

BECKE LOUIS

BY REEF AND

PALM

Louis Becke

By Reef and Palm

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By Reef and Palm

INTRODUCTION

When in October, 1870, I sailed into the harbour of Apia, Samoa, in the ill-fated ALBATROSS, Mr Louis Becke was gaining his first experiences of island life as a trader on his own account by running a cutter between Apia and Savai'i.

It was rather a notable moment in Apia, for two reasons. In the first place, the German traders were shaking in their shoes for fear of what the French squadron might do to them, and we were the bearers of the good news from Tahiti that the chivalrous Admiral Clouet, with a very proper magnanimity, had decided not to molest them; and, secondly, the beach was still seething with excitement over the departure on the previous day of the pirate Pease, carrying with him the yet more illustrious "Bully" Hayes.

It happened in this wise. A month or two before our arrival, Hayes had dropped anchor in Apia, and some ugly stories of recent irregularities in the labour trade had come to the ears of Mr Williams, the English Consul. Mr Williams, with the assistance of the natives, very cleverly seized his vessel in the night, and ran her ashore, and detained Mr Hayes pending the arrival of an English man-of-war to which he could be given in charge. But in those happy days there were no prisons in Samoa, so that his confinement was not irksome, and his only hard labour was picnics, of which he was the life and soul. All went pleasantly until Mr Pease—a degenerate sort of pirate who made his living by half bullying, half swindling lonely white men on small islands out of their coconut oil, and unarmed merchantmen out of their stores—came to Apia in an armed ship with a Malay crew. From that moment Hayes' life became less idyllic. Hayes and Pease conceived a most violent hatred of each other, and poor old Mr Williams was really worried into an attack of elephantiasis (which answers to the gout in those latitudes) by his continual efforts to prevent the two desperadoes from flying at each other's throat. Heartily glad was he when Pease—who was the sort of man that always observed LES CONVENANCES when possible, and who fired a salute of twenty-one guns on the Queen's Birthday—came one afternoon to get his papers "all regular," and clear for sea. But lo! the next morning, when his vessel had disappeared, it was found that his enemy Captain Hayes had disappeared also, and the ladies of Samoa were left disconsolate at the departure of the most agreeable man they had ever known.

However, all this is another story, as Mr Kipling says, and one which I hope Mr Becke will tell us more fully some day, for he knew Hayes well, having acted as supercargo on board his ship, and shared a shipwreck and other adventures with him.

But even before this date Mr Becke had had as much experience as falls to most men of adventures in the Pacific Ocean.

Born at Port Macquarrie in Australia, where his father was clerk of petty sessions, he was seized at the age of fourteen with an intense longing to go to sea. It is possible that he inherited this passion through his mother, for her father, Charles Beilby, who was private secretary to the Duke of Cumberland, invested a legacy that fell to him in a small vessel, and sailed with his family to the then very new world of Australia. However this may be, it was impossible to keep Louis Becke at home; and, as an alternative, a uncle undertook to send him, and a brother two years older, to a mercantile house in California. His first voyage was a terrible one. There were no steamers, of course, in those days, and they sailed for San Francisco in a wretched old barque. For over a month they were drifting about the stormy sea between Australia and New Zealand, a partially dismasted and leaking wreck. The crew mutinied—they had bitter cause to—and only after calling at Rurutu, in the Tubuai Group,

and obtaining fresh food, did they permit the captain to resume command of the half-sunken old craft. They were ninety days in reaching Honolulu, and another forty in making the Californian coast.

The two lads did not find the routine of a merchant's office at all to their taste; and while the elder obtained employment on a sheep ranche at San Juan, Louis, still faithful to the sea, got a berth as a clerk in a steamship company, and traded to the Southern ports. In a year's time he had money enough to take passage in a schooner bound on a shark-catching cruise to the equatorial islands of the North Pacific. The life was a very rough one, and full of incident and adventure—which I hope he will relate some day. Returning to Honolulu, he fell in with an old captain who had bought a schooner for a trading venture amongst the Western Carolines. Becke put in \$1000, and sailed with him as supercargo, he and the skipper being the only white men on board. He soon discovered that, though a good seaman, the old man knew nothing of navigation. In a few weeks they were among the Marshall Islands, and the captain went mad from DELIRIUM TREMENS. Becke and the three native sailors ran the vessel into a little uninhabited atoll, and for a week had to keep the captain tied up to prevent his killing himself. They got him right at last, and stood to the westward. On their voyage they were witnesses of a tragedy (in this instance fortunately not complete), on which the pitiless sun of the Pacific has looked down very often. They fell in with a big Marshall Island sailing canoe that had been blown out of sight of land, and had drifted six hundred miles to the westward. Out of her complement of fifty people, thirty were dead. They gave them provisions and water, and left them to make Strong's Island (Kusaie), which was in sight. Becke and the chief swore Marshall Island BRUDERSCHAFT with each other. Years afterwards, when he came to live in the Marshall Group, the chief proved his friendship in a signal manner.

