of trepidation, in spite of the fact that he had supplied the gramophone and the bangle, which, by the way, were the sole reasons that Mata suffered him. But to-day he was filled with the courage of achievement. He found it possible to look his awe-inspiring surroundings in the eye, to sit squarely on unaccustomed furniture, and even dispose of the eternal encumbrance of his feet.

Mata noticed the change in his demeanour and wondered vaguely, but held her peace. She knew that

whatever caused it was bound to come to the surface in a child-like nature such as Roo's. And she was not mistaken.

"Mata," he boomed in his deep chest voice, "the time has come for us to marry."

"So?" she questioned with charming insouciance.

"It is so," chanted Roo. "You wish for Papeete, for a house, for many stockings of silk, for a piano—for the world. It is yours. I can give it you, I!" He thumped his massive chest dramatically. "For two years I have worked alone in the deep waters—for you. For two years I have faced the perils of shark and devil-fish. . . ."

He said a great deal more—the people of the atolls are not addicted to mock modesty—and long before he had done Mata was leaning forward with parted lips and shining eyes.

"Show it me," she whispered. "Roo, you must show it me!"

Roo did as he was bid. He was incapable of doing anything else where Mata was concerned. She took the pearl from between his clumsy fingers and devoured it with her eyes. There was not a doubt that all Roo had said was true. Mata was a judge. Her only regret was that out of her many and varied suitors success had fallen to this man of bulging eyes and incipient paralysis. She studied him furtively and for the first time thoroughly. Could anything be done with him? Was there the slightest hope of rendering him passable before the critical tribunal of her distant half-caste relatives in Papeete? She was afraid not. And yet—

Her glance fell again to the pearl, appraising its value to the last franc. The computation made almost anything possible.

“You will sell to André?” she suggested.

Roo shook his head.

“We will go to Papeete,” he said with unusual firmness, “and I will sell to the Chinaman. He is honest.”

Mata allowed a low, rippling laugh to escape her. She knew well Roo’s opinion of his rival André.

“I was but teasing, my Roo,” she said.

“Then we sail on the *Miri* in three days’ time,” boomed Roo.

“Three days!” wailed Mata in simulated alarm. “Only three days?”

“That is all, my Mata, and in the meantime no one shall know?”

“Need you ask? And you will take care——”

Roo tapped his belt significantly. A man is prone to such foolishness in the hour of triumph. On one side was a small pouch, on the other a sheathed knife. Then he passed out into the sunshine, stumbling over nothing whatever in the doorway.

There was little time and much to be done. Two days Roo spent shelling with the others, thereby convincing the weary buyer for the Compagnie Maritime that his advice had been taken. So much so that Roo succeeded in extracting from him a Prince Albert suit and its appurtenances. This he donned at noon of the third day, and, in a bath of perspiration such as only these atrocities in raiment can produce, was striding into the settlement when he met André.

"Where now?" queried this half-caste pearl expert, with his ingratiating smile.

"To my business," boomed Roo.

"And that?"

"Is my business," returned Roo, and instantly wished that he had not said it. It was his to allay suspicion, not arouse it, especially at this, the eleventh hour.

André's ferret eyes rested on Roo with a drunkard's fatuous solemnity.

"And you have no time, not even for one small drink with a friend?"

"There is always time for that," said Roo, with what for him was supreme cunning.

André drew a glass flask from his hip pocket.

"The best out of Papeete!" he chanted, holding it up to the light and swaying gently. "To good-will between rivals, eh?"

And at that hour Roo found it in his heart to pity André. There is no solicitude so genuine as that of the successful suitor for his less fortunate rival. Roo drank, and in less than two minutes was lying prone on the beach, with the attenuated fingers of André the expert at his belt.

He opened his eyes on a canopy of stars. It was night, and the dirge in his ear had swelled to a roar, and there was a band of fire about his head. Also the pearl was gone.

A giant figure in a dishevelled Prince Albert suit staggered to its feet and stumbled through the sand in the starlight. It came to a halt before the home of the

most beautiful woman in the world. The superlative parlour was deserted. Only the outhouse showed any signs of life in the form of a flickering yellow light and on the mats beside it Mata's father nursing his mammoth leg, and swaying and moaning in anguish as befits the bereaved.

Roo took a stride toward the squatting figure, his hand outstretched, the fingers awork, then turned aside and passed down the beach. For a moment he stood staring over the starlit sea, then with quick, ferocious movements he tore the Prince Albert suit from his body and flung it on the sand.

When the moon rose, it found him squatting at the water's edge, still staring seaward. Roo was thinking.

And the schooner *Miri* was plowing a phosphorescent furrow through the night.

"But it was so simple, my pearl, that I hardly like to speak of it. They are big, but they are soft, these Paumotan savages. One tap, in fair fight, too, and the thing was done."

Thus André at the ship's rail, with Mata at his side asking a woman's unnecessary questions.

"I do not like it, André," she said. "That man is different to the others. He will not forget."

André turned and studied the alluring profile at his elbow.

"Then you would have had me make it impossible for him to remember?" he suggested.

Mata did not answer, but her meaning was none the less clear.

"Little savage!" laughed André, and stroked her hand as it lay on the rail. "Have no fear. Papeete is not the Paumotus. There are gendarmes to protect life and property. Besides, how is he to prove he ever had a pearl?"

"That is so," mused Mata. But she shivered, and André fetched her bedizened wrap from the cabin.

On arrival in Papeete, where André sold the pearl for thirty thousand francs, the sequence of events was as inevitable as may be supposed. From mere neglect, André's treatment of Mata descended by rapid stages to vicious brutality, and within the month she was a broken woman.

Of an evening she would escape from the house that was her torture chamber, and walk aimlessly in a dowdy wrapper along the coral wall that formed the beach. Here the water was deep, and clear and clean. Mata loved to look down—down. It reminded her of a Paumotan lagoon.

And here it was that on a night of dazzling moonlight a head clove the water at her feet. With a curious lack of surprise or alarm she saw that it was Roo's. He *had* died, then.

Presently it spoke, with the booming intonation of old.

"You are not happy, then, my Mata?"

She did not answer. She could not. But her head was bowed until it rested on her knees. Her body commenced to sway, and the moan of the bereaved floated out on the water.

When she looked up, the head was gone.

André had bought his election to the club that overlooks the harbour. Here on the wide balcony, and over countless absinthes at the little round tables, he could mix on equal terms with the elect of Papeete, win or lose prodigious sums at cards, roulette, or billiards, and dabble in pearls on quite an imposing scale.

The life suited him. It presented possibilities of a chicanery that was second nature to André. He became famous in the Island underworld as a "fence." No matter how a stone had been acquired, André would buy it without question—for less than half its value. Often he would be sitting at cards when one of his runners whispered in his ear, and he would excuse himself to interview some quaking thief or murderer, or both, in the deeper shadows of the beach. It paid. Such people are more tractable than most.

That was why on a certain night he deserted an unprecedented run of luck to plunge into the velvet darkness of the beach road.

He found his man, as the runner had said, under the flamboyants at the end of the coral wall. André did not speak. He was in the habit of letting others do that. But this fellow, a hulking savage, by the loom of his half-naked body in the shadows, was strangely silent.

"Well?" snapped André impatiently.

A hand was outstretched, an immense hand, and André's went to meet it. But the other proved to be empty, and its fingers closed on his like a steel trap. Another shot from the darkness, enveloping his face as in a mask.

“Greetings, my friend!” boomed the voice of Roo. “We will make it a long one, of Papeete’s best, eh?”

The entwined and writhing bodies struck the water as one. The inky waters parted and closed. A minute passed—two minutes. Roo had gone deep, to fifteen fathoms, perhaps, and into a world of his own, where none but his kind could follow. The ripples expanded in ever-widening circles, and were still. Three—four minutes came and went. Roo was surpassing his own record, and it was not before the end of the fifth that his head broke water and he clambered gasping up the coral wall.

Mata was tossing sleeplessly on her mats, waiting for she knew not what. She was always waiting now, and never did she know what for until André made it clear.

At the sound of a naked footfall on the veranda steps she started as though stung.

“Where is André?” she demanded of the giant figure that loomed in the doorway.

“He sleeps,” boomed Roo. “We have been drinking, André and I. Come, my Mata!”

WE OF MALITA

HURRICANES and bananas are incompatible. In other words, we of Malita were ruined. Enraged nature had seen fit to stretch out her inexorable hand and wipe the fruits of our labour from the face of the island as cleanly as a drawing from a slate. We were talking about it on my veranda.

“The question is,” began the inevitable Tomlin, tilting back his packing case, the cane chairs having gone to his betters, “what are we going to do about it? Personally, I’m down and out.”

“I suppose it hit us all equally,” I suggested.

There followed a series of doleful nods.

“Pulp,” grunted Webb.

“Except the weeds,” chirped Tomlin, “I’ve got the finest unscathed crop of creeping vine south of the line, and——”

“As a banana country,” said Rands, ignoring the nuisance, “and as far as I’m concerned, gentlemen——” He raised his right hand with grave deliberation.

“Which being interpreted?” I suggested.

“Never again,” explained the American.

“As bad as that, eh?”

“Sure. My motto is: ‘Once bitten, twice shy; twice bitten cut it out, whatever it is, before it eats you.’”

“But I want to tell you this,” he added, pausing for

effect; "Pineapples take no account of blows. I came through Hawaii on my way here, and they're growing pineapples there on land that costs them a thousand dollars an acre; pineapples no better than ours in the bush of Malita. It costs them a dollar and a half a day for labour, and they're making money. Here we should pay nothing for the land, a shilling a day for labour—and a thousand for the canning plant," he ended a trifle hurriedly. His flashing eye challenged the company. "As an idea?" he demanded.

"Excellent," admitted someone. "But——"

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Rands, and subsided.

"But the thousand?" came the still small voice.

The American's face was buried in a tumbler of what he persisted in calling a highball. "I've given you the idea," he said on its withdrawal; "the rest is up to you."

Malita practically lived on my veranda during these drear days of despondency, and one afternoon—the same as a hundred others, brazen and breathless—Tomlin was reading the *Levuka Herald* when he made a noise in his throat and said: "Well, I'm——"

As usual, no one took the faintest notice. Tomlin continued to read with extraordinary concentration for upward of five minutes, then wandered across to the veranda railing and stood there, alternately whistling and staring out at the glare.

Suddenly he turned. "I have an idea," he announced, "and it's a good one, although it's mine."

"Common theft?" suggested Rands.

Tomlin shook his head. "No," he said, "you can't call it that."

“Appropriation?” murmured Nares.

“Out with it,” rasped Webb.

“Then I gather you want my little idea,” said the imperturbable Tomlin. “Have any of you ever heard of Colin Sterling?”

“Sounds Scotch,” suggested an intelligent someone.

“It is,” admitted Tomlin. “It is also the name of the wealthiest shipping man in Liverpool. He wallows, literally wallows, in slathers and slathers of money. A thousand to him is as an unripe banana to you and me.”

“And you know him?” I suggested. I thought I was beginning to see daylight.

“I know of him,” corrected Tomlin, “which is quite enough for our purposes. He doesn’t know how to spend his money, so he lets his youngest son do it for him. He’s the only one of the family who has the knack. The others are like the father and the extraordinary thing is that the old man’s prouder of the spendthrift than of all the others put together. A son of Colin Sterling who doesn’t think twice about keeping a taxi waiting! He’s looked on as unique in the annals of the family.”

“This is all very instructive,” Nares interpolated. “But is one permitted to ask how the eccentric son of a wealthy Scotsman in Liverpool affects us of Malita?”

Tomlin waited for his glass to be filled before answering. “Certainly,” he said; “the answer is in the newspaper yonder. This same eccentric son is on an educational world tour—thinks he paints—and he lands in Levuka the day after to-morrow.”

We leaned back in our chairs. The tension was relaxed. This seemed to trouble Tomlin. "Mind you," he warned, "I don't mean what you mean. Nothing would induce me to cadge. Besides, I don't know the man."

"Sure," murmured Nares, his cigar pointing at a reflective angle. "Haven't been introduced. I know the dope."

"No; and don't intend to be," supplemented Tomlin, with unusual warmth. "Look here, Rands; I know all sorts of schemes are flitting through your nimble brain, but there's only one way this thing's going to be done, and that's my way. It's going to be a straightforward affair without any subtleties or complications of any kind. It's based on simple logic."

"I like to hear a man talk like that," said Rands. "Fire ahead."

Tomlin's simple logic took three minutes to propound and as many hours to discuss. Certainly it was simple, but opinions differed as to its being logic. It was christened variously and according to taste, but Tomlin held his ground with unlooked-for determination. Night descended on Malita like a hot, moist blanket, and our voices, raised in altercation, mingled under the tropic stars and drowned the boom of the surf on the barrier reef.

One by one we fell into line, driven by the overpowering weight of necessity. Webb was the last to succumb. "All right," he grunted. "Something's got to be done, and I suppose this *is* something."

"And that's all the thanks I get," wailed Tomlin.

It was.

The launch left Malita the next morning, manned by its owner, Tomlin, and Rands, and, after waving it farewell from the landing, Webb and I returned to the bungalow in pensive silence. We both knew that we were a couple of old fools, who had been carried away in a weak moment by a full glass and the contagious enthusiasm of youth. We both knew that at that moment we would have cheerfully given what little we possessed to be able to hail the launch and cry off. Also, we both knew that it was too late. "How will they do it?" I ventured to suggest at lunch. "Force?"

Webb shrugged his massive shoulders and gave his attention to curried bush pig. There were occasions when Webb was not the best of company.

Toward evening two days later, the launch came back to Malita down the golden pathway of the setting sun. Webb lowered the glasses. "They've done it, anyway," he announced, and we strolled mechanically down to the landing.

Exactly what we expected to see it is difficult to say. Personally, I was conscious of alternate waves of bewilderment and belief as the launch gave its last despairing kick and sheered alongside. At the helm sat a remarkably pink young man in immaculate white flannels and an art tie, chatting pleasantly with Tomlin. Nares was in his usual state of filth and agitation over his precious engine. Rands was making fast. Tomlin looked up and waved his hand to us. "Cheer-o!" he called. "We've brought a visitor."

The remark was accompanied by a prodigious and entirely uncalled-for wink as the pink young man picked a discriminating way through the litter of decayed banana skins up the rickety landing steps.

“Mr. Sterling—Webb, father,” Tomlin bawled after him, presumably by way of introduction.

“Awfully good of you,” drawled the pink young man, shaking us warmly by the hand. “Topping place you have here.”

Webb grunted, and I said something idiotic; then we all went up to the bungalow.

At the first opportunity—while Sterling was under the shower, to be exact—I tackled Rands.

“Don’t know a thing,” he jerked at me—“don’t know a thing except that Tomlin brought him out of the club with a valise, and here he is.”

“And he doesn’t know?” I inquired.

“Hasn’t a notion.”

At that moment Sterling emerged from the shower pinker than ever. “Topping bath,” he observed, and floated into the bedroom.

A little later Tomlin was the centre of a hurried conclave behind the crotons. “Easy as falling off a log,” he chortled. “Not a soul in the club, house boy asleep as usual, jumped at the chance of seeing plantation life on a real South Sea island, and here we are.” He panted and gazed round the semi-circle of faces. An apprehensive glint came into his eyes. “Look here,” he demanded plaintively, “you’re not going back on the thing?”

We protested valiantly.

At dinner our guest informed us that Malita was "topping; simply topping." "It's been the dream of my life to see the South Seas," he confessed. "Of course I kicked about the Mediterranean a bit in the gov'nor's yacht, but there's nothing at all like this—so unsullied, so dreamlike. It's hard to imagine here that somewhere people are slaving their lives away; scrambling after money."

"Sure," agreed Rands thoughtfully.

"I mean, now, what can you possibly want here?" Sterling proceeded. "You have three excellent meals a day, a comfortable house, and—this." He waved a hand in the direction of the blue-black darkness outside which happily veiled the decayed stumps of my banana plants and a pile of empty corned-beef tins. "It's paintable," he added, as though this were the acme of praise.

Rands seemed to be struggling with a strong emotion. "Well, I don't know," he confessed. "Scenery may be good to paint, but it's poor stuff to live on. What we want is pineapples—pineapples with a capital P."

The slogan had been dragged from him. From it he slid into explanation, and before the meal was over Sterling was in possession of the main facts of our pitiful case. "Topping!" was his verdict, pronounced over the third glass of my whisky. "Absolutely topping idea. Pineapples! And only a thousand for a plant! Why, the thing's a gift. Here's to pineapples!"

We drank enthusiastically.

Rands, with his tongue as near hanging out as I have ever seen a man's, then proceeded to point out the

fatal obstacle to the realization of our dreams. With a catch in his voice, he confessed that the sordid but necessary thousand was not ours to command.

Sterling was sympathetic. "It's splendid," he announced with conviction. "I think it's perfectly splendid how you fellows out here on the edge of the world face difficulties that would appall a meaner soul. Face them and overcome them," he added hopefully.

"This one isn't overcome," growled Webb, and I know his enormous foot was swinging under the table; "or ever likely to be."

"Oh, you can't tell me that," bantered Sterling, "I know what you fellows are—splendid, topping," he said meditatively, refilling his glass.

Then we went out on the veranda.

Late that night we of Malita assembled in the packing shed and stared at one another blankly.

"Well, that's that," said Tomlin.

"I believe the insufferable little tike's pulling our legs," offered Webb.

"Nix on that," snapped Rands. "I know when I'm being bull-dozed. It's just natural, unadulterated hide. You couldn't prick decent feelings into him with a handspike."

"And he's got such lots and lots of money," chanted Tomlin from his improvised stage on an empty banana crate.

Personally, I began to feel uncomfortable, and I know that Webb looked it. Suddenly he burst into speech:

“I have a suggestion to make—that we drop it. It’s crazy. We’re a lot of damned fools.”

There was silence for a moment. Then Rands spoke. “Thank you,” he said. “It was someone else’s idea; someone else carried it out, and you agreed to see it through. Are you going to let us down?”

“No,” said Webb. “I won’t let anybody down. As it happens we can ship the young cub back, and he’ll never know what he’s missed. Put it to the vote. . . . But mind you,” he added, “if this thing goes through, there can be no more half measures about it. It isn’t a joke. It’s serious business. I’ve let myself in for it, and, if it has to be done, I’ll take on the biggest part of the job.”

It was the longest utterance we of Malita had ever heard Webb make. It sobered even Tomlin for the moment.

“Those in favour——”

Two hands went up, Rands’ and Tomlin’s. Nares’s fluttered up after them. I’m convinced he was only actuated by the thought that if he didn’t vote that way his everlasting launch would have spluttered to Levuka and back for nothing. Webb contemplated the trio from under his shaggy eyebrows for a moment, then grunted and went out.

“In my opinion——” began Nares. We fell upon him in a simultaneous pæan of encouragement. “In my opinion,” he struggled on, “the affair can still be—er—handled on a pacific basis. Possibly——”

“Why, sure,” agreed Rands. “It only wants nous, tact, and you’re the man, Nares. You’re it.” Nares

stared about him with the expression of a startled rabbit. "It's up to you to tell him why he's here," pursued the inexorable Rands. "It's your turn next."

Nares shot one fleeting glance of entreaty in my direction. It was a horrid sight. Such must have been the look in the eyes of the early martyrs under the upraised sword of the gladiator. And I turned away my head. That's the sort of person I am.



After breakfast, Sterling, pinker and more ecstatic than ever, wandered off up the beach with the dogs, a water-colour block, and a paint box. He was not going to let his visit interfere with our work, he informed us. He could find plenty to amuse him.

Our "work" consisted in sitting on the veranda, staring listlessly at the unlovely remains of my banana patch.

"Only a thousand," mused Tomlin, "and he's got such lots and lots of money." The last part of this utterance he had succeeded in rendering particularly obnoxious by setting it to ragtime.

Sterling did not return till afternoon tea. In one hand he carried a rush basket full of an indescribable mess, in the other a native fish spear. His shoes were slung over his shoulder, his faultless flannels rolled to the knee, and his solar topee set jauntily on the back of his head.

“Oh, lor’!” groaned Webb, “it’s going to be ‘topping’.”

It was. Everything was. What were those nimble little fellows that dashed about with a sort of mast sticking up, and vanished into holes? Soldier crabs? How topping! And those big fellows up in a tree, with eyes, or something, on the end of a stalk a foot long? Tree lobsters? Splendid. And this, and this—— He littered the veranda with every species of South Sea crustacea—and there are a few—until the place was like an insanitary skating rink.

Nares’s hour of doom drew near. One by one we evaporated from the veranda and collected in the mosquito-proof office adjoining the living room to witness it. Nares had demanded a clear stage for his operations.

We heard the two men enter the living room, and Nares, in a remarkably natural voice, suggest whisky and sparklet. “. . . Of course, as you see,” he was saying in his mincing accents, “we are practically ruined. The hurricane swept everything before it. Luckily the launch escaped, or I don’t know what we should have done.”

“Quite,” sympathized Sterling. “And is that jolly little launch your only means of leaving the island?”

“Yes,” sighed Nares. “We had in mind, before the hurricane, of course, a fifty-ton auxiliary schooner to carry all our produce, but now”—he giggled weakly—“we have no produce.”

