



Albert Dorrington

# TESS

*and other stories*

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An original collection, produced and Edited by Terry Walker,  
January 2024, from stories published in newspapers and magazines.

This volume contains 47 stories amounting to 157,000 words

## Albert Dorrington

1874 - 1953



London-born Albert Dorrington adventured to Australia at about the age of 16, and held numerous jobs, travelling extensively as far north as the Torres Strait and the islands. He began writing for publication in the mid-1890s, mostly in the *Bulletin*. In 1907 he and his family moved to the UK where his literary career flourished. He produced a number of novels and many short stories, most of which are set in the more exotic parts of north Australia and the Islands.

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## 1: The Baltic Man

*Clipper* (Hobart, Tas) 17 June 1905

*[The Battle of Tsushima (1905) is the inspiration for this story--Ed.]*

HE WAS sitting in the bar with 'Shling' Olsen. There had been a subscription, and Carl Svedensdorp, who owns three schooners and a hulk, bought him some slop-made clothes and assisted him personally to put them on.

His hair was almost white, and he stared curiously at the gang of Finnish sailors in the opposite corner. A mastiff lay in the doorway; he spoke to it softly, and the dog licked his hand. Then he took a glass of rum, and, with a sudden movement, seemed to fling it into his throat. He raised his finger to the ceiling cautiously.

'Poolice?' he said, gently. The Finns looked annoyed. A Northern word— it was almost a snarl— was flung at him. He looked pleased and sorry. The Norwegian captain gave him some tobacco. He had been in the U.S., but that didn't concern his story. He addressed himself in strict confidence to the Norwegian.

'My name : Nicholas Petroff. Six feet two. Russ. I want eh job. Torpedo factory, concussion parts maker, spinner of steel en' brass en' copper. My mother— my father, Russ. Good farm on the Volga. I go to de Black Sea factories. But de Government shove me aboard a collier bound for Madagascar en' de Baltic Fleet. En' de Fleet snapped me up ' Eh, my hair is white! Dey gave me a Cronstadt gun en' said it was my brother. I look it over en' clean it. En' de lice crawl over me ven I sight for aim, en' cause bad shootin'. Bad for God en' the Tsar. Goot for the Jap en' his Mikada.

'I say: "Bite hard, my brothers; be white en brave. We shall be hammered to death. Die because you cannot live."

'Eh, id vos sorrowful to see de young boys on board, soft as milk, quiet, dumb— de children ob de Steppes, de Volga farms, de Yenesei, de Ural mountain children, de goat herds, de keepers of kine, shepherds. Last year dey plough de fields; dis year dey are flung at a quick firer.

'Ve vas bound anyveres. De Japs was to meet us at de end ob de world, at de South Pole, in de Sea of India. De fleet vas a rabble. Here vas Ivan Skolski, a peasant, in charge ob a torpedo. Here was a Neva blacksmith swingin' on de searchlight. We vas a pack of fools, hunted from place to place. We haf no right anyveres. No right to de sun or moon. Dey belong to de Jap already. If we stop in some quiet bay to rest our sick, thousands of miles from de seat ob war, Europe en' England vas ablasse.

' "Turn dem out, turn, de blackguards, out." De Englishman could not eat his food ven he hear we take shelter.

'Hunted dogs, hunted beasts, no place for our sick, even in de African bays. Eferyone hates the . Tsar. Eh, Christs, I hate him, too. But I cry in de nide ven I tink ob de boys penned in de Baltic hulks.

'Ve leave Madagascar, where de black leper come aboard to sell us fruit. Ve straggle across de ocean. Ve struggle mit de big Cronstadt guns ven de cyclone almost sent us ober. Der vas fightin' mit knives between decks— for a bit ob meat, for vodki, or for de name ob a harlot. En' der officers yap, der cap'n yap. But troo de ship goes a cry like a bitch in an empty hold.

'En de talk ob de Jap! One man say dot de Jap vas de size ob your arm. Anoder say dot Nippon haf a yellow god dot live under the sea, en' tear de belly out ob ships. De officer warns us dot de Jap haf no brain, only a skull mit a camera inside.

'One day in de middle ob hell der *Kniaz Suvaroff* signal us, en' Rozhdjestvenski comes aboard. He vas white, en' his face vas like a corpse as he lean against de rail.

' "Dis man vill be crucified," said a Siberian gunner to me. "Do you nod see id in his face? Dey vill drive nails into his hands en' feet. A Mongol man vill gif him vinegar on a sponge. Eh, Christs," said de Siberian, an' ve shall go up der hill mit him."

Rozhdjestvenski looked at de ship. Id vas like a sheep-yard. Blood en' sweat could nod make id clean. You could nod keep away de vodki. De Admiral lifted his hands. He say no word ; he vas dumb. But his hands go up as if he would cry out. "Look at de crucifixion," says de Siberian.

'We crawl east to Annam. "De Japs vill get us here," said de cowards. De nide vas dark an' squally. Some trade boats 'en colliers i come up to us. Dey tell us dat the Jap haf a sausage-machine to put us in. Togo vas round the corner mit a hundred battleships; his gunners vere de finest in de world.

' "Can dey shoot?"

' "Sacre ! Hit needles mit a 12 inch."

' "Vos dey friken ob us goot mans?"

' "Friken? Yah, dam! You vas a joke, a menagerie. Good nide, sausages!"

'Dot nide de drums beat to quarters. "Jap torpedoes under bows!" shouts officer. De ammunition hoist drops shells ober de deck. De Siberian gunner vas first to knock open his breech, en' den he try to slam in a big shell, but someding in de breech push back de shell. De oder guns vas de same ; someding inside vas pushin' back de shells. De surtch-lights went out.

'I swear id vas true. De Jap spies haf crawled indo de gun breech en' dey vud nod let de shell go in. "Qvick!" says de Siberian ; he ran at de gun,

slammed the shell home, en' locked de breech. When be fire his gun de shell trundle out mit a scream. Der vas spies in all de guns, but dey go out in front ob de shells.

'Ven you haf a small enemy like de Jap it vas wise to look in de jug efery time you haf a drink.

'I got away at Annam in a coal basket. I den ship to Shangai en' Brisbane.

'Ven a Russian like Rozhdjestvenski lifts up his hands it vas time to get into a coal-basket.'

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## 2: General Bill

*Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 25 Oct 1905*

SHE WAS a thievish-looking schooner, and her skipper, Jan Petersen, was a fat, silent man— also, an inveterate sea-vagabond and harbour pirate. The mate was a Finn, and the crew answered to the names of Jacob Ollsen and Carl Svederborg. The supercargo was a bull-dog named Bill.

Bill slept on deck with nose and ears towards the gang-plank. When a sailor brought cargo or luggage aboard Bill was always asleep. But if any unauthorised person attempted to leave the schooner, carrying a bundle or package, Bill arose from his dreams and made noises in his throat, until the captain ran up and explained that the departing visitor was a friend of the family, and in no way connected with the police.

Considered merely as a dog, Bill was of no account whatever. There were much better looking animals to be had for a plug of tobacco or a sheath-knife. Bill was a sailor-man's dog; he knew every line and halyard aboard a schooner-rigged vessel. He knew the cook who put pickles and pepper in the soup, and the cook knew what Bill thought of a scalded nose.

Most cooks made themselves at home when they joined the schooner, starting by stroking the Finn's big red cat. Nine cooks out of ten worked off stale sea-going jokes on Bill, such as wrapping up an ounce of cayenne in a pound of steak, and heaving it dreamfully in the direction of Bill's mouth.

The skipper, Jan Petersen, carried on most of his trade inside Sydney Harbour. His dingy plied by night along the jetties. He borrowed skiffs and sailing boats, and repainted them. Odd portions of cargo, coils of rope, hawsers, and tarpaulin were lifted from pier ends and wharfs and sold to the Chinese dealers who buy fungi and ships' bolts and copper without questions.

For a week past the schooner had been under police surveillance. A cartload of illicit whisky had been captured near Bondi, and it was supposed that captain Jan Petersen had brought it in ballast from one of the bush stills on the North Coast. At present Jan was not to be found. The schooner creaked and whined at her moorings as though trying to explain to the detective concealed under the pier that she was a thoroughly respectable craft with a virgin horror of ill-doing.

Detective Lanigan had to help him an experienced waterside man, by the name of Dick McGinty. Dick lay on his stomach under the wharf and watched unceasingly. Lanigan squatted in the shadow of a big bond store, ready to grapple with the elusive Jan Petersen the moment he crossed the wharf.

'E can't sail without his schooner,' said the congested voice of McGinty. 'E's dead sure to come aboard to-night. You can have him stoo'd, biled, or fried once he puts foot on this wharf.'

The wharf was quite deserted. Afar off the coloured lights of the big ferry steamers flashed and rippled across the harbour. Lanigan smiled and glanced at his watch. Nothing happened.

A white plug-shaped object lying near the schooner's gangway caught his eye. Walking over, the detective saw a bulldog curled up with its nose towards the city.

'It's Dutchy's dog,' whispered M'Ginty. 'Bill they call him. Good sort of a dog in 'is way, but he's always playin' off some little game in the interests of the schooner. Never takes a spell like other pups. Treat him like a hot fire bar, Lanigan, an' he won't stick to your 'and.'

'Hulloa, Bill!' The detective snapped his fingers, and whistled cheerfully. Bill pricked his left ear slightly, but did not move.

'Where's the cap'n, Bill?' whispered Lanigan. 'Sool him out, Bill. Good old dog!'

Bill sat up suddenly and wagged his tail.

'Be careful of him,' advised M'Ginty under the wharf. 'E's been bred an' born among crimps. 'E'd sell his own father to keep that thievin' Dutchy outer gaol.'

The detective stooped and patted Bill's head. 'Seems to me that he's keeping watch over something, Dick. I fancy Dutchy must be close at hand.'

'Keep yer eye on the dog, Lanny, koller 'im if 'e moves.'

Bill looked into the detective's face suddenly, and then trotted across the road towards the Salvation Army barracks.

Lanigan chuckled, 'By jove, we're on a scent; you'd better come too, Dick,' he shouted.

Both men followed until the dog arrived at the barracks entrance. A crowd of sailors and others were singing inside. Bill sniffed on the steps, while McGinty ran his eye over the line of heads and backs in front of him.

'That fat shellback ain't 'im,' he said, contemptuously. 'No, he ain't here. I believe the dog is misinformed.'

The two men turned into the street dejectedly. Pausing with his face in the air, Bill breathed hard on the steps of the barracks. Then changing his mind swiftly, he ran across the street. The men followed cautiously.

'By jove!' said Lanigan, 'the dog knows something. I've seen lots of dogs looking for their owners on Saturday nights.'

Bill lingered near the Ship Inn, as though listening for the sound of a well-known voice, but after a while he started off again. He stayed a moment at the

door of a clothes-dealer. Then he ran into a pawn shop and made inquiring sounds with his front paws against the counter.

'Hallo, Beela! the captain not here?'

The pawnbroker's teeth flashed in the shadow of the iron safe. Bill looked depressed, and retreated. He made his way towards a German boarding-house. A group of Baltic men lounged at the entrance.

'Hi yah, Beel, vas dot you, Beel!'

Bill ran among them, his tail moving like a whip lash. Then after pretending to bite a big Norwegian, he dashed inside the boarding-house.

A woman's loud voice broke out in welcome. 'Vy, Beel, vere haf you peen dis long viles, eh? Someone tell me dot Cap'n Petersen sold you to a Chinaman.'

Bill emerged with a look of disgust in his eyes, and paused in the middle of the street.

'Doing his dogged best,' said detective Lanigan quietly. 'A dog like that would be invaluable to me at times.'

'E travels alright,' grinned the assistant. 'Why, what's 'e up to now?' Bill was standing quite still, a lone and sorrowful look in his eyes, as though trying to recall some long-forgotten place once frequented by Captain Petersen. Then, without a glance at his two followers, he started at a fast gait down the street.

'We'd better follow,' cried Lanigan. 'He's on the right track this time.'

'Never put me money on dogs,' grumbled McGinty; 'especially when they've got ears same shape as Bill's. I never see a dog with such ears; he'd bark if a fly walked across the street.'

'Hurry on,' panted the detective, 'or we'll lose him in the crowd.'

Bill, smitten with a sudden inspiration, swung round again towards the quay, past the Sailors' Home and the German wharf, and halted in front of a low-roofed building that showed a faint glimmer of light through a small window.

'The morgue!' Detective Lanigan wiped his brow. 'This dog is getting on my nerves.' He regarded Bill incredulously.

The door of the morgue was open, but the absence of anything living or dead proved that the dog had failed again. An air of dejection and weariness came over Bill; it seemed as though he wanted to lie down and have done with the business. Both men were now certain that the dog was in the habit of rounding up Captain Petersen whenever the schooner was about to sail.

Lanigan patted Bill's heaving sides.

'Good old chap. Where is he, eh? We'll give him 12 months' hard labour when we do find him,' said the detective sweetly.

'Don't let the dog 'ear you say that,' whispered McGinty.

Bill shook himself lazily, and ambled down the street. The unemployed dogs idling in the road gave him a wide berth as he ran past. They knew him for a professional fighter, who slammed himself at anything on four legs, big, little, black or brindled.

'Talk about fox an' 'ounds,' gasped McGinty. 'You could light a theatre with this dog's sagacity. If you showed 'im a pipe of tobaccer, he'd borrar a match for yer.'

It seemed to both men as though Bill would never stop running. McGinty suggested hiring a hansom, and following him more leisurely, but the detective thought otherwise. He pointed out that Bill might vanish down a lane before they could alight from a cab.

The dog halted suddenly on the outskirts of the city, then ran towards an iron-railed house that was almost hidden from the road by closely-planted trees. A Stygian gloom enveloped the building. There was no sound of life or laughter about its darkened windows. Bill gazed steadily at McGinty, then walked to the corner of the lane, and was gone in a flash.

'Sold, by jingo!' Detective Lanigan almost leaped into the lane, but there was no sign of Bill.

'How 'ave we been sold,' inquired McGinty?' There was a certain innocence in the question that turned Lanigan's humour to gall. 'That dog has been fooling the pair of us all night! He's brought and left us up against the Blind Asylum, the place for people without eyes— like you and me.' The detective fidgeted uneasily at his watch chain. 'Someone must have shown Bill the trick. It's clever in it's way.'

'Can't see where the cleverness comes in.' complained the tired McGinty.

Detective Lanigan shrugged his shoulders, and turned towards the city.

'Guess you'd think it clever if anyone told you that a two-and-sixpenny dog had pulled the smartest detective in Sydney from his post of observation, and rushed him against the back wall of a blind asylum. If that isn't clever I'll buy you a dog that can play the piano.'

McGinty suddenly saw the full strength of Bill's manoeuvring, and—

'The 'orrible brute,' he gasped. 'Come along,' growled Lanigan.

They hurried back to the wharf, only to find that the schooner had slipped away in the darkness with Captain Petersen on board.

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### 3: The Fall Of The City

*Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 2 May 1906*

SEA AND SKY were at rest. A 40-ton fore-and-aft rigged schooner creaked at her moorings beyond the old Fort stairs. Heveril's wide verandahed cottage snuggled in the shadow of Sutro heights. Adele Heveril sat in a low wicker chair, her brooding eyes turning at intervals to her husband.

'Why do you wish me to return to Sydney alone, Phillip? Surely it would be better for me to wait another three months, and go with you.'

There was a certain fear in her voice, that one hears in frightened children. He looked at his watch, half sullenly, and pushed aside the morning paper, as though the scare-headings annoyed him.

'I am sick of the everlasting dollar, Adele, and the senseless hustle that surrounds a modern business man.'

'Yesterday you were enthusiastic about your chances here, Phillip. Everything American was good. Why do you want to leave San Francisco?'

'Don't press me too, far, Adele. I'm bothered over one or two matters. Something— and the devil has gone wrong.'

'Money matters, Phillip?' She looked into his nerve-racked face, and then gently, very gently caught his arm. 'Phillip!'

'Hush, dear.'

'But, I can guess, oh I can guess.' she flung herself sobbing into a chair. It was the short-voiced pitiful weeping that comes at times from strong, trustful women.

He watched her half amazed, while the blood leaped from his heart, and the man in him cried coward again and again. She knew in a desultory way that he gambled a little on 'change. He had private little speculations in wheat that were unknown to his employers. Other business men in San Francisco were doing the same thing, but it occurred to her at times that his moderate income would never permit of rash ventures.

He was employed as an accountant in the wholesale house of Von Shrader and Keys. It was through her father that he had obtained his position. She was Australian-born, and had been married to the young Californian only a year before in Sydney. He had always felt that California offered more scope for his energies than the more prosaic New South Wales, where he had lived several years. So he returned there.

He sat like an image in the chair; his dry lips making no sound. He seemed to be waiting for a voice to arouse him. It was almost dark; through the slow heat of the surf below she heard the distant clamour of the city. Lights sprang

from point to point; lamps and electric globes flashed and winked through the stiff-crested palms.

'Adele, I have been unlucky. Whatever I touch turns to failure and disaster. I have ventured and lost.'

'Von Shrader's money, Phillip?'

'Yes, Adele, Von Shrader's money.'

A silence followed, sharp and bitter; the silence that comes for a moment between an honest woman and a gambler.

'Can you make it good, Phillip?'

'Yes, if I had time; but—' he stood up half savagely, like a man about to wring his hands.

Again the silence. The woman's head dropped a little, her inert hands rested lifelessly against a bowl of jonquils on the wicker table. Through the dull roar of the distant city she almost heard the sharp-voiced newsboys calling out the particulars of her husband's guilt. 'What are you going to do?'

'Fight on. I'm playing with the last 500 dollars this week. I will take no more. If that fails—'

He glanced at her, and his lips, grew white; a look of premature age crept into his eyes.

'How shall we face it, Phillip?'

'Don't press me into the abyss, Adele. The devil only gets young men half way. If the Fates would give me one chance, I'd be honest for aye. Do you believe me, Adele?'

'Yes.' She held him tightly for a moment. The despair in her face vanished as she kissed him.

'Other men are playing with money that does not belong to them, and I have been trapped by the success of others,' he whispered. 'I want to pull out, dear.'

Adele Heveril could not sleep that night. She thought of her home in Sydney, and of the bright years when Phillip had loved her in his boyish way, when a drive along the South Head-road with her meant more than wheat combinations and reckless finance.

Phillip Heveril was like a man sliding on a thin crust; the slightest mistake meant oblivion and gave. The firm of Von Shrader and Keys trusted him implicitly. He had come to them with the highest testimonials. He had also introduced an acquired breezy atmosphere of Australian field and sky. A day or two later, he met Von Shrader, the head of the firm, while passing from an outer room into the elevator.

'Good morning, Heveril!' The old man nodded pleasantly to his young accountant. Then he stared at him keenly through his gold rimmed pince-nez.

'Look a bit pale, young man,' he said, kindly. 'Don't let things worry too much. Keep your health, and ease down a trifle when the grit begins to cut.'

Later in the day, Von Shrader popped into the accountant's room incidentally.

'By the way, Heveril, you are a married man. Better take a month's holiday, I fancy.'

The blood leaped to Heveril's face. The ruler in his hand came down almost sharply on the desk.

'Thank you, sir, but I would really prefer to wait another week or so. Even married men are not always prepared for a holiday,' he said, with a light laugh.

'Don't let a cheque stand in the way, Heveril.' Von Shrader smiled pleasantly, and looked up at the sunlit windows. 'Just hand over your books and keys to young Kenneth Martin, and we'll fix you up for a spell. You want it, my boy. I'll lend you that little Panhard car of mine, eh? Take a run round, the orchards at San Jose.'

Heveril returned home that evening with a sick, frosty feeling at his heart. He was practically forced by the kindly Von Shrader to take a holiday. In his absence young Kenneth Martin, a shrewd ambitious Californian, would put his finger on his defalcations in the first few days.

The night came up clear, with here and there a streamer of cloud to heighten the beauty of the starlit hay.

'Let us dine at Vaurien's, Adele. Put on your cloak,' he said abruptly. 'One good night before the fall, eh, my girl? A little wine and music. What does it matter?'

'You are flushed and feverish Philip. Have they found?'

'Almost. I'm invited to take a months holiday.'

He stood up and stretched himself wearily. 'A holiday,' he continued, 'with a large white gaol at the end.'

He caught her as she swooned across the verandah floor.

'Adele, forgive me.'

The despair in her almost lifeless face struck him cold and dumb. The night air seemed to pinch his blood. Through the long hours of midnight came the sound of music across the bay, harp and violin, and human voices singing. The city never seemed to sleep or doze. It still throbbed in the still hours before the dawn. A group of Dago fishermen sang lustily as they tramped with their nets across the beach. In the distance many lights still shone. The slow procession of the stars warned him that night had gone and day stood on the threshold of the East. Adele was tossing on the couch. She looked up at his almost livid face.

'Philip, why don't you rest a little?'

'I intend to go for an early swim,' he answered hoarsely. 'It may brighten me a bit.'

She sank back among the pillows; he drew a revolver from a valise, and stole from the room.

A cold dawn wind came from heights of Sutro. Beyond in the hollow of the bay, the stars were paling before the coming sun. In the East lay the city, not yet awakened. A sudden white mist rolled in from the sea blotting out headland and fort. Here and there in the breaking sky a few crystal streaks heralded the dawn. One lone idea dominated Heveril's mind— self extinction; it stood above cities and the splendour of dawn skies, it pushed aside the love he bore his young wife.

His hand closed over the butt of the revolver in his pocket; a dull sick taste clung to the roof of his mouth. He glanced sharply at the sky; it was past the hour when men and beasts are afraid; and he turned towards the old piazza road, that led to the beach.

With the sound of the surf in his ears he swung round suddenly, as though an animal were shaking the earth beneath his feet. A vertigo seized him, as though the earth had taken an upward leap in space. A reeling madness was in the air; shoreline and cliff quivered as if the hands of a Titan were rending them asunder. Philip spun round like a man flung from a great height.

A silence followed, then he heard the thunder of falling masonry, the smashing of roofs and windows in the distance. A parapet rocked and slid with a roar across his path; the dust choked and blinded him. Staggering down the road he beheld an automobile rushing towards him.

'Stop! stop!' A leap took him into the centre of the road; but the chauffeur trumpeted for him to stand aside.

'Halt!' Heveril's revolver jumped wickedly into line with the chauffeur's face. The motor seemed to belch impatiently, then drew up, throbbing like a human thing on the hillside.

'Tell me,' cried Heveril, steadily, 'what has happened to the world?'

'The city is dead, annihilated.' A man with a dust-mask over his face spoke from the car. Signalling the chauffeur to proceed, he snarled a good-bye to his interrogator. Heveril drew aside while the car tore up the hillside towards Sutro heights.

In the heart of the earth-riven city, a wheel of flame seemed to plough from street to street. Black smoke and fire ash blew seaward, with the dawn. Deep in the hollow, he heard the cries of men and women, the hurrying of engines, as the firemen fought into the ruins. Above the cannonade of falling roofs was the imbecile clanging of a bell. Dong! dong!



Phillip will never know how he reached the city. Armed soldiers rode past furiously occasionally the flash of a rifle told him that a robber of the dead had been caught red-handed. From Nob Hill came the sound of heavy dynamite blasting. The terror had gone from his face. A man hailed him suddenly at the corner of Market street.

'Hulloa Phil! No work to-day. Von Shrader's wiped clean out. Shucks, what a holy blathering mess!'

Heveril stood in front of his old office site, where the fallen woodwork flamed beneath the stones. A party of firemen raced up, and requested him to withdraw. From a distance he beheld the complete destruction of Von Shrader and Keys, as the brigade dynamited the debris, and swept clear the space to prevent the onrushing flames from enveloping the adjoining blocks.

'Clear the track of combustibles!' shouted the chief.

Heveril staggered home blindly. The ache and turmoil of the city were deadly as a bombardment. For miles the sky was half hidden by a blood-red film of dust. Nearing Sutro he glanced upwards with feverish eyes. The little white verandahed cottage stood intact under the shoulder of the heights. A woman ran down the garden path as he approached. He did not speak, but held her close to his heart.

'The city, the city?' she whispered.

'Wiped out; and the fires are effacing the sins of men. Look!'

A volume of white smoke leaped skyward; a shower of hot ashes fell like shrapnel across the road. From east to west a wall of flame ran like a wind-blown scarf.

'God has covered your sin, Phillip; you will have time to repay the firm—they will know nothing—you are saved!' He closed his eyes as they entered the cottage.

'To-morrow will see a new city," he said slowly.

'And a new man, Phillip?'

'Yes, Adele.'

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#### 4: The Man With The Dingo

*Armidale Chronicle (NSW) 23 June 1906*

DICK STURGESS had not attended a sale of thoroughbreds for some time. He was half-disgusted with his recent lack on the turf. But a whisper had gone abroad that Burrumbeet, the son of Maranoa, was for sale. The owner was a Chinaman, named Wong Lee, and his experience with the big bay horse had led to a series of financial blizzards.

It was well known in Melbourne and Sydney that Wong Lee had a big following of backers. From Goulburn to Bourke the market gardeners and lottery men put their money on the dish faced Burrumbeet every time it started.

Dick Sturgess was interested in the doings of the big bay. The best English and Australian racing blood was in its veins. As a weight-carrier it challenged comparisons with Malua and Paris; from hock to neck it was a pack of muscle and sinew.

On the day of the sale, Sturgess received a letter from his friend Cardew in Queensland, known throughout the Gulf as a man who would fight flood and fire to pay a debt or help a comrade. His letter ran—

*"Buy Burrumbeet. He is worth 2000 guineas. You will probably pick him up for 200. I am coming to Sydney this week. Will explain further.—Jack Cardew."*

The sale was well attended. Sturgess, a bit uneasy in mind, met Wong Lee, the owner of Burrumbeet in the auctioneer's room. In the matter of horse dealing Sturgess had found Chinamen more to be trusted than the average European or Hindoo; they would not lie or auction a faked horse under false pretences.

'What's wrong with Burrumbeet ?' asked Sturgess bluntly.

The Chinaman glanced at him steadily: there was a look of dejection in his wrinkled face. 'Him welly goo' horse. Me unlucky. You buy him, you mi' win everyting savvy!'

'He seems to have been running badly. He lost the Metrop. when be ought to have won easily; How much have you lost over him?'

The Chinaman's eyes kindled suddenly. 'Thirty thousand pond,' he said gently.

Sturgess whistled softly. 'All your own money?' he asked sympathetically.

'No, no!' Wong Lee shook his bead. 'Money b'long to other Chinamen syndicate, you know. We lose welly much an' shut up, eh?' He laughed lightly.

The first bid for the unlucky bay horse was 100 guineas. Sturgess added ten; in three minutes it had reached 200. A short, black-haired man was bidding against Sturgess.

