BECKE LOUIS

THE EBBING OF THE TIDE

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The Ebbing Of The Tide / South Sea Stories – 1896:

Содержание

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"LULIBAN OF THE POOL"

A boy and a girl sat by the rocky margin of a deep mountain pool in Ponape in the North Pacific. The girl was weaving a basket from the leaves of a cocoa-nut. As she wove she sang the "Song of Luliban," and the boy listened intently.

""Tis a fine song that thou singest, Niya," said the boy, who came from Metalanien and was a stranger; "and who was Luliban, and Red-Hair the White Man?"

"*O Guk!*" said Niya, wonderingly, "hast never heard in Metalanien of Luliban, she who dived with one husband and came up with another—in this very pool?"

"What new lie is this thou tellest to the boy because he is a stranger?" said a White Man, who lay resting in the thick grass waiting for the basket to be finished, for the three were going further up the mountain stream to catch crayfish.

"Lie?" said the child; "nay, 'tis no lie. Is not this the Pool of Luliban, and do not we sing the 'Song of Luliban,' and was not Red-Hair the White Man—he that lived in Jakoits and built the

big sailing boat for Nanakin, the father of Nanakin, my father, the chief of Jakoits?"

"True, Niya, true," said the White Man, "I did but jest; but tell thou the tale to Sru, so that he may carry it home with him to Metalanien."

Then Niya, daughter of Nanakin, told Sru, the boy from Metalanien, the tale of Luliban of the Pool, and her husband the White Man called "Red-Hair," and her lover, the tattooed beachcomber, called "Harry from Yap."

"It was in the days before the fighting-ship went into Kiti Harbour and burnt the seven whaleships as they lay at anchor[1] that Red-Hair the White Man lived at Jakoits. He was a very strong man, and because that he was cunning and clever at fishing and killing the wild boar and carpentry, his house was full of riches, for Nanakin's heart was towards him always."

"Was it he who killed the three white men at Roan Kiti?" asked the White Man.

"Aye," answered Niya, "he it was. They came in a little ship, and because of bitter words over the price of some tortoise-shell he and the men of Nanakin slew them. And Red-Hair burnt the ship and sank her. And for this was Nanakin's heart bigger than ever to Red-Hair, for out of the ship, before he burnt her, he took many riches—knives, guns and powder, and beads and pieces of silk; and half of all he gave to Nanakin."

"*Huh!*" said Sru, the boy. "He was a fine man!"

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[1] The Shenandoah, in 1866.

"Now, Harry from Yap and Red-Hair hated one another because of Luliban, whom Nanakin had given to Red-Hair for wife. This man, Harry, lived at Ngatik, the island off the coast, where the turtles breed, and whenever he came to Jakoits he would go to Red-Hair's house and drink grog with, him so that they would both lie on the mats drunk together. Sometimes the name of Luliban would come between them, and then they would fight and try to kill each other, but Nanakin's men would always watch and part them in time. And all this was because that Luliban had loved Harry from Yap before she became wife to Red-Hair. The men favoured the husband of Luliban because of Nanakin's friendship to him, and the women liked best Harry from Yap because of his gay songs and his dances, which he had learnt from the people of Yap and Ruk and Hogelu, in the far west; but most of all for his handsome figure and his tattooed skin.

"One day it came about that his grog was all gone, and his spirit was vexed, and Red-Hair beat Luliban, and she planned his death from that day. But Nanakin dissuaded her and said, 'It cannot be done; he is too great a man for me to kill. Be wise and forget his blows.'

"Then Luliban sent a messenger to Ngatik to Harry. He came and brought with him many square bottles of grog, and went in to Red-Hair's house, and they drank and quarrelled as they ever did; but because of what lay in his mind Harry got not drunk, for his eyes were always fixed on the face of Luliban.

"At last, when Red-Hair was fallen down on the mats, Luliban whispered to Harry, and he rose and lay down on a couch that was placed against the cane sides of the house. When all were asleep, Luliban stole outside and placed her face against the side of the house and called to Harry, who feigned to sleep. And then he and she talked for a long time. Then the white man got up and went to Nanakin, the chief, and talked long with him also.

"Said Nanakin the chief, 'O White Man, thou art full of cunning, and my heart is with thee. Yet what will it profit me if Red-Hair dies?'

"'All that is now his shall be thine,' said Harry.

"'And what shall I give thee?' said Nanakin.

"'Only Luliban,'" said the White Man with the tattooed body.

"On the morrow, as the day touched the night, the people of Jakoits danced in front of Nanakin's house, and Harry, with flowers in his hair and his body oiled and stained with turmeric, danced also. Now among those who watched him was Luliban, and presently her husband sought her and drove her away, saying; 'Get thee to my house, little beast. What dost thou here watching this fool dance!'

"Harry but laughed and danced the more, and then Red-Hair gave him foul words. When the dance was ended, Harry went up to Red-Hair and said, 'Get thee home also, thou cutter of sleeping men's throats. I am a better man than thee. There is nothing that thou hast done that I cannot do.'

"Then Nanakin, whose mouth was ready with words put

therein by Luliban, said, 'Nay, Harry, thou dost but boast. Thou canst not walk under the water in the Deep Pool with a heavy stone on thy shoulder—as Red-Hair has done.'

"'Bah!' said Harry. 'What he can do, that I can do.'

"Now, for a man to go in at one end of this pool here"—and Niya nodded her head to the waters at her feet—"and walk along the bottom and come out at the farther end is no great task, and as for carrying a heavy stone, that doth but make the task easier; but in those days there were devils who lived in a cave that is beneath where we now sit, and none of our people ever bathed here, for fear they would be seized and dragged down. But yet had Red-Hair one day put a stone upon his shoulder, and carried it under the water from one end of the pool to another—this to show the people that he feared no devils. But of the cave that can be gained by diving under the wall of rock he knew nothing—only to a few was it known.

"'Show this boaster his folly,' said Nanakin to Red-Hair, who was chewing his beard with wrath. And so it was agreed upon the morrow that the two white men should walk each with a stone upon his shoulder, in at one end of the deep pool and come out of the other, and Harry should prove his boast, that in all things he was equal to Red-Hair."

"When Red-Hair went back to his house Luliban was gone, and some said she had fled to the mountains, and he reproached Nanakin, saying: 'Thy daughter hath fled to Ngatik to the house of Harry. I will have her life and his for this.' But Nanakin

smoothed his face and said: 'Nay, not so; but first put this boaster to shame before the people, and he shall die, and Luliban be found.'

"Now, Luliban was hid in another village, and when the time drew near for the trial at the pool she went there before the people. In her hand she carried a sharp *toki* (tomahawk) and a long piece of strong cinnet with a looped end. She dived in and clambered out again underneath and waited. The cave is not dark, for there are many fissures in the top through which light comes when the sun is high.

"The people gathered round, and laughed and talked as the two white men stripped naked, save for narrow girdles of leaves round their loins. The skin of Red-Hair was as white as sand that lies always in the sun that of Harry was brown, and covered from his neck to his feet with strange tattooing, more beautiful than that of the men of Ponape.

"They looked at each other with blood in their eyes, and the long, yellow teeth of Red-Hair ground together, but no words passed between them till Red-Hair, poising a great stone on his shoulder, called out to Harry: 'Follow me, O boastful stealer of my wife, and drown thy blue carcass.'

"Then he walked in, and Harry, also with a heavy stone, followed him. Ere one could count a score those that watched could not see Harry, because of the depth of the water and the darkness of his skin. But the white skin of Red-Hair gleamed like the belly of a shark when it turneth—then it disappeared.

"When they were half-way through a stone fell through a fissure of the cave, and Luliban, who watched for the signal, dived outwards with the line of cinnet, and came behind Red-Hair and put the noose over his left foot, and Harry, who followed close, cast the stone he carried away and raised his hand and stabbed him in the belly as he turned, and then, with Luliban and he dragging tight the line of cinnet, they shot up from beneath the water into the cave and pulled Red-Hair after them."

"The people had gathered at the farther end of the pool to see the two men come up; and when they came not they wondered, and some one said: 'The devils have seized them!'

"Then Nanakin, who alone remained on the top of the rocks, called out, 'Alas for the white men! I can see bubbles, and the water is bloody,' and he beat his head on the rocks and made great grief and called out to the devils in the cave, 'Spare me my white men, O devils of the cave, spare me my good white men. But if one must die let it be him that hath offended.'

"Ah! he was a cunning man, was Nanakin, the father of Nanakin my father.