“Quite,” repeated Sterling to the accompaniment of complaining cane as he sank into my only safe chair.

There was a pause, broken after what seemed a century by another giggle, even more weak.

"Do you know," said Nares, in tones intended to be conversational, "we have racked our brains to think of some method to raise money, only a little."

"Really?" remarked Sterling. "That should be easy enough."

"Ah, but you don't know our difficulties," said Nares. "We are already mortgaged to the hilt. Only a thousand would set us up with a canning plant, and the rest would be plain sailing."

"In that case," said Sterling (I could feel Rands's fevered breath down the back of my neck. Tomlin was on tiptoe, with mouth agape. Webb was standing with his grizzled head on one side like an inquisitive hen. He is slightly deaf in one ear)—"in that case, I should stretch a point to get that thousand."

"We have—intend to," Nares corrected himself. "Fair means or foul, you know."

"Quite," agreed Sterling.

"In fact"—again Nares had recourse to the giggle, which I could feel was rapidly driving Webb berserk—"in fact," he ended weakly and a trifle hurriedly, "we conceived the idea—rather daring, of course—of abducting some wealthy man and holding him up to ransom."

There was another brief but agonized pause before Sterling slapped his knee and burst into a roar of laughter. "Daring? Not a bit. What's to stop you? Topping. I should like to see the fun."

Nares stared at him as though fascinated, then trailed

off into imitation laughter himself. The two of them sat there making the most absurd noise.

“You see——” Nares had begun again, when something uncommonly like an earthquake rent us of Malita asunder, and stumbled through the mosquito door. It was Webb, a terrible sight.

“Stop your cackling!” he roared at Nares. “And you,” turning on Sterling, “understand this now, if you never did before—you’re not a guest here; you’re a hostage. We abducted you. We’d have abducted you by force if we’d had to. We shall keep you by force if we have to—until you hand over a thousand cash. We’re not asking for the money; we’re demanding it. It’s robbery. We’re desperate.”

Webb came to an abrupt full stop. The well of his rhetoric had run dry. Sterling turned slowly to Nares. He was slightly less pink than usual, that was all. “Who is this gentleman?” he inquired. “I don’t seem to know him.”

“I’m not a gentleman,” boomed Webb. “I’m a robber. We’re all robbers. Are you going to part up or not?”

Sterling looked up at him serenely; then, from sheer force of habit, slipped a gold cigarette case from his pocket and tapping one of its contents on the lid. “Topping,” he murmured irrelevantly.

“And that’s another thing,” flashed Webb. “Say that again and you’ll be kicked.”

Sterling regarded him in mild surprise. “Say what?” he inquired.

“Topping.”

“Ah, splendid,” drawled Sterling, after due reflection.

Webb towered over him like an impending hurricane. “Are you going to pay?” he demanded.

“No,” said Sterling deliberately.

“Very well, then.” Webb shuffled his enormous feet on the matting of the floor. “You’ll stay here until you do.”

“Nothing would please me more,” returned Sterling, and helped himself from the tantalus.

For a moment Webb seemed at a loss. Was our tower of strength faltering? “That can soon be put right,” he threatened. “Think it over.”

“Certainly,” Sterling agreed. He had now entirely resumed his normal shade of pink. “And now, may we return to a less transpontine mode of intercourse? Mr. Nares here was telling me of some top—splendid scheme of raising money for pineapples. . . .”

“He daren’t say it,” triumphed Tomlin in the packing shed a few hours later. “We’ve got him. Although I must say he takes it rather well, we’ve got him.”

“Think so?” grunted Webb. “Seems to me the difficulty will be to get rid of him without——” His voice rumbled away into ruminative silence.

We hardly dared to look one another in the eye. The appalling possibility conjured up by Webb’s unfinished sentence left us speechless. He looked round at me with a grim smile playing under his moustache.

“I thought you hadn’t properly digested this thing

before you set out on it. We've got to get that money now."

What is one to do with a hostage who has no desire for freedom? On the contrary, Sterling appeared to be having the time of his life. He told us frankly that he had fallen violently in love with Malita, and if it was a pose it was too cleverly done for us to detect. Each day he wandered at large—the dry batteries had been removed from the launch—and returned with some noisome thing that was a curio to him and a pest to us. His thirst for island lore was insatiable. His water-colour sketches were either completely above our heads or else the ghastliest daubs that ever soiled paper; personally, I can never tell which. And for us the hard fact remained that time, precious time, was slipping away without any appreciable results.

"I was wondering how long you'd sit down under this," Webb told us, after some murmurings of discontent at the fourth packing-shed convention, "and you were all so full of ideas at first. Perhaps *you're* for climbing out now?"

We protested violently.

"Very well, then," said Webb, "what about it?"

Rands took him by the buttonhole. I think Rands must have been an insurance agent in Denver. "See here, Webb, old man," he crooned. "You're the doctor; there's no getting away from that, and——"

"I knew I should have to be," grumbled Webb.

And the net result was Sterling's confinement in the smallest and hottest room in the bungalow. There he sat in silk pyjamas, under a corrugated iron roof, and

sizzled, the deathlong day. He grew less pink and a good deal thinner, but, as he pointed out, it gave him a top—splendid chance of working out the plans of his model village scheme.

“They’ll be instituting inquiries,” suggested Nares in his best startled-rabbit manner, after the third day of the melting process. “We have, as it were, launched an avalanche——”

Webb gave him a look that blasted him on the spot.

“There’s nothing else for it,” said Rands with slow deliberation. “I guess the old hands at this game knew their business all right.”

“But—what—how?”

Instinctively we gathered closer in an awed circle, which Webb broke up by grunting with unprecedented vigour, and stalking from the shed. I’m certain it was only his contempt for our weak-kneed attitude that kept us up to the mark.

That evening Webb was observed passing a length of stout cord over a beam of the veranda roof.

“What’s the game?” asked Rands.

Webb did not answer. He completed the task and then turned to me. “Now,” he said, “just tie that as tight as you can around my thumbs—there, that’ll do. Now, you two, pull on the other end.”

We obeyed mechanically. The toes of Webb’s enormous feet just trailed the ground.

“Now swing me slowly—one, two, three, four. Now let me down.”

He stood there while we untied his thumbs, then went over to the tandalus.

“*That*, morning and afternoon, increasing one each time,” he growled. “Saw it done once.”

Rands and I melted gracefully into the landscape.

“Whew!” he exclaimed, when we were clear of the bungalow. “Our Mr. Webb is a sticker.”

“Didn’t you know that?” said I.

We walked in pensive silence for a space.

“Wonder if *he* heard?” suggested Rands. “That house is like a band-box.”

“I don’t see that it makes any difference if he did,” said I.

Rands shrugged his shoulders and gave his attention to the view. “Pineapples,” he breathed. “Can’t you see ’em on that hill? And a cunning little plant on those flats, and an overhead cable. . . .”

Yes, it was worth it.

The next morning a perfectly peaceful sunrise was ruined by the silly, ineffectual noises of Nares. I first heard him running—actually running at five o’clock in the morning—up the powdered coral pathway to the bungalow, then the hurried patter of his feet on the veranda steps, and finally his panting breath.

“She’s gone,” he squealed. “The launch has gone.”

There were the rumblings of an earthquake in the room opposite mine, and Webb’s pyjamaed figure appeared in the doorway.

“Where did you put those dry batteries?” he demanded.

“They were in my room,” panted Nares; “under the bed. I—they——”

Webb broke open the door of Sterling’s oven with a

gnarled toe. It was no longer Sterling's. It was empty.

"That's broken it," said Webb, and climbed into bed again, leaving Nares still gesticulating in the middle of the room.

"B-but the launch," he wailed; "she'll never pass Vuna Point with him driving her. She'll——"

"She'll go quite far enough for his purposes," boomed Webb. "Go to bed, you ass."

"He'll go to Suva," said Rands of the nimble mind. He had been sleeping on the veranda. Rands affects a hammock and a nightshirt for some extraordinary reason. "He'll go to Suva, and bring along the sheriff—I mean the police, and——"

"Go to bed," repeated Webb.

"And we can't get away," ended Tomlin brightly.

Sterling's escape completely broke up Webb. He, even he, who I knew could not have hurt a fly in ordinary circumstances, had nerved himself up to the necessary pitch for torture, and now the relapse had set in. Each day and all day we scoured the horizon for the craft bearing our fate, but none appeared. We could almost hear the pink young man chortling at our suspense: "Topping!" he would be able to call it without restraint. We of Malita grew peevish under the strain, and blamed one another like fishwives. Webb alone sat silent, staring out to sea and swinging his foot.

"Five years," Tomlin would chirp; "about five years, I should think, with a possible remission for good conduct."

“Say,” Rands would jerk out, “I don’t know if I can bash you, Tomlin, but I’ll sure try if you don’t quit that.”

And Nares would look from one to the other with the same silly startled expression on his rabbit face, and we all knew he was thinking of his launch.

Oh, it was a ghastly week. Truly, Sterling’s vengeance.

Then, out of the blue, our fate approached us, climbing down from the horizon in a solitary speck that resolved itself into a launch—two launches, one towing the other. The first was a noble affair of white enamel and glittering brass; I could see Nares’s mouth watering as he looked at it. The other was his own.

“Say,” exclaimed Rands, with the glasses to his eyes, “it’s him, all right; I can see Pink-and-White. There are two others in topees, and the rest’s nigs. What do we do about it?”

“Do?” repeated Webb dully; it was the first time he had spoken that day. “It’s the Government, and a squad of comic-opera police. Do? Sit here and wait for ’em. What else?”

“Not by a jugful,” cried the hopeful Rands. “We’ll get up into the hills—hide. They’ll think we’ve cleared.”

“How?” droned Webb.

“Swum, flown—anything they like. Aw, make a fight for it, Webb.”

“Too hot,” said Webb.

It took a good quarter of an hour to argue Webb out

of his chair on the veranda, and then he only came to satisfy us.

We of Malita trailed into the hills, a harassed and perspiring flock of refugees. From a ledge high up on the volcanic rock we looked down on our pygmy world—the bandbox bungalow, the pathetic square of black dots that had once been a banana patch, the landing like a centipede thrusting its body into the fair face of the Pacific. “It’s not a bad old spot, you know,” mused Tomlin sentimentally. His words echoed the thoughts in each one of our minds. Malita was very dear now that she was slipping from us.

“If we can only stick it out a day or two,” Rands suggested, “we might be able to slip down in the night and vamoose in the launch. What’s the matter with Samoa or Tonga?”

“It’s the Government,” droned Webb, his every word pulverizing Rands’s ideas like a sledge hammer. “It’s a man hunt. Ever seen a Government man hunt? They’ve got us labelled and pigeonholed in their old barn at Suva by this time, and wherever we go, whatever we do, they’ll be somewhere in the background. Slow, but—oh, lor’!—sure.”

There was deathly silence as the two launches came to rest and spilled their pygmy people onto the landing. Sterling led the procession to the bungalow, and without hesitation, passed inside, followed by the Government. The police squatted in a formal row in the compound, while one of their number remained with the launch.

“That’s that,” remarked Tomlin.

“Rats in a trap!” murmured Nares, presumably to add to the general gaiety.

Presently the three white men came out, the police sprang to their feet, and the entire cortège spread itself over Malita. Throughout the brazen day we lay on our ledge in agonized suspense. No one came near us. We were hungry, aching, and, above all, thirsty.

Toward evening the party returned along the beach from the direction of the native village. Sterling and the Government took up their quarters in my bungalow, and the police disposed themselves among the *buris* (outhouses) in the compound. A yellow, homelike glow sprang into being at the living-room window, and we pictured the pink young man telling the Government over a glass of amber liquid that something or other was “topping.”

Then it rained—the warm, penetrating douche of the tropics.

Webb sat with his feet dangling over the ledge like overweighted pendulums, the lining of the white pulp that had once been his solar topee emitting green cataracts down his sodden ducks.

“This will go on, and on, and on until they get us,” he rumbled. “They’ve written a ‘report’ on their first day’s ‘investigations.’ There’ll be another to-morrow, and another the day after that, until they’ll be able to write down, very neatly: ‘On January 26, at 10 A. M., the prisoners were discovered——’ Pah!” he bellowed, and scrambled to his feet. “What’s the use?”

“What are you going to do?” inquired someone.

“Go down and give myself up,” he retorted. “A cell’s dry.”

And—would you believe it?—we all followed him. Like a flock of sodden sheep we trailed down that hillside and up the bungalow path. What we must have looked like standing in pools of our own making on the veranda, I have no idea, though I believe Sterling has.

Webb marched in on a homely little scene. The Government was leaning over a plan of Malita outspread on my table. Sterling was sprawled in my favourite chair, blowing smoke rings from a noble-looking cigar and staring dreamily at the ceiling. “Where on earth have you been?” he demanded at sight of the apparition.

“Little pleasure excursion up the hillside,” said Webb. “What are you going to do with us?”

“Sorry,” Sterling apologized, and poured out five ample tots of a brandy that was new to me but uncommonly mellow. “Hadn’t you better change?” he suggested.

We changed in stony silence.

“And now,” he said, “I want to thank you for the top—splendid time you gave me, and apologize for my hasty departure. That room——”

“We’d rather you wouldn’t be funny about it,” said Webb. “Come to the point.”

“Very well,” agreed Sterling; “what about those pineapples?”

“Pineapples!”

“Yes; you’re not going to tell me you fellows went

through the agonies you must have suffered without there being something in this pineapple idea?"

"Who are these?" demanded Webb, suddenly indicating the gaping Government with a hairy hand.

"Surveyors," said Sterling. "Who did you think they were?"

"That doesn't matter," said Webb; "but——"

A pained expression passed over Sterling's pink face. "You're not going to let me down," he wailed— "after me buying the island for you, mortgages and all?"

And to this day Sterling cannot be brought to believe that Webb's intentions with the rope on the veranda were serious. The argument invariably causes one to say: "Top—splendid!" and the other to swing an enormous foot, when we foregather on the veranda of a large white bungalow overlooking the Malita Pineapple Estate Incorporated.

THE PREPOSTEROUS PARTNER

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the roar of the explosion, a geyser of earth, roots, and stones shot skyward, to fall rattling amongst the neighbouring trees, and again the silence of the bush closed down.

“Five!” counted Creswell aloud, and grinned through his sweat. He had taken to talking to himself of late, though he had no notion of it. A man has little time for noticing anything besides his work when he battles with the Queensland bush.

“Not so bad,” he added judicially, inspecting the churned-up earth and root ends that were all that the dynamite charge had left of a six-foot eucalyptus stump. “Not so bad.”

With hardly a pause, he went on to the next, a stubborn blood-wood, and opened the attack with a crow-bar. It was killing work, and it was killing Creswell, though he would have been the first to ridicule such a suggestion. No one did suggest it, because no one in the Nambye district cared one way or another. If a crazy “new chum” chose to work himself to death in the bush, whose business was it but his own? That was Nambye’s attitude. Such a thing had happened before, and would no doubt happen again, until the over-zealous pioneer realized that the correct method

of acquiring a pineapple plantation is to relieve his neighbours of their played-out acres at a fancy figure.

But then Nambye did not know. No one knew, except Joyce Helliar, what manner of fever it was that consumed Bob Creswell, and she kept that knowledge to herself. It was doubtful if Nambye would understand. Few men suffer from overscrupulousness, and that was what ailed Creswell. Two years ago the flick of a coin had decided whether he or his partner Soames should go to the War. Soames had won, and Creswell had never forgotten it. Soames was to fight his country's enemies; Creswell was to fight nothing more romantic than the Queensland bush and a bank overdraft. The humiliation of it! And he had given his word—there was no wriggling out—his word that he would “look after the place—and Joyce”; that was how the happy-go-lucky Soames had put it, with a nudged elbow and a grin at the last injunction that was entirely lost on his more stolid partner. Three times Creswell had written asking to be let off, pleading with Soames that it was more than he could bear; but he received no reply. Soames had only written twice, soon after he left, the chatty, inconsequential letters of a man without a care in the world, and his name had never appeared in the casualty lists. Until that happened Creswell considered himself bound.

“Look after the place—and Joyce!” That was all he had to go upon, and he had gone upon it to such effect that five acres were already bearing, another five of virgin bush were cleared and ready for the plow, the overdraft was at least stationary, Joyce

was as well as a perfectly healthy young woman can be, and he had reduced himself to the semblance of a scarecrow. A fool? Perhaps; but some men are built like that.

Joyce dismounted at the edge of the clearing, a cool white figure against the sweltering background of the bush, and coo-ee'd twice before Creswell looked up and came shambling toward her. His beard was rather more ragged than ever, she noticed; his clothes, clotted and smeared with red earth, seemed to hang from his broad, angular shoulders. The inevitable question was in his eyes, and Joyce met it with a smile and a shake of the head.

"I can't make it out," he said, sitting in the grass beside her and scraping the earth from his boots with a twig. He always said that, and Joyce's reply was invariably the same.

"No news is good news, remember." Then Creswell would subject her to his slow, appraising scrutiny, and talk about "the place," always about "the place."

The usual programme was proceeding without a hitch, when Joyce introduced an entirely unlooked-for remark:

"Have you had any dinner?"

It had a marked effect on Creswell. He was in the midst of a minute description of blasting operations, and he stopped dead, staring at her in a daze.

"Yes—that is, I think so," he faltered.

"But you're not quite sure," said Joyce gravely. "Well, perhaps you can find room for these."

She watched him as he sat munching the sandwiches

she had brought, his eyes never leaving his handiwork out in the clearing.

“Not so bad, is it?” He nodded in the direction of the dynamite débris. “Five in a week. It’ll please Clem.”

“If it doesn’t, it ought to,” said Joyce, with unusual asperity. The sight of Creswell that morning had somehow come as a shock.

He regarded her in blank amazement for a moment. To Creswell such a remark savoured almost of sacrilege.

“I mean it,” she added firmly. “I think he’s very lucky to have a partner to carry on as you are, and—and he ought to write and say so.”

Creswell looked away across the clearing with a puzzled frown. He had always regarded women as peculiar, but there was something radically wrong here. She was thinking of him—him instead of Soames.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said patiently. “I expect he has plenty to do without writing—plenty to do. Besides”—he turned with a sudden earnestness—“what is anything—anything that I can do here compared with what he is doing over there?”

Joyce did not answer. What could she say? That he, Creswell, would have found time to write under any circumstances? That it was not his fault, but his misfortune that he was not “over there,” too, and that he was paying for it doublefold? In short, that Creswell was worth three of Soames, anyhow? When is it possible for a woman to say what is in her mind? And so Joyce Helliard did not answer. She was sorry now that she had said so much.

He showed her "the place", as though she had not seen it from end to end a hundred times. The young pines were coming on, weren't they? First crop in another three months, and then—down with the overdraft! She followed his gaunt, restless figure between the rows, and watched the pleasure lighting his eyes when she made an admiring comment. She found that—"Clem would like to see that" pleased him most.

He even demonstrated for her benefit, and with child-like pride, the workings of the latest addition to the corrugated-iron humpy* on the top of the hill—a real live shower-bath, consisting of a riddled kerosene tin filled with water and hoisted by a rope and pulley.

"Can't you just see him wriggling and spluttering under it, after a hard day in the bush?" he demanded triumphantly.

Joyce admitted that she could, though at that particular moment she was paying more attention to the fact that Creswell's trousers were upheld with wire nails instead of buttons, and that his mouth had taken to twitching.

That night the dry spell broke. It began with rain that beat a welcome tattoo on the roof of Creswell's humpy.

"Good!" he muttered, and lay staring up at the ridge pole with a contented smile. It was just what the young pines wanted.

But what they did not want was precisely what the playful Queensland climate saw fit to give them during the next two hours. The clamour overhead broke into

*Cabin.

a deafening crescendo. The roof trembled and sagged as though under the assault of battering-rams. With his face pressed close to the window-pane, Creswell looked out through a sheet of falling water, and, by the fitful gleam of lightning, caught distorted glimpses of red earth churned to a morass, of thriving paw-paw trees beaten to a pulp. And this was on the hilltop. What of the young pines on the slope? He flung open the door and went outside. At the first impact he was beaten to his knees, so he crawled—crawled on hands and knees down the bed of a cataract that was the slope of the hill. He could see nothing, but he could feel, and he must know. Inaction was the hell of it!

Things jostled him and swept by in a turmoil of water. He wondered vaguely what they were. His wondering developed into a stubborn refusal to believe what they were, until his hand went out involuntarily and grasped an uprooted pineapple plant. Then he knew. There was an ever-growing dump of them at the bottom of the hill, and against this he sank exhausted.

He was aroused by brilliant sunshine and the derisive call of a "laughing jackass."* What could be more appropriate? Creswell laughed, too—a mirthless sound that came from the soul. The world was still in existence, then, the same old world of rolling red-earth hills, bush, and sunshine; only the puny works of man had passed. The young pines were no more. It was as though in a frenzy the fingers of some giant

*An Australian bird.

hand had descended on the fair face of the hillside and clawed it to ribbons.

Creswell rose slowly and plodded through ankle-deep mud to the humpy. There he methodically prepared breakfast, and an hour later had resumed operations on the refractory bloodwood stump with a crowbar.