The cruise proved a profitable one, and from that time Mr Becke determined to become a trader, and to learn to know the people of the north-west Pacific; and returning to California, he made for Samoa, and from thence to Sydney. But at this time the Palmer River gold rush had just broken out in North Queensland, and a brother, who was a bank manager on the celebrated Charters Towers goldfields, invited him to come up, as every one seemed to be making his fortune. He wandered between the rushes for two years, not making a fortune, but acquiring much useful experience, learning, amongst other things, the art of a blacksmith, and becoming a crack shot with a rifle. Returning to Sydney, he sailed for the Friendly Islands (Tonga) in company with the king of Tonga's yacht—the TAUFAAHAU. The Friendly Islanders disappointed him (at which no one that knows them will wonder), and he went on to Samoa, and set up as a trader on his own account for the first time. He and a Manhiki half-caste—the "Allan" who so frequently figures in his stories—bought a cutter, and went trading throughout the group. This was the time of Colonel Steinberger's brief tenure of power. The natives were fighting, and the cutter was seized on two occasions. When the war was over he made a voyage to the north-west, and became a great favourite with the natives, as indeed seems to have been the case in most of the places he went to in Polynesia and Micronesia. Later on he was sent away from Samoa in charge of a vessel under sealed orders to the Marshall Islands. These orders were to hand the vessel over to the notorious Captain "Bully" Hayes. (Some day he promises that he will give us the details of this very curious adventure). He found Hayes awaiting him in his famous brig LEONORA in Milli Lagoon. He handed over his charge and took service with him as supercargo. After some months' cruising in the Carolines they were wrecked on Strong's Island (Kusaie). Hayes made himself the ruler of the island, and Mr Becke and he had a bitter quarrel. The natives treated the latter with great kindness, and gave him land on the lee side of the island, where he lived happily enough for five months. Hayes was captured by an English man-of-war, but escaped and went to Guam. Mr Becke went back in the cruiser to the Colonies, and then again sailed for Eastern Polynesia, trading in the Gambiers, Paumotus, and Easter and Pitcairn Islands. In this part of the ocean he picked up an abandoned French barque on a reef, floated her, and loaded her with coconuts, intending to sail her to New Zealand with a native crew, but they went ashore in a hurricane and lost everything. Meeting with Mr Tom de Wolf, the managing partner of a Liverpool

firm, he took service with him as a trader in the Ellice and Tokelau Groups, finally settling down as a residential trader. Then he took passage once more for the Carolines, and was wrecked on Peru, one of the Gilbert Islands (lately annexed), losing every dollar that he possessed. He returned to Samoa and engaged as a "recruiter" in the labour trade. He got badly hurt in an encounter with some natives, and went to New Zealand to recover. Then he sailed to New Britain on a trading venture, and fell in with, and had much to do with, the ill-fated colonising expedition of the Marquis de Ray in New Ireland. A bad attack of malarial fever, and a wound in the neck (labour recruiting or even trading among the blacks of Melanesia seems to have been a much less pleasant business than residence among the gentle brown folk of the Eastern Pacific) made him leave and return to the Marshall Islands, where Lailik, the chief whom he had succoured at sea years before, made him welcome. He left on a fruitless quest after an imaginary guano island, and from then until two years ago he has been living on various islands in both the North and South Pacific, leading what he calls "a wandering and lonely but not unhappy existence," "Lui," as they call him, being a man both liked and trusted by the natives from lonely Easter Island to the faraway Pelews. He is still in the prime of life, and whether he will now remain within the bounds of civilisation, or whether some day he will return to his wanderings, as Odysseus is fabled to have done in his old age, I fancy that he hardly knows himself. But when once the charm of a wild roving life has got into a man's blood, the trammels of civilisation are irksome and its atmosphere is hard to breathe. It will be seen from this all-too-condensed sketch of Mr Becke's career that he knows the Pacific as few men alive or dead have ever known it. He is one of the rare men who have led a very wild life, and have the culture and talent necessary to give some account of it. As a rule, the men who know don't write, and the men who write don't know.

Every one who has a taste for good stories will feel, I believe, the force of these. Every one who knows the South Seas, and, I believe, many who do not, will feel that they have the unmistakable stamp of truth. And truth to nature is a great merit in a story, not only because of that thrill of pleasure hard to analyse, but largely made up of associations, memories, and suggestions that faithfulness of representation in picture or book gives to the natural man; but because of the fact that nature is almost infinitely rich, and the unassisted imagination of man but a poor and sterile thing, tending constantly towards some ossified convention. "Treasure Island" is a much better story than "The Wreckers," yet I, for one, shall never cease to regret that Mr Stevenson did not possess, when he wrote "Treasure Island," that knowledge of what men and schooners do in wild seas that was his when he gave us "The Wreckers." The detail would have been so much richer and more convincing.

It is open to any one to say that these tales are barbarous, and what Mrs Meynell, in a very clever and amusing essay, has called "decivilised." Certainly there is a wide gulf separating life on a Pacific island from the accumulated culture of centuries of civilisation in the midst of which such as Mrs Meynell move and have their being. And if there can be nothing good in literature that does not spring from that culture, these stories must stand condemned. But such a view is surely too narrow. Much as I admire that lady's writings, I never can think of a world from which everything was eliminated that did not commend itself to the dainty taste of herself and her friends, without a feeling of impatience and suffocation. It takes a huge variety of men and things to make a good world. And ranches and CANONS, veldts and prairies, tropical forests and coral islands, and all that goes to make up the wild life in the face of Nature or among primitive races, far and free from the artificial conditions of an elaborate civilisation, form an element in the world, the loss of which would be bitterly felt by many a man who has never set foot outside his native land.

