Becke Louis

Rodman the Boatsteerer and Other Stories

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Louis Becke
Rodman The Boatsteerer And Other Stories / 1898

RODMAN THE BOATSTEERER

I

With her white cotton canvas swelling gently out and then softly drooping flat against her cordage, the *Shawnee*, sperm whaler of New Bedford, with the dying breath of the south-east trade, was sailing lazily over a sea whose waters were as calm as those of a mountain lake. Twenty miles astern the lofty peaks of Tutuila, one of the islands of the Samoan group, stood out clearly in the dazzling sunshine, and, almost ahead, what at dawn had been the purple loom of Upolu was changing to a cloud-capped dome of vivid green as the ship closed with the land.

The *Shawnee* was "a five-boat ship," and, judging from the appearance of her decks, which were very clean, an unlucky one. She had been out for over a year, and three months had passed since the last fish had been killed. That was off the coast of Chile, and she was now cruising westward and northward towards the eastern coast of New Guinea, where Captain Harvey Lucy, the master, expected to make up for the persistent ill-luck that had attended him so far. Naturally a man of most violent and ungovernable temper, his behaviour to his men on the present voyage had led to disastrous consequences, and the crew, much as they admired their captain as one of the most skilful whalemen who had ever trod a deck, were now worked up into a state of exasperation bordering on mutiny. Shortly before the Samoan Islands were sighted, the ship's cooper, a man who took the cue for his conduct to the hands from the example set by the captain, had had a fierce quarrel with a young boat-steerer, named Gerald Rodman, who, in a moment of passion, struck the cooper such a terrific blow that the man lay between life and death for some hours. An attempt to put Rodman in irons was fiercely resisted by a number of his shipmates, who were led by his younger brother. But the after-guard were too strong for the men, and after a savage conflict the two Rodmans and three other seamen were overpowered by Captain Lucy, his four mates and the carpenter and stewards. As was common enough in those days on American whaleships, nearly all the officers were relatives or connections by marriage, and were always ready to stand by the captain; in this instance the cooper was a brother of the second mate. Six days had passed since this affair had occurred, and when Upolu was sighted the five men were still in irons and confined in the hot and stifling atmosphere of the sail-locker, having been given only just enough food and water to keep body and soul together.

Four bells struck, and Captain Lucy made his appearance from below. The watch on deck, who had hitherto been talking among themselves as they went about their work, at once became silent, and muttered curses escaped from their lips as they eyed the tall figure of the captain standing at the break of the poop. For some minutes he apparently took no notice of any one about him; then he turned to the mate, who stood near him, and said:

"Have you had a look at those fellows this morning, Brant?"

"Yes," answered the officer. "They want to know if you're going to let them have a smoke."

A savage oath preceded Captain Lucy's reply—

"They can lie there till they die before any one of them shall put a pipe in his mouth."

"Just as you please, captain," said the mate, nonchalantly. "I guess you know best what you're doing. But there's going to be more trouble aboard this ship if you don't ease up a bit on those five

men; and if I were you I wouldn't go too far. One of 'em—that youngest Rodman boy—can't stand much more of that sail locker in such weather as this. And I guess *I* don't want to go before a grand jury if he or any of 'em dies."

"I tell you, Brant, that rather than ease up on those fellows, I'd lose the ship. I'm going to keep them there till we strike another fish, and then I'll haze what life is left in them clean out of them."

Rough and harsh as he was with the crew of the *Shawnee*, Brant was no vindictive tyrant, and was about to again remonstrate with the savage Lucy, when, suddenly, the thrilling cry of "There she blows!" came from the look-out in the crow's nest; and in a few minutes the barque's decks were bustling with excitement. A small "pod" or school of sperm whales were in sight. Four boats were at once lowered and started in pursuit.

When first sighted from the ship the whales were not more than two miles distant, and moving towards her. The mate's boat was first away, and in a very short time fastened to the leader of the "pod"—a huge bull over sixty feet in length. In less than five seconds after the keen-edged harpoon had plunged deep into his body, the mighty fish "sounded" (dived) at a terrific speed; the other whales at once disappeared and Brant's boat shot away from the other three. The remaining boats were those of the captain and the second and third mates. For some ten or fifteen minutes their crews lay upon their oars watching the swift progress of the mate's boat, and scanning the sea from every point around them, to discern where the vanished and unstricken whales would rise to breathe again. At last they saw the great bull, to which the mate's boat was fast, burst out upon the surface of the water, two miles away. For a minute the mighty creature lay exposed to view, beating the sea into a white seeth of foam as he struck the water tremendous blows with his tail, and sought to free himself from the cruel steel in his body. As he thrashed from side to side, two of his convoy rose suddenly near him as if in sympathy with their wounded leader. Then, in an instant, they all disappeared together, the stricken whale still dragging the mate's boat after him at an incredible speed.

Knowing that in all probability the two whales which had just appeared would accompany the great bull to the last—when he would receive the stroke of the death-dealing lance from Brant—the captain of the *Shawnee* at once started off in pursuit, accompanied by the second and third mates' boats. The crews bent to their tough ash oars with strength and determination. There was no need for the dreadful oaths and blasphemies with which Captain Lucy and his officers assailed their ears, or his threats of punishment should they fail to catch up the mate's boat and miss killing the two "loose" whales; the prospect of such a prize was all the incentive the seamen needed. With set teeth and panting bosoms they urged the boats along, and presently they were encouraged by a cry from the third mate, who called out to the captain and second mate that the wounded whale was slackening his speed, and Mr. Brant was "hauling up alongside to give him the lance." In another fifty strokes the captain and the two officers saw the great head of the creature that was dragging the mate's boat along again appear on the surface, and on each side were his devoted cetacean companions, who were almost of as monstrous a size as the bull himself.

With savage oaths the captain urged his crew to fresh exertions, for just then he saw the mate go for'ard in his boat and plunge his keen lance of shining steel into his prize, then back his boat off as the agonised whale again sounded into the blue depths below, with his life-blood pouring from him in a bubbling stream.

II

On board the *Shawnee* the progress of the boats was watched amid the most intense excitement; and even the imprisoned seamen, in their foul and horrible prison, stretched their wearied and manacled limbs and sought to learn by the sounds on deck whether any or all of the boats were "fast"—that is, had harpooned a whale. Broken-spirited and exhausted as they were by long days of cruel and undeserved punishment, they would have forgotten their miseries in an instant had the fourth mate ordered them on deck to lower his boat—the only one remaining on board—and join their shipmates in the other boats in the chase. But of this they knew there was little prospect, for this remaining boat had been seriously injured by a heavy sea, which had washed her inboard a few days before the fight between the officers and crew. Presently, however, they heard the hurried stamping of feet on deck, and then the voices of the fourth mate and cooper giving orders to take in sail.

"Jerry," said a young English lad named Wray, to the elder Rodman, "do you hear that? One of the boats must have got 'fast' and killed. We'll be out of this in another half-hour, cutting-in. The captain won't let us lie here when there is work to be done on deck; he's too mean a Yankee to satisfy his revenge at the expense of his pocket."

But their pleasant belief that a whale had been killed, and that the ship was shortening sail while the carcass was being cut-in, was rudely disturbed a few minutes later, when the *Shawnee* took a sudden list over to port, and they were all pitched to the lee side of the sail locker in a heap. A squall had struck the barque.

Bruised and lacerated by the force with which they had been hurled together, the five prisoners sat up, and were soon enlightened as to the condition of affairs by the carpenter making his appearance, taking off their galling irons, and ordering them on deck.

The squall was a very heavy one, accompanied by savage gusts of stinging rain, and the old ship, with her canvas in great disorder, was every now and then thrown almost on her beam ends with its fury. After considerable trouble the officers and crew succeeded in saving her canvas from being blown to ribbons, and got the barque snug again. A quarter of an hour later the squall began to lose its force, but the rain descended in torrents, and obscured the view of the now agitated ocean to such an extent that the look-outs from aloft could not discern its surface a cable length away. All those on board the barque felt intense anxiety as to whether the mate had succeeded in killing his whale before the squall burst upon him, for they knew that had he not done so he would have been compelled to cut the line and let his prize escape; no boat could live in such a sea as had arisen when "fast" to a sperm whale which was travelling at such a speed, even though fatally wounded and weak from loss of blood.

An hour passed, and then, to the joy of all on board, the rain ceased, a faint air came from the westward and blew away the thick clouds of tropic mist which enveloped the ship. Ten miles distant the verdant hills and valleys of Upolu glistened in the sunshine, and then one of the look-outs hailed the deck:

"I can see a boat, Mr. Newman—it is Mr. Brant's. He has killed his whale, sir."

In an instant the fourth mate was running aloft, but before he had ascended to the fore-top the lookout cried:

"I can see the other three boats now, sir, and they are all 'fast,' too."

A cheer broke from the *Shawnee's* hands, and, disregarding for the time all discipline, they sprang aloft one after another to gaze upon the thrilling scene. Three miles away, and plainly discernible in the now clear atmosphere, was the mate's boat lying alongside the big bull, which had just been killed, and at about the same distance were the boats of the captain and second and third mates, all "fast" to whales, and racing swiftly to windward toward the horizon.

The fourth mate at once came down from aloft and held a hurried consultation with the cooper —an old and experienced whaler. It was evident to them that the three boats had only just succeeded

in getting "fast," and that, as darkness was so near, the officers in them would have great difficulty in killing the whales to which they were "fast," as the sea was still very lumpy from the violence of the squall. None of the boats were provided with bomb-guns, the use of which would have killed the whales in a very short time; and the wind having again died away it was impossible for the ship to work up to them. Nothing, it was evident, could be done to assist the three boats, but it was decided to send the one remaining on board the barque to help the mate to tow his whale to the ship before the hordes of sharks, which would be attracted to the carcass by the smell of blood, began to devour it.

The carpenter was at once set to work to make her temporarily water-tight. By this time the sun had set, and only the position of the mate's boat was made known to the ship by a light displayed by Mr. Brant.

Standing on the port side of the poop, Martin Newman, the fourth mate, was gazing anxiously out into the darkness, hoping to see the other three boats show lights to denote that they had succeeded in killing their fish, and were waiting for a breeze to spring up to enable the barque to sail towards them. Although Newman was the youngest officer on board, he was an experienced one, and the fact that his boat had not been fit to lower with the other four had filled him with sullen rage; for he was of an intensely jealous nature, and would rather have seen the boats return unsuccessful from the chase than that he alone should have missed his chance of killing a fish.

Presently the younger of the two Rodmans, who was his (Newman's) own boatsteerer, ventured, in the fulness of his anxiety for his shipmates, to step up to the officer and speak:

"Do you think, sir, that the captain and Mr. Ford and Mr. Manning have had to cut their lines?"

The officer made no reply; and could the young boatsteerer have seen the dark, forbidding scowl upon his face, he would never have addressed him at such an unpropitious moment. But imagining that his question had not been heard, the youth repeated it.

Newman turned, and seeing the lad standing in an attitude of expectancy, asked him in savage tones what he was doing there.

"Nothing, sir; I only–"

"I'll teach you that a man doing nothing doesn't suit me when I'm in charge of the deck of this ship!" and he struck the boatsteerer a terrific blow in the mouth, which knocked him off the poop on to the main deck.