The auctioneer watched both men closely, with the cunning of his kind, he tried to pit them against each other.

'Two hundred, only two hundred! Come, gentlemen, you couldn't buy a decent dog for the money!' he cried. 'The horse has been badly trained and run. Look at the animal gentlemen; clean built as a new nine inch gun. Fit to win a Melbourne Cup if he gets honest treatment.'

'Two-fifty,' nodded Sturgess. The black-haired man added ten. Sturgess raised another twenty, and his rival turned away in disgust. Burrumbeet, the loser of many fine races, was knocked down to Sturgess for 280 guineas.

'An out and out shyster,' said a dealer in the crowd. 'He is the worst finisher south of the line.'

Sturgess laughed, and gave instructions to have the unlucky horse sent to his stables.

'Sound in wind, limb, and pedigree, sir,' said Warner, his trainer, after a trial and careful survey of Burrumbeet. 'But I'd like to speak my mind before you spend more money on your purchase.'

'Speak out.' Sturgess eyed the trainer in surprise. 'Let us hear the best and worst; it's all in the game.'

Warner passed his hand with a slight flexing motion across the horse's chest.

'See here, sir,' he said, huskily. 'The horse was ill-used when a colt.' He pointed to a number of old scars scarce visible through the fine silken coat. 'Badly cut and hurt, I should say. Looks as though a man with a rake had been at work on his

Sturgess examined the spot indicated and found that Warner was right. It appeared to him as though the horse had slipped near a barbed wire fence or had jagged himself against loose corrugated iron.

The trainer shook his head. 'Those fears are old teeth marks,' he said quietly, 'the work of a mastiff or hound of some kind.'

'Do you think it has interfered with his racing up to date, Warner?'

'Hard to say, sir. I know the horse as I know one of my own children. I saw him run at Caulfield last year. Had the field behind him until he came to the straight; then he seemed to get scared over something and bucked up. Played the game right through the season-races like a motor and chucks it at the pinch.'

'There's an outside influence at work,' answered Sturgess thoughtfully, 'something I'm dying to sift and find out for the sake of a good horse that has suffered ill treatment.'

THE NEXT DAY Jack Cardew arrived from Queensland, and met Sturgess at his house near Randwick.

'Glad you bought Burrumbeet,' he began warmly. 'If you regret your bargain, I'll take him from you and allow 50 guineas on your deal.'

'Thanks; I'll see him through the season,' laughed Sturgess, placing a chair on the verandah for his friend. 'I think you know something, Cardew, that isn't in the stud book.'

The miner laughed and his eyes shone strangely. 'I knew something that would have saved the Chinese syndicate £30,000. I know enough to have you ruining yourself in twelve months,' he replied earnestly. 'The man with the dingo won't let you win a race, and the books will bleed you white, Dick.'

'The man with the dingo! What do you mean?' Sturgess regarded him seriously.

'Listen.' Cardew lay back in his chair and lit a cigar thoughtfully. 'Two years ago, Ralph Spence, the Melbourne owner, imported Burrumbeet from Lord Belstrade's stud for 1000 guineas. After the colt was landed in Melbourne it was sent to one of Spence's stations on the Murray. About a month after its arrival trouble broke out among the shearers; there were riots and grass burnings, and some of Spence's property was destroyed. One night a man named Hawker sooled a purebred dingo on to the colt in a grass paddock near the river. It was a cruel affair. The dog fought the colt as though it were a sheep, tearing its breast and mutilated it badly. Spence offered, a reward of £100 for the arrest of Hawker, but the man and dingo were too cunning, and so far as Spence was concerned neither was seen again.

'Spence's vet., a clever French surgeon, took the colt in hand, and after six months' careful treatment had it in first rate order. A year later, when Burrumbeet appeared on the tracks, no one would have guessed that it had been half eaten by a dingo.

'The horse,' continued Cardew, 'won his first race at Randwick, and at the Summer Cup put up a record for the last five furlongs.' Cardew sat up in his chair stiffly and looked keenly at Sturgess. 'Burrumbeet did nothing after that. Just dropped into the habit of getting badly licked when he ought to have won.'

'Well,' Sturgess shrugged his shoulders, 'what do you think?'

'The man with the dingo has been doing the thinking,' grinned Cardew, 'and the unscrupulous sports helped him. Whenever Burrumbeet swept into

the straight, Hawker, with the dog on a chain, used to show himself near the rails.'

Dick Sturgess stood up as though someone had touched him with a knife. Then he sat down, and his lips were white as a sick man's. 'Go, on,' he said, hoarsely.

'Looks funny, doesn't it,' went on Cardew, 'to see a man shoving an old dingo through the rails on to the course at the moment when Burrumbeet is leading into the straight by three lengths. Some people think a horse is blind to everything when running a race. A dozen things will throw it out of its stride; a bit of white paper or a fluttering rag will send many good nags shying across the course.'

'Then you think that Burrumbeet still remembers the dog that tore its breast?' asked Sturgess, harshly.

'Remember it! I guess a horse's memory is as long as a dog's,' answered Cardew. 'The sight of the old dingo snarling under the rails would bring back old memories, and utterly spoil its chances of winning.'

'Didn't the jockey notice the man and the dingo?' ventured Sturgess.

'Not a bit. Dozens of dogs, black and yellow, hang about racecourses. The jockeys that have ridden Burrumbeet put it down to funk or bad temper. Mr. Spence sold the horse to a Chinese syndicate.'

'Do you mean to say,' broke in Sturgess, 'that Hawker and his dingo follow Burrumbeet from race to race spoiling his chance of winning?'

'Yes, when it pays. The game of baulking Burrumbeet was played for all it was worth. Once the horse catches sight of the dingo standing near the rails it's all up.'

'Who pays Hawker to interfere with the horse's running?' asked Sturgess, suddenly.

'It pays a lot of unscrupulous people to put a good horse out of the race it time,' answered Cardew. 'Once it becomes known that a certain horse can be rattled, depend upon it there is always one man anxious to see him stiffened.'

Sturgess remained deep in thought for a moment; then he moistened his dry lips. 'Why did you advise me to buy Burrumbeet when you knew that he is so easily put out?'

Cardew rubbed his palms together softly, as though he were handling gold dust.

'Deal with the man and the dingo, and you have got the best racehorse in Australia.'

Sturgess rose and placed the verandah excitedly. His eyes kindled with the fire that never accepts defeat.

'I begin to understand the game that Hawker and his dingo have played. I shall enter Burrumbeet for the Caulfield, but I've no guarantee that Hawker and his dingo will keep out of the way.'

'The dog is never seen until the day of the race,' said Cardew. 'Probably our only chance of dealing with it will be a moment or two before the bell rings.'

'If we placed a couple of good riflemen at different points of the course, we might get a shot at the brute,' growled Sturgess.

'And bring the police and stewards on your track for shooting across the flat on race day. Get yourself disqualified for life. Caulfield is the easiest course in the world to play tricks on. There's a sand hill at the back where a man might hide a dozen dogs. Hawker will choose the same spot this year. I am certain that he came from the sand hill last year. Leave it to me. I'll fix up the dingo if it shows its ears at Caulfield and no one will hear anything about it.'

Cardew left that night, and a month later met Sturgess at his Elsternwick stables. The big bay horse was in excellent condition. There was a feeling throughout the racing world that Burrumbeet would run well under Warner's hand; there were others who looked upon the bay as a brilliant waster, with no heart for a finish.

Sturgess dearly loved a good bone and a good man. He felt that Burrumbeet had received cowardly treatment from the beginning. His sense of justice smarted at the thought of a valiant thoroughbred suffering a wrong at the hands of unscrupulous sportsmen.

The day of the race was bright and full of promise for the men who had placed their fortunes at the disposal of horses. Sturgess had missed Cardew early in the morning. He had sent a messenger to his hotel, but he was not to be found.

Burrumbeet, keen and fit as a well-tempered blade, stood in the saddling paddock with Warner and the jockey in attendance.

Where was Cardew? Sturgess fretted in and out of the grandstand. The crowd surged in and around until the flat resembled a sea of moving heads. He glanced towards the naked spaces beyond the course at the sand ridge, where fifty men with dingoes might be hiding. A bell clanged, and the loud murmuring of the crowd deepened and ceased suddenly.

'Eight to one Maranoa!' cried a bookmaker in his ear. 'Seven to one Burrumbeet!'

Where was Cardew, who had promised to look after the man with the dingo? Sturgess squeezed his way through the crowd, and levelled his glasses upon the sand ridge. A bit of smoke drifted across the line of vision.

The countryside beyond seemed destitute of human habitations. A bit of uncleared scrub land filled the near perspective. Suddenly the figure of a man

moved stealthily towards the I Band- ridge. Lowering his glasses slightly, Sturgess saw a yellow dog following at a distance.

The owner of Burrumbeet gritted his teeth; his breath came in sharp expulsions: 'Hawker and his dingo, by Jove! Where in is Cardew?'

The man stooped near the rails and beckoned to the yellow dog that crouched sullenly in his wake, and half refused to come to heel. The man stooped forward again and seemed to fling a threatening word at the halting dingo. A moment later he had seized the dog by the neck and was hauling it to the edge of the course.

Sturgess remained dumbfounded for a moment; he was overcome by a wild desire to rush into the Judge's box and have the race stopped until man and dingo were ejected from the grounds. Turning again with poised glasses, he saw the figure of Cardew rise from the grass holding in his arms a big-chested bull dog.

Sturgess fairly jumped as his glasses swept the field. Cardew and Hawker faced each other with the suddenness of a policeman and burglar. Hawker turned and ran furiously towards the scrub. The dingo whipped round with ears stiffened, the hair bristling on its neck and shoulders.

Too late! In a flash the bull dog swung in and flung it to earth without sound or effort. The fight as it appeared to Sturgess was short and horrible. The bull dog pinned its yellow adversary by the breast and worried it into a lifeless heap.

The race bell rang sharply. 'They're off! They're off!'

The horses moved from the post in ragged line; the race had begun.

Sturgess lowered his glasses and closed his eyes for a moment. A great babel of voices rose about him.

Then came a sharp silence and a crashing shout.

'Maranoa!'

'Peerless!'

'Dreadnought!'

The flat was alive with gesticulating arms; men sprang in the air waving their hats. Sturgess opened his eyes as the horses swept into the straight. Maranoa, Dreadnought, and Peerless were almost abreast; behind them, like a sleuth, crept Burrumbeet. Dreadnought swerved and rolled in his stride. In a flash the horses drew together at the Judge's box. A hush fell upon the crowd; then a shout broke like a gunshot on Sturgess's ears

'Burrumbeet!'

Ten minutes later Cardew appeared leading his bulldog into the paddock, where Sturgess and Warner were shaking hands beside the big bay horse.

'Anybody want to buy a dead dingo?' laughed Cardew. 'There's one lying at the back of the course.'

'Kindly introduce me to your friend,' said Sturgess, patting the dog's broad back. 'I owe him a debt of gratitude.'

'Name of Bill,' laughed Cardew. 'Next time Hawker appears at a meeting, Bill will race him to the first police station, eh, Bill?'

And the dog looked up as though it understood.

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## 5: Sea Tigers

*Worker (Wagga, NSW) 21 Dec 1905*

THE affairs of Captain Hayes were at a low ebb. The authorities at Noumea had compelled him, almost at the point of the bayonet, to pay a fine of \$1000 for maliciously interfering with the *Montmartre*, a nickel ore tramp, while on her way to Sydney. 'Bully', had boarded her under the impression that she was carrying bullion somewhere between decks. Finding nothing but loaded ore bags, he apologised briefly to the captain, and offered him his best cigar.

Once outside Noumea Harbor, Hayes tramped to and fro across his narrow poop with a certain wolfish energy that alarmed his first mate, a blue-eyed Swede, who had joined him a year before in the Carolines. With the money-chest at low ebb, Hayes was always bitter and unsociable; yet when fortune smiled he would sing a chanty in a loud, uneven voice, drink with anyone, and fling dollars to the kanakas at Erromango, or regale the hungry white beachcombers at Apia.

The Swede, standing under the poop, stared through a pair of night glasses across the dark water. Hayes leaned over the rail and watched him sourly.

'I guess if that Dutch gin ship of yours doesn't turn up' we'll have to pawn the schooner at Thursday Island.'

'She must pass de Torres Light, cap'n. She must stand away on the Flinders side ob de Three Sisters to make Espiritu Santo.'

The Swede had informed Bully a month before of the coming of the Dutch cargo tramp, loaded to her scuppers with Schiedam schnapps, bound for Espiritu Santo and all the trade islands in the South Pacific. Bêche-de-mer and American dollars may fluctuate in value, but a case of gin has a standard currency east of Thursday and Kerguelen.

Hayes was not easily tempted into committing acts of piracy, but in the matter of borrowing a cargo of schnapps or rum he was unscrupulous. He carried a white crew, mostly Boston and New Plymouth men, semi-desperadoes in their way, men with police court records who found it difficult to obtain a berth in any civilised port. When there was tough work and dollars in the air, Hayes never put his trust in kanaka crews, he preferred white men, good or bad.

Another day passed, and the following night showed them a low, wooded cape on the starboard quarter, a thin white light pierced the darkness ahead, then it vanished. Thirty seconds later, it appeared again, and lit up the ragged coast line.

'Big Barrier Light, cap'n!' shouted the Swede.

Bully lit a cigar. 'Might be a darned bonfire for all I know! You take a turn at the wheel, old man, and don't run my schooner into that graveyard on the starboard quarter.'

Bully stumbled below, yawning like a tiger released from its cage. The sound of surf reached the mate, a long booming noise that told of heavy seas plunging upon a low, flat shore. A tiny flame showed for a moment on the western horizon; it was like a coloured star at first, until it, began to roll and heave in the sea-way. The mate, staring from the narrow wheel-house, knew it for the port-light of an ocean tramp. He watched it keenly for an hour, until it climbed over the horizon and bore in the schooner's direction.

Hayes came on deck rubbing his eyes.

'Show 'em a Chinese rocket, Mr. Christensen, and if they don't lay to quick and lively we'll put a twelve-pound stinkadore through their parlour window.'

The mate carried out the order smartly. One of the crew, a discharged American gunnery lieutenant, ran a small cannon for'ard and awaited orders. Hayes watched the effect of the mate's signals through his night glass. He saw that the approaching vessel had eased off a few points and was slackening speed.

The crew stood about Hayes, eagerly awaiting the order to board her by foul or fair means.

'Now, my lads,' said Bully; 'I'm going aboard in the whaleboat. Lower her smartly, and I'll boot the man overboard who shows a bit of steel outside his shirt.'

Six men took their places silently in the newly-painted whaleboat. Bully lit a cigar, and regarded them critically.

'Well, my lads, some of you are good and some are bad. I can always see a big jail in the face of a bad man. I don't mind a bit of forgery in a man's past; I can forgive any crime but cowardice, and if there's one hero to-night he'd better get out and walk. Savvy?'

'Aye, aye, cap'n.'

'Give way, my lads. I reckon this tramp we're after has got a hundred cases of square-face in her fore-hold.'

A stiff breeze was blowing from the nor-nor'-west, and Hayes put the whaleboat round for the vessel's stern. As they drew near he scrutinized the big, dark hull that loomed ahead. Then he swore softly.

'Guess she ain't an island tramp! She's big enough to hold a regiment of soldiers. She's a two-thousand tonner !

The vessel had hove to, and Hayes steered the whaleboat under her stern. A large head appeared over the side suddenly; a voice with a foreign accent addressed them politely:

'Are you a gunboat?'

Bully gritted his teeth. 'We're all gun,' he rapped out savagely. 'And I guess if you're a gentleman you won't keep us bumming about here on a dark squally night.'

A couple of rope ladders were passed over the side. Bully, with four of his crew, swarmed over the rail like cats. They were confronted almost immediately by a big-headed, square-shouldered Hollander, who regarded Hayes solemnly.

'Vat vos your pizness, gentlemens? I vas at your service.'

He bowed stiffly, and the flesh on his fat face rolled and trembled.

Bully's eyes wandered over the ship; in a flash he summed up the lascar crew loafing in the alleyway or squatting unconcerned near the hatches.

'What ship is this?' he demanded.

'De *Frankfort* from Hamburg to Sydney. We haf a cargo of pianos en machinery. Nodin' else vort mention.'

'Pig-iron and pianos! Guess I don't want any music to-night, ' thanks, Mr. What's-your-name. How much square-face do you happen to be carrying? Quick and lively now, and don't waste my time.'

The Dutch captain eyed him suspiciously. 'You vas not a man-o'-war,' he said slowly.

'My son,' Bully swung upon him menacingly; 'you'll get all the war you want in five minutes if you waste my time.'

Bully walked for'ard inquisitively, kicking a lascar sailor out of his way as he approached the hatch. Two huge square boxes stood in tho centre of the deck; they were covered with tarpaulin. Hayes regarded thorn curiously.

The Dutch captain followed him closely. 'You moost not touch dose boxes,' he said nervously, 'or you get hurt, mein friendt.'

Bully affected surprise.

'I just want to see the kind of boodle stowed underneath the tarpaulin, Dutchy. My name is Hayes, and if you don't like it you can write a better one on my forehead if you're able. Savvy?'

He made a swift sign to his men. In a flash the big tarpaulin sheet was hauled to the deck. The next instant Bully leaped three feet in tho air, his revolver in a dead line with a pair of eyeballs that flamed at him from behind the cage bars.

The Dutch captain chuckled softly, a ripple of laughter went over the ship.

Hayes did not move. 'What's the name of the beast in that cage?' he demanded.

'It vas a Bengal tiger, Captain Hayes. I vas carryin' id to de Zoological beobles at Melbourne. He nearly haf you dot time.'

The big tiger watched them through the cage bars; then it crouched to the floor, emitting a tremulous snarl.

'Guess it nearly ran into my gun,' grunted Hayes. 'Hold up the lantern, please.'

One of the crew brought a light to the cage-front, while Hayes admired the brute's sleek coat and tremendous jaws. Turning to the Dutch captain he addressed him sharply:

'See here, Mister What's-your-name, I'm after gin, and you haven't any. I'm not going to loot your old ship; you're not the person we're after.'

'Vell, leave mein ship,' growled, the Dutchman.

'In my own time, and without your assistance,' says Hayes. 'Now listen, Dutchy, and be civil, or my lads will put a shot under your water-line.'

The Dutch captain shrugged his shoulders. 'Your name was Hayes. Dot was enough for me. I do not want murder on' mein' sheep to-night.'

'I'll serve it up in two colours if you waste my time.' Bully pointed to where the schooner lay.

'Take your ship alongside my schooner, and I'll borrow your Bengal tiger. You've a good cargo derrick; you can lower the beast, cage and all, to the deck.'

'The beast was insured. 'En' I was' not responsible for pirates.'

'A real pirate would have hanged you first, Dutchy, and ate the tiger, stripes and all, afterwards.'

At midnight, the steamer's derrick lowered the large cage with great care on to the schooner's deck. Bully superintended the work critically, and as the derrick chain rattled back he held up his hand.

'Just pass some spare meat over, sonnies, and I'll let you go. I can't feed Mr. Bengal on sea biscuits.'

IT WAS a clear hot night when the schooner entered Apia harbor. Lights winked from the hills; window panes of orange and purple showed through the distant-palms. Giving the lightship a wide berth, Bully swung her under the dark shelter of the wooded headland, almost touching the cannon flanked sides of an American man-o'-war.

Hayes, in a dark uniform, leaned over the schooner's rail and hung a small light on the starboard quarter. An hour later a couple of Samoans rowed, towards the schooner and whistled softly.

'That you, Maletto?'

Hayes leaned forward and heaved the lamp, aboard. One of the Samoans, a thick-set fellow with large teeth, addressed Bully Hayes for ten minutes in the vernacular.

'Do not come ashore, O captain! There is a law-writ awaiting thee here in Apia. They have waited long for your coming. It is a matter of debt, O Captain ! A bailiff awaits thee night and day on man-o'-war steps. Beware of the sea-bailiff, O captain! He will nail the law-writ to your mast, and defy you to leave port until the money matter has been settled. If there is no money in your locker, O captain, he will sell your schooner under the hammer.'

The Samoan sat back in the boat, and bowed his head. Bully reflected a moment, then threw him some money, and told him to depart. After the boat had gone he sat down and smoked silently.

'I guess the bailiff's name is McIvers, the big half-caste from tho Solomons. He shot a white man up there in the sixties for stealing a bottle of square-face. And McIvers wants to come and nail a writ on my schooner! Guess he'd travel 20 miles on an ice-blast to sell up a blind asylum.'

Hayes sat back and laughed hoarsely. 'I reckon the firm that sooled him on to me will soon be short of a bailiff.'

It was still dark when, Hayes and the crew crowded into the whaleboat suddenly and rowed ashore. They landed silently, at man-o'-war stops, unarmed and smartly dressed. As they passed up tho- landing stage, a big half-caste with shining, eyes came from behind a wall and tapped Bully's shoulder.

'Good-night, cap'n ! I'll trouble you to put me aboard your schooner. There's a matter of £300 to be settled before you leave Apia. I am the agent for Burke and Richards, ship chandlers and traders.'

Hayes shrugged his shoulders. 'Guess I'm not interfering with you in the execution of your duty, Mr. Mac,' he said politely. 'You can raffle the darned schooner, or give tho scow away to your relations if you like.'

The bailiff grinned; his big saffron-coloured face was full of smiles. 'You had a good trip, cap'n?' he said softly.

'What you'd call fair to middling, answered Hayes thoughtfully. 'There's a valuable consignment of peanuts in the fore hold— don't eat too many— and there's a Borneo princess locked in the fore-cabin. Don't upset the perfume or spoil her temper when you climb aboard. She can hit a man with a knife at twenty paces.'

'How much cash, Cap'n?'

The sea-bailiff took out a note-book as though to make an inventory.

'Oh, we always put it in a bag and let it down with the anchor,' laughed the buccaneer.

The bailiff danced nimbly down the stops and clambered into the schooner's whaleboat.

'No you don't !' Bully leaped after, him, caught him neck and waist, and threw him ashore,

'Be a bailiff in your own canoe, Mister Mac. I don't want any half-bred vermin in my clean boat. Hoosht !'

The half-cast staggered to his feet, his white teeth bared, his black blood spinning savagely through his head. He was known throughout the islands as the craftiest fighter between Honolulu and Sydney. There was not much space on the narrow pier for in and out punching, and as the big half-caste bailiff sprang back a small broad-bladed knife showed for a moment in his half-shut fist.

'Drop it!' shouted the crowd. In a flash they were around him, but Hayes snarled them into silence.

'I'll allow him his fist and knife. Guess I'm white enough to belt hailstones out of the best nigger born of a kanaka woman.'

It has been said that Bully Hayes never turned his back on a square fight. It may be safely stated that he often ventured where professional pugilists would have sat down to consider the job. The fight began and was over in thirty seconds. Bully's square-toed boot met the half-caste's projecting shin, the knife flashed up and back twice, Hayes ducked, and sent in his right with a smash on the saffron-coloured throat.

When the bailiff stood up there was a look in his eyes that one sees in the pictures of devils and half-castes. Bully regarded him good-humouredly, and then offered him a big cigar.

'Now, my son, hire a boat. You'll get one for half a dollar. Don't put yourself in a white man's place, in future.'

Five minutes later he watched the bailiff rowing slowly from Matautu Point towards the schooner lying at anchor. Hayes afterwards produced a dozen witnesses to prove that the half-caste had gone aboard of his own free will. When asked why a live tiger had been released from its cage to roam about the schooner's deck, Hayes replied that it must have broken loose after the crew had gone ashore.

A couple of native police searched the schooner thoroughly, but neither tiger nor bailiff were seen afterwards.

ONE CHRISTMAS EVE in Sydney Bully explained the mystery to a crowd of sailors at the old Black Dog Inn.

'You see, sonnies, it's this way. The tiger was a nervous beast, and when black Mac. climbed over the schooner's rail he took him in, boots and all. Then about an hour after, I should say, the tiger reckoned that life wasn't worth living, and jumped overboard. You couldn't expect a highly strung beast to set down and calmly digest a black bailiff,' said Hayes.

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## 6: A Relic of De Quiros.

*Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 20 June 1906*

HE WAS a Spanish Cuban, and he came to Espiritu Santo in a trading schooner with a stowaway's certificate as his only credential. When he said that his name was Sebastian de Quiros I looked at him sharply and smiled. He was dressed in cheap trade clothes, and wore a wide-brimmed panama that would have sheltered an elephant. His eyes were like bits of hot metal set in a face of bronze.

He had no business in Santo; he slept on the beach, and sometimes under the trade house verandah; also he loafed with the solemnity of a cat, and secretly watched me and the big German trader, Carl Schultz.

The name De Quiros sounded strangely in my ears, it revived schoolboy memories when the deeds of Columbus, Cook, Bass, and De Gonnville lightened my lessons and filled me with admiration for the men who had sailed ships across wide oceans into the unknown.

When Carl Schultz offered the young beachcomber work, he sat in the sand and laughed immoderately at the suggestion; then he would make diabolical faces behind the German's big back until the natives shrieked with laughter.

He came frequently to the trade house verandah, and smoked the German's cigarettes while we listened to the boom of the surf across the outer reefs.

'Vat is your business in Santo?' said the German one night.

The young Spaniard moved uneasily, and I caught the gleam of his white teeth in the dark of the verandah.

'I want to see a leetal of the world,' he answered quickly. 'Then I return to Madrid and die happy. Et is a beautiful night,' he said with a sudden indrawing of breath. 'Listen!'

Through the everlasting silence we heard the seas breaking with the sound of gun wheels across the bay. The night was full of tropic stars, and the crested palms thrashed softly in the S.E. trade.

'Vas you efer in dese parts before, senor?' asked the German suddenly.

Sebastian de Quiros stood beside me, and his eyes were sharp as pointed jewels.

'It is 300 years since the *Capitana* and *Almiranta* anchored over there.' He pointed across the bay of Santo. A strange pallor overspread his features. 'Do you know, gentlemen,' he said turning to us quickly, 'I can almost hear the slow beat of the anchor chains as they plunged into the water, three hundred years ago.' He breathed sharply, and his thin, womanish hands came together

tightly. 'This is the Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo— the southern land of the Holy Spirit.'

He paced the wide verandah with a certain tigerish energy that was not lost upon the big German trader.

'Come away,' he whispered to me. 'Dot boy haf something on his mind.'

We retired to the trade room, and a native servant placed an oil lamp on the table. I sat on an unopened bale of cotton goods while the German smoked dreamfully; the sound of distant breakers fell lazily on our ears.

'Who was der first navigator in dese parts?' he asked slowly.

'De Quiros was among the first flight,' I answered. 'Maybe our young Spanish beachcomber is in some way connected with the famous old 'sea captain.'