There is a certain monotony, perhaps, about these stories. To some extent this is inevitable. The interest and passions of South Sea Island life are neither numerous nor complex, and action is apt to be rapid and direct. A novelist of that modern school that fills its volumes, often fascinatingly enough, by refining upon the shadowy refinements of civilised thought and feeling, would find it hard to ply his trade in South Sea Island society. His models would always be cutting short in five minutes the hesitations and subtleties that ought to have lasted them through a quarter of a life-time.

But I think it is possible that the English reader might gather from this little book an unduly strong impression of the uniformity of Island life. The loves of white men and brown women, often cynical and brutal, sometimes exquisitely tender and pathetic, necessarily fill a large space in any true picture of the South Sea Islands, and Mr Becke, no doubt of set artistic purpose, has confined himself in the collection of tales now offered almost entirely to this facet of the life. I do not question that he is right in deciding to detract nothing from the striking effect of these powerful stories, taken as a whole, by interspersing amongst them others of a different character. But I hope it may be remembered that the present selection is only an instalment, and that, if it finds favour with the British public, we may expect from him some of those tales of adventure, and of purely native life and custom, which no one could tell so well as he.

PEMBROKE.

CHALLIS THE DOUBTER

The White Lady And The Brown Woman

Four years had come and gone since the day that Challis, with a dull and savage misery in his heart, had, cursing the love-madness which once possessed him, walked out from his house in an Australian city with an undefined and vague purpose of going "somewhere" to drown his sense of wrong and erase from his memory the face of the woman who, his wife of not yet a year, had played with her honour and his. So he thought, anyhow.

You see, Challis was "a fool"—at least so his pretty, violet-eyed wife had told him that afternoon with a bitter and contemptuous ring in her voice when he had brought another man's letter—written to her—and with impulsive and jealous haste had asked her to explain. He was a fool, she had said, with an angry gleam in the violet eyes, to think she could not "take care" of herself. Admit receiving that letter? Of course! Did he think she could help other men writing silly letters to her? Did he not think she could keep out of a mess? And she smiled the self-satisfied smile of a woman conscious of many admirers and of her own powers of intrigue.

Then Challis, with a big effort, gulping down the rage that stirred him, made his great mistake. He spoke of his love for her. Fatuity! She laughed at him, said that as she detested women, his love was too exacting for her, if it meant that she should never be commonly friendly with any other man.

Challis looked at her steadily for a few moments, trying to smother the wild flood of black suspicion aroused in him by the discovery of the letter, and confirmed by her sneering words, and then said quietly, but with a dangerous inflection in his voice—

"Remember—you are my wife. If you have no regard for your own reputation, you shall have some for mine. I don't want to entertain my friends by thrashing R—, but I'm not such a fool as you think. And if you go further in this direction you'll find me a bit of a brute."

Again the sneering laugh—"Indeed! Something very tragic will occur, I suppose?"

"No," said Challis grimly, "something damned prosaic—common enough among men with pretty wives—I'll clear out."

"I wish you would do that now," said his wife, "I hate you quite enough."

Of course she didn't quite mean it. She really liked Challis in her own small-souled way—principally because his money had given her the social pleasures denied her during her girlhood. With an unmoved face and without farewell he left her and went to his lawyer's.

A quarter of an hour later he arose to go, and the lawyer asked him when he intended returning.

"That all depends upon her. If she wants me back again, she can write, through you, and I'll come—if she has conducted herself with a reasonable amount of propriety for such a pretty woman."

Then, with an ugly look on his face, Challis went out; next day he embarked in the LADY ALICIA for a six months' cruise among the islands of the North-west Pacific.

That was four years ago, and to-day Challis, who stands working at a little table set in against an open window, hammering out a ring from a silver coin on a marline-spike and vyce, whistles softly and contentedly to himself as he raises his head and glances through the vista of coconuts that surround his dwelling on this lonely and almost forgotten island.

"The devil!" he thinks to himself, "I must be turning into a native. Four years! What an ass I was! And I've never written yet—that is, never sent a letter away. Well, neither has she. Perhaps, after all, there was little in that affair of R—'s.... By God! though, if there was, I've been very good to them in leaving them a clear field. Anyhow, she's all right as regards money. I'm glad I've done that. It's a big prop to a man's conscience to feel he hasn't done anything mean; and she likes money

—most women do. Of course I'll go back—if she writes. If not—well, then, these sinful islands can claim me for their own; that is, Nalia can."

A native boy with shaven head, save for a long tuft on the left side, came down from the village, and, seating himself on the gravelled space inside the fence, gazed at the white man with full, lustrous eyes.

"Hallo, TAMA!" said Challis, "whither goest now?"

"Pardon, Tialli. I came to look at thee making the ring. Is it of soft silver—and for Nalia, thy wife?"

"Ay, O shaven-head, it is. Here, take this MASI and go pluck me a young nut to drink," and Challis threw him a ship-biscuit. Then he went on tapping the little band of silver. He had already forgotten the violet eyes, and was thinking with almost childish eagerness of the soft glow in the black orbs of Nalia when she should see his finished handiwork.