It was so that Joyce found him when she dismounted at the edge of the clearing. One glimpse of the chaos on the hillside was enough; her glance returned to the dishevelled figure at work on the bloodwood stump, and a mist came into her eyes. She could not bring herself to speak when he came toward her.

"Nasty damp night," he said, with a wry smile, and proceeded to scrape the mud from his boots with a twig.

Involuntarily her hand went out.

"Bob," she said softly—"oh, Bob!"

He turned and looked into her tear-filled eyes, which caused him to look away again.

"More than half my fault," he jerked out. "Might have known that slope was a bit too steep. The other will be better—when it's cleared."

"It's not that, Bob—not the place. What does it matter compared with—with other things?"

He did not answer. Soames might have made things a bit clearer before he went away, Creswell reflected. It made it difficult to know just what to say to a woman with tears in her eyes. What did the place matter? Wasn't it clear enough that it meant everything to the two of them—a home, a future? That when Soames came back he, Creswell, would discreetly

remove himself, and that this, the little he could do for his partner, was all that had kept him going during the past nightmare months, all that spurred him even now to fresh endeavour? Evidently not. There was a hitch somewhere. He stared helplessly across the clearing.

Her voice seemed to be coming from a long way off, but he heard it. He distinctly heard her saying. “. . . It’s not the place, Bob; it’s you,” and the words caused his clasped hands to tighten their grip.

“I?” he demanded harshly. “What do you mean?”

“Can’t you see?” questioned Joyce. “Can’t you see that it isn’t right for you to go on and on like this—that no man can stand it?”

“Clem’s standing it,” grinned Creswell.

“Not without a rest,” she objected quietly—“not without a single break, alone in the bush, month after month, year after year. He at least has excitement, change, people to talk to—oh, all the things that a man can’t do without and remain——”

“Yes?”

“A man,” she ended desperately.

“Thanks,” said Creswell, staring at his boots.

“It’s the truth,” flashed Joyce. “Take a little—ever such a little—holiday. Come down to Nambye and stay with Father and me for a week. There’s tennis and—and a piano. Anything for a change.” She took hold of his arm and shook him gently. “Do, Bob—for me!”

Creswell shrank from her. Suddenly he was afraid, mortally afraid of himself. After all these months

and years of iron discipline, it had come to this! And what if some day this same discipline failed? Such a contingency had never presented itself before. The mere thought of it now frightened him into speech.

"Thanks," he muttered, a senseless smile twisting his lips. "But why all this trouble over me?"

He was aware that she moved away from him, but he dared not look round, not until he heard the beat of her pony's hoofs and caught a glint of white vanishing amongst the trees.

So in some way he had offended her. Perhaps it was as well. He walked slowly across the clearing and picked up the crowbar.

Then came the armistice, and not long afterward a telegram for Joyce. It was from Soames, and it invited her and Creswell to dinner at an hotel in Brisbane. She smiled in spite of herself—it was so exactly like Clem. But the smile died from her lips as she glanced toward the hills, and she went to Brisbane alone.

At the hotel an immaculate individual in khaki met her in the vestibule. It was Clem—Clem with such a prodigious difference that for a moment she was at a loss. But only for a moment. She soon found him to be the same old Clem, boyish of face and manner, care-free, irresponsible, skimming over the surface of life with his usual adroitness. He had changed in nothing but his clothes, she decided.

"Where's Bob?" he asked suddenly, as though his partner's absence had only just struck him.

"He's not well," said Joyce.

“Poor old beggar! Still taking life too seriously?”
She nodded.

“Why didn’t you write, Clem?”

Soames looked up from his soup and laughed.

“I should like to know how many times I meant to,” he said; “but something always came in the way. Besides, if I had, there would have been nothing to say but mud, shells, and again mud. You saw it all in the papers.”

“Yes,” said Joyce.

“But I can’t complain. Done pretty well, and the life does get a grip on you. I couldn’t do anything else now—somehow everything seems so small. All the same,” he added thoughtfully, “I should like to have seen old Bob.”

Joyce found herself staring unseeingly at one of his glittering buttons.

“Aren’t you going to see him?” she asked quietly.

“Don’t see how I can,” said Soames, crumbling the bread at the side of his plate. “I only came over in charge of a repatriated draft. I ought to sail tomorrow.”

“Then——” But Joyce stopped. The futility of what she was going to say to this man struck her dumb. Instead, she leant over the table, with one hand unconsciously extended on the cloth. “Clem,” she said, “I want you to listen.”

He looked up at that.

“Clem, you must see Bob.” Something in her voice startled Soames into attentive silence. “You must,” she repeated, with a defiant toss of the head; “you owe

it to him. Oh, I know what you mean," she went on hurriedly; "everything's so small—it must be, after all you've seen and done. 'The place' means nothing to you now, but it does to Bob. It's—it's his life. You don't know what he has been through for you."

"For me?"

"Yes. I know it must sound comic, but it's the truth. I can't explain. You must see, then perhaps you'll understand."

Soames was as perturbed as he ever allowed himself to be. In rather a bewildered state of mind he left his servant to pack, and rushed up to Nambye the next morning in the fastest car Brisbane had to offer. He left it in the village and trudged alone up a red-earth bush track until he came to a small square clearing in the surrounding sea of eucalyptus trees.

At the slip rails his eye encountered in turn a corrugated iron humpy on the hilltop, a few tree stumps, and a red-earth slope with what appeared to be a rubbish heap at the bottom. This was "the place" as Soames saw it.

At the crest of the hill he caught sight of an exceedingly tall thin man at work on a tree stump, with a crowbar. This was his partner.

"Hullo, old man!" he called.

Creswell turned, stood for a moment with drooping jaw, then came shambling toward him. It was so that the partners met after three years.

During the next hour it was given Soames to understand. He marvelled at the destruction of five stumps per week. He exonerated his partner from all blame

for the rubbish heap at the bottom of the hill, and waxed equally eloquent over the kerosene-tin shower bath and the fact that the bank overdraft was stationary. He even ate with apparent relish the damper and salt beef that awaited them in the humpy. But where he surpassed himself was after the meal, when he went over to the window and stood looking out, wondering how he was going to tell his partner that he had precisely two hours in which to catch the steamer.

“’Pon my word, old man,” he said, taking the deep breath of the diver before the plunge, “you’ve done such wonders with ‘the place’ I hate leaving it.”

There followed an awkward silence, so he hurried on—

“The new slope’s going to be a topper, I can see that; and, as you say, the other will do for oranges—er—but the fact is, I’ve found the only job I’m any good at, and—well, I must be getting on with it.”

He turned. Creswell was standing beside the table, with set mouth and something in his eyes that Soames was at a loss to understand.

“What d’you mean?” he said shortly.

Soames had faced a variety of things in the past three years, but it is doubtful if any of them had been more objectionable than this. He squared his shoulders to it.

“I mean that soldiering has got me for keeps, Bob,” he said. “I believe it’s what I was made for—I can’t see anything else. I never was any good here. I never should be; you know that.”

“You mean you don’t want ‘the place’?” said Creswell.

Soames nodded and took refuge in pacing the floor.

"You can buy me out, or something," he suggested airily. "It's hard to explain, but——"

"You needn't trouble," Creswell interposed. "I understand perfectly. But—what about Joyce?"

Soames stopped in his stride.

"Joyce?" he repeated.

"Yes," said Creswell doggedly. "Perhaps you've forgotten what your last words to me were?"

Soames remained motionless, thinking furiously. Then quite suddenly he remembered. He saw it all. He could have laughed, but for Creswell's eyes. He crossed the room to this preposterous partner of his and laid a hand on either of his shoulders.

"Bob," he said, "as well as being the soundest man I ever knew, you're an old fool. No, I haven't forgotten. 'The place' is all right, but you haven't looked after Joyce as I meant you to. Don't you think you'd better be getting on with it?"

A cloud of red dust marked the passage of Soames's car toward Brisbane. Creswell turned back into the humpy, paused for a while in deep thought, then proceeded with the utmost deliberation to bathe, shave, and dress. This done, he passed down the bush track to Nambye, and found Joyce alone, in a hammock on the veranda.

“—HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES”

IT IS a disconcerting thing, when dressing for dinner, to find that someone has been watching you through the entire process. Mr. Mumpus jerked the absurd little curtain over as much of the open porthole as it would cover, and fell to doing the same thing with his hair.

As a matter of fact, and although he would not have had it known for worlds, Mr. Mumpus was not in the habit of dressing for dinner at all. He was a hack accountant, if you know what that means, and when his day's work of mental acrobatics was done, he was only too pleased to climb into a moth-eaten dressing gown and abandon himself to the production of uncertain noises on the clarionet, this being his only means of expressing what was in him apart from a mind like a ready-reckoner.

But on the S. S. *Wykeba* it was a different matter. He was on holiday, the first clean breakaway in his routine-sodden life. He had fallen for the cunningly devised announcements of the Phipps Gilroy Navigation Co. anent Island travel. He was “revelling in the romance of ‘the Islands of the Blest’; witnessing the strange customs of a picturesque people; casting off for thirty days (and incidentally thirty pounds) the shackles of present-day civilization, and harking back to un-

trammelled Nature.” Or so the announcements read, and who was he to argue the point? Had not the *Wykeba* touched at three separate South Sea Islands for not less than twelve hours apiece? Had he not witnessed a *hula* or a *meke* or whatever they called it, nauseated himself in an effort to drink *kava*, and bought a war club (manufactured in Sydney), and a rush basket of coral fronds that he had no notion what to do with when he had it?

And now the *Wykeba* was alongside Mahiti wharf. Mr. Mumpus had looked it all up. Mahiti was a French



protectorate with twelve thousand inhabitants. Its chief exports were copra, pearl shell, and vanilla, and he was there for twelve mortal hours. What was to be done? According to schedule, and the dictates of an intensely methodical mind, he should go ashore and “revel, etc.,” but for the first time on this epoch-making tour his spirit rebelled. He refused to do any one of those things that Messrs. Phipps Gilroy had mapped out for him. Instead, he would take his clarinet into the music room and get the rather dull little person in apparently eternal mauve “semi-evening” to play his accompaniments. She would do it. She seemed of the type that will do anything for anybody, and consequently receives little or no attention herself.

With this object in view, Mr. Mumpus pieced together his beloved instrument and tested the reed by playing the opening movement of a cavatina. During

the pause that followed, a faint clapping of hands and a whispered "encore" came from behind the porthole curtain, and with a cluck of annoyance he drew it aside.

"Go away," he ordered severely. "D'you hear? Go——" and there he stopped.

There was something in the little picture he had disclosed that gave him pause. It was beautiful, far too beautiful to dispel peremptorily. The porthole was level with the wharf, and as though in a dull gold frame an elfin figure reclined, its soft brown eyes fastened on Mr. Mumpus in a child-like stare of wonderment; while from out the background of velvet darkness came a medley of tropic scent and sound—frangipane, copra, and sandalwood, the ceaseless chatter of crickets, the patter of naked feet, snatches of song.

"What you want?" demanded Mr. Mumpus with a valiant effort at *bêche-de mer*.

The elf nodded at the instrument in his hand.

"Me like 'im," it solemnly averred.

"You do, eh?" A whim seized Mr. Mumpus. He knelt on the settee, and trilled a stanza from the "Mikado." "How's that?"

The elf wriggled its approval. Mr. Mumpus experienced the acute satisfaction of holding an audience in his hand.

"Ze 'Marseillaise'!" it ordered, beating its small brown fists on the planking of the wharf. "Ze 'Marseillaise'! 'E is ze day of France!"

And Mr. Mumpus found himself obliging with the utmost zest.

“Papa belong me ’im Frenchman,” explained the elf with a touch of pride when it was done.

“Indeed?” murmured Mr. Mumpus. “And your mother?”

“Mama belong me Mahitienne. Them finish.”

“Finish?”

“*Mais oui*, pouf! like zat.”

“Indeed,” repeated Mr. Mumpus sympathetically and for lack of something better to say. He still knelt on the settee, and contemplated at a range of perhaps twelve inches this diverting work of nature. It was apparently perfect. The hair was blue-black and of amazing length and richness, the teeth white and even, the skin a dull gold, the eyes—there was something in the eyes that vaguely disturbed Mr. Mumpus. They were essentially not of his world, but of another, mysterious, alluring, out there through the porthole. They caused him temporarily to overlook the fact that he was a hack accountant, much less an exemplary tourist already late for an exemplary dinner of frozen meats and tinned asparagus. For the first time in his life Mr. Mumpus obeyed impulse without question. Mechanically slipping a section of clarinet into either pocket of his “ready to wear” dinner jacket, he insinuated his meagre person through the porthole, and stood looking down on the elf.

“Now!” he cried with challenging abandon.

She took him to a shop across the way, and pointed out a perfectly preposterous mask of bucolic cheeks and elongated nose.

“I’m all right,” she said judicially, and Mr. Mumpus

bought it. What was more, he put it on, to the intense delight of his companion, and they set off into the town, as strangely assorted a pair as ever Mahitian moon has smiled upon.

Unquestionably it was the day of France. A band played somewhere. The flamboyant-bordered streets seethed with heterogeneous humanity—stolid Anglo-Saxons, vivacious Latins, Chinamen, Kanakas, and a blending of each too subtle for analysis. Carnival was in the air. No one cared, least of all Mr. Mumpus. No one knew him. He did not know himself. A solid handful of confetti caught him in the nape of the neck, and slowly worked its passage down his spine. A paper tongue, full three feet long, shot from out the laughing face of a passer-by and smote him on his false nose. This was too much. He bought a bag full of miniature bombs that exploded on impact, and used them with telling effect.

At a crowded café he ordered *vin rouge* and an omelette with the air of an habitu , and derived infinite satisfaction from watching a sprinkling of his fellow passengers looking bored and a trifle foolish in their bizarre surroundings. There was the ponderous lady in blue who at one time had no doubt possessed a voice, and her lap husband; also the young couple that had such an annoying habit of getting under foot on the boat deck of an evening; the Yankee inventor of an entirely new abortion in safety razors, and a successful composer who rendered life in the music-room unendurable with luscious ballads. They were all so obviously what they were, whereas he, Mr. Mumpus, behind his impenetra-

ble incognito of vermilion pasteboard, might be anything—anything! Was he not sitting cheek by jowl with such romantic figures as schooner skippers, shellers, planters, adventurers? Their very conversation, heard in snatches and in conjunction with a second glass of *vin rouge*, held a mystery all its own—

“. . . too deep for skin diving . . . yes, and sharks . . . hear they've got compressors, up in the Straits . . . forty-two fathoms, what d'you say to that?”

Or—

“We could get a court in behind the old vanilla.”

“Wouldn't be enough run-back.”

“Chop down vanilla. Must have a court . . . put the boys onto it on Monday . . . play you for that *Passing Show* record on Wednesday.”

“That's a go.”

“Here's how!”

“Cheer-o.”

Or—

“Who's the gink in the proboscis?”

“Search me, but the kid's got him, anyway.”

“May be one of them.”

“Don't think so; Pete's watching 'em like a cat.”

“But I thought Pete. . . .”

“Out a week ago . . . kid can't shake him off . . . too bad, but there you are. . . .”

It was at this juncture that the elf seized Mr. Mumpus by the hand and literally dragged him into the street.

“Too much 'ot,” she contrived to explain as they

wormed a passage through the throng, yet it occurred to Mr. Mumpus that her hand was cold, deathly cold. "Ah Wong all right," she added, and steered him into a fetid haunt of fan tan and "dope" where they found a vacant corner of a battered settee.

Exactly why they had come there, Mr. Mumpus never discovered, for it seemed that he had no sooner taken in his surroundings of smoke, a Chinese banker by murky lamplight, wrangling humanity and the staccato click of counters, and was fairly launched on coffee, liqueur, and a freckled cigarette, than he was for some obscure reason wafted out of the place and across the street to the *Palais de Dance*.

The transition was a trifle sudden, but then so was the elf, and somehow it seemed to fit in with the generally kaleidoscopic nature of the evening's happenings. He could not play fan tan, neither could he dance, yet he found his arms encircling the elf, and his feet moving more or less rhythmically to the strains of a two-piece orchestra. In fact, it seemed to him that he was doing rather well. This, then, was dancing. He had no idea it was so simple—merely a matter of one two, and one two, so that it came as all the more of a shock when he found himself on a moonlit beach. They had evidently danced clean through the *Palais*, and out of the open door at the far end. The elf was rearranging his "made-up" tie that had an uncanny knack of standing on end. He looked into her upturned face, and fancied that he saw fear in her eyes.

But there was no time to make sure of anything in this fantasia that had caught him up like a whirlwind.

They were off again, hand in hand along the hard wet sand, skirting the festoons of silver ripples, and sending the hermit crabs scuttling and crackling to their burrows. There was no sense to it all, no sense whatever, he reflected, and thanking Providence on that account, joined his raucous barytone to the elf's clear contralto as she chanted a *meke* to the moon.

At a place where coral mushrooms reared fantastic shapes out of the still waters of the lagoon, they cried a halt and, sitting side by side in the sand, Mr. Mumpus “by request” boomed the fine, round notes of his clarinet into the night, while the elf listened enthralled. She had never met such a man. Indeed, it was extremely doubtful if she would ever meet such another.

To Mr. Mumpus it seemed that he had never produced such exquisite sound. “Damon,” “O Santissima,” Raff's “Cavatina,” floated in turn over the lagoon, and were lost in the distant thunder of surf on the barrier reef. He was as lost to the world as the great beyond.

He did not even notice when the elf left his side, and went to meet the slinking shadow of a man that approached them along the edge of the beach.

She stood before him when they met, her two hands at her breast, as though to ward off a blow.

“Well?” he said in French.

She did not answer.

“Well?” he repeated and, taking her two shoulders in his powerful hands, crushed them as in a vise.

“He is so small,” pleaded the elf, her face twisted with pain, “and—and he has nothing—nothing—ah!”

“Then why. . . .”

“I do not know,” wailed the elf. “Pete, *mon Dieu*, stop! I do not know, unless—unless it was *that*.” A note hung on the still air, a reed-like note that swelled and faded, and died.

The man turned his head in the direction of a grotesque figure squatting on the sand in the moonlight. Its profile was one of bloated cheeks and absurdly misshapen nose, and it swayed in rhythmic ecstasy.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Mumpus was in the throes of his favourite serenade, and nothing short of an earthquake would have disturbed him.

“Is he mad, or drunk, or both?” demanded the man.

“I do not know,” repeated the elf dully, “but he is so small, so helpless—Pete!”

He flung her aside and took two strides toward the squatting figure, but only two. The elf’s hand shot out and caught him by the ankle, spilling him to the ground, and a wild-cat, not an elf, was on his shoulders, raining blow after blow with a coral rock upon his head.

He did not move. The elf stood back panting, and viewed her handiwork. Still he did not move. Then she turned and ran, blindly, madly along the beach, a flitting figure in the moonlight that dwindled, and faded, and was lost amongst the palm groves.

And Mr. Mumpus finished his favourite serenade, and looked about him. The elf was gone. The spell was broken . . . perhaps it was as well. He consulted his watch, the first sign of rational thought, and clucked in horror at the hour. It was nearly four . . . and the *Wykeba* sailed at dawn . . . and there

was a hint of pallor on the horizon! He scrambled to his feet and hurried along the beach, passing within a few yards of an oblong shadow on the sand, until the dark bulk of the *Wykeba* loomed ahead.

But it was not until he emerged into the searching rays of the bunch-light at the head of the gangway, and the deck hand had at first stared, then grinned, that he remembered his incognito and snatched it from his face. He hung it on the same hook as the rush basket of coral fronds, lay smiling through the port-hole for a space, and slept.

THE MASCOT

HE SAT in the sand, staring over his knees at a tiny island that danced in the shimmering heat haze. He was not beautiful, but then few mascots are. His weak eyes were so puckered against the glare as to be almost invisible; he was over-fat for his years, which could not have been more than thirty, and there was a vacuousness in his fixed gaze and drooping jaw that was not healthy. He was trying to think.

Now, a mascot has no business to think; it is not expected of him. All he has to do is to sit back and look wise, and accept what comes his way with becoming dignity. That is why the career so exactly suited James Eustace Talbot.

It is not a joke. It is a serious business. Just as a warship has its bulldog, a regiment its goat, or an eminently respectable family its black cat, so a South Sea tribe has its white man, when it can get him. If he is of the right variety, he gives little trouble. His wants are few—a grass house, sufficient to eat and drink, and an unlimited space of time in which to do nothing. His habits are gentle, and he is, as a rule, easily domesticated. Then there is always the mysterious element of good fortune attaching to him.

It is as pleasant to render one's neighbours envious in

the South Pacific as elsewhere. For instance, if a hurricane misses your particular district by half a mile, you will say with an air of quiet superiority: "We have a white man," which will at once explain the phenomenon and sow the necessary seeds of covetousness in the breasts of your hearers. If, upon the other hand, the hurricane happens to blow your possession into the sea, you will say: "We have a white man, otherwise we should undoubtedly have been blown into the sea also." And if you are blown into the sea—well, that ends the matter, anyway. A mascot is a useful thing to have about the place.