When Ned Rodman came to, he found his head supported by his brother and young Wray, and the rest of the hands on deck standing around him in sympathetic silence. Newman was the most liked of all the officers, and the lad whom he had struck down had been rather a favourite of his, principally, it was supposed, because the two Rodmans came from the same town as himself; and when the disturbance had arisen with the cooper, and the two brothers had been put in irons, Newman had several times expressed his sorrow to them when he had visited them in their prison. His sudden outburst of violence to Ned Rodman was therefore a surprise to the men generally; and several of them glanced threateningly at the figure of the fourth mate, who was now striding to and fro on the poop, occasionally hailing the look-outs in angry tones, and asking if any more boat-lights were visible.

Gerald Rodman, though no words escaped his lips as he wiped away the blood which welled from a terrible cut on his brother's temple, had in his eyes a red light of passion that boded ill for the fourth mate when the time came. He was five years older than his brother, and, although both were boatsteerers, and had made many cruises in the Pacific, this was the first time they had been shipmates. Unlike Ned, he was a man of a passionate and revengeful nature, and the second mate, to whose boat he belonged, had warned the cooper of the *Shawnee* never to meet Gerald Rodman ashore alone.

"He is a man who will never forgive an injury, and I would not care to be in your shoes if he gets you by yourself one day."

And, as a matter of fact, Gerald Rodman had sworn to himself, when he lay in irons, in the sail-locker, to have his revenge upon both the cooper and Captain Lucy, should he ever meet either of them ashore at any of the islands the barque was likely to touch at during her cruise. He was a man of great physical strength, and, for his position, fairly well educated. Both his parents were dead, and he and his brother Ned, and a delicate sister of nineteen, were the sole survivors of a once numerous family. The care of this sister was the one motive that animated the elder brother in his adventurous career; and while his reserved and morose nature seemed incapable of yielding to any tender sentiment or emotion, it yet concealed a wealth of the deepest affection for his weakly sister, of which the younger one had no conception. And yet, strangely enough, it was to Ned that Nellie Rodman was most attached; it was to *his* return that she most looked forward, never knowing that it was Gerald's money alone that maintained the old family home in the quiet little New England village in which her simple life was spent. Little did she think that when money was sent to her by Gerald, saying it came "from Ned and myself," that Ned had never had a dollar to send. For he was too careless and too fond of his own pleasure to ever think of sending her money. "Jerry," he thought, "was a mighty stingy fellow, and never spent a cent on himself—and could easily send Nell all she wanted." And yet Gerald Rodman, knowing his brother's weak and mercurial nature, and knowing that he took no care in the welfare of any living soul but himself, would have laid his life down for him, because happy, careless Ned had Nellie's eyes and Nellie's mouth, and in the tones of his voice he heard hers. So as he sat on the deck, with his brother's head upon his knees, he swore to "get even" with Martin Newman, as well as with Captain Lucy and cooper Burr, for as he watched the pale face of the lad it seemed to him to grow strangely like that of his far-off sister.

He had just completed sewing up the gaping wound in his brother's temple, when the cooper came up to the group:

"Here, lay along, you fellows; the carpenter has finished Mr. Newman's boat, and some of you loafing 'soldiers' have to man her and help Mr. Brant to tow his whale alongside. Leave that man there, and look spry, or you'll feel mighty sorry."

III

As the cooper turned away the younger Rodman, assisted by his brother, staggered to his feet. The fall from the poop had, in addition to the cut in his temple, severely injured his right knee, and he begged his brother to let him lie down again.

"Yes, yes," whispered Gerald Rodman, hurriedly; "lie down, Ned," and then the lad heard him speaking to Wray in eager, excited tones.

"I'm with you, Jerry," said the young Englishman, quickly, in answer to something that Rodman had said; "where is he now?"

"In the cabin, getting some Bourbon for Mr. Brant's boat. There is only the Dago steward with him, and if Porter and Tom Harrod will join us we shall manage the thing right enough."

"What is the matter, Jerry—what are you talking about?" asked Ned from where he lay.

"Keep still, Ned, and ask us nothing just now; there's a chance of our getting clear of this floating hell. I needn't ask *you* if you'll join us. Come on, Wray."

The fourth mate and the Portuguese steward were in the main cabin filling some bottles from a large jar of Bourbon whisky. Their backs were turned to the door, and both were so intent upon their task that they neither heard nor saw the four figures steal softly upon them. Suddenly they were seized from behind by Wray and Gerald Rodman, and then quickly gagged by Harrod and Porter before either had time to utter a cry. In a few minutes the four men had armed themselves with cutlasses from the rack around the mizzen-mast, which came through the cabin at the for'ard end of the table, Rodman also taking the captain's and chief mate's loaded revolvers out of their berths.

The fourth mate and steward were then carried into the captain's cabin, and Gerald Rodman spoke:

"Newman," he said, "we are going to take charge of this ship for a while. If you make an attempt to give an alarm you are a dead man. Wray, stand here and run them both through if they make the ghost of a sound."

Again entering the captain's cabin, he returned with two or three charts, a sextant and the ship's chronometer, which he placed on the table just as a heavy footfall sounded on the companion steps. It was the cooper.

"The boat is all ready, Newman," he said, as he entered the somewhat darkened cabin; "who is going in her?"

"We are," said Rodman, dealing him a blow with the butt of his pistol and felling him. "Leave him there, Wray—he'll give us no trouble. Now take every one of those rifles out of the rack and put them on the table. There's two kegs of powder and a bag of bullets in Mr. Brant's cabin—get those as well."

This was quickly done, and, calling to the others to follow him, Rodman sprang up the companion. No one but the man at the wheel was on the poop, and the leader of the mutineers, looking over the rail, saw that the boat was alongside with only one hand in her. Besides this man there were but eight other persons besides the mutineers on the ship, including the fourth mate, cooper, steward, and carpenter.

Calling the carpenter to him, Rodman covered him with his pistol, and told him and the rest of the startled men to keep quiet or it would be worse for them.

"Two of you help my brother into the boat," he ordered. He was at once obeyed, and Ned Rodman was passed over the side into the hands of the man in the boat.

"Put out every light on deck and aloft," was his next command, and this was done by the watch without delay; for there was in Rodman's face such a look of savage determination that they dared not think of refusing. Then he ordered them into the sail-locker.

“Now, Mr. Waller,” he said, addressing the carpenter, “we don’t want to hurt you and these three men with you. But we are desperate, and bent on a desperate course. Still, if you don’t want to get shot, do as I tell you. Get into that sail-locker and lie low. Mr. Newman and the cooper and the steward are already disposed of. And I’m going to put it out of the power of Captain ‘Brute’ Lucy to get me and those with me into his hands again.”

“You won’t shut us up in the sail-locker and scuttle the ship and let us drown, will you?” asked the carpenter.

“No; I’m no murderer, unless you make me one. If there is any one I have a grudge against it is Mr. Newman and the cooper; but I won’t do more to the cooper than I have already done. Still I’m not going to leave the ship in your hands until I have messed her up a bit. So away with you into the locker, and let us get to work.”

Then, with the man from the boat, the carpenter and his companions were pushed into the sail-locker and the door securely fastened. Looking down from the skylight into the cabin Rodman saw that the cooper had not yet come to, and therefore no danger need be apprehended from him. Sending Wray below, the rifles, ammunition, and nautical instruments were passed up on deck and handed down into the boat. Then, leaving Porter on guard to watch the cooper, Rodman and the others went for’ard with a couple of axes and slashed away at the standing fore-rigging on both sides; they then cut half-way through the foremast, so that the slightest puff of wind, when it came, would send it over the side. Then, going for’ard, they cut through the head stays.

“That will do,” said the boat-steerer, flinging down his axe; and then walking to the waist he hailed the boat:

“Are you all right, Ned?”

“Yes,” answered the youth, “but hurry up, Jerry, I think a breeze is coming.”

Running aft, the elder brother sprang up the poop ladder and looked down through the skylight into the cabin. “Cut Mr. Newman and the steward adrift,” he said to Wray.

Wray disappeared into Captain Lucy’s cabin, and at once liberated the two men, who followed him out into the main cabin.

“Martin Newman,” said Rodman, bending down, “just a word with you. You, I thought, were a shade better than the rest of the bullying scoundrels who officer this ship. But now, I find, you are no better than Bully Lucy and the others. If I did justice to my brother, and *another person* I would shoot you, like the cowardly dog you are. But stand up on that table—and I’ll tell you why I don’t.”

The dark features of the fourth mate blanched to a deathly white, but not with fear. Standing upon the table he grasped the edge of the skylight, under the flap of which Gerald Rodman bent his head and whispered to him:

“Do you know why I don’t want to hurt you, Martin Newman? When I came home last year I found out my sister’s love for you; I found your letters to her, and saw her eating her heart out for you day by day, and waiting for your return. And because I know that she is a dying woman, and will die happy in the belief that you love her, I said nothing. What I have now done will prevent my ever seeing her again, though I would lay my life down for her. But listen to me. Ned will, must, return to her, and beware, if ever you accuse him of having taken a hand in this mutiny–”

The hands of the fourth mate gripped the skylight ledge convulsively, and his black eyes shone luridly with passion. Then his better nature asserted itself, and he spoke quietly:

“Jerry, I did not know it was Ned whom I struck to-night. I was not myself.... I never meant to harm *him*. And for Nell’s sake, and yours and Ned’s, give up this madness.”

“Too late, too late, Newman. I would rather die to-night than spend another hour on board this ship. But at least, for Nell’s sake, you and I must part in peace,” and the mutineer held out his hand. It was grasped warmly, and then with a simple “goodbye” Rodman turned away, walked to the poop ladder and called out:

“Into the boat, men!”

Five minutes later they shoved off from the *Shawnee*, whose lofty spars and drooping canvas towered darkly up in the starless night. At the last moment Gerald Rodman had hoisted a light on the mizzen-rigging as a guide to the four absent boats. As the mutineers pulled quickly away its rays shone dimly over the barque's deserted decks.

When daylight came the *Shawnee* was still drifting about on a sea as smooth as glass, and the four boats reached her just before the dawn. The boat with the mutineers could not be discerned even from aloft, and Captain Harvey Lucy, in a state of mind bordering on frenzy, looked first at his tottering foremast and then at the four whales which had been towed alongside, waiting to be cut-in. With the rising sun came another rain-squall, and the foremast went over the side, although Martin Newman with his men had done their best to save it. But Lucy, being a man of energy, soon rigged a jury-mast out of its wreck, and set to work to cut-in his whales. Three days later the *Shawnee* stood away for Apia Harbour in Samoa.

"Those fellows have gone to Apia," he said to mate Brant, "and I'll go there and get them if it takes me a month of Sundays."

But when the *Shawnee* dropped anchor in the reef-bound harbour, Captain Lucy found that he had come on a vain quest—the mutineers' boat had not been seen.

For seven years nothing was ever heard of the missing boat, till one day a tall, muscular-looking man, in the uniform of a sergeant of the New South Wales Artillery, came on board the American whaleship *Heloise*, as she lay in Sydney harbour, refitting. He asked for Captain Newman, and was shown into the cabin.

The captain of the *Heloise* was sitting at the cabin table reading a book, and rose to meet his visitor.

"What can I do for you, sir? Good God! is it you, Gerald Rodman!"

The soldier put out his hand. "Is my sister alive, Newman?"

"She died three years ago in my arms, hoping and praying to the last that she might see you and Ned before she died. And Ned?"

"Dead, Newman; he and Wray and Porter died of thirst. Harrod and I alone survived that awful voyage, and reached New Zealand at last. Was Nell buried with the old folks, Martin?"

"Yes," answered the captain of the *Heloise*, passing his hand quickly over his eyes, "it was her wish to lie with them. We had only been married two years."

The sergeant rose, and took Newman's hand in his, "Goodbye, Martin. Some day I may stand with you beside her grave."