The boy returned with a young coconut, unhusked. "Behold, Tialli. This nut is a UTO GA'AU (sweet husk). When thou hast drunk the juice give it me back, that I may chew the husk which is sweet as the sugar-cane of Samoa," and he squatted down again on the gravel.

Challis drank, then threw him the husk and resumed his work. Presently the boy, tearing off a strip of the husk with his white teeth, said, "Tialli, how is it that there be no drinking-nuts in thy house?"

"Because, O turtle-head, my wife is away; and there are no men in the village to-day; and because the women of this MOTU [Island or country.] I have no thought that the PAPALAGI [Foreigner] may be parched with thirst, and so come not near me with a coconut." This latter in jest.

"Nay, Tialli. Not so. True it is that to-day all the men are in the bush binding FALA leaves around the coconut trees, else do the rats steal up and eat the buds and clusters of little nuts. And because Nalia, thy wife, is away at the other White Man's house no woman cometh inside the door."

Challis laughed. "O evil-minded people of Nukunono! And must I, thy PAPALAGI, be parched with thirst because of this?"

"FAIAGA OE, Tialli, thou but playest with me. Raise thy hand and call out 'I thirst!' and every woman in the village will run to thee, each with a drinking-nut, and those that desire thee, but are afraid, will give two. But to come inside when Nalia is away would be to put shame on her."

The white man mused. The boy's solemn chatter entertained him. He knew well the native customs; but, to torment the boy, he commenced again.

"O foolish custom! See how I trust my wife Nalia. Is she not even now in the house of another white man?"

"True. But, then, he is old and feeble, and thou young and strong. None but a fool desires to eat a dried flying-fish when a fresh one may be had."

"O wise man with the shaven crown," said Challis, with mocking good nature, "thou art full of wisdom of the ways of women. And if I were old and withered, would Nalia then be false to me in a house of another and younger white man?"

"How could she? Would not he, too, have a wife who would watch her? And if he had not, and were NOFO NOA (single), would he be such a fool to steal that the like of which he can buy—for there are many girls without husbands as good to look on as that Nalia of thine. And all women are alike," and then, hearing a woman's voice calling his name, he stood up.

"Farewell, O ULU TULA POTO (Wise Baldhead)," said Challis, as the boy, still chewing his sweet husk, walked back to the native houses clustered under the grove of PUA trees.

Ere dusk, Nalia came home, a slenderly-built girl with big dreamy eyes, and a heavy mantle of wavy hair. A white muslin gown, fastened at the throat with a small silver brooch, was her only garment, save the folds of the navy-blue-and-white LAVA LAVA round her waist, which the European-fashioned garment covered.

Challis was lying down when she came in. Two girls who came with her carried baskets of cooked food, presents from old Jack Kelly, Challis's fellow-trader. At a sign from Nalia the girls took one of the baskets of food and went away. Then, taking off her wide-brimmed hat of FALA leaf, she sat down beside Challis and pinched his cheek.

"O lazy one! To let me walk from the house of Tiaki all alone!"

"Alone! There were two others with thee."

"Tapa Could I talk to THEM! I, a white man's wife, must not be too familiar with every girl, else they would seek to get presents from me with sweet words. Besides, could I carry home the fish and cooked fowl sent thee by old Tiaki? That would be unbecoming to me, even as it would be if thou climbed a tree for a coconut,"—and the daughter of the Tropics laughed merrily as she patted Challis on his sunburnt cheek.

Challis rose, and going to a little table, took from it the ring.

"See, Nalia, I am not lazy as thou sayest. This is thine."

The girl with an eager "AUE!" took the bauble and placed it on her finger. She made a pretty picture, standing there in the last glow of the sun as it sank into the ocean, her languorous eyes filled with a tender light.

Challis, sitting on the end of the table regarding her with half-amused interest as does a man watching a child with a toy, suddenly flushed hotly. "By God! I can't be such a fool as to begin to LOVE her in reality, but yet ... Come here, Nalia," and he drew her to him, and, turning her face up so that he might look into her eyes, he asked:

"Nalia, hast thou ever told me any lies?"

The steady depths of those dark eyes looked back into his, and she answered:

"Nay, I fear thee too much to lie. Thou mightst kill me."

"I do but ask thee some little things. It matters not to me what the answer is. Yet see that thou keepest nothing hidden from me."

The girl, with parted lips and one hand on his, waited.

"Before thou became my wife, Nalia, hadst thou any lovers?"

"Yes, two—Kapua and Tafu-le-Afi."

"And since?"

"May I choke and perish here before thee if I lie! None."

Challis, still holding her soft brown chin in his hand, asked her one more question—a question that only one of his temperament would have dared to ask a girl of the Tokelaus.

"Nalia, dost thou love me?"

"Aye, ALOFA TUMAU (everlasting love). Am I a fool? Are there not Letia, and Miriami, and Eline, the daughter of old Tiaki, ready to come to this house if I love any but thee? Therefore my love is like the suckers of the FA'E (octopus) in its strength. My mother has taught me much wisdom."

A curious feeling of satisfaction possessed the man, and next day Letia, the "show" girl of the village, visiting Challis's store to buy a tin of salmon, saw Nalia, the Lucky One, seated on a mat beneath the seaward side of the trader's house, surrounded by a billowy pile of yellow silk, diligently sewing.

