

BECKE LOUIS

EDWARD

BARRY

Louis Becke

Edward Barry

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Louis Becke

Edward Barry / South Sea Pearler

CHAPTER I.

"EDWARD BARRY—'DEAD BROKE.'"

A wild, blustering day in Sydney, the Queen City of the Southern Seas. Since early morn a keen, cutting, sleet-laden westerly gale had been blowing, rattling and shaking the windows of the houses in the higher and more exposed portions of the town, and churning the blue waters of the harbour into a white seethe of angry foam as it swept outwards to the wide Pacific.

In one of the little bays, situated between Miller's Point and Dawe's Battery, and overlooked by the old-time Fort Phillip on Observatory Hill, were a number of vessels, some alongside the wharves, and others lying to their anchors out in the stream, with the wind whistling through their rain-soaked cordage. They were of all rigs and sizes, from the lordly Black Ball liner of a thousand tons to the small fore and aft coasting schooner of less than fifty. Among them all there was but one steamer, a handsome brig-rigged, black-painted and black-funnelled craft of fifteen hundred tons, flying the house flag of the Peninsular and Oriental Company. Steamers were rare in Sydney Harbour in those days (it was the year 1860), and the Avoca had pride of place and her own mooring buoy, for she was the only English mail boat, and her commander and his officers were regarded with the same respect as if they and their ship were the admiral and staff of the Australian squadron.

Leaning with folded arms upon one of the wharf bollards, and apparently oblivious of the driving sleet and cutting wind, a shabbily dressed man of about thirty years of age was looking, pipe in mouth, at the mail boat and the sailing vessels lying in the stream. There were four in all—the steamer, an American whaling barque, a small brig of about two hundred tons flying the Hawaiian Island colours, and a big, sprawling, motherly-looking full-rigged ship, whose huge bow ports denoted her to be a lumberman.

The man put his hand in his pocket and jingled together his few small remaining coins; then he turned away and walked along the wharf till he reached the side of a warehouse, the lee of which was sheltered from the wind and rain. He leant his back against the wall and again handled the coins.

"Seven shillings and two coppers," he said to himself, "and a waterman would want at least three shillings to pull round here from the Circular Quay in such nasty weather. No, Ted Barry, my boy, the funds won't run it. But that brig is my fancy. She's all ready for sea—all her boats up with the gripes lashed, and the Custom House fellow doing his dog-trot under the awning, waiting for the skipper to come aboard, and the tug to range alongside as soon as this howling gale takes off a bit. I'll wait here for another hour and watch for him."

Sitting under the lee of the wall, he again filled his pipe and began to smoke placidly, scanning with a seaman's eye the various vessels lying alongside the wharves.

Work had ceased for the day, the lumpers and longshore men had gone to their homes, and the usual idlers and loafers, which are always to be found in the immediate vicinity of shipping, or sitting about on the wharf stringers, fishing, had been driven away by the inclemency of the weather, or were gathered in small parties in the bars of the numerous public-houses near by. Now and then a seaman would be seen either returning to his ship or hurrying along the wharf towards the city with his coat collar turned up to his ears, and his hands thrust into the capacious pockets of his heavy jacket; the whole scene was miserable and depressing.

Presently a policeman appeared, walking slowly along under the shelter of the warehouse walls. He too was enjoying the luxury of a pipe, for there was no danger of running across the sergeant

on such a day as this. As he drew near to the man who was sitting down he gave him a quick but apparently careless glance—a wharf policeman has a natural distrust of a man who keeps hanging about the stores and warehouses, doing nothing, or standing out in the open, exposed to the rain. But the guardian of the peace was satisfied that the object of his brief scrutiny was no loafer or possible burglar, and bade him a civil "Good-day," to which the man at once responded.

"It's beastly weather, isn't it?" said the official, as he leant against the wall, evidently disposing himself for a chat.

"It is indeed," replied the other, "and it's getting dirtier still over there to the south-east."

"That's pleasant for me. I don't get relieved until midnight, and this beat here is none too pleasant a one on a dark night, believe me."

"So I should imagine. I'll be glad to get back into the city as soon as I can; but I'm waiting here to see if I can get aboard that little brig over there. Do you know her name?"

"Yes. She's the *Mahina*, a South Sea trader. But I don't see how you can get off to her, there's no waterman here, and none of her boats will come ashore—I can tell you that much for certain. The captain is on shore looking for men, and those who are aboard won't be given a chance to put foot in a boat."

"Why, anything gone wrong aboard?"

"Rather! There's been a lot of trouble with the men, though there hasn't been any court work over it. The captain and mate are holy terrors—regular brutes, I'm told. Six of the hands swam ashore a few nights ago and got clean away, poor beggars. You ain't thinking of joining her, are you?"

"Indeed I am. I want a ship pretty badly. I'm broke."

"Well, don't ship on *that* craft, young fellow, take my advice. Are you dead, stony broke?"

"Pretty near, all but a few shillings. And I find it hard to get a ship—that is, the sort of ship I want. I've been in the South Sea trade a couple of years, and I like it."

"Ah, I see. Well, you know best, mister. I daresay you'll see the *Mahina's* captain coming down the wharf before it gets dark. He's a little, dark-faced, good-looking chap, with a pointed beard. I wish you luck, anyway."

"Thank you," said Barry, as he returned the policeman's good-natured nod and watched him saunter off again towards the end of the wharf.

Half an hour later five men appeared, all walking quickly towards the spot where Barry was still patiently waiting. The man who was leading he at once recognized as the captain of the brig—the four who followed at his heels were common seamen by their dress, and ruffians of the first water by their appearance. Each carried a bundle under his arm, and one a small chest on his shoulder; he was evidently the wealthy man of the lot.

Stepping out from under the shelter of the wall, Barry stood in the centre of the path, and waited the captain's approach.

"Are you in want of hands, sir?" he asked, touching his cap. The master of the brig gave him a swift, searching glance from head to feet, and then without answering the inquiry he turned to his followers.

"Go on to the end of the wharf. Hail the brig to send a boat ashore, and then wait for me." His voice was clear and sharp, but not unpleasant. The four men shuffled off, and the moment they were out of hearing he addressed himself to Barry.

"I've just found all the men I want, but I could do with another—if he is anything better than such things as those," and he nodded contemptuously at the figures of the four seamen. Then with lightning-like rapidity of utterance he asked, "You're not a foremast hand?"

"I want to ship before the mast," was the quiet answer.

"Got a mate's or second mate's certificate?"

"Yes; both."

"Last ship?"

"The *Tawera*, brig, of Tahiti."

"Ha! You're used to the Island trade, then?"

"Pretty well."

"Willing to ship as mate or second mate?"

"Yes, and no. Willing enough in one way, and not liking it in another. I'm hard-up, have no clothes, and should cut a sorry figure on such a smart-looking brig as yours when I haven't even a donkey's breakfast¹ to bring aboard if I shipped before the mast. And I'm not the man to stand guying, especially from beauties like those who were here just now."

Again the captain's keen, dark eyes flashed—this time in a semi-approving manner—as he looked at Barry's bronzed face and tall, square-built figure. He stroked his carefully trimmed pointed beard and thought for a few moments.