And then, ere the captain of the whaleship could stay him, he went on deck, descended the gangway, and was rowed ashore to the glittering lights of the southern city.

A POINT OF THEOLOGY ON MÂDURÔ

The *Palestine* Tom de Wolf's South Sea trading brig, of Sydney, had just dropped anchor off a native village on Mâdurô in the North Pacific, when Macpherson the trader came alongside in his boat and jumped on board. He was a young but serious-faced man with a red beard, was thirty years of age, and had achieved no little distinction for having once attempted to convert Captain "Bully" Hayes, when that irreligious mariner was suffering from a fractured skull, superinduced by a bullet, fired at him by a trader whose connubial happiness he had unwarrantably upset. The natives thought no end of Macpherson, because in his spare time he taught a class in the Mission Church, and neither drank nor smoked. This was quite enough to make him famous from one end of Polynesia to the other; but he bore his honours quietly, the only signs of superiority he showed over the rest of his fellow traders being the display on the rough table in his sitting-room of a quantity of theological literature by the Reverend James MacBain, of Aberdeen. Still he was not proud, and would lend any of his books or pamphlets to any white man who visited the island.

He was a fairly prosperous man, worked hard at his trading business, and, despite his assertions about the fearful future that awaited every one who had not read the Reverend Mr. MacBain's religious works, was well-liked. But few white men spent an evening in his house if they could help it. One reason of this was that whenever a ship touched at Mâdurô, the Hawaiian native teacher, Lilo, always haunted Mac-pherson's house, and every trader and trading skipper detested this teacher above all others. Macpherson liked him and said he was "earnest," the other white men called him and believed him to be, a smug-faced and sponging hypocrite.

Well, as I said, Macpherson came on board, and Packenham and Denison, the supercargo, at once noticed that he looked more than usually solemn. Instead of, as on former occasions, coming into the brig's trade-room and picking out his trade goods, he sat down facing the captain and answered his questions as to the state of business, etc., on the island, in an awkward, restrained manner.

"What's the matter, Macpherson?" said the captain. "Have you married a native girl and found out that she is related to any one on the island, and you haven't house-room enough for 'em all, or what?"

The trader stroked his bushy sandy beard, with a rough brown hand, and his clear grey eyes looked steadily into those of the captain.

"I'm no the man to marry any native girl, Captain Packenham. When I do marry any one it will be the girl who promised hersel' to me five years ago in Aberdeen. But there, I'm no quick to tak' offence at a bit of fun. And I want ye two tae help me to do a guid deed. I want ye tae come ashore wi' me at once and try and put some sense into the head of this obstinate native teacher."

"Why, what has he been doing?"

"Just pairsecuting an auld man of seventy and a wee bit of a child. And if we canna mak' him tak' a sensible view of things, ye'll do a guid action by taking the puir things awa' wi' ye to some ither pairt of the South Seas, where the creatures can at least live."

Then he told his story. Six months before, a German trading vessel had called at Mâdurô, and landed an old man of seventy and his grand-daughter—a little girl of ten years of age. To the astonishment of the people the old man proved to be a native of the island. His name was Rimé. He had left Mâdurô forty years before for Tahiti as a seaman. At Tahiti he married, and then for many years worked with other Marshall Islanders on Antimanao Plantation, where two children were born to him. The elder of these, when she was fifteen years of age, married a Frenchman trading in the Paumotu Islands.

The other child, a boy, was drowned at sea. For eight or nine years Rimé and his Tahitian wife, Tiaro, lived alone on the great plantation; then Tiaro sickened and died, and Rimé was left by himself. Then one day came news to him from the distant Paumotus—his daughter and her white husband had

fallen victims to the small-pox, leaving behind them a little girl. A month later Rimé worked his way in a pearling schooner to the island where his granddaughter lived, and claimed her. His heart was empty he said. They would go to Mâdurô, though so many long, long years had passed since he, then a strong man of thirty, had seen its low line of palm-clad beach sink beneath the sea-rim; for he longed to hear the sound of his mother tongue once more. And so the one French priest on Marutea blessed him and the child—for Rimé had become a Catholic during his stay in the big plantation—and said that God would be good to them both in their long journey across the wide Pacific to far-off Mâdurô.

But changes had come to Mâdurô in forty years. When Rimé had sailed away to seek his fortune in Tahiti he and his people were heathens; when he returned he found them rigid Protestants of the Boston New England Cotton-Mather type, to whom the name of "Papist" was an abomination and a horror. And when Rimé said that he too was a Christian—a Katoliko—they promptly told him to clear out. He was not an American Christian anyway, they said, and had no business to come back to Mâdurô.

"And," said Macpherson, "I'll no suffer this—the poor creature an' the wee lit child canna git a bit to eat but what I gie them. And because I *do* gie them something to eat Lilo has turned against me, an' says I'm no a Christian. So I want ye to come ashore and reason wi' the man. He's but a bigot, I fear; though his wife is no so hard on the poor man and the child as he is; but a woman aye has a tender heart for a child. And yet, ye see, this foolish Rimé will no give in, and says he will die before he changes his faith at Lilo's bidding. They took awa' his silly brass cruceefix, and slung it into the lagoon. Then the auld ass made anither out of a broken canoe paddle, and stickit the thing up in my cook-shed! And I have no the heart to tell him to put it in the fire and warm his naked shin bones wi' it. But I think if we all tackle the native teacher together we may knock some sense into his conceited head, and make him treat the poor man better. 'Tis verra hard, too, on the poor auld fellow that these people will not give him back even a bit of his own land."

Then he went on to say that ever since Rimé had landed he and the child had been sleeping every night in his (Macpherson's) cooking-shed. The trader had given him a bundle of mats and free access to a pile of Fiji yams and a bag of rice, and sometime Louisa, Lilo's Hawaiian wife, would visit them at night, ostensibly to convert Rimé from the errors of Rome, but really to leave him a cooked fish or a piece of pork. Most of the day, however, Rimé was absent, wandering about the beaches with his grand-daughter. They were afraid to even pass near the village, for the children threw stones at them, and the men and women cursed them as Katolikos. Matters had gone on like this till two weeks before the *Palestine* arrived, when Lilo and some of his deacons had formed themselves into a deputation, and visited the trader. It was very wrong of him, they said, to encourage this wicked old man and his child. And they wanted him to cease giving them food or shelter—then when the "Katolikos" found themselves starving they would be glad to give up the "evil" religion which they had learnt in Tahiti. Then would they be baptized and food given them by the people of Mâdurô.

Macpherson tried to reason with Lilo. But neither he nor the white-shirted, but trouserless, deacons would listen to him. And furthermore, they gave him a warning—if Rimé continued obstinate, they would hold him (Macpherson) responsible and *tapu* his store. Rimé did continue obstinate, and next morning the trader found himself *tabooed*, which is a mere euphemism for boycotted.

"That's pretty rough on you, Mac," said Packenham.

"'Twill just ruin me, I fear. Ye see there's four other traders on this island besides me, and all my business has gone to them. But what can I do? The silly auld fule of a Rimé won't give in, and I canna see him starve—the damned auld Papist."

At noon, as Packenham, with his supercargo and Macpherson, stepped out of the trader's dwelling, and walked together to the Mission House, a native went through the village blowing a conch. Lilo had agreed to meet the white men and discuss matters with them. Already the big room in the teacher's house was filled with people, who sat around the walls three or four deep, talking in

whispered tones, and wondering why the white men troubled so much over a miserable old man and a wretched child, who were both accursed "Katolikos."

As the captain and his friends entered, Lilo, the teacher, advanced to meet them. He was a small, slenderly built man, with a skin scarcely darker than that of an Italian, and very handsome features. After a few words of effusive welcome, and a particularly sweet smile to Macpherson, he escorted the white men to their seats—three chairs placed together at the head of the room.

Presently there was a shuffling of naked feet outside, and five or six young men entered the house, pushing before them an old man and a girl—Rimé and his grand-child. In the centre of the room was a small square mat of coconut leaf—the Marshall Island prisoners' dock. With limbs trembling with age, Rimé seated himself cross-legged; the child, kneeling at his back, placed her bony arms around his wrinkled body, and clasped him tightly; her eyes, big, black, and mournful, filled with the indifference born of despair. Then, as she saw Macpherson, a faint semblance of a smile flitted across her sallow face.

Lilo struck his hand upon a little table before which he sat, and at once the assembly was silent. Then he turned to Packenham and, in perfect English, pointing to the two figures in the centre of the room, said—

"That is Rimé and his child. They have given us much trouble, and I and the deacons of this island do not want trouble. We are Christians, and will not have any 'Katolikos' here. Mr. Macpherson says we are cruel. He is wrong. We are just, and this man and this child must give up their false faith. But because you and Mr. Denison have written me a letter about this matter I have called the people together so that we may talk. So, if you please, captain, will you speak, and I will interpret whatever you say to the people."

"Will he, the damned little sweep?" muttered the supercargo to Packenham; "tell him that we can talk Mâdurô as well as he can—and better."

So, much to the teacher's disgust, Packenham answered in the Mâdurô dialect. "'Twas better," he said, "that they should all talk Mâdurô." Lilo smiled unpleasantly, and said, "Very well."

Then Packenham, turning to the people, spoke to the point.

"Look into my face, people of Mâdurô, and listen to my words. Long before the missionaries came to this island I lived among ye for three years with my wife Nerida. And is there here one man or one woman who can say that I ever lied to him or her? So this do I say to ye all; and to thee, Lilo, the teacher of the Word of God, that ye do wrong to persecute this old man and this child. For is it not true that he hath land, which ye have denied to him? Is it not true that he is old and feeble, and his limbs tremble as he walks? Yet ye neither give him food nor drink, nor yet a mat whereon to lie his head. He is a 'Katoliko,' ye say? Are there not many thousands of 'Katolikos' in Hawaii, the land from whence comes Lilo? And I ask of thee, Lilo, do they suffer wrong from the King and the chiefs of Hawaii because of their faith? So to thee, Lilo, do I say 'beware.' Thou art but a young and ignorant man, and were I to tell the white missionaries in Honolulu (who are thy masters) that this old man and this little child would have died of hunger but that the heart of one man alone was tender to them, then wouldst thou hang thy head in shame when the mission ship comes here next year. For hath not Christ said, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy?' And so I say to ye all, let this old man dwell among ye in peace, for death is near to him, and shame will be thine if ye deny to him his right to die on his own land, of which ye have robbed him."

The teacher sprang to his feet, his dark eyes blazing with passion.

"There shall be no mercy shown to Katolikos; for they are of hell and the devil and his works!" and from the people there came a deep growl of approval, which changed into a savage hissing as Macpherson rose and stretched out his hand.

"Let me speak," he said.

"No," shouted the teacher. "Who are *you?* You are a bad man, you are–"

Packenham made two strides over to Lilo and placed his heavy hand on his shoulder—"Sit down, you damned little psalm-singing kanaka hog, or I'll knock your eye out. He *shall* speak."

"Get thee hence, thou shielder of the devil's children," said a young, fat deacon, walking up to the trader and spitting contemptuously at his feet. "We want no such white men as thee among us here in Mâdurô." In an instant Macpherson struck him between the eyes and sent him flying backwards among his fellow-deacons. Then came an angry roar from the people.

The trader turned to Packenham with a groan, "I'm a ruined man now, Captain Packenham, and all through this auld fule of a Papist." Then he again tried to speak amidst the uproar.