"The men and the women and children ran up again from the end of the pool; for, although they were greatly afraid, they durst not leave their chief by himself to beat out his head upon the stones. So they clustered round him and wailed also with him. And Nanakin raised his voice again and again and called out to the devils of the pool to spare him one white man; and the people called out with him. Yet none of them dared look upon the water

of the pool; only Nanakin turned his eyes that way.

"At last the chief said, 'Ho, what is that?' and he pointed to the water, and they saw bubbles again rise up and break the surface of the water. 'Now shall I know if my white men are dead.'

"And, as they looked, behold there shot up from the water a yellow gourd, and the men shouted, some in wonder and more in fear. And Nanakin leaned over the edge of the rock and stretched out his hand and drew the gourd to him. Then he took it in his hand, and lo! there was tied to the neck a piece of plaited cinnet, which ran deep down into the water under the rock.

"Again Nanakin called out to his men who stood crouched up behind him. 'What shall I do with this? shall I pull it up?'

"And then—so the people said—there came a voice from the bowels of the earth, which said, 'Pull!'

"So they drew in the line, and as they drew it became heavy, and then something came up with a splash, and those that held the line looked over, and lo! there was the head of Red-Hair, wet and bloody, tied to the end of it by the ear.

"The head was laid upon the rock, and then the people would have turned and fled, but that Nanakin and two of his priests said there was now no fear as the cave devils were angry alone with Red-Hair, who had twice braved them.

"Then the two priests and Nanakin leant over the wall of rocks and called out again for the life of Harry to be spared, and as they called, he shot out from underneath and held out his hands; and they pulled him in.

"'Let us away from here quickly,' was all he said. 'I thank thee, O chief, for thy prayers; else had the devils of the pool taken off my head as they have taken off that of Red-Hair, and devoured my body as they have devoured his.'

"Then the people picked him up, for he was weak, and every one that was there left the pool in fear and trembling, except Nanakin and the two priests, who laughed inwardly.

"When all was quiet, Luliban, too, came up from under the water and dried her body, and oiled and scented her hair from a flask that she had hidden in the bushes, and went back to Red-Hair's house, and, with downcast face but a merry heart, asked her women to plead with her husband not to beat her for running away. Then they told her of the doings at the pool.

"When ten days were gone by for mourning, Luliban became wife to 'Harry from Yap,' and he took her with him to Ngatik, and the favour of Nanakin that was once Red-Hair's became his, and he prospered. And for long, long years no one knew how it was that Red-Hair lost his head till Luliban told it."

"*Huh!*" said Sru, the boy, admiringly. "He was a Fine Man, that Red-Hair; but the white man with the tattooed skin was a Better."

NINIA

I

Away out upon the wide Northern Pacific there is a group of three little islands. They are so very, very small that you need not seek to discover them on the map of the Pacific Ocean; but if any of you have a chart of the North or West Pacific, then you would easily be able to find them. Run your eye up north, away past the Equator, in the direction of China, and you will see, to the north of New Guinea, a large cluster of islands named the "Caroline Islands," some of which are named, but most are not—only tiny dots no bigger than a pin's head serve to mark their position. Perhaps, however—if you get a German chart—you may see one of the largest of the small dots marked "Pingelap," and Pingelap is the name of the largest of the three little islands of my story; the others are called Tugulu and Takai.

Now, although Pingelap and Tugulu and Takai are so close together that at low tide one may walk across the coral reef that encircles the whole group from one island to another, yet are they lonely spots, for there is no other island nearer than Mokil, which is ninety miles away.

But yet, although the three islands are so small, a great number of natives live upon them—between four and five hundred.

There is only one village, which is on Pingelap, and here all the people lived. The island itself is not more than two miles in length, and in no place is it more than a quarter of a mile in width; and Tugulu and Takai are still smaller. And from one end to the other the islands are covered with a dense verdure of cocoanut palms, with scarcely any other tree amongst them, so that when seen from the ship two or three miles away, they look exactly like a belt of emerald surrounding a lake of silver, for in their centre is a beautiful lagoon surrounded on three sides by the land, and on the west protected from the sweeping ocean rollers by a double line of coral reef stretching from little Takai to the south end of Pingelap.

There are hundreds of beautiful islands in the Pacific, but not any one of them can excel in beauty lonely little Pingelap. There are two reefs—an outer and an inner. Against the outer or ocean reef huge seas for ever dash unceasingly on the windward side of the island, and sometimes, in bad weather, will sweep right over the coral and pour through the shallow channel between Tugulu and Pingelap; and then the calm, placid waters of the lagoon will be fretted and disturbed until fine weather comes again. But bad weather is a rare event in those seas, and usually the lagoon of Pingelap is as smooth as a sheet of glass. And all day long you may see children paddling about in canoes, crossing from one shining beach to another, and singing as they paddle, for they are a merry-hearted race, the people of these three islands, and love to sing and dance, and sit out in front of their houses

on moonlight nights and listen to tales told by the old men of the days when their islands were reddened with blood. For until fifteen years before, the people of Pingelap and Tugulu were at bitter enmity, and fought with and slaughtered each other to their heart's delight. And perhaps there would have soon been none left to tell the tale, but that one day an American whaleship, called the *Cohasset* touched there to buy turtle from Sralik, the chief of Pingelap, and Sralik besought the captain to give him muskets and powder and ball to fight the Tugulans with.

So the captain gave him five muskets and plenty of powder and bullets, and then said—

"See, Sralik; I will give you a white man too, to show you how to shoot your enemies."

And then he laughed, and calling out to a man named Harry, he told him to clear out of the ship and go and live ashore and be a king, as he was not worth his salt as a boatsteerer.

And so this Harry Devine, who was a drunken, good-for-nothing, quarrelsome young American, came ashore with Sralik, and next day he loaded the five muskets and, with Sralik, led the Pingelap people over to Tugulu. There was a great fight, and as fast as Sralik loaded a musket, Harry fired it and killed a man. At last, when nearly thirty had been shot, the Tugulu people called for quarter.

"Get thee together on Takai," called out Sralik, "and then will we talk of peace."

Now Takai is such a tiny little spot, that Sralik knew he would

have them at his mercy, for not one of them had a musket.

As soon as the last of the Tugulu people had crossed the shallow channel that divides Tugulu from Takai, the cunning Sralik with his warriors lined the beach and then called to the Tugulans—

"This land is too small for so many."

And then Harry, once the boatsteerer and now the beachcomber, fired his muskets into the thick, surging mass of humanity on the little 'islet, and every shot told. Many of them, throwing aside their spears and clubs, sprang into the water and tried to swim over to Pingelap across the lagoon. But Sralik's men pursued them in canoes and clubbed and speared them as they swam; and some that escaped death by club or spear, were rent in pieces by the sharks which, as soon as they smelt the blood of the dead and dying men that sank in the quiet waters of the lagoon, swarmed in through a passage in the western reef. By and by the last of those who took to the water were killed, and only some eighty or ninety men and many more women and children were left on Takai, and the five muskets became so hot and foul that Harry could murder no longer, and his arm was tired out with slaughter.

All that night Sralik's warriors watched to see that none escaped, and at dawn the hideous massacre began again, and club, spear, and musket did their fell work till only the women and children were left. These were spared. Among them was Ninia, the wife of Sikra, the chief of Tugulu. And because she

was young and fairer than any of the others, the white man asked her of Sralik for his wife. Sralik laughed.

"Take her, O clever white marn—her and as many more as thou carest for slaves. Only thou and I shall rule here now in this my island."

So Harry took her and married her according to native custom, and Ninia was his one wife for nearly fifteen years, when one day he was quietly murdered as he lay asleep in his house with his wife and two children; and although Sralik wept loudly and cut his great chest with a shark's teeth dagger, and offered sacrifices of turtle flesh to the white man's *jelin*, Ninia his wife and many other people knew that it was by Sralik's orders that Harry had been killed, for they had quarrelled over the possession of a whaleboat which Harry had bought from a passing ship, and which he refused to either sell or give to Sralik.

However, Sralik was not unkind to Ninia, and gave her much of her dead husband's property, and told her that he would give her for an inheritance for her two daughters the little islet—Takai.

And there in the year 1870 Ninia the widow, and Ninia her eldest daughter (for on Pingelap names of the first-born are hereditary) and Tarita, the youngest, went to live. With them went another girl, a granddaughter of the savage old Sralik. Her name was Ruvani. She was about eleven years of age, and as pretty as a gazelle, and because of her great friendship for Ninia —who was two years older than she—she had wept when she

saw the mother and daughters set out for Takai.