"I want a chief mate for the *Mahina*; the one I have now is seriously ill and cannot live more than a day or two. When can you come aboard—to-night?"

Barry shook his head impatiently. "I told you, sir, that I have no clothes but those I stand up in—"

"Can you get what you want right off if I advance you ten sovereigns?"

"Five will do—or three if you have a slop chest aboard."

"The *Mahina* is a trading vessel (though I'm going to have a try at pearling this trip) and carries a general store from a needle to an anchor aboard; but at the same time, although you can get what you want in the way of clothing, you may want money for other purposes. Are you willing to come aboard to-night, and take first mate's duty?"

"Yes."

"Then take these"—he took two five pound notes from his pocket-book and placed them in Barry's hand. "This is Saturday, and the shops keep open till late. But I rely on you to be here on this wharf not later than midnight. My mate, whose place you will take, is very ill, my crew are a troublesome lot—six of them have deserted, and the rest of them would clear out to-night if they could. I shall look out for you, and send a boat when you hail."

"I shall be here sooner, if you wish it," replied Barry, "but I do not want all this," and he gave back one of the bank notes. "I don't owe a cent to any one, but I have some gear of mine in pawn."

The captain waved it back courteously. "Keep it, sir; keep it—we sail early on Monday morning, and you will not be able to get on shore again."

"Thank you," laughed Barry. "I've no doubt I can find use for it." Then he added, "My name is Barry."

"And mine is Rawlings. I hope we shall pull together, Mr. Barry," this with a pleasant smile as he buttoned up his overcoat. "Ha, there is my boat, and I must take my gaol-birds on board. Good-afternoon. I shall look for you about twelve o'clock."

Then with a polite inclination of his head he stepped out towards the waiting boat, and left his new chief officer to pursue his way into the city with a light heart.

¹ A now almost obsolete nautical expression for a mattress staffed with straw.

CHAPTER II. THE MAYNARDS

A quarter of an hour's walk through the dimly lighted and squalid streets which intersect Miller's Point and Church Hill brought Barry out into the glare and noise of the lower part of the principal thoroughfares of the city, which, boisterous as was the night, was fairly thronged with the poorer class of people engaged in their Saturday night's shopping.

Pushing his way through the crowd in no very gentle manner, for he was both wet and hungry, he at last reached a respectable-looking second-class hotel at the corner of George and Bridge streets. The house was much frequented by men of his own position in the merchant service, and, as he walked into the comfortable parlour and stood by the fire to warm himself, he was greeted by all the occupants of the room—four decently dressed mates or second mates.

"You look pretty wet," said an old red-faced man, moving his chair further away from the fire, so as to give the newcomer more room; "why didn't you take your oilskins with you when you went out?"

Barry laughed with the utmost good-nature. "Because Uncle Levi Harris down the street is taking care of them for me, Mr. Todd. And he's got my watch and chain, and my sextant and some other things as well."

The four men—mere casual acquaintances of a few weeks' standing—gave a sympathetic murmur, and then one of them in a deep, rumbling kind of voice, and without even looking at Barry, inquired if he could "do with a change of togs?"

"Much obliged to you, Mr. Watson," replied the young man, "but I'll be all right now. I've got a ship, the skipper has given me an advance out of his own pocket, and as soon as I get my watch and other things out of old Levi's I'm going up the town to buy some clothes."

"You ain't going into a pawnshop yourself, are you?" inquired Todd. "Don't you do it, young fellow. Why, the skipper as give you the advance might see you going in, and chuck it up in your teeth again some day."

"Aye, that's true," said another; "men like us can't run the risk of being seen even looking in at a pawnshop window."

"Well, as I can't get any one to go for me, I must go myself," said Barry, who was quick to perceive that his companions thought nothing of a man having to avail himself of a pawnbroker's shop, but did think it exceedingly improper to be seen entering or leaving one.

"Leave it till Monday morning," said another. "I'll get one of the hands aboard my hooker to go for you if you give me the tickets."

Barry shook his head. "I've promised to be aboard to-night, and we sail early on Monday morning."

"Humph! That's a corker," said the man with the rumbling voice; "there's no getting out of that;" then rising from his seat he walked to the door, opened it, and then turning his head, said, "Just come here a minute, mister, and I'll tell you how we might manage it."

Barry followed him out into the passage and then upstairs into his bedroom.

"Look here," said Watson as he struck a match, lit a candle and then his pipe, and speaking amidst a cloud of smoke, "you don't know much of me, and I don't know much of you, but I do know that you're one of the right sort. I could see you were getting pretty well pushed, although you have always kept a stiff upper lip. Now, look there. There's my chest. Help yourself to some dry togs—they'll fit you right enough. Then go out, and do all you want to do, and if you have time come back here and we'll have a glass of grog together. If you haven't—why, it don't matter. I've been on *my* beam ends often enough, I can tell you."

Barry put out his hand. "Thank you, Mr. Watson. If you'll lend me a suit of clothes, I'll feel grateful. I've only those I stand up in, and I'm feeling jolly cold. But I've a good suit or two in pawn with my other gear, and I'll be back here with them in half an hour."

Without another word Watson opened his sea chest and threw a collection of clothing upon the bed.

"There's shirts, collars, ties, and everything else you want in the chest, and boots under the bed. Blow out the light when you've finished, lock the door, and leave the key in the bar, and if you're on for a yarn when you come back, you'll find me downstairs with old Billy Todd. Welsh rarebit at ten o'clock."

Then refusing to listen to Barry's thanks, he went out to rejoin his companions.

Immediately he had finished dressing himself in his new friend's clothes, Barry rolled his own up in a bundle, locked the room door, and hurried down into the bar, where he left the key as directed, and had some coffee and a sandwich or two instead of supper, for he was anxious to return as quickly as possible, and then make his way down to the *Mahina*.

The pawnbroker's shop was less than ten minutes' walk from the hotel, and stepping briskly along he soon reached its doors, entered, and went directly to the open counter instead of availing himself of one of the dirty, ill-smelling little confessional boxes wherein hapless creatures confess their poverty to Poverty's Father Confessor, mine uncle.

Producing his tickets, a young Hebrew gentleman at once gave him his immediate attention, and one by one the articles were brought and delivered to him, after repayment of the money loaned and interest, which transaction took four pounds out of the ten he possessed. His watch and chain were the last to be produced, and as he was winding up the former, before placing it in his vest pocket, he heard a voice proceeding from the nearest confessional box, speaking to one of the assistants, which caused him to start and then listen intently. It was a voice he remembered well—clear, refined, but tremulous with age.

"I can assure you," it said, "that it was bought in Calcutta fifty years ago, and cost two hundred rupees."

"Vell, my good sir, it doesn't madder nodings to me vat it cost. I dell you dot ve don't advance nodings on dose dings. Ve cannot fill up dis blace mit such rubbish."

"Will you buy it, then? Will you give me three pounds?"

"Vy don't you say dree dousand! Now I dell you vat I vill do, so as to have no more droubles mit you, ven I have mine pizness to addend—I vill give five shillings for it."