"Sit down, damn you," said Denison, the supercargo, "and don't excite them any more. They're ready for any mischief now. Oh, you she-devil," and he darted into the middle of the room towards Rimé and his grand-daughter. A stout muscular girl had torn the child's arms from the old man's waist, and was beating her savagely in the face with clenched fists. Denison gave her an under-clip on the jaw and sent her down, and in a few seconds the old man and child were the centre of a struggling group—the white men hitting out right and left to save them from being murdered. The teacher's wife, a tall, graceful young woman—with whom Denison had been exchanging surreptitious glances a few minutes before—weeping copiously the while, aided them by belabouring the backs of the women who were endeavouring to get at the prostrate figure of the little girl. But Packenham, Macpherson, and the supercargo were too much for the natives, and soon cleared a space around them.

"Take them to the ship, Captain Packenham," said the teacher's wife pantingly, in English. "These people are mad now. Go—go at once."

Picking up the frail figure of the old man, the captain, followed by Macpherson and the supercargo, soon gained the boat through a shower of stones and other missiles. Ten minutes later they were on board the Palestine.

"What a devil of a row!" said Packenham, as he clinked his glass against that of Macpherson, who, after the exciting events of the past hour, had been induced to take a nip to steady his nerves; "you ought to be d–d well ashamed of yourself, Mac, to be mixed up in a fight over a Papist. What would Mr. MacBain say, eh?"

"It's a verra bad business for me," said Macpherson ruefully. "Ye'll have to come back for me next month and tak' me awa' from Mâdurô. I'll do no more business here, I can see."

"Right you are, Mac," and Packenham grasped his hand. "I *will* come back for you, if it takes me a month of Sundays to beat against the trades. And you're a white man, Mac; and I'll never laugh at MacBain nor Aberdeen theology any more."

That night, as the captain of the *Palestine* slept upon the skylight, old Rimé, who, with the child, lay upon the deck just beneath Packenham, rose softly to his knees and peered into the white man's face. He was sleeping soundly. Rimé touched his grandchild with his foot. She awoke, and together they pressed their lips to the skipper's hand. Then, without a sound, they stole along the deck, clambered over the brig's low side, dropped into the water and swam ashore.

When daylight came the *Palestine* was rolling heavily to a sweeping westerly swell, with the wind piping hard through her cordage as she strained at her cable. The absence of old Rimé and the child was not discovered till coffee time; the mate thought they had gone to sleep in the hold.

"They've swum ashore in the night, Pack," said the supercargo to Packenham. "I believe the old fellow will be content to die of starvation—hallo, here's Mac coming off in his boat!"

In less than ten minutes the trader's boat was close to the ship, and Macpherson, bringing her up to the wind close under the brig's stern, hailed Packenham.

"Hae ye seen anything of the old man Rimé?"

"No," answered the captain; "the old fool cleared out last night. Isn't he on shore?"

"No. And there's a canoe missing from the beach, and I believe the auld Papist fule has taken the wee bit lassie wi' him, and thinks he can get to Ponape, whaur there's 'Katolikos' in plenty. And Ponape is sax hundred miles awa'."

"Well, come aboard and get some breakfast."

"Man, I'm going after the old fule! He's got no sail and canna be twenty mile awa'. I'll pick him up before he gets to Milli Lagoon, which is only saxty miles from here."

Packenham swore. "You infernal ass! Are you going to sea in a breeze like this by yourself? Where's your crew?"

"The deevils wadna' come wi' me to look for a Papist. And I'm not going to let the auld fule perish."

"Then come alongside and take a couple of our Savage Island boys. I can spare them."

"No, no, captain. I'm not going tae delay ye when ye're bound to the eastward and I'm going the ither way. Ye'll find me here safe enough when ye come back in anither month. And I'll pick up the auld deevil and the wee bit lassie before mid-day."

And then, with his red beard spreading out across his shoulders, Macpherson let his boat pay off before the wind. In an hour he was out of sight.

Three weeks afterwards the *Sadie Perkins* sperm whaler of New Bedford, came across a boat, five hundred miles west of Mâdurô. In the stern sheets lay that which had once been Macpherson, the "auld fule Papist, and the wee bit lassie."

A MAN OF IMPULSE

Blackett, the new trader at Guadalcanar in the Solomons, was entertaining a visitor, an old fellow from a station fifty miles distant, who had sailed over in his cutter to "have a pitch" with his nearest white neighbour. And the new man—new to this particular island—made much of his grizzled visitor and listened politely to the veteran's advice on many subjects, ranging from "doctoring" of perished tobacco with molasses to the barter of a Tower musket for a "werry nice gal."

The new trader's house looked "snugger'n anything he'd ever seed," so the old trader had told him; and Blackett was pleased and very liberal with the liquor. He had been but a few months on the island, and already his house was furnished, in a rude fashion, better than that of any other trader in the region. He was a good host; and the captains of the Fiji, Queensland, and Samoan "blackbirders" liked to visit him and loll about the spacious sitting-room and drink his grog and play cards—and tell him that his wife was "the smartest and prettiest woman in the group."

Blackett was especially vain of the young Bonin Island half-caste wife who had followed his varying fortunes from her home in the far north-west Pacific to the solitary, ghostly outlier of Polynesia—lonely Easter Island, and thence to and fro amongst a hundred other islands. He was vain of her beauty—the beauty that had led him to almost abandon any intention of returning to civilisation; he was vain of the dark, passionate eyes, the soft, wavy hair, and the proud little mouth inherited from her Lusitanian father. Of this latter person, however, neither Blackett nor Cerita, his wife, were over-proud—he was a notorious old scamp and ex-pirate, even for that part of the Pacific, and Cerita knew that Blackett had simply bought her from him as he would buy a boat, or a bolt of canvas.

Blackett, finding it impossible to make old Hutton drunk or get him to turn in, resigned himself entirely to the old pirate, who, glancing to the far end of the room, to where Cerita and his own wife, a tall, lithe-limbed Aoba woman, were lying together on a mat smoking cigarettes, proceeded to pour out the story of his countless murders and minor villainies.

Blackett himself was a negatively-moral man. He could shoot a native if necessity demanded, but would not do so hastily; and the old trader's brutal delight in recounting his pot-shots only excited a disgust which soon became visible in his face.

"*That's* all right, Mr. Blackett," said Hutton, with a hideous grin distorting his monkeyish visage; "I'm only a-tellin' you of these here things for your own good,… an' I ain't afeered of no man-o'-war a-collarin' *me*. This here island is a place where you've got to sleep with one eye open, an' the moment you sees a nigger lookin' crooked at you put a lead pill in him—that is, if he's a stranger from somewheres. An' the more you shoots the better you'll get on with your own nigs; they likes you more and treats you better."

With a weary gesture, Blackett rose from his seat. "Thank you, Hutton, for your advice. If I thought a nigger meant to send an arrow or a spear through me I'd try to get the drop on him first. But I couldn't kill any one in cold blood on mere suspicion. I could no more do that than—than you could kill that Aoba wife of yours over there."

Old Hutton rose, too, and put a detaining hand on Blackett. "Look here, now, an' I suppose you think I'm lyin'. If I thought that that there Aoba wench was foolin' me in any way—sech as givin' away my tobacco to a nigger buck, I'd have to wentilate her yaller hide or get laid out myself."

Blackett shuddered. "I'm going to turn in. Let us have another drink, Hutton. If the Dutch firm's schooner shows up this month I'll clear out of this accursed hole. I hate the place, and so does my woman." He used the term "woman" instead of wife purely out of deference to Island custom; but Hutton noticed it.

"Ain't she really your wife?" he asked inquisitively.

"No—yes—what the devil does it matter to you?" And Blackett, whose patience had quite worn out, filled the glasses, and passed one to his visitor, who uncouthly apologised. Then the two shook hands and laughed.

The night was close and sultry, and Cerita was lying on the cane-framed bed, fanning herself languidly. The man was leaning, with his face turned from her, against the open window, and looking out into the jungle blackness that encompassed the house. He was thinking of Hutton's query, "Ain't she really your wife?" His wife! No; but she would be yet. He would leave this infernal island, where one never knew when he might get a poisoned arrow or spear into him. He was making money here, yes; but money wasn't worth dying for. And 'Rita was more than money to him. She had been the best little woman in the world to him—for all her furious temper.

"Yes, he would leave these blackguardly Solomons, with their hordes of savage cannibals,… and go back to the eastward again,… and Sydney, too. He could easily stow her away in some quiet house while he went and saw his people." And so Blackett thought and smoked away till 'Rita's voice startled him.

"Give me a match, Harry: I want to smoke. I can't sleep, it's so hot, and my arm is tired fanning, and the screen is full of mosquitoes. That devil of a girl—where is she?"

"There!" said Blackett, pointing to beneath the bed, where Europuai, his wife's attendant, lay rolled up in a mat.

"The black beast!"—and the half-blood rose from the bed, throwing the mosquito-net angrily aside—"and I thought she was sleeping near the Aoba woman, the wife of that drunken old Hutton," and, stooping down so that her black hair fell like a mantle over her bare shoulders, she seized the short, woolly head of the sleeper and dragged her out.

Blackett laughed. "Easy, 'Rita, easy! You'll frighten her so that she'll clear out from us. Let her take her mat over there in the corner. Give the poor devil a chance. She's terrified of old Hutton, so sneaked in here to hide. She's only a wild bushy"—and he looked compassionately at the almost nude figure of the girl that his wife had bought from a bush town for a musket—because she wanted "something to worry," he used jokingly to say.

The savage creature took the mat sullenly, went to the far end of the room, and covered herself up again.

"You're too soft with women," said Rita, scornfully.

"I know I am—with you," he answered, good-naturedly. And then the angry gleam in the black eyes died away, and she laughed merrily.

Two days had passed. Old Hutton had returned to his station, and Blackett was returning with a boatload of copra from a village across the bay. Heavy rain-squalls tore down upon the boat at short intervals, and Blackett, drenched to the skin, began to feel the first deadly chills and pains of an attack of island fever. Usually light-hearted, he now felt angry, and savagely cursed at his crew when the heavily-laden boat touched and ground against the coral knobs that lay scattered about her course. It was long past midnight when he reached his station, and, stepping wearily out of the boat, dragged his aching limbs along the beach. 'Rita had heard the boat, and Blackett could see that a bright fire was burning in the thatched, open-sided cook-house, and that 'Rita herself was there, with a number of native children making coffee.

The quickening agonies of fever were fast seizing him, and, entering the house and throwing himself on a seat, he felt his brain whirling, and scarcely noticed that Tubariga, the local chief, was bending over him anxiously. Then 'Rita came with the steaming coffee, and one quick glance at Blackett's crouched-up figure told her that the dreaded fever had seized him at last.

'Rita proved herself what Blackett always called her, "one of the smartest little women going." With Tubariga's help, she carried him to the bed, and sent out for some women to come and rub and thump his aching joints while she dosed him with hot rum and coffee. And then Blackett asked her what she was doing out in the cook-house. Hadn't she a cook? Then the suppressed rage of the hot-

blooded girl broke out in a flood of tears. Europuai, the wild bush-girl, had been sulky all the time he was away, and she had given her a little beating with a bamboo. And then the black devil had run away, and—here the angry beauty wept again—she (‘Rita) had to go out into a filthy cook-shed to boil water before a lot of man-eating savages! No one would help her, because they were all such fools that she always lost her temper with them.

Blackett—under the combined influences of rum, strong coffee, fever, and woman’s tears—went into a rage, and glared angrily at the chief, Tubariga.

“You’re a d–d nice fellow,” he said in English; “you get my wife to pay a good musket for a girl, and then as soon as I am away you let that girl run back into the bush. You’re a bad friend.”

Tubariga felt hurt. He prided himself on two things—his knowledge of English and his friendship for white men. He rose to his feet, grasped his rifle, and made for the door.