Fierce-hearted Sralik coming to the doorway of his thatched hut heard the sound of weeping, and looking out he saw Ruvani sitting under the shade of some banana trees with her face hidden in her pretty brown hands.

When he learned the cause of her grief his heart softened, and drawing his little grand-daughter to him, patted her head, and said—

"Nay, weep not, little bird. Thou too shalt go to Takai; and see, because of thee my heart shall open wide to Ninia and her daughters, and I will give her four slaves—two men and two women—who shall toil for you all. And when thou art tired of living at Takai, then thou and thy two playmates shall come over here to me and fill my house with the light of thy eyes."

So that is how Ninia, the widow of the wandering white man, and her two daughters and their friend came to live at the little islet called Takai.

II

The months went by and Ruvani, the chief's granddaughter, still lived with her friends, for she was too happy to leave them. Sometimes, though, on bright moonlight nights, the three girls would paddle across to the big village and gather with the rest of the village girls in front of the chiefs house, and dance and sing and play the game called *n'jiajia*; and then, perhaps, instead of going home across the lagoon in the canoe, they would walk around on the inner beaches of Pingelap and Tugulu. And long ere they came to the house they could see the faint glimmer of the fire within, beside which Ninia the widow slept awaiting their return.

Stealing softly in, the girls would lie down together on a soft white mat embroidered with parrots' feathers that formed their bed, and pulling another and larger one over them for a coverlet, they would fall asleep, undisturbed by the loud, hoarse notes of a flock of *katafa* (frigate birds) that every night settled on the boughs of a great *koa* tree whose branches overhung the house.

Sometimes when the trade-winds had dropped, and the great ocean rollers would beat heavily upon the far-off shelves of the outer reef, the little island would seem to shake and quiver to its very foundations, and now and then as a huge wave would curl slowly over and break with a noise like a thunder-peal, the frigate-birds would awake from their sleep and utter a solemn

answering squawk, and the three girls nestling closer together would whisper—

"'Tis Nanawit, the Cave-god, making another cave."

Ere the red sun shot out from the ocean the eight dwellers on Takai would rise from their mats; and whilst Ninia the widow would kindle a fire of broken cocoanut shells, the two men slaves would go out and bring back young cocoanuts and taro from the plantation on Tugulu, and their wives would take off their gaily-coloured grass-girdles and tie coarse nairiris of cocoanut fibre around them instead, and with the three girls go out to the deep pools on the reef and catch fish. Sometimes they would surprise a turtle in one of the pools, and, diving in after the frightened creature, would capture and bring it home in triumph to Ninia the widow.

Such was the daily life of those who dwelt on Takai.

One day, ere the dews of the night had vanished from the lofty plumes of the cocoanut palms, there came to them a loud cry, borne across the waters of the silent lagoon, over from the village —

"A ship! A ship!"

Now not many ships came to Pingelap—perhaps now and then some wandering sperm-whaler, cruising lazily along toward the distant Pelew Islands, would heave-to and send a boat ashore to trade for turtle and young drinking cocoanuts. But it was long since any whaleship had called, and Ninia the widow, as she looked out seawards for the ship, said to the girls—

"'Tis not yet the season for the whaleships; four moons more and we may see one. I know not what other ships would come here."

By and by they saw the ship. She sailed slowly round the south point of Pingelap and backed her foreyard, and presently a boat was lowered and pulled ashore.

Little Tarita, clapping her hands with joy, darted into the house, followed by Ruvani and Ninia, and casting off their wet girdles of banana fibre—for they had just come in from fishing—they dressed themselves in their pretty *nairiris* of coloured grasses, and put on head-dresses of green and gold parrots' feathers, with necklaces of sweet-smelling berries around their necks, and were soon paddling across the lagoon to see the white strangers from the ship, who had already landed and gone up the beach and into the village.

It is nearly a mile from Takai to the village, and before the girls reached there they heard a great clamour of angry voices, and presently two white men dressed in white and carrying books in their hands came hurriedly down the beach, followed by a crowd of Sralik's warriors, who urged them along and forced them into the boat.

Then seizing the boat they shot her out into the water, and, shaking their spears and clubs, called out—

"Go, white men, go!"

But although the native sailors who pulled the boat were trembling with fear, the two white men did not seem frightened,

and one of them, standing up in the stern of the boat, held up his hand and called out to the angry and excited people—

"Let me speak, I pray you!"

The natives understood him, for he spoke to them in the language spoken by the natives of Strong's Island, which is only a few hundred miles from Pingelap.

The people parted to the right and left as Sralik, the chief, with a loaded musket grasped in his brawny right hand, strode down to the water's edge. Suppressed wrath shone in his eyes as he grounded his musket on the sand and looked at the white man.

"Speak," he said, "and then be gone."

The white man spoke.

"Nay, spare us thy anger, O chief. I come, not here to fill thy heart with anger, but with peace; and, to tell thee of the great God, and of His Son Christ who hath sent me to thee."

Sralik laughed scornfully.

"Thou liest. Long ago, did I know that some day a white-painted ship would come to Pingelap, and that white, men would come and speak to us of this new God and His Son who is called Christ, and would say that this Christ had sent them, and: then would the hearts of my people be stolen from Nanawit the Cave-god, and Tuarangi the god of the Skies, and I, Sralik the king, would become but as a slave, for this new God of theirs would steal the hearts of my people from me as well."

The white man said sorrowfully—

"Nay, that is not so. Who hath told thee this?"

"A better white man than thee—he who slew my enemies and was named Haré (Harry). Long ago did he warn me of thy coming and bid me beware of thee with thy lies about thy new God and His Son Christ."

Again the missionary said—

"Let me speak."

But Sralik answered him fiercely—

"Away, I tell thee, to thy white-painted ship, and trouble me no more," and he slapped the stock of his musket, and his white teeth gleamed savagely through his bearded face.

So the two missionaries went back, and the *Morning Star* filled away again and sailed slowly away to the westward.

That night as the three girls lay on the mats beside the dying embers of the fire, they talked of the strange white men whom Sralik had driven away.

Ninia the widow listened to them from her corner of the house, and then she said musingly—

"I, too, have heard of this God Christ; for when Haré, thy father, lay in my arms with the blood pouring from his wound and death looked out from his eyes, he called upon His name."

Young Ninia and her sister drew closer and listened. Never until now had they heard their mother speak of their white father's death. They only knew that some unknown enemy had thrust a knife into his side as he lay asleep, and Ninia the widow had, with terror in her eyes, forbidden them to talk of it even amongst themselves. Only she herself knew that Sralik had

caused his death. But to-night she talked.

"Tell us more, my mother," said girl Ninia, going over to her, and putting her cheek against her mother's troubled face and caressing her in the darkness.

"Aye, I can tell thee now, my children, for Sralik's anger is dead now.... It was at the dawn, just when the first note of the blue pigeon is heard, that I heard a step in the house—'twas the death-men of Sralik—and then a loud cry, and Haré, thy father, awoke to die. The knife had bitten deep and he took my hands in his and groaned.

"'Farewell,' he said, 'O mother of my children, I die!' Then he cried, 'And Thou, O Christ, look down on and forgive me; Christ the Son of God.'

"With my hand pressed to his side, I said: 'Who is it that thou callest upon, my husband? Is it the white man's God?'

"'Aye,' he said, 'this Christ is He whom I have so long denied. He is the Son of the God whose anger I fear to meet now that my soul goes out into darkness.'

"'Fear not,' I said, weeping, 'I, Ninia, will make offerings to this white God and His Son Christ, so that their anger may be softened against thy spirit when it wanders in ghost-land.'

"So he groaned and was dead. And for six or more moons did I put offerings to the white God upon thy father's grave as I had promised. No offerings made I to our own gods, for he despised them even as he despised his own. But yet do I think his *jelin* (spirit) is at rest in ghost-land; else had it come to me in the night

and touched me on the forehead as I slept.”

III

A month had gone by since the day that Sralik had driven away the "Christ ship," as the people called the *Morning Star*, and then word came over from Sralik to Ruvani, his granddaughter, to come over and take her part in a night-dance and feast to the rain-god, for the year had been a good one and the cocoanut trees were loaded with nuts. For this was the dancing and feasting.

All that day the eight people of Takai were busied in making ready their gifts of food for the feast which was to take place in two days' time. In the afternoon, when the sun had lost its strength, the three girls launched their canoe and set out for a place on the northern point of Pingelap, where grew in great profusion the sweet-smelling *nudu* flower. These would they get to make garlands and necklets to wear at the great dance, in which they were all to take part.