"Will you, you sweep!" shouted Barry, striking the wooden partition a blow with the side of his clenched hand; and then to the astonishment of the pawnbroker and his assistants, and the people in the shop, he seized his parcel, and pushing open the partition door kicked vigorously at the "confession box."

"Open the door and come out of this place, Mr. Maynard," he cried—"I'm Ted Barry!"

In an instant the door was opened, and a little, pale-faced, white-moustached man came out. A faint cry of astonishment escaped his lips.

"Come, sir, take my arm," quickly said the seaman, who saw that the old man was trembling with excitement; "let us get out of this before we have a crowd round us."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Barry," was the eager reply, "do let us get away. I feel so upset; and then, too, your voice gave me a shock—no, no, not a shock, my boy, but a surprise, a pleasant surprise," and he pressed his arm closely to Barry's. "Rose, poor Rose will be delighted to hear I have seen you."

"Where is she?" asked Barry quickly.

The old man halted and looked piteously into his face.

"She is near here, Mr. Barry. We are poor, very poor now; she is serving in a draper's shop."

An exclamation of pity that he could not repress burst from the seaman's lips. Then he pulled himself together again.

"Let us sit down somewhere for half an hour if you can spare me the time," he said. "See, there's a good place," and he indicated a large, brilliantly lighted restaurant on the opposite side of the street. "I've had no supper. Will you come and have some with me, and we can have a chat?"

"Yes, yes; of course I will, my dear boy. But I must not stay long. I always wait for Rose to see her home, and must be outside the shop at nine o'clock."

"It is now a little past eight. We will have something to eat; and then—if you will allow me to come with you—I should like to see Miss Maynard. This is my last night on shore. My ship sails early on Monday."

"She will be delighted to see you, poor child; delighted and yet distressed to hear that you are leaving. She has never forgotten you, and we have often wondered why you have not written to us for so long. 'Tis quite a year."

Barry's face flushed with pleasure, but he made no reply. Entering the restaurant, he chose a table in a quiet corner, and ordered some supper. Then for the first time he was able to observe the thin, pinched face and shabby clothing of his companion. "Poor old fellow, and poor little girl!" he said to himself, and then, being a man of action, he at once went to the point that was uppermost in his mind.

Placing his big, sun-tanned hand on that of the old man, he said somewhat nervously,—

"What you told me just now about your changed circumstances has distressed me very much. Will you, for the sake of our old friendship when I was chief officer of the *Maid of Judah*, accept a small loan from me? Do not refuse me, please. I assure you it will give me the greatest happiness in the world," and then disregarding the old gentleman's protestations with smiling good-humour, he forced the money into his hand, and went on volubly, "You see, sir, it's only a trifle—six pounds—and of no earthly use to me, especially as I'm off to sea again. So pray do not refuse me."

"Mr. Barry ... my dear boy ... you are indeed a generous friend, and a friend in need, but"—and here the tears stole down his withered cheeks as he tried to smile—"I know your good-nature too well. I was always, as my poor wife used to say, a stupid old man, but I am not so stupid as not to know that had matters gone well with you, I should not have met you to-night where I did. No, no, I cannot take all this hard-earned money from you; but if you will lend me thirty shillings—"

"Sh! sh! my dear sir, you are entirely mistaken. I am not rolling in wealth, I admit; but at the same time I'm not in want of money, and have a good ship. And then," he added in the most unblushing manner, "I only went to the pawnshop to redeem these things here for a friend of mine, who couldn't go for them himself. Now here's our supper, and if you say another word about that wretched money you'll spoil my appetite, which at present is a remarkably healthy one."

"Then God bless you, my dear boy. Rose will herself thank—"

"If you say a word about the matter to Miss Maynard in my presence I *shall* be put out," said Barry with unmistakable emphasis.

As they ate their supper, Barry, whose spirits seemed to become brighter every minute, led the old man to talk, and he soon learnt of the misfortune that had befallen him—an unfortunate copper mining investment had stripped him of almost every penny in the world, and from comparative affluence he had fallen into almost deepest poverty. Too old to obtain employment in his former profession—that of an architect—and too proud to ask for assistance from any of his friends who might have helped him, he at last succeeded in securing a miserable weekly wage as clerk in a shipping firm, where his knowledge of foreign languages was of value. For some few months he and his daughter managed to keep their heads above water; then came sickness and consequent loss of his clerkship, and increasing hardships to be endured in their poor lodgings in the poorest quarter of the city. Rose Maynard, with aching heart, saw him rapidly sinking into despondency as their funds became lower and lower with each rent day. What could she do to help? Against her father's wish, she had written to his sister in England, and told her of his position. The sister, a wealthy maiden lady, had sent a 5 pound note and a long letter to her brother full of indignation at his "criminal carelessness"

and suggesting that Rose was quite old enough to go out as a governess to some "well-connected family, or, failing that, as companion," and winding up with the intimation that the money enclosed had been sent "out of sisterly regard, though destined for a far worthier purpose—the restoration fund of St. Barnabas's Church."

Barry ground his teeth and muttered something under his breath. He had often heard Rose Maynard speak of her aunt Martha, who was evidently not a lovable person.

"It hurt us terribly," continued Mr. Maynard, "but our necessities were pressing, and I decided to keep the gift. Rose, however, begged me not to use it till the following day. Then she went out. She was only away for a few hours, and on her return I found she had obtained a situation in a draper's shop at thirty shillings a week. That very day I returned my sister's gift, urging her to use it for the 'worthier purpose.' Rose, who cannot help being mischievous, was in such high spirits that she added a postscript, asking her aunt to be sure to send us six copies of the free parish magazine containing the announcement of her princely donation, as it would interest people in Australia; and the wilful girl enclosed sixpence for postage."

"Bravo, Rose—Miss Maynard!" cried the seaman, leaning back in his chair and laughing heartily.

"Since then we have managed to get along fairly well, but a month ago Rose contracted a low fever, and had to remain at home until the beginning of this week. She is quite recovered now, thank Heaven, and this afternoon, as I was turning over some of the little articles we had saved when our home was broken up, I came across this curiously carved ivory tobacco-box. It belonged to my father, who told me that he had paid two hundred rupees for it in India. Surely, I thought, I can either sell or pawn it for a few pounds, so that when Rose comes home to-night I can give her a pleasant surprise. But, as you know, I was bitterly mistaken; and yet I was about to take the man's offer, when I heard your voice. See, here it is."

The box was certainly an exquisite specimen of Indian carving, and, as Mr. Maynard said, of great antiquity.

Barry looked at it admiringly for a minute or two, and then said,—

"Do not offer it to a pawnbroker again. I should think it is worth at least twenty pounds. There is a famous collector in Sydney—a Colonel Maclean; do you know him?"

"No, I have never heard the name."

"I know him very well; he visits every ship that comes from the South Seas, in search of rare curios. Take or send this to him. He is a wealthy and liberal man, and will give you its full value, or three times as much if he wants it badly." Then he gave Mr. Maynard the address.

Their supper being finished, and it being nearly nine o'clock, Barry paid the bill out of his remaining seven shillings, and left his parcel under the care of the waiter.