“Here, come back, Tubariga. Perhaps it isn’t your fault. Let her stay away. She’s no good, anyway.”

Tubariga came back. “Tell me, white man, do you want your servant to come back?”

“Yes, d– you!” answered Blackett, who now again was seized with that hideous brain-whirl that in fever is simple delirium, “bring her back, alive or dead.”

The chief nodded and went out.

Next morning the first fierce violence of the fever had temporarily left him, and Blackett was lying covered up with rugs, when the grim figure of Tubariga entered noiselessly, and stole to his side. Motioning the trader’s wife away, Tubariga’s savage features relaxed with a pleased smile.

“Well, Tubariga, how are you?” said Blackett. “‘Rita tell me I damn you too much last night, eh? Never mind, old chap, I was mad about that girl running away. You can tell her people to keep her—and the musket too. Rita don’t want her any more. Ship come soon, then we go away.’”

Again the pleased smile spread over the chiefs face. Bending over Blackett he placed his hideous lips, blood-red with the stains of betel-juice, close to his face, and said with the simple pride of a child, “*Me pinish him*.”

“What?” said Blackett, with a strange feeling at his heart—“What did you do to that girl, Tubariga?”

Sitting down with his rifle across his knees, the chief told the conscience-stricken trader that he had followed the girl to a bush village, where he, Tubariga, as their chief, had demanded her from her parents. They insisted on her going back, but she whimpered and said that the white man’s wife would beat her. She sprang for the jungle, and, ere she reached it, a bullet from the chiefs rifle struck her in the side. And then, with a feeling of horror, Blackett listened to the rest of the tale—the poor wretch, with her life-blood ebbing fast, was followed up and a spear thrust through her heart.

He was sitting at the table with his face clasped in his hands when ‘Rita came in. She was smoking her inevitable cigarette, and the thin wreaths of blue smoke curled upwards from her lips as she leant one arm on the table and caressed Blackett’s ice-cold forehead with her shapely hand. Suddenly she stooped and sought gently to remove his hands from his face.

“Harry, are you very ill, old fellow? What can I do for you?”

“Do for me?” and the sudden misery that had smitten his heart looked out from his pallid face, … “give me back the peace of mind that was mine ten minutes ago. Leave me to die here of fever —for you I have become a murderer—a man no better than Hutton. The blood of that poor girl will for ever be between us.” And then she saw that tears were falling through his trembling fingers.

“Harry,” she said, “I thought you were more of a man”—and here her voice softened—“don’t grieve over it. It wasn’t your fault,… and I have been a good little girl to you. Don’t be miserable because of such a little thing as that. If Tubariga hadn’t killed her, I daresay I should have done so myself. She was a sulky little wretch.”

I know Blackett well. The horror of that day has never entirely left him. But for that one dark memory he would have married ‘Rita—who would have most probably run a knife into his ribs later

on, when the influence of her beauty had somewhat waned and he began to look at other women. The fateful impulse of that moment when he told the chief to bring back the girl dead or alive wrecked and tortured his mind beyond description. And he can never forget.

His 'Rita and he left the island soon afterwards to wander away back to Eastern Polynesia, but his continued fits of melancholy annoyed the girl so much that she one day quarrelled with and left him, and made a fresh matrimonial engagement with a man less given to mawkish sentiment.

THE TRADER

I

The evening fires were lighting up the darkness of the coming night, when Prout, the only white man on the island, left his house on the edge of the lagoon, and, with his little daughter running by his side, walked slowly through the village.

As they passed through the now deserted pathways that intersected the straggling collection of grey, thatched-roofed houses, and Prout's heavy step crunched into the broken coral, the natives, gathered together for their evening meal, looked forth, and the brown women called out a word or two of greeting to the child, and smiled and beckoned her to leave her father for an instant and take the fruit or piece of cooked breadfruit that they held out to her with their brown hands. But only a solemn shake of the little head, and then she and the taciturn, bronzed-faced man went by, the child's tiny fingers grasping his tanned and roughened hand as they walked across the narrow island towards the sound of the muffled thunder of the surf on the outer ocean beach.

Here, with the little one perched beside him and looking wonderingly into his grave, impassive face, the white man would sit for long hours staring moodily out upon the tumbling breakers as they reared and fell upon the black, grim shelves of the reef.

Sometimes, as he sat with his chin resting on his hand, and the red glow of his pipe sending now and again a fitful gleam of light across the rugged lines of his face, the girl would get quietly down from the moss-grown coral boulder on which she rested by his side, and stepping down to the short, steep beach, play with childish solemnity with such pebbles and light shells as lay within the reach of her little hands. Perhaps, if the tide was heavy and at its flood, and a breaker heavier than the rest breached shorewards in a white wall of seething foam, and crashed and rattled together the loose coral slabs that marked the line of high-water mark, the silent, dreaming man would spring to his feet with a loud warning call. And the little one, answering his deep tones with her soft, sweet treble, would spring back to her father's side, and nestling her tender form against his gaunt frame, lay her cheek against his, and say, in the soft Tokelau tongue, "'Twas a great wave, my father!"

"Aye," he would answer, as he placed an arm round the child and gazed at her for a moment, "'twas a great wave truly, *taka taina*,[1] and thou art so small, that if it but touched thy feet thou wouldst be swept away like as a leaf in a strong wind. So stay thee here beside me, sweet one," and again his face would turn seaward, and the silence of the night, save for the soughing of the wind and the cry of the surf, fall upon them again.

Thus the first hours of the island night would pass, till a glare of light flashed upon the blackness of the sea beyond the snow-line of surf, as the canoes from Matakatea would round the point, each one with a flaming torch of dried palm-leaves held high by a brown, tattooed hand, to dazzle the flying fish that, with wings outspread, floated motionless upon the surface of the water.

Then, because the child had no playmates, and her little life was almost as joyless and as solitary as his own, he would wait with her till the long line of canoes passed by, so that she could see the bronzed, half-naked figures of the paddlers, and the bright gleam and shimmer of the fish as they were swept up by the deadly net, and hear the warning cry from the torch-bearers, as in the depths beneath they saw the black shadow of a prowling shark rushing to seize the net, or perchance the outrigger of the canoe, in his cruel, murderous jaws.

[1] "Little one of my heart."

Slowly the canoes paddled by, and as they passed, the hum of voices and laughter and the cheery lilt of island melody died away, and the paddlers looked shoreward to the motionless figure of Prout, who, with the child by his side, seemed to heed naught but the wide sweep of ocean that lay before him.

But though the voices and laughter and snatches of song ceased, many of the kindly-hearted people would, ere they passed, call out a word or two of greeting to the white man and his child, and the latter would wave her hand and smile back, while her father, as if awakened from a dream, called out, in the island tongue, the customary “May your fishing to-night be lucky.” And then, as the last canoe vanished, and the glare and the smoke of the torches with it, he, with the little Mercedes by his side, walked back to his house on the lagoon.

And so, night after night, save in the stormy season of the year, when the white rain-squalls gathered together on the windward sea-line, and swept quickly down upon the island and drenched the loose, sandy soil with pouring showers, the white man had sat with his face turned seaward to the cloudless horizon of the starlit ocean and his mind dwelling upon the ever-present memories of the past.

Such, for three years past, ever since he had first landed among the people of Nukutavau, had been the existence of Prout, the silent, solitary trader.

II

Nine years before, Prout, then one of the "smartest" Englishmen in the Hawaiian Islands, had been manager of the Kalahua sugar plantation on Maui. Out of his very loneliness in the world—for except his mother, in a far-away Devonshire village, there was no one in the outside world that cared aught for him—there grew upon him that quiet, reserved temperament that led the other white men on the plantation to call him in kindly jest, "Prout, the Hermit."

But although he never mixed with the men on the Kalahua Estate in the wild revelries with which they too often sought to break the monotony of their existence and celebrate a good season, he was by no means a morose or unsociable man; and Chard, the merry-hearted Belgian sugar-boiler, often declared that it was Prout alone who kept the estate going and the native labourers from turning on the white men and cutting their throats, out of sheer revenge for the brutal treatment they received from Sherard, the savage, drunken owner of Kalahua.

Between Roden Sherard and Prout there had been always, from the first day almost of the latter entering upon his duties, a silent, bitter antagonism. And the reason of it was known only to the two men themselves.

In those times the native labour for the Hawaiian sugar plantations was recruited from the islands of the Mid-Pacific, and from the chains of sandy atolls lying between the Bonins and the Radack Archipelago of the Marshall Group. On Kalahua there were some three hundred natives, and within a month of Prout taking charge, he had changed their condition so much for the better, that not one of the wild-eyed, half-naked beings who toiled from sunrise to dark but would give him a grateful glance as he rode through the cane fields. And Sherard, who rode with him, would see this, and scowl and tell Prout that as soon as his engagement terminated, he, Sherard, would bring back Fletcher, the former manager, "a man who would thump a kanaka into a pulp if he dared to look sideways at him."

"If you are not satisfied with me you can bring him here to-morrow if you like," Prout had said coldly to him one day. "I've managed bigger places than this in Demerara, and on no one of them have I ever seen a nigger struck. But then, you see, in Demerara the planters are Englishmen, and Englishmen as a rule don't shine at nigger walloping."

Sherard, a black-visaged Marylander, snapped his teeth together and, smothering his rage, tried to laugh the matter off.

"Well, I suppose you're right, Prout. I know I have got a good man in you; but at the same time, God never intended these damned saucy niggers to be coddled and petted."

Prout laughed ironically as he repeated Sherard's words "coddled and petted!" And then long-suppressed wrath boiled out, and, swinging his horse's head round, he faced the owner of Kalahua.

"Look here, Sherard, give me the control of these three hundred natives for the next two seasons and I'll stake my life that they'll do more work for you than you have ever had done by that brute Fletcher when he had five hundred here. Do you think that these people *knew* what was in store for them when they came here?—that in place of an encouraging word they would get a threat or a blow? That those of them who have wives and daughters can forget what has befallen *them?* Do you think that I don't know that you speak of me to your friends with contempt as 'a nigger-loving Britisher'? And yet, Sherard, you know well that, were I to leave Kalahua tomorrow, every native on the estate would leave too—not for love of me, but to get away from *you*."

Sherard laughed coarsely.

"You've got more in you than I thought, Prout. What you say is true enough. Let us quit quarrelling. I know you can do more with them than Abe Fletcher could; and I guess I'm not going to interfere with you."

But, for all that, Prout did not trust Sherard, and he made up his mind to leave the estate when his two years' engagement came to an end.

"The *Mana* is in Honolulu with a cargo of Line Island boys, Prout," said Sherard to him about a month or two after this; "I wish you would get away down there, and try to obtain some more hands. You talk the language like a Line Islander, and will have no trouble in getting all the men we want."

But when Prout boarded the labour schooner *Mana* there was not a native left. The other planters on Oahu had been there before him, and the master—Captain Courtayne—called him down to have a drink in the cabin.

"You are the new manager on Kalahua, hey? Well, I'm sorry you've had your trip for nothing; but, at the same time, I'm real glad to see Sherard left out in the cold. He's a bad man, sir, and although you might think that because I'm in this trade I'm not particularly soft, I can tell you that I'd be thundering sorry to see any of the crowd I've brought up go to him."

"Your feelings do you honour, Captain; but I can assure you that the Kalahua boys are well treated now," said Prout, as he took the cigar the seaman handed him.

The quiet manner and truthful look in Prout's face made the master of the schooner regard him intently for a few moments, then he said abruptly:

"Do you know Honolulu well?"