In an hour or two they had gathered all the *nudu* flowers they desired, and then little Tarita looking up saw that the sky was overcast and blackening, and presently some heavy drops of rain fell.

"Haste, haste," she cried to the others, "let us away ere the strong wind which is behind the black clouds overtakes us on the lagoon."

Night comes on quickly in the South Seas, and by the time they had seated themselves in the canoe it was dark. In a little

while a sharp rain-squall swept down from the northward, and they heard the wind rattling and crashing through the branches, of the palms on Tugulu.

Ninia, who was steering, boldly headed the canoe across the lagoon for Takai, and laughed when Ruvani and Tarita, who were wet and shivering with the cold rain, urged that they should put in at the beach on Tugulu and walk home.

"Paddle, paddle strongly," she cried, "what mattereth a little rain and wind! And sing, so that our mother will hear us and make ready something to eat. Look, I can already see the blaze of her fire."

Striking their paddles into the water in unison, they commenced to sing, but suddenly their voices died away in terror as a strange, droning hum was borne down to them from the black line of Tugulu shore; and then the droning deepened into a hoarse roaring noise as the wild storm of wind and fierce, stinging rain tore through the groves of cocoanuts and stripped them of leaves and branches.

Brave Ninia, leaning her lithe figure well over the side of the canoe, plunged her paddle deep down and tried to bring the canoe head to wind to meet the danger, and Ruvani, in the bow, with long hair flying straight out behind her, answered her effort with a cry of encouragement, and put forth all her strength to aid.

But almost ere the cry had left her lips, the full fury of the squall had struck them; the canoe was caught in its savage breath, twirled round and round, and then filled.

"Keep thou in the canoe, little one, and bale," cried Ninia to Tarita, as she and Ruvani leaped into the water.

For some minutes the two girls clung with one hand each to the gunwale, and Tarita, holding the large wooden *ahu* or baler, in both hands, dashed the water out. Then she gave a trembling cry—the baler struck against the side of the canoe and dropped overboard.

Ninia dared not leave the canoe to seek for it in the intense darkness, and so clinging to the little craft, which soon filled again, they drifted about. The waters of the lagoon were now white with the breaking seas, and the wind blew with fierce, cruel, steadiness, and although they knew it not, they were being swept quickly away from the land towards the passage in the reef.

The rain had ceased now, and the water being warm none of them felt cold, but the noise of the wind and sea was so great that they had to shout loudly to each other to make their voices heard.

Presently Ruvani called out to Ninia—

"Let us take Tarita between us and swim to the shore, ere the sharks come to us."

"Nay, we are safer here, Ruvani, And how could we tell my mother that the canoe is lost? Let us wait a little and then the wind will die away."

Canoes are valuable property on Pingelap, where suitable wood for building them is scarce, and this was in Ninia's mind.

They still kept hold of their paddles, and although afraid of the sharks, waited patiently for the storm to cease, little thinking

that at that moment the ebbing tide and wind together had swept them into the passage, and that they were quickly drifting away from their island home.

All that night Ninia the widow and her four slaves sought along the beach of Tugulu for the three girls, who they felt sure had landed there. And when the day broke at last, and they saw that the gale had not ceased and that the canoe had vanished, they ran all the way over to the village, and Ninia threw herself at Sralik's feet.

"Thy granddaughter and my children have perished, O chief."

The chief came to the door of his house and looked out upon the wild turmoil of waters.

"It is the will of the gods," he said, "else had not my whaleboat been crushed in the night," and he pointed to the ruins of the boat-shed upon which a huge cocoanut tree had fallen and smashed the boat.

Then he went back into his house and covered his face, for Ruvani was dear to his savage old heart.

And Ninia went back to her lonely house and wept and mourned for her lost ones as only mothers weep and mourn, be they of white skins or brown.

Away out into the ocean the canoe was swept along, and Ruvani and Ninia still clung to her, one at the head and one at the stern. Once there came a brief lull, and then they succeeded in partly freeing her from water, and Tarita using her two hands like a scoop meanwhile, the canoe at last became light enough

for them to get in.

They were only just in time, for even then the wind freshened, and Ninia and Ruvani let the canoe run before it, for they were too exhausted to keep her head to the wind.

When daylight broke Ninia, with fear in her heart, stood up in the canoe and looked all round her.

There was no land in sight! Poor children! Even then they could not have been more than twenty miles away from the island, for Pingelap is very low and not visible even from a ship's deck at more than twelve or fifteen miles.

But she was a brave girl, although only fourteen, and when Tarita and Ruvani wept she encouraged them.

"Sralik will come to seek us in the boat," she said, although she could have wept with them.

The wind still carried them along to the westward, and Ninia knew that every hour was taking them further and further away from Pingelap, but, although it was not now blowing hard, she knew that it was useless for them to attempt to paddle against it. So, keeping dead before the wind and sea, they drifted slowly along.

At noon the wind died away, and then, tired and worn out, she and Ruvani lay down in the bottom of the canoe and slept, while little Tarita sat up on the cane framework of the outrigger and watched the horizon for Sralik's boat.

Hour after hour passed, and the two girls still slept. Tarita, too, had lain her weary head down and slumbered with them.

Slowly the sun sank beneath a sea of glassy smoothness, unrippled even by the faintest air, and then Ninia awoke, and, sitting up, tossed her cloud of dark hair away from her face, and looked around her upon the darkening ocean. Her lips were dry and parched, and she felt a terrible thirst.

"Tarita," she called, "art sleeping, dear one?"

A sob answered her.

"Nay, for my head is burning, and I want a drink."

The whole story of those days of unutterable agony cannot be told here. There, under a torrid sun, without a drop of water or a morsel of food, the poor creatures drifted about till death mercifully came to two of them.

It was on the evening of the second day that Ninia, taking her little sister in her own fast weakening arms, pressed her to her bosom, and, looking into her eyes, felt her thirst-racken body quiver and then grow still in the strange peacefulness of death. Then a long wailing cry broke upon the silence of the night.

How long she had sat thus with the child's head upon her bosom and her dead sightless eyes turned upward to the glory of the star-lit heavens she knew not; after that one moaning cry of sorrow that escaped from her anguished heart she had sat there like a figure of stone, dull, dazed, and unconscious almost of the agonies of thirst. And then Ruvani, with wild, dreadful eyes and bleeding, sun-baked lips, crept towards her, and, laying her face on Ninia's hand, muttered—

"Farewell, O friend of my heart; I die."

And then, as she lay there with closed eyes and loosened hair falling like a shroud over the form of her dead playmate, she muttered and talked, and then laughed a strange weird laugh that chilled the blood in Ninia's veins. So that night passed, and then, as the fiery sun uprose again upon the wide sweep or lonely sea and the solitary drifting canoe with its load of misery, Ruvani, who still muttered and laughed to herself, suddenly rose up, and with the strength of madness, placing her arms around the stiffened form of little Tarita, she sprang over the side and sank with her.

Ninia, stretching her arms out piteously, bowed her head, and lay down to die.

She was aroused from her stupor by the cries of a vast flock of sea birds, and, opening her eyes, she saw that the canoe was surrounded by thousands upon thousands of bonita that leaped and sported and splashed about almost within arm's length of her. They were pursuing a shoal of small fish called *atuli*, and these every now and then darted under the canoe for protection. Sometimes, as the hungry bonita pressed them hard, they would leap out of the water, hundreds together, and then the sea birds would swoop down and seize them ere they fell back into the sea.

Ninia, trembling with excitement and the hope of life, watched eagerly. Presently she heard a curious, rippling noise, and then a rapidly-repeated tapping on the outrigger side of the canoe.

Oh! the joy of it; the water was black with a mass of *atuli*

crowded together on the surface, and frightened and exhausted.

She thrust her hands in among them and threw handsful after handsful into the canoe, and then her dreadful thirst and hunger made her cease, and, taking fish after fish, she bit into them with her sharp teeth, and assuaged both hunger and thirst.

As she tore ravenously at the *atuli* the sky became overcast, and while the bonitas splashed and jumped around her, and the birds cried shrilly overhead, the blessed rain began to fall, at first in heavy drops, and then in a steady downpour.

Taking off her thick grass girdle, she rolled it up into a tight coil and placed it across the bottom of the canoe, about two feet from the bows, so as to form a dam; and then, lying face downwards, she drank and drank till satisfied. Then she counted the *atuli*. There were over forty.