'Tree hundred years was a long time to go broodin' about ancestors,' he laughed. 'Most people's forget a lot of uncles und faders in such a time.'

'A Portuguese or Spaniard does not forget,' I said. 'From Bang Sancho to Philip II. is but a day in the annals of Spanish ancestry.'

'Der was blenty of openin' at der South Pole for a Government explorer,' guffawed the German. 'All der Oder blaces haf got der electric trams.'

The following day was full of incident. At dawn the smoke of a steamer blew up from, the skyline. Later, a narrow-beamed white-hulled steam yacht stood across the bay and dropped anchor. At midday a cushioned dinghy painted blue and gold put off from the yacht and landed a clean-shaved spotlessly-dressed American at the pier steps. I was standing on the trade-house verandah scanning the yacht's lines and the Stars and Stripes flaunting in the south-east wind.

The American turned swiftly and approached the trade house like one with urgent business on hand. The German watched him inquisitively.

'It was not efery day a white an' gold yacht drop her anchors into Santo,' he muttered. Then he bowed courteously as the newcomer entered the palisade and crossed to the verandah. Raising his hat slightly he addressed us in a somewhat high-pitched voice. 'My sailing master informs me that this place is called Espiritu Santo,' he said quickly.

'Dis vas Santo, all right, sir!'

The German heaved his big bulk across the verandah and pushed a chair invitingly near his visitor.

'My name is Valentine K. de Quiros.' The newcomer dropped into the chair and drew out a gold-mounted cigar case. 'I am an American citizen with a mission,' he said cheerfully.



'Der vas a lot ob De Quiroses about choost now,' grinned the German. 'Vas you lookin' for a new world, sir?' he asked good-humouredly 'because we do nod keep dem in stock now.'

The American frowned slightly. A big diamond lit up his long manicured forefinger. He sat back in the chair and nibbled the end of a small cheroot.

'You see,' he began, nervously, 'I am a bit of a dollar king in my own country. I own canals and pork factories and bean stores. I've got everything to hand except an ancestor. I'm of Spanish Portuguese descent, and since the pride of ancestry got hold of me my lawyers, acting upon certain information received, have been looking up the archives of Manilla, New York, and Madrid. They have discovered,' he continued rapidly, 'that I am a true descendant of Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, who landed here three hundred years ago, with a nobleman named Torres.'

'I'll sell you dis part 'of de island if id vas any goot,' broke in the German. 'Id vas hereabouts your famous ancestor landed. You can have de corner block for 2000 dollars.'

The American shook his head impatiently. 'I wish to be frank with you,' he said, quietly. 'I am in quest of an old *marae*, or sacred grove, situated on the north-west corner of the bay. Here's the map.' He drew a faded navigator's chart from his valise and spread it on the verandah floor.

'The *marae* is marked quite plainly, as you will see,' he went on. 'It is between two hills, and faces the east. The sacred grove is of interest to me, because Pedro de Quiros concealed something within which was never afterwards reclaimed.'

'Tree hondred years haf not altered Santo much,' growled the German, glancing at the outspread chart. 'If de article you vas after vas of great value, depend upon it, sir, id vill nod be dere now.'

'My friend, I will be brief with you.' The American smoked thoughtfully for a few moments, then looked at Carl Shultz keenly. 'Three hundred years ago my ancestor, Pedro de Quiros, concealed a small silver crucifix under the sacred stone of the *marae*, marked here on the chart. I want to recover it.

'How much vas it vort?' The German eyed him curiously. 'Silver crosses vas cheap dese times.'

The American shrugged his shoulders im patiently. 'I am not concerned with its intrinsic value, my friend. It is a family heirloom I desire most earnestly to recover. I want to have it in my house. I want to say to the New York Four Hundred: 'Here is something that a Columbus might be proud to wear: it belonged to Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, the man who bore a lamp across unknown seas, and lit up the ship-less tracks around Australia.'

He paused a moment, his face glowing with excitement.

'If either you gentlemen will help me to recover the little silver cross I will— I will—'

'I go mit you at once!' cried the German. 'I will take a couple of servants to show us der way. Gif me der chart, Valentine de Quiros. I tink der vas an old *marae* someveres in der hills.'

At the German's request I stayed in the trade house, listening to the dull booming of distant surf. A crescent moon hung low in the eastern sky.

From time to time the sound of a 'tangi' crying song came up from the distant village. A flare of candle-nut torches illumined the hills beyond. Long past midnight I was awakened by the crunching of feet on the gravel outside. Slipping to the verandah, I saw the German and Valentine de Quiros standing near the palisade talking excitedly. The American was flushed and angry, like a man who had been robbed or misled. Turning suddenly from the trade house, he hurried towards the village. The German came panting to tin verandah, wiping his heated face.

'Did you find the silver cross?' I asked, earnestly. 'What is the matter?'

'De oder De Quiros vas dere before us,' growled Schultz. 'The ground under der sacred stone ob der *marae* haf been freshly dug. By Shimminy! id look as if de Spanish de Quiros vas here on der same business. . Dey vas strangers to one anoder anyhow. Id vas funny dot dey should be here at der same time, eh? What you tink, eh?'

The German tramped up and down the verandah sullenly.

'After tree hundred years dese two de De Quiroses come to Santo after a leedle silver cross. Dey both get sudden information at the one time, eh? By Shimminy!'

He laughed, with his big hands resting on both hips.

'Why did Pedro de Quiros conceal the cross here in Santo?' I asked.

'Id vas left here as an omen, I tink,' answered Schultz. 'Der American fellow told me dat Captain de Quiros intended to coom back und see de big island continent dot he shoost missed. His letter to King Philip, says der American, vas proof ob dot de silver cross vas buried in der Southern Land of de Holy Spirit as a proof dot he vud keep his word. Poor Captain de Quiros!'

The German leaned from the verandah and smoked furiously for half a minute.

'Dese two descendants ob his will be at each oders' trotes tonide. Der Spaniard is in der village und der American haf gone to look him up and ask him about de cross be took from der *marae*.'

It occurred to me suddenly that the Spanish beachcomber was aware of the American's movements. How had these two strange men, descendants of the famous navigator, managed to be at Espiritu Santo at the same moment

and for the same purpose? The little silver cross concealed by Pedro de Quiros had lain untouched under the sacred stone for centuries. Yet both visitors had measured each other's coming to an hour.

There was something supernatural in the adventure. I could not sleep that night. I felt as though the wings of Tragedy were beating around Espiritu Santo.

Suddenly, through the stillness, came the crunching of gravel and the pattering of naked feet. Then a revolver shot split the silence and brought me to the verandah peering into the velvet night.

'Throw up your hands, Senor Sebastian! The American's voice rang sharp and insistent. In the deep shadows of the verandah palms I beheld the young Spanish beachcomber half crouching among the banded lianas and ferns.

The American was standing near the palisade, a heavy revolver gripped in his right hand.

'Senor Sebastian.' His voice was cold and without mercy. 'You have in your possession a silver crucifix, which I value highly. I have crossed three oceans to find it.' He coughed hoarsely, and thrust out his chin fiercely. 'I will give you ten seconds to hand it over. One two.'

He began to count slowly.

'The cross is mine, Valentine de Quiros!'

The voice came from the tangle of liana; and it was full of snarling hatred. Only the eyes were visible, and they shone with a luminous ferocity.

'Three' snapped the American coldly. 'Four — five — six.'

The Spanish beachcomber rose and stood rigid in the starlight, his arms folded over his breast.

'Shoot!' he said bitterly; 'the world is full of dogs and spying Americans.'

I heard a soft footfall behind me. The German, wearing sandals of banyan bark, stepped silently from the traderoom, and in a flash covered the American with a Winchester rifle.

'Hands down, friendt Valentine. Dis trade house ob mine vas not a ranch or a Yankee poker saloon. Down hands, qvick!'

The American lowered his arm smartly without turning his head.

'Thank you.' The big German smiled grimly. 'I vud like to be arbitrator here, gentlemens; und dis goot rifle ob mine vill make my award final. Do you onderstand, gentlemens?'

The American shrugged his shoulders and remained silent. The beachcomber peered forward, his face alive with anger and curiosity.

'Put your revolver on de verandah rail, please, und I vill begin,' said Shultz, slowly.

The American obeyed, and folded his arms. 'Now—' Shultz watched the two men closely— 'both you gentlemens vas named De Quiros, und you both

claim der leedle silver crucifix left here by an old sea captain, tree hundred years ago.'

'Mine by right of birth!' broke in the American, hoarsely. 'Mine to have and keep.'

'Dios!' The beachcomber smote himself over the heart with his fist. 'The blood of Pedro de Quiros is here. I am unarmed, but a Spaniard knows how to die for his name.'

'Dis vas all very pretty,' laughed the German across his levelled Winchester. 'It was like a comic opera duet, eh? Come, come, gentlemens, und sit in my trade room. One of you vas a millionaire, de odder a poor sailor midout food.'

He paused a moment and signalled the Spaniard to enter the house.

'Come, you, too, Valentine de Quiros,' he said genially, 'und be generous to your poor kinsman.'

The affair was settled before dawn. The young Spaniard and American faced each other across the table, while the German composed his huge, catlike limbs in a low chair, watching them closely. It was decided that Valentine de Quiros should hand over \$10,000 to Sebastian the beachcomber in exchange for the little silver crucifix. The young Spaniard consented sullenly. With white lips and trembling hand he drew from his breast pocket the tiny, age-worn cross, which he had unearthed, only a few hours previously, from its resting-place under the sacred stone of the *marae*.

THREE years later, while standing on the Quai de la Transportation at Ile Nou, a big canoe rowed by 12 convicts swept alongside the pier. Swart, villainous fellows they were, with apish brows and cruel mouths. One face only relieved the sullen line of downcast heads: he sat in the bows, his chest thrown forward. In the shift of an eye he saw me and nodded. It was Sebastian de Quiros.

I learned afterwards from the Governor of the penitentiary that the young Spaniard had been at the head of a gang of conspirators and forgers. He had been deported from France only a year before, on a charge of barratry on the high seas. By the grace of the chief surveillant, I was permitted a few moments conversation with Sebastian— his real name was Miguel Carot.

We met in the Quartier Disciplinaire; he smiled in my face, and saluted briskly. His ugly prison clothes failed to rob him of his debonair appearance or his pitiless laugh.

'Touching the little silver cross you unearthed at Espiritu Santo,' I began slowly. 'And the clean-shaved American named Valentine de Quiros. I fancied you had the best of the deal,' I said, encouragingly.

The convict's eyes seemed to dance for a moment, and before I could protest he clapped a hand on my shoulder gaily, and winked at the white-helmeted surveillant standing by.

'The little silver cross. Dios! How well I remember ! I put it there myself while my confederates in New York notified him from the archives of Manilla that a small document had been unearthed which proved beyond doubt that Valentine de Quiros, millionaire and financier, was a descendant of Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, the navigator. The story of the cross buried under the sacred stone within the *marae* reached him from another source— through me. The whole business was nicely put up for the millionaire, and—' he laughed and winked again, 'so was I.'

'Did the American discover the fraud?' I asked.

'Never, señor. He is still congratulating himself on his bargain.'

The convict turned for a moment, winked at the surveillant, saluted me sharply, and marched back to his comrades in the canoe.

'A genial blackguard, m'sieur.' The surveillant swung after him, nursing his rifle carelessly on his left arm. Half-an-hour later the big canoe swept past as the steamer bore me from Noumea harbour. The Spaniard raised his cap politely.

'Some day, when I am not too busy,' he shouted, 'I shall come and discover Australia!'

I never saw him again.

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## 7: Bully Hayes

Worker (Wagga, NSW) 30 Aug 1906

*"Bully" Hayes was a notorious American-born "blackbirder" who flourished in the 1860 and 1870s, and was murdered in 1877. He arrived in Australia in 1857 as a ships' captain, where he began a career as a fraudster and opportunist. Bankrupted in Western Australia after a "long firm" fraud, he joined the gold rush to Otago, NZ. He seems to have married four times without the formality of a divorce from any of his wives.*

*He was soon back in another ship, whose co-owner mysteriously vanished at sea, leaving Hayes sole owner; and he joined the "blackbirding" trade, where Pacific islanders were coerced, or bribed, and then shipped to the Queensland canefields as indentured labourers. After number of wild escapades, and several arrests and imprisonments, he was shot and killed by his ship's cook, Peter Radek.*

*So notorious was "Bully" Hayes, and so apt his nickname, (he was a big, violent, overbearing and brutal man) that Radek was not charged; he was indeed hailed a hero.*

*Dorrington wrote a number of amusing and entirely fictitious short stories about Hayes. Australian author Louis Becke, who had sailed with Hayes, also wrote about him.*

— Terry Walker

THE pearling luggers lay three-deep at the end of the pier. Gangs of black land white shellers loafed under the narrow sun awnings, smoking or squirting betel juice across the decks. Captain William Hayes was leaning over the pier rail, cigar in mouth, his white teeth showing through his black beard. Beside him were groups of men from all the islands of the South Pacific, Germans, Dagoes, Scandinavians and Rotumah men, and the talk ran on matters connected with shell and bêche de mer.

'If my chance came again,' said Hayes, suddenly, 'I'd go on the stage and fight pirates with wooden swords— there's always more money in shamming the business than doing the real thing.'

A diver with a consumptive eye coughed sadly.

'I've seen 'em playing at divers on the stage,' he said. 'Used to make me feel tired the way they lifted the gold box from the wreck with the quids spillin' out and the band playin'.'

'There's many a thing done in the islands,' broke in Hayes, 'that would make people sit back if they could see it behind the footlights with musical attachments. I fought a Dago for possession of a 50-acre pearl lagoon down in the Shoe Archipelago once. I've still got his knife marks under my singlet. He had ten kanakas, I had six, and we used to crawl on to one another in the middle of the night up to our necks in water, wrestling, stabbing and feeling carefully for each other's eyes. After I'd boosted him across the sky line, I set to work raking up the I golden-edged shell. Most of it was worth £200 a ton then, and we slaved for nine months until we'd gutted the lagoon from end to end.

My part of the cheque, after we'd cased and bagged the shell, came to £700. It was gone in a month.

'A Sydney spieler fell across me in Apia. His wife and daughters were with him, and they looked sweet enough to read evening prayers at Government House. Cards was their game. We played Banker and Van John, and the two girls bagged my cheques as fast as I drew 'em up. The old mother of the crowd cried when she saw me losing heavily. I guess her tears would have floated an ordinary alligator— they didn't lift me much though. After the family had cleaned me up, the old man offered to play me for my schooner. I held off a bit until the girls said they'd stand out of the game to give me a chance. They were sure I could play the old man with my left hand.

'We played and papa wiped me out with the ace of spades. Next morning I asked the family to come aboard and inspect their new possession. The girl who'd won most of my money said it was wicked of papa to take my new schooner. Then she told me I had nice eyes.

'I didn't say anything. They trooped aboard, mother and dad and the girls. Dad had little pouches of flesh under his eyes, and when he walked they seemed to run up and down his cheekbone. We were lying offshore, and while the crowd was below admiring the brass cabin fittings, we boosted the anchor aboard and got out to sea.

'It was funny to see 'em come on deck yelling like a crowd or devils.

' "Don't squeal, ladies and gentlemen," says I, "or that man-o'-war guard-boat will hear you."

'Outside the harbor I called the family into the state-room. The girls cried until the rouge turned blue on their cheeks. The old man breathed as though his heart was putting up a record jump. I sat there and looked at 'em, and I guess when they looked at me they saw a big black dog in my eyes. Nobody spoke. I wanted them to do a bit of hard thinking.

'The schooner was running her nose into it; the thunder of big seas shook us fore and aft. The old man stood up and his knees trembled.

'Captain Hayes,' he says, 'you are taking us out to sea.'

' "I'll supply you with free passages to H—," says I, "If you don't hand over the money you spieled from me. You can think it over, Mr. Sharpfinger; we're bound for the Line Islands, and there's no hurry."

' "Good God!" says he. "Where are the Line Islands?"

' "Thousand mile nor'-west of the Navigators," says I. "It's a long time between drinks up there."

'The girls lay on the state-room sofa and started to bite the cushions, while the old man staggered up and down feeling his hair.

' "The cheques are at the hotel," says he. "I swear to you, Hayes, that we haven't ten dollars in cash with us."

'It looked like a fix for me, and I dropped into my cabin to think it over. I couldn't take the old blackguard's cheque, and if I allowed the girls to go ashore they'd put a gunboat on my track, and jail me in short order. I'd made up my mind to block these Sydney sharps.

'Back to the state-room I went after an hour's hard thinking. They were weeping and sprawling about as though I'd given 'em a dose of poison. '

' "Now," says I, "there's one way out of the difficulty. I'll put back, if you like, and go ashore with papa while he gets the cheques from the hotel."

'It seemed a bit risky for me, but I reckoned I could handle papa if I got him alone. The old lady agreed; then the girls said I was a nasty brute for wanting my money back. Anyhow, we brought the schooner round and crept into the harbor when it was dark enough to dodge the guard-boat.'

'My mate, Bill Howe, took command of the schooner while I pulled ashore with papa in the dingy. At Man-o'-war Steps I took his hand gently, the hand he used to deal me all the bad cards with, and spoke in his ear. "Papa," says I, "if you look at a policeman or raise your hand or voice until we come out of the hotel I'll bullet you in three places."

'He waved his other hand towards the schooner.

' "You've got my family aboard. I'm thinking of them," says he.

'Down the main street we walked, his arm in mine. We had a drink at the hotel bar. Somebody was hammering the piano upstairs, while a crowd of French sailors danced on the footwalk outside.

'I escorted papa to his bedroom while he fossicked in his drawers and valise for my cheques. Then he remembered that his eldest daughter had several amounting to £250. I waited outside her room while he slipped in and lit the lamp. There was no need to bustle him, seeing that I had his family in my keeping.

'Still, he was dead slow getting my cheques. A woman keeps things different to a man, and I allowed him ten minutes to go through her millinery and glove boxes— that's where most ladies sling their valuables. When he came out I noticed that his lips were a bit dry; the pouches of flesh under his eyes shook and trembled. I put it down to excessive grief at parting with the boodle.

'We had another drink at the bar while I counted the cheques; there was one for fifty dollars missing, and when he offered to go back and hunt for it I said it didn't matter.

'The family was wailing and weeping in the state-room when we got aboard. Putting the cheques in my locker, I lowered the whale-boat and helped



the family in. I asked one of the girls for a kiss as she stepped over, but she promised to box my ears first time she met me ashore.

'I stayed aboard the schooner until they left Apia next day. We gave 'em a parting cheer as the steamer ran past. Never saw 'em again.

'A bombshell was walling for me when I strolled ashore. Old papa had cashed five cheques with my signatures attached. Blitz, the German shell buyer, had given him American dollars for 'em— two thousand five hundred in all.'

'My name was good in those days. Well, I looked at the signatures, and they were mine, every one. I raced aboard the schooner and examined the cheques old papa had given me. They were imitations of my signature— done well enough to take me in anyhow. He had drawn them up in ins daughter's room. I guess old papa had a nerve like a rhinoceros to forgo my own signatures while I waited outside in the passage. And fancy him handing 'em to me in a place like Apia!

'They say the trick has been worked to death around Sydney. It broke me in halves and turned me sour. Next time I meet a respectable family man who wants to play cards, I'll give him a bath in my lagoon where the twelve foot sharks conduct all my funerals. 'I feel,' said Hayes finally, 'that a lagoon full of healthy sharks are about equal to a Sydney spieler. And I'm a bit of one myself, at times,' he added with a grin.

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### **8: The Race: Little Jim's Story.**

*Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 7 Nov 1906*

MY PRIDE was hurt when Dick Marsden entered me for the Ladies' Bracelet at Bong Bong. Having a just regard for my pedigree, I hated country races. There was a feeling in me at times that I could overtake the white flash that runs down a lightning rod. I objected to be classed with a crowd of hacks, feeling certain that most of them ran in carts during the week, while the others know more about chasing kangaroos than flat racing.

My owner, Dick Marsden, knew that the best English and Australian racing blood ran in my veins; the strains of St. Gatien, Dutchoven, and Lady Betty, put me to rights when it came to a dead finish.

The race at Bong Bong was a tenth-rate bush circus, a matter of ten sovereigns, with an added sweepstake of a pound. I was badly ridden, jockeyed, nagged, and spurred. I won very much against my will with an iron-fisted jockey sawing my mouth, and half strangling me.

At 24 Dick Marsden had married Phyllis Chalmers, a Victorian girl. He was cashier in a Melbourne warehouse, until hard times came; and in the crash that followed the boom, he found himself without a billet, and with only a little money in the bank. Bush-fires and drought ruined her father; and Dick, silly, big-hearted Dick, had backed bills for his smart friends and got left.

Immediately after his dismissal, Dick cast about, for an opening; but unemployed cashiers were as plentiful in those days as overdrafts and empty houses. Fagged and weary he would return home after scouring the city for employment. Billets were harder to obtain than 40-oz nuggets or an agent-generalship.

Finally, one wet miserable day, Dick told Phyllis that I was their only asset, but when he spoke about selling me, she cried so bitterly that he postponed the event a little while longer. As a two-year-old, I was the property of old Captain Marsden, Dick's uncle, who owned a station at Gunoon Downs. The captain always said that he would hand me over to his nephew the moment he could afford to look after a first-class horse. Dick's salary was £300 a year then, but Captain Marsden didn't think it was enough to maintain a wife and a five-hundred-guinea racehorse.

Captain Marsden died suddenly, leaving his affairs in a dreadful state. A big-fisted bailiff walked into Gunoon Downs station, and held the floor until things were straightened out. He came into my stable one morning, and looked at me over the partition.

'Ah, my beauty' he said, huskily, 'you're the flyer known at Little Jim, eh? We'll turn you into cash bye and bye.'

I waited with my ears back, hoping he would come a bit closer. I had never lifted a full-grown bailiff through the stable door, but it's quite easy, even when your shoes are off. When Dick heard of Captain Marsden's death, he ran up to Gunoon and interviewed the bailiff about me. Dick always regarded me as his property, but the bailiff thought otherwise, and defied him to open the stable door. Dick didn't argue with the bailiff, he simply unlocked the stable the following night, and away we went — Dick and I. He'd tell you about it himself if you asked him.

And after Captain Marsden's affairs were wound up, it was found that his creditors came out of it well enough to allow Dick's claim to hold good. I was sorry for Dick and Phyllis and baby. As a three-year-old, I never liked babies, but when the financial crash came, Phyllis brought the red-fisted little mite into the stable, and cried on a heap of straw at my head.

Dick was away in Melbourne. I was used to hearing Phyllis laugh and cry, but when she sobbed with baby resting against my neck it made me feel queer. I know what ruin is, black ruin that strips a house bare, and leaves an unsatisfied wolf where Love should sit. I heard it in Phyllis' crying, and I stood still not daring to flinch while baby twisted its fingers in my mane.

One cold morning Dick returned from Melbourne bringing with him a small, bright-eyed little man named Dare.

'They came to my stable and saddled me, and without a word led me to the grass track at the rear of the house. Dare's horse was standing near the paddock gate, a big, classy bay, with a muscle-packed neck, and thighs and quarters heaving with bone and strength. It cheeked it's bit half savagely as I approached; it had a coat of silk, and the head of a racing machine.

'So... this is Little Jim,' said Dare, passing his hand with a flexing motion toward my fetlock. I quivered at his touch; it seemed as though he was counting my sinews and veins.

'Ye-es,' he continued slowly. 'Bit small.' Then he drew back and eyed me steadily. 'Better try him over a couple of furlongs with Dreadnought. One can never tell,' he said testily.

Dare mounted Dreadnought. Dick took charge, of me, and in a jiffy we were off. It was only a flutter, but Dreadnought seemed to eat the ground as he hammered along. I didn't feel like racing that morning, but when Dick spoke to me, I flashed alongside the big bay hauling at the bit savagely for my head.

'Whoa, whoa!' laughed Dick, 'you little glutton, whoa!'

Dare swung round and again, looked over me.

'Not so dusty,' he snapped. 'If he was taken in hand for awhile he might.' He looked meaningly at Dick.

Dick shook his head uncertainly. But Dare examined me again, hoof, eye and mouth.

'Hang it!' he said staring at me, 'he's the dead image of Little Paris. Look at his shoulders and neck! Great Scott! He might sneak the Cup if we looked after him.'

'No, no, it's too big, out of his class,' answered Dick sharply. 'Think of him meeting Burrumbeet and The Jap, Maranoa, and The Czar; he's too Email, and I wouldn't ask the little beggar to do it,' Dick patted me affectionately. 'You don't know what he's been to me; he saved my life and honour one night, in the ranges when the troopers were at my heels.'

You didn't borrow him, eh?" laughed Dare.

'No one had a netter right to him than I,' answered Dick hotly; 'he belonged to Uncle Harry at Gunoon Downs, and after he died he was claimed by a thieving bailiff named Howitt. Little Jim used to follow me about the yard like a sheep dog. I rode off with him one night while the estate was under auction. The bailiff Howitt sent the troopers after me. I was taken to the lockup at Yarraba, but Jim slipped away into the ranges with his saddle and bridle on. The Yarraba lockup couldn't hold me that night. I climbed out and found him in the hills among the brumbies. You know the rest, Dare; I got away and the affair dropped.'

Dick patted my neck affectionately. 'I don't think I'll enter him for the Cup, Dare; let us try a smaller race.'

'Bah!' Dare swung round almost savagely. 'I thought you were Dick Big Heart. What's upset you?'

Then after a little while he put his hand on Dick's shoulder kindly.

'My boy, your father was my friend, once. Men call me the Hound. But I've made enough money and to spare, and I'll see you through if it comes to a pinch.'

I was taken back to the stable. Dreadnought— I learned that he was the winner of a dozen big events— was placed in the adjoining stall.

'Plenty of work ahead,' he said to me. 'Derby, Caulfield, and Cup. Whips and colours, spurs and bit. Heigho, what a grand life.'

'I'm only a beginner,' I answered modestly. 'Besides, I don't like racecourses.'

'H'm.' Dreadnought glanced at me peevishly. 'You a beginner! Go and tell that to the boy who brings the chaff.'

That night Dare clapped a bell-topper over Dreadnought's mouth to keep him from biting me.

About a week later I was entered for the Cup. Then Dare began to prepare me for the event. Under his clever hand I felt myself grow limber and flexible as indiarubber. They walked and swam me in the sea water at the back of the house, where the gulls hovered in swarms across the bay. My muscles were flexed with hard and soft brushes, my food weighed and given to me at certain hours, until I yearned to break bit and bridle whenever my head was pulled.

One hot day I was taken to Flemington, and stabled alongside some of the big Melbourne cracks. I used to meet them on the tan in the early morning. Big, princely fellows they were, with flashing eyes and wicked heels. I could not but admire the two first favourites, The Jap and Burrumbeet, who were closely attended and 'clocked' whenever they exercised or went for a morning gallop. Heigho, no one took the trouble to throw a watch 'on me!