"Ho, dear friend of my heart! Is that silken dress for thee? For the love of God, let me but touch it. Four dollars a fathom it be priced at. Thy husband is indeed the king of generosity. Art thou to become a mother?"

"Away, silly fool, and do thy buying and pester me not."

Challis, coming to the corner of the house, leant against a post, and something white showed in his hand. It was a letter. His letter to the woman of violet eyes, written a week ago, in the half-formed idea of sending it some day. He read it through, and then paused and looked at Nalia. She raised her head and smiled. Slowly, piece by piece, he tore it into tiny little squares, and, with a dreamy

hand-wave, threw them away. The wind held them in mid-air for a moment, and then carried the little white flecks to the beach.

"What is it?" said the bubbling voice of Letia, the Disappointed.

"Only a piece of paper that weighed as a piece of iron on my bosom. But it is gone now."

"Even so," said Letia, smelling the gaudy label on the tin of salmon in the anticipative ecstasy of a true Polynesian, "PE SE MEA FA'AGOTOIMOANA (like a thing buried deep in ocean). May God send me a white man as generous as thee—a whole tin of SAMANI for nothing! Now do I know that Nalia will bear thee a son."

And that is why Challis the Doubter has never turned up again.

"'TIS IN THE BLOOD"

We were in Manton's Hotel at Levuka-Levuka in her palmy days. There were Robertson, of the barque ROLUMAH; a fat German planter from the Yasawa Group; Harry the Canadian, a trader from the Tokelaus, and myself.

Presently a knock came to the door, and Allan, the boatswain of our brig, stood hat in hand before us. He was a stalwart half-caste of Manhiki, and, perhaps, the greatest MANAIA (Lothario) from Ponape to Fiji.

"Captain say to come aboard, please. He at the Consul's for papers—he meet you at boat," and Allan left.

"By shingo, dot's a big fellow," said Planter Oppermann.

"Ay," said Robertson, the trading skipper, "and a good man with his mauleys, too. He's the champion knocker-out in Samoa, and is a match for any Englishman in Polynesia, let alone foreigners"—with a sour glance at the German.

"Well, good-bye all," I said. "I'm sorry, Oppermann, I can't stay for another day for your wedding, but our skipper isn't to be got at anyhow."

The trading captain and Harry walked with me part of the way, and then began the usual Fiji GUP.

"Just fancy that fat-headed Dutchman going all the way to Samoa and picking on a young girl and sending her to the Sisters to get educated properly! As if any old beach-girl isn't good enough for a blessed Dutchman. Have you seen her?"

"No," I said; "Oppermann showed me her photo. Pretty girl. Says she's been three years with the Sisters in Samoa, and has got all the virtues of her white father, and none of the vices of her Samoan mammy. Told me he's spent over two thousand dollars on her already."

Robertson smiled grimly. "Ay, I don't doubt it. He's been all round Levuka cracking her up. I brought her here last week, and the Dutchman's been in a chronic state of silly ever since. She's an almighty fine girl. She's staying with the Sisters here till the marriage. By the Lord, here she is now coming along the street! Bet a dollar she's been round Vagadace way, where there are some fast Samoan women living. 'Tis in the blood, I tell you."

The future possessor of the Oppermann body and estate WAS a pretty girl. Only those who have seen fair young Polynesian half-castes—before they get married, and grow coarse, and drink beer, and smoke like a factory chimney—know how pretty.

Our boat was at the wharf, and just as we stood talking Allan sauntered up and asked me for a dollar to get a bottle of gin. Just then the German's FIANCEE reached us. Robertson introduced Harry and myself to her, and then said good-bye. She stood there in the broiling Fijian sun with a dainty sunshade over her face, looking so lovely and cool in her spotless muslin dress, and withal so innocent, that I no longer wondered at the Dutchman's "chronic state of silly."

Allan the Stalwart stood by waiting for his dollar. The girl laughed joyously when Harry the Canadian said he would be at the wedding and have a high time, and held out her soft little hand as he bade her adieu and strolled off for another drink.

The moment Harry had gone Allan was a new man. Pulling off his straw hat, he saluted her in Samoan, and then opened fire.

"There are many TEINE LALELEI (beautiful girls) in the world, but there is none so beautiful as thou. Only truth do I speak, for I have been to all countries of the world. Ask him who is here—our supercargo—if I lie. O maid with the teeth of pearl and face like FETUAO (the morning star), my stomach is drying up with the fire of love."

The sunshade came a little lower, and the fingers played nervously with the ivory handle. I leant against a coconut tree and listened.

"Thy name is Vaega. See that! How do I know? Aha, how do I? Because, for two years or more, whenever I passed by the stone wall of the Sisters' dwelling in Matafele, I climbed up and watched thee, O Star of the Morning, and I heard the other girls call thee Vaega. Oho! and some night I meant to steal thee away."

(The rascal! He told me two days afterwards that the only time he ever climbed the Mission wall was to steal mangoes.)

The sunshade was tilted back, and displayed two big, black eyes, luminous with admiring wonder.