All that day the rain squalls continued, and then the wind settled and blew steadily from the east, and Ninia kept the canoe right before it.

That night she slept but little. A wild hope had sprung up in her heart that she might reach the island of Ponape, which she knew was not many days' sail from Pingelap. Indeed, she had once heard her father and Sralik talking about going there in the whaleboat to sell turtle-shell to the white traders there.

But she did not know that the current and trade wind were setting the canoe quickly away from Ponape towards a group of low-lying atolls called Ngatik.

The rain had ceased, and in the warm, starlight night she

drifted on to the west, and as she drifted she dreamed of her father, and saw Ninia the widow, her mother, sitting in the desolate house on Takai, before the dying embers of the fire, and heard her voice crying:

"*O thou white Christ God, to whom my husband called as he died, tell me are my children perished? I pray thee because of the white blood that is in them to protect them and let me behold my beloved again*."

The girl awoke. Her mother's voice seemed to still murmur in her ears, and a calm feeling of rest entered her soul. She took her paddle, and then stopped and thought.

This new God—the Christ-God of her father—perhaps He would help her to reach the land. She, too, would call upon Him, even as her mother had done.

"See, O Christ-God. I am but one left of three. I pray Thee guide my canoe to land, so that I may yet see Ninia my mother once more."

As the dawn approached she dozed again, and then she heard a sound that made her heart leap—it was the low, monotonous beat of the surf.

When the sun rose she saw before her a long line of low-lying islands, clothed in cocoanuts, and shining like jewels upon the deep ocean blue.

She ate some more of the fish, and, paddling as strongly as her strength would permit, she passed between the passage, entered the smooth waters of the lagoon, and ran the canoe up on to a

white beach.

"The Christ-God has heard me," she said as she threw her wearied form under the shade of the cocoa-nut palms and fell into a heavy, dreamless slumber.

And here next morning the people of Ngatik found her. They took the poor wanderer back with them to their houses that were clustered under the palm-groves a mile or two away, and there for two years she dwelt with them, hoping and waiting to return to Pingelap.

One day a ship came—a whaler cruising back to Strong's Island and the Marshall Group. The captain was told her story by the people of Ngatik, and offered to touch at Pingelap and land her.

Ninia the widow was still living on Takai, and her once beautiful face had grown old and haggard-looking. Since the night of the storm four ships had called at Pingelap, but she had never once gone over to the village, for grief was eating her heart away; and so, when one evening she heard that a ship was in sight, she took no heed.

Her house was very sad and lonely now, and as night came on she lay down in her end of the house and slept, while the other four people sat round the fire and talked and smoked.

In the middle of the night the four slaves got up and went away to the village, for they wanted to be there when the boat from the ship came ashore.

At daylight the ship was close in, and the people in the village

saw a boat lowered. Then a cry of astonishment burst from them when they saw the boat pull straight in over the reef and land at Takai, about a hundred yards from the house of Ninia, the white man's widow.

Only one person got out, and then the boat pushed off again and pulled back to the ship.

Ninia the widow had risen, and was rolling up the mat she had slept upon, when a figure darkened the doorway. She turned wonderingly to see who it was that had come over so early from the village, when the stranger, who was a tall, graceful young girl, sprang forward, and, folding her arms around her, said, sobbing with joy—

"My mother… The Christ-God hath brought me back to thee again."

BALDWIN'S LOISÈ—Miss Lambert

Her mother was a full-blooded native—a woman of Anaa, in the Chain Islands—her father a dissolute and broken white wanderer. At the age of ten she was adopted by a wealthy South Sea trading captain, living on the East Coast of New Zealand. He, with his childless wife, educated, cared for, and finally loved her, as they once loved a child of their own, dead twenty years before.

At sixteen Loisé was a woman; and in the time that had passed since the morning she had seen her reckless, beach-combing father carried ashore at Nukutavake with a skinful of whisky and his pockets full of the dollars for which he had sold her, the tongue and memories of her mother's race had become, seemingly, utterly forgotten.

But only seemingly; for sometimes in the cold winter months, when savage southerly gales swept over the cloud-blackened ocean from the white fields of Antarctic ice and smote the New Zealand coast with chilling blast, the girl would crouch beside the fire in Mrs. Lambert's drawing-room, and covering herself with warm rugs, stare into the glowing coals until she fell asleep.

She had not forgotten.

One day a visitor came to see her adopted father. He was captain of a small trading schooner running to the Paumotus—her mother's land—and although old Lambert had long since

given up his trading business and voyagings, he liked to meet people from the Islands, and, indeed, kept open house to them; so both he and Mrs. Lambert made him welcome.

The captain of the schooner was a man of a type common enough in the South Seas, rough, good-humoured, and coarsely handsome.

After dinner the two men sat over their whisky and talked and smoked. Mrs. Lambert, always an invalid, had gone to her room, but Loisé, book in hand, lay on a sofa and seemed to read. But she did not read, she listened. She had caught a word or two uttered by the dark-faced, black-bearded skipper—words that filled her with vague memories of long ago. And soon she heard names—names of men, white and brown, whom she had known in that distant, almost forgotten and savage childhood.

When the seaman rose to leave and extended his tanned, sinewy hand to the beautiful "Miss Lambert," and gazed with undisguised admiration into her face, he little thought that she longed to say, "Stay and let me hear more." But she was conventional enough to know better than that, and that her adopted parents would be genuinely shocked to see her anything more than distantly friendly with such a man as a common trading captain—even though that man had once been one of Lambert's most trusted men. Still, as she raised her eyes to his, she murmured softly, "We will be glad to see you again, Captain Lemaire." And the dark-faced seaman gave her a subtle, answering glance.

All that night she lay awake—awake to the child memories of the life that until now had slumbered within her. From her opened bedroom window she could see the dulled blaze of the city's lights, and hear ever and anon the hoarse and warning roar of a steamer's whistle. She raised herself and looked out upon the waters of the harbour. A huge, black mass was moving slowly seaward, showing only her masthead and side-lights—some ocean tramp bound northward. Again the boom of the whistle sounded, and then, by the quickened thumping of the propeller, the girl, knew that the tramp had rounded the point and was heading for the open sea.

She lay back again on the pillow and tried to sleep. Why couldn't she sleep, she wondered. She closed her eyes. The branches of the pine that grew close to her window rustled and shook to a passing breath of wind, and her eyes opened again. How strangely, though, it sounded to-night, and how her heart was thumping! Again the white lids drooped and half closed again, and the pine branches waved and soughed gently to the breeze.

And then the dead grey of the wall of the room changed to a bright, shimmering white—the white of an island beach as it changes, under the red flush of the morn, from the shadows of the night to a broad belt of gleaming silver—and the sough of the pine-tree by the window deepened into the humming music of the trade-wind when it passes through the sleeping palms, and a million branches awake trembling to its first breaths and shake

off in pearly showers the dews of the night. Again she raced along the clinking sand with her childish, half-naked companions, and heard the ceaseless throb of the beating surf upon the windward reef, and saw the flash of gold and scarlet of a flock of parrakeets that with shrill, whistling note, vanished through the groves of cocoa-nuts as they sped mountain wards. Then her latent native soul awoke and made her desperate.

Ere two days had passed she was missing, and six weeks later a little white-painted schooner hove-to off one of the Paumotu Group, lowered a boat, and landed her amongst the wondering natives.

The dark-faced, black-bearded man who steered the boat held her hand a moment ere he said good-bye.

"It is not too late, Loisé."

She raised her face and laughed scornfully.

"To go back? To go back to hear the old man who was a father and the good woman who was a mother to me, tell me that they hated and despised me!" And then quick, scalding tears.

The man's face flushed. "No, not that, but," with an oath, "look here, if you'll come with me I'll head the schooner for Tahiti, and as soon as she swings to her anchor we will be ashore and married."

She shook her head. "Let me go, Captain Lemaire. Whatever comes to me, 'tis I alone who must answer for it. And so—good-bye."

She stood and watched the boat hoisted to the davits, and saw

the schooner slowly gather way, and then glide past and disappear round the palm-crowned point. Then she turned with streaming eyes and choking voice to the brown-skinned people that stood around her, and spoke to them in her mother's tongue.

So ended the sixteen years' life of the beautiful Miss Lambert and began that of Loisé, the half-blood.

LOISÉ, THE HALF-BLOOD

There was a wild rush of naked, scurrying feet, and a quick panting of brown bosoms along the winding path that led to Baldwin's house at Rikitea. A trading schooner had just dropped anchor inside the reef, and the runners, young lads and girls—half-naked, lithe-limbed and handsome—like all the people of the "thousand isles," wanted to welcome Baldwin the Trader at his own house door.