My box was at the end of the row. Dreadnought and Bill were my stable companions. Bill was Dick's faithful bulldog. He was fond of me, and he used to lie in the straw, his small eyes, half closed, his tiny ears pricked at the slightest sound. Dare said that a bulldog was an excellent companion for a Cup horse.

The Jap soon leaped to position of first favourite. He was fancied on account of the way he smothered the field at Caulfield. Then came Burrumbeet, The Czar, and Maranoa, The Dingo and Alligator. I was hardly mentioned in the betting. And Dick—it made me tremble to think of it— sold everything belonging to him to prepare me for the race.

Phyllis, Baby, and Dick rented a three-roomed cottage near the course. Phyllis would often bring Baby into my box, while Dick smoked and yarned at the door with Dare. These silly young people hadn't a penny in the world now, everything was sold and mortgaged except Baby and me. 'What's the good worrying about the race until it's lost?' said Dick to Phyllis. 'We'll shake the field up or bust,' he laughed.

'But Jim is such a little horse,' sobbed Phyllis. 'I saw him this morning cantering beside that terrible man-eater The Jap, and, oh, Dick, he looked no bigger than a pony on the track.'

Dick came into the box and slapped my shoulder briskly. 'Jim, Jim, you pulled me out of the fire once. I can't ask you to do it again. The Jap and Burrumbeet will break us, I fear, and then—' He stopped, and covered his face.

Phyllis came in and put Baby against my shoulder, and it said, 'Boo-oo-oo, Geegee!'

I kept to my work cheerfully, and one morning I heard Dare say that the papers were reporting every bit of my work. Within a week my price was 10 to 1; later it shortened to 8s to 7s. I had heard of men bearing the pinch of hunger before making a final bid for fortune. I knew that every penny spent in training me meant an extra pinch for Phyllis and Baby. And yet I could not blame Dick

for putting his last hope in me. It hurt him a little to see dainty Phyllis going out in shabby clothes. She was like a grey mouse when she moved among the well-dressed ladies and owners' wives.

One midnight, when Dick had gone to bed, I heard a scraping on the roof of the stable. Then the iron began to squeak, as though a crowbar were tearing it open. The moon was shining. I saw the faces of two men looking down at me. Dreadnought became restive, and trembled violently.

'That's him,' said one of the men, pointing to me suddenly. 'He's very quiet. Make him swallow the ball, Joe. Don't mark or hurt him in any way.' A moment later Joe— he was an evil-eyed stable boy— slipped down, holding something in his hand.

'Steady, whoa,' he whispered. 'Whoa, Jim—'

I felt that Dreadnought was shaking with fear in the next stall. 'I'll settle your claim to the Cup, my beauty,' said Joe in my ear. He caught me by the mouth and forced back my head. For a moment I felt that he was strangling me...

Dick, Dick. I thought. He will never know what has happened.

'Hist!' whispered the man on the roof sharply; in a flash I saw Bill the dog leap from the straw to Joe's knee, and in a second was swinging from his throat.

'Help! Murder! Help!' dog and man rolled on the stable floor beneath my feet, clawing and tearing at each other. The dog made no sound, voiced no appeal, but the man with the poison ball in his fist rolled and screamed for help.

Dare came, lightning in his eye, a dog whip in his right hand, and flung wide the stable door. Then a jockey boy flashed a big lantern on the scene. Dare choked off the dog, and picked up Joe.

'So,' he said, shaking him fiercely. 'What's your little game?'

Dare stooped and picked the poison ball from the floor. Then he looked at the trembling man, and his face grew livid.

'You unprincipled dog; have you no spirit for clean sport? Out, you dog, out!'

Dare smote with his heavy whip again and again. The would-be poisoner staggered to the door with the lash marks on his neck and arms.

'Go,' said Dare, 'quickly.' The man ran, cursing his luck and the dog that had trapped him.

'You'd better sleep in the stable,' said Dare to Dick. 'There's a gang of spielers hanging about ready to do Little Jim an injury. They think he is likely to interfere with their books, I suppose. I'd like to see the little fellow ruin the

whole gang. All the same, we'll have to watch him night and day until the race is over.'

The night before the Cup was like a furnace; the heat clung to the stables like a hot blanket. Then came a violent change; a sudden deluge of rain roared on the roof, and made Dick sit up and cover his face.

'All over now,' he choked; 'The ground will be like a glue-pot to-morrow. The mud will tire him; he's so small and light.'

Dare peeped into the stable with a glum face. He strolled out after midnight to look at the course, and returned silent and depressed. Phyllis and Baby were quite cheerful, especially Baby; it clung to my neck, saying, 'Boo, oo, boo, gee gee.'

'That's what the crowd will say to me after the race,' groaned Dick. And the rain thundered on the roof, and ran in swimming belts of mud across the flat. Afar off I heard the mighty Jap coughing in his box.

The voice of a sleepless jockey boy broke upon the night. 'Wait till the numbers are up. I'll show you how to ride.'

Then I fell asleep. When I awoke a cool breeze was blowing across the tracks. A grey sky and wet grass greeted me as I crossed the flat for my final morning gallop. Later in the day I heard the voice of a multitude roaring around me. All over the Hill and Flat they spread, men, women, and children, laughing and panting in close packed hundreds. The paddock and enclosures were alive with colours and prettily dressed women. Phyllis and Baby came to have a last look at me before I entered the saddling paddock. Her dress was poor, her face pinched and worn.

'Six to four The Jap,' roared a voice. Eight to four Burrumbeet.'

'Good-bye, Jim,' said Phyllis to me. 'Good-bye, dear.'

I stamped my foot angrily. 'It's Baby he wants,' whispered Dick. 'We'll have to humour him.' For one moment Phyllis allowed Baby to lie against my shoulder.

'Boo, boo, gee gee,' it said in my ear.

After that I don't remember much what happened. My jockey, a well-knit little fellow, walked me on to the course. 'Little Jim!' shouted someone. 'Here he is! Number eight on the card.' The clamour of a great multitude buzzed in my ears. Hundreds of glasses were upon me as I cantered half lazily past the stand. 'Isn't he a tot?' said his Excellency, leaning over. 'Almost a pony. Ah, here's The Jap! What a magnificent horse!'

The favourite swung past me, his jockey tugging at his big head. I watched them for a moment as we ambled to the post. The Jap will fight out the last furlong, I said to myself, until my heart breaks, but it is going to break or win.

My head flashed up and down. I felt the blood of my sires surging through my veins.

A bell rang while a great silence fell upon the crowd. One by one the Cup starters lined up to the post. I had a place on the outside. Old racers like Burrumbeet and Maranoa kept their eyes on the flag, and, as it fell, the field moved away without a mishap.

'They're off!' It was roared from hill to flat. The great race had begun. Now, I thought, if the boy has grit we'll have a look in for the sake of a little woman and a baby.

'Steady Jim,' said the boy in a low comforting voice. 'Steady, you little glutton.' I liked his voice and his sure hold on my mouth. If he felt that I could whip the stars in their flight, he was a boy of sense and discrimination. He crouched forward until I could hardly feel him in the saddle. He seemed to hang his weight on air-pegs. There was no flash riding, no bumping to throw me out of my stride.

'Bless you, my boy,' I said, 'what a golden jockey!'

There were thirteen first-class horses in front of me, trained to the hour, well ridden, and biding their time; and they shovelled the mud along my line of sight like a gang of navvies.

'Get out of my way!' shrieked Burrumbeet's jockey; 'I can't get through.'

'Catch hold of my tail!' shouted The Jap's I rider, 'and I'll give you a tow.'

'Steady Jim!' sang out my jockey. 'The fight hasn't started yet. 'Through a mud-mist in front I beheld The Jap and Maranoa striding along like machines.

'Easy; whoa, Jim! Easy, you little devil,' choked the boy. 'Great Scott! it's our race if nothing happens.'

A loud murmur surged like the sound of ocean surf across the hill and flat.

'Maranoa and the Jap!'

The shout went skyward like a half frantic appeal to the Fates. The big field was behind us now. My heart I was beginning to sing, and hey, the whips I were out!

'Home!' snapped the boy. 'Now for it, I Jim!'

'Maranoa, Maranoa, come back to me,' I breathed.

The whip stung, but not so sharp I as the thought of defeat. The long quiet straight leaped ahead; the judge's box loomed like a small sepulchre at the end. It seemed to reel towards us.

'The Jap!'

'Burrumbeet!'

'Maranoa!'

The sky seemed to close upon the maddening voices. Then a hoarse triumphant roar boomed down the hillside. The Jap rolled in his stride like a



dying colossus, and I ate the ground inch on inch until I breathed the air in front of his big head. Then through the sting of spur and whip came the human roar.

'Burrumbeet, Burrumbeet!'

A great silence fell upon the multitude that was broken by a clear ringing challenge.

'Little Jim!'

'Yah!' shouted my jockey, 'I should think so.'

I forgot everything else, except Phyllis, as I walked from the paddock. Dick found her sitting in the garden, holding baby to her heart.

'Well,' said Dick, huskily. 'What do you think of it, dear?'

'I heard 'the men crying it in the road,' she half whispered. 'Oh, Dick, Dick, it's like a dream,' she sobbed .

Dare came up and shook hands with Dick and Phyllis. Then he put baby on my back and walked me up and down the yard.

'If you'd like to sell Little Jim,' he said, winking at Dick. 'I'll make you a good offer.'

Dick stroked his chin and grinned behind his hand.

'What do you consider a fair offer?' he asked, mischievously.

'Dick!' cried Phyllis. 'How dare you talk of such a thing! I'd sooner sell—' She stopped and blushed furiously.

'Baby?' asked Dick, quietly.

'Almost,' answered Phyllis.

We are pretty comfortable now. Phyllis doesn't wear cotton dresses, and Dick tells everyone that I galloped the wolf from the door.

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## 9: Outcasts of Christmas Island

*Worker (Wagga, NSW) 13 Dec 1906*

THE surf broke in white belts over the reefs of Vanua Island. The beaches of the inner lagoons were of dazzling whiteness where the tide flushed in with musical insistence.

A trade house stood in a palm-fringed clearing, its wide verandah facing the ocean. A bearded man in a canvas suit lay in a hammock at the verandah end. From time to time his binoculars swept the horizon, revealing a whaleboat rigged with boom and foresail creeping slowly in.

Dimly he made out the figure of a man at the steering oar. In the bows sat a woman staring under her hand at the palm clad island ahead.

The bearded man whistled softly, wondering what manner of woman it was who ventured across the horizon in a kanaka steered whaleboat. Later, when the boat entered the lagoon without mishap, he rose to meet his visitor as she stepped onto the beach with the air of a born sailor. He stood a little distance from her, his eyes shooting over her sea-drenched clothes and sunburnt face.

She was not more than 25, blue eyed, with a touch of gold in her wind-lashed hair. His throat grew dry as he regarded her. Her sudden appearance, the refinement of her manner and bearing, aroused his curiosity.

'You are Captain Hayes,' she began slowly. 'I must apologise for my hasty visit.'

Her quick eyes wandered towards the tradehouse, and then to the bearded colossus standing in front of her.

'My name is Hargood.' She smiled pleasantly, and the slanting sun rays touched the gold wedding ring on her finger. 'Bessie Hargood to my friends,' she added. 'My husband was well-known in Sydney and Samoa.'

Hayes regarded her keenly. Her quiet laugh sounded strange in this silent sea-girt atoll. It was two years since he had looked upon a white woman's face, and the blood of kinship leaped from his heart and stayed like wine in his cheeks.

'Well?' His white teeth showed rough the rift in his black beard. 'Why did you come here, Mrs. Hargood? I am lonely man, and few respectable people dare to call on William Henry Hayes.'

'I came to ask your help, Captain Hayes,' she said very quickly. 'A white woman does not risk a two hundred miles sea journey in a whale boat for pleasure or curiosity.'

'A lot of people are curious about me,' sighed the buccaneer. 'The Americans and English gunboats for instance.'

'Your reputation is better than you think, Captain Hayes. I have never heard a white woman speak ill of you.'

That's so.' The buccaneer nodded as if absently. 'I guess the ladies in Samoa and the Line islands found my talk clean as most mission boys.'

'Captain Hayes.' She seemed to break in on his words suddenly; 'I want your help.'

'Say the word, lady, and I'll listen to your reason.'

'I feel sure of it,' she continued. 'The fact is,'— her head dropped slightly— 'eighteen of our boys died last month, and we want to leave the island immediately.'

'Eighteen deaths in a month!' The buccaneer drew away, slightly; a shadow wiped across his eyes. 'What— what—' his speech grew thick, his face whitened.

'Eighteen deaths,' she repeated sadly. 'It swept over us like a whirlwind.'

'It swept over you,' repeated Hayes suddenly. 'What do you mean?' The blood had left his face; sweat stood on his brow.

'Oh! It— *it!*' She wrung her hands tearfully. 'The pestilence— small-pox. We couldn't help it!' she cried, 'God knows how it came. Night and day we fought it on that desolate island. No doctors, no ministers, only Death with its sword, and the everlasting sea.'

She paced the white beach, sobbing quietly.

'I heard from a Navigator Islander that you were here at Vanua,' she went on, 'and so I came.'

Hayes remained staring at her.

'I've no immediate use for small-pox,' he said pensively. 'It's one of those things that drifts over the sea and strikes a man in the prime of his youth. What do you want to do?' he asked.

'Help my people to get away from the Island of Death,' she said quickly. 'Your schooner would carry us to Sydney. There are eight lives to be saved,' she added seriously.

Hayes was not easily moved or persuaded, but the woman's mission was terribly clear to him. In that year small-pox had swept from the Navigators to the Bismarck Archipelago with deadly effect, filling the island cemeteries with natives and whites alike.

Bessie Hargood's eyes grew limpid in their appeal for help. Hayes did not speak for a while. Then, turning, he begged her to take a little food after her weary voyage.

She followed him to the shade of the trade house verandah and accepted a chair. He touched a bell at her elbow. Swift upon it came a couple of white-clad natives, and at a word from Hayes they brought a table to the verandah.

In a few moments the cloth was laid; a silver tea urn and various kinds of cooked meats and fruit were placed before her. Without words the sea-weary woman sat beside the buccaneer and ate in a half-famished way of the white bread and fruits at her elbow. He assisted her occasionally, pouring out the tea, and addressing her only at intervals.

'A whale boat isn't the place for a lady,' he said solemnly. 'Why didn't some of your men folk take the trip?'

'They were rather afraid of you, Captain,' she answered brightly. 'Some people imagine that you walk about with a gun, killing things at sight.' Her eyes sparkled as the food warmed and nourished her.

Dinner over, Hayes went aboard his schooner lying at anchor inside the lagoon, and with the help of his kanakas prepared her for the run to Christmas Island.

Towards evening, the schooner with Bessie Hargood and her servant aboard passed through the reef channel to the open Pacific. Hayes stood by the wheel whistling softly, his eyes fixed on the whitening seas that crowded over the distant reefs.

BESSIE Hargood remained in her cabin for two days, her kanaka servant carrying her food from the galley. On the fourth morning after leaving Vanuay a hump of reef bulged across the horizon; then, the hoarse booming of surf reached her below. Hastening on deck she met Hayes scanning, a palm-fringed islet through his binoculars.

'If that's your island,' he said slowly, 'we'll fetch the lagoon on the eastern side, ma'am.'

At midday they were safely inside the reef entrance, within hailing distance of a tiny village, half hidden in a jungle of pandanus and tropic undergrowth. A bamboo thatched house stood near the beach, and as the schooner's anchor rumbled to the lagoon floor several white-clad figures hurried indoors. It seemed as though they feared the close scrutiny of Hayes' binoculars.

'Your people seem a bit frightened, ma'am!' The buccaneer turned to his lady passenger inquiringly. 'What's the matter with them?'

'They are a bit shy of you, Captain Hayes,' she laughed. 'But they'll like you better on closer acquaintance.'

Save for the bamboo-thatched house the island appeared deserted. No sound of life was heard within the village. A deadly stillness hung over the

woods and inlets; it was as though the pestilence had destroyed even the birds and sea fowls.

As the whaleboat put off from the schooner seven white-clad figures assembled on the house verandah and gaped at the buccaneer sitting in the stern. Bessie Hargood stood up in the bows waving her handkerchief.

The kanakas brought the boat well under the lee of the house. Hayes again fixed his glasses on the skulking white-clad figures in the verandah shade.

'Great Scott! they're Chinamen!' He glanced swiftly at the woman in the bows. 'You didn't tell me that your people were Chinese....'

The woman's lips grew dry at the sound of the big harsh voice.

'They are not common Chinamen,' she said hurriedly. 'Five of them are high-caste Manchus from the University of Pekin.' A flush of anger swept over the buccaneer as his eyes fell upon the slant-eyed crowd waiting on the verandah.

'I don't like chows on my schooner, ma'am,' he broke out, 'and I can't understand an Australian lady risking her life to get 'em off the island.'

The whaleboat grounded on the beach suddenly, and without answering Hayes, Bessie Hargood hurried ashore and half ran towards the house. The buccaneer's fury did not abate when the seven celestials marched with ghost-like, solemnity to meet her. One by one they salaamed reverently, greeting her in their own language.

The mystery of it all unsettled Hayes. Here was a white lady, well educated and refined, stranded on an island with seven Asiatics who treated her with veneration and religious regard.

The eldest celestial, with a flowing white beard, advanced and bowed courteously to Hayes, addressing him in good English.

'We are very glad to see you, Captain Hayes,' he said smoothly. 'The kanakas stole our schooner a month ago, and we are in a peculiar position.'

'I promised Mrs. Hargood that I'd carry her to Sydney, and I've just been telling her that I don't like Chinamen,' he said bluntly. 'Still,' he felt his beard thoughtfully, 'I don't mind your company if all is well and above board.'

'We are well as you see.' The big white-bearded Chinaman indicated the smiling row of celestials drawn up on the verandah. 'We have a little money, and we shall be glad to pay a reasonable amount for our passage to Sydney in your schooner.'

No time was lost in getting the Chinamen's belongings on board the schooner. Everything had been disinfected days before— a smell of burnt sulphur hung over their wardrobes and boxes. Punctually at six bells the whaleboat made its last trip from the island, bringing the seven Chinamen and one sandalwood box covered with a silk pall. Hayes stood by the gangway as

they laid it on deck; stepping forward briskly he removed the silk coving inquisitively.

'What's in here?' he demanded huskily. 'I'm rather particular about my cargo just now.' He glanced at the long sandalwood box uneasily.

Bessie Hargood touched his hand gently. A look of unutterable sorrow was in her eyes.

'Captain Hayes, I ought to have; told you that when my little boy Frank passed away a month ago— he died of fever, not small-pox. One of these gentlemen,' she indicated a smiling Chinaman standing near the gangway, 'undertook the process of embalming the little body.'

Hayes stood transfixed; his jaw hung suddenly; the creaking, of the schooner's yards broke the painful silence.

'Everyone belonging to me is dead,' she went on, 'husband and children, sister and friends. I am returning to Sydney a desolate woman, except for this last relic.'

She knelt by the little sandalwood box, her shoulders shaking with grief. The lid was made of glass and the face of a well-preserved child was visible inside. Hayes turned away, swiftly.

'Guess I'm not the man to stand between you and your little son,' he said thickly. Then, as if to shake the emotion from his voice, he roared out an order to the crew, and in half-an-hour the schooner was running before a stiff S.E. wind for Sydney Heads.

Shortly after midnight, the buccaneer's native boy, Tamasese, crept into his cabin and shook him stealthily. Hayes sat up in the bunk rubbing his eyes.

'What is it?' he demanded huskily. 'Anything, wrong?'

'Nothing wrong much, Cap'n,' whispered the boy. 'Me go into Chinamen's quarters one while ago when they go sleep.'

'Take care,' grunted the buccaneer; 'they'll cut you in slices if they catch you fooling round their cabin.'

The boy grinned good humouredly. 'Me not frightened of one dam chow, cap'n. Me fancy that pretty box tied up in the silk shawl.'

'You inquisitive brat !' Hayes stretched out his hand half angrily; 'There's a dead child inside. Don't mess about with those things. If the woman hears about it she'll break her heart. Leave the box alone, Tamasese ; it's sacred, you understand— one little child inside.'

'No dam fear, Cap'n!' chuckled the boy. 'Dead boy in um box only made of wax. Me break off one bit off his finger. See!'

Hayes sprang from his bunk and lit the swinging lamp overhead, then examined the broken wax finger in the boy's hand.

'What in thunder's their game?' he muttered. 'Where's the sense in hawking a wax dummy across the ocean?'

He sat on the edge of the bunk, staring at the broken finger. The Chinamen or the woman had evidently forgotten, in the hurry of departure, to secure the glass lid of the sandalwood box. The grinning face of Tamasese fairly shone in the lamp glow as he continued the story of his adventure.

'Me lift up the lid, Cap'n, an' feel one big heap of wool under the wax head. Then my fingers twist in an' out until I touch one little bag full of pearls, twenty or thirty all together!'

'Pearls!' Hayes leaned forward and caught the boy's wrist fiercely. 'By God, you've hit it, sonny! They've been working a big shell lagoon; they've been hanging on to the pearls with the idea of collecting a perfect set. I know what pearl matching is...'

The mystery of Christmas Island began to grow clear to Hayes. The wax figure in the sandalwood box had been placed there with the object of keeping him from inspecting it too closely. It was undoubtedly a Chinaman's way of keeping his hoard sacred from thieving hands. They were certain that once Bessie Hargood convinced Hayes of the sacredness of the box and its contents, their store of pearls would remain Untouched during the voyage; The buccaneer knew instinctively that they feared him. His name had an ominous sound in the South Seas; and it was only the fear of death by disease or starvation that compelled them to travel in his schooners. He sat quite still in the cabin, staring at the boy Tamasese. He was certain that his celestial passengers were armed belt and heel. He had detected a look in their, eyes that showed plainly they would fight like devils if he attempted to meddle with their property.

Bessie Hargood kept to her little stateroom, only appearing on deck at intervals when the weather was fine, and the sea smooth. As the days flew by and Sydney drew nearer, the thought of the pearls lying under the wax figure in the box disturbed the Captain's rest. He estimated their value at anything over 50,000 dollars, and the proximity of so much wealth filled him with a desire to annex the Chinamen's portion at least.

On December 20th, Sydney Heads loomed through the morning mists. Bessie Hargood was on deck leaning over the rail thoughtfully. The Chinamen were below attending to their luggage as the schooner raced through the Heads.

Hayes, with a grin on his face, ran up a yellow flag suddenly as he steered for the quarantine grounds and let go his anchor.

The rattle of the chain was heard by the Chinamen below; in a flash they appeared on deck, their eyes glittering with excitement.

'Why you put up that yellow flag?' one of them demanded shrilly. 'That one dam fool thing to do.'

'Guess I'm only complying with the shipping laws,' answered Hayes. Christmas Island is scheduled as an infected port. This schooner must be, inspected by a medical officer, the crew and passengers mustered aft and thoroughly examined before pratique is granted.'

Bessie Hargood approached him gently.

'We are free from infection, Captain Hayes, as you know. That yellow flag may cause us to be quarantined for several days.'

'I'm sorry, ma'am; but the people of New South Wales must be considered. Small-pox is not a disease to be trifled with.'

An hour later a Government Medical Officer swung aboard, and after a careful examination of the schooner warned Hayes not to leave his anchorage until further notice. The people of Sydney, he explained, were in no hurry to acquire confluent small-pox.

All that day the seven Chinamen fretted below, while Bessie Hargood gazed impatiently at the narrow stretch of water that separated her from the shore. Night came, and the dull boom, of surf breaking on South Head beat upon their ears.

Hayes smoked thoughtfully in his cabin listening to the slightest movement on deck. The rustling of a woman's dress reached him suddenly. Looking up he saw Bessie Hargood, standing; in the doorway. He nodded briefly, and waited for her to speak. The creaking of the schooner almost drowned her whispering voice.

'Captain Hayes,' she began, 'I am anxious to go ashore. My people, are waiting for me. The weariness of the voyage, the inactivity is telling on my health.'

Hayes regarded her through his half shut eyes.

'Anything else ma'am ?' he asked coldly.

'I want to go ashore,' she repeated tremulously; 'and, oh, Captain Hayes, I would like—' she paused, and for the first time during the voyage, broke into tears.

'Oh,' he said quietly.

'I would like to take my dead child with me; I could cover it with a silk shawl. It would be no trouble for me to carry.'

She sobbed quietly in the cabin doorway, while above on deck, could be heard the pad, pad, of the promenading Chinamen.'

'I don't know how it's to be done, ma'am,' he answered slowly. 'What do you propose?'

Her face lit up at the question; she steadied her voice before speaking.



'If you lowered a boat at midnight, one of the Chinamen could land me near Watson's Bay. He would then return to the schooner.'

The buccaneer sat up stiffly, a frown on his brow.

'I can't trust a quarantined Chinaman on 'the harbor with my boat, ma'am. 'The water police would bring you back for sure. Then ye'd smell gaol, ma'am. No,' he added suddenly, 'I don't quite see it, ma'am.'

'If money will tempt you—' she began.

'It won't,' he snapped. 'I'm not going to trust my liberty in the hands of a Chinaman, ma'am. But,' he glanced at her swiftly. 'I'll take you ashore in the boat myself if you like. Guess I know more about dodging water police than your Chinamen.'

She caught her breath like a sick woman. It was as though his sudden proposition had frightened her.

'I— I—' she gasped.

'I don't see your objection,' he said gruffly. 'This is my schooner; I'm master here. You can accept my offer or leave it, ma'am.'

'I must ask their permission first. We are a kind of a syndicate,' she said coldly, 'and we prefer to consult each other in all things. Since my husband died on Christmas Island I've had to take his place in business matters.'

She passed on deck, and there was a hurried consultation among the restless Chinamen. Half an hour later she returned to Hayes' cabin.

'Well?' He regarded her quizzingly.

'I am ready to go ashore if you will take me,' she said quietly.

Without speaking Hayes followed her on deck, and in the darkness a boat was lowered from the starboard side of the schooner. It was a calm, windless night, and the boat heaved gently as she stepped into it. Next came the sandalwood box, which was placed at the woman's feet in the boat's stern. Hayes ran his eye over the quiet harbor to where the pilot steamer lay at anchor under the lee of the South Head'. Then he softly took his place at the oars.

A white strip of beach across the dark water caught his eye. He pulled towards it leisurely, his thoughts shaping themselves swiftly as he rowed.

Bessie Hargood sat still with the sandalwood box at her feet. She did not speak or meet his glance as the boat drew near the beach. He had no intention of parting with, the sandalwood box without extracting the Chinamen's share of the pearls. He felt quite willing to allow her half of the treasure; there was no need to rob her mercilessly.