And, as has been said, it suited Talbot. Out of a ruthless world he had come—a world with which he was utterly unsuited to do battle. The younger son of a younger son, brought up in an atmosphere of hounds and lawn tennis, he had one day awakened to the distressing fact that it would be necessary for him to work for a living. He had noticed that some people did it, and it looked easy, if uninteresting. For the most part it appeared to consist in departing by a certain train to the City, writing a few letters at a roll-top desk or dictating to a stenographer, and returning by a certain other train, whereby, and in time, one accumulated sufficient pelf to discontinue the process.

Talbot did it. He did it for over a month, and at the end of that time made his second illuminating discovery—namely that, as far as he was concerned, the thing was impossible. There was not that in his head which can be bartered for sufficient food, clothes, and lodging.

What of his hands? About this time he was fond

of saying: "It's no use. I wasn't built for an office. I'd sooner go out with a pick and shovel." And he continued to say it until some unfeeling person made the inevitable rejoinder: "Then why not *go* out with a pick and shovel?"

Talbot did it. He went to Canada and did it for nearly two months—"it" consisting of digging post-holes two feet deep by a foot square from sunrise to sunset, at five cents a hole. As the field he was helping to construct was to be ten miles in circumference, and the post-holes were four yards apart, and his record was twenty in the day, his mind, when not disturbed by bruised hands or mosquito bites, was occupied with the mathematical problem of how long it would take to finish the field, and what he would have earned by the time it *was* finished.

He never reached a solution, because by the end of the second month he was convinced that one more day of post-hole digging would result in his mental collapse.

"Manual labour," he told himself at this time, "is not for those of active mind. For them it is nothing short of torture. I would sooner——" And there his soliloquy faded into silence because when both head and hand fail there is not much left for a man.

Under the circumstances some would have taken to drink, or married for money, or even worse, and it is all to Talbot's credit that he did none of these things. Instead, he ricocheted over the world like a bagatelle-ball in search of its abiding-place, and finding it on the island of Kau, in the South Pacific Ocean, promptly sank to rest with a "click" of unutterable relief.

He did not know that he was a mascot. All he knew, or cared to know, was that, after long and painful experience, he had discovered an Elysium where it was possible to live without money and without toil, where his mere presence gave pleasure to others and harmed no one—except himself. This last in parenthesis, for Talbot's mental and physical decline had been so gradual that he was unaware of it. He had grown a beard, but then many do in the tropics; it saves trouble. He was fatter than when he came to Kau, which only showed that the place agreed with him. His heart appeared to indulge in acrobatics on occasion, but whose does not? As for memory and powers of concentration, he never pretended to have either, so they were no loss. And his eyes and knees? Well, that was *kava*. He frankly admitted it, and quite often after an apparently inanimate object had performed some impossible evolution for his benefit, or he stumbled over something which on investigation was found not to exist, he told himself that he must "let up on the *kava* a bit."

No, he had been in the Islands a year—or was it two?—and, on the whole, he had nothing to reproach himself with. Who can say more?

And now he was on the verge of spoiling it all by trying to think. And it was an island, this toy island dancing in the heat haze, that was responsible. It was called Onioti; Talbot knew that. Also it was *tabu*, but in a land where for no apparent reason every other rock, glade, and sand spit is "sacred," the circumstance had not interested him. All that troubled Talbot was that

in the vicinity of that island he had either heard something that was physically incapable of emanating from such a spot, or his hearing, as well as his sight, was beginning to play him false.

Either contingency was sufficiently alarming to set the rusty mechanism of his mind in motion. He remembered being paddled out to sea by his faithful attendant for the purpose of fishing, and he remembered that, while the canoe lay rising and falling on a gentle swell, he had heard a voice, a high-pitched, unlovely voice, singing something that at the time struck him as unusual, and had rung in his head with maddening persistence ever since. It was one of those great, simple airs that live, that bring back memories crowding, crowding—of cool rains, and lights reflected in wet pavements; of theatre porticos and hurrying crowds; of—of Gilbert and Sullivan opera; of—of “The Yeomen of the Guard”; that was it—a chorus from “The Yeomen of the Guard!” Talbot wriggled in the sand with sheer pleasure at having recalled it. Who could say he had no memory? And who could explain such a song proceeding from Onioti?

Talbot struggled to his feet without the customary helping hand of his attendant, and shambled along the sun-drenched beach. Joni saw him from afar, and came running in alarm with the huge green-lined umbrella specially imported for the mascot's benefit.

“I will go fishing,” said Talbot.

Joni launched the canoe in silence. There was no accounting for the whims of mascots, and they must be humoured. If it were not for the kudos attaching to

the post of attendant, he could have often wished that he were of the common people.

“We will go where we went yesterday,” he was instructed now, and scarcely were the lines overboard in the lee of Onioti than his charge burst into song. The mascot’s voice was not beautiful—it sounded harsh and discordant to Joni—but it pleased the singer, which was the main point.

Suddenly it ceased, and the sun-bathed silence closed down. Then, as though a reluctant echo had been awakened on the palm-fringed island, an answer came faint but clear over the water.

Joni dipped his paddle, and the canoe moved slowly seaward.

“Joni!” It was the mascot, leaning forward, tense of face, trembling like a croton in the wind. “Joni, I want to land on Onioti.”

“Onioti *tabu*,” muttered Joni, and bent to the paddle.

“Joni, what you take to land me on Onioti?” The mascot’s voice had risen in a querulous crescendo. “I give you plenty ’bacco, a knife—wisiki!”

Never for a moment did the rhythmical plash of the paddle falter.

“Joni——”

The attendant had more than half expected it. The mascot was upon him, a large, soft, ineffectual man, whom he forced gently back on to his pile of mats in the bottom of the canoe like a refractory infant.

“Onioti *tabu*,” he repeated soothingly, and resumed his paddling. All was well. One must expect these

sudden outbursts of passion. The mascot would have forgotten all about it by the morrow.

But there Joni was wrong.

During the bout of fever that inevitably followed the undue excitement in the canoe, Onioti danced before Talbot's eyes to the accompaniment of "The Yeomen of the Guard" chorus, and it was a changed mascot that ultimately rose from its mat-strewn bed and tottered into the sunshine.

Naked, pot-bellied children tugged at his *sulu* "for luck," as they had been taught, and the elders assembled in their doorways to congratulate him on his recovery; but he made no response. He was still thinking.

The *Turaga* (Prince) of Kau, who suffered from over-education at a distant seat of learning, found his mascot dull.

"Fever is the deuce, old chap," he observed, tugging a horny foot to his groin.

"It is," said Talbot.

"It takes it out of a fellow—what?"

"It does," Talbot admitted.

"And as for quinine," continued the *Turaga* conversationally, "it causes tunes to play in the head."

This also was the truth, as Talbot knew.

"Why is Onioti *tabu*?" he asked suddenly.

The *Turaga's* lethargic gaze turned in Talbot's direction with unexpected swiftness, then ascended to the sinnet-bound rafters of the palace roof.

"Why is anywhere *tabu*?" he suggested mildly.

"That's what I was wondering," said Talbot.

The *Turaga* smiled indulgently. There was no accounting for a mascot's wonderings.

"Well," he explained patiently, "we have some queer beliefs, 'relics of barbarism' they called them at college, but they—they survive; that is the word."

"I see," said Talbot.

"They survive," repeated the *Turaga*, moistening his lips as though over a choice morsel, "and one of them is that spirits sometimes come back to see that all is well with the place where their bodies lie. We like to leave them to it, so we make the place *tabu*. Quaint, is it not, old chap?"

"Very," said Talbot. "Then there is someone buried on Onioti?"

The *Turaga's* gaze left the palace rafters and fell on Talbot.

"Yes," he said, "there is, as you say, someone buried on Onioti. Also," he added irrelevantly, "there is a council to-night."

"I will be there," said Talbot magnificently, but rather marred his exit by stumbling over nothing whatever in the doorway.

The *Turaga* of Kau grinned and wagged his head. Oh, but they were amusing, these mascots!

The council dragged out its weary length. Talbot sat next to the *Turaga*, as was the custom, and mechanically sampled each cocoanut shell of *kava* as it was dipped from the carved *tanoa* bowl. This was necessary, because it was the time for planting *taro*, and all men know that, unless the ceremony is faithfully carried out, the crop will be a failure.

Then they talked. Lord, how they talked! And Talbot usually slept. Propped against one of the supporting posts, he slept the sleep of *kava* and inanition, while men expounded with a wealth of picturesque detail what really remarkable fellows they were, and their ancestors before them; while girls danced the history of Kau from the dark ages to the present day of enlightenment; while they ate pig roasted whole in banana leaves and unbelievable quantities of turtle.

But for some reason he did not sleep on this occasion. He sat looking on and thinking, and, when it was over, lay on his mat-strewn bed, staring wide-eyed but unseeing at a chink in the reed wall, through which a solitary and monstrous star winked invitingly.

The attendant, prone across the doorway, slept the sleep of repletion, together with the rest of Kau, and knew nothing of what passed. If he had seen, it is doubtful if he would have believed, for he was ignorant of the amazing, if temporary, effects on mascots of large quantities of neat spirit.

Talbot made three successful journeys through the enlarged chink in the reed wall, and finally launched the canoe on a sea of inky shadows. There was a faint off-shore breeze, so he hoisted the lugsail and sailed for Onioti, a fairy islet of quivering palm fronds in the starlight.

The canoe's prow kissed the sand, and Talbot scrambled almost nimbly ashore. He was feeling extraordinarily buoyant. If only it would last! He patted the pocket of his disreputable duck jacket to make sure the elixir was still there, and with renewed confidence

followed a narrow but well-defined track leading from the beach through a tangle of tropical vegetation to the door of a native hut. An old man lay sleeping peacefully on his bamboo pillow across the threshold, a very old man by the ease with which Talbot rendered him innocuous. Then he went inside and struck a match.

By its flickering light he saw enough to make him thankful when it went out. Extraordinary noises were proceeding from a pile of mats in a far corner.

"Speak English," snapped Talbot. "I heard you singing Gilbert and Sullivan yesterday, so you can't kid me."

"Who the devil are you?" issued out of the darkness with startling clarity.

"That's better," said Talbot.

"Where's Tomati?" wailed the voice.

"Tomati is sleeping rather more soundly than usual," said Talbot.

"You've killed him?"

"I don't think so."

"What do you want?"

"You," said Talbot. "Help yourself."

The elixir passed into the darkness and did not return. Talbot involuntarily wiped the back of his hand on his *sulu*. Something had touched it—something that should have felt like another hand.

"What are you doing on Kau?" inquired the unknown, after a liquid pause.

"Nothing," said Talbot.

"You mean——"

"Just that."

There followed a cackle of laughter.

"This is really quite amusing," chuckled the unknown; "the present—er—incumbent of Kau compares notes with his predecessor. Ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh," snapped Talbot. "If you laugh, I'll—I'll finish the business."

"So that's the way it's taken you?"

"Yes; I've been thinking."

"You shouldn't."

"I know, but I have and——" Talbot broke off and shuddered.

"Great mistake," continued the unknown, who showed signs of becoming garrulous. "All right if you don't think. They look after you. But you should have been with the old man. Never saw much of the *Turaga*—struck me as insipid. Those were the days! Long-pig in my day, long-pig——"

"Can you walk?" said Talbot.

"No. Why?"

"I was wondering how to get you down to the canoe."

"Canoe? What d'you mean?"

"I mean we're going to get out of here."

"I don't want to go."

"I can't help that," said Talbot.

"What's the use? You haven't seen me by daylight. Besides——"

"I can't help that, either. I'm not going to leave you here."

A noise proceeded from the corner—a noise that in some respects resembled weeping.

"It'll kill me! It's madness! I tell you it'll kill me."

“That’s another thing I can’t help,” said Talbot, between clenched teeth, and, grasping the topmost mat, pulled with all his strength.

It was surprising how easily it followed him over the floor, down the bush track and on to the beach. But there was not much on it. What there was he contrived to bundle into the canoe, and with the dawn Kau was a blue smudge on the eastern horizon.

An outrigger is hard to beat “full-and-by,” and the wind held as only a “trade” knows how. For a day and a night and part of yet another day Talbot sat at the steering paddle, speeding he knew not whither, provided it was away from Kau. And during that time, and for many days to follow, he was a man possessed. A single motive shone before him like a flame. It was all that gave him strength.

The unknown gave little trouble—he was incapable of it—and except when supplying him with food and drink, Talbot kept his eyes averted. He found it best. Finally, and with the lashed steering paddle still under his arm, he slept.

He was awakened by sounds coming from the bow of the canoe. The unknown was sitting bolt upright, his sightless eyes staring fixedly at the moon.

“I say,” he muttered—“I say!”

“Yes?” answered Talbot.

“I’m dying!” announced the unknown.

Talbot did not answer. What was there to be said in face of this perfectly natural, if belated, occurrence?

“I tell you I’m dying,” repeated the unknown, as though hurt that the information had not created a

deeper impression. "Said it would kill me," he added bitterly. "What was the use?"

"Is there anything I can do?" he asked. "Any message. . . ."

"Message!" repeated the unknown and laughed, and, laughing, died.

At the first blaze of dawn Talbot looked over the side, down, down into the crystal-clear depths.

"It's clean," he said aloud. And even as he spoke, a dark shadow passed under the canoe and was gone.

On the starboard bow there was land, big land, by the cloud-capped hills, range on range. Talbot headed for it, and in a few hours landed on a powdered coral beach. He buried the unknown above high-water mark, and plunged into the bush.

He walked, and continued to walk. It seemed very desirable to keep moving, until he could sleep from sheer exhaustion. He lived on fish—caught by hand in the rock-pools—crabs, shell fish, and wild fruit. He trudged like an automaton through mangrove swamps and blazing sand and primeval jungle. He did this for two weeks, and still lived. He was a man who knew what he wanted, and was after it, that was all. He had landed on Tannau, though he had no notion of it, and he had walked and slept and eaten his way half round the island before he came to the Company sugar estates at Laneka.

For a while he stood at the edge of the clearing, a lean, dishevelled figure, his *sulu* in ribbons, his shirt little better. He was dazed. He must get used to seeing alert white men in pith helmets, hurrying about

their affairs, lines of neat white bungalows with mosquito doors, and mammoth sheds of throbbing machinery. He squatted native fashion in the sand, watching it all with an awful loneliness in his soul.

He marked the superintendent's bungalow on the hill, and when night fell made his way toward it. A yellow, homely light filtered through the drawn blinds. The superintendent was smoking an after-dinner cigar on the veranda.

"What do you want?" he demanded, not unkindly, when the first shock of the encounter had passed.

"Work," said James Eustace Talbot.

THE HABIT OF THE SEA

"IT'S Herriott!" exclaimed someone with binoculars to his eyes.

"Of course it is," was the prompt rejoinder. "Herriott doesn't let others see to that sort of thing—in a race. She's pitching, too, by the look of it."

The wide terrace and green lawns of a Sydney yacht club were thronged with an enthusiastic multitude and every eye was on *Stella*, the leader in the race for the challenge cup. Something was amiss with her gaff topsail. It fluttered impotently while every other sail strained and bellied to a stiff nor'easter.

Then a pigmy figure was seen to creep for'ard to the mast, up it by the hoops to the shrouds, and still up and outward along the gaff. Twice it paused, clinging like a fly to the jolting, swaying spar as the yacht buried her aquiline nose in the muss of a lumpy sea. It reached the peak, a glinting white speck against the intense blue background of the sky, there was a brief struggle that could be better imagined than seen by the spectators, and the topsail was sheeted home, true and clean as a piece of cardboard.

A murmur of discreet applause went up from the club grounds. While jibing at the last mark, *Stella's* jack-yard had fouled the peak halyards, and Herriott had cleared it. The race was his.

Indeed, it would be difficult to mention anything that

was not Jack Herriott's. Abounding health, sufficient means, and a charming wife were his, not to mention a seeming inability to do anything otherwise than brilliantly.

A blond and smiling giant, picturesquely dishevelled, he came ashore in one of the launches, to be inundated by members and friends. They congratulated him on winning the cup, but no mention was made of his feat in clearing the jackyard under sail. That was no more than a piece of ordinary good seamanship that would be expected from a man like Herriott, and he knew his kind far too well to refer to it himself.

Behind him, and in almost glaring contrast as they threaded their way up the lawn, limped Tony Landon, Herriott's mate on the *Stella*, and oldest friend. Physically he was sufficiently unattractive to be remarkable rather than insignificant, and the wound in his foot, received in France, had not added to his charm. Also a certain *gaucherie* made him anything but a social ornament, but in his good-natured, open-hearted way Herriott had clung to his old friend even after marriage, which was admitted to be a trifle unusual.

Stella Herriott met her husband on the terrace, smiled her congratulations, and allowed him to pass on into the club, where he sprawled at length in a deep leather chair and listened to divergent views on the race with a sufficient showing of boredom.

"Splendid, wasn't it?" said Landon, during a brief moment with Stella at the end of the terrace.

She nodded and smiled. "And you," she added swiftly.

"I?" Landon's unlovely face creased into a frown of perplexity.

"You were at the wheel while he was aloft, weren't you?"

"Oh, that!"

"Yes," said Stella gravely. "You'll dine to-night?"

Landon inclined his head and retreated precipitately before the onrush of a nautical dowager. As a matter of fact, he needed no invitation to the Herriotts'. His status as a friend of the family was of the "dropping in" variety—which made it all the more difficult to keep away.

In the lounge hall he found Herriott contemplating the cup he had won that afternoon.

"Conning the spoils, eh?" Landon commented.

Herriott turned and smiled. "Yes," he said, "and thinking."

"Mistake," grunted Landon.

"As a rule, perhaps, but not this time." Herriott's eyes shone with enthusiasm. He held aloft the cup. "This empty bauble has filled me with horrid ambition——"

"*America* Cup or anything like that?"

"Something as far from cups as I can get. I'm sick of 'em."

Landon nodded.

"And of racing, and racing machines, and white flannels, and club dinners, and claptrap. I want the sea."

"Rather a large order, isn't it?"

"You ought to know."

Landon did know. There were few things he had not done in a somewhat hectic youth, from brass polishing to sailing before the mast.

"I've never had a chance really to get out," complained Herriott—"family and that sort of thing—but I'm going to, now, that's all. Stella agrees that it would do us both good."

"Both?"

"Yes, you don't imagine she'd be left out of anything like that, do you?"

Landon did not answer.

"I don't believe Lan approves," Herriott communicated to his wife in mock confidence during dinner. "Thinks the sea's altogether too much for us. We'll teach him!"

And they did over coffee in the lounge.

"Elucidate the mystery," suggested Landon, stirring his cup thoughtfully.

"Certainly," beamed Herriott. "Our idea is no paid hands, salt junk, four hours on and eight off, and a passage and perhaps a bucketing in a boat, instead of a slithering match in a racing machine."

"Where to?"

"The Islands, for choice."

"I see," said Landon, after a pause.

"Drat the man!" Herriott broke out, with a characteristic touch of impatience. "What's the matter? Think Stella's not up to it?"

Landon's slow glance travelled from his coffee cup to the delicate profile of the woman at his side.

"Because I may tell you she's the best hand I ever

had aboard," Herriott defended loyally. "If you think the briny's too much for Stella, you ought to have been with us in the sailing dinghy when——"

"I wasn't thinking anything of the sort," said Landon quietly.

"Then perhaps you're frightened of *me*," suggested Herriott, with an incredulous but slightly nettled laugh.

Landon laughed also. The occasion called for it. Stella saw fit to come to the rescue.

"When you've quite done discussing me like a pound of pork," she said, "may I suggest that we're giving poor Lan rather an uncomfortable evening?"

"I hope so," grinned Herriott.

"And do you expect him to enthuse over anything? Because I don't."

"He needn't," complained Herriott; "but that's no reason why he should sit like an owl when his skipper—his skipper, mark you—suggests getting out of sight of the club house for once."

"And all this," sighed Landon resignedly, "because I don't leap to my feet and wave my arms in ecstasy at the notion of you good people facing salt junk for a month!"

"Then you'll come?"

"I?"

"Listen to him!" wailed Herriott. "He's just tumbled to it that he's wanted."

Landon stared at his injured foot after a fashion of his. "As to navigation," he suggested irrelevantly, "my mathematics are the memory of an ugly dream these days. How are yours?"

“Worse. I thought of taking old Owen. He has a yachting ticket, and juggling with sights and figures is about all he’s fit for.”

Landon stirred in his chair, then rose abruptly. “All right,” he said, “I’ll go—I mean——”

“We know what you mean,” laughed Herriott—“that you will be delighted to accompany my wife and myself on a unique cruise to the Islands.”

“Something like that,” said Landon. “Good-night.”

When he had gone, Herriott fell to discussing plans with the ardour of a schoolboy. He was intense, virile, over anything that took his fancy, and it was so that Stella loved to see him. They had been married a contented year, and it was their mutual taste for yachting that had brought them together. Stella would never forget that. Born of seafaring stock, and reared within sight and sound of the Pacific’s infinite moods, her own love of the sea and ships was innate. Unconsciously, perhaps, her standards were set by them. There are some women like that.

“There’s no fathoming old Lan,” Herriott called through to her from the dressing room that night. “I wonder if we’re dragging him into this thing against his will?”

“I don’t think any one could do that,” she answered.

“I suppose not, but——” The rest was smothered in a yawn, and Herriott fell to whistling a chanty between his teeth.