Two of them—a boy and girl—gained the trader's gate ahead of their excited companions, and, leaning their backs against the white palings, mocked the rest for their tardiness in the race. With one arm around the girl's lissom waist, the boy, Maturei, short, thickset, muscular, and the bully of the village, beat off with his left hand those who sought to displace them from the gate; and the girl, thin, créole-faced, with soft, red-lipped mouth, laughed softly at their vexation. Her gaily-coloured grass waist girdle had broken, and presently moving the boy's protecting arm, she tried to tie the band, and as she tied it she rattled out

oaths in English and French at the score of brown hands that sought to prevent her.

"*Hui! Hui!!* Away, ye fools, and let me tie my girdle," she said in the native tongue. "'Tis no time now for such folly as this; for, see, the boat is lowered from the ship and in a little time the master will be here."

The merry chatter ceased in an instant and every face turned towards the schooner, and a hundred pair of curious eyes watched. Then, one by one, they sat down and waited; all but the two at the gate, who remained standing, the boy's arm still wound round the girl's waist.

The boat was pulling in swiftly now, and the "click-clack" of the rowlocks reached the listening ears of those on shore.

There were two figures in the stern, and presently one stood up, and taking off his hat, waved it towards the shore.

A roar of welcome from the thronging mass of natives that lined the beach drowned the shrill, piping treble of the children round the gate, and told sturdy old Tom Baldwin that he was recognised, and scarce had the bow of the boat ploughed into the soft sand of the beach when he was seized upon and smothered with caresses, the men with good-natured violence thrusting aside the women and forming a body-guard to conduct him and the young man with him from the boat to the house. And about the strange white man the people thronged with inquiring and admiring glances, for he was big and strong-looking—and that to a native mind is better than all else in the world.

With joyous, laughing clamour, the natives pressed around the white men till the gate was reached, and then fell back.

The girl stepped forward, and taking the trader's hand, bent her forehead to it in token of submission.

"The key of this thy house, Tâmu," she murmured in the native tongue, as she placed it in his hand.

"Enter thou first, Loisé," and he waved it away.

A faint smile of pleasure illumined her face; Baldwin, rough and careless as he was, was yet studious to observe native custom.

The white men followed her, and then in the open doorway Baldwin stopped, turned, and raised his hand, palm outwards, to the throng of natives without.

"I thank thee, friends, for thy welcome. Dear to mine ears is the sound of the tongue of the men of Rikitea. See ye this young man here. He is the son of my friend who is now dead—he whom some of ye have seen, Kapeni Paraisi" (Captain Brice).

A tall, broad-shouldered native, with his hair streaming down over his shoulders, strode up the steps, and taking the young man's hand in his, placed it to his forehead.

"The son of Paraisi is welcome to Rikitea, and to me, the chief of Rikitea."

There was a murmur of approval; Baldwin waved his hand again, and then, with Brice, entered the house.

Outside, the boy and girl, seated on the verandah steps, talked and waited for orders.

Said Maturei, "Loisé, think you that now Tâmu hath found

thee to be faithful to his house and his name that he will marry thee according to the promise made to the priests at Tenararo when he first brought thee here?"

She took a thick coil of her shining black hair and wound it round and round her hand meditatively, looking out absently over the calm waters of the harbour.

"Who knows, Maturei? And I, I care not. Yet do I think it will be so; for what other girl is there here that knoweth his ways, and the ways of the white men as I know them? And this old man is a glutton; and, so that my skill in baking pigeons and making *karri* and rice fail me not, then am I mistress here.... Maturei, is not the stranger an evil-looking man?"

"Evil-looking!" said the boy, wonderingly; "nay, how canst thou say that of him?"

"What a jolly old fellow he is, and how these people adore him!" thought Brice, as they sat down to dinner. Two or three of the village girls waited upon them, and in the open doorway sat a vision of loveliness, arrayed in yellow muslin, and directing the movements of the girls by almost imperceptible motions of her palm-leaf fan.

Brice was strangely excited. The novelty of the surroundings, the wondrous, bright beauty of sea, and shore, and palm-grove that lay within his range of vision were already beginning to weave their fetal spell upon his susceptible nature. And then, again and again, his glance would fall upon the sweet, oval face and scarlet lips of the girl that sat in the doorway. Who was she?

Not old Baldwin's wife, surely! for had not the old fellow often told him that he was not married?… And what a lovely spot to live in, this Rikitea! By Jove, he would like to stay a year here instead of a few months only.... Again his eyes rested on the figure in the doorway—and then his veins thrilled—Loisé, lazily lifting her long, sweeping lashes had caught his admiring glance.

Brice was no fool with women—that is, he thought so, never taking into consideration that his numerous love affairs had always ended disastrously—to the woman. And his mother, good simple soul, had thought that the best means of taking her darling son away from unapproved-of female society would be a voyage to the islands with old Tom Baldwin!

Dinner was finished, and the two men were sitting out on the verandah smoking and drinking whisky, when Brice said, carelessly—

"I wonder you never married, Baldwin."

The old trader puffed at his pipe for a minute or two ere he answered—

"Did you notice that girl at all?" and he inclined his head towards the door of the sitting-room.

The young man nodded.

Then the candid Baldwin told him her history. "I can't defend my own position. I am no better than most traders—you see it is the custom here, neither is she worse than any of these half-blooded Paumotuans. If I married a native of this particular island I would only bring trouble on my head. I could not show

any preference for any particular girl for a wife without raising the bitterest quarrels among some of the leading chiefs here. You see, as a matter of fact, I should have married as soon as I came here, twenty years ago; then the trouble would have been over. But I didn't. I can see my mistake now, for I am getting old pretty fast;… and now that the missionaries are here, and I do a lot of business with them, I think us white men ought to show them some kind of respect by getting married—properly married—to our wives."

Brice laughed. "You mean, Baldwin, they should get married according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church?"

"Aye," the old trader assented. "Now, there's Loisé, there—a clever, intelligent, well-educated girl, and as far as money or trade goes, as honest as the day. Can I, an old white-headed fool of sixty, go to Australia and ask any *good* woman to marry me, and come and live down here? No."

He smoked in silence awhile, and then resumed.

"Yes; honest and trustworthy she is, I believe; although the white blood in her veins is no recommendation. If ever you should live in the islands, my lad—which isn't likely—take an old fool's advice and never marry a half-caste, either in native fashion or in a church with a brass band and a bishop as leading features of the show."

Loisé came to them. "Will you take coffee, Tâmu?" she asked, standing before them with folded hands.

The trader bent his head, and as the girl with noiseless step

glided gracefully away again he watched her.

"I think I will marry her, Brice. Sometimes when the old Marist priest comes here he makes me feel d–d uncomfortable. Of course he is too much of a gentleman—although he is a sky-pilot—to say all he would like to say, but every time he bids me good-bye he says—cunning old chap—'And think, M. Baldwin, her father, bad as he was, was a *white man!*"

The young man listened in silence.

"I don't think I will ever go back to civilisation again, my lad—I am no use there. Here I am somebody—there I am nobody; so I think I'll give the old Father a bit of a surprise soon." Then with his merry, chuckling laugh—"and you'll be my best man. You see, it won't make any difference to you. Nearly all that I have, when I peg out, will go to you—the son of my old friend and shipmate."

A curious feeling shot through Brice's heart as he murmured his thanks. The recital of the girl's history made him burn with hot anger against her. He had thought her so innocent. And yet the old trader's words, "I've almost made up my mind to marry her," seemed to dash to the ground some vague hope, he knew not what.

That night he lay on a soft mat on Baldwin's verandah and tried to sleep. But from between the grey-reds of the serried line of palms that encompassed the house on all but the seaward side, a pale face with star-like eyes and ruby lips looked out and smiled upon him; in the distant and ever varying cadences of

the breaking surf he heard the sweet melody of her voice; in the dazzling brilliancy of the starry heavens her haunting face, with eyes alight with love, looked into his.

"D–n!" He rose from his couch, opened the gate, and went out along the white dazzle of the starlit beach. "What the devil is the matter with me? I must be drunk—on two or three nips of whisky.... What a glorious, heavenly night!… And what a grand old fellow Baldwin is!… And I'm an infernal scoundrel to think of her—or a d–d idiot, or a miserable combination of both."