"And so thou hast left Samoa to come here to be devoured by this fat hog of a Dutchman! Dost thou not know, O foolish, lovely one, that she who mates with a SIAMANI (German) grows old in quite a little time, and thy face, which is now smooth and fair, will be coarse as the rind of a half-ripe bread-fruit, because of the foul food these swine of Germans eat?"

"Allan," I called, "here's the captain!"

There was a quick clasp of hands as the Stalwart One and the Maid hurriedly spoke again, this time in a whisper, and then the white muslin floated away out of sight.

The captain was what he called "no' so dry"—viz. half-seas over, and very jolly. He told Allan he could have an hour to himself to buy what he wanted, and then told me that the captain of a steam collier had promised to give us a tug out at daylight. "I'm right for the wedding-feast after all," I thought.

But the wedding never came off. That night Oppermann, in a frantic state, was tearing round Levuka hunting for his love, who had disappeared. At daylight, as the collier steamed ahead and tautened our tow-line, we could see the parties of searchers with torches scouring the beach. Our native sailors said they had heard a scream about ten at night and seen the sharks splashing, and the white liars of Levuka shook their heads and looked solemn as they told tales of monster sharks with eight-foot jaws always cruising close in to the shore at night.

Three days afterwards Allan came to me with stolid face and asked for a bottle of wine, as Vaega was very sea-sick. I gave him the wine, and threatened to tell the captain. He laughed, and said he would fight any man, captain or no captain, who meddled with him. And, as a matter of fact, he felt safe—the skipper valued him too much to bully him over the mere stealing of a woman. So the limp and sea-sick Vaega was carried up out of the sweating foc'sle and given a cabin berth, and Allan planked down two twenty-dollar pieces for her passage to the Union Group. When she got better she sang rowdy songs, and laughed all day, and made fun of the holy Sisters. And one day Allan beat her with a deal board because she sat down on a band-box in the trade-room and ruined a hat belonging to a swell official's wife in Apia. And she liked him all the better for it.

The fair Vaega was Mrs Allan for just six months, when his erratic fancy was captivated by the daughter of Mauga, the chief of Tutuila, and an elopement resulted to the mountains. The subsequent and inevitable parting made Samoa an undesirable place of residence for Allan, who shipped as boatsteerer in the NIGER of New Bedford. As for Vaega, she drifted back to Apia, and there, right under the shadow of the Mission Church, she flaunted her beauty. The last time I saw her was in Charley the Russian's saloon, when she showed me a letter. It was from the bereaved Oppermann, asking her to come back and marry him.

"Are you going?" I said.

"E PULE LE ATUA (if God so wills), but he only sent me twenty dollars, and that isn't half enough. However, there's an American man-of-war coming next week, and these other girls will see then. I'll make the PAPALAGI [foreign] officers shell out. TO FA, ALII [Good-bye]."

THE REVENGE OF MACY O'SHEA

A Story Of The Marquesas

I

Tikena the Clubfooted guided me to an open spot in the jungle-growth, and, sitting down on the butt of a twisted TOA, indicated by a sweep of his tattooed arm the lower course of what had once been the White Man's dwelling.

"Like unto himself was this, his house," he said, puffing a dirty clay pipe, "square-built and strong. And the walls were of great blocks made of PANISINA—of coral and lime and sand mixed together; and around each centre-post—posts that to lift one took the strength of fifty men—was wound two thousand fathoms of thin plaited cinnet, stained red and black. APA! he was a great man here in these MOTU (islands), although he fled from prison in your land; and when he stepped on the beach the marks of the iron bands that had once been round his ankles were yet red to the sight. There be none such as he in these days. But he is now in Hell."

This was the long-deferred funeral oration of Macy O'Shea, sometime member of the chain-gang of Port Arthur, in Van Dieman's Land, and subsequently runaway convict, beachcomber, cutter-off of whaleships, and Gentleman of Leisure in Eastern Polynesia. And of his many known crimes the deed done in this isolated spot was the darkest of all. Judge of it yourself.

The arrowy shafts of sunrise had scarce pierced the deep gloom of the silent forest ere the village woke to life. Right beside the thatch-covered dwelling of Macy O'Shea, now a man of might, there towers a stately TAMANU tree; and, as the first faint murmur of women's voices arises from the native huts, there is a responsive twittering and cooing in the thickly-leaved branches, and further back in the forest the heavy, booming note of the red-crested pigeon sounds forth like the beat of a muffled drum.

With slow, languid step, Sera, the wife of Macy O'Shea, comes to the open door and looks out upon the placid lagoon, now just rippling beneath the first breath of the trade-wind, and longs for courage to go out there—there to the point of the reef—and spring over among the sharks. The girl—she is hardly yet a woman—shudders a moment and passes her white hand before her eyes, and then, with a sudden gust of passion, the hand clenches. "I would kill him—kill him, if there was but a ship here in which I could get away! I would sell myself over and over again to the worst whaler's crew that ever sailed the Pacific if it would bring me freedom from this cruel, cold-blooded devil!"

A heavy tread on the matted floor of the inner room and her face pales to the hue of death. But Macy O'Shea is somewhat shy of his two years' wife this morning, and she hears the heavy steps recede as he walks over to his oil-shed. A flock of GOGO cast their shadow over the lagoon as they fly westward, and the woman's eyes follow them—"Kill him, yes. I am afraid to die, but not to kill. And I am a stranger here, and if I ran a knife into his fat throat, these natives would make me work in the taro-fields, unless one wanted me for himself." Then the heavy step returns, and she slowly faces round to the blood-shot eyes and drink-distorted face of the man she hates, and raises one hand to her lips to hide a blue and swollen bruise.