'Steady ma'am,' he whispered, as the boat bumped heavily on the beach. 'I'll give you a hand with the box.'

Raising it lightly from the stern he bore it ashore, and stooped to place it on the sand. Then he glanced up as though something had touched his spine. Her right hand pointed towards him and he caught the gleam of a revolver barrel covering him wickedly.

She stood half-a-dozen paces from him, her eyes shining strangely; her mouth shut tight as a steel trap.

'Walk back to the boat, Captain Hayes. If you move a hand or turn, I'll shoot you without mercy.'

There was a peculiar softness in her voice; a tremulous courage that was without haste or hysteria. The buccaneer, without turning, walked to the boat swearing softly. She followed to the water's edge watching him narrowly.

'Push off,' she commanded, 'and if you let go the oars I'll show you how a woman can hit a buccaneer at fifty yards.'

Hayes made no reply as he pulled away from the revolver. Then he saw her stoop and vanish swiftly into the scrub.

A dozen strokes brought him ashore again, furious at being held up so simply. Leaping from the boat he blundered after her into the thick coast scrub. But Hayes was an inexperienced bushman; stones and creepers tripped him as he ran. Panting with exertion he listened and waited, but the silence of desolation was upon everything.

The overturned sandalwood box lay on the beach, the wax face of the figure stooped and examined it carefully, but the pearls had vanished.

It occurred to him now that the box had been brought ashore, as a blind; it had given her an opportunity to cover him with her revolver the moment he stooped to place it on the beach.

Returning to the schooner he discovered that the Chinamen had decamped in the whaleboat, taking their valuables with them. Two days later the boat was found near Clontarf. The misadventure compelled him to put to sea before dawn to escape a marine inquiry.

TWO YEARS afterwards, at Vanua, he received a letter from Bessie Hargood. The writing was beautifully clear :

*Dear Captain Hayes,*

*I'm afraid we treated you rather badly. You must not forget that you bear a bad name throughout the Pacific, and we had to play possum with our pearls. If you had turned on me the night I covered you with my revolver, I would have dropped it or fainted; but you didn't.*

*Affectionately*

*Bessie Hargood.*

Inside the letter were four twenty pound notes.  
'Well, I'm damned!' said Hayes.

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## 10: A Bit of Comedy

*Punch* (Melbourne, Vic) 27 Dec 1906

WHEN WILLIAM COTTER unloaded £30,000 worth of gold from the White Span mine, Kalgoorlie, he put most of the money in the bank and married a young lady whose parents had once occupied a leading position in Perth society.

Her father had suffered from the financial blights which swept over the fortunes of many Westralian magnates. Rosalind Marcombe had been educated at a private school in England. She admired Bach and Wagner, sang in a pretty contralto voice, and finally married William Cotter, with his bowyangs and sun-blistered face, for the sake of the home he could give her. Her elegance of manner, her daintily chosen words abashed Bill Cotter. When she sat opposite him at table, surrounded by silver and chinaware, he felt unhappy. He would have preferred eating his food in the kitchen, where he could have taken his pipe from the mantelshelf and smoked undisturbed. Even his expensive clothes and clean-shaved face failed to give him a genteel appearance. Whenever his wife's friends glanced at him across the table Bill became nervous, and dropped things on the floor.

Rosalind Cotter was far from despising the man she had married. She pitied his clumsiness, and often tried to coach him into the ways and manners of good society.

But Bill Cotter grew angrier each day; his wife's charm of manner, her genteel behaviour seemed to illuminate his own ignorance and shortcomings. The monotonous refinement of the frequent dinner parties jarred on his patience. The sound of Rosalind's voice often awoke him from his sullen broodings at table. She was always tactfully apologising for his gruffness of manner, always trying to prevent him eating peas with his knife.

One day, after being lectured for drinking tea out of a saucer, Bill collected his large dignity, and fairly shook with wrath. "Rosie... I'm as good as you, and better than your father, with his sneers an' his advice. I could wipe the floor with both your brothers—the two flannelled understrappers who play tennis with girls. If they had salt in 'em they'd chuck up tennis an' bun-parties an' hit out for the gold-fields an' do somethin' for their fambily."

"William," answered Rosalind, quietly, "behave yourself."

"Never troubled about my haitches," went on Bill, savagely; "but I reckon my people are as good as yours. I've seen your mother"—Bill looked his wife between the eyes—"an' I 'ope you'll 'ave the pleasure of seein' mine some day, Mrs. Cotter."

Rosalind gasped, and retired in tears to her room. Bill strolled cityward, and played billiards with the marker at the Southern Cross Hotel.

FOUR MONTH later William Cotter decided that a trip to Sydney would be desirable for many reasons. His wife accompanied him cheerfully, and a pretty villa was rented at Coogee. The little Westralian girl enjoyed her first week by the sea without misgivings or regrets.

About a fortnight after their arrival Bill bought a theatrical journal in the city, and ran his eye over the list of actors and actresses who were resting or open to engagements. A card bearing the inscription, "Muriel Cotter, Comedy Actress. 'Elvira.' Manly," arrested his attention.

That night, with the lady's address in his pocket, Bill journeyed to Manly, and within an hour was standing at the door of "Elvira HO'ISP." He was admitted to the front room by a pale-faced girl attendant, and told to wait. In a few minutes a tall, middle-aged lady of aristocratic appearance swept in, and bowed slightly to her visitor.

Bill regarded her admiringly, and in a husky voice asked if Miss Cotter was at home. "I am Miss Cotter."

She glanced at him enquiringly, and sat on the opposite chair. Bill was silent for many seconds, then, with a strange lump in his throat, he began his story.

"Y'see, Miss Cotter. I made a bit o' money out West, an' married a toney girl, who looks upon me sideways, so to speak. She's a good little woman, you understand, but I can't fight her frills an' pride as I'd like to. Her fambily look on me as a rich larrikin, an' I want ter correct that impression."

"Tragic, quite tragic, and very difficult to remedy," answered Miss Cotter, thoughtfully.

"Me bein' used to pick and shovel," continued Bill, "I'm supposed to 'ave sprung from low-borned people with corns on their 'ands. Now ma'am,"— Bill faced her with great suddenness— "if a lady like yourself was ter call on me in a carriage an' say yer was my mother— only pertend, yer know— it wud give me a lift in her estimation, an' I'd have more pull with her people when it come to a question of hancestors."

Muriel Cotter, the comedy actress, stared blankly at Bill for a few moments, then coughed dubiously. Bill, in turn, shuffled his feet uneasily and wiped his hot, red face.

"It ain't a compliment to yer, Miss Cotter, askin' yer to be me mother. I'm nigh on thirty years an' yer mightn't be a day older yourself. Still"—he smiled knowingly—"yer cud make up yer part."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," answered the actress "I am not unwilling to enter into the joke providing—" She looked fixedly at Bill. "The wages."

Bill nodded, and winked. "Name yer salary," he said, definitely.

She coughed a little anxiously. "It has always been £20 a week, but times are hard and managers harder. We'll call it £7 a week until you feel justified in terminating the contract."

"Play yer part an' I'll make it a bit over, said Bill steadily. "I don't want you to spare Rosin's feelin's; she never spared mine."

Bill breathed hard when he remembered the peas and knife incidents.

"I suppose you 'ave one or two nice dresses. Miss Cotter?"

The comedy actress smiled, bowed with the grace of a leading lady.

"I have several Paris frocks that I wore in 'Magda'. My wardrobe is excellent."

"Magda. Magda," muttered Bill "It was staged out West. A lady sweeps in an' sez 'Ere I am,' she sez, 'me, mesself. Nobody helped me to do it but mesself. I, me.' That's the part I'd like you to play when you meet Rosie. Turn yer back on her an wave yer arms."

The actress smiled.

"You wish me to overawe your wife a little, I suppose."

She consulted her watch carefully. "I will call on you to-morrow evening at eight, if it is convenient."

BILL was seated in the drawing room when the hansom drew up outside. Rosalind moved half nervously from the piano, and glanced at the open window. A soft booming of surf broke upon them occasionally. The door-bell rang sharply; a moment or two later the servant entered with a card.

"Mrs. Cotter, ma'am," she said, gently.

Rosalind turned a bewildered face to her husband.

"Who is it?" she gasped.

"It's maw." Bill rolled back on the lounge, a thumb in his waistcoat, a frown on his brow. "Didn't think she'd call on pore me."

The drawing room door opened. Miss Cotter, the comedy actress, entered in tragic haste, a lorgnette in her right hand; her long train of white silk clung with a dazzling radiance about her ankles. For a moment she remained statuesque and silent in the centre of the room until Bill looked up and met her eye. Then, with a glance that seemed to measure worlds, she regarded Rosalind.

"Are you Mrs. Willie Cotter?" she asked, gently.

"It's only Maw," broke in Bill, hoarsely. "Maw, that's Rosie."

Rosalind stood up, quaking in her surprise.

"I never heard," she began, half audibly.

"Of course, you didn't, my dear." The actress kissed her very tenderly.

"Willy was always such a stupid boy. No room in his head for anything except mines, mines, mines."

Bill lay back on the lounge with the air of one who had consumed champagne since boyhood.

"How's things, Maw? Yer lookin' pearly. Yer still to the fore, I 'ope?"

"Oh, you wicked, wicked boy! Why didn't you tell me in your letter, instead of allowing me to find out?" There was a touch of anger and reproach in her voice. She slapped his large red hand reproachfully. "Why didn't you tell me you were married?"

The bleak look in Rosalind's eyes vanished.

"I didn't think Willy had a mother," she said, timorously. "He left us to guess things."

"And you guessed that I was an old apple woman, wearing a large white apron, or a stout, gruffy person who sold ginger-beer."

The comedy actress took Rosalind's hands, and kissed her softly. "Dear little wifey, I'm not going to play the society mother-in-law. I want to see you happy with my big, rough, boorish son."

"He only seems rough," pleaded Rosalind. "He is careless, not unkind."

The comedy queen swept across the room and for a moment regarded the pair with twinkling eyes. Then she became serious.

"My dear Rosalind, Willy is backward in many things. Perhaps I am to blame. At ten he ran from home. Instead of school, he chose the life of a gold-hunter. And the life has made him positively unbearable."

"Maw!" Bill regarded the actress reproachfully. But Miss Cotter paced the room with bowed head, while the beauty of her Paris clothes struck a note of envy in Rosalind's heart. "You are from Perth," she said, addressing Rosalind, gently, "a dreadfully out-of-the-way place, my dear— out of touch with civilisation."

She paced the room with quick, graceful steps, which had only come to her after years of rehearsal. Her swift eyes took in at a glance the drawing room and its appointments.

"My dear Rosalind, you must let me help you in the matter of furnishing your home. Your pictures, for instance, are pretty, your furniture chippy, but not Chippendale."

She touched the carpet with her gloved hand, and sighed commiseratingly. "German rags, my dear." Then she looked tenderly into the young wife's eyes, and laughed, playfully. "It takes a lifetime of culture and experience to make a connoisseur. How few know the difference between a Tintoretto, a Veronese

and an oleograph! And your piano—" Without a word she ungloved her hands, and a voice quivering with emotion sang Tosti's "Good-Bye."

Rosalind listened, and in her heart she knew that none of her acquaintances could have sung it with so much beauty and ease as Bill's mother. At 10 p.m. the comedy actress drove away, promising to call again before Rosalind returned to Perth.

Bill became a new man after Miss Cotter's visit. He was never tired of telling Rosalind that her parents ought to have taught her the difference between oleographs and oil paintings. When she responded by saying that no civilised person eats peas from his knife-blade, Bill asked her to supply him with a bit of real Chippendale instead of Chinese boards painted red.

ONE WET evening he returned from a game of billiards later than usual. Entering the house, he saw a light burning in the drawing room. He opened the door softly and peeped in. A sunburnt little woman was seated on the lounge beside Rosalind; she was dressed in old-fashioned, country-made clothes; a large Quakeress hat, with black ribbons attached, rested on chair. She sighed in a glad, nervous way as Bill entered; her eyes were luminous with suppressed excitement.

She ran towards him, and— the great Bill stooped and kissed her heartily. "Why, mother," he said, "how are yer?"

"Willy, Willy, why didn't you say you was in Sydney, lad?"

A big blush leaped into Bill's face. For a moment he glanced sheepishly at Rosalind, but saw something in her eyes that reassured him.

"There ain't no mistake about this mother, Rosalind," he said. "Hugs a feller like a bear; and I ain't worth it."

Rosalind's eyes were full of laughter and tears. "And the lady in the Paris dress, the lady who understood Paul Veronese and Tintoretto?"

"This is my mother." Bill drew the little old woman beside him on the lounge. "And if you ask along the Castlereagh they'll tell you she's a lady."

"I've been listenin' to Rosalind singin', Willy," said the little woman, quietly, "an' I do wish Coonamble could hear her pretty voice. I feel proud, I do," she said, earnestly, "to see my son married to such a dear wife."

"Ask him if he has been a good son," laughed Rosalind. "Ah, dear, he is good. He never forgot his mother— never for a day."

"Did he leave you— poor?" asked Rosalind.

"Him !" Bill's mother turned slowly to the young wife, and fixed upon her two kindly eyes. "Why, the Castlereagh is proud of his name. When you come up, my dear, they'll tell you he has grit and honesty. Deary, we were poor all our lives, father and children alike— bad luck, bush fires an' bad seasons—



until Willy here rolled his swag and went West, an' met his reward. He didn't forget his people. His brothers own good farms; his father an' me are comfortable."

Her lips quivered a little. "I do hope, deary, that you will be happy with my son. If you come to Coonamble with him, they will treat you like a queen. You ain't too ashamed to come, deary?"

She regarded her son's wife with tender, wistful eyes.

"No, no." Rosalind stooped and kissed her. "I would like to see his people if he cared for me to go." Her eyes were full of tears.

"I reckon they're worth seein' if you think so, Rosie." He drew her close to him. "How do you like mother this time?" he whispered.

She pulled down his head and pinched his ear.

"Much better than the picture woman with the powder on her cheek," she answered.

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## 11: A Deal in Planets

*Daily News* (Perth, WA) 2 April 1908

'ONE OF my divers missing!'

Captain Hayes stooped over the lugger's side and peered under the steps, where Io San and Kusima Shani were preparing to descend again. into the shoal water of the Vanderdecken Bank.

'Where's Sushi Ma this morning?' he called out.

Io San shook water from his hair and ears; his chest and biceps were grid-ironed with scars where the jagged reef-points caught him in his descent

'Sushi Ma not here to-day,' he answered sullenly. 'Gone ashore long ago last night. Big thief Sushi. No dam good!'

Scattering weeds and shell-litter from his basket, he dropped like a plummet into the fretting shoal-water. A few bubbles trailed white as blisters where his plug-shaped body moved over the oyster swathes below.

Hayes watched the diver's lightning movement as he plucked and scooped the golden-edge shell from the shallow floor of the bank. All round on the spongy-beds of coral the scattered trepang lay like black cucumber. The long fine sea-grass moved and swayed under the diver's feet, where the endless lanes of coral shut out the questing barramundi and the shark.

With a fish-like motion of the body the diver swept to the surface, a half filled basket of shell under his arm.

Hayes turned towards the little township that seemed to straddle over the hummock- ridden sky-line. It was composed of kanaka hovels, and boasted a Chinese bank. Around him on every side were pearling luggers and bêche-de-mer schooners. The surface of the bay seemed alive with the bobbing heads of sleek-bodied Japanese divers. The loud rattle of knives reached him, accompanied by the squalling voices of the shell-openers employed on the big store-ship anchored within a cable's length of the fleet.

It was seldom that a 'skin,' or swimming diver, deserted, for although Captain Hayes was an iron-fisted disciplinarian, he was a liberal master, and generous to a fault in the matter of feeding and berthing his crews of Rotumah men and Japanese divers. Sushi Ma, the missing diver, had been twice charged with theft of pearl, and acquitted by a hastily formed tribunal of lugger captains on the usual plea of insufficient evidence. And as Hayes glanced from fleet to skyline he meditated swiftly upon the cause of Sushi's desertion, until it became clear to him that the little brown man was playing thief on a larger scale than usual.

The buccaneer's meditations were of a brief and hurried nature. Slipping into a dinghy he pushed off from the steps and rowed leisurely to the pier, situated at the head of an evil-smelling creek known as Deliverance Inlet. Once ashore he strolled thoughtfully down the crooked, front street that zig-zagged through interminable sandhills. A few spindly trees cast ominous blots of shadows across the ant-pitted, road. Small groups of Kiwais and bêche de mer fishers loafed in the doorways of the kanaka boarding-houses, watching the well-known figure of the man who had held a French gunboat in check only six months before.

From a word gathered here and there, as he strolled through the township, the buccaneer was certain, that something unusual had happened among the wealthy Chinese pearl buyers.

A Cingalee girl, with dorian flowers in her hair, tittered softly as he passed. A half-drunken sailor blundered from a near shanty and gaped owlishly at the buccaneer. Hayes caught him by the sleeve gently and swung him round.

'I'll give you a case of gin for that smile of yours, Jimmy,' he said huskily. 'Where's Sushi Ma?'

The sailor, an old shell-opener from one of the Dutch Arab Company's boats, hiccupped noisily, and glanced over his shoulder at the black shanty keeper watching him from inside.

'You've been robbed, Hayes,' he said, in a smothered whisper, 'Sushi— hic— sold big pearl he picked up on your bank. Not a blister pearl— hic— onderstand; not baroque either; just a fair hummer, an' half the chows— hic— are in the deal.'

'The chows are all right,' said, the buccaneer lazily. 'How much did Sushi get for it, anyhow?'

'The yellow banks opened— hic — their safes to buy it,' chuckled the sailor. 'It's the loveliest freak gem y'ever set eyes on!'

'You saw it then?'

'Through the bank window— hic— yesterday. Eight chows were licking n'— hic— breathin' over it. Loveliest gem y'ever saw! They've christened it the Three Planets. Best thing, found in the Straits since the Little Coronet was lifted— hic— off the Aroes reef.'

Hayes shrugged his shoulders wearily, but his eyes leaped across, the crooked line of bamboo-thatched verandahs and gambling-dens that hedged in the Chinese bank at Deliverance.

Nodding absently to the sailor, he strode down the road whistling softly. He was not concerned with the whereabouts of Sushi Ma, he was merely anxious to confront a Chinese bank proprietor named Willy Ah King, whose reputation as an illicit pearl-buyer had travelled from Van Diemen's Gulf to the

Batavian fisheries. As a receiver of stolen gems Willy Ah King had baffled every attempt on the part of the Territorian police to convict him.

His agents cruised in their big sampans from Sud. Est to Thursday Island, and no pearling lugger was safe from their heathen blandishments and sleight-of-hand thefts. Despite every precaution to guard their luggers against these Chinese marauders, the fleet owners were compelled to admit that the finest pearls found on the banks passed mysteriously into the hands of Willy Ah King. The pearl companies fretted and bided their time, hoping some day to catch his agents within shooting distance of their luggers.

Hayes had put all his capital into the six luggers working the shell-strewn floor of the Vanderdecken Bank, where the narrow swathes of golden-edge, and silver-lip pearl glittered among the coral and trepang beds. And from time to time he learned, in a roundabout way, how the fruits of his labours were being filched from under his eyes.

The Chinaman is the craftiest law evader within the Gulf. His mind is an abyss of unfathomable schemes and untraceable larcenies. The habits and movements of the white criminal may be part foreseen or anticipated, but to the average investigator the brain of the Mongolian is a jungle and a blank. The most expert detectives in Australia have grown morose and senile in their efforts to unravel the innumerable problems connected with Chinese frauds.

The bank at Deliverance Inlet was managed by Willy Ah King and his mysterious Australian wife. It was built of iron, and its dark corridors were lined with hessian and old canvas sails. There were pak-a pau and fan-tan rooms, where few white men had ever entered. Pearls were gambled and fought for, but no one ever guessed how Willy Ah King transported his ill-gotten gems from Deliverance Inlet to Booby Island. His private schooner had often been boarded by water-police, and thoroughly searched, the bank had been similarly ransacked from strong-room to chimney, yet no more pearl had been found than would cover the head of a writing pencil.

Hayes entered the bank in time to see a pigtailed head vanish behind a beetle covered screen. A pair of slant eyes seemed to burn suddenly through the uplifting tobacco smoke.

'What you want, Hayes? Wha' fo' you come here?'

Willy Ah King heaved his eighteen-stone bulk into the narrow passage and blinked innocently. 'Me welly busy now. You come to-morrow.'

'Guess there'll be no to-morrow for you, King, if I'm kept waiting,' snapped the buccaneer. 'Don't play your to-morrow on me. I've got a nickel plated bullet that will cut a hole in your to-morrow. Savvy?'

'You welly funny man, Hayes,' smiled the big Chinaman. 'You talkee shoot shoot. Me welly tired. Me no savvy anything.'

'I've been robbed, of a three-planet gem, King.' Hayes spoke smoothly, and his eyes fell instinctively on the kris-like knife snuggling in the folds of the silken *slanderdang*. 'I want you to make up your mind about returning it. I'll give you till four o'clock this evening, and if the pearl isn't aboard my lugger where it belongs—'

'What you do then?' grinned the Celestial placidly.

'Guess you'll know when my heel is on your face, King. I'll give you time to warn your committee of monkey-headed swindlers. I'll allow you most of the afternoon to discuss honest finance.'

'To-morrow, Hayes— to-morrow. You welly excited.'

The Chinaman wagged his head like a spring-fitted image as the buccaneer picked his way out of the unlit passage.

The bank reeked of opium fumes. In the sweating darkness of the back rooms gangs of Filipinos and Burghis men sprawled in grotesque attitudes. Some lay with knees up-drawn and eyes staring at the bamboo rafters overhead, others crouched face down on their mats as though someone had flung them from a great height, and above all came the low slaving sound of opium pipes.

From every loophole and shutter a Mongolian face watched him as he swung down the hot, ant-pitted road. At the wharf jetty he paused near an ill-kept house with broken shutters, and listened. A voice had hailed him from within, and he waited somewhat impatiently for it to repeat itself.

In the silence he heard the shrilling wail of a Chinese fiddler that throbbed like a maddened nerve. Swearing softly, he moved on, but the voice reached him. before he had proceeded a dozen yards. 'Follow the man with the falcon, Hayes.'

The buccaneer- stared at. the broken windows of the house as though expecting to see the face of the speaker. A door slammed suddenly upstairs: the sound of slippered feet hurrying along the passage reached him. An other door closed more violently than the first, leaving him to gape at the empty house front. The voice was strange to him, and he was inclined to think that the gang of Chinese pearl thieves were trying to fool and bewilder him.

'Follow the man with the falcon,' he muttered. 'Guess I'll be following some of their funerals if they don't brighten up their honesty.'

Stepping into the dinghy he pulled slowly across the bay to where the luggers rolled and sweltered abeam of the Vanderdecken Bank. Swarms of gulls and man-o'-war hawks fed ravenously in the oily backwash where the careless shell-openers had flung their rotting heaps of burley from the deck of the big store-schooner. Resting on his oars, Hayes scanned the half-moon-

shaped bay, the dazzling expanse of white beach that stretched to the jungled promontory in the north.

The low thunder of surf on the outer reefs broke sullenly across the bay; a white sail flitted, and hung for a moment against the sombre, green of the wooded headland. The boat was evidently in the hands of an inexperienced sailor, and threatened to capsize as the sudden gusts of wind drove it beachward half-full of water.

'Chinaman taking a holiday,' muttered Hayes. 'Ought to be at home washing clothes instead of piling himself on a sand-bar.'

The next moment he half-rose in the dinghy, smothering an exclamation of surprise. '

Driven ashore by the sudden change of wind, the Chinaman scrambled from the thwarts, his left arm raised as he floundered through the surf, the waves beating about his hips and shoulders. Pulling closer inshore, and, keeping well within the shelter of the mangroves, the buccaneer tied the dinghy to an outspreading root, and walked to a point overlooking the beach. The Chinaman was now squatting in the soft white sand, his face towards Deliverance Inlet. Perched on his left arm was a full-grown falcon; a hood was drawn over its head, and from time to time the Chinaman's finger wandered gently over its sleek feathers and knife-like talons.

In a flash the buccaneer recalled the mysterious instructions which had come from the house with the broken shutters. Strolling from the mangrove shade he wheeled suddenly upon the unsuspecting Celestial. The Chinaman rose with a cry, and tried to regain the overturned sailing-boat. Hayes caught him wrist and throat, and flung him stammering, on the sand-heap. The falcon hopped to the beach, fluttering its wings aimlessly.

'There's nothing to run away for, John.' The buccaneer regarded him leisurely. 'What are you doing here with that bird?'

The Chinaman trembled violently at sight of the white man with the flashing teeth and sombre eyes. Clutching the falcon nervously, he shook himself into an upright attitude.

'Me came here to hunt little birds,' he chattered. 'Me catchee teal an' duck, plenty teal over there.' He pointed to a reed choked lagoon beyond the illimitable range of ant-hills in the north.

'Never heard of a falcon being used, to hunt teal,' said Hayes suspiciously.

'Welly much likee teal. Me catchee lille-black duck, too.'

The Chinaman's fingers strayed over the bird's muscular shoulders and hood; his small, slant eyes glanced at the sky from time to time.'

'You are telling lies, John.' The buccaneer lit a cigar thoughtfully. 'Do you know me?' he asked softly.

'You Cap'n Bully Hayes from pearling-lugger,' half-whispered the other. My father know you welly well. Him say you welly nice man.'

'Nice! of course I'm nice!' said, the buccaneer ponderingly. 'I've been nice to all Chinamen since I was a little boy. But you're lying about that falcon. Didn't your father tell you what I once did to a man who told me lies?'

'You beat him welly much, eh, Cap'n?' The Chinaman wriggled uncomfortably, and his lips grew dry with fear.

'No, I didn't beat him,' Hayes spoke with a touch of remorse in his voice. 'Circumstances compelled me to light him up at both ends with a pair of tar-barrels.'

'You no lightee me up with a tar barrel, Cap'n Hayes. Wha' fo' you wantee make me go on fire? Me likee you.'

'I like you, too, John,' sighed the buccaneer; 'but, much as I like you, I shall have to send up your temperature a few hundred degrees unless you climb down to honest facts. Be honest, and avoid tar-barrels,' he added sombrely.

The Chinaman fell on his knees before the scowling, white man. 'You no burn me -up. Me give you falcon to catchee um pigeon.'

'Oh, the falcon catches pigeons!'

Hayes gaped a, little, then, stooping, he shook the stammering Celestial by the throat.

'Who sent you here to catch pigeons? Quick, or I'll squeeze out your lying tongue!'