Stella awoke suddenly, completely, as one gets into the habit of doing at sea. The *Pioneer*, a snub-nosed, es-

sentially sea-worthy pilot cutter of fifteen tons register, converted into a luxurious cruiser with tremendous enthusiasm by Herriott, was rolling idly, her canvas fluttering, the boom straining at the main sheet with every lurch of the ship.

Stella concluded they were becalmed, and instinctively pitying the unfortunate on watch, settled down again to make the most of the few hours' sleep at her disposal. From the first she had insisted on being treated as one of the crew, nothing more nor less, and she had been taken at her word. In consequence, since leaving port four days ago she had been happier than at any time since, as a girl, she had navigated her own small craft amongst the rocky bays and islands of her home.

The same sea sense that had told her the *Pioneer* was becalmed now informed her that such a thing could not be. There was a breeze; she could hear it. Was it possible that the yacht had come up into the wind, that the helmsman had succumbed to the terrible drowsiness that often assails him through staring overlong at the swaying compass card? She slipped from the bunk of her minute cabin and passed through to where a sliding hatch aft afforded a glimpse of the helmsman in the steering well. There was none. The wheel was deserted and locked amidships. The *Pioneer* was hove-to.

Through a porthole in the hatch combing it was also possible to command a view of the deck for'ard, and here with face pressed close to the glass Stella stood as one hypnotized. In the searching moonlight all was clear. Her husband and Landon were on deck, barefooted

as always but standing with bowed heads beside an indistinct shape that lay in shadow. Landon's lips were moving.

At the moment Stella was impelled to rush on deck. What had happened? Why had they not told her? Was this treating her as one of the crew? But something restrained her, perhaps the age-old discipline of the seafarer that was in her blood. The captain, even if he were her own husband, had not seen fit to summon her. Perhaps he was right. Her presence might have made things more difficult. In any case it was enough.

Landon's lips had ceased to move. The two men stooped, raised the burden at their feet, and gently lowered it over the side. When they straightened themselves, their hands were empty. They came aft, talking in low tones, but when seated on the sliding hatch every word was audible.

“. . . and what on earth do we do now?" demanded her husband in a voice that was new to her.

"Hush!" whispered Landon. "She still sleeps, thank God!"

"Hush nothing!" said Herriott petulantly. "She would be the first to want to be told."

There was a short pause.

"I know," said Landon. "Of course you must do as you think best—my mistake."

The matter seemed to pass from Herriott's mind.

"We must turn back," he stated firmly; "that goes without saying. But what I don't know is how we're going to get there. Do you?"

It was the voice of a lost child.

"We have yesterday's noon position on the chart, and we've got a log. It's dead reckoning, and I can do that. If the present wind holds——"

"Ah, the wind!" muttered Herriott. "I was just thinking——"

"I shouldn't do too much of that. It isn't always good."

"What d'you mean?" The tone was truculent.

"I mean," came Landon's level response, "that we're on a different lay to racing now. We're at sea. We've been playing at things; now we're up against 'em. What's more, we're 'hands'—not bad 'hands,' as they go—but we can't navigate."

"Is that what made you so infernally chary of joining us?"

"Partly."

"And the rest?"

"There's something coming up from the nor'east," said Landon. "How's the barometer?"

Stella heard him creep for'ard, down the fo'castle companion, and into the saloon. There was the brief flash of an electric torch, again darkness, and the soft patter of his returning footfall.

"How is it?" came Herriott's anxious question.

"Fallen, and still at it."

"And what does that mean here?"

"Haven't a notion till it gets us," said Landon, "but we're all right hove-to. Look here, this thing has got on our nerves, and small wonder. I suggest you turn in until dawn."

"And you?"

"I'm as comfortable here as anywhere."

"You'll call me if anything happens?"

"Double quick."

By the time Herriott had reached the saloon Stella was in her bunk. She heard a cupboard opened softly, the faintest clink of glass, and a sigh as her husband settled down on one of the settees. She lay motionless, staring wide-eyed at the white-enamelled timber overhead.

With the dawn a gray nor'easter bore down upon the *Pioneer*, and quickly strengthened to a gale. Hove-to under double-reefed mainsail, the little yacht took it without flinching, as she had been built to do, and Stella busied herself with preparing hot drinks for the men when they should come below.

In passing through the saloon to the galley she found her husband still outstretched on the cushions.

"Stella," he said, "I have something horrible to tell you. Owen died last night."

She did not attempt to simulate surprise, but sat on the settee beside him without speaking.

"He just petered out at the wheel," Herriott went on in a strained voice. "It was my relief, and I found him sitting there—dead. Heart failure, I suppose. We—we made quite sure, and then buried him."

"Why didn't you tell me?" said Stella gently.

"Lan—we both thought it best not to. We should never have brought him. It's my fault. I feel terrible about it."

"Why?" said Stella. "You needn't. It was no one's fault. He knew what he was in for, and still

wanted to come." She paused. "It's the way I should like to go when I do," she added quietly.

Herriott looked at her. There was something in his eyes that she had not seen there before.

"You take it well," he said.

"How else would you have me take it?" she asked him.

"It's this awful feeling of responsibility for everything—everything," muttered Herriott. "It weighs me down. I must share it with someone."

"Why not with me?" said Stella.

"Lan doesn't approve——"

"Pouf for Lan!" said Stella. "He's not captain."

"I suppose that's it. But he ought to be."

Stella gave him a quick almost startled look.

"He ought to be," repeated Herriott. "I feel it. He has this infernal sea knack of doing things without talking about them. He's a born seaman. I'm discovering that I'm not."

Stella put a finger to his lips. "Never say that," she said. "I can't believe it."

"You mean you don't want to."

"I mean I don't want to, and I can't."

A wave crest smote the *Pioneer* a resounding thwack on her snub nose and swept the deck, dying with a gurgle in the scuppers.

Herriott swung his feet from the settee.

"Listen," he said. "You may as well know. We're hove-to in a gale that may last a week and drift us anywhere. There's nothing between us and the South Pole but the sea, and neither Lan nor I can navigate. I

think that's all—oh, except that there are only fifteen gallons in the fresh-water tank. You see the position?"

"Yes," she said, "and thanks—I like to know. I'll have breakfast ready in ten minutes."

Herriott caught her at the galley door. "No, by thunder, you don't!" he roared, thrusting her aside, and commenced wrestling with the kettle in the reeling galley.

Stella left him to it, and went on deck in oilskins. Landon, soaked through, was limping about the deck seeing to lashings.

"Better go below!" he shouted at her above the turmoil of wind and sea.

She did not answer, but returned him look for look, and proceeded to help. Soon they had finished. The *Pioneer* rode like a cork. Gray, wind-swept hills of water bore down on her out of the angry murk ahead, but she soared to their summit and down their reverse slopes with the agility of an acrobat.

"She's snug!" shouted Landon, grinning through rivulets of water. "Staunch little packet."

Stella nodded and smiled. He looked aft and waved an arm.

"Sea room, that's all we want," he said, "and we've got it. She's all right; come below."

Stella was following him toward the companion when he turned in the lee of the hatch.

"Jack's told you?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, and they went below.

Herriott was fuming over the inadequacies of oil stoves in anything of a sea, and when the meal was

served he sat silent and morose. He was a changed man, and he knew it. There is nothing quite like a prolonged bucketing in small craft to give the best of us a glimpse of himself. Herriott felt vaguely that the sea had found him wanting, and the knowledge alternately surprised and tortured him.

Neither Stella nor Landon addressed him, but talked of the habits of sea birds during storm, of the formation and action of waves, and such-like trivialities that irritated Herriott beyond expression. Was it possible that they were blind to their position? Or were their verbal banalities a mask? In any case they were treating him as a child, he felt. It was a conspiracy between this friend of his and his own wife to humiliate and nullify him. There was a bond between them, too. It was the first time he had noticed it. How long had it been? What was it? He must be careful, very careful, but he was not to be fooled. Suspicion smouldered in his eyes.

He left the table abruptly and went on deck, to cling to the shrouds and stare stonily over the tossing, wind-swept waste. In that hour it seemed to Herriott that the sea was imbued with personality. He had wanted it—as his servant. It was here—his master. It was sapping him of his manhood, discovering him to his wife and to his friend. It was a mighty, unknown enemy that he hated and feared.

“Jack’s out of sorts,” said Stella, when he had gone.

“I know,” Landon answered, without meeting her steady gaze. “You must remember I’ve known him a long time—longer than you.” She waited for him to

go on, and he did—he had to. “Salt junk, and one thing and another. He’ll be all right in a day or two.”

That was all they said. It was all they needed to say.

For three days and three nights the *Pioneer* rode and drifted, and with the dawn of the fourth the wind veered, without slackening strength, to the opposite quarter. Landon noted the change.

“It’s fair,” he said. They were the first words he had uttered to Herriott in two days. “We ought to make all the northing we can.”

“Fire ahead,” returned Herriott; “you’re in charge.”

“Since when?”

“Now.”

“Why?”

“Because I choose.”

The two men faced one another on the lurching deck. They had known each other as well as it is possible for one man to know another under normal present-day circumstances, yet now each looked into the eyes of a stranger. Landon turned on his heel.

“All right,” he said. “Stand by to hoist the square-sail.”

Herriott obeyed with compressed lips, and presently the *Pioneer* was racing homeward before a following gale. At the wheel it was soul-racking work. The gray hills of water had grown to mountains, up which the little craft was lifted as by a giant hand and flung reeling into the valley beyond. Combers, seemingly out of the sky, hung over her and broke as by a miracle, astern. It was fatal for the helmsman to look behind

him. In the history of the sea more than one has been shot for so doing. The sight causes the breath to catch, the body to flinch for just that fraction of time that it takes to broach-to and founder.

And Stella enjoyed it! Herriott made the amazing discovery that night while his wife was on watch, and her small, finely chiselled face came into the searching radius of the binnacle lights. It was the face of a thoroughbred engaged in combat that it loved. The thing was inexplicable to Herriott. He dreaded his trick at the wheel with an intensity of which he had never dreamed himself capable.

At midnight, through the sliding hatch, he watched Landon relieve Stella. They talked, Herriott caught wind-blown snatches of it—

“. . . must be doing ten at least. . . . Plumb on our course, as far as I can make out. If this lasts. . .”

“She answers well.”

“Like a bird. . . . Ah, here they come!” The hissing thunder of a breaker drowned the rest. The *Pioneer* was hurled into a pit that appeared bottomless, until at long last she brought up with a soul-sickening jolt. Landon’s set face, with its protruding jaw, relaxed into a grin of triumph.

“Like a bird!” he repeated admiringly.

Herriott staggered to his bunk, gripped the creaking white-enamelled timber overhead in his two hands, and laughed—if it could be called a laugh. “‘Like a bird!’” he mimicked inanely between clenched teeth, and laughed again. The bond—this was the bond between them, their inborn love of the sea that he had thought

his also until the soul-revealing nightmare of the last two weeks. And now he found himself an outsider aboard his own ship—with his own wife! He was an intruder, a mountebank. Herriott still hated the sea, but quite suddenly he no longer feared it. It was his enemy, and he would fight.

At four o'clock he went to relieve Landon.

"How's she going?" he asked.

"Bit tricky," said Landon, without taking his eyes from the swaying compass card.

Herriott waited, but Landon made no move.

"It's my watch," said Herriott.

"Do you think——"

"I've given up thinking—on your advice. It's my watch."

The *Pioneer* fell corkscrewing into an inky trough. Landon righted her with an effort.

"Stella's below," he said shortly. "You put me in charge. I'm going to carry on."

A white rage seized on Herriott, but he controlled it.

"I was sick," he said steadily. "I'm all right now, and I'll take over."

He waited for an answer, but there was none.

"If you don't hand over, I'll make you," said Herriott.

"Don't be a fool—as well," muttered Landon.

Herriott took him in his powerful hands, flung him on deck, and seized the wheel.

"Go below," he ordered, and Landon went.

Outside Stella's cabin he paused.

"You heard?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.

“He took me by the scruff of the neck and pitched me on deck like a dog,” he whispered gleefully. “He’s at the wheel, with a face like thunder. Jack’s found himself.”

“Thank you, Lan,” said Stella.

That was an interview between his wife and his friend that Herriott never heard about, but when the *Pioneer*, after as evil a night as she had yet encountered, ran into fair weather and finally picked up her mooring off the club-house, he took Landon aside.

“Is an apology any good, old man?” he asked.

“Not a bit,” snapped Landon. “You ought to have brained me.”

BARTER

BELLAIRS crushed a mosquito on his left cheek with the precision of an expert, and addressed the Pacific Ocean dispassionately:

“Do you mind telling me the fascination—or is it the lure?—of these storied isles of the Equator?”

The Pacific, except for flinging another lazy ripple up the wet sand, did not answer. Neither did Tritton.

“You are uncommunicative, my friend,” observed Bellairs.

“What’s the good of talking?” grumbled Tritton, who carried throughout life the air of one nursing a grievance.

“Talking is a recognized medium of intercourse,” explained Bellairs sententiously. “It is one of the few proofs we possess that we are in any way removed above the beasts of the field. You surely wouldn’t deprive us of our little conceit?”

“Then talk sense.”

Bellairs sighed, and drew his knees closer to his chin.

“I will,” he said. “Now that we are on Ono, what do we do?”

“I’ve got my trade,” asserted Tritton with a touch of pride.

“Why, of course,” said Bellairs hopefully. “I had forgotten—in fact, I *have* forgotten. What did you say——”

“Bartender.”

“Ah, yes.”

“I can make a ‘twelve-colour rainbow’ with any man.”

“Really,” mused Bellairs. “What a thing it is to carry at one’s finger tips, as it were, an accomplishment that can be converted into hard cash at any moment. As for me—I wonder if they want a potman on Ono.”

“Thought you was the educated sort,” sneered Tritton.

“I am,” admitted Bellairs, “very highly educated, I believe. Hence my colossal ignorance.”

It was this sort of remark that annoyed Tritton. It left nothing to be said. He considered Bellairs a fool, and Bellairs was the first to admit it, which rather takes the wind out of one’s sails. But there was reason to believe that he had money, which in itself was quite enough to quell any outward signs of dislike on Tritton’s part.

The two men, as strangely assorted a pair as ever drifted across one another’s path, had been stewards aboard the *Manara* for the last month, and by some freak of fate had both seen fit to desert at Ono, in the Lau Group. They had come from heaven knows where; they were bound they knew not whither. They belonged to that restless band of world-wanderers who appear for a space in the utmost corners of the earth and are gone, unmourned and unsung.

"If a steward, why not a potman!" persisted Bellairs. "I believe I could be a potman; in fact, I *will* be a potman."

He rose deliberately and shook the sand from his shapeless ducks. He was a large man, inclining to corpulence, and of an age as uncertain as a woman's. But there was an air about him that in some subtle way demanded, and usually elicited, respect.

"There is a great deal in will power, friend Tritton," he remarked, as they trudged through the sand toward the settlement. "I have heard one can think oneself into almost anything. Potman!" he added, with closed eyes.

The settlement proved to be the usual semi-circle of weather-board stores and bungalows facing the beach. Elephantine native women in gaudy wrappers drifted aimlessly about the thoroughfare, and dogs, with their inevitable Island heart disease, lay sleeping at intervals along the wooden sidewalk. Apart from these signs of animation, Ono's metropolis apparently contained nothing but yellow sunlight and the boom of surf.

"Looks lively, don't it?" observed Tritton.

Bellairs mopped his face with an already soaking handkerchief.

"Never go by outward appearances," he urged hopefully. "Who knows——?"

But Tritton had left him and vanished through the swinging doors of the Polynesian Hotel. Bellairs seated himself in a weather-beaten cane chair under a screw-pine. In a surprisingly short time Tritton emerged.

“Nothing doing,” he said. “Whisky neat with chaser.”

“But how nice,” murmured Bellairs.

“If you can pay for it. But where’s the chance for a real live wire with a nigger woman dispenser and nothing to dispense? This is what they call ‘steamer day’ in these parts, and as far as I can see the whole of Ono lives at the Polynesian until the shipment runs dry.”

“Then a potman——”

“Oh, dry up!” snapped Tritton.

“I am,” returned the imperturbable Bellairs, moistening his lips. “Let us mingle with the giddy throng and trust to something eventuating. I can feel the lure of these blessed islands stealing over me already.”

After something like an hour’s contact with every known species of the human race south of the Line Tritton insinuated himself through a medley of planters, traders, and what-not to where Bellairs was carrying on a dignified conversation with the local magistrate. In answer to a nudged elbow, Bellairs excused himself with an old-world courtesy that left the magistrate agape, and followed his companion upstairs.

“I’ve happened on to something,” said Tritton, turning suddenly at the end of a murky passage and speaking in a tense undertone. “Have you got any money?”

Bellairs regarded him speculatively for a moment, and Tritton’s eyes fell. He was physically incapable of sustaining a direct gaze, and he knew it, which always makes an affliction the harder to bear.

"A plain question deserves—a plain question," said Bellairs ponderously. "Do I *look* as if I had money?"

Tritton was on the point of turning away in disgust. There was no getting nearer to this fool of a man. But he remembered himself in time.

"You're mighty cheerful for any one who hasn't," he said, with a feeble attempt at banter.

"Thank you for those kind words," beamed Bellairs. "And what if I *have*?"

"I know how you can multiply it by a hundred in two months."

"Really? How?"

Tritton's glance roamed the dim interior of the Polynesian for a space, and, by the time it had reached his feet, where it usually rested, he had gained control of himself.

"See here," he said patiently, "if I told you how this thing is to be done you could do it without me, couldn't you?"

"I very much doubt it," said Bellairs.

"Well, that's how most people would look at it. I have the scheme, you have the money. What about it?"

"A partnership?" suggested Bellairs, with the light of inspiration in his rather weak eyes.

Tritton nodded.

"Lead on, partner," said Bellairs.

A doubtful-looking individual in soiled ducks and a battered pith helmet awaited them on the veranda overlooking the sun-soaked beach. Bellairs bowed grace-

fully and ordered three glasses of the Polynesian's invariable from a Solomon Island houseboy.

"It's like this," said the individual, in unnecessarily subdued tones, when the three heads were well over the wicker table: "Ono's no good to any man."

"I suspected as much," said Bellairs brightly. "In fact, it's a case of 'Oh, no'!"

The individual regarded him blankly until Tritton's foot came into contact with his own, when he contrived to laugh.

"Exactly," he said. "But to return to business: you mustn't judge the Laus by Ono, any more than you can judge the last place on the map. It's the outlying islands that count. I've just come in from Taneba—had to, fever, and——" He stopped abruptly, produced a dirty bandana handkerchief, and, untying a knot in one corner, rolled on to the table three fair-sized pearls.

"Two hundred," he added shortly; "just had 'em priced; and all for a dud safety-razor and three coloured prints of a defunct monarch in medals. Fact is, they don't know. The Laus are not like the Paumotus or any recognized pearling-grounds, where every Kanaka is a born judge of stones. Here they find them sometimes, and just don't know what they've got. These were in a baby's rattle. . . ."

He said a great deal more, and the brief tropical twilight had descended on Ono when the partners emerged from the Polynesian.

"A most informative person," was Bellairs's verdict as he strolled along the beach toward the harbour with

Tritton in anxious attendance. "I wonder what it was all about?"

"Can't you see?" wailed Tritton. "There's money in this thing."

"Quite," agreed Bellairs. "I was merely wondering where our obliging friend comes in."

"He has a trading cutter open to charter. It's only a pound a day, and——"

"Ah," murmured Bellairs.

This brief utterance had an extraordinary effect on Tritton. His thin mouth twitched at the corners, and a glint came into his furtive eye.

"You're not going to let me down," he accused in a tone half whine, half threat—"not after me telling you? Because——"

For no apparent reason he stopped. Bellairs regarded him with the air of one studying the writhings of an insect.

"Because what?" he said, and, receiving no answer, resumed his way toward the harbour. "Try and remember that confidence is the foundation of successful partnership, friend Tritton," he remarked airily. "My innocent observation was intended to convey that I had discerned the reason of our friend's magnanimity; and why should we, the firm of Bellairs & Tritton, pay one pound a day for a craft when—— Now, how would that snub-nosed atrocity suit us?"

They had stopped at the harbour wall of coralite boulders and stood looking down on the Ono trading fleet, which reflected the characteristics of its owners to a halyard. The particular craft Bellairs had pointed

out was a decrepit cutter of about ten tons register, with the name *Moana* on her quarter and a board lashed to the port shrouds marked "For Sale."

"I didn't know you meant to buy," said Tritton in surly apology.

"That is where you have to be so exceedingly careful," returned Bellairs.

"Can you sail a ship?"

Bellairs closed his eyes.

"I seem to remember a following sea off Finisterre when to look astern was to be lost. And haven't I—yes, surely—some recollection of the Mediterranean when Lady Sibyl inadvertently dropped her 'pom' overboard, and I failed to retrieve . . . ?"

"Then that's all right," said Tritton with dawning hope in his voice. "We shall only want some grub and a bit of barter."

"A bit of what?"

"Barter." Tritton winked knowingly. "You leave that to me."

"I will," said Bellairs; "barter shall be your special care. I'll see about the ship. I suggest that we meet here about eleven o'clock to-night."

Tritton nodded almost cheerfully, and departed on his mysterious quest.