The draper's shop was just closing as they reached it; presently one by one the employees came out and stood under the awning, gazing with apprehension at the rain and soaking streets.

"Here is Miss Maynard, sir," said a young woman pleasantly to the old gentleman, as a tall, slenderly built girl, closely wrapped up in a serge overcoat, stepped out of the shop and looked eagerly up and down the street. In another moment she was at her father's side, her sweet, pale face smiling into his. Barry was standing a little distance away.

"Come, Rose, come. I've such a pleasant surprise for you, my child," he heard her father say, as with the girl on his arm he pushed through the little crowd to where his companion was waiting. "Here she is, Mr. Barry."

"Oh, I am so glad, so glad to see you again," was all she could say in soft, trembling tones as his hand closed around hers, and simple as were the words, they thrilled the man's heart.

"Glad indeed," echoed her father, "glad indeed, my child," and then his next words sent a chill of misery through her; "but sad to say, we meet but to part, and to part almost immediately, for he must leave us before ten o'clock to go on board his ship, which sails on Monday. So let us make haste home, Rose, so that we may at least bid him farewell in a better place than the open street."

Their lodgings were but a few doors away, and in a few minutes all three were seated in the dingy little combined dining and sitting-room, which, with two bedrooms, formed their "furnished apartments." There was, however, a bright wood fire burning in the grate, and this gave the place an aspect of cheerfulness. The table was laid for supper, and Mr. Maynard, whose thin little face was flushed with excitement, after divesting his daughter of her cloak, placed a kettle on the fire. Then he turned to her with an expression of dismay.

"Dear, dear me, Rose. I have quite forgotten to buy the coffee. And to-morrow will be Sunday. How very thoughtless of me!"

Seizing his hat and umbrella, he bustled off.

"Poor father is quite excited, Mr. Barry," said Rose with a faint smile, "but he won't be more than ten minutes. He is housekeeper now.... I suppose you know all that has happened to us since—"

"Yes, yes," said Barry hurriedly, as he rose, and coming over to her took both her hands in his, and looked into her pale face. "Oh that I had only known of his misfortunes six months ago, when I could have helped you. Rose, dear Rose—"

"Don't, don't," she said brokenly; "why do you come to us now, when for a year you have never written? I said to you just now that I was glad to see you. It is not so. Your coming has made me very, very unhappy—for I was trying to forget."

"For God's sake, Rose, hear me. I cannot now tell you all that has happened to me, for your father will be here presently, and my personal honour is pledged to my captain to be on board to-night, and so I must hurry away at once and it will be impossible for me to come ashore to-morrow. But you shall have a letter from me in the morning, that will tell you all, and clear me in your eyes, dear."

The man's eyes glowed with the passionate sincerity of his words, and she uttered a sob of joy.

"Oh, Ted, Ted, if you only knew how I have suffered! I could not understand it ... it was killing me. If it were not for poor father I should have been glad to die. And now you are going away again. Oh, what does it all mean? I feel dull and stupid, and cannot think—" then a burst of tears.

"Hush, little woman. To-morrow my letter will help you to forget the unhappiness I have unintentionally caused you. There, look up, dear Rose, and listen. I hear your father coming. I cannot again part from you without telling him of my love for you."

"Ted! I shall be the happiest woman in the world then; for then I can talk of you to him when you are at sea. How many long, long months this time, Ted?" and she smiled through her tears.

"Not many, I hope, dear—not more than six, I hope."

Mr. Maynard's step sounded on the landing, and in another moment he came in.

"Here it is, my dear—" he began, and then he stopped suddenly. "Crying, my child? Poor little girl, you are done up, and weak as well."

"Indeed I'm not, father. I feel lovely and strong. See," and she sprang to him, and threw her arms around his neck, to his intense amazement.

Then Barry spoke out straightforwardly.

"Mr. Maynard, ever since we came out together in the *Maid of Judah* I have loved Rose. And to-night I ask your forgiveness for not having told you so two years ago. But I was waiting till I got a ship of my own."

The old man gently disengaged his daughter's arms and held out his hand to the seaman.

"God bless you, my boy; why didn't you tell me before? Surely her happiness is my first care. And I've guessed it all along."

CHAPTER III. THE BRIG *MAHINA*

Ten o'clock had just struck when Barry returned to the hotel, with a heart as light as that of a boy, and walking into the parlour found it occupied by his friend Watson and the three others.

"Here I am, you see, Mr. Watson, just in time for a yarn and smoke before I leave. Will you give me your key, please?"

"Aye, aye, sonny," said the rumbling-voiced mate, taking it from his pocket. "Hurry up. Welsh rarebit in five minutes."

Hastily changing his borrowed clothes Barry then went into his own room and packed his one bag, which he at once carried downstairs. Fortunately he owed the landlord nothing, and though he had but three shillings in the world, his face indicated nothing but a supreme content when he rejoined the old mate and his companions.

The Welsh rarebit and its liquid concomitants having been duly disposed of, Barry rose and told his friends that as he must be on board his new ship by midnight, and then had to write a letter, he must leave them. Then he shook hands all round, each man wishing him luck.

Watson came to the door with him. "Got all you want, sonny? Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, come into the side parlour here, and I'll tell you my yarn before I write that letter. I've a full hour, and I can do both in that time."

"Aye, aye," said Watson in his deep voice, as he seated himself.

"Well, here it is—the yarn I mean. I came out here to Sydney two years ago, chief officer on the *Maid of Judah*. There were a lot of passengers. One family—an old gentleman, his wife and daughter and myself got pretty thick."

"Count of the daughter?"

Barry nodded. "Yes. The skipper was a lardy-da sort of a beast, and fell foul of me on account of talking to her too much—so he told the girl's mother—who was a silly, brainless sort of a woman, and thought him a perfect gentleman—I knew him to be a beast. Between the two of them they made trouble enough for me, though the old gentleman stuck to me, and didn't believe in the skipper. And anyway the girl liked me best, you see."

The old mate nodded. "I've seen a lot of skippers like that. The way women—married women travellin' alone especially—takes to such swabs is agin Natur'. I don't understand it—never could."

"Well," resumed Barry, "one day, after we reached Sydney, the skipper and I came to blows—over the girl. I asked for leave—told him I was going ashore to see the Maynards. He said something foul about the girl, and so I dropped it into him—knocked him off the break of the poop on to the main deck. He was nearly killed. I got two months' gaol."

Rumbling voice nodded again. "An' o' course the gal wouldn't recognise you again. Don't tell me. I know something about women."

Barry smiled. "But *she* isn't one of that sort, Mr. Watson. Both she and her father used to come and see me—the mother hated me. Of course, when I came out, the owners of the *Maid of Judah* wouldn't have anything to do with me after spoiling the beauty of their curly-headed pet skipper, and so I was stranded for a bit. But I soon got a berth as mate on a brig called the *Tawera*, trading between Tahiti, Valparaiso, and Sydney. Used to write to the girl (whose mother had died meantime) and was putting by money. Then I got into another mess."

"Women?" queried Watson, puffing solemnly at his pipe.

"No," answered Barry hotly; "didn't I tell you that I used to write to *her*? I'm not one of that sort."