'My master, Wong Chat, send me over to kill um pigeon belonging to Willy Ah King.' The Chinaman caught his breath fiercely, and bent his head. 'Him say Willy Ah King's pigeon cally letters to pearl-buyers at Booby Island. He want me to get letter welly quick.'

The buccaneer whistled softly; a thought flashed through his mind that left him cold-eyed and doubtful.

'Sit here,' he said to the quivering Celestial, 'and carry out your master's instructions. And don't move towards that boat until I give you the word.'

The Chinaman squatted in the sand, obediently holding the falcon at arm's length, while his eyes scanned the far off hills that shut out the squalid township from view. Hayes strode up and down the beach, heavy-browed and brooding, halting at times to watch the land-crabs scuttling over the reef ends and bars. Occasionally his eye sought the naked hummocks at the head of Deliverance Inlet where the smoke of the town hung sullenly along the skyline.

A sudden shout took him sharply to the water's edge. The Chinaman was pointing to a bird-like speck that rose from the distant hummocks and floated swiftly across the bay..

'That Willy Ah King's pigeon! Him fly over here byemby to Booby Island!'

The China man danced excitedly in the sand, his eyes glinting strangely. 'Guess you ought to know how to fly your falcon!' cried Hayes. 'Keep your head, and don't get rattled.'

Running to the edge of the peninsular, the Celestial drew the hood from the falcon's head, halting for a moment as though gauging the height and velocity of the pigeon's flight as it drew nearer.

The buccaneer followed his movements closely until the released falcon swooped upward with the speed of an eagle.

For thirty seconds he gazed in amazement at the up-wheeling bird, his blood tingling with excitement.

The pigeon appeared to remain stationary in mid-air, as though aware of its enemy's presence. Then it swooped downwards in wild fluttering curves toward the cover of the sheltering bush. With scarce moving pinions the falcon poised itself like a dark ball over the down-fluttering bird, then, with the swiftness of a bullet, flashed upon its quarry. A few feathers scattered overhead as the stricken bird fell within a few yards of the waiting Celestial.

Running forward, he unfastened a small roll of paper from the foot of the bird, and presented it timorously to Hayes. Unrolling it curiously, the buccaneer saw that it was covered with Chinese characters very much smeared and traced in red ink.

Eight years spent among the Mongolian traders of the South Pacific had taught him something of the Chinese language; a glance at the ink-blurred letter revealed its contents. It was addressed to Min Yik, a wealthy pearl buyer at Booby Island, and ran: —

*'Most Honoured Sir, — Our presence growing small at mention of your illustrious name. We beg, to approach you at this period of, the moon with great news. We are in possession of a very fine lustrous pearl— a sister to the stars and a cousin to our own magnificent sun. It, was brought to us by a wretched diver, by name of Sushi Ma— a poor Japanese dog unworthy of our Imperial connection. I cannot describe the gem we bought from him; he accepted five hundred Chilian dollars, and departed. It is a peculiar pearl of great orient and milkiness, and is composed of one large planet-gem surrounded by three satellite pearls. It is undoubtedly a freak, and will appeal to the eyes of many barbarian kings and ladies— or dealers in Amsterdam and Hatton Garden, With many salutations, I am hastening to despatch it to your keeping in the usual way. I have been bothered by a dog named Hayes; and the Territorian police are watching all the roads and exits from Deliverance Inlet: All Chinamen are searched.*

WILLY AH KING.

Hayes swore impatiently as he pocketed the note, and stared at the Chinaman endeavouring to place the hood over the head of the fluttering falcon. He was suddenly conscious of his own inability to cope with the gang of



unscrupulous Mongolians who utilised carrier pigeons to transport messages and illicit pearls from one port to another. It occurred to him that the missing pearl might at that moment be passing through space per medium of a fast-flying pigeon.

He turned to the Chinaman hastily.

'Your master sent you here to catch Willy King's bird, thinking it was carrying a valuable pearl, I suppose?'

The Celestial smiled faintly. 'My master watch Willy King train pigeon every day from top of the bank. Byemby he think pigeon carry allee pearl away to Booby Island. Then my master, Wong Chat, buy falcon from circus man five, six months ago, an' we teach um every day kill urn bird an fowl.'

'You trained the falcon to catch birds in the air,' nodded the buccaneer. 'Chinaman cut Chinaman, eh? What are you going to do next?'

'My master tell me to wait till one, two, three pigeon fly over. Me wait today, to-morrow, long time yet. Me not in welly great hurry, Cap'n.'

'Phew!' The buccaneer regarded the Chinaman's immobile face, the lustreless slant eyes and stooping shoulders half-curiously.

'You think that the big pearl will come this way if you wait long enough?' he asked quietly.

'Me welly sure. Pearl come along in one lillie while, Willy King clevvah man. My master welly smart, too.'

Hayes lit his second cigar reflectively, and wondered how many of the lugger captains had been victimised by the gang of illicit merchants, controlled by a pigeon-flying expert named Willy King. The buccaneer was in no hurry to acquire riches, but his muscles leaped at thought of his hard won treasure slipping into the hands of the slant-eyed robbers. The missing pearl was his exclusive property, and its value could only be judged by Willy King's letter to the gem merchant at Booby Island.

From his position on the wooded headland he could easily watch the flight of a trained pigeon passing from Deliverance Inlet; and unless the bird made a wide detour, he was certain that the falcon would bring down the Three Planet Pearl the moment Willy King's carrier came within striking distance.

The prospect improved Hayes' temper. He was now prepared to stay on the headland until the pearl-carrying pigeon was released from the bank at Deliverance Inlet. Only a Chinaman's brain could have evolved such a scheme. He laughed silently as he padded up and down the surf-fretted beach, scanning the wide bay from east to west; while the Chinaman caressed the impatient falcon with both hands.

Through the hot stillness came the sound of the divers and shell openers at their work; from time to time a flock of gulls settled in a thrashing cloud on

the red hump of the Vanderdecken Bank. The buccaneer was conscious of a white-painted skiff moving from the luggers towards the promontory.

A kanaka, wearing a wide-brimmed Panama was at the oars; a lady sat in the stern dressed in a yellow sarong, and carrying a white, umbrella. The skiff appeared to have been circling the small fleet of luggers as though its occupants were interested in the work of the Japanese divers. Approaching the beach swiftly, it ran ashore under the lee of a narrow sand-spit.

Hayes noted that the lady was examining him carefully through a pair of silver-plated binoculars. Addressing a few words to the kanaka she approached smilingly, and halted within a dozen paces. Hayes bowed slightly, and waited for her to speak.

'I have been watching the pearl divers at work,' she began almost breathlessly. 'It seems incredible that men can swim under water and collect shells in their baskets.'

'It is remarkable,' answered Hayes somewhat coldly. 'The shells are often hidden in a jungle of sea-grass and coral, and there are times when they are discovered inside the roof of a diver's mouth,' he added bitterly.

'It would be interesting to study the methods of these pearl-thieves. I have heard that the Chinese buyers are quite unscrupulous.'

She spoke eagerly, and her eyes seemed to float in a nimbus of liquid violet as she glanced at the buccaneer. The tropic sun had turned her creamy skin to a delicate olive, and Hayes told himself that she was twenty-three, and dangerously pretty.

'The Chinese are perfect gourmands when it comes to eating gems,' he answered lazily. 'I generally argue with a pearl-thief along the barrel of a rifle,' he drawled; 'it saves thinking.'

She laughed somewhat immoderately at his words, and stroked the beach sand with the point of her umbrella. She was of medium height, and her semi-European clothes were expensively made. Hayes decided that she was the wife of some prosperous, trader or Government official stationed at Thursday Island.

Calling to her kanaka servant, she indicated a spot on the beach where she intended to rest for a while. A hamper was brought from the skiff and opened, wine and food spread on a snow-white cloth by the violet-eyed woman, who laughed at the buccaneer's unaccountable impatience.

'Come and picnic on the sands. I have some excellent claret and cold chicken.'

She regarded him quizzingly as he tramped up and down the beach. Hayes desired to be left alone, and the voice of the woman broke harshly upon his

thoughts. Still, he had no wish to play the part of a boor, and he found himself, after a while, seated on the beach, staring moodily at a bottle of claret.

'You must not think me bold or curious,' she said frankly. 'At present I am suffering from overdoses of loneliness and nerve trouble. It is fully a month since I saw a woman of my own colour and nationality.'

The buccaneer almost forgot his own mission in the glamour of her swift running, conversation. He knew that many brave little Australian women became female Crusoes for their husbands' sake, and lived out their lives on lonely atolls and trading stations, until madness or pestilence brought them the order of release.

Yet through her well-conducted chatter he divined a certain uneasiness of manner, as though great things hung on the balance of a word. Behind her, alert and obedient, stood the big-chested kanaka servant, watching him with sombre eyes.

A sudden movement in the rear startled him. The Chinaman had run to the water's edge, and was pointing excitedly towards Deliverance Inlet, where a brown speck fluttered and rose in a straight line towards the peninsula.

'Me catchee pigeon this one time, Cap'n', he said gleefully. 'Waitee one lille while till um cross the water.'

Hayes sprang to his feet, and discovered that the lady in the yellow sarong had raised the hooded falcon from the beach, where the excited Chinaman had left it.

The bird, unused to being handled so familiarly, struck sharply with its talons at the hand that clutched it. With a suppressed cry she flung the clawing falcon into the surf beside her. The kanaka, standing by the skiff, leaped forward at the sight of her blood-stained wrist and smote fiercely at the struggling bird with the blade of an oar. Battered and half-submerged it lay with its wings outstretched on the surface of the incoming tide. Stifling an oath, Hayes hurled the kanaka aside and raised the, half drowned bird from the water. It shivered in his hands, stunned and bewildered, as though the oar-blade had broken its wings. Hereat the Chinaman danced frantically, pointing skyward to where the swift-moving pigeon was already passing over their heads.

'Why you hurt my falcon?' he screamed. 'Why you come heah an' killee my plitty bird? Wha' fo'? wha' fo'?' he demanded wrathfully.

The woman wiped her blood smeared wrist carefully, and turned apologetically to Hayes. 'I did not think the falcon would strike me. And I am so very fond of birds.' Slowly, almost accidentally, it seemed, she raised her eyes and followed the fast disappearing pigeon and it vanished beyond the forest of mangroves.

Hayes made no response as he swung along the beach, full of rage against what seemed to him an over-whelming touch of ill-fortune. When he returned to the weeping Chinaman he saw with relief that the lady had departed in her skiff. Watching her for a moment, he fancied that she was laughing boisterously under her big white umbrella.

'No good to stay here, longer.'

He turned to the Chinaman, and stared sullenly at the limp, water-draggled falcon in his hands.

'We've been licked badly,' he added, as he strolled towards the dinghy. 'And blamed if I could prevent it, either!'

A few minutes later he gained the lugger's side, and clambered aboard with his half-smoked cigar fuming between his teeth.

His first mate, Howe, met him near the cuddy, a pair of glasses bulging from his pocket, which hinted that he had been a witness to the little comedy enacted on the beach.

'Been picnicking with Willy King's wife, Cap'n,' he began deferentially. 'Could see you from here quite easily. She's been cruisin' about the fleet all the mornin'.'

Hayes gaped for a moment, and spat away his cigar in disgust.

'That woman Willy King's wife! What in thunder was she doing round here?'

'After pearls, I reckon Cap'n. She's the, worst blarneyer in the Gulf. She'd have stopped here all day if that hawk hadn't chased the pigeon. She was talkin' to one of the divers at the time, when she suddenly looked up an' spotted some feathers flyin'. She nearly jumped out of the skiff. I heard her tell the kanaka to pull for his life, and see what was happening on the beach.'

'The Chinaman with the hawk didn't know her, anyway,' growled Hayes. 'And he knows more about Willy King than most men.'

'The rich chinkies don't have their wives on view in these parts,' answered the mate huskily. 'Mrs. Willy lives in a red-and-white bungalow at Thursday Island most of her time. Reckon there aren't ten people in the Straits who know she's a Chinaman's wife.'

The buccaneer sat on an empty shell case and nursed his chin. It occurred to him that she was now on her way to Deliverance Inlet to report how she had broken up the cleverly arranged falcon attack upon the 'carriers.'

The mate swept a heap of shell litter into the scuppers, glanced furtively at the sky, and then at the heavy-browed buccaneer.

'Somebody's been flying pigeons over here all the morning,' he broke in gloomily. 'Here comes another!' he cried, nodding towards a brown object that lifted from the violet haze beyond Deliverance Inlet.

The buccaneer almost leapt to his feet and gazed at the low-flying pigeon that moved swiftly through the blinding sun-glare overhead. Darting below, he appeared a few seconds later, a fowling-piece in his hand, his lips twitching strangely. Leaning over the rail he waited until the bird cleared the eastern edge of the bank, and fired twice in succession. The pigeon twitched down, striking a sandy slope where the tide swept in between jagged pinnacles of reef.

'Pigeon number three— and three's my lucky number!'

Hayes pushed off from the steps in the dinghy, and guided it through the treacherous lanes of coral. Snatching up the bird he almost tore away a tiny parcel secured with a strong silk thread to its foot. Opening it he beheld a triplet of pearls clustered round a planet gem of matchless lustre.

He returned to the lugger silently, and without a word to the gaping mate passed to his cabin. Later, the mate paused near the stairhead, and listened to the chuckling noises that came from below.

'Mad as a hare!' he muttered. 'Just been and risked the only boat we've got to pick up a blamed two-penny bird from a razor-back shoal. Skipper's gone daft,' he whispered to one of the divers as the pealing laughter reached him from the buccaneer's cabin.

THAT NIGHT, when the pearling fleet wore to its moorings at Deliverance Inlet, it was discovered that the Chinese bank had closed and barred its doors. Seven of its directors had resigned and through the long hot night the voice of Mrs. Willy King was heard expostulating with her Mongolian husband.

A message had been received from Booby Island stating that the third pigeon had not arrived!

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**12: The Tall White Lady**

*Critic* (Adelaide) 15 April 1908

THE SHELLERS swarmed into Sashino's hut without ceremony and squatted on the floor. The two Manila boys sat behind the Japs. The Malays from Kasinga Muru's lugger crowded the doorway. Japanese etiquette forbade them entering; the Jap. has no stomach for the Malay.

The hut stood naked in the warm gulf sand. A network of dank inlets imbibed the shallow waters inside the bar. A dozen small boats clung heelward of the pearling fleet. At intervals a banana-John in a solar-topee addressed the skipper of a 40-ton fore-and-aft schooner. The skipper, a New Britain skull-trader, told him in snarls that the boys had gone ashore to Sashino's raffle. John, being a new chum from Shanghai, couldn't understand.

A panting silence filled the overcrowded hut. A tiny window faced the Gulf, and the hot sunlight streamed in upon the faces of the Jap. pearl-ers. They were squat, mis-shapen men, dull-eyed as though the Gulf slime and the pump-air had filled them with ague and the germs of death. In a far corner of the hut was a cheap tea-house screen. The Manila-boys pointed to it and grinned. The pearl-ers sat shoulder to shoulder, and when a man raised his cigarette one beheld an occasional sore on the wrist, where it plunges into the soaped sleeve of the rubber diving-jacket.

Sashino was last to enter the hut; his cheek bones stood square beneath his Mongolian eyes. His pants were white, and his cummerbund was of crimson silk. He was the dude of the pearling fleet, and he had once worked in a 'Frisco laundry, but he discovered that pearling paid much better.

"Say, boys, give order. No dam fuss. My wife not too drunk to show up, eh? Then I wake her out of the devil's sleep."

Pushing aside the screen, Sashino revealed a woman huddled on a yellow mat. Her hair clung like a wolf's mane to her neck. Her skin was white beneath her ragged German trade dress; but her face was bitten and tarnished by the Gulf wind and sun.

The sudden laughter of the shellers awoke her. She sat up blinking feebly, but through the veneer of vice that lay upon her features the Japs. discerned the high-caste lines of an English lady. They merely laughed at Sashino's way of addressing her. Sashino sat opposite her, wagging his head like a broken image.

"This lady is my English wife, boys. No good since the opium took her. No good— no good."

"I come home to her very tired, boys. You know how the lungs go after work." He coughed and squeezed his chest with both hands. The shellers grunted.

"Ah King gave her the opium one day, and she cuts into my sleep when I want it bad. Sleep, sleep the diver must have, boys, or he jibber and run amok. She wakes up and sings; oh dam, and the song of hers, oh dam, and the opium hysterics, dam dam!"

Sashino breathed like a man with a hurt lung. "I go down into the sea to escape her screams." He waved his cigarette at the blinking woman. "All day the big flies sit on her face. She does not wash. She is no profit to me. I do not beat her, because she is a lady."

A swart sheller addressed him suddenly in the vernacular.

Sashino nodded. "You get dice. There are twenty of you. Shake up. The high man takes her. I tell you, boys, she is an English lady. No caste-break, no tar-brush" — the crowd giggled — "keep away Ah King and the opium and she is a bargain. Taught me good English... Dam good wife."

The woman on the mat blinked, yawned violently behind her small hand. Then she stared dully at the ring of brown men squatting in the centre of the hut. A box rattled suddenly. A toothless old sheller threw the dice across the floor.

"Seven; no good, Tashan!"

"She might have taught me French," mumbled the old man.

The dice passed from hand to hand hurriedly. Sashino smoked indifferently, but the woman's eyes grew brighter and brighter.

Matsu Hayadi, the pocket Hercules, with the China war-medals on his dungaree coat, refused to throw.

"I want not this woman, Sashino. She too tall and old. The young lubra is better for a wife. This raffle is a violent shame, upon my honour."

The woman on the mat struggled to her knees, clawed the hut-side with her nails, and stood up. She was a head taller than the crowd. With a gesture almost regal she pushed back the mane of her hair, while her lips quivered.

"You did not consult me in this matter, Sashino," she said quietly. "Why do you allow the fish-catcher with the medals to insult me?"

Sashino frowned.

"Matsu Hayadi is a gentleman, Harriet; you may go to the dogs or the Kanakas, I care no dam. Hayadi is a gentleman."

The woman's silvery laughter cut them like whips. They stood up, and she laughed over their heads. Then, with the simplicity of a child, she begged them to be seated.

They sat at her feet, sullenly.

"Children of Japan, will you listen to a lady?"

Swift as a bullet each sheller's brow touched the earth.

"Ah, that is sensible, my children. You have all been to school, I see. You are all fighters and gentlemen, are you not?"

The shellers regarded her stonily. She faced them with luminous eyes and head erect. Her outstretched arm revealed the blue veins and the almost transparent skin.

"Children of Nippon, ere you cast dice for an English lady, consider what her arm has done."

"Has done?" grinned the shellers.

She smiled upon them tenderly. "Years ago, my children, when you were busy with your paper gods, this arm, this blood of mine, swung a sword east and west across the world; it held black and white nations by the throat, compelling obedience. It destroyed fleets, liberated slaves, and begat Cromwell. Its captains would not cease a game of bowls, even when the loud Armada thundered upon its shores. This black dicer with the medals on his breast refuses me!"

She laughed, held out her hand while a sheller thrust a cigarette between her fingers.

Matsu Hayadi lowered his head sulkily. "That is nothing—we of Nippon may cut the world in half when the Equator calls."

"The Equator 'called' me," laughed the woman, "and it gave me a cotton dress and a thirst. I began life by marrying an ambassador. I loved him, until I saw him in silk knickers. Then I ran away to India with a soldier. I lost caste because I ate chutney with a rajah. After that the Fall, I became the fashion among the native princes. I tasted hasheesh at Simla, and it left me in the coolie lines. How many of my kind have awakened at midnight in the everlasting coolie-traps?"

Sashino yawned wearily, his mouth gaped, his teeth flashed; he cracked the joints of his fingers with shot-like rapidity.

"Who will take her?" he asked; "who will take?"

Twenty shellers rose simultaneously, nodded politely to Sashino, and quitted the hut. Nikoo Shani, the toothless old pearler, remained. He stared across the hut with almost sightless eyes.

"Give her to me, Sashino. She will teach me history and French." He salaamed, and his shrivelled skin seemed to shake on his bones.

"Honour the aged," answered Sashino quietly. "Take her."

With finger pointing at the woman, he snapped a parting word.

"Go, now. You are too many times fluent. I listen not."

She smiled weakly. "This mat is mine, Sashino. May I take it?"



He nodded, tightened his cummerbund, and arranged his thin moustache. She broke into laughter, and slapped him between the shoulders.

"See how I descend, Sashino, from pit to pit, without a glass of wine to cheer me. Think of it, while the love of some Mimosa is in your heart, and the air tubes are choking your lungs."

She passed out, but the hot beach smote her with its sudden glare. For a moment she reeled in the sand. The man-'o-war hawks soared across the bar; a dinghy, crowded with pearlers, pulled towards a lugger in the offing. Nikoso Shani followed her uncertainly. Then he caught her ragged sleeve, and mumbled in her ear.

"History, first; French and Algebra."

There were livid marks under her eyes. A savage opium-thirst stayed in her throat. The Gulf sun seemed to spin across the sky. She clutched the old sheller's arm.

"Promise me, Nikoso, that you will not let me descend into the last Pit."

"The Pit, O Harriet? The last Pit has no number."

"It is over there, Nikoso Shani. Listen."

The old sheller bent his head for a moment; from across the bay came the monotonous chant of a Kanaka crew at work— slow, mournful, unutterably tragic. Nikoso nodded.

"The Kanakas, he said, absently. "They are singing a Christian hymn."

Terror stole like a white film across her eyes. "They are the last of all," she whispered. "When there is no shelter for my body, no pillow for my head, I must go to them. The Jewess Magdalene was happier, she had no last fences to climb." .

She regarded the old pearler with lifeless eyes. They arrived at his hovel, near the mouth of the inlet. He pushed the door.

"There is shelter here," he mumbled. She entered silently, and flung her mat into the darkest corner. He closed the door.

"You must not forget the Algebra, the history, and French," he said.

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### 13: The Siege of Molasses

*Daily News* (Perth) 27 May 1908

(Also published as "Bully Hayes, Buccaneer", *Sun*, Kalgoorlie, 1913)

A DROGHER passed under the schooner's stern and manoeuvred clumsily toward the mill jetty beyond the river bend. Captain Hayes watched it and yawned wearily. The silence of the river and the aching monotony of the shore line filled him with a mad desire to up anchor and away.

He was awaiting a final message from the Northern Planters' Syndicate before continuing his trip to the islands in quest of Kanaka labourers for the cane fields. Like many other blackbirders, Hayes had learned to sleep with an eye on the gunboats and water police whenever he found it necessary to lie at the mouth of a Queensland river. Of late years the man-hunting business had received cold support from the Government. The buccaneer had been warned that if caught while attempting to land un-indentured labour within a hundred miles of Australian territory he would be arrested.

Turning suddenly from the chart-room, he saw a boat shoot around the river bend in his direction. A bare headed man was rowing furiously, and, as he swung under the schooner's stern Hayes detected a scared look in his eyes. He was a lean sun-dried man, dressed in old dungaree, and a fireman's black flannel shirt. He stood up in the boat, resting his hand nervously against the schooner's side.

"Is Cap'n Hayes aboard?" he shouted. His voice had the querulous intonation of one who had been recently pursued by a troop of fiends. Hayes leaned over the rail elaborately, a look of suppressed interest in his eyes.

"Guess I'm your man," he said carelessly. "And I reckon by the drops of treacle in your boat that you're Jimmy Belcher, the mill-owner."

The sun-dried man gestured violently as he pointed with a black, sun-scalded finger up the river.

"I'm Belcher, worse luck," he began shrilly. "I'm in trouble with my kanakas. I came to ask you if— if—"

"Call in the troopers," snapped Hayes. "Don't go round ask'n your neighbors to help you put down a twopenny insurrection. No decent man wants to fight the kanakas this weather."

"Listen, for God's sake, Cap'n Hayes!" Belcher in his agony clawed the schooner's side with his fingernails. "My black mill hands have mutinied. They broached a cask of rum this morning, and they've smashed up £200 worth of crushing machinery. There's a vendetta spreading throughout the plantations. I barely escaped with my life. My wife and children are barricaded in the

homestead. The black devils have surrounded the mill and are threatening to fire it."

"Call in the troopers," repeated Hayes. " People don't hesitate when I start to smash things."

"They are away fighting the mutineer boys at Marana plantation twenty miles from here," cried Belcher. " I came to you. Hayes, because there isn't another white man within call. I don't mind the machinery being wrecked: it's the missus and kids I've got to fight for. If you won't help me—"he glanced at Hayes appealingly— "I'll have to see it out alone."

Seizing his oars he fell back into the boat and bent forward suddenly. A responding flash leapt into the buccaneer's eyes as the boat shot from the schooner.

"Ahoy, not so fast, there ! You explain things trio suddenly, Mr. Belcher. Come under the rail with your blamed boat, and I'll climb down."

Slipping below, he appeared after a few moments with a pair of navy revolver bulging from his pockets.

"Must take the bull-pups," he said lightly; "they encourage civility. There's one man in Queensland who knows how to deal with the free-and-easy mill wrecker. His name is William Henry Hayes," he added grimly.

Once in the boat Hayes put a stiff back to his oar, and they were soon racing up the sluggish stream, leaving the schooner a couple of miles in their wake. The swift Queensland night closed on them without warning, wrapping bush and river in tropic, darkness. A curlew, waited beyond the distant ti-tree ; here and there a fish leaped from the slow-moving stream as the rowers panted at their work. An intolerable stillness hung over the black readies where the mill stood, shut in by the close planted cocoa palms.

Turning the boat inshore Belcher made a swift gesture to his companion as they stole up the stone steps leading to the dark sugar mill. A dozen, grey-roofed outbuildings showed faintly through the tropic gloom, where the huge cane-stacks. lay ready for crushing. Entering the yard bi a side gate, Belcher halted in the shadow of a cane-truck cautiously.

"There are twenty-five boys, all told," he said in a half-whisper. "They are armed with tomahawks and cane knives. It's the worst uprising among the kanakas since the Maryborough affair eight years ago. The islanders have been spoiling for a fight ever since they came here last month. It arose because I gave a job to an Erromango boy whose grandfather was the blood enemy of one of their tribe."

Hayes smiled grimly as he recalled many savage tribal feuds he had witnessed in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. But the thought of the business in hand kept him silent.

A clammy heat swam through the night air. Swarms of tiger mosquitoes attacked them as they half-crouched in the shadow of the truck. The silence of the mill set Hayes thinking hard.

"The rum your kanakas broached this morning is getting in some fine work," he said after a while. "It's paralysed them, or else they're sleeping it off. Was it the usual poison, or merely treacle and dynamite?" he asked.

"The rum wasn't too pure," admitted the mill-owner. "Good enough for plantation kanakas, anyway."

Hayes knew the ways of the islanders as few white men ever hoped to. He had lived and traded with them for fifteen years, and he had learned the value of prudence and dash when dealing with a blood vendetta.