He received something of a surprise about 11.30 that same night, when, raising his head from the task of stowing barter in the *Moana's* fo'cstle locker, he distinctly heard the ripple of water past the ship's side.

On reaching deck he was still more astonished to find the decrepit cutter slipping quietly out to sea under

mainsail and jib, with his partner in the steering well humming a contented little tune as he fondled the tiller.

The lights of Ono, mostly issuing from the Polynesian Hotel, grew fainter astern, and presently they were alone with the sea and the stars and a light southeast "trade."

It affected Tritton strangely. He had never done anything of the sort before, and he was vaguely awed by the mystery of it all—awed for the first time in his life by something other than money and brute force. He went aft for company.

"This is all right," he said, staring up at the towering mainsail. "What's it worth?"

"That is impossible to say," said Bellairs, "until we've tried her; as impossible as in the case of a horse or a wife."

"And how d'you know where you're going?"

"I don't," admitted Bellairs, "except that by the Cross and a pocket compass we're heading for Taneba."

"The Cross?"

"Yes; some of those curious little twinkling fellers up there. Ever noticed them, friend Tritton?"

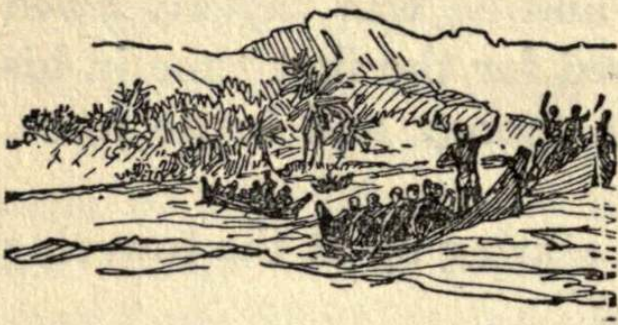
Tritton remained silent. He was thinking, wondering, if Bellairs were quite the sort of fool he seemed.

He was wondering much the same thing the next morning, when the *Moana* was bowling comfortably along with lashed tiller, and Bellairs came below to consult the chart.

"As this was lent me by my particular friend the magistrate, I should be obliged if you would refrain from sitting on it," he said, smoothing out the parch-

ment on the fo'castle table, and studying its strange hieroglyphics with apparent understanding.

Undoubtedly Bellairs knew what he was about at sea. Tritton reached this conclusion on the second day, and when on the third Bellairs pointed out a blue smudge on the starboard bow, and laconically intimated that it was Taneba, Tritton found himself holding his partner



in much the same esteem as a child might a conjurer who produces a rabbit from a hat.

“According to direction,” said Bellairs, when six fathoms of the *Moana's* rusty cable had run into Taneba lagoon, “this is where we await developments.”

It was not long before canoes put out from shore, and, following a parley which neither side understood in the least, the *Moana's* decks were soon crowded with Kanakas and their wares. These consisted for the most part of *taro* root, chickens suffering from malnutrition, and bunches of bananas swarming with white ants.

“Punk,” said Tritton, after a cursory inspection. “We'd better show 'em what we do want, eh, Bellairs?”

“I leave the commercial side entirely in your hands,” replied Bellairs, seating himself on the stern horse and peeling a banana.

In impressive silence Tritton produced his “barter” and arranged it with the tender care of a window-dresser on the aft hatch. There were three *papier*

mâché belts, six jew's harps, a packet of fish hooks, and, in strict accordance with instructions, several coloured prints of someone or other in whiskers and a red *cumberbund*. Tritton then passed on to the gem of his collection—a few synthetic pearls of the curio-store variety, which he held cupped in his unclean palm and submitted for inspection with an interrogative raising of the eyebrows. Beyond a few nods and cluckings of recognition the audience remained unimpressed.

“He's right,” Tritton told Bellairs excitedly when the last of the visitors had taken to their canoes and were paddling shoreward. “They just don't know.”

It was late that night, and the partners were asleep, when a gentle rasping on the *Moana's* side brought Bellairs on deck.

“Missi *Turaga* (gentleman)!” came a plaintive voice out of the darkness, and looking over the side, Bellairs saw an outrigger canoe made fast to the *Moana's* rail, with a diminutive dark person sitting patiently on a stern thwart.

“Good mornin', Missi *Turaga*,” droned the voice. “Um *Buli* (chief) of Niama say me go all along *Turaga* plenty quick. Me go.”

“Madam,” said Bellairs gravely, “I greet you. My *bêche-de-mer* is faulty but sincere. Come aboard plenty quick.”

The visitor swung herself up the *Moana's* side with the agility of a cat, and stood on deck revealed as a native girl of perhaps twelve, with a mass of raven-black hair, a spotless *sulu*, and soft brown eyes.

The reason for her visit was an engaging mystery to

Bellairs for upward of half an hour, during which she inspected the *Moana* from stem to stern with cluckings of admiration and delight. Then, happening on to the locker containing some of the remaining items of Tritton's "barter," it became apparent that she had paid a midnight call for no other purpose than to curl her legs under her and twang a jew's harp.

Bellairs laughed. Tritton did not.

"Kick her out," he growled from his bunk, and turned his yellow face to the wall.

He may have slept, though it is doubtful. At any rate, when next he turned and opened his eyes he lay for a moment rigid with astonishment. The child was on Bellairs's knee, industriously curling an end of his ragged moustache to the accompaniment of a crooned *meke* air. It was a homely little scene under the yellow light of the swinging lamp; but Tritton hardly noticed it—his eyes feasted on the table, where lay ten fair-sized pearls.

"Um *Buli* of Niama say *Turaga* like um plenty all right," the child was babbling between twirls of Bellairs's moustache. "Um say *Turaga* pay plenty all right."

"Um *Turaga*, um—maybe," said Bellairs, with an air of splendid indifference.

It was too much for Tritton. He moved, and the child looked up. Instinctively she shrank closer to Bellairs and uttered something in her unintelligible jargon. Bellairs smiled.

"Pray don't disturb yourself, partner," he said; "the lady tells me she is not taken with you."

"Keep her talking," snapped Tritton; "that's all

you've got to do." His hand went under the pillow for a moment; then he swung from the bunk, carefully striking the table with his foot so that the pearls rolled to the floor.

With a startled cry the child sprang after them, but Tritton was before her.

"There," he said, rising after a protracted hunt and studiously counting ten pearls into the waiting brown palm. "Now are you more taken with your Uncle Tritton?"

"You no want um?" inquired the visitor perplexedly. "Um *Buli* of Niama say *Turaga* like um plenty all right."

"Not this time, thank you," grinned Tritton. "Good-night, and mind the step."

A few minutes later a bewildered child of nature paddled off into the darkness.

Bellairs stood at the ship's rail for some time after the rhythmic splash of the canoe paddles had died away; then he sighed unaccountably and went below.

Tritton was hunched over the table examining the pearls as Bellairs came down the companion.

"Can you beat it?" he exploded. "Ten-ten! I don't know much about 'em, but they look as good as his, and at the same price it means a thousand—a thousand," he added in an awed whisper.

Bellairs put the coffee-pot on the stove, and stood regarding it awhile in silence.

"I confess to a misspent life," he said at last deliberately, "but in this case—I am not sure that I like it, friend Tritton."

Tritton turned in a flash.

“If you don’t like it, you know what to do!” he jerked out.

“I was wondering,” mused Bellairs. “In a way it was excusable—the true commercial instinct can be held to account for much—but don’t you think this particular transaction rather savours of robbing the kid’s money-box?”

Tritton sprang to his feet impatiently.

“You make me tired,” he stuttered. “We came out after pearls, didn’t we? Well, we’ve got ’em. If they don’t know what a pearl is, why shouldn’t they be as satisfied with the curio-store brand as the real thing? Exchange is no robbery. If you want to pay for ’em into the bargain, you can, but leave me out of it.”

Bellairs poured the coffee into a tin mug, drank it, and climbed into his bunk.

“There is something in what you say,” he admitted, staring up at the *Moana’s* dingy timbers. “To-morrow we will visit the *Buli* of Niama—that I may relieve my pesky conscience—and you spy out the land for further consignments.”

After which enigmatic utterance he slept.

But Tritton did not. There was too much to think about. “A thousand!” He repeated the magic words many times before it occurred to him with something of a shock that his own share would be precisely half that amount. There was certainly a good deal to be thought about.

The pilgrimage to Niama was not the pleasant excursion that it had promised to be. According to

bêche-de-mer directions and copious gesticulations, it lay "all along beach plenty far too much," and the beach led in turn through ankle-deep mangrove swamp, through primeval jungle, and over a perfect switchback of red earth hills.

Even Bellairs had little to say, and Tritton trudged at his side in stony silence. He had ceased to speculate on things in general, because he had long since decided in his own mind what must be done to equalize the deficit in his calculations of the previous evening. Opportunity was all that he lacked, and toward noon it looked remarkably like coming his way.

They had reached a village of sorts, and Bellairs unexpectedly collapsed on the mats of the guest house, shivering convulsively.

"Not to p-put too fine a p-point on it," he stuttered between chattering teeth, "I feel rotten."

Those were the last words Tritton heard him utter. The last sight of him was a bulky figure under a pyramid of mats that shook as with an earthquake. Then he ran. There was no need to, because fever always takes large men first and leaves them last, but for some reason Tritton ran. He boarded the *Moana* and contrived to set sail, and it was not until Taneba was a smudge on the horizon that his peace of mind was fully restored, which for Tritton was probably a record.

Perhaps even then his satisfaction was premature. Cities and men and women he knew how to mould to his own ends, but toward night, alone on a waste of waters, with no sense of direction, less knowledge of a ship, and some unhealthy looking clouds banking up

on the horizon, Tritton was compelled to admit that there was something baffling about the sea. The same distressing sensation of awe that had assailed him on sailing from Ono crept over him now. He dispelled it by a glance at the pearls. They were all there, all ten—a thousand pounds' worth! The mere sight of them revived him like an elixir. During the next few hours he inspected them not less than twenty times. It was necessary. The *Moana* was tearing through a jet-black sea, mountains high, before a hurricane, or so it seemed to Tritton. In reality, she was probably doing a lumbering eight knots before half a gale; but ignorance has an unpleasant knack of magnifying. It was only possible to *think* of the pearls now; Tritton was too occupied with the tiller to do anything else, and even that was difficult. Seas were coming aboard—cold, unpleasant seas that lashed the face and chilled to the marrow. Where was he going? He did not know, except that it must be away from Taneba. This was the Pacific Ocean; he *did* know that; and there should have been blue sea and sunshine and islands—many islands, where one could land at will and barter with fools of Kanakas. There was something radically amiss with Tritton's universe. It was wrong, *all* wrong—except for the pearls. . . .

They were his last thought before the boom swung out of the night with a shriek of tackle and struck him on the side of the head.

The long-suffering *Moana* had giped, and giping before half a gale was rather more than she had bargained for. Her ancient mast went at the deck, and

when Tritton opened his eyes the ship wallowed a dismantled wreck.

There followed days and nights which to Tritton were now vague memories of an ugly dream. He remembered that the storm had spent itself and that a stark calm had followed, accompanied by a brazen, wilting heat. He remembered the awful discovery that in his haste to leave Taneba he had omitted to fill the water-beakers, and that half-ripe bananas held maddeningly little moisture. But over all a mist now seemed to hover, a mist that slowly grew more opaque, obliterating all things except the pearls. They were all that had kept Tritton alive.

So the crew of a trading cutter found him, babbling quietly to himself in the fo'castle, with a chewed banana skin in one hand and something in the other that he thrust from sight at their approach.

The *Buli* of Niama tugged a horny foot closer to his groin.

"I do not savvy, Mr. Bellairs," he said in his precise mission English, and with a perplexed wrinkling of the brow. "I send my daughter to sell you pearls because I run a curio store in Levuka for many year, and know how the white man loves them. I learn many things at my curio store in the great city; but what I do not learn is why, when I send you pearls, you will not buy but send me other pearls in exchange. Now that the fever is better maybe you will tell me."

"Certainly, *Buli*," said Bellairs, with the utmost suavity. "I could not pay you for the pearls because

I have no money. My worthy partner was under the impression that I had, and is now paying the penalty by being afloat somewhere on the Pacific in a ship that is neither his nor mine. But that is beside the point. Now that he has seen fit to abscond, I see nothing against giving you the facts, as a slight token of gratitude for all you have done for me."

"That is well said," commented the *Buli* judicially.

"I'm glad you like it," said Bellairs. "Must say I'm rather taken with it myself. But here's the rub. You who have owned a curio store in a great city like Levuka should know that there are two kinds of pearls—real and imitation."

"I have heard so," admitted the *Buli*.

"Well, not to put too fine a point to it, we took your pearls and sent you ours, which were imitation."

The *Buli* of Niama glanced up at the high rafters of the guest house, then at Bellairs.

"So were mine!" he said.

THE LAUGH

CROWTHER was waiting. He had no notion of it. He thought he was enjoying the cool of the morning with a pipe on the veranda, as he had been in the habit of doing for seven years past. But in reality he was waiting.

And presently it appeared—the peak of a lugsail gliding slowly along the far side of the reef. He picked up a battered telescope and trained it on the moving scrap of canvas. Nothing more could be seen until of a sudden, and with surprising completeness, the rest of the sail burst into view, together with the dark bulk of an outrigger canoe. It had turned into the boat passage, and was now scudding through it on the eight-knot current that converted Rahiti pass into a mill race at the turn of the tide.

Here there were pale green shallows beset with coral fangs, and rocks rearing a vicious head out of the swirl in midchannel, yet through them the canoe threaded a headlong course, steered with unerring skill by the quick eye and practised hand of a slight figure in a fluttering blue wrapper that crouched alert in the stern.

With the telescope resting on the veranda rail, Crowther punctuated the performance with grunts of approval: “Ah! Good! Umph! Now——” He had taught Mata how to take Rahiti pass at the turn of the

tide, as he had taught her all that she knew, and his was the intense pride of the tutor in an accomplished pupil. It was natural.

The canoe had now reached the untroubled waters of the lagoon, and before its prow had slid to rest on the beach in front of the bungalow the girl leapt into the knee-deep water and held aloft a gleaming fish.

"*Sanqua!*" she cried, and hurried up the coral pathway to the house.

A discreet clapping of hands proceeded from the veranda where Crowther sprawled in a cane chair.

"Is that all?" she demanded, standing before him like a crestfallen child. "And for a *sanqua*, too?"

"What more do you want?" grinned Crowther.

For answer she bent down and kissed him, then sank to the mats native fashion and launched into a detailed account of the capture of Crowther's favourite fish.

"He was lying half under the reef—for shade, I suppose—with his tail and a bit sticking out. For a long time I couldn't make up my mind what to do——"

"And the tail and a bit waited while you did it?" interpolated Crowther.

"Yes. He must have been asleep. Do fish sleep, Uncle?"

"No," said Crowther at a hazard.

"Well, then, I must have kept very still—I did keep very still—and thought and thought. The line would have been the safest, but somehow the spear seemed more—more——"

"Sporting," suggested Crowther.

"Yes. So I tried to remember what you told me

about—illusory reflection and all that, and it came out right.”

Crowther inclined his head in mock recognition of the doubtful compliment, but it passed unheeded. Mata babbled on in growing excitement, using indescribable little gestures to illustrate her meaning.

“I aimed a good three inches to the left of him, and it was queer to feel the spear stick into something that didn’t look as if it was there. But it was there, and didn’t he wriggle! And here he is, and—and it’s my birthday, Uncle.”

“Really?” said Crowther, with studied unconcern. “Well, if you’ll run along and get into something dry, we’ll have breakfast.”

While she was gone, he took his seat at the head of the table, laid as usual on the veranda, and pretended to read a book propped against the milk jug. But again he was waiting, and not for long. Mata slipped into her customary chair, and was in the act of adding the three well-known lumps of sugar to his comprehensive cup of tea, when the exclamation came, half word, half gasp: “Uncle!”

A moment later she was on his knee, one hand at his shoulder, the other upheld, the better to display a pretty little pearl necklace.

“But they’re real,” she cried, with dancing eyes, “really real!”

“Oh, no,” muttered Crowther. “I went to great trouble about that necklet—chartered a schooner to bring the dud article all the way from Sydney.”

But she was not listening to his heavy badinage that

she knew so well. Her head sank to his shoulder, and there was the hint of a woman's inexplicable tears in her eyes.

"Uncle," she said, playing with the middle button of his drill jacket, "you're too good to me."

"Much," he admitted promptly. "I often marvel at my own generosity, forbearance, and all the rest of it. It would be different if you gave any cause for it—if you were a good girl, for instance—but as it is——" He sighed heavily and lapsed into silence.

Mata slid from his knee and contemplated him gravely.

"You're laughing at me," she accused. "You're always laughing at me. I wonder if you ever won't?"

The whimsical smile died of a sudden from Crowther's face. He leant forward and, taking her two small arms in his hands, stood her before him like a doll.

"You mustn't mind, Mata," he said in a voice that was new to her. "I have to laugh. If I didn't I should do something that you wouldn't like half as much. You understand? I *must* laugh."

Mata stared at him wide-eyed, and nodded, though she did not understand in the least.

"Many, many happy returns of the day, little girl," his strange, almost frightening voice went on, "and don't ever again dare to remind me when it's your birthday. There, run along—my tea's getting cold."

For once Mata failed to obey. She did not run, but walked, very slowly for her, down the veranda steps and along the beach, with the pearl necklet forgotten in her hand. Against the bole of a wind-bent

palm she leant at last, staring over the sea. She was trying to understand. But out of her groping thoughts only the old, immutable truths emerged. This large man with the kindly eyes and tickling moustache was the most wonderful being in the world, the only being in the world. He knew everything and could do anything. What else was there to understand? She answered the question by turning her attention to the necklace, and in rather less than five minutes was flaunting its glories before the goggling eyes of her brown-skinned playmates of the beach. Mata was sixteen.

On the veranda, with his chair pushed back from the débris of breakfast, Crowther was engaged in the rather more protracted and infinitely less accommodating reflections of middle age. Mata was sixteen. Sixteen was a fairly advanced age for a child, wasn't it? And what was it that he had sworn to himself should occur on her sixteenth birthday—and on her fifteenth, and fourteenth, for the matter of that? He pretended that it was an effort to remember, though, as a fact the thing had hovered over him like a cloud for some time past. It was a pretty little game for a grown man to be playing with himself, this juggling with an evil hour by putting back the clock. It is popular, too, but, like most games, it comes to an end. Mata was sixteen. Mata must go "outside."

Having decided so much, irrefutably this time, Crowther's musings led him back to the beginning of it all—that awful dawn ten years ago, when, on the tail end of a hurricane, a fine three-masted schooner loomed out of the murk to wind'ard, running under bare poles

and head-on for Rahiti. The thing was clear to him now—it always would be clear—as on the day that it happened. He remembered summoning the “boys” and buffeting his way along the wind-whipped beach shouting—shouting a warning to a ship in a hurricane a cable’s length from the rocks! It was a sample of the inane things one is apt to do on occasion. Then the crash, almost drowned in the roar of surf, yet sickeningly distinct, and the hurtling of fragments across the beach. A splintered spar, he remembered, missed his head by a few feet; a strip of canvas encircled his legs, almost lifting him from his feet. Something tinkled on the rocks behind him, probably metal. Something else was swept into a rock pool and left there by the receding wave, a bundle by the look of it, that spun like a top in the swirl. But it was a movement of its own that claimed Crowther’s sudden attention. Either it was alive, or he had gone mad. In any case, he clambered down to the pool, despite the warning cries of the “boys,” and made his escape with the bundle under one arm and a breaker seething about his waist.

It was alive. It was Mata, and a “boy” bore her, howling lustily, to the house.

Crowther stayed. He saw the schooner pounded into the semblance of a broken eggshell against the reef and the battered remains sucked back into the turmoil, only to be hurled aloft on a mighty comber and pitched headlong into unknown depths. Nothing was left—nothing but the eternal surf breaking on Rahiti—so Crowther went home.

He found the living room, his sacred living room, in

the possession of a minute person attired in a blanket, meditatively munching a banana.

“Take it away,” he told his Kanaka cook, and, going into his bedroom, shut the door. He could not wrench from his mind the awful picture of that ship, a home of warmth and light, buried—buried alive.

It was not until the evening that he could bring himself to endure an interview with the sole survivor, who stared at him with wide, inquiring eyes, and answered his questions, or failed to answer them, according to the whim of the moment. Crowther elicited the following: it was a female child of six. It rather wanted its father, though it seemed more perturbed over the loss of a kitten named Zip, or something like it. It could not remember its mother. It had no notion how it came to be in a rock pool on Rahiti, but, by the miracle of hurricanes that can pulverize an iron winch into a thousand fragments and leave a lamp chimney intact, it was unscathed. It had come a long way, from a big house in an immense city by the sea, probably one of the Pacific Coast towns, where it had a dog called Peter, and a horse that bucked when you squeezed a ball on the end of a string. Oh, and its name was Mata, which, being interpreted, undoubtedly meant Martha. That was all.

For several days Crowther wondered what he ought to do about it, and ended, as usual in the Islands, by doing nothing—nothing, that is, but letting the child play in the sun and sea with the other juveniles of its species, that appeared to emanate from the labour lines in ever-increasing swarms.