Prout did not; his visits there had been few and far between.

"Do you know any decent people here who could take care of my daughter for me till I come back from my next trip?"

"No, Captain, I do not."

"Take another whisky, sir, and I'll tell you the fix I'm in. You see I'm new to this business. I had a trading station down on one of the Ellice Islands where I've lived for the last twenty years. This schooner came there about six months ago, and the captain died in my house. As the mate couldn't navigate, and I am an old shell-back, I sold out my trading station, took charge of her, brought my daughter aboard and filled the schooner with Line Island labourers."

"Her mother is dead, I suppose?"

Captain Courtayne coloured and shifted about in his seat. "Well, no, not as far as I know; but, you see, down there in the south-east a man has to change his wives occasionally. For instance, if you marry a Samoa girl you must live in Samoa; she won't leave there to go and live on Nanomea or Vaitupu, where the people have different ideas and customs. And, as we poor traders have to shift about from one island to another sometimes, we can't afford to study a woman's whims."

Prout grasped the situation at once. "I see; your daughter, then, is your child by a former wife?"

"Just so. Her mother was a Hervey Island half-caste whom I married when I was trading on Manhiki. We drifted apart somehow—perhaps it was my fault. I was a careless, hard-drinking man in those days. But, here I am telling you a lot of things that don't interest you, when I ought to tell you at once what it is I thought you might help me with. You see, Mr. Prout, my little Marie has lived with me all her life. Since she was five years old she has never left me for a day, and I've done my best to educate her. She's as good and true as gold, and this is what troubles me—I don't want to take her away again in the schooner if I can help it. Do you think—do you know—of any English or American family here that would take her to live with them till I return from this voyage? I'm willing to pay well for her keep."

Prout shook his head. "I should advise you to take her back with you, Captain. How old is she?"

The captain went to the companion-way and called out:

"Marie."

"Yes, father," answered a girl's soft voice.

"Come below a minute."

Prout heard some one getting out of a hammock that was slung over the skylight, and presently a small slippered foot touched the first step of the companion-way; and then a girl, about fifteen or sixteen, came into the cabin, and bowing to him, seated herself by the captain of the schooner. Then,

as if ashamed of the formal manner of her greeting, she rose again, and a smile lit up her beautiful face, as she offered her hand to him.

Prout, one of those men whose inborn respect for women often makes them appear nervous, constrained, and awkward in their presence, flushed to the roots of his hair as she let her soft hand touch his.

"That is Marie, sir," and the skipper glanced somewhat proudly at the graceful, muslin-clad figure of his daughter. "Marie, this gentleman says he does not know any English or American ladies here."

The sweet red mouth smiled and the dark eyes danced.

"I'm very glad, father; I would rather go away with you to sea in the *Mana* than stay in a strange place."

But Marie Courtayne did not go away; for next morning her father, through Prout, learned that the French Sisters were willing to take her as a boarder till the schooner returned, and so to them she went, with her tender mouth twitching, and her eyes striving to keep back the tears that would come as she bade her father goodbye.

"You'll go and see my little Marie sometimes, I hope, Mr. Prout?" said Courtayne, as he bade farewell to the manager of Kalahua.

Prout murmured something in reply, and then the captain of the *Mana* and he parted.

Three months later the American cruiser *Saranac* brought the news that she had spoken the labour schooner *Mana*, Captain Courtayne, off the island of Marakei, in the Gilbert Group, "all well, and wished to be reported at Honolulu." After that she, her captain and crew, and the two hundred Kanaka labourers she had on board, were never heard of again.

For nearly a year Prout and Marie Courtayne waited and hoped for some tidings of the missing ship, but none came. And every now and then, when business took him to Honolulu, Prout would call at the Mission School and try to speak hopefully to her.

"He is dead," she would say apathetically, "and I wish I were dead, too. I think I shall die soon, if I have to live here."

Then Prout, who had grown to love her, one day plucked up courage to tell her so, and asked her to be his wife.

"Yes," she said simply, "I will be your wife. You are always kind to me," and for the first time she put her face up to his. He kissed her gravely, and then, being a straightforward, honourable man, he went to the Sisters and told them. A week afterward they were married.

When he returned to Kalahua with his wife, Sherard met them on the verandah of his house, and Prout wondered at the remarkable change in his manner, for even to women Sherard was coarse and tyrannical.

From the moment he first saw Marie's fresh young beauty Sherard determined to have a deadly revenge upon her husband. But he went about his plans cautiously. Only a few days previously he had made a fresh agreement with Prout to remain for another two years. Before those two years had expired he meant to put his plan into effect. There was on the plantation a ruffianly Chileno who, he knew, would dispose of Prout satisfactorily when asked to do so.

When Marie's child was born, Sherard acted the part of the imperatively good-natured employer, and told Prout that as soon as his wife was strong enough, he was to leave the house he then occupied and take up his quarters permanently in the big house.

"This place of yours will do me, Prout," he said, when his manager protested; "and your wife's only a delicate little thing. There's all kinds of fixings and comforts there that she'll appreciate, which you haven't got here. D–n my thick skull, I might have done this before."

"Thank you, Sherard," said Prout, with a genuine feeling of pleasure. "You are very good to us both. But I won't turn you out altogether; you must remain there too."

Sherard laughed. “Not I. You’ll be far happier up there together by yourselves, like a pair of turtledoves. But I’ll always be on hand in the smoking-room when you want me for a game of cards.”

The change was soon made, and Moreno, the Chilian overseer, grinned when he saw the white-robed figure of the manager’s wife lying on one of the verandah lounges, playing with her child.

“Bueno,” he said to Sherard that night, as they drank together, “the plan works. Make the bird learn to love its pretty nest. *Dios*, when am I to feel my knife tickling Senor Prout’s ribs?”

“At the end of the crushing season, I think,” answered Sherard coolly; “the brat will be old enough to be taken from her by then.”

It is a bad thing for a man to “thump” either a Chilian, or a Peruvian, or a Mexican. And Prout had “thumped” the evil-faced Chileno very badly one day for beating a native nearly to death. Had he been wiser he would have taken the little man’s knife out of his belt and plunged it home between his ribs, for a Chileno never forgives a blow with a fist.

III

"Are you going over to Halaliko to-night, Prout?" asked Sherard, walking up to where his manager and Marie sat enjoying the cool of the evening. He threw himself in a cane chair beside them and puffed away at his cheroot, playing the while with the little Mercedes.

"Yes, I might as well go to-night and see how the Burtons have got on," and Prout arose and went to the stables.

Sherard remained chatting with Marie till Prout returned, and then, raising his hat to her, bade them good-night."

"Don't let Burton entice you to Halaliko, Prout," he said with a laugh; "he knows that your time here is nearly up."

Prout laughed too. "I don't think that Marie would like me to give up Kalahua for Halaliko—would you, old girl?"

She shook her head and smiled. "No, indeed, Mr. Sherard. I am too happy here to ever wish to leave."

Whistling softly to himself, Prout rode along the palm-bordered winding track. It was not often he was away from Marie, but he meant to take his time this evening. It was nearly five miles to Burton's plantation at Halaliko, and half an hour would finish his business there. He knew that, as soon as he left, Marie would tell the native servant to go to her bed in the coolie lines, and then she would herself retire; and when he returned he would find her lying asleep with her baby beside her.

To the right the road wound round a great jagged shoulder of rocky cliff, and clung to it closely; for on the left there yawned a black space, the valley of Maunahoehoe, and, as he rode, Prout could see the glimmer of the natives' fires below—fires that, although they were but distant a few hundred feet, seemed miles and miles away.

A slight sound that seemed to come from the face of the cliff above him caused him to look upwards, and the next instant a heavy stone struck him slantingly on the side of his head. Without a sound he fell to the ground, staggered to his feet, and then, failing to recover himself, vanished over the sloping side of the cliff into the valley beneath.

A shadowy, supple figure clambered down from the inky blackness of cliff that overhung the road, and peered over the valley of Maunahoehoe. It was Moreno, the Chilian.

"Better than a knife after all; Holy Virgin, he's gone now, and I forgive him for all the blows he struck me."

Long before daylight, Prout, with his face and shoulders covered with gory stains, staggered into the native village at Maunahoehoe and asked the people to lend him a horse to take him back to Kalahua.

When within half a mile of Kalahua, almost fainting from loss of blood and exhaustion, he pulled up his horse at a hut on the borders of the estate and got off. There were some five or six natives inside, and they started up with quick expressions of sympathy when they saw his condition.

"Give me a weapon, O friends," he said. "Some man hath tried to kill me."

A short squat native smiled grimly, reached to the rafters of the dwelling, and took down a heavy carbine, which he loaded and then handed to the white man.

"'Tis Moreno who hath hurt thee," said the native; "at midnight he rode by here in hot haste."

With the native supporting him, Prout rode along the road to the Estate gates.

As he reeled through he heard a faint cry.

In another minute he was on the verandah and looking through the French lights into Marie's dimly-lighted bedroom. An inarticulate cry of anguish burst from him. Sherard and his wife were together.

Steadying himself against a post he took aim at the trembling figure of his wife, and fired. She threw up her arms and fell upon her face, and then Sherard, pistol in hand, dashed out and met him.

Ere he could draw the trigger, Prout swung the heavy weapon round, and the stock crashed into the traitor's brain.

"It is the death of a dog," said the native, spurning the body with his naked foot.

She was dying fast when Prout, with love and hate struggling for mastery in his frenzied brain, stood over her.

"He took my child away from me," she said.... "He said he would kill her before me,… and it was to save her. Only for that I would have died first. Oh, Ned, Ned–"

Then with a look of unutterable love from her fast-dimming eyes, she closed them in death.

That was why Prout, after two years of madness in a prison, had stepped on board Hetherington's schooner and asked the captain to take him away somewhere—he cared not where—so that he could be away from the ken of civilised and cruel mankind and try and forget the dreadful past.

IV.

They are a merry-hearted, laughter-loving race, the people of white-beached Nukutavau, with whom the trader lived. To them the grave-faced, taciturn man, who cared not to listen to their songs or to watch their wild dances on the moonlit beach—as had been the custom of those white men who had dwelt on the island before him—was but as one afflicted with some mental disease, and therefore to be both pitied and feared. At first, indeed, when he had landed, carrying his child in his arms, to bargain with Patiaro, the chief, that the people should build him a house, the women of the island had clustered around him as he stepped out of the boat, and with smiles upon their faces, extended their arms to him for the child. But no answering smile lit up the man's rugged features, though, to avoid the appearance of discourtesy (to which all island races are so keenly sensitive) he gave the infant into the keeping of old Malineta, the mother of the chief.

Patiaro, the chief, holding the stranger's right hand in both his own, looked searchingly into his calm, deep-set eyes with that dignified curiosity which, while forbidding a native to put a direct question to an utter stranger, yet asks it by the expression of his face. But Prout, whose anxious glance followed the movements of the grey-haired mother of the chief, as she pressed his child to her withered bosom, seemed to notice not his questioning look.

Following the stranger's gaze, the chief broke the silence:

"'Tis my mother, *ariki papalagi*.[2] who carries thy child—Malineta, the mother of Patiaro, the chief of Nukutavau, he who now speaks to thee. And I pray thee have no fear for the little one."

The quiet, dignified courtesy with which the chief addressed him recalled the white man to himself, and a pleasant smile lit up the native's features when the stranger answered him in Tokelau —the *lingua franca* of the equatorial isles of the Pacific—north and south.