A large cane-truck standing on rails in the centre of the yard attracted him. He regarded it for a few moments with undue curiosity, then turned inquiring to the mill owner:

"Is that cane truck empty?" he demanded.

"Quite. We haven't worked it for the last few days," answered Belcher under his breath. "Keep close to me, cap'n," he whispered, "Those kanakas of mine have eyes like telescopes."

The buccaneer made no reply as he edged near the truck cautiously. Belcher followed, keeping within arm's length of his companion. Hayes dropped on all fours suddenly and pointed to the truck.

"There's a pair of black feet hanging over the end," he growled. "I thought at first it might have been a couple of dead fowls or a bunch of bananas."

"Feet!" gasped the mill-owner. "Surely you are mistaken, cap'n!"

"Guess I know a nigger's big toe from a ninepin," answered Hayes. That cane-truck is loaded with boys sleeping off the effects of rum. Providence has delivered the insurrectionaries into our keeping. If you've no objection, Mr. Belcher, I'll show you how to play a dry kanaka on to a wet wicket."

"We've no time to play cricket with mutineer kanakas," grumbled the mill-owner. "This is too serious a business for jokes, Cap'n Hayes. My property has been destroyed; the lives of my wife and children threatened."

The buccaneer laughed softly. "I'll bowl this sleeping crowd of mutineers. You shall be umpire. Now watch !"

Creeping stealthily toward the truck, he paused under the end wheels for several minutes, and withdrew a long iron pin that held the body of the truck to the frame-like support over the axles. Putting his shoulder against the end, he pushed until it moved noiselessly along the smooth iron rails. At each stride the truck increased in speed until he had to trot beside it to keep pace. The rails led to the mill pier that ran several yards into the river to allow droghers and small craft to land cane at the mill.

Immediately the fast-moving truck touched the pier Hayes slipped aside and matted. Two of the rum-sodden islanders sat up suddenly as they were borne riverward along the smooth, rails. There was a dazed look in their eyes—one big-jawed fellow, more sober than the rest, struggled to his feet with a savage cry of warning. He was a moment too late. The truck had reached the pier end, and crashed against the heavy cross-beam that spanned the rails. The truck tilted automatically, and emptied its human load into the deep, slow-moving river. Hayes waved the truck-pin in the air.

"How's that for out?" he shouted.

Smothered yells came from the river. One by one the heads of the half-frantic mutineers appeared on the dark surface of the stream, swimming in all directions, and cursing in their Polynesian dialect the man who had caught them so easily. Their leader, a muscular; long-bodied Erromango native, returned stealthily toward the pier. A cane-knife gripped in his right hand, he seemed to slice through the oily water as he swam with, powerful overarm strokes to the landing steps. Snatching an oar from the boat, Hayes leaped forward and brought it with a smash against the black, up-turned face.

"Not this way, Johnny," he said cheerfully; "you call tomorrow and me lend you one piece of gaster to mend your face."

The uplifted cane-knife vanished in the stream; the long-bodied Kanaka rolled porpoise-like, screaming and holding his face.

"Now," said Hayes, addressing the amazed duster of heads in the water, "I'll gun the first man who shows his skin this side of the river. Savvy?" A chorus of savage invective followed this threat, but the sight of their leader swimming with blood-stained face for the opposite shore decided them. They followed, a dozen in number, trudgeoning with seal-like ease in his wake.

"They'll make for the scrub," said Belcher, or lie in the hills and play at bushranging until the mounted police and the black-trackers root them out. I wish the other lot—the big trasher gang—were with them."

"The big trasher gang! Great Scott! How many lots are there?" cried the buccaneer. "I guess you'll have to provide yourself with a war-balloon to deal with your little insurrection."

"Worst of it is, I don't know where the big gang is hiding."

The mill-owner turned sullenly from the pier and glanced back at the silent outbuilding in the distance. "They've destroyed the retorts and vats, and Lord knows whether they're biding, in the sheds or the palm-scrub at the back."

Stealing from shadow to shadow, with the fear of death in every limb, Belcher conducted the buccaneer to a six-roomed bungalow at the rear of the mill. The place was in darkness; windows and doors were barred and locked,

and as the two men approached silently the sound of a child crying inside reached them.

"Fancy haying to lock up your wife and children all day!" cried the mill-owner, impatiently, "expecting to see a score of black devils chopping their way through the roof with machetes and tomahawks."

Belcher tapped at the door stealthily and gave a peculiar whistle. A bolt was withdrawn hurriedly; a woman's face peered out for a moment.

"All right, Kate," whispered the mill-owner. "I've brought a friend along."

Mrs. Belcher was a lady of Irish descent, with sun-tanned face and courageous eyes. During her husband's absence she had remained by the barred window, rifle in hand, while her four children whimpered dismally in the dark passage.

"The block rascals have quietened down," she said cheerfully. "Sure we put in a whole day waitin' an' waitin' for the boys to come tearin' down the chimney or through the roof. But for the childer, 'twas meself that would have gone to thim an' conducted the mutiny in proper spirit."

Hayes shook hands with her warmly and patted the white-faced children encouragingly. "I'm glad to help you, ma'am," he said politely. "I've confabulated with junkmen and Malays in my day, but these kanakas of yours aren't fit to fight a squad of Chinese barbers. Don't worry, Ma'am," he said gently. "My patent ice-field is beginning to move, and it licks up things like an old-man torpedo."

After reconnoitring the scrub at the rear of the bungalow Hayes requested Mrs Belcher to retire in peace for the night. Returning to the mill yard, he approached a two-storied shed that stood at the end of the retort rooms. A huge square vat almost filled the centre. From its sides and bottom oozed a thick, black substance that stayed in sullen pools about the earth floor.

"My reserve stock of molasses," whispered the mill-owner. "Filthy stuff to handle in the hot weather."

"Pretty big vat, isn't it?" Hayes spoke under his breath, keeping well in the shadow of the half-open crate.

"I run it off into casks when ready for shipment," answered Belcher. "There's money in it, and—"

A livid flash lit up the shed; the terrific boom of a rifle followed. A bullet ripped the woodwork above Hayes' right shoulder.

"Good!" he said aloud. "I'll remember that, my lads."

Returning to the yard, followed by Belcher, he took up a position behind a stack of cane, his revolvers gleaming in the starlight.

"First nigger out will race a bullet " he shouted hoarsely. "Are you listening, boys?"

A series of yells followed from within the shed, followed by a guttural murmur as though the gang of cane-trashers were debating the situation. It occurred to Hayes that the majority of them were sober, and had refused, even in their mutinous delirium, to partake of the fiery plantation-rum.

Another rifle shot followed; the bullet ripped the cane-stalks above Belcher's head. Then both men heard the gate of the shed close with a bang and the bolts' driven home inside.

"They're going to hold the fort," laughed Hayes. "That rifle of theirs will make it awkward for anyone crossing the yard day or night. Any provisions inside?"

"Only sugar and molasses. They'll soak into that until it sickens 'em."

"Um !" Hayes' stood up suddenly and seized a machete lying at the foot of the cane stack.

"Guess I don't feel inclined to sit here too much, Mr. Belcher. We'll shake them up, if you don't mind."

"Don't be a fool, Haves!" cried the mill-owner. "You can't face that gang of hyenas with a thing like that. They'll tear you to pieces."

"A thing like this!" The buccaneer swung the machete, sabre-like, with the skill of a guardsman. "If you allow those vermin to stay another day unchallenged, they'll be out at sun-up looting and murdering."

Ignoring the mill-owner's protest, he walked to the rear of the shed and discovered a flight of steps leading to a loft above.

Mounting stealthily, he opened the door and entered the loft. It was used as a store-room for the new bags fresh from the Indian jute mills. Slipping off his boots, he groped around until his hand touched the ring of a trap-door leading to the room below.

Haves was aware that the slightest sound would, alarm the big gang of cane-trashers beneath. Their deep voices broke upon him clearly, and as he listened he heard a slow-voiced islander outlining a plan to attack the bungalow at dawn, before the Queensland troopers arrived. They were too cunning to venture out in the dark, knowing from vast experience that a couple of white riflemen could pick them off from different points of the mill-yard.

Hayes appeared in no hurry to interrupt their plans. Chin in hand, he stretched himself on a pile of bags and waited until long after midnight. The guttural whispering ceased gradually; deep snoring told, him that sleep had overcome them, one by one. A wisp of moon showed in the east, casting a faint gleam of light across the shed.

Rising, he lifted the trap-door softly and peered below. Several blurred forms of grey and white loin-cloths indicated where the kanakas had flung themselves across the shed floor. They sprawled in different attitudes, some

with knees drawn and hands stretched: others lay on their chests, their faces to the earth.

A ladder connected the loft with the ground floor. On his right and within arm's length stood, the big square vat of treacle. Descending the ladder, Hayes clung with both knees to the spokes and leaned over until the blade of the machete touched the long steel bolt that held the movable side of the vat in its place. The bolt slipped back noiselessly, allowing the hinged sides to open slowly as the weight of the molasses pressed out and down. With a heavy sighing sound the fifteen tons of black molasses broke in silent flood over the sleeping kanaka shapes.

Hayes slipped back to the loft and waited. A muffled cry of agony reached him, followed by a series of gasping, choking sounds from the twenty stalwart islanders, caught in the relentless grip of the slow-moving treacle.

Hayes thrust his head through the trap-door suddenly, and lit a cigar.

"I guess that rifle of yours isn't going off again," he said genially. "Own up, like good boys, that it's a euchre party. I reckon if Britain and America knew the value of treacle as an offensive weapon they'd introduce it all big engagements. Gosh! it sticks, eh sonnies?"

The shouts of dismay subsided as the fear-stricken kanakas clawed and dragged themselves through the binding, viscous mass that clung to their knees and feet with glue-like tenacity.

Hayes sat on the ladder steps and spoke words of comfort and advice to the panting, clawing crowd below. Most of the islanders were struggling to regain an upright position; others sprawled in wrestling attitudes, striving to free themselves from the octopus-like grip of the treacle flood. A few lay on the floor of the shed, unable to rise— bound and helpless in the glutinous stream.

"I guess you boys don't hit a tide of molasses every day?" said Hayes sympathetically. "If there was a circus handy I'd bring in a few bears to lick it off."

The leader of the gang struggled to his feet, a dripping, treacle-covered rifle in his hand. He glared at the buccaneer seated on the ladder, and shook the useless weapon at him.

"*Ahampes!*" I keel you some day! Why for you not fight us proper?" he demanded.

"If you had hurt a woman or child in the district, answered Hayes, "I'd have tied the whole crowd of you to the plantation fence at sunrise. The blowflies would have done the rest of the fighting. Savvy?"

At dawn four mounted troopers appeared at the mill gates, accompanied by several black police armed with carbines. Hayes descended from the loft,



and indicated the shed where the helpless kanakas were scraping each other with iron hoops.

"Guess you'll find 'em inside,' quiet as lambs, sergeant." he said briefly.

The sergeant looked puzzled, and turned to the white-faced mill-owner inquisitively. "Did they surrender after armed resistance?" he asked sternly. "We'll have to teach the brutes a lesson."

The buccaneer apologised for not being able to wait and see the guilty mill-wreckers escorted to the lock-up at Marana. He returned to the boat under the pier steps, accompanied by Belcher.

"Good-bye, Hayes," said the mill-owner, extending his hand gloomily. "This little mutiny will cost me a pretty penny. My machinery wrecked, my store of molasses run to waste."

The buccaneer regarded him fixedly through a cloud of cigar smoke.

"I reckon some men don't know how to spell thanks," he "Why, I burnt down a fifty thousand dollar store in Samoa last year because a fellow named Bill Harris called me liar, and hid himself in the roof."

"Did the store belong to you, cap'n?" Belcher asked meekly.

"Great Scott! No! I've got a sane spot somewhere."

Waving his hand to the mill owner Hayes pulled down the river towards the schooner.

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**14: The Giant**

*Daily News* (Perth, WA) 30 Sep 1908

A TROPIC night with scarcely a movement under the bamboo-thatched verandah, The shapes of half a dozen water-weary divers were visible in the swinging hammocks; several trepang fishers from the Malay prau *Lambero Dynna*, lay huddled in the cool beach sand under the weather side of the house. A Burghis boy and a snoring Dutch skipper, from one of the Company's luggers obstructed the doorway; their chafed wrists and swollen necks spoke of india-rubber diving jackets and submarine work among the rich oyster swathes of Torres Straits.

Captain William Hayes strolled in from the darkness of the pier, where his schooner, the *Three Moons*, was undergoing repairs. He glanced shrewdly at the sleeping figures and entered the bar, where Mr. Ebenezer Wick, the Customs officer, was mixing a pink-coloured drink in a long glass.

'Rooting about the sea-floor for shell doesn't seem to improve these men's appearance.' Hayes nodded briefly to the huddled shapes on the verandah outside. 'When I begin to look like Bafio, the dago, I'll load my diving-boots with scrap-iron and stay in thirty fathoms.'

Bafio, the Italian 'skin' diver, crouching in a far corner of the bar, was not lovely to see: his reef-torn hands and feet, the bulging veins of neck and face, spoke of the torment endured by the naked divers, too poor or shiftless to buy a common rubber suit and helmet.

'Blind in one eye, too,' added the buccaneer, stooping over him. 'Got scrapping with a family of Japanese wrestlers last year. How did it happen, Ebenezer?'

The Customs officer explained at length how Bafio had caught a lugger full of Japanese poaching on his shell preserves one evening at the beginning of the pearling season. In his unthinking rage the Italian had challenged the oyster-thieves to a finish fight on the deck of their own lugger. And the little brown men accepted the invitation swiftly and with glee. They crowded him like a troop of pocket tigers, fought him throat and heel in a howling bunch until they lay on each other gasping and exhausted. It was a sanguinary little fight. Three of the Japs retired with broken limbs; while Bafio succumbed to a sudden garotte-hold and thumb-twist that left him short of an eye.

'Those big men don't impress me.' said Hayes, when Ebenezer had finished. 'Some of 'em are too blamed slow to race an oyster. If I had to storm Valhalla to-night, I'd ask for a packet of small men to stand by one.'

The buccaneer picked his way among the sleeping forms until he reached a spare hammock at the verandah end. Twisting a nipa leaf about a green cigar, he lay back and smoked thoughtfully, while the tide fretted and whispered over the endless stretches of sand. Mr. Wick sat beside him somewhat obsequiously, for in that lone region, where infinity throbbed between jungle and sea-line, the voice of the white man was like music in Hades.

'You don't remember Oedler, the freak-agent, who walked through Queensland years ago looking for chow giants?' went on Hayes thoughtfully. 'He spent eighteen months hereabouts trying to run down a white aboriginal—albino, I suppose— and was nearly speared for his trouble.

'Oedler stood on the beach at Bowen one day and signalled me just as I was crossing the bar in my schooner the Daphne. 'I've some passengers for you, Hayes,' says he, 'If you've any accommodation.'

'At that time I would have accommodated a family of baby elephants if they'd been offering. I knew Oedler in Sydney, when he was running a five-horse circus— used to paint his own nose when he couldn't afford a clown— until the people got to like him for his pluck. They like pluck in Sydney, especially when it runs about a circus with vermilion on its nose.

'He stood on the beach with the broken end of an old trombone in his hand, and blew speeches at me for thirteen minutes. I gathered from the noise he made that he was the proprietor of a family of freaks, and wanted to take them to a big circus in Shanghai.

'Now I was willing to carry baby elephants, but I didn't want any long haired Circassian ladies aboard my schooner, nor any spotted men from the jungles of Borneo. I had carried show-people before, and I always managed to quarrel with the spotted man. They put on airs.

I once took a professional fasting man from Rockhampton to Sydney, and his appetite caused a famine onboard. We finished the trip on mangoes and tolled seagull.

'Oedler seemed annoyed when I asked if he'd got any fasting men in his collection of freaks. He blew denials at me through the trombone.

'I needn't be afraid about this company,' he said. He was willing to cover their appetite with a five hundred dollar insurance risk.

'Then he blew some more explanations, and finished by asking me to keep calm.

'I thought it over for two minutes, while he performed a solo about the passage money and the twenty per cent, reduction usually allowed to travelling-circus people. I decided to take him.

'He retired to the little wooden hotel that lay behind a cane field, while we ran the schooner closer inshore and made fast to a floating oil drum used for a

buoy. The mate, Bill Howe, dusted out the state-room, and persuaded most of the cockroaches to go to bed before the freak family came aboard.

'Nobody ever complained about our cockroaches. They were the most obedient insects that ever owned a three-hundred-ton schooner; and they always knew when Bill was angry. He came on deck wiping his brow.

'All clear and roomy below?' says I.

'Heaps of room, Cap'n, if the 'roaches will only keep to their end of the ship,' says he. 'They're sure to feel a bit hurt at me drivin' 'em from the state-room.'

'I never understood Bill's kindness to insects. Some people said he drank heavily in the old days, and broke one of his feet jumping on a blue centipede that didn't belong to this earth. You never knew for certain what Bill was jumping on.

'We sighted Oedler doming from the hotel followed by his freak, family. The lady was about three feet high, and walked with some dignity beside Oedler. A girl of eight or nine led the way, bowling a hoop as she ran towards the beach.

'Nothing queer about these little freak people,' says I to the mate. 'I've seen shorter women looking after a husband and a family of thirteen.'

'Wait a bit, Cap'n.'

'Bill leaned over the side and pointed to something moving round a corner of the cane-field. It looked like a tree at first, swaggering along; but a peep through the glass showed that it was a man, all legs and body and head. When he drew level with the others on the beach we saw that Oedler only reached up to the third button of his waistcoat.

'Family giant,' said the mate. 'Wonder if he unscrews at the knees or comes to pieces?'

'The crowd came alongside, in a shift and the midget lady was first up the narrow gangway, followed by the girl with the hoop. Oedler panted after them, and introduced us. The midget shook hands warmly with me, and said she hoped we'd have a nice passage to China. Then, standing on her toes beside the rail, she asked me to help her big husband aboard. He was not used to climbing up ships, she said.

'The unwieldy show giant sat in the skiff staring at the steep gangway as if it were a blamed fire-escape.

'Bit gone in the knees, p'r'aps,' says Bill. 'Maybe he don't unscrew after all.'

'Now, Mr. Longbody,' says I, 'when you've finished growing you'd better come aboard.' I didn't want to hurt his feelings, but I was afraid he might come to pieces if he stayed in the sun too long.

'Come along, David dear,' shouted the midget lady. 'Everything's quite safe. The gangway won't fall.'

The giant looked up at us like a frightened schoolboy, then gathered himself together as though he was going to shin up a lightning-conductor. I've seen landlubbers claw the side of a ship and perform like acrobats when climbing aboard from the water, but I've never seen a circus giant lie on his chin and ears to do it. He seemed frightened of the water under him, frightened of the spars and rigging above, and his eyes bulged as he stuck midway up the narrow steps and refused to come farther.

'Bill Howe tried to lasso him, while the cook stood by with a boathook and pushed him off when he threatened to bump. There was a bit of a swell on, and when Bill got the noose over him, and the cook fastened him with the hook, he came aboard head first into the pantry,

The crew crowded round to get a glimpse of the freak-man. From foot to head he was a pile of muscle and simplicity. Oedler had found him and the midget lady performing inside a threepenny bush circus near Charters Towers. He was paying their passage to Shanghai on the chance of hiring them to one of the British or American show people.

The giant's name was David Clipp. His mother was an Australian bush-born woman, his father a Devonshire farmer who'd settled in Queensland somewhere in the 'fifties.

The little girl with the hoop was the result of David's marriage. I guess she was shyer than a wood-pigeon at first, but she soon got to know the sailors. They used to spend most of the mornings making oakum dolls and painting the blamed ship any colour that suited her fancy.

The midget kept to herself during the trip north. Like most women who marry giants, she was pale-faced, and a bit eerie. The sort of creature that would have gone well in double harness with a poet— if she'd been two feet taller,

Big David seemed out of place on my three-hundred-ton schooner, The cabin was three sizes too small; we had to saw planks out of the walls to allow his legs to straighten whenever he sneezed or turned in his bunk.

We stopped three days at Thursday Island, and took aboard more passengers for New Guinea and the Philippines. Most of them wanted to climb over the rail when they saw David come out of the stateroom. They a mistook him for Fo Fum, the man-eating giant in the story-books. Several of the crew were over six feet, but they were mannikins beside David Clipp.

I never had much faith in giants; they're mostly a shingle short, and useless as workers. David was the most peaceful chap you ever saw — and the laziest. When he slept on deck it was pretty hard to pass without treading on his face

or hands. Bin, Howe used to walk barefoot over his neck and brow, and nothing particular happened.

'We reckoned, after a while, that I the big fellow hadn't any feeling in his face— the mate said it was as useful as a doorstep when he wanted to reach the taffrail or poop. You din't know how big or small a man can be until you sail with him in a three-hundred-ton schooner.

'At Sumbawa we stuck on a sand-bar, and the whole crew got out to heave her over. We sweated for three hours with pulley-blocks and boats doubly manned without shifting her a foot. David leaned over the rail watching us solemnly with his big childlike eyes. Then it occurred to him that something was wrong. Without a word he climbed down and stood waist deep under the schooner's stern. Resting his shoulder against her side, he heaved, and lifted until the veins of his forehead and throat bulged.

"Heave," says he.

'We heaved, and the ribs of the schooner whined and cried out as she slipped off the bar. Nobody complained about the size of David's feet and hands after that affair. But he had his weak spot— his heart was no bigger than a mallee hen's. When a thing moved towards him without notice he grew pale and over- thoughtful. He was afraid of things— of the sea, and the big-voiced sailor-men, or a sudden scuffle between a couple of quarrelsome deck hands.

'North of Batavia a big old-man cyclone struck us, It flung us on our beam-ends, and fluted about us like a white wolf, for eight hours. The sea became yellow as whisky, and the lightning seemed to leap at us from the bed of the ocean.

'I found David in his bunk, his grey face peeping from the blankets, the fear of the almighty sea in his eyes,

'Come out and give the men a hand,' says I, tugging at the bedclothes. 'Four of them are hurt badly. Two have been washed overboard, Come out!' and I hauled at the clothes pretty smart.

'Shifting a blamed iceberg would have been an easier job. Only his set face and bulging eyes could be seen. His wife and child sat in a corner of the cabin, staring like sheep at me and the mountain of flesh wrapped in the bunk-clothes.

'The little girl sized up tho affair sooner than the mother. She crept to the bunk and touched David's arm.

'Daddy,' says she, 'the Captain wants you to go on deck. The crew are hurt.'

'I stood over him half savagely, and shook him roughly, for I saw that he was trembling like a little child.

'Your father's no good to me, my girl,' says I. 'It's a man I came down for.'

'We were through that bit of weather, and the calm days that followed gave us a chance to Jury-rig and repair most of our battered top-hamper. David would never meet my eye afterwards. We called him the big soap man, and the cook threw potato peelings over him whenever he passed the galley.

'One day my cabin-boy, a Sydney rat of twelve, kicked him out of the stateroom because he had burnt a hole in the table-cloth with a match. David took the kick meekly, although a flip from his hand would have broken the lad's neck.

'There's a lot of tragedy about the wives of these big wastrels and cowards. Their wives understand, and their children cry over it. For every white boy and girl likes to think their daddy is a brave man, who can take care of little children and weak women.

'Oh, we were sorry for that midget lady with the quiet, dreamy eyes, and guess there wasn't a man on the schooner who wouldn't have stopped a bullet to shelter the little lassie, who had the misfortune to be the daughter of a big, aimless coward.

'Matters grew worse when the little dreamy-eyed woman came to me one day and began explaining her big man's failings.

'Captain Hayes,' says she, 'you are misjudging my husband. He is kind and gentle to me, his wife, and he loves his child as dearly as any man, What do you want him to do? Other men beat their wives and children. He is tender and— and—'

'Gone in the heart, ma'am,' says I, sorrowfully.

'What do you expect of him, Captain Hayes?'

'Nothing, ma'am,' says I. 'I'm sorry for him. We're all sorry for you. The world's got no use for white-lipped cravens.'

'Guess that struck home, and I shouldn't have said it. But a sailorman can't paint a white coward red! He can't theorise about a weak heart and call it a tiger's beating inside the breast of a man.

'After that we, left David alone. Sailors got tired of nagging a harmless thing that won't bite back. We simply stepped on his face when he was in our way; the cook gave him pan-grease when he passed the galley, or a drop of hot water to keep his feet from feeling cold.

'It was the year old Admiral Tung's fleet of black junks was raising Cain among the China traders south of Hainan and Bangkok.

'We sighted a high-pooped dragon-headed junk at dawn, about a week after leaving Manila. It stood against the sky-line frowsy as an unclean bird, its ragged lateen sails slanting vulture-like, ready to pounce on the first unguarded vessel that heaved in sight.

'She saw us, and her sails swooped round with a clatter and a bang. Guess there wasn't enough wind to elevate a thistledown, but she came with the speed of a small typhoon, her long sweeps eating up the miles like the wheels of an express train,

'There was no wind to dodge them in that tropic sea. They began by dropping small shot around us, but no one ever yet accused a Chinese pirate of straight shooting. It isn't their game. Years of study and careful instruction go to the making of a good gunner, and the junk-men never pinned their faith in cannonading tactics. It's the way they grapple and swarm over your decks that makes 'em hard as wolves to repel.

'They were up with us in half an hour, and their heavy three-pronged grappling anchors were clanking over our sides before we had collected our small stock of arms and ammunition. They opened on us with a volley of stink-pots that fumigated the air for miles. Our jury-rigged mainsheet went overboard like the broken wing of a flying-machine the moment their stiff lateen sails collided with our rigging.

'Then from nowhere in particular came the buzzing of small bullets and the humming rattle of chain and bolt shot that fairly rooted the sticks out of us. It seemed for a minute or so as if the big dragon was blowing hot scrap-iron into us. A piece of chain knocked me endways, and I lay in the scuppers with a broken arm and a cashed rib that sent a taste of death into my mouth.

'I'd seen many kinds of shambles in the 'pelago, and I'd run my schooner into a black vendetta in New Britain once, when you could have built a winter residence with dead Kanakas. But these Chows got us before we could say Amen.

'David's little girl was standing under the bridge watching the strange black flag fluttering above us, and the curious yellow men swarming over the dragon-headed poop. A musket flash lit up her face suddenly: I saw her turn and fall in a heap almost beside me.

'The junk ground against our counter until her big brass dragon bulged over the rail. The enormous lateen sails seemed to shut out the sun when the swart-faced blackguards swung hand over hand across our stern. Some of the crew fired and took shelter in the galley, where the mate was busy loading fowling-pieces and pistols.

'David came up from below just as a driven beast walks. His big body stooped suddenly as he looked at the little white shape huddled under the bridge, A blood spot showed on her face and pinney; there was blood on her hand where she had put it up, as though to touch the swift, noiseless bullet when it struck her.