It was a visit to the scene of the wreck that brought

Crowther up with a round turn. He stood looking down into the unfathomable depths, thinking of the ship—the ship down there—and suddenly he said: “I promise.” He became aware that he had spoken aloud, that he had given his word to someone or something. It frightened him. From that hour his attitude toward the child changed. It seemed to dawn on him that she was something more than a diverting pet.

So, out of the ensuing years and his own efforts, had emerged the wondrous product that was Mata of the present day. She was tall, lithe like a boy, and amazingly beautiful. She knew all that Crowther could teach her—how to handle a boat, swim without effort, look upon deceit of any sort as a species of cowardice and therefore beneath her, read a book, and have ideas of her own on a subject. Crowther looked upon her as the work of his hands, and never ceased to marvel at its excellence.

Yes, it might be said that he had kept his promise—so far. But what of the future? There were things that he could not teach her, things that she must know. Of late he had stumbled on the distressing truth that he had brought her up as a boy, and, in spite of him, she had grown into a woman—an annoying trick of Nature. He approached the painful subject with characteristic bluntness that evening of her sixteenth birthday, as they sat reading by lamplight.

“Mata,” he said, “you know these advertisements of schools in the magazines—academies, they seem to call ’em—with pictures of girls dancing, and paddling canoes, and camping out, and what not?”

Mata looked up and nodded.

“Well, how would you like to go to one?”

“Not a bit, thanks, Uncle,” said Mata.

“They learn other things, you know,” he struggled on—“things I can’t teach you.”

Mata’s frank gray eyes conveyed her disbelief.

So through endless ramifications the discussion waxed and waned.

“You mean,” said Mata at last, closing her book with a snap of finality—“you mean you want me to go, Uncle?”

And Crowther stared up at the ceiling before answering, and down at the mat-strewn floor.

“Yes,” he lied.

She went to her room, and Crowther, feeling nothing short of despicable, listened outside her door. She was weeping. Something swept over him like a wave. He knocked and entered. She was lying face downward on the counterpane.

“Mata—Mata!” he muttered stupidly.

She turned and drew him toward her.

“Uncle, you’ll come, too, won’t you?” she pleaded.

Crowther took a grip of himself and sat on the edge of the bed.

“Why, of course,” he said huskily. “I’ll come disguised as a gargoyle or something. And we’ll have a miniature Rahiti in the playground—I beg its pardon, ‘campus’—and at night I’ll climb down from my perch on the imitation battlements and we’ll spear goldfish with a pickle fork by candlelight, and——”

And again Crowther had contrived to laugh.

So Mata went "outside" to acquire such additional frills as an enlightened age deems indispensable to budding womanhood, and Crowther settled down to wait once more, this time for two mortal years.

It was a dreary business, as dreary as Mata appeared to find her end of the contract. Crowther had been under the impression that no feminine mind was proof against the lures of "outside," yet after eighteen months of them, and with only another six to go, she was still, according to her unfailing letters, "longing for home," which meant Rahiti, and yes—himself. The thought sent the blood to his head. He tried to laugh at it, but found the process increasingly difficult as time passed. Why should he always have to laugh? By heavens, he would laugh no more! He would make of Rahiti a home—a real home—worth "longing for"! He would —

As a matter of fact, what Crowther did the next morning was to subject his reflection in the looking glass to an unsmiling survey, and with equal gravity extract four gray hairs from his head. After which he set to work with newborn zest, planning certain additions to the bungalow.

It was about this time that the monthly schooner brought a youth named Owen to Rahiti seeking employment. Crowther gave it him, partly for company and partly because there was plenty to be done. He was of the reserved, earnest type, with a shock of blond hair, unbelievably pink cheeks, and a habit of blushing which in itself is a refreshing phenomenon south of the Line. Crowther took to him on the instant.

"I want you to take the copra entirely off my hands," he told him in the mosquito-proof office with its battered, ill-kept ledger and litter of island specimens.

"I'm sick of the sight and smell and feel of it. I—er—have other things to do."

Owen gravely inclined his head.

"Sit down," said Crowther; "have a cigar. We'd better try and understand one another as soon as possible. What brought you to these outrageous parts?"

Owen seated himself, and blushed.

"Don't tell me if you don't want to," Crowther added. "It's only vulgar curiosity on my part."

"I was in a bank," blurted Owen.

"Good," said Crowther, and pushed the disreputable ledger across the writing table. "You'd better take this over as well."

"I have been going through it," said Owen with professional gravity. "The system is bad, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Haven't a doubt of it," beamed Crowther, "and if you can put it right, and keep up the level of production——"

"Don't you mean increase production?" corrected Owen.

Crowther laughed.

"I suppose so," he admitted, "though, as a business, I'm afraid I've lost my enthusiasm for Rahiti. I look upon it more in the light of a home."

"Quite," agreed Owen, with his quaint air of punctiliousness. "A very beautiful home," he added thoughtfully.

Crowther's glance wandered to the window with its sectional view, like a framed and glowing water colour, of beach and palm and sea.

"Not bad," he muttered. "But nothing to what I'm going to make it——" He turned in his chair with an abrupt reversion to the subject in hand. "So if you'll look after your end of things, Mr.—er—Owen, I'll look after mine, and we'll see what happens."

What happened during the next few months was considerable. A wing was added to the bungalow containing rooms—such rooms! There were *yaka-wood* panelling, a standard lamp, mats as finely woven as a Panama hat, and imported furniture of unsurpassed luxury and elegance. Crowther was in the habit of musing amidst these splendours as in a palace of dreams. There was only a month now—only a month——

As for Owen, he appeared incapable of anything but work. A day with copra, followed by an evening with a new and immaculate ledger, seemed the acme of his desires. Undoubtedly there was some powerful incentive behind the boy's efforts. His innate earnestness had developed into a fervour that Crowther welcomed as unique in his experience of overseers but was at a loss to understand.

At a loss, that is, until late one evening he visited the boy's quarters and found him, head on arms, and arms on open ledger, sound asleep.

Crowther shook him gently.

"Hi, this won't do," he said. "Sling that thing in the corner, and turn in, and be a bit late to-morrow if

you can manage it. I'm not going to have overseers killing themselves on the premises."

Owen looked up, the habitual flush mounting to his cheeks. His folded arms slid from the ledger, and with them a square of pasteboard that fluttered to the floor at Crowther's feet. He picked it up mechanically, and was returning to the table when the action was arrested in mid air. For a moment he stood motionless, staring slack-jawed at a photograph of Mata, then placed it on the table and drew back into the shadow.

"So you know my niece," he said evenly, yet in a voice that he failed to recognize as his own.

Owen pushed back his chair and stood before Crowther. There was no confusion in the movement, only the supreme self-consciousness of youth.

"I've been meaning to tell you," he began.

"But you didn't," Crowther interpolated sweetly, "so why should you now? Because I happen to have blundered on to your secret?"

"There should have been no secret—there is no secret," Owen corrected himself; "We met at a friend's house during the holidays. I—we——"

"You can cut the details, if you don't mind," said Crowther.

"Very well, then," Owen's head went up as though in answer to a challenge. "I love her."

"Naturally," said Crowther. "And as you're so bent on unburdening yourself, what then?"

"I am working—for her," answered the boy simply. "I came here because I knew it was her home, and that she would be returning soon. I was afraid, if I told

you of our—acquaintance, it might influence you against me.”

“Why?”

“I knew how fond you must be of her.”

“How?”

“Naturally,” mimicked Owen, with a hint of apology.

There was neither question nor answer to that. Crowther remained silent, his face mercifully in shadow, watching the antics of this pink-cheeked destroyer of dreams. They had “met at a friend’s house . . . during the holidays!” What more was needed? What could be more natural, in the most natural of worlds? Crowther asked himself this assiduously as a curb to the insane desire to take this same pink-cheeked head and dash it against the wall. It was still saying something. . . .

“I wanted you to form an unbiassed opinion of me, Mr. Crowther. Are you satisfied?”

“I?” Crowther advanced out of the gloom. The mask of a smile was on this face. “Satisfied?” He had intended to say something else—heaven knew what!—but instead he laughed.

“You find it amusing,” Owen accused, with a ludicrous air of offended dignity.

“You must excuse me,” Crowther apologized. “It’s an unfortunate habit of mine. No, I don’t find it in the least amusing, only satisfactory—entirely satisfactory, Mr.—er—Owen. Good-night.”

The next morning Owen was down with his first bout of fever, and three days later Mata arrived.

Crowther saw the schooner creeping down from the

horizon, and Mata, a slim, unmistakable figure in the bows, waving a handkerchief far out to sea because she knew that he would be watching for her through the telescope.

It seemed to Crowther that the "outside" had made surprisingly little difference, or was it the fashion of the moment for young ladies in bewilderingly dainty muslins, and their hair "up," to welcome their alleged uncles by nearly strangling them? He did not know. He did not care.

"Oh, it's good—good!" she cried, clinging to his arm and glancing bright-eyed about her as they passed along the landing and up the powdered coral pathway to the house.

With the mock ceremony of a flunkey, Crowther bowed her into the palace of dreams. She sampled its splendours, from the white-enamelled bedstead to the standard lamp, with little gasps of delight.

"Tea will be served on the veranda in ten minutes, your ladyship," Crowther announced, and withdrew.

Whereupon Mata took a step toward the door, and paused. Something seemed to have come upon her of a sudden, out of nowhere, a mantle of thought that enveloped her until she found herself pouring out tea—from the same old pot, into the same comprehensive cup with its three lumps of sugar. They talked, talked and listened, each to the beloved voice of the other, until Crowther consulted his watch.

"Time!" he called. "I've had you for the first hour, my lady. More than my share. What about him?"

"Him?" Mata looked up in frank perplexity.

"Thought that would fetch you," beamed Crowther.

"More surprises?" she questioned.

For answer, he took her by the arm, across the compound to Owen's quarters, and, thrusting her gently inside, closed the door.

Then he went down to the beach, and walked and walked until he came to the scene of the wreck, where he sat staring into the depths.

There was nothing he desired so much as solitude during that hour, yet presently he became aware of a figure flitting swiftly along the beach. It wore a faded blue wrapper, and its hair streamed in the wind. It sank at Crowther's side.

"Uncle," it panted, "help me!"

"All I can," said Crowther, "but it's quite simple. He's the best overseer I ever had. He gets more out of Rahiti in six months than I used to in a year, and it's about my turn for the 'outside.' I'm going to live with a capital L. I'm going to——"

Mata was not listening, or failed to understand.

"He made a mistake," she said dully, "a terrible, terrible mistake."

"Impossible," said Crowther. "I'm certain he never made a mistake in his life."

"He did," Mata persisted. "Oh, Uncle, if you laugh at me, I think I shall die. We met——"

"At a friend's house during the holidays," prompted Crowther.

"And he thought—I don't know what he thought, but I never gave him any cause to think it."

"You'd better cut that part out," advised Crowther. "He had some difficulty over it himself. He polished it off in the end by telling me that he loved you. Why not try that way, Mata?"

Mata sighed.

"Did he tell you that I loved him?"

"No, but——"

"Well, then——" said Mata.

Crowther turned slowly and looked at her.

"You see," she went on, staring out to sea, "there happens to be someone else."

"That's unfortunate," admitted Crowther, "but he can be imported by the next schooner."

"He doesn't need importing," said Mata, her eyes still turned toward the crimsoning horizon.

There was silence for a space.

"I tell you what it is, little girl," said Crowther unsteadily. "We'd better defeat all these complications by marrying each other. Not such a bad idea when you come to think of it, eh?"

Mata looked at him with the eyes of understanding.

"Then you *have* come to think of it," she said, "without——without the laugh?"

THE INEVITABLE INGRAM

THERE was something going on out there to the westward. The sunset was the same miracle of beauty that it usually is near the Equator, but below and beyond them there hovered a gray-green void that slowly spread like some disfiguring disease over the fair face of the sky. And the heat! It was slow asphyxiation.

Ingram had seen and felt all this before. Once, in his overseeing days, it had heralded the wiping of a vast estate from the face of the earth.



And again, only six years earlier, it had spelt the mowing of a neat swathe through three bungalows, a medley of "labour lines," and five hundred acres of young rubber. It had not meant very much

to him in those days; the devastated properties were not his, and as a spectacle it had been magnificent. But now——

He leant out over the veranda railing, a gaunt, anxious figure in the encroaching gloom. Twice he looked back over his shoulder before speaking. Through the mosquito door streamed a flood of homely yellow light. His wife sat beside the wicker table, sewing. Ingram's grip of the veranda railing tightened.

“Olive!” he called softly.

She came, a pale wisp of a woman in the loose, flowing wrapper of the Islands, and stood beside him at the rail.

“Yes?” she said.

“There’s something coming up,” said Ingram, staring over the sea. “It may be something, and it may be nothing, but it’s the season, and we ought to be ready.”

“What had I better do?” she asked him in a low, colourless voice.

“Take whatever you value on to the hill,” he told her—“Roko, the sewing-machine, anything. I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

She went into the living room and stood for a moment looking about her. “Anything she valued!” She smiled. It was so like Bob to imagine there *was* anything—on Tahao.

Roko, the fox terrier sybarite, was engaged in lethargic fly-catching operations on his favourite mat. The sewing-machine in its intensely varnished case with gold lettering reflected the lamplight with customary brilliance. A dog and a sewing-machine! She took them to the “hill” as directed, and sat in the sand with her alleged valuables on either hand, waiting.

Tahao was an atoll, and what Bob persisted with ludicrous gravity in calling the “hill” was the highest point on it, at least ten feet above the level of the sea. From its summit one commanded a view of perhaps a mile more ocean than could be seen from the beach. Also it afforded a refuge for those who wished to cling to the last delectable moments of life if the sea saw fit to inundate Tahao, which was entirely probable.

Through the stagnant darkness sounds filtered up to the "hill"—Bob's deep-toned exhortations to the two "boys," their jabbered response, the methodical thud of a maul, the crackle and scrape of corrugated iron. Olive knew precisely what was going on. They were driving pegs deep into the ground at the four corners of the house, and passing wires over the roof to hold it down. This, their home, must be anchored to Tahao at all costs. Bob would see to that. He invariably saw to everything. Life, even on Tahao, was of such immense importance to him.

Olive sat with hands clasped about her knees. She had thought her mind long since numb, but to-night, in face of the omnipotent threat hovering on the horizon, she found herself piecing together the twisted fragments of her married life like an ineffectual puzzle.

No one could have faced heavy odds with more fortitude, more thoroughness, and less avail than Bob Ingram. As incapable of recognizing defeat as of accomplishing victory, he staggered to his feet after each reverse and fought on with an ox-like stolidity that Olive knew to be heroic and blamed herself for finding exasperating.

For three years he had striven to make a home for the woman he loved. It was here—on Tahao. Then had come the vanilla boom. According to Bob, there was nothing like vanilla. The demand was unlimited. In five years, or less, they would be in a position to install a manager, and live in God's country. Well, either vanilla did not like Tahao, or Tahao did not like vanilla.

After eighteen months of precarious existence, as wearing to the nerves of its attendants as that of an exacting invalid, it died.

But what of that? A trading cutter was the thing! Freight rates were fantastic. The vessel would pay for herself in a year, and then—— These were the days when Bob's enthusiasms were infectious. With considerable pomp the cutter was christened *Olive* and reduced to matchwood a month later on a neighbouring reef.

This was a calamity. There was no denying it. For a whole day Bob patrolled the veranda in subdued fashion, but at breakfast the next morning he returned to the attack with redoubled vigour. It appeared that he had explored Tahao lagoon as never before, and there was *bêche-de-mer* there, quantities of it. He explained, with the rekindled light of enthusiasm in his pale eyes, that *bêche-de-mer* was rapidly coming into favour as the most nutritious of table delicacies, fetching untold wealth per ton delivered in Papeete. He had figured it out, and if he worked with the "boys," there was a fortune in it within two years—or was it three? He consulted an old envelope, disfigured with pencilled calculations, and found it to be three.

Olive watched them set out in the whale boat, saw through the telescope their pigmy figures splashing through the lagoon shallows or clambering over the reef, and toward evening the return of the heavily laden whale boat. Then, after a hasty meal, smoke boxes were erected on the beach, and the task of curing the *bêche-de-mer* was carried on into the night.

When the day's work was done, Bob flung himself,

exhausted, unspeakably begrimed, but happy, into a cane chair on the veranda.

“We’re on to it now, little woman,” he grinned. And Olive smiled back, wondering, as she did so, why it was so impossible for her to share his faith.

She could not watch him for long and remain inactive. On the third evening she donned a work-worn overall and plunged her hands into the revolting mess. It was necessary to impale each sea slug on a little stick before placing it in the smoke box. Surely she could do this! But no. Bob seized her wrist on the instant and conducted her to the house like a wayward child. It was the first time she had seen him really angry.

“I won’t have it!” he stormed. “Whoever heard of such a thing?”

Argument she knew to be worse than useless. It worried him, and that was the last thing Olive wished to do.

“Don’t you see?” he pleaded later. “If I can’t keep my end of things going, I’m no good. The house is yours.”

And with the house, and its predominating features of a dog and a sewing-machine, Olive was forced to be content.

“Ten tons!” he informed her triumphantly at the end of the month. “At this rate——”

At this rate, and by recourse to the mathematical envelope, he was able to prove that the length of time required to make a fortune had been over-estimated. It was two years, after all, not three. In the meantime, he had reduced himself to the resemblance of a skeleton,

and there was a feverish light in his eyes that Olive recognized with secret dread.

The arrival of the schooner that condescended to call at Tahao every three months was always the event that may be imagined, but on the next occasion, and after two months' intimacy with *bêche-de-mer*, it was nothing short of thrilling.

The captain, a hard-headed, soft-hearted Scot, came ashore in the whale boat with his customary contributions of rum and cigars, and settled down on the veranda to make his brief visit the pleasant thing that it invariably was. Papeete was booming, it appeared. There was talk of a tramway—a tramway in Papeete! Copra was soaring; shell was rocketing—

“Ye hae nothing for me this trip?” he suggested at last. It was the invariable signal that he must be going. He always said it, and always with the tactful addition of “this trip,” though he knew that not on this trip, nor on any other, would Tahao supply his schooner with a cargo.

And it was here that Bob sprang his child-like surprise on the visitor. Without a word, and labouring under intense excitement, he led the captain to the stores shed and flung wide the doors.

From earthen floor to corrugated iron roof the place was stacked with *bêche-de-mer*, representing a work comparable with the pyramids. Had he anything “this trip”? Well, he had, that was all.

The captain advanced into the gloom, selected an immaculately cured slug from the pile, and turned it slowly on a horny palm.

"Is it all like this?" he inquired shortly. He was talking business now.

"All," stammered Bob.

The captain shook his head sadly.

"Too bad, too bad," he muttered absently. "They're 'chalk fish', ye ken. Wouldn't pay freight these days. Now, if they'd been 'deep-water blacks' . . ."

At this juncture he stopped, because it was necessary to lift Bob Ingram from the ground and carry him to his bed, where he remained, in a state of alternate coma and delirium, for upward of a week.

This surely was the end, Olive told herself, with a secret and guilty joy. There was nothing more on Tahao to be undertaken, persisted in, and failed over. It was her turn now. She would nurse him back to health and, in the subtle ways known only to a woman, persuade him to abandon ambition for the less harried paths of content. A new interest had come into her life. Her manner changed, and Bob noticed it.

"Olive," he said one evening, during his convalescence on the veranda, "Olive, I've been thinking."

"You mustn't—yet," she said. "Try and rest. There's plenty of time."

He turned in his chair and looked into her eyes. "But that's just it," he said; "there isn't. I've been thinking about you."

"About me?"

"Yes. I haven't thought enough about you. You—you've been splendid."

"Good gracious, is that all?"

“Not quite. You need a change. Tahao is no place for a woman.”

So he realized that. After three years Bob realized that much. Olive's head bent lower over the needlework in her lap.

“What's the matter with clearing out for a while?” he droned on. “Sydney, San Francisco, anywhere you like?”

“Nothing that I can see,” said Olive in a carefully controlled voice. “It would set us up.”

“Ah, I didn't mean that,” he objected gently. “I can't very well get away—just now. Later, perhaps, when—when I've really got things going here.” He stirred uneasily. “I've been thinking about that, too,” he went on absently. “I see now where I've been going wrong. Too much of a hurry. Too much get-rich-quick. It can't be done outside of a city office, and we're on an atoll. When you come down to bed-rock, there's only one thing—copra.”

He paused. Olive made no comment, and presently he went on.

“Listen!” And she listened, with the old, prophetic instinct of fatal futility, to the praises of the cocoanut palm. There was no doubt about the dried kernel of the cocoanut. It was currency, and it was indigenous to Tahao. He was a fool for not having planted up the island with it at the outset. Nothing could happen to copra. . . . And at the end of it all she said:

“But doesn't it take seven years for the trees to bear?”

He admitted it—admitted it with a smile on his lips

and the lust of battle in his eyes. But this was not what they had started out to discuss. What of the proposed holiday for Olive?

She went down to the beach and stood staring across the waste of waters at her feet. She knew that if she once left Tahao, she could not bring herself to return. She knew that she should never have married a pioneer, even loving him as she loved Bob. She was not of the type to thrive on adversity, to find each obstacle a spur to fresh endeavour. Equally, she was not of the type to abandon a ship in distress.