"Nay, I fear not for the child, Patiaro, chief of Nukutavau, but yet it may not be well for her to be taken to the village awhile; for with thee and thy people doth it rest whether the child and I remain here, or return to the ship and seek some other island whereon I may build my house and live in peace. And I will pay thee that which is fair and just for house and land."

But in those days, before too much civilisation had brought these simple people deadly disease, Christianity, and the knowledge of the great Pit of Fire, the brown men thought much of a white man; and so Patiaro, the chief, made haste to answer:

"Let the child go with my mother, and tell thou the men in the boat that everything thou desirest of me and my people to do shall be done. Five rainy seasons have come and gone since a white man has lived here; so I pray thee, stay."

[2] White gentleman.

The white man inclined his head; then he turned and walked to the boat, and spoke to the captain of the little vessel which, to bring him to the island, had dropped her anchor just outside the current-swept passage of the lagoon.

"I am remaining here, Captain Hetherington. Will you let your men put my gear out on the beach?"

Hetherington, the skipper, looked at his passenger curiously, and then answered:

"Cert'nly. But I'm real sorry you are leaving us, I don't want to pry inter any man's business, and you know these islands as well as I do; but I guess I wouldn't stay here if I war you. Why, it won't pay a man to stay and trade on a bit of a place like this," and he cast a deprecatory look around him.

The trader made him no answer, and the skipper of the schooner, ordering his crew to take out his passenger's goods and carry them to the village, stepped ashore, and held out his hand to the chief, whose fine, expressive features showed some signs of fear that the captain's remarks were intended to dissuade the stranger from remaining on the island.

Motioning to the white men to follow him, the stalwart young chief led the way to the *fale kaupale*, or council-house of the village, where food and young coconuts for drinking were brought in and placed before them by the young women.

Sitting directly in front of his guests, the chief served them with food with his own hands, in token of his desire for friendship and to do them honour, and then quietly withdrew to direct the natives who were carrying the trader's goods up from the boat to his own house, further back in the village.

"I would wish ter remark, mister," said the American skipper as he pulled out his pipe and commenced to fill it, "thet, ez a rule, I don't run any risk ev bustin' myself with enthoosiastic admiration fer Britishers in general—principally because they air the supporters of er low-down, degradin' system ev Government, which hez produced some bloody wars and sunk my schooner the *Mattie Casey*, with a cargo of phosphates valued et four thousand dollars."

"It was a heavy loss to you, Captain Hetherington, but you surely do not dislike all Englishmen because the *Alabama* sunk your vessel?" said the trader, with a melancholy smile, whilst his restless eye sought the village houses to discern the movements of the chief's mother with his child.

The American pulled his long, straggling beard meditatively. "Wal, I don't know, they're a darned mean crowd anyway." And then, with a sudden change of manner, "Say, look here, mister; hev yew finally made up your mind ter remain on this island among a lot ev outrageous, unclothed, ondelikit females, whar every prospeck pleases an' on'y man is vile; or air yew game ter come in pardners with me in the schooner an' run her in the sugar trade between 'Frisco and Honolulu?"

Prout grasped the old man's hand, but shook his head.

"You are a generous man, Captain Hetherington, but I cannot do it. I am no seaman, and, what is more to the point, I have no money to put into the venture."

"Thet's jest it," the American answered quickly, "but yew hev a long head—fer a Britisher, a darned long head—an' I reckon yew an' me will pull together bully; so jes' tell the chief here to get the traps back inter the boat again, an' yew an' me an' little Mercedy will get aboard agin–"

"No, no, no," and the trader rose to his feet and walked quickly to and fro—"no, Hetherington; I cannot do as you wish. Here, among these islands, it is my wish to live; and here, or on such another island as this, and among such wild, uncivilised beings, must I die."

"So?" and the hard-featured American raised his shaggy eyebrows interrogatively. "Waal, I reckon yew regulates your own affairs ter your own fancy; but look here, mister," and the kindly ring in the old skipper's voice appealed to the man before him—"what about little Mercedy? Yew ain't agoin' to let thet pore child grow up among naked, red-skinned savages, hey?"

A deep flush overspread the trader's face, and then it paled again, and he ceased his hurried, agitated walk.

“Hetherington!… do not, I implore you, say another word to me on the subject. It is better for me to remain here with my little Mercedes.... So, here, give me that honest hand of yours and leave me.... But, stop, I forgot,” and he thrust his hand into a large canvas pouch that hung suspended from his shoulder, “I did indeed forget this, Captain; but forget the kindness that you have shown to me and my child during the four months I have been with you, I never can.”

The Yankee skipper’s face was visibly perturbed as he heard the jingle of money in the canvas pouch, and he worked his jaws violently, while his heavy, bushy brows met together as if he were in deep study, and uneasy mutterings escaped from his lips. Suddenly he rose and left his companion.

As he shambled away to the far end of the council-house, he caught sight of a number of native women and children advancing towards himself and his passenger. Foremost among them was the old woman Malineta, her lean and wrinkled face wreathed in smiles, for the white man’s child, whom she still carried, had placed one arm around her neck. As she drew near the American, the little one smiled and made as if she wished to go to him, or to her father who stood near by.

Holding out his arms to the child, the skipper took her from the old woman, and then he turned to Prout.

“Say, I’ve jest been reckonin’ up an’ I make out yew hev been jest four months aboard o’ my hooker thar, an’ I reckon thet twenty dollars a month ain’t more’n a fair an’ square deal.”

Again the red flush mantled to the trader’s brow. “No, no, Hetherington. I am poor, but not so poor that I should insult you by such an insignificant sum as that. Two hundred and fifty dollars I can give you easily, and freely and willingly,” and advancing to the captain he offered him a number of twenty-dollar gold pieces.

An angry “Pshaw!” burst from the captain. He thrust the proffered money aside, and then, with his leathern visage working in strange contortions, he walked quickly outside, and sitting down upon an old unused canoe, bent his grizzled head, and strained the child to his bosom. And presently Prout and the natives heard something very like the sound of a sob.

Then, as if ashamed of his emotion, he suddenly rose, and kissing the child tenderly, gave her back to the woman Malineta. Then he turned to Prout.

“Waal, I guess I’ll be goin’.... Naow, jest yew put them air cursed dollars back again. It’s jest like yew darned Britishers, ter want ter shove money inter a man’s hand, jest like ez if he war a nigger, an’ hadn’t a red cent ter buy a slice of watermelon with,” and then all his assumed roughness failed him, and his eyes grew misty as he grasped the Englishman’s hand for the last time.

“Thet thar Mercedy.... Why, I hed sich a little mite once....” and he chewed fiercely at the fresh plug he had thrust into his cheek.

“Dead?” queried Prout, softly.

“Yes; diphthery. Yew see it came about th’ way. When I got back ter Cohoes—thet’s whar I belong—after that cussed pirut Semmes sunk my hooker, an’ ‘Riar sees me standin’ in front ev her without givin’ her any warnin’ I was comin’, she gets that skeered that she drops kerwallop on the floor, an’ when she come to, an’ heerd that the *Mattie Casey* was gone, waal, thet jest sorter finished her. Waal, she hung on ter life fur a year or so, kep’ getting more powerful weak in the intelleck every day; an’ when she died, my little Hope was on’y four years old. An’ Hope died when I was away servin’ in the *Iroquois* lookin’ fur Semmes,… an’ I ain’t got no one else to keer fur me naow.... Waal, goodbye, Prout; I guess I’ll beat up ter windward of this grewp, and then make a bee-line fur Honolulu.”

In another minute he had shambled down to the boat, and as the sun sank below the line of coconuts on the lee side of Nukutavau, the schooner swept away into the darkness. Then Prout, taking the little girl in his arms, followed old Malineta to the house of Patiaro the chief, and again took up the thread of his lonely existence.

Four years had come and gone. In his quiet house, under the shadow of the ever-rustling palms, Prout lay upon his rough couch of coarse mats, and little Mercedes stood beside him with her tiny hand upon his death-dewed forehead.

The missionary ship had just anchored in the lagoon, and Patiaro and his men had paddled off to her, so that, save for the low murmur of voices of women and children in the houses near by, the village lay silent.

Weeping softly, the child placed her tender cheek against the rugged face of the dying man, and whispered:

"What is it, my father, that aileth thee?"

He drew her slender figure to him with his failing hands and kissed her with pallid lips, and then Prout the trader gave up the battle of life.

MRS. CLINTON

I

As the sun set blood red, a thick white fog crept westward, and the miserable fever-stricken wretches that lay gasping and dying on the decks of the transport *Breckenbridge* knew that another day of calm—and horror—waited them with the coming of the dawn on the morrow.

Twenty miles away the dark outline of the Australian shore shone out green and purple with the dying sunshafts, and then quickly dulled again to the sombre shades of the coming night and the white mantle of fog.

On the starboard side of the high quarterdeck of the transport the master stood gazing seaward with a worn and troubled face, and as he viewed the gathering fog a heavy sigh broke from him.

"God help us!" he muttered, "ninety-six dead already, and as many more likely to die in another week if this calm keeos up."

A hand was laid on his shoulder, and turning he met the pale face of the surviving surgeon of the fever-stricken ship.

"Seven more cases, Belton—five prisoners and two marines."

The master of the *Breckenbridge* buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

"Can nothing be done, doctor? My God! it is terrible to see people perishing like this before our eyes when help is so near. Look! over there, only twenty miles away, is Twofold Bay, where there is a settlement, but I dare not send a boat ashore. There are not ten sound men in the ship, and if an easterly wind springs up I could not keep my ship from going ashore."

The young surgeon made no answer for awhile. Ever since the *Breckenbridge* had left Rio, one or more of the convicts, seamen, or military guard had died day after day; and he had striven hard since the outbreak of the fever to stay its deadly progress. The cause he knew well: the foul, overcrowded 'tween decks, where four hundred human beings were confined in a space not fit to hold a hundred, the vile drinking-water and viler provisions, the want of even a simple disinfectant to clear the horrible, vitiated atmosphere, and the passage, protracted long beyond even the usual time in those days, had been the main causes of their present awful condition.

Presently the surgeon spoke—

"Nothing can be done, Belton."

"How is Lieutenant Clinton, sir?" asked the master, as the surgeon turned to leave him.

"Dying fast. Another hour or so will see the end."

"And his wife and baby?"

"She bears up well, but her infant cannot possibly live another day in such weather as this. God help her, poor little woman! Better for her if she follows husband and child."

"Who is with Mr. Clinton, doctor?" asked the master presently.

"Adair—No. 267. I brought him into the cabin. Indeed, Clinton asked me to do so. He thinks much of the young fellow, and his conduct ever since the outbreak occurred deserves recognition. He has rendered me invaluable assistance with Clinton and the other sick in the main cabin."

"He's a fine young fellow," said Belton, "and his good example has done much to keep the others quiet. Do you know, doctor, that at any time during the last three weeks the ship could have been captured by a dozen even unarmed men."

"I do know it; but the poor wretches seem never to have thought of rising."

"What was Adair sent out for?" asked Belton.

"Lunacy; otherwise, patriotism. He's one of a batch of five—the five best conducted men on the ship—sentenced to end their days in Botany Bay for participating in an attack on a party of yeomanry

at Bally-somewhere or other in Ireland. There was a band of about fifty, but these five were the only ones captured—the other forty-five were most likely informers and led them into the mess."

A hurried footstep sounded near them, and a big man, in a semi-military costume, presented himself abruptly before them. His dark, coarse race was flushed with anger, and his manner insolent and aggressive. Not deigning to notice the presence of the surgeon, he addressed himself to the master of the transport.