In a few days two things had happened. Baldwin had married Loisé, and Brice was madly in love with her and she with him. Yet scarcely a word had passed between them—he silent because of genuine shame at the treachery of his thoughts to the old man; she because she but bided her time.

One day he accepted an invitation from the old French priest to pay a visit to the Mission. He went away quietly one morning, and then wrote to Baldwin.

"Ten miles is a good long way off," he thought. "I'll be all right in a week or so—then I'll come back and be a fool no longer."

The priest liked the young man, and in his simple, hospitable way, made much of him. On the evening of the third day, as they paced to and fro on the path in the Mission garden, they saw Baldwin's boat sail up to the beach.

"See," said the priest, with a smile, "M. Baldwin will not let me keep you; and Loisé comes with him. So, so, you must go, but you will come again?" and he pressed the young Englishman's

hand.

The sturdy figure of the old trader came up through the garden; Loisé, native fashion, walking behind him.

Knitting his heavy white eyebrows in mock anger he ordered Brice to the boat, and then extending his hand to the priest—"I must take him back, Father; the *Malolo* sails to-morrow, and the skipper is coming ashore to-night to dinner, to say good-bye; and, as you know, Father, I'm a silly old man with the whisky bottle, and I'll get Mr. Brice to keep me steady."

The tall, thin old priest raised his finger warningly and shook his head at old Baldwin and then smiled.

"Ah, M. Baldwin, I am very much afraid that I will never make you to understand that too much of the whisky is very bad for the head."

With a parting glass of wine they bade the good Father good-bye, and then hoisting the sail, they stood across for Rikitea. The sun had dipped, and the land-breeze stole softly down from the mountains and sped the boat along. Baldwin was noisy and jocular; Brice silent and ill at ease.

Another hour's run and Baldwin sailed the boat close under the trading schooner's stern. Leaning over the rail was the pyjama-clad captain, smoking a cigar.

"Now then, Harding," bawled the old trader, "don't forget to be up to time, eight o'clock."

"Come aboard, and make out your order for your trade, you noisy old *Areoi* devil," said Harding. "You'll 'make it out ashore,'

eh? No fear, I won't trust you, you careless, forgetful old dog. So just lay up alongside, and I'll take you ashore in half an hour."

"By Jupiter, I mustn't forget the order," and Baldwin, finding he could not inveigle the captain ashore just then, ran the boat alongside the schooner and stepped over her rail—"Go on, Brice, my lad. I'll soon be with you. Give him some whisky or beer, or something, Loisé, as soon as you get to the house. He looks as melancholy as a ghost."

As the boat's crew pushed off from the schooner, Brice came aft to steer, and placing his hand on the tiller it touched Loisé's. She moved aside to make room for him, and he heard his name whispered, and in the darkness he saw her lips part in a happy smile.

Then, still silent, they were pulled ashore.

From his end of the house he heard a soft footfall enter the big room, and then stop. She was standing by the table when, soon after, he came out of his room. At the sound of his footstep she turned the flame of the shaded lamp to its full height, and then raised her face and looked at him. There was a strange, radiant expectancy in her eyes that set his heart to beat wildly. Then he remembered her husband—his friend.

"I suppose Tom won't be long," he began, nervously, when she came over to him and placed her hand on his sleeve. The slumbrous eyes were all aglow now, and her bosom rose and fell in short, quick strokes beneath her white muslin gown.

"Why did you go away?" she said, her voice scarce raised

above a whisper, yet quivering and tremulous with emotion.

He tried to look away from her, trembling himself, and not knowing what to say.

"Ah," she said, "speak to me, answer me; why don't you say something to me? I thought that once your eyes sought mine in the boat"—then as she saw him still standing awkward and silent, all her wild passion burst out—"Brice, Brice, I love you, I love you. And you, you hate me." He tried to stop her.

Her voice sank again. "Oh, yes, yes; you hate me, else why would you go away without one word to me? Baldwin has told you of—of—of something. It is all true, quite true, and I am wicked, wicked; no woman could have been worse—and you hate me."

She released her hold upon his arm, and walking over to the window leant against it and wept passionately.

He went over to her and placed his hand upon her shoulder.

"Look here, Loisé, I'm very, very sorry I ever came here in the *Malolo*"—her shaking figure seemed to shrink at the words—"for I love you too, but, Loisé—your husband was my father's oldest friend—and mine."

The oval, tear-swept face was dangerously close to his now, and set his blood racing again in all the quick, hot madness of youth.

"What is that to me?" she whispered; "I love you."

Brice shut his fists tightly and then—fatal mistake—tried to be angry and tender at the same moment.

"Ah, but Loisé, you, as well as I, know that among English

people, for a man to love his friend's wife–"

Again the low whisper—"What is that to me—and you? You love me, you say. And, we are not among English people. I have my mother's heart—not a cold English heart."

"Loisé, Baldwin is my friend. He looks upon me as his son, and he trusts me—and trusts you.... I could never look him in the face again.... If he were any other man I wouldn't care, or if, if–"

She lifted her face from his shoulder. "Then you only lied to me. You don't love me!"

That made him reckless. "Love you! By God. I love you so that if you were any other man's wife but his–" He looked steadily at her and then, with gentle force, tried to take her arm from his neck.

She knew now that he was the stronger of the two, and yet wished to hear more.

"Brice, dear Brice," she bent his head down to her lips, "if Baldwin died would you marry me?"

The faintly murmured words struck him like a shot; she still holding her arms around him, watched his face.

He kissed her on the lips. "I would marry you and never go back to the world again," he answered, in the blind passion of the moment.

A hot, passionate kiss on his lips and she was gone, and Brice, with throbbing pulses and shame in his heart, took up his hat and went out upon the beach. He couldn't meet Baldwin just then. Other men's wives had never made him feel such a miserable

scoundrel as did this reckless half-blood with the scarlet lips and starry eyes.

That night old Baldwin and the captain of the *Malolo* got thoroughly drunk in the orthodox and time-honoured Island business fashion. Brice, afraid of "making an ass of himself," was glad to get away, and took the captain on board at midnight in Baldwin's boat, and at the mate's invitation remained for breakfast.

At daylight the mate got the *Malolo* under weigh, the skipper, with aching head, sitting up in his bunk and cursing the old trader's hospitality.

When the vessel was well outside the reef, Brice bade him good-bye, and getting his boat alongside started for the shore.

"I will—I must—clear out of this," he was telling himself as the boat swept round the point of the passage on the last sweep of the ocean swell. "I can't stay under the same roof with him day after day, month after month, and not feel my folly and her weakness. But where the deuce I can get to for five months till the schooner comes back, I don't know. There's the Mission, but that is too close; the old fellow would only bring me back again in a week."

Suddenly a strange, weird cry pealed over the water from the native village, a cry that to him was mysterious, as well as mournful and blood-chilling.

The four natives who pulled the boat had rested on their oars the instant they heard the cry, and with alarm and deep concern

depicted on their countenances were looking toward the shore.

"What is it, boys?" said Brice in English.

Before the native to whom he spoke could answer, the long, loud wailing cry again burst forth.

"Some man die," said the native who pulled stroke-oar to Brice—he was the only one who knew English.

Then Brice, following the looks of his crew, saw that around the white paling fence that enclosed Baldwin's house was gathered a great concourse of natives, most of whom were sitting on the ground.

"Give way, boys," he said, with an instinctive feeling of fear that something dreadful had happened. In another five minutes the boat touched the sand and Brice sprang out.

Maturei alone, of all the motionless, silent crowd that gathered around the house, rose and walked down to him.

"Oh, white man, Tâmu is dead!"

He felt the shock terribly, and for a moment or two was motionless and nerveless. Then the prolonged wailing note of grief from a thousand throats again broke out and brought him to his senses, and with hasty step he opened the gate and went in.

With white face and shaking limbs Loisé met him at the door and endeavoured to speak, but only hollow, inarticulate sounds came from her lips, and sitting down on a cane sofa she covered her face with her robe, after the manner of the people of the island when in the presence of death.

Presently the door of Baldwin's room opened, and the white-

haired old priest came out and laid his hand sympathetically on the young man's arm, and drew him aside.

He told him all in a few words. An hour before daylight Loisé and the boy Maturei had heard the old trader breathing stertorously, and ere they could raise him to a sitting position he had breathed his last.

Heart disease, the good Father said. And he was so careless a man, was M. Baldwin. And then with tears in his eyes the priest told Brice how, from the olden times when Baldwin, pretending to scoff at the efforts of the missionaries, had yet ever been their best and truest friend.