And so she stayed, while Bob feverishly planted cocoanuts, and raved of their rapid growth, and made calculations on envelopes, and one brazen day succeeded another until Tahao was transformed from a glaring strip of coral sand into a promising plantation of three-year-old palms, and Olive sat on the "hill" with Roko and the sewing-machine, waiting. . . .

They had finished fastening the house to Tahao, and silence closed down until there filtered through it a sound, faint, yet seeming to fill the world. Roko whined and snuffed the air suspiciously. The sound grew in volume, and far off the darkness was slashed with a thin ribbon of phosphorescent light. The sound was wind, the light was a wave, and with sudden, demoniac violence the awful pair descended on Tahao.

The roof of the bungalow snapped its puny fastenings in the first gust, and Olive heard it rattling off into the darkness like ineffectual stage thunder. Then she felt Bob's arm dragging her down to the sand. Water

enveloped her. It was cool and quiet after the turmoil overhead. She hoped that it would remain. She prayed that it would remain . . . But no. Bob saw to that. He invariably saw to everything. He clung to a pandanus root with one hand, and his wife with the other, and after an eternity dragged her to her feet.

They stood on the summit of the "hill," waist-deep in swirling water. There was nothing else in all the world. Tahao was gone. Olive swept the hair from her eyes and laughed, and Bob did his best to calm her hysteria. But it was not hysteria. It was just that Tahao was gone!

Tahao was gone for little more than an hour. Thereafter Olive watched it reappear as the sea fell, inch by inch, foot by foot, under the paling sky. First the summit of the "hill" on which they stood, and a few battered treetops, then the beach with its chaos of débris that had once been a plantation of three-year-old palms. The eternal sun shone. The Pacific subsided into a drowsy swell.

By noon the "boys" had returned in the whale boat, to which they had clung all night, and already Bob was superintending the erection of a pandanus lean-to.

"You've been properly through it, little woman," he said, preparing her palm frond bed for the night. "Try and sleep."

"I'm not tired," she said, raising herself on to an elbow. "And, Bob——"

"Yes?"

"What are we going to do?"

“Do?” He stared at her dully. His face was lined with exhaustion. “Wait for the schooner.”

“And then?”

It was torture to question him now. Olive knew it, and persisted. She felt that she must know, or never sleep again. “Then you’re going to get out of here, if I know anything,” he answered her shortly.

“And you?”

He stretched himself at length on his rough couch, and stared at the crazy roof, through which glimmered the stars.

“I hardly know,” he said, “yet. Haven’t had time to think.” He swept the lank hair from his forehead with a weary gesture. “Pretty heart-breaking, isn’t it?”

Olive did not answer.

“It hasn’t done for the lot, though,” he went on presently. “Somewhere about half, I should think——”

“Ah, about half,” repeated Olive mechanically. “And if it had ‘done for the lot’, it would have been the end.”

“The end—of what?”

“Of Tahao.”

He stared at the roof for a space. “I suppose so,” he said slowly, with the air of one to whom such a contingency had never presented itself. “There’s nothing I hate like a quitter, but I’m getting on a bit to wait another—another seven years.”

“It’s a long time,” said Olive.

Then she saw that he was asleep. And she had been going to tell him, persuade him into seeing what manner

of man he was, destined, inevitable. That there are men like that, and that it is better for such to leave the scene of their failures and start at the bottom of the ladder, if need be, so long as the chain of fatal futility be broken. But it was too late now. He was asleep. To-morrow he would wake with a fresh store of his inexhaustible, bull-headed pertinacity. He would agree that she must go, but he must stay. "There was nothing he hated like a quitter." Would she have him lie down and admit he was no good?

And so Olive said nothing the next morning, but watched him and the "boys" scouring the lagoon shallows for oddments of salvage. He was as pleased as a child when they found two sheets of the bungalow's corrugated iron roof, the sewing-machine less ornate but intact, and a promiscuous assortment of tinned provisions.

So the sun-drenched days came and went as of old. Olive found it increasingly difficult to sleep, and of a night she had taken to creeping from the lean-to, past the "boys," sleeping soundly beside the dying embers of the campfire, and up to the "hill."

From here, under a vivid moon, it seemed to her that Tahao lay outspread like a grinning skeleton, with flesh, in the form of the surviving palms and tangle of brush-wood banked against them, still clinging to the bones. . . .

Tahao was a bonfire, ready laid! The thought sprang at her one night like a beast of prey. Here was an end! Even he had said so. She thrust it from her, but it returned with the force of irrefutable logic. It

would be better for him—in the end. She was certain of that. A flame, a mere spark, with the trade wind behind it, and the thing was done. It could so easily happen . . . the campfire . . . no one would guess . . . and after a time, when he had found his niche back there in the world, she would tell him—she would have to tell him—and he would laugh. They would laugh together over Tahao.

What was it that made her pause for a single instant? She did not know. But neither did she move from the summit of the “hill.”

And it was while she sat there, her hair streaming in the wind, her eyes transfixed on space, that the miracle happened, though in reality it was no miracle, but the most natural occurrence in the world. A gust caught the embers of the campfire and scattered them wide. Olive did not see it. All she saw was a light on the beach. For a moment she stared at it spellbound, incredulous, the next she had sped down the slope with a warning cry and was trampling on a serpent of fire that writhed ahead of her through the tangle of brush, always ahead, always just beyond reach.

How long the battle lasted she had no notion, but this she knew—that it was Bob, Bob himself, who first cried a halt. Sweating, begrimed, he burst through the smoke and bore her out of the inferno.

“Olive,” he kept muttering, “Olive!”

Tahao was a semicircle of leaping flame. He took her to the “hill” and together they watched it burn itself out.

“There’s nothing to be done,” he said, “nothing. This is the end.”

And he spoke truth.

He left with his wife by the schooner, and has long since ceased to be the Inevitable Ingram.

THE SPELL

IF FENNER had thrown away that absurd wreath of flowers, things might have turned out differently. I—even I—admit that now, because I *know*.

Jimmy Fenner enjoyed a huge popularity on Miatu, and it was not of the “grog” variety, either. I don’t believe he had ever given a nigger alcohol in his life. He had the right temperament, that was all; and, as surely as a dog or a child knows its friend, so surely does the South Sea Kanaka recognize and appreciate a kindred spirit.

There were those “at home” who deplored Jimmy Fenner. They said there was nothing in him, and neither was there—of evil. For all his six feet of good-looking, powerfully built manhood, backed by an income that would have been the ruination of most men, he was a child—pleasure-loving, irresponsible, simple of soul.

But to return to the absurd wreath of flowers. It was made of crimson *drala* blossoms and thrown to him from one of the canoes that swarmed round the schooner like a flock of sea birds. Fenner was standing at the rail, and when he slipped the wreath over his head, and stood there like a six-foot, twentieth-century Dryad, a great shout went up.

"Ah, of course," he muttered, and smiled whimsically. He had learnt something of Island custom in the last six months and knew that if a man did this, it meant that he would return. "What a liar I am," he added guiltily.

"*Samoce, Samoce!*" he called over the water as the schooner headed for the channel in the barrier reef, then turned abruptly from the rail and lit a cigar.

"It's been a great time, Clem," he said with a catch in his voice that I attributed to smoke.

"Great," I agreed.

"There's nothing quite like it," he added after a pause.

"No, nothing," I answered.

He glanced at me with a certain disappointment, walked aft, and stood looking out over our wake to where a green dot that was Miatu danced in the shimmering heat haze.

There was cause for his disappointment. I should have enthused over these fairy isles and their child-like people. I should have met his mood, and capped comparative with superlative, for it would all have been genuine, but—I was thinking of Lady Fenner, already wondering how I should account for our long-delayed return to civilization and things practical. Fenner's mother was methodical, and after the fashion of such people, demanded method in others. "Why had I not returned on the date specified?" I could hear her asking the question in her incisive falsetto. "Because Fenner wouldn't leave!" It sounded weak on my part, and savoured of betrayal. "Because the tropics are demoralizing, and——" But that was worse.

Between Miatu and Levuka, Fenner spent most of his time hunched on the deck, staring over his knees.

"Whew!" I exclaimed, strolling past him for the third time without being noticed. "You've still got those flowers round your neck. They're getting high."

He looked down at them, then at me.

"Yes," he answered absently.

"Heigh ho for a few theatres," I sighed presently, looking for'ard.

"Don't," he snapped, still staring aft.

I left him. It would wear off, I decided. There was plenty of time.

At lunch—fish, turtle steak, *taro*, and pineapples—he became more communicative.

"With another three months' practice Pope would make a really fine bat," he observed, apropos of nothing. Then again: "A year's sound coaching for the whole team and they'd give the average county club a run for its money." Or: "I can just see Miatu with a resident's bungalow on Beritania Hill; white, of course, with an avenue of coral and pandanus. They've got the secret, Clem; there's no getting away from that."

"Secret of what?" I demanded brusquely. It is a dangerous sign when a healthy, normal young man begins to talk about houses on hills with pandanus avenues.

"Life," said Fenner.

"That isn't life," I told him, waving a dramatic hand in the wrong direction; "it's a dream, a pleasant one I'll grant, but you'll wake up the minute you rub shoulders with your own world."

"I wonder," he mused. And, to tell the truth, so did I—until we reached Levuka, where four cablegrams from Lady Fenner persuaded me that I had spoken nothing but the truth.

I think Fenner was "wondering" most of the way to London. He kept very much to himself, and spent most of his time in a deck chair, smoking, and looking out to sea, with his hands interlocked behind his head.

He was to stand for Parliament, and marry a Miss Strickland, Lady Fenner informed me on our return to Craigmoor.

"Oh, yes," I murmured, or something equally absurd.

Lady Fenner fixed me with the penetrating gray eyes that had haunted me from Levuka to London.

"The tour was a mistake," she announced with her usual abruptness. "It was badly managed."

I wanted to ask her how *she* would have ordered the movements of a twenty-five-year-old child of independent means and nature during a year's world wanderings, but refrained. She would have told me.

"Rex was to have seen the world," she accused. "But from what I can learn he has seen nothing but some islands—somewhere or other. What was the attraction?"

My eye wandered through the bay window over Craigmoor's well-ordered acres, then conjured a vision of Miatu on a moonlit night with brown-skinned men and women dancing a *meke*.

"I really can't say," I admitted, "except——"

"Yes?"

"Except that they were very beautiful, and we stayed there some time."

Lady Fenner frowned. From boyhood I remembered that frown, and still feared it.

"There was—nothing else? No feminine attraction?" Lady Fenner leant forward. "Remember, Clem, you are Rex's oldest—only friend; I relied on you."

"No, no, certainly not," I stammered. "It was, well, just the place. I can't define its attractions exactly—no one has been able to from Stevenson downward—but, there it was."

"And here it is still apparently," snapped Lady Fenner. "Rex is not the same. I hoped—I always thought—that extensive travel only proved that there is no place like home."

We talked a great deal more about Rex, Craigmoor, and the future, but I left with a vague presentiment that in "those islands, somewhere or other," Lady Fenner had found her match, if not her master.

"I can't stand this," Fenner told me one day in town. "Just look at it!"

I looked, and saw Hyde Park on a May morning.

"Well?" I demanded. "What's the matter with it?"

"I don't mean *this* exactly," he answered, indicating the Row with a flick of his stick, "although it's futile enough in its own way—liver brigade, clothes, pretence, pretence, pretence—but everything. They're trying to make me stand for Parliament."

"It doesn't appeal to you?"

“Appeal?” He struck savagely at a pebble, and sent it hurtling into the wheels of a passing perambulator. “Look at the finished article!”

“You’d sooner umpire at Miatu,” I sneered.

He stopped in his stride and confronted me. His face was transfigured.

“Just that!” he said; and the trouble was I could entirely sympathize.

“Went to a theatre—and supper the other night,” he mumbled presently. “Such drivel! Such belly worship!”

“Perhaps you’d prefer a *meke* and a fish feast?” I suggested.

He looked at me, but did not answer with his lips.

In the circumstances I was hardly surprised at receiving an urgent wire from Lady Fenner toward the end of June.

“He’s gone,” she said as soon as the drawing-room door had closed. “Vanished!”

I had never seen Lady Fenner so—I was going to say “human.” She was agitated, and showed it.

“Good gracious!” I exclaimed, with as much astonishment as I could muster.

“And in the midst of everything!” she wailed. “He left me this. Read it, and tell me what it means.”

I read:

MY DEAR MATER:

It’s no go; I can’t stand it. I avoided farewells because they would mean explanations that I couldn’t give, and you wouldn’t understand. Ask Clem; I think he has an inkling.

I’m sorry to have upset all your arrangements, but, after all, what *does* it matter? If you are as annoyed over this as I expect you

will be, keep saying that—"What *does* it matter?" and you'll get as near to my reasons for cutting it all as I could ever take you.

Your affectionate son,

REX.

I pretended to be reading for several seconds after I had finished. I could feel an outraged mother's eyes riveted upon me. What, in Heaven's name, was I to tell her? What I suspected—that because he had worn an absurd wreath of *drala* blossoms when he left Miatu he was bound to return there? Yes, even at that time I had begun to wonder. . . . But the mere thought of offering such a preposterous suggestion to Lady Fenner in the drawing room of Craigmoor must have brought a shadow of a smirk to my lips. I heard Lady Fenner speaking.

"Is this a practical joke?" Her tone was almost eager.

I looked up at that.

"No," I said. "It's not a joke. He has gone back to Miatu."

"Miatu?"

"Yes; an island in the Lau group, west of Fiji."

"But——" Lady Fenner swallowed something, and looked about the room.

"We may as well face it," I went on with a sudden access of candour. "He has gone back to the Islands because he likes the life there better than here. It's quite possible, you know. What's more, I doubt if he means to come back."

Then it was that Lady Fenner rallied her forces—such forces!—and for a solid hour I was attacked, propitiated, flattered, argued into pledging myself to do my utmost to bring back her son.

"I relied on you," was her parting shot, and two weeks later I sailed for the South Seas, primed to the brim with every argument, every appeal, calculated to swell the heart if not the mind of man.

I was sick to death of them by the time I reached Colombo, not altogether sure of them at Sydney, and at Miatu the last vestige of them was wiped from my mind like a drawing from a slate. I was still frenziedly groping for them as I walked up the powdered coral pathway to the guest house. What was it in this infernal paradise of a place that made one forget?

Red earth paths, vivid greensward, shady cocoanut palms, and yellow sunlight all was the same, except for a wooded hill behind and above the village. Here a score of natives were leisurely felling trees or squatting in circles, alternately rolling banana-leaf *salukas* and scraping bamboos with their copra knives.

I found Fenner entertaining the Buli at afternoon tea.

"Well, well, well," he drawled, and pushed me into a wicker chair. "Kava or tea?"

"Whisky-and-soda, thanks," I replied.

He shook his head and dropped one eyelid.

"'Fraid we can't do it. But I can recommend the tea; it's Miatu."

The Buli grinned from ear to ear.

"*Vinaka, vinaka Miatu!*" he chuckled, and waddled out into the sunlight.

Fenner stretched his legs and yawned, then went over to a cupboard in the corner and produced a whisky tantalus.

"You ought to have seen my welcome," he said,

pushing it across the table. "I thought the old Buli would have a fit. And the others—nothing would do them but they must build me a house—you remember my house—on the hill behind the village; they're at it now."

For a while he sat watching me at my whisky-and-soda. Suddenly he laughed, and I think it was that riling laugh that brought back to me in a flood all Lady Fenner's arguments.

"Fire ahead," he jeered. "You're aching to get it off your chest, and I'm ready now; I'm on my native heath."

"I'm going to try to persuade you to come home."

"Back to England, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Of course you are; fire ahead."

"You owe it to your mother—to Craigmoor. Think——"

"Do you suppose I haven't thought, Clem?" He was serious now, and leant forward, tapping the wicker table with a strong brown finger. "Do you suppose I didn't cudgel my brains almost to bits before taking this step? I owe the mater nothing except the accident of birth. As for Craigmoor, I'm on the credit side there."

"Your mother wants you."

"Does she? It's funny she's never shown it before. But, yes, I admit she may want me—for Parliament or some equally futile career, so that she can hear people say of her son: 'He's getting on,' or 'He's a coming man.' Getting on—toward what?"

“Work of some kind is necessary for every man.” I remembered that very distinctly. It had sounded well—in the drawing room at Craigmoor.

“It all depends what you call work. A lover of birds is ‘working’ when he studies their habits. A botanist—a naturalist——”

“Work is doing something that one doesn’t particularly care about,” I ventured. “We need it as a discipline, restraint. It’s the curse of Adam, but somehow it still holds good.”

Fenner smiled his exasperating smile.

“Well, all I can say is that we’re out of the cursed area here,” he drawled. “I don’t feel as if I ought to be doing something I don’t particularly care about. What’s more, I don’t do it, and behold—a man!” He protruded his deep chest and thumped it triumphantly.

“You’ll ‘go native,’” I suggested.

“Not at all,” he answered suavely. “I wear seven duck suits a week, and live—as you see. Besides, although I don’t work according to your standards, I have interests—plenty to occupy me. We’re planning a polo ground. I’m getting in some Tongan ponies. Then there’s the tea; that was my idea.”

I felt that we were straying from the point.

“Look here,” I blurted desperately, “you have an income of fifteen thousand pounds a year. Is it going to lie idle?”

“Ah,” mused Fenner, “I never thought of that. I see your point—I’m receiving without giving. Quite good! Would you like it? I don’t want it.”

“I?”

“Yes; it’s you or a charity. Which shall it be?”

“Good heavens!” I gasped. “You’re not all there, Rex. Think, man—think what it means.”

“I’ve done all the money thinking I’m going to do,” said Fenner. “Have a cigarette.”

“But——”

“Have a cigarette.”

I took one and lit it mechanically.

“You’re under a spell, Rex—that’s it,” I muttered, looking at him across the table.

“Perhaps,” he admitted, emitting smoke with the words. “It’s very pleasant. I see nothing against it.”

He levered himself out of his chair and came round to me.

“It’s no good, Clem,” he said; “they’ve discovered the secret of life on Miatu, and I’m going to share it with them.”

“And the secret?” I suggested, with a poor effort at superiority. I must have looked foolish as I said it, for he laughed his deep, riling laugh.

“Do you mean to say you don’t know?” he queried. “Happiness, you old fathead! Come and have a look at the tea.”

During the sun-bathed days that followed I was torn between the growing conviction that Fenner was right and my pledge to his mother. How was the man to be moved? For hours I would sit thinking out crushing arguments that Fenner dispersed as though they had been smoke.

His obstinacy annoyed me intensely, but, had I

known it, his annoyance was far greater than mine. It found vent with startling unexpectedness.

We were walking along the beach road with .22 rifles on the off chance of pigeon, and, as usual, I was improving—or trying to improve—the occasion with my half-hearted appeals to his better judgment, when he turned on me with a swiftness of which I had never dreamt him capable. I had never seen Fenner angry in my life, but I did now, and it was not pleasant.

“Look here,” he said evenly, but his teeth were bared, “I’m sick of this—sick of you. When are you going?”

“When you come with me,” I managed to jerk out.

“Well, you’ll die and rot here before that,” he answered, still with a terrible restraint. “And I don’t want a man who has been my friend doing that on Miatu. You leave here to-morrow, or I won’t be answerable for the consequences.”

“What on earth do you mean by that?” I demanded, aghast.

“What I say.”

“You must be mad.”

“Perhaps—a homicidal maniac. But there it is: you leave here to-morrow, or you’ll be shot.”

“And who will do the shooting?”

“I will.”

He meant it. In that instant I realized that he actually meant it. We spoke no more that day.

After my bath the next morning I found all my belongings packed and piled outside the guest house, and Fenner sitting in the doorway with a rifle across

his knees. There was nothing for it but to follow the porters down to the waiting cutter. I never felt so small in my life, but what was the use of coming to violence?

I had already stepped aboard when Fenner strolled down the landing.

"Good-bye, Clem," he said.

I think I grunted.

"I shall be glad to see you back any time—when you've changed your views. At present they're boring, and we're not cultivating boredom on Miatu. By the way," he added, as the boys began hauling on the main sheet, "about that fifteen thou' a year: it's going to Charing Cross Hospital unless I hear from you to the contrary inside of two months. Think it over."

I leant over the gunwale.

"Go to the devil!" I exploded. Lord, how he annoyed me!

"'Fraid we don't cultivate him, either, on Miatu," said Fenner, and smiled his exasperating, self-satisfied smile. Suddenly it was blotted out. Something had hurtled between us, and fell in a jumble about my neck. A great shout went up from the natives on the wharf when it was seen to be a wreath of scarlet *drala* blossoms.

For an instant I fought with the desire to tear it from me and fling it into the sea. Then it occurred to me that this would be rather a childish thing to do, so I left it where it was as the cutter slid from the wharf and headed for the channel in the barrier reef.

"I've failed," I told Lady Fenner. "That's all I can say—I've failed."

I've no idea now what she said to me; I was thinking of other things.

At the end of a month I had booked my passage, and in two more I was walking up a coral and pandanus avenue to a white house on the hill behind the village at Miatu.

"I've changed my views," I said.

"Come in," said Fenner.

THE END

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