'His face seemed to slacken; his eyes grew round as two pieces of money; his pain and astonishment showed like a fever-sweat on his brow and chest.

'He took up the child and carried her below quietly. And amid the yelpings and clatter of the boarding junkmen he spoke unmoved to the little woman shivering in the cabin doorway.

'Mounting the stairs again, he stood under the broken poop where the colliding junk had torn the bridge-stays asunder. A six-foot length of broken stanchion lay on the deck. He picked it up slowly, and it whistled the air when he thrashed it up and down to test its strength and weight.

'The litter of broken spar-ends and shredded sails prevented the junkmen from seeing David until he ploughed his way aft to where the slant-eyed devils were pouring below in quest of loot and treasure. A few had gained the stateroom, the smashing of glass and furniture told us that they were hunting for opium and loose dollars in the lockers and cabin drawers.

'Another crowd swarmed over the rail, their short crooked knives rippling in the tropic glare, They did not see David until he broke through the litter of spars and fallen tophammer, Then they yelped at sight of the man, at his white lips and round eyes, the foam that fell like tiger-froth from his big soft chin. No god, black or white, had ever looked at them with the eyes of David Clipp.

'They drew together until they were a solid bundle of knife-points, and considered him. He stood seven paces away, his shoulders stooping, his lips mumbling what seemed to be a child's nursery song. There was no hate in his eyes, only the grey stare of the Northern baresark, His muscles shook and heaped under the white flesh as he sprang at the bundle of knife-points. The bar bit and slogged into the reeling line of steel. He was across the deck and back again nimble-footed as a schoolboy, cleaving and braining with a horrible left-to-right sweep of the bar.'

Hayes paused awhile and re-lit his half-smoked cigar.

'The Chinese pirate is no coward,' he continued huskily. 'He's got to be brave, or he'd starve at the game. But he likes all the soft fighting he can get, although he'll face the lightning of small guns until he's half blown out of the water. Deck fighting is pirates' business; shoulder to shoulder, knife to knife, they hit you in a pack; and if you haven't been trained to whip wolves and tigers It's much easier to lie down and present 'em with your funeral expenses.

'But the crowd that swarmed over us had never been hit at short range with, a six-foot bridge-stay. They'd never been hit to leg or brained on a dry wicket. David played 'em singly and in bundles. They broke, and scurried like rats to the schooner's rail, they fought each other in their wild haste to dodge the giant's murderous blows. Like a bear among puppies he killed them In

groups before they reached the rail. Their short knives were useless against his paralysing onslaught.

'His great height and proportions filled them with superstitious fear. Some cast themselves into the water, mutilated and crippled; others crawled into the alley-way holding up their hands in token of surrender.

'David leaned on his weapon panting and weary; around him a dozen battered shapes, unable to rise or speak, Below in the stateroom were a crowd of yellow ruffians stripping and smashing everything within reach. Their shoutings ceased for a while, as though they'd grown suspicious of the silence on deck. Three of them came to the foot of the stairs and looked up.

'David was leaning on his bridge stay above, breathing heavily. The junk had sheered off on the starboard tack, firing into us wildly from time to time, and killing one of my Liverpool mainsheet men named Johnson.

'It was about time for me to give an order, 'Now, lads,' said I, crawling to the crowd in the galley, 'give the big fellow a hand to clear out the chinkies below. Down the hatch with you, and rip away the bulkhead partition, and chase the yellow scum upstairs into his arms.'

'The men were below before the order left me. I heard the axes at work beating in the planks that separated the forehold from the stateroom. While above, in the hot sunlight, stood David Clipp, the sweat of battle on his big throat and brow. But the light of his baresark rage had gone from his eyes; his jaw hung, and his knees grew slack as a sick man's.

'The pause in the fight had given him time to reflect over the mutilated shapes huddled around him. It was the silence that touched him most; if someone had struck at him or cried out from the heap of skull-battered men his courage would have held fast. To make things worse, a squat, bull shouldered junkman crawled from the heap exposing his face and body pulverised into a shapeless mass of bone and flesh. He looked at David long and steadily, and his head nodded.

'David's face whitened as the eyes looked into his; he reeled across the deck dragging the bridge-stay after him.

'Quick!' I called to the lads below. 'Our Davy's turning cold.'

'The horde of looters in the stateroom turned like trapped wolves as the bulkhead partition crashed in, leaving a hole big enough to ram a dozen gun-barrels through. They crowded up the stairs, but stayed half-way at sight of the shambles on deck, and the blood-weary giant leaning against the mast.

'He saw them, and his legs shook with fear. There was no time to curse his fainting courage. If the yellow devils were allowed to gain the deck or their second fighting wind they were hardy enough to hold the schooner until the high-pooped junk grappled with us again.

'They came up the stairs two abreast, measuring David foot and eye, like jackals driven towards a sick lion. The sight of their short crooked knives was more than he could stand. A hoarse whimper came from him. He looked at them once over his shoulder, and, quick as a frightened dog, slunk for'ard, leaving the stairhead clear.

'The devil take you, David!' said I.

'Just here a cry came from below, and I knew it must be from the woman sitting beside the little child in David's cabin. Her voice rose like a wail, as though she had just realised her loss,

'The sound of her voice brought David round with a jerk he listened for the cry to repeat itself as the yellow looters streamed up from below. Their rat-like instincts told them that the big man's courage ran in streaks. They leaped yelping at him as he turned, But David, the coward, was not to be caught by a bundle of loin-cloths and a dozen stabbing arms. The woman's cry had stiffened his courage. Pivoting nimbly, he met them with a straight swing of the bar, followed by a murderous in-and-out chopping that broke them into a limping, howling mob.

'It was the first time I had ever seen a show-giant cross-cut with a six-foot bridge-stay, and my ears caught the dull whooping sound of iron striking against flesh and bone.

'A half-maddened junkman ducked cunningly and ran in under the whirling bar, his strong hands clutching at David's ankles. The, giant sprang three feet in the air and his right foot came down on the ruffian's face, squeezing it to the slippery deck. I crawled from the house, pistol in hand, but I was afraid to fire for fear of hitting David. And it seemed to me that the fight only lasted about ninety seconds; it was over while the blood was hot on the bridge-stay.

'My crew came up with a rush, from below, but the work was over; and they crowded round David, who had flung himself face down on the deck beside the pigtailed heap of Mongolians under the rail. One lay with knees updrawn and fists thrust out, another was doubled over the stern-rail, where the bridge-stay had broken his back as he tried to crawl over.

'David groaned and covered his face as they pressed round him; he had cast the bridge-stay overboard, and his eyes had the look of one who had been licking, the floor of Gehenna!

'Come, come, my lad,' said the mate; 'smarten up a bit and go below.'

'They gave him a stiff nobbler of spirits, for we knew that he would cry like a child the moment he faced his wife in the cabin.

'The junk had drifted far to lee-ward. The few fighting men who remained on board had witnessed the little Homeric fight on the schooner's deck; and, to

a man, they were in no mood to face another swinging six foot bar, that piled up the dead faster than grape-shot or modern ammunition.

'They carried me below, and I saw David's wife bathing the shot-wound on the little girl's face. The big surprise came when the child showed signs of life; and before night she pulled round, looking quite cheerful. The bullet had touched her right cheek between eye and ear, and David sat on the cabin floor and hugged her when she asked for a drink of water.

'We were picked up two days later, in an unseaworthy state, by a Hong Kong passenger steamer. There was a Calcutta doctor on board, and he looked after David's little girl like a white man and a father.

'We were landed at Swatow in better health than when we started. And, barring a slight scar on the right cheek, the girl was as lively as ever.

'David went to Europe with his agent, and fell in with Barnum's people. I heard afterwards that he was the butt of the circus. The dwarf and the 'smallest man on earth' treated him unmercifully. They used to nail his boots to the floor and sew up the sleeves and lining of his clothes.

'I was told that a crowd of stable boys and circus mannikins gave him a terrible drubbing one morning, at the back of the elephant sheds. They said he wept like a girl while the young fiends laid on him with switches and brooms.

'Guess I'm pretty careful about hitting giants these times, especially the big, soft-eyed men who tremble when you show them your boot-end. You never know when they will rush round and paint the deck vermilion with a bit of broken furniture or a bridge stay.'

Hayes rose somewhat wearily from his hammock. Day was breaking along the surf-fretted east, where a dozen pearling-luggers stood motionless against a lip-red sky. Smoke from the trepang huts floated across the bay. One by one the pale, water-weary divers limped from the verandah, yawning and rubbing their reef-chafed bodies. Bafio, the one-eyed, followed to the boat, waiting to carry them to the Vanderdecken Reef, where the golden-edge shell lures white and brown man to the uttermost depths.

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## 15: The Dragon Smelter

*Sunday Times* (Perth, WA) 15 Aug 1909

CAPTAIN HAYES was awakened by the sudden banging of oars under the schooner's side. Slipping from his bunk, he reached the deck in time to meet a half naked white man clambering up the gangway. In a flash Hayes recognised the figure of his boatswain, Tom Emery, who had deserted from the schooner only a month before.

The binnacle revealed the newcomer's ragged appearance, the mosquito-bitten face, the half-healed cuts on the reef-torn hands and feet, that spoke of labour and privations among the Chinese mining camps of North Queensland.

Hayes was awaiting a cargo of pearl-shell from the luggers in the offing, and the boatswain's desertion had threatened to interfere with his sailing arrangements. His anger and indignation evaporated at sight of Emery's appearance. He put out his hand impulsively, and gripped the shaking, toil-hardened fingers.

With a single exception, Emery's experiences ashore had been similar to those of others who had deserted their ships in the hope of finding gold. He had found employment at a big mining camp in the hills. During his labours the boatswain had become suspicious of the large quantities of gold escorted from the working of a big Chinese syndicate near by.

One night he shadowed the coolie escort from the mine to the door of a small temple situated at the head of a gully about a mile from the camp. Two Chinamen took charge of the gold blocks, and, according to Emery, the whole consignment of metal was afterwards riveted to the feet of an iron dragon that stood on the altar within the shrine.

Hayes heard Emery's story with misgivings, although, from experience gathered in Queensland, he was aware that Chinamen, when forced to safeguard newly-won gold, adopt the most unthinkable methods of concealment.

For a long time he paced the schooner's deck in silence, while the thought of so much wealth lying within reach filled him with tigerish impatience.

"Those two Chinamen," he muttered, "would wake the blamed Continent if they sighted us inside their joss house."

"Try 'em with a suckin'-pig, Cap'n," suggested Emery. "A pig has been known to bluff a Chinky where a gun only fooled the show."

A glimmering of Emery's idea filtered gradually through the buccaneer's mind. And after one or two inquiries concerning the pig's whereabouts, he agreed finally to accompany him the following night to the temple at the head of the gully.

The piglet, obtained from an old fisherman near the pier head, was secured in a sack and conveyed by Emery in the direction of the Chinese temple. Hayes followed leisurely in the rear.

The bush-track skirted the big Mongolian mining camp, where the stunted box-trees shut out the vast stretches of spinifex country beyond. A splinter of light pricked the masses of shadow near the temple entrance.

"Keep to the back of the shrine," whispered the boatswain, "and give me a leg-up to the roof, Cap'n."

The piglet had been gagged and muffled to prevent it squealing, and as Emery gained the flat roof he pulled the sack after him, and approached the skylight on all fours.

Hayes stood in the shadows and waited. Behind in the masses of hill and jungle shade, flared the coolie camp-fires; a shout or signal of any kind from the two Chinamen within the temple would bring a pack about his heels.

An unmistakable sound came from the roof, followed by the boatswain's hoarse-mutterings; then sharp squeals echoed in rapid succession as if the released pig had struck the altar in its descent through the skylight. Round and round the sacred precincts it ran, filling the hot silence with shrill protests. A clattering of sandalled feet was heard in the temple doorway; voices charged with anger and surprise reached Hayes as the two guardians of the shrine dashed towards the altar and seized the rioting intruder. Leaving the door ajar, they ambled towards an enclosed compound on the western side of the temple. Here they paused to inspect the noisy invader. Shang Wah, chief guardian of the shrine, held the pig at arm's length, while a dreamful ecstasy over-clouded his eyes.

"Our prayers have been heard at last, Wing Poo," he said in his musical Nankingese. "Only last night I dreamed of such a thing, and it has come even before our cooking fires are out."

The buccaneer crawled forward and slipped through the open door into the temple. A smell of burning roots and oils assailed him; the strange odour of flame-chastened offerings lingered in the darkness. At the altar he paused, and glared at the dragon's outline perched on its castings of gold. Taking a jemmy from his pocket, he worked it under the massive blocks of metal until the woodwork cracked and split under the tremendous leverage. The dragon tilted suddenly and leaned on its side. With almost superhuman strength the buccaneer hauled it to his shoulder, and staggered with it to the open door of the shrine.

For a moment he stared from the doorway at the backs of the two chattering Celestials in the compound, then lounged into the shelter of the bush.

Emery was beside him in a flash, and together they bore the unwieldy iron monster down a deep side track, where the stiff kangaroo grass lacerated their ankles at every stride. It was soon evident to both men that they were wandering in an opposite direction to the schooner. A small stone building shone suddenly through the darkness: scattered around it were heaps of broken mineral ore and tailings. A quantity of scrapped mining machinery littered the ground. Peering inside the deserted building, Hayes saw that it had once been used as a smelting house. A small brick furnace stood opposite the door, further examination revealed an iron ladle lying on top of some fluxing ore.

The two men panted in the darkness as though the hurried journey across the sandhills had told on their strength. Several miles of rough ground had yet to be crossed before the schooner was reached. It was long past midnight and the dawn would be upon them long before the inlet was sighted. Once the darkness lifted their chances, of eluding the scattered bands of Chinese fossickers were extremely small. A hue and cry would be raised at sight of two white men hauling their sacred dragon towards the creek.

Striking a match cautiously, Hayes examined the massive blocks of gold which had been screwed and riveted to the feet of the iron-monster. It would take a bullock dray to shift it through the sand-hills," he said shortly."

"And if we leave it here until to-morrow night some of those black trackers at the Chinese camp will ferret it out."

"Smelt it in the crucible," suggested Emery. "The gold'll run to the bottom of the pot; the iron part can be thrown away."

"What then?" demanded Hayes, whose knowledge of smelting work was limited.

"Run off the gold into bars with the ladle. We can carry 'em to the schooner easy enough. We don't want the blamed dragon, Cap'n. The gold'll come away from its claws easy enough once the fire's started."

"There's a lot of sense being warmed out of your head to-night, Emery," laughed Hayes as he heaved the mass of gold and iron into the furnace.

A heap of coke stood near the furnace, and with some dry wood from a stack outside the boatswain soon had a draught-fed fire roaring up the wide bricked flue. Hayes regarded the glowing fire with interest, then turned to the stooping boatswain hurriedly.

"You'd better make your way to the schooner and bring back a couple of sacks. We can leave here at daybreak and nobody will be the wiser."

Throwing a final armful of coke into the furnace, Emery departed noiselessly in the direction of the creek. Hayes watched him across the low-lying hills, then closed the smelting door to prevent the red light of the furnace

from reflecting on the white quartz heaps outside. The coke burned fiercely under the circular-shaped crucible, and the buccaneer soon witnessed the swift fluxation of metal as, one by one, the heated gold blocks fell away from the mass of iron which held them. Drawing the cumbersome dragon from the furnace, he cast it into a far corner of the smelting house.

For several seconds he was overcome by an irresistible desire to stir the glowing orange-hued mass lying at the bottom of the crucible. Never before had he seen molten gold flow and splash from the basin-like rim of a three-foot ladle. Like a child fascinated, he allowed the fluid gold to drip and spill back into the crucible until it emitted a trickling, purling sound delightful to the ear.

It occurred to him suddenly that it would be an easy matter to run the metal into a shallow trench scooped out of the floor. The earth would make an excellent mould for the gold bars.

Stooping near the door, he listened, with his shoulder against the panel, scarce daring to breathe. Something was pressing the door from the outside, and for a fraction of time he allowed it to open about the fifth of an inch. A naked Chinaman was standing outside, and the light rays from the furnace flashed suddenly in his eyes. Swift as a panther, Hayes reached for his throat and missed, the pig-tailed head ducked nimbly and vanished.

The furnace rays illumined the white heaps of quartz outside while Hayes searched wrathfully for a glimpse of the spying intruder. The ghostly silence of the ti-tree and thorn-bush scrub gave no hint of the Chinaman's whereabouts. A far-off shouting turned him sharply in the direction of the coolie camp fires. All along the hip of the range streamed a procession of small lamps, held aloft by scores of naked figures reconnoitring in his direction.

There was no lock to the smelting house door: no weapon worthy of the name to stave off, even for a second, the first rush of the coolie mob. The lanterns dipped and vanished suddenly, as though the near bush had engulfed them.

"They're coming— the air is thick with them. I guess I have no business to be caught in a place like this."

Hayes fell back to the door of the smelting-house.

A shrill, wailing sound came from the near ti-tree, a sobbing noise that resembled the first rush of a dingo pack, it broke, suddenly from the scrub, and with it a score of lean-hipped Mongolians, dancing in their rage, flashing their mine-lamps over the glittering quartz heaps in front of the smelting-house.

"Now.... Johnny boys, don't be in a blamed hurry. Guess you'll let me fight long enough to warm the soles of my feet."



What followed happened in the fall of an eye. A dozen coolies burlled themselves at the swiftly-slammed door. Hayes held his back to it with the strength of a Titan, while fist and knives hammered and smote from the outside. The din was terrific. Nothing could withstand the fierce impacts, the irresistible weight of twenty Chinamen flung ram-like at the rough hewn panels.

The buccaneer gasped under the strain, jammed his feet into the earth, buttressed the quaking door with arms and shoulder until it rattled and splintered about his ears. Then his eye fell on the molten metal in the glowing crucible, the long-handled ladle resting against the wall. A single leap took him across the smelting-house to the red door of the furnace. Snatching up the iron ladle he pivoted nimbly and faced the intruding mob of coolies.

Four of their leaders fell head first through the suddenly opened door, checking for a moment the wolf-like rush of the mob. The problem of effective resistance appeared incredibly simple the moment the crowd of bronzed hued bodies tumbled in a heap before him. A plunge of the iron ladle into the crucible brought up a brimming mass of molten metal that was emptied in a blinding wave over the struggling group in the doorway.

A second helping from the glowing crucible was executed even more deftly, for Hayes saw that by tossing the fluid gold in the air, it scattered in a tortuous stream over their naked backs and shoulders. Up and out he cast the flesh-eating metal, plying his ladle with laughter and savage grunts. He saw it shoot like quick-silver over the pig-tailed heads and shoulders, streaming in learning pools about the unprotected feet and ankles.

"Guess you've bit the big gold-cure!" he shouted suddenly. "Guaranteed to do away with a Sunday thirst or—" He turned with his brimming ladle up-lifted and found the smelting-house deserted.

A couple of scalded Chinamen dragged themselves through the doorway, where the fast-pooling metal lay in shining gouts of red about the door. Outside the frantic mob withdrew to the shelter of a sand hill and discussed the situation. The shoulders and the limbs of the front and middle rank men were covered with metal scalds. Many of the others bore traces of the terrible baptism of gold; their faces and bodies disfigured where the yellow fire had sealed and spilled over them.

From the furnace lit house came the jeering laughter of the white barbarian. They could see him standing beside the crucible, the flare and sweat of battle upon his face.

"The dog has skinned us with our metal," snarled a Tonquinese coolie from the rear. "Let us fight him another way."

They gathered in a bunch near the smelting-house door armed with stones picked from the pile at hand. Hayes, stooping beside the furnace, knew that they would batter him to pulp the moment he tried to leave the building.

One of the leaders advanced within a few feet of the door, and dropped a heavy short-fused dynamite cartridge near the threshold. Retreating nimbly, he rejoined his comrades, and took his stand beside the pile of broken stones.

The buccaneer leaned forward half-hypnotised, and stared at the slow burning fuse, the carbon-like flame that ate its way slowly towards the cartridge. He knew what would happen the moment the fire reached the metal cartridge-case, for he had seen rocks and hills rent asunder by smaller charges of dynamite. The smelting-house would fall about his ears as surely as though a five-inch shell had struck it. There was only one exit, and that was by way of the coolie stone-heaps.

Hayes rested out the long-handled ladle and contemplated the changing colour of the fire that bit its way surely and swiftly down to the cartridge-cap. He noted how the white glow turned from saffron to violet. The fuse-end began to smoke dully, then emitted a murderous red spark that interested him vastly. He almost felt the coming impact, the thunderous shock of earth and stone that would engulf him.

With a glance at the mob half-concealed behind their stone-heap, he leaped out, snatched up the smoking cartridge, and cast it in their midst. Its swift passage through the air seemed to quicken the last throbbing spark; a deafening roar smothered the howls of dismay that went up from the close-packed coolies. A blade-white flame seemed to eat the darkness about them, splitting the stone-heap in fifty directions; the sobbing roar of it shook the smelting-house to its foundations.

Hayes peeped out and the bitter fumes of dynamite blew back in his face. Several indistinct forms moved from the scattered stone-heap, moaning, calling to each other in supplicating voices. Drops of rain fell at his feet; he glanced skyward, instinctively.

At that moment a long arm shot out from the near tree— a jagged stone struck him full on the brow. Staggering forward, he pitched over and lay almost in the doorway of the smelting house. A couple of big-chested coolies crept from the scrub-shadows and stood over him critically.

"The stone is better than the knife, Chung Lee. He will not melt or steal our gold again. Look how he has played with it!"

The speaker pointed to the gold-fretted floor of the house, where the ruddy patches of metal lay in hardened heaps and cakes of curious design. Grasping the ladle, he dipped it into the crucible and poured the fluid gold in short bars over the floor.

"Let us do what the barbarian would have done," he said, hurriedly, "and escape to the coast. The men who fight get the blows and the scalds. We who know better get the beautiful gold." He paused, with the brimming ladle of metal poised in the air reflectively, and glanced at the motionless figure stretched near the door.

"For what he he's done, Chung Lee, let us fill his mouth with burning gold; let us pour it down his great throat until it reaches his heart... the dog defiled our gods."

Chung Lee placed a fierce restraining hand on the uplifted ladle.

"Gold is hard enough to win, Foo Yen, without pouring it into the mouth of the *yanjen*. Let us hurry; others are coming."

Three bars of gold were run on the earthen floor, and the last dregs scraped from the furnace. Not a scrap of metal remained in the smelting-house when they emerged laden from hip to shoulder with bullion. They passed the sprawling, motionless shapes of their comrades in silence, and hurried north in the direction of Port Darwin.

When Emery returned, three hours later, he found Hayes sitting inside the smelting-house with his hands pressed over his eyes. The boatswain's glance wandered from the empty crucible to the huddle of coolies outside.

"It's been a drawn fight, Cap'n." he ventured dismally. "Everybody's got a headache, it seems."

Hayes rose with an effort, his lips puckering a trifle maliciously.

"A man wants two heads to fight Chinamen with, Emery. The one I've got is always stopping pieces of flying iron."

They returned through the sandhills and gullies to the schooner.

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## 16: The Pearler's Baby

*Daily News* (Perth) 4 Jan 1910

(Also as "The Christmas Pearl", 1916, with some minor changes)

TWO DIVERS had been drowned on the Vanderdecken Bank, about six miles east of Thursday Island. A whisper had gone through the pearling-fleet that foul play among the rival lugger captains had caused the accident.

In company with the Inspector of the Torres Straits Pearl Fisheries we crossed from the mainland in a small oil-launch to where the lugger squadrons rolled under the lee of a surf-washed bank.

The deck of the big store-ship *Aladdin* was strewn with rotting bivalves and tangled headgear. Marine inquiries conducted within the Carpentaria seaboard are often brief and searching. Hauled aft by their respective captains, the small gangs of Malays and Burghis men were submitted to a sharp cross-examination by the inspector. Nothing was elicited, however, beyond the fact that the two divers had been caught in a tide-rip and carried with their fouled air-lines under the keels of the luggers.

Deprived of his glass helmet and rubber dress the drowned diver is not good to see. Death had come to both men through the sudden scouring action of an unknown current and the green shadow or his merciless strength was reflected in their wide-open eyes.

A death certificate was granted to their captain, and, after the usual formalities, we took our departure. In the launch the inspector suggested that we should pay a visit to the little township snuggling beyond the distant sand hummocks. There had been some talk, he said, of a kidnapped baby on the part of a man named Morton Hake and his wife Janet.

Heading the launch for a tiny inlet between some mangrove jungle, we stepped ashore and passed leisurely down the crooked street, where a few score pearl shellers and *bêche-de-mer* men idled with the low-roofed paka-pau shops and Chinese gambling houses. A strange quiet fell upon the township at the sudden entry of an officer wearing the uniform of the Queensland Government.

From the close-shuttered opium houses streamed gangs of sullen-browed kanakas and Malays, ejected for the moment from their sleeping-mats and bunks by the affrighted proprietors and hasheesh syndicates. Somewhere beyond the sweltering roofs and casements a Chinese fiddle throbbed unceasingly; while above, in an almost livid sky, the sun poured its tropic wrath upon the treeless dunes and mud flats.

We found Morton Hake in his hut near the beach, a pile of trawling-nets about his bare feet

Although Hake fished in his spare hours, his name figured occasionally in the local excise officer's reports. Something had been said of him in connection with an illicit still and the tubs of over-proof whisky that were nightly smuggled aboard the pearling-luggers in the bay. Our visit, in the present instance, was one of friendly curiosity, and Hake seemed to fathom our intentions in the shift of an eye.

He was a strong, blonde man, with a scar on his left cheek that might have come by way of a slanting kris stroke or a casually flung trepang spear. He waved us to a pair of empty shell-cases on the beach, and we sat down with the thunder of surf in our ears.

'That baby of Black Fogarty's, Hake?' the Inspector began genially. 'It's bad enough to hear of you kidnapping the Government's excise duties. Pearlers' babies ought to be left alone, you know.'

A flash of hostility crossed the man's eyes, that changed gradually to an amused grin.

'I plead guilty with honest intentions, sir,,,' he said in a brogue-mellowed voice; 'and under, stress of provocation.'

The story of the kidnapped baby had already spread across half the Continent. Passing from the pearling fleets it became a much-discussed theme among the cattlemen of the Paroo River, where the sun-blackened overlanders soon carried it south of the Maranoa.

'Go on, Hake,' nodded the Inspector of Fisheries. 'The father of the baby is known to every police-boat this side of Darwin.'

'Black Fogarty had no hand in the matter, inspector.' Hake sat beside us in the white beach sand, his reef torn nets drawn across his knees. 'The affair was between myself and his wife Kate.'

'The woman who bored a hole in the Government