"And now he is dead, M. Brice, and had I been but a little sooner I could have closed his eyes. I was passing in my boat, hastening to take the mission letters to the *Malolo* when I heard the *tagi* (the death wail) of the people here, and hastening ashore found he had just passed away."

Sick at heart as he was, the young man was glad of the priest's presence, and presently together they went in and looked at the still figure in the bedroom.

When they returned to the front room they found Loisé had gone.

"She was afraid to stay in the house of death," said Maturei, "and has gone to Vehaga" (a village eight miles away), "and these are her words to the Father and to the friend of Târau—'Naught have I taken from the house of Tâmu, and naught do I want'—and then she was gone."

The old priest nodded to Brice—"Native blood, native blood, M. Brice. Do not, I pray you, misjudge her. She only does this because she knows the village feeling against her. She does not belong to this island, and the people here resented, in a quiet way, her marriage with my old friend. She is not cruel and ungrateful as you think. It is but her way of showing these natives that she cares not to benefit by Baldwin's death. By and by we will send for her."

After Baldwin had been buried and matters arranged, Brice and the priest, and a colleague from the Mission, read the will, and Brice found himself in possession of some two or three thousand dollars in cash and as much in trade. The house at Rikitea and a thousand dollars were for Loisé.

He told the Fathers to send word over to Vehaga and tell Loisé that he only awaited her to come and take the house over from him. As for himself he would gladly accept their kind invitation to remain at the Mission as their guest till the schooner returned.

The shock of his friend's death had all but cured him of his passion, and he felt sure now of his own strength.

But day after day, and then week after week passed, and no word came from Vehaga, till one evening as he leant over the railing of the garden, looking out upon the gorgeous setting of the sun into the ocean, Maturei came paddling across the smooth waters of the harbour, and, drawing his canoe up on the beach, the boy approached the white man.

"See," he said, "Loisé hath sent thee this."

He unrolled a packet of broad, dried palm leaves, and taking from it a thick necklet of sweet-smelling *kurahini* buds, placed it in Brice's hand.

He knew its meaning—it was the gift of a woman to an accepted lover.

The perfume of the flowers brought back her face to him in a moment. There was a brief struggle in his mind; and then home, friends, his future prospects in the great outside world, went to the wall, and the half-blood had won.

Slowly he raised the token and placed it over his head and round his neck.

In the morning she came. He held out his hand and drew her to him, and looking down into her eyes, he kissed her. Her lips quivered a little, and then the long lashes fell, and he felt her tremble.

"Loisé," he said simply, "will you be my wife?"

She glanced up at him, fearfully.

"Would you marry me?"

His face crimsoned—"Yes, of course. You were his wife. I can't forget that. And, besides, you said once that you loved me."

They were very happy for five or six years down there in Rikitea. They had one child born to them—a girl with a face as beautiful as her mother's.

Then a strange and deadly epidemic, unknown to the people of Rikitea, swept through the Paumotu Group, from Pitcairn Island to Marutea, and in every village, on every palm-clad atoll,

death stalked, and the brown people sickened and shivered under their mat coverings, and died. And from island to island, borne on the very breath of the trade-wind, the terror passed, and left behind it empty, silent clusters of houses, nestling under the cocoanuts; and many a whale-ship beating back to the coast of South America, sailed close in to the shore and waited for the canoes to come off with fruit and vegetables; but none came, for the canoes had long months before blistered and cracked and rotted under the fierce rays of the Paumotu sun, and the owners lay dead in their thatched houses; for how could the dead bury the dead?

It came to Rikitea, and Harry Brice and the priests of the Mission went from village to village trying by such means as lay in their power to allay the deadly scourge. Brice had seen his little girl die, and then Loisé was smitten, and in a few days Brice saw the imprint of death stamped upon her features.

As he sat and watched by her at night, and listened to the wild, delirious words of the fierce fever that held her in its cruel grasp, he heard her say that which chilled his very heart's blood. At first he thought it to be but the strange imaginings of her weak and fevered brain. But as the night wore on he was undeceived.

Just as daylight began to shoot its streaks of red and gold through the plumed palm-tops, she awoke from a fitful and tortured slumber, and opened her eyes to gaze upon the haggard features of her husband.

"Loisé," he said, with a choking voice, "tell me, for God's

sake, the truth about Baldwin. *Did you kill him?*"

She put her thin, wasted hands over her dark, burning eyes, and Brice saw the tears run down and wet the pillow.

Then she answered—

"Yes, I killed him; for I loved you, and that night I went mad!"

"Don't go away from me, Harry," she said, with hard, panting breaths; "don't let me die by myself.... I will soon be dead now; come closer to me, I will tell you all."

He knelt beside her and listened. She told him all in a few words. As Baldwin lay in his drunken sleep, she and Maturei had pierced him to the heart with one of the long, slender, steel needles used by the natives in mat-making. There was no blood to be seen in the morning, Maturei was too cunning for that.

Brice staggered to his feet and tried to curse her. The last grey pallor had deepened on her lips, and they moved and murmured, "It was because I loved you, Harry."

The sun was over the tops of the cocoanuts when the gate opened, and the white-haired old priest came in and laid his hand gently on Brice who sat with bowed figure and hidden face.

"How is your wife now, my good friend?" he asked.

Slowly the trader raised his face, and his voice sounded like a sob.

"Dead; thank God!"

With softened tread the old man passed through to the inner room, and taking the cold hands of Brice's wife tenderly within his own, he clasped them together and placed the emblem of

Christ upon the quiet bosom.

AT A KAFA-DRINKING

I

The first cool breaths of the land breeze, chilled by its passage through the dew-laden forest, touched our cheeks softly that night as we sat on the traders' verandah, facing the white, shimmering beach, smoking and watching the native children at play, and listening for the first deep boom of the wooden *logo* or bell that would send them racing homewards to their parents and evening prayer.

"There it is," said our host, who sat in the farthest corner, with his long legs resting by the heels on the white railing; "and now you'll see them scatter."

The loud cries and shrill laughter came to a sudden stop as the boom of the *logo* reached the players, and then a clear boyish voice reached us—"*Ua ta le logo*" (the bell has sounded). Like smoke before the gale the lithe, half-naked figures fled silently in twos and threes between the cocoanuts, and the beach lay deserted.

One by one the lights gleamed brightly through the trees as the women piled the fires in each house with broken cocoanut shells. There was but the faintest breath of wind, and through the open sides of most of the houses not enough to flicker the

steady light, as the head of the family seated himself (or herself) close to the fire, and, hymn-book in hand, led off the singing. Quite near us was a more pretentious-looking structure than the others, and looking down upon it we saw that the gravelled floor was covered with fine, clean mats, and arranged all round the sides of the house were a number of camphorwood boxes, always —in a Samoan house—the outward and visible sign of a well-to-do man. There was no fire lighted here; placed in the centre of the one room there stood a lamp with a gorgeous-looking shade, of many colours. This was the chief's house, and the chief of Aleipata was one of the strong men of Samoa—both politically and physically. Two of our party on the verandah were strangers to Samoa, and they drew their chairs nearer, and gazed with interest at the chief and his immediate following as they proceeded with their simple service. There were quite a number of the *aua-luma* (unmarried women) of the village present in the chief's house that evening, and as their tuneful voices blend in an evening hymn—

"*Matou te nau e faafetai*"—we wished that instead of four verses there had been ten.

"Can you tell us, Lester," said one of the strangers to our host, "the meaning of the last words?—they came out so clearly that I believe I've caught them," and to our surprise he sang the last line—

Ia matou moe tau ia te oe.

"Well, now, I don't know if I can. Samoan hymns puzzle

me; you see the language used in addressing the Deity is vastly different to that used ordinarily, but I take it that the words you so correctly repeated mean, 'Let us sleep in peace with Thee.' Curious people these Samoans," he muttered, more to himself than for us: "soon be as hypocritical as the average white man. 'Let us sleep in peace with Thee,' and that fellow (the chief), his two brothers, and about a paddockful of young Samoan bucks haven't slept at all for this two weeks. All the night is spent in counting cartridges, melting lead for bullets, and cleaning their arms, only knocking off for a drink of kava. Well, I suppose," he continued, turning to us, "they're all itching to fight, and as soon as the U.S.S. *Resacca* leaves Apia they'll commence in earnest, and us poor devils of traders will be left here doing nothing and cursing this infernal love of fighting, which is inborn with Samoans and a part of their natural cussedness which, if the Creator hadn't given it to them, would have put many a dollar into my pocket."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.