"Mr. Belton, I protest against the presence in the main cabin of a ruffianly convict. The scoundrel refuses to let me have access to Lieutenant Clinton. Both on my own account and on that of Mr. Clinton, who needs my services, I desire that this man be removed immediately."

"What right, sir, have you, a passenger, to protest?" answered Belton surlily. "Mr. Clinton is dying and Prisoner Adair is nursing him."

"That does not matter to me, I–"

The surgeon stepped in front of the newcomer.

"But it *shall* matter to you, Mr. Jacob Bolger, Government storekeeper, jailer, overseer, or commissary's runner, or whatever your position is. And I shall see that No. 267 suffers no molestation from you."

"Who are you, sir, to threaten me? The Governor shall hear of this when we arrive at the settlement. A pretty thing that I should be talked to like this by the ship's doctor!"

"By God, sir, I'll give you something to talk about," and the surgeon's Welsh blood leapt to his face. Advancing to the break of the poop, he called—

"Sergeant Matthews!"

The one remaining non-commissioned officer of the diminished convict-guard at once appeared and saluted.

He was a solemn-faced, taciturn man, devoted to Clinton.

"Mr. Belton," said the doctor, "in the serious illness of Lieutenant Clinton I now assume charge of the military guard and convicts on this ship, and as a first step to maintain proper discipline at such a critical time, I shall confine Mr. Bolger to his cabin. Sergeant, take him below and lock him in."

Bolger collapsed at once. "I beg your pardon, doctor, for my hastiness. I did not know.... I was–"

The surgeon cut his apologies short. "Go to your cabin, sir. I shall not have you locked in, but, by heavens! if you attempt to go into Mr. Clinton's cabin I'll put you in irons, Government official though you are. I am well aware that your presence is particularly objectionable to Mrs. Clinton."

With an evil look Bolger left them, and the surgeon, turning to Belton, said: "That settles *him*, anyway, for a time. He's a thorough scoundrel, I believe. Mrs. Clinton has a positive horror of the man; yet the brute is continually pestering her with offers of his services. Now I must go below again to poor Clinton."

In the dimly lighted cabin the young officer lay breathing heavily, and as the doctor softly entered he saw that the time was now very near. By her husband's side sat Marion Clinton, her loosened wavy brown hair hiding from view her own face and the dying hand which she held pressed to her quivering lips. At her feet, on a soft cushion on the floor, lay her infant, with one thin waxen hand showing out from the light shawl that covered it; at the further end of the cabin stood a young, broad-shouldered man in grey convict garb. As the doctor entered he stood up and saluted.

The sound of the opening door made Clinton turn his face. "Is that you, Williams?" he said, in slow, laboured tones. "Marion, my girl, bear up. I know I am going, old fellow. Do what you can for her, Williams. The Governor will see to her returning to England, but it may be long before a ship leaves.... Marion!"

"Yes," she answered brokenly.

"Is baby no better?"

"No," she answered with a sob, as she raised her tear-stained face to Surgeon Williams, who shook his head. "There is no hope for her, Harry."

His hand pressed hers gently. “God help you, dear! Only for that it would not be so hard to die now; and now I leave you quite alone.”

She stooped down and lifted the fragile infant, and Williams and No. 267 turned their faces away for awhile. Presently Clinton called the surgeon.

“Williams,” and his eyes looked wistfully into the doctor’s, “do what you can for her. There is something like a hundred guineas among my effects—that will help. Thank God, though, she will be a rich woman when my poor old father dies. I am the only son.”

The surgeon bent down and took his hand. “She shall never want a friend while I live, Clinton, never.”

A light of thankfulness flickered in Clinton’s eyes, and the pallid lips moved; and then as wife and friend, each holding a hand, waited for him to speak, there came the sound of a heavy sob. Convict 267 was kneeling and praying for the departing soul.

Slowly the minutes passed, the silence broken but by the creaking and straining of the ship as she rose and fell to the sea, and now and again the strange, mournful cry of some night-fishing penguin.

“Marion,” Clinton said at last, “I would like to speak to Adair before I die. He has been good to you and to me.”

Walking softly in his stockinged feet, Adair advanced close to the bed.

“Give me your hand, Adair. God bless you,” he whispered.

“And God bless you, sir, and all here,” answered the young Irishman in a husky, broken voice.

“Hush,” said the surgeon warningly, and his eyes sought those of the watching wife, with a meaning in them that needed no words. Quickly she passed her arm around Clinton, and let his head lie upon her shoulder. He sighed heavily and then lay still.

The surgeon touched the kneeling figure of Convict Adair on the arm, and together they walked softly out of the cabin.

“Come again in an hour, Adair,” said Dr. Williams; “you can help me best. We must bury him by daylight. Meanwhile you can get a little sleep.”

No. 267 clasped his hands tightly together as he looked at the doctor, and his lips worked and twitched convulsively. Then a wild beseeching look overspread his face. “For God’s sake don’t ask me!” he burst out. “I implore you as man to man to have pity on me. I *cannot* be here at daylight!”

“As you please,” answered Williams, with a surprised expression; and then as he went on deck he said to himself, “Some cursed, degrading Irish superstition, I suppose, about a death at sea.”

Slowly the hours crept on. No noise disturbed the watcher by her dead save the low voices of the watch on deck and the unknown sounds that one hears at night alone. Prisoner Adair was sitting in the main cabin within near call of Mrs. Clinton, and, with head upon his knees, seemed to slumber. Suddenly the loud clamour of five bells as the hour was struck made him start to his feet and look quickly about him with nervous apprehension. From the dead officer’s state-room a narrow line of light from beneath the door sent an oblique ray aslant the cabin floor and crossed the convict’s stockinged feet.

For a moment he hesitated; then tapped softly at the door. It opened, and the pale face of Marion Clinton met his as he stood before her cap in hand.

“Have you come to take”—the words died away in her throat with a sob.

“No,” he answered, “I have but come to ask you to let me say goodbye, and God keep and prosper you, madam. My time here is short, and you and your husband have made my bitter lot endurable.”

She gave him her hand. He clasped it reverently in his for a moment, and his face flushed a dusky red. Then he knelt and kissed her child’s little hand.

“Are you leaving the ship? Are we then in port or near it?” she asked.

He looked steadfastly at her for a moment, and then, pushing the door to behind him, lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Mrs. Clinton, your husband one day told me that he would aid me to regain my freedom. Will you do as much?"

"Yes," she answered, trembling; "I will. I shall tell the Governor how you–"

He shook his head. "Not in that way, but now, now."

"How *can* I help you now?" she asked wonder-ingly.

"Give me Mr. Clinton's pistols. Before daylight four others and myself mean to escape from the ship. The guard are all too sick to prevent us even if we are discovered. There is a boat towing astern, lowered with the intention of sending it ashore to seek assistance. Water and provisions are in it. But we have no firearms, and if we land on the coast may meet with savages."

Without a word she put her husband's pistols in his hands, and then gave him all the ammunition she could find.

"Do not shed blood," she began, when the convict clutched her arm. A sound as of some one moving came from the next cabin—the one occupied by Jacob Bolger—and a savage light came into Adair's eyes as he stood and listened.

"He would give the alarm in a moment if he knew," he muttered.

"Yes," she answered; "he hates you, and I am terrified even to meet his glance."

But Mr. Jacob Bolger made no further noise; he had heard quite enough, and at that moment was lying back in his bunk with an exultant smile, waiting for Adair to leave the cabin.

Then the convict, still crouching on the floor, held out his hand.

"Will you touch my hand once more, Mrs. Clinton?" he said huskily.

She gave it to him unhesitatingly.

"Goodbye, Adair. I pray God all will go well with you."

He bent his face over it and whispered "Goodbye," and then went up on deck.

As No. 267 stumbled along the main deck he saw that all discipline was abandoned, and even the for'ard sentry, that for the past week had been stationed to guard the prisoners when on deck, had left his post.

At the fore-hatch four shadowy forms approached him, and then the five men whispered together.

"Good," said Adair at last. Then they quickly separated.

Six bells had struck when Jacob Bolger opened his cabin door, peered cautiously about, and then, stepping quickly to Mrs. Clinton's door, turned the handle without knocking, and entered.

"Why do you come here, Mr. Bolger?" said Marion Clinton, with a terrified look in her dark eyes. "Do you not know that my husband is dead and my child dying?" And, holding the infant in her arms, she barred a nearer approach.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Clinton; but I come as a friend, first to offer you my poor services in your great affliction, and secondly—but as a friend still—to warn you of the dangerous step you have taken in assisting a party of convicts to escape from the ship."

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Bolger, have some pity on me! My dear husband is dead, my child has but a few hours—perhaps minutes—to live. Do not add to my misery."

"I shall not betray *you!*" and he advanced a step nearer to her; "but it is my duty," and his cunning eyes watched her shrinking figure keenly, "to prevent these men from escaping." And then he turned as if to go.

Her courage came back. "Mr. Bolger"—and she placed her hand on his cuff, shuddering as she did so—"you are not a rich man. Will you—can I—will a hundred guineas buy your silence? It is all I have. Forget that which you know. Let these wretched men escape. What harm can it do you?"

His savage, brutal nature came out, and he laughed coarsely.

"None, but—but you would like to see them get away, would you not?"

"Yes," she answered, looking at him with dulled eyes, "Adair has been very good to us."

"Well, look here; money cannot buy my silence, but *you* can. Now do you know what I mean?"

"No," she answered despairingly. "How should I? What is it you wish me to do?"

"This"—and he bent his evil-eyed face close to hers—"promise to marry me three months from now."

She gave a gasping cry, and sank back upon her seat. He followed and stood over her, and then spoke quickly—

"Ever since I first saw you I have loved you. You are a free woman now, and I shall have a good position at the settlement."

She made a gesture of horror, and his voice grew savage and threatening. "And unless you make me that promise I'll give the alarm now, and Adair and his confederates shall hang together. Come, think, and decide quickly—their life or death rests in your hands."

For some moments she bent her gaze upon the pinched and sunken features of her dying child; then she raised her head, and a swift gleam of fire came into her eyes.

"I will do as you wish. Now go."

Without a word Bolger turned and left the cabin.

As he walked quickly through the main cabin he did not see the tall figure of Sergeant Matthews standing a few feet aft from Mrs. Clinton's cabin-door. The moment Bolger disappeared the sergeant tapped and called—

"Mrs. Clinton!"

A new terror beset her as she recognised the sergeant's voice; but she bravely stifled it and bade him come in.

The solemn, wooden-faced soldier looked at her steadily for a second or so, and then, being a man of few words, got through with them as quickly as possible.

"Beg pardon, madam, doctor sent me with a message to Mr. Bolger, telling him he was at liberty to leave his cabin; found he was gone; heard his voice in here; waited to see if could be of any assistance to you, madam."

There was a kindly ring in his voice which encouraged her.

"Matthews, did you hear what Mr. Bolger was saying?"

The sergeant looked stolidly before him. "I did, madam—part of it."

"Part?" she repeated agitatedly.

"Yes, madam—about Adair and some other men."

She pressed her hand to her throat. Matthews was an old, tried servant of her husband's in former years. "Close the door!" she said suddenly.

Opening a locker, she took out a leathern-bound writing-desk, unlocked it, and in a moment or two more turned to the sergeant with a small but heavy purse in her hand.

"Sergeant," she said quietly; "this money, nearly a hundred guineas, is for you. I may not live to reach the settlement at Port Jackson. And I would like to reward you for—for–" The rest died away.

Matthews understood. He took the money, saluted, and with softened tread left the cabin. He was not a hard man, and had meant to do his duty when he heard Bolger speak of Adair's intended escape; but a hundred guineas was a large sum to him.

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