"Beg pardon, sonny. I'm an old fool. But what was the mess?"

"I left the *Tawera*—like a blind fool—at Tahiti, and sailed for the Paumotu Group on a pearl-shelling cruise in a cutter. We ran ashore on a reef off Ahunui, and lost nearly everything of course—I was half-owner—and lived on the Paumotus for nearly a year before I could get away to Auckland. Then I came to Sydney—best place for another ship, you know—but couldn't get one. Had to pawn all my gear to keep myself going. Didn't care to go and see her—you know, under the circs—afraid of the old woman, who I didn't know was dead. So I booted it around trying to get a ship. And now comes the curious part of my yarn; I had hardly got a ship, when I—just after I left you this evening—met Mr. Maynard. He's broke, lost all his money in a mine or something. She—the girl I mean, had to take a berth in a draper's shop. But I've seen her, and everything's all right, and I'm as happy as a sandboy. Let's have something to drink. I must hurry off aboard, and write a letter to her."

"Steady, boy. Steady about drinks," and the old man put his hand on Barry's knee. "I'll have a drink with you with pleasure, but I'll pay for them. I don't suppose you got much of an advance, did you now? And how much have you left?"

Barry laughed, and then told the old mate his story in detail, and confessed to having but three shillings left.

"Mr. Barry, you're a gentleman. I hope the girl is one of the right—"

"She is one—" began Barry.

"There, that'll do, my boy. I'm sure she is; a girl who sticks to her father in that way will make the two ends and bight of a good wife. Now, look here. I've a hundred or two in the Bank of Australasia here, and if you want a tenner—aye, or two—you can have it straight away; the landlord will cash a cheque for me."

Barry gripped the old sailor's hand.

"You're a 'white man' as they say here in Australia, a white man to the backbone! And I thank you sincerely, very sincerely, but I don't want it. But I'd like you to know Miss Maynard. Here is the address, I'm writing to her to-night, as soon as I get aboard, and I'll let her know you are coming. I had no time to tell her a heap of things—all about our being cast away on the Paumotus, and all the rest of it. Now I must be off—it's past eleven, and I have promised to be on board at twelve. We sail at daylight." Then he gave his friend some particulars about the brig.

Watson shook the young man's hand warmly, and they parted.

Half an hour later Barry was standing on the wharf hailing the brig. A boat at once pushed off from her side and pulled in. The wind by this time had already decreased in violence, but it was still blowing strongly, though the sky was fairly clear, and a few stars were showing.

Jumping into the boat, which was manned by four native sailors, and steered by a thick-set, powerful white man, who was wrapped up in a heavy coat, and who bade Barry a gruff "good evening," she was quickly slewed round, and in a few minutes was alongside again. No lights were visible on deck, but Captain Rawlings was standing in the waist smoking a cigar.

"Ha, here you are, Mr. Barry," he said pleasantly, shaking hands with his new officer; "come below with me, please. Mr. Barradas, hoist in the boat as quickly as possible. Mr. Barry, this is Mr. Barradas, my second mate."

Following the captain, Barry entered the cabin, which was large and well lighted. A native steward was in attendance; at a sign from Rawlings he brought decanters of spirits and two glasses, and placed them on the table.

"Take a drink, Mr. Barry. Let us drink success to our voyage."

"Thank you," said Barry, and Rawlings clinked his own glass against his in a friendly fashion. Then as he set his glass down the captain, still smiling in a pleasant manner, said, "That is your cabin there, Mr. Barry; the steward will put your things in. And now you'll be surprised to hear that I've decided to get under weigh at once, instead of waiting for daylight. Steward, tell Mr. Barradas to get ready to heave up."

Barry's face expressed his astonishment and disappointment—astonishment that the captain should choose a dark and boisterous night to take his departure, and disappointment at his thus being prevented from writing to Rose Maynard and sending his letter ashore. Rawlings was quick to note the change in his face, and his own features, too, underwent a sudden transformation.

"I expect my orders not to be questioned, Mr. Barry," he said, in a sharp, imperious tone.

"Certainly not," assented Barry, "I am merely disappointed at being unable to write a very important letter. That is all, sir."

The captain's smile was back in an instant.

"Can you do it in a quarter of an hour?" he asked.

"Less than that—ten, five minutes will do. I can scribble a few lines at once if you will allow me. But how can I get it ashore?"

"Oh, the Custom House fellow—the tide-waiter will take it for you. I'll put him ashore in the dinghy as soon as we begin to heave up. Be as quick as you can, please. Steward, bring writing gear for Mr. Barry, quick."

Whilst Barry hurriedly scribbled a few lines to Rose telling her that the brig was putting to sea at that moment, and that he would write her fully at the first available opportunity, Captain Rawlings paced to and fro in the main cabin, waiting.

"Ah, finished already. The tide-waiter is asleep in his cabin, and I said I would not disturb him till the last moment. But I'll wake him now."

"Thank you," said Barry, handing him the letter. "Shall I go for'ard now, sir?"

"If you please," answered Rawlings politely.

The moment Barry left the cabin the captain opened the letter, read it, smiled contemptuously, and closed it again. Then he too went on deck, and walked aft.

"Are you ready, bos'un?" he said to a man who with two others was standing by the dinghy davits on the port side.

"Yes, sir."

"Then lower away. And, here, put this letter in his pocket. Take him well up into the middle of the wharf, and lie him down somewhere under shelter."

Just as the windlass pawls gave their first clink the dinghy was lowered, and in a few seconds shot out from the brig's side. Reaching the wharf steps, one man jumped out and held the boat, whilst the other two lifted out the inanimate figure of the Custom House officer, carried him up the wharf, and laid him down under the shelter of a housed-in donkey-engine. Then one of them, the boatswain, thrust Barry's letter into the man's breast-pocket, and the two left him. In less than ten minutes the boat was alongside again and being hoisted up.

As the brig's forefoot came over her anchor Rawlings, who gave his orders very quietly, waited for a favourable moment. A gust of wind canted her head away from the shores of the little bay, and in a few seconds her anchor was a-trip, and under her fore and main topsails and headsails only the *Mahina* wore round, and began to slip through the water.

As soon as the anchor was secured Rawlings came for'ard and stood beside his chief mate, watching the shore lights.

"That'll do, Mr. Barry. We're all right now. With this westerly we won't run foul of anything coming up the harbour. Leave a couple of these native chaps here on the look-out; they can see through a stone wall."

In less than an hour the brig was between the heads, and then Rawlings told Barry to make more sail, and gave the helmsman his course, E.N.E.

As the mate called out to the hands to loose the topgallant sails, and half a dozen men sprang aloft, the captain turned to Barry.

"Oh, I had quite forgotten those gaol-birds. Bos'un, bring a light. Come with me, Mr. Barry, and," he added, "bring one of these with you," as he took a belaying-pin out of the rail.

Wondering what was now afoot, Barry followed the skipper to the deck-house, the after part of which was used as a sail locker. The door was locked.

"Hold that light up, bos'un," said Rawlings quietly, as he took a key from his pocket, and opened the door. "Now then, men, come out, and look smart about it."

One by one the four rough fellows whom Barry had seen on the wharf in the afternoon came out. The tallest of them, with a sullen look at the captain, muttered something under his breath.

"None of that, now," said Rawlings, and quick as lightning he dealt the man a smashing blow on the head with the iron belaying-pin. He fell full length upon the deck and lay there motionless. Rawlings looked at him with calm unconcern. "Take him for'ard," he said in drawling tones to the other three, "and take warning too. Let me see one of you but look sideways at me or any of my officers, and you'll get a surprise. Off you go."

Shortly after four bells had struck, as the chief mate was seated on the skylight smoking his pipe, and thinking of the unnecessary violence of Captain Rawlings, Barradas, who had the watch, stopped in front of him.

"Don't you care about turning in?" he asked civilly.

"No, I don't feel a bit sleepy; in fact, I'll be glad when it's eight bells."

The second mate nodded, took a couple of turns up and down the deck, and then stopped again. "What do you think of the *Mahina*? She can sail, eh?"

"She does seem very fast."

"Fastest vessel in the Pacific for her size, but a bit overmasted. Think I can give her the royals now—the wind is taking off, and sea going down fast." Then, after he had given the necessary orders, he began again.

"Heard you were mate of the *Tawera*, mister."

Barry nodded.

"Then you're used to kanakas and their ways"—this half questioningly, half affirmingly. "These chaps here—most of them, anyway—are kanakas. Good sailor men too. Better than those – swabs we had to shove in the sail locker until we got to sea. But I daresay we'll knock some work out of them."

"Did they try to run away, then?"

Barradas grinned. "We didn't give 'em the chance. We're short-handed as it is."

"I heard that half a dozen of your men had bolted," said Barry.

"Did you? Why, who told you? Oh, the wharf policeman. Yes, that's right enough; we did lose six men. They were six of our best men, too—Penrhyn Islanders," and then he quickly moved away, and thrusting his hands in his pockets seemed deeply interested in the man who was loosing the fore-royal.

Presently Rawlings came on deck, and said to Barradas—

"Poor Tracey is dead. He breathed his last a few minutes ago." And then he addressed Barry.

"My poor mate is dead, Mr. Barry."

Barry jumped up in astonishment. "I'm sorry to hear that, sir. And I had no idea he was on board."

"Yes, poor fellow," replied Rawlings quietly, "he refused to go ashore, in fact pleaded so hard with me, that I could not resist his wishes. He hated the idea of dying in an hospital, so I gave way to him."

"What was his illness?"

Rawlings hesitated a moment, and then answered, "I might as well tell you, though only Mr. Barradas and myself are aware of the cause of his death. Two days ago he shot himself in a fit of depression. I had two doctors off at once to see him, but they both told me that he could not possibly live, and that even to move him ashore would hasten the end. Now, will you come below?"

With a curious, but yet undefined feeling of dissatisfaction Barry went below with the captain, who, taking off his cap, opened the door of one of the state-rooms, and motioned to his chief officer to follow.

Lying in the bunk of the state-room, which was well lit up, was the figure of a man, who, when Rawlings lifted the sheet which covered his face, was handsome even in death and appeared to Barry to have been about thirty years of age. Round the forehead and upper part of the head was a bandage. This Rawlings lifted and showed Barry a bullet hole in the left temple. Then covering up the dead man's face again, he stepped out into the main cabin, and motioned Barry to a seat.

"Sit down, Mr. Barry. You must listen to me for a few minutes, and I shall now quickly explain to you one or two things that may have appeared somewhat strange to you since you joined the ship. I have had a very great deal of trouble, trouble that my officers have shared with me. But I must tell you the story in detail, painful as it is for me to relate it; indeed, neither Barradas, myself, nor the boatswain, the only three remaining out of the ship's original company, care to speak of it, for death and disaster have followed us throughout.

"When that poor fellow Tracey joined me in Honolulu as mate he was accompanied by his wife, a young Australian lady, to whom he was deeply attached. He was anxious to pay for her accommodation during the cruise, but to this I would not consent. And I saw he was simply overjoyed at her being allowed to sail with him.

"I bought this vessel intending to run her among the Marshall and Caroline Islands in the usual trade—you know: coconut oil, turtle shell, and sharks' fins. After leaving Honolulu we cruised among the eastward islands and did well—so well that we nearly filled the ship. Then we stood away for the Carolines, and on our way ran into Port Lêle on Strong's Island, to wood and water. It was after we left there that Tracey lost his wife. Poor girl, her end was a terrible one."

He sighed, and then resumed. "A very terrible end—she was lost overboard. But let me tell the whole story.

"Whilst we were lying at anchor at Lêle we met an old trader there, with whom Tracey and myself frequently spent an evening. One night, when we were talking together over various matters, the old man, who was very ill at the time, told us that he had a secret to reveal, if we made it worth his while. Knowing him as I had for many years as an honest old fellow, I listened with interest to what he had to say, and in a few minutes he had satisfied Tracey and myself that he knew of the existence of one of the richest pearling grounds in the Pacific; and provided he could find partners who would deal squarely with him, he would disclose the exact locality. His poverty had prevented him from buying a vessel and returning to the island, which was only a week's sail from Lêle; but as the years went by, and his prospect of buying a vessel seemed as far off as ever, he determined to seek the aid of others. As a proof of his statements, he not only showed us a dozen or so of splendid pearl shells, but also a score or two of magnificent pearls. Some of these he entrusted to me to sell for him in Sydney. I have, at his request, kept a few for myself. Let me show them to you."

Going into his cabin, he presently returned with six or eight pearls, all of which were certainly splendid specimens. Placing them on the scarlet table-cloth he pushed them over to Barry to examine.

"They certainly are beauties. I've seen larger and better in the Paumotus when I was in the *Tawera*," said Barry, "but anyway, that lot is worth 400 pounds or 500 pounds."

Rawlings nodded. "Well, to cut a long story short, we came to an agreement with the old man, whereby I was to find divers, and provide all working expenses, boats, and the necessary gear, and to receive one-half of all the shell and pearls found. Tracey was to stand in with us, too—old Gurden and myself were each to give him one-tenth.

"Taking the old man on board—the poor old fellow was not only in feeble health, but was childishly anxious to, as he said, 'smell the smell of a big town again'—we left Strong's Island for Sydney. From the very first Gurden became weaker, and on the fourth or fifth day out he told us that he did not believe he would live through the night. We tried to cheer him up, but he only shook

his head, and requested us to commit to paper the exact bearings of the patches of the pearl-shell beds on the lagoon he was doomed never to see again. This was done, and he then requested that as Tracey's wife had nursed him during the time he was on board, that what would have been his share of the profits of our coming venture should be given to her, as he had not a relative or connection in the world. Early in the morning he had breathed his last.

"We buried the old fellow that afternoon, and almost immediately afterward dirty weather came up from the northward, and by nine o'clock we were driving along under an ugly sky at a great rate. Tracey was below, turned in, and I was on deck with Barradas, who had taken the wheel for a few minutes to allow the man who was steering to lend a hand at some job on the main deck. Just then, poor Alice Tracey came up from below, walked aft, and stood at the stern with her hand on the rail, looking at the brig's boiling wake; this was a frequent habit of hers. Neither of us took any further notice of her after she had remarked that the cabin was very stuffy—we were running before the wind at the time. About five minutes later I went for'ard, and just as Barradas was giving up the wheel again, he noticed that Mrs. Tracey had disappeared. He gave the alarm in an instant, for he knew she had not gone below again, and must have fallen overboard without a cry.

"In bringing to, to lower a boat, our decks were twice filled, and this caused much delay. Poor Tracey nearly went mad, and both he and the boatswain searched for her all night in two boats, while we burnt every blue light on board, and then kept a flare going till daylight—all without avail. We were then about five miles west of Pleasant Island, and Tracey had a wild hope that his wife, who was a splendid swimmer, might have kept herself afloat and succeeded in reaching the land, which is densely populated. To please him I sent the boats ashore, and made inquiries from the natives, but of course there was not the slightest hope. She must have hurt herself when she fell, and sunk at once, or else she could not have failed to have been seen or heard by one of the two boats.

"The rest of the voyage was sad enough in all conscience, for Tracey was never the same man again. The crew, too, began to get the idea that we were to be an unlucky ship, and eventually became gloomy, discontented, and finally almost mutinous. I dropped a good many of them at various islands as we came along, but picked up others in their places—just the sort of men I wanted for divers and boat work. At Levuka I shipped six Penrhyn Islanders—the best divers in the Pacific—but the other fellows contaminated them, and they too bolted from me in Sydney. Poor Tracey took all our misfortunes very much to heart, for, in addition to his grief at the loss of his wife, he imagined that we should find ourselves forestalled when we reached Providence Lagoon. He had been very quiet and depressed for some days, but I never imagined that his mind would become unhinged. However, one night he locked himself in his cabin and shot himself."

"Poor fellow!" said Barry, with genuine sympathy.

"I feel his loss most keenly, I can assure you," resumed Rawlings, laying down his cigar, and sighing as he stroked his pointed beard. "Well, all that could be done for him was done, but, as I have just said, the doctors gave no hope from the first. When he became conscious—which was early on the following day—and was told that he had no chance of life, he took it very quietly, but begged me to let him remain on the ship and not send him ashore. He had an absolute horror of dying in an hospital, he said. Both of the doctors said it was just as well, so I yielded to his wishes. And then, besides being my chief officer, he was a personal friend, and was largely interested with me in this pearl-shelling venture, though he had no share in the brig."

Barry nodded. "Hard lines."

"Hard lines, indeed. And now you will see how I was situated. Poor Tracey urging me almost with his dying breath to put to sea, my solemn promise to him that I would do so the moment I could get men to replace those who had run away, and my own anxiety—all these things tended to irritate and upset me. To get men at the Government shipping office meant a delay of perhaps three or four days, to obtain a suitable man as mate might have meant a week. During this time poor Tracey's death would have still further complicated matters and hindered the *Mahina* from putting to sea. I

had picked up those four loafing scoundrels you saw me bring aboard only an hour or two before I met you; and, just before I did meet you, I had decided to give Tracey's berth to Barradas, and promote the boatswain to second mate. However, I did meet you, and very glad I am of it, for I am sure we shall pull together."

"I am sure of it," answered Barry, who now felt a sympathy for the man.

"I must tell you," added Rawlings presently, with a smile, "that I am not much of a navigator, and as Barradas is no better I shall rely on you, as I did on Tracey."

"Certainly, sir."

After a few minutes' more conversation, in which Rawlings outlined his plans for the trading and pearling operations, and showed Barry a large scale chart of Arrecifos Lagoon in the Caroline Islands, which was the brig's destination, the two men parted for the night.

Immediately after breakfast on the following morning the brig was laid to, the crew ranged upon the deck, and the body of her former chief officer was carried up from the cabin by two native seamen and committed to the deep.

CHAPTER IV. MR. BILLY WARNER, OF PONAPÉ

Ten days after leaving Sydney the *Mahina* had rounded the south-eastern end of New Caledonia, and was steering a northerly course between the New Hebrides Group and the great archipelago of the Solomon Islands for Arrecifos Lagoon. During these ten days Barry had had time to study Captain Rawlings and the rest of the ship's company, and had come to the conclusion that there was some mystery attached to both ship and crew. The latter, with the exception of the boatswain, who was a dark-faced, ear-ringed Greek, and the four new hands brought on board by the captain, were all natives of various islands of the Equatorial Pacific. Seven of the twelve, with two of the white men, were in Barry's watch; Barradas had the rest. Among Barry's men was a stalwart young native, much lighter in colour than the others, very quiet in his demeanour, but willing and cheerful. His name, so he told Barry, was Velo, and he was a native of Manono, in the Samoan Group. For the past four or five years he had been wandering to and fro among the islands of the Pacific, his last voyage being made in a luckless Hobart Town whaleship, which he had left at Sydney in disgust and without a penny in his pocket. Like Barry, he had been attracted to the *Mahina* by the fact of her being engaged in the island trade, and indeed had only joined her two days before Barry himself. His cheerful, ingenuous manner, combined with his smart seamanship, made the chief officer take a great liking to him, and even Barradas, gruff and surly and ever ready to deal out a blow, admitted that Velo was, next to the boatswain, the best sailorman of all the crew.

On the second day out the strong westerly had failed, and was succeeded by light and variable airs, much to Rawlings' anger. Walking the poop one day with Barry, he gave vent to such a sudden outburst of rage and blasphemy at the little progress made by the brig that the chief officer gazed at him in astonishment. However, on the morning of the fourth day, a steady breeze set in, and Rawlings' equanimity was restored. His anxiety to make a quick passage was very evident, and when the vicinity of the Northern Solomons was reached, and continuous and furious squalls were experienced almost every night, he would refuse to take in sail till the very last moment, although both his mates respectfully pointed out the risk of carrying on under such circumstances, for, besides the danger to the spars, the islands of the Solomon Group were but badly charted, and the currents continually changing in their set. But to these remonstrances he turned an impatient ear.

"We must push her along through the Solomons," he had said one dark night to Barry as the *Mahina* was tearing through the water under the hum of a heavy squall, quivering in every timber, and deluging her decks with clouds of spray which, from there being a head sea, leapt up from her weather bow as high as the foretopsail. "I want to get into Arrecifos Lagoon as quickly as I can, even if we do lose a light spar or two. I'm no navigator, as you know, but I know the Solomons as well as any man, for I've been trading and nigger-catching there for six years at a stretch—a long time ago; and out here, where we are, we're safe; there's a clear run of six hundred miles, free of any danger. So the old skipper of the *Black Dog* used to tell me—and he knew these parts like a book."

Presently, as he leant back on his elbows against the weather rail, he added in an indifferent tone of voice, "At the same time, I believe there is no cause for hurry. But perhaps Tracey has imbued me with some of his fears that some one else might get there before us, and either get the pick of the shell, or perhaps skin the whole lagoon out altogether."

Northward from the lofty, verdure-clad Solomons the brig sped steadily onward, leaving behind her the fierce, sweeping rain squalls, and the swirling currents, and mighty ocean tide-rips, whose lines of bubbling foam, seen far away, often caused even the native look-outs to call out "Breakers ahead?" and then she sailed into the region of the gentle, north-east trade wind, till the blue mountain-peaks of Ponapé the beautiful showed upon the sunlit sea far to windward. And here the scarcely won

trade failed, and by nightfall the Mahina lay floating upon a sea of glass, and Rawlings paced the deck the best part of the night, savagely chewing at his cigar and cursing at the delay.

Both Barry and Velo knew from the appearance of the sky that the calm was certain to last three days at least, and possibly ten days or a fortnight; so on the following morning, when at breakfast, the former suggested to Rawlings that the hands might give the ship a coat of paint outside.

"Hardly worth beginning it," said the captain. "We're bound to get a breeze some time this morning."

Barry shook his head. "I'm afraid not, sir. I know of calms about these parts lasting three solid weeks, and judging from the look of the sky and the thick haze hanging over Ponapé I think we can safely count on this one lasting for three days at the very least. But even if it runs into a week or ten days there is one good thing about calms here—the current sets north-east at a great rate, two knots an hour at least."

Rawlings cursed under his breath, and then moodily assented to Barry's suggestion.

"Very well, Mr. Barry, just as you please. But I hope you are mistaken about the calm continuing. It's too hot to last long, I imagine."

Soon after breakfast the hands set to to paint ship, and worked steadily on until a little before seven bells, when Barry heard one of the crew, a Gilbert Islander named Billy Onotoa, call out excitedly—

"*Te bakwa! Te bakwa! Roria te bakwa bubura!*" ("A shark! a shark! look at the big shark!")

The native (who was one of the smartest men on board), without asking permission from his officer—permission which he knew would be readily granted—jumped on deck and dived below into the fo'c'sle for the shark-fishing tackle which every Gilbert Islander carries with him when at sea. Rawlings and Barry, who were both on the after-deck, went to the rail and looked over and saw that there was a very large grey shark swimming leisurely to and fro under the staging on the port side where the men were painting. Just then Barradas came on deck and joined them.

"Holy mother!" he exclaimed. "What a devil! He's half a fathom broad across his shoulders. And he's hungry, too; look how the pilot fish are running round the ship. That's a sure sign he has an empty belly. If he wasn't hungry they would cruise alongside him, quite close."

As he spoke Billy Onotoa emerged from the foreshuttle and was met by the Greek boatswain, who angrily bade him get back to his work again, and tearing the heavy shark hook and its tackle from his hand, flung it overboard.

The dark, expressive eyes of the native, usually so pleasant and smiling, flashed resentfully, and he bent his head in sullen silence as he moved slowly towards the bulwarks.

"Mova quicka, you dam blacka dog!" said the Greek savagely, and raising his foot he gave the man a heavy kick.

Like lightning Billy Onotoa spun round, his sheath knife flashing in his right hand, and the lust of blood in his eyes; in an instant the two were struggling madly together.

Barry, Barradas, and one of the white seamen sprang forward and endeavoured to separate them, but the rest of the Gilbert Islanders leapt to the aid of their countryman, and in less than a minute the deck was filled with a group of struggling men. The Greek, who was a man of enormous strength, had been quicker than his assailant in the use of the knife, and had already stabbed the Islander twice in the shoulder, whilst Billy, who was a much smaller man, had driven his own weapon through the Greek's right arm, his countrymen meanwhile trying their best to use their knives upon the boatswain without hurting either the two mates or the white sailor, who were striking out all round with their clenched fists, shouting to the natives to desist.

At last, however, the two principals in the combat were separated by Velo the Samoan, who, seizing the now maddened Billy Onotoa by both feet, dragged him out of the *mêlée*, and lifting him in his arms threw him down the foreshuttle, whilst Barry quietened the Greek by a blow on the jaw, which sent him reeling across the deck with his blood-stained knife still clutched tightly in his hand.

Barradas, who, like Barry, had kept his temper throughout, had yet managed to receive a terrible knife slash—intended for the Greek—across his temple, and, blinded by the flow of blood, staggered across the deck towards the open gangway, missed his hold of the stanchions, and pitched headlong overboard.

Velo leapt after him with a cry of alarm. "Quick, Mr. Barry! Stand by! The shark!"

Barry and several of the men rushed to the side to assist Velo in rescuing the second mate. They were not a moment too soon, for as the Samoan, who had grasped Barradas by the hair and was holding his head out of water, was swimming toward the staging under the main chains, the shark suddenly appeared under the counter, swimming high up on the surface. Barry saw in an instant that one of the two men in the water was doomed unless swift measures were taken. Jumping on the rail, he leapt overboard, feet foremost, and landed on the monster's back.

There was a swirl and rush of foam, and then a cheer from the crew as the shark darted off in terror, and Barry quietly swam alongside again and clambered on deck, together with Velo and his brother officer.

Then, before dinner, he went forward, examined and dressed Billy Onotoa's wounds, Rawlings standing beside him and eyeing the native in an unsympathetic and forbidding manner.

"The boatswain is badly hurt, Mr. Barry," he said suavely, "and as you are such a good surgeon, perhaps you will leave this damned kanaka and attend to him."

Barry turned on him with a subdued fierceness. "I'll attend to the scoundrel presently, Captain Rawlings, though he doesn't deserve it. He is a downright sweep—like all his ear-ringed kidney. He had no right to kick this man, who is one of the best and smartest men aboard. I gave him a clip on the jaw, and when I've dressed his arm and he is able to turn to again I'll give him another if he tries to start any of these tricks again."

Rawlings smiled pleasantly. "My dear Barry, don't excite yourself. The boatswain is, no doubt, a bit of a bully, and does not understand these natives as you do. But, at the same time, he is a good sailor man, and erred, as Marryat says in one of his novels, 'through excess of zeal.' So do not be too harsh."

"I have no inclination to be 'harsh' with any man, Captain Rawlings. You are the master of this ship, and I am only your chief officer. I take my orders from you, and I look to you to support me in maintaining the necessary discipline. But I tell you plainly that the native crew on this ship are a different class of natives to which you have been accustomed in the Solomon Group and the New Hebrides. They will not take a blow from any man—white or black. And whilst I know my duty to you as master of this brig, I warn you that there will be bloody doings if the boatswain ever again lays his hands upon one of the Gilbert Islanders. They are ripe for mutiny now."

Rawlings flicked the ash off his cigar.

"We don't want any trouble like that, Mr. Barry, do we? And I shall give Paul a good dressing down, and tell him to be careful in future. I have the utmost faith in your judgment, Mr. Barry, and I want everything to go on pleasantly."

Barry nodded, and then went aft and attended to the Greek's wounded arm. This occupied him for nearly half an hour, and then as he was entering his cabin to change his clothes, which were torn and blood-stained, Barradas stopped him and held out his hand.

"Mr. Barry, you are a brave man. You saved my life, for if you had not jumped on to the shark I should have been taken. Velo told me so just now. He said that he might have been safe, but that I was on the outside and that the shark would have had me in his jaws if you had not jumped overboard."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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