The man throws his short, square-set figure on a rough native sofa, and, passing one brawny hand meditatively over his stubbly chin, says, in a voice like the snarl of a hungry wolf: "Here, I say, Sera, slew round; I want to talk to you, my beauty."

The pale, set face flushed and paled again. "What is it, Macy O'Shea?"

"Ho, ho, 'Macy O'Shea,' is it? Well, just this. Don't be a fool. I was a bit put about last night, else I wouldn't have been so quick with my fist. Cut your lip, I see. Well, you must forget it; any way, it's the first time I ever touched you. But you ought to know by now that I am not a man to be trifled with; no man, let alone a woman, is going to set a course for Macy O'Shea to steer by. And, to come to the point at once, I want you to understand that Carl Ristow's daughter is coming here. I want her, and that's all about it."

The woman laughed scornfully. "Yes, I know. That was why"—she pointed to her lips. "Have you no shame? I know you have no pity. But listen. I swear to you by the Mother of Christ that I will kill her—kill you, if you do this."

O'Shea's cruel mouth twitched and his jaws set, then he uttered a hoarse laugh. "By God! Has it taken you two years to get jealous?"

A deadly hate gleamed in the dark, passionate eyes. "Jealous, Mother of God! jealous of a drunken, licentious wretch such as you! I hate you—hate you! If I had courage enough I would poison myself to be free from you."

O'Shea's eyes emitted a dull sparkle. "I wish you would, damn you! Yet you are game enough, you say, to kill me—and Malia?"

"Yes. But not for love of you, but because of the white blood in me. I can't—I won't be degraded by you bringing another woman here."

"'Por Dios,' as your dad used to say before the devil took his soul, we'll see about that, my beauty. I suppose because your father was a d-d garlic-eating, ear-ringed Dago, and your mother a come-by-chance Tahiti half-caste, you think he was as good as me."

"As good as you, O bloody-handed dog of an English convict. He was a man, and the only wrong he ever did was to let me become wife to a devil like you."

The cruel eyes were close to hers now, and the rough, brawny hands gripped her wrists. "You spiteful Portuguese quarter-bred —! Call me a convict again, and I'll twist your neck like a fowl's. You she-devil! I'd have made things easy for you—but I won't now. Do you hear?" and the grip tightened. "Ristow's girl will be here to-morrow, and if you don't knuckle down to her it'll be a case of 'Vamos' for you—you can go and get a husband among the natives," and he flung her aside and went to the god that ran him closest for his soul, next to women—his rum-bottle.

O'Shea kept his word, for two days later Malia, the half-caste daughter of Ristow, the trader at Ahunui, stepped from out her father's whaleboat in front of O'Shea's house. The transaction was a perfectly legitimate one, and Malia did not allow any inconvenient feeling of modesty to interfere with such a lucrative arrangement as this, whereby her father became possessed of a tun of oil and a bag of Chilian dollars, and she of much finery. In those days missionaries had not made much headway, and gentlemen like Messrs Ristow and O'Shea took all the wind out of the Gospel drum.

And so Malia, dressed as a native girl, with painted cheeks and bare bosom, walked demurely up from the boat to the purchaser of her sixteen-years'-old beauty, who, with arms folded across his broad chest, stood in the middle of the path that led from the beach to his door. And within, with set teeth and a knife in the bosom of her blouse bodice, Sera panted with the lust of Hate and Revenge.

The bulky form of O'Shea darkened the door-way. "Sera," he called in English, with a mocking, insulting inflection in his voice, "come here and welcome my new wife!"

Sera came, walking slowly, with a smile on her lips, and, holding out her left hand to Malia, said in the native language, "Welcome!"

"Why," said O'Shea, with mocking jocularly, "that's a left-handed welcome, Sera."

"Aye," said the girl with the White Man's blood, "my right hand is for this"—and the knife sank home into Malia's yellow bosom. "A cold bosom for you to-night, Macy O'Shea," she laughed, as the value of a tun of oil and a bag of Chilian dollars gasped out its life upon the matted floor.

II

The native drum was beating. As the blood-quickenings boom reverberated through the village, the natives came out from their huts and gathered around the House of the Old Men, where, with bound hands and feet, Sera, the White Man's wife, sat, with her back to one of the centre-posts. And opposite her, sitting like a native on a mat of KAPAU, was the burly figure of O'Shea, with the demon of disappointed passion eating away his reason, and a mist of blood swimming before his eyes.

The people all detested her, especially the soft-voiced, slender-framed women. In that one thing savages resemble Christians—the deadly hatred with which some women hate those of their sex whom they know to be better and more pure than themselves. So the matter was decided quickly. Mesi—so they called O'Shea—should have justice. If he thought death, let it be death for this woman who had let out the blood of his new wife. Only one man, Loloku the Boar Hunter, raised his voice for her, because Sera had cured him of a bad wound when his leg had been torn open by the tusk of a wild boar. But the dull glare from the eyes of O'Shea fell on him, and he said no more. Then at a sign from the old men the people rose from the mats, and two unbound the cords of AFA from the girl, and led her out into the square, and looked at O'Shea.

"Take her to the boat," he said.

Ristow's boat had been hauled up, turned over, and covered with the rough mats called KAPAU to keep off the heat of the sun. With staggering feet, but undaunted heart, the girl Sera was led down. Only once she turned her head and looked back. Perhaps Loloku would try again. Then, as they came to the boat, a young girl, at a sign from O'Shea, took off the loose blouse, and they placed her, face downwards, across the bilge of the boat, and two pair of small, eager, brown hands each seized one of hers and dragged the white, rounded arms well over the keel of the boat. O'Shea walked round to that side, drawing through his hands the long, heavy, and serrated tail of the FAI—the gigantic stinging-ray of Oceana. He would have liked to wield it himself, but then he would have missed part of his revenge—he could not have seen her face. So he gave it to a native, and watched, with the smile of a fiend, the white back turn black and then into bloody red as it was cut to pieces with the tail of the FAI.

The sight of the inanimate thing that had given no sign of its agony beyond the shudderings and twitchings of torn and mutilated flesh was, perhaps, disappointing to the tiger who stood and watched the dark stream that flowed down on both sides of the boat. Loloku touched his arm—"Mesi, stay thy hand. She is dead else."

"Ah," said O'Shea, "that would be a pity; for with one hand shall she live to plant taro."

And, hatchet in hand, he walked in between the two brown women who held her hands. They moved aside and let go. Then O'Shea swung his arm; the blade of the hatchet struck into the planking, and the right hand of Sera fell on the sand.

A man put his arms around her, and lifted her off the boat. He placed his hand on the blood-stained bosom and looked at Macy O'Shea.

"E MATE! [Dead!]" he said.

THE RANGERS OF THE TIA KAU

Between Nanomea and Nanomaga—two of the Ellice Group—but within a few miles of the latter, is an extensive submerged shoal, on the charts called the Grand Cocal Reef, but by the people of the two islands known as Tia Kau (The Reef). On the shallowest part there are from four to ten fathoms of water, and here in heavy weather the sea breaks. The British cruiser BASILISK, about 1870, sought for the reef, but reported it as non-existent. Yet the Tia Kati is well known to many a Yankee whaler and trading schooner, and is a favourite fishing-ground of the people of Nanomaga—when the sharks give them a chance.

One night Atupa, Chief of Nanomaga, caused a huge fire to be lit on the beach as a signal to the people of Nanomea that a MALAGA, or party of voyagers, was coming over. Both islands are low—not more than fifteen feet above sea-level—and are distant from one another about thirty-eight miles. The following night the reflection of the answering fire on Nanomea was seen, and Atupa prepared to send away his people in seven canoes. They would start at sundown, so as to avoid paddling in the heat (the Nanomagens have no sailing canoes), and be guided to Nanomea, which they expected to reach early in the morning, by the far distant glare of the great fires of coconut and pandanus leaves kindled at intervals of a few hours. About seventy people were to go, and all that day the little village busied itself in preparing for the Nanomeans gifts of foods—cooked PURAKA, fowls, pigs, and flying-fish.

Atupa, the heathen chief, was troubled in his mind in those days of August 1872. The JOHN WILLIAMS had touched at the island and landed a Samoan missionary, who had pressed him to accept Christianity. Atupa, dreading a disturbing element in his little community, had, at first, declined; but the ship had come again, and the chief having consented to try the new religion, a teacher landed. But since then he and his sub-chiefs had consulted the oracle, and had been told that the shades of Maumau Tahori and Foilagi, their deified ancestors, had answered that the new religion was unacceptable to them, and that the Samoan teacher must be killed or sent away. And for this was Atupa sending off some of his people to Nanomea with gifts of goodwill to the chiefs to beseech them to consult their oracles also, so that the two islands might take concerted action against this new foreign god, whose priests said that all men were equal, that all were bad, and He and His Son alone good.

The night was calm when the seven canoes set out. Forty men and thirty women and children were in the party, and the craft were too deeply laden for any but the smoothest sea. On the AMA (outrigger) of each canoe were the baskets of food and bundles of mats for their hosts, and seated on these were the children, while the women sat with the men and helped them to paddle. Two hours' quick paddling brought them to the shoal-water of Tia Kau, and at the same moment they saw to the N.W. the sky-glare of the first guiding fire.

It was then that the people in the first canoe, wherein was Palu, the daughter of Atupa, called out to those behind to prepare their ASU (balers), as a heavy squall was coming down from the eastward. Then Laheu, an old warrior in another canoe, cried out that they should return on their track a little and get into deep water; "for," said he, "if we swamp, away from Tia Kau, it is but a little thing, but here—" and he clasped his hands rapidly together and then tore them apart. They knew what he meant—the sharks that, at night-time forsaking the deep waters, patrolled in droves of thousands the shallow waters of the reef to devour the turtle and the schools of TAFU ULI and other fish. In quick, alarmed silence the people headed back, but even then the first fierce squall struck them, and some of the frail canoes began to fill at once. "I MATAGI! I MATAGI! (head to the wind)" a man called out; "head to the wind, or we perish! 'Tis but a puff and it is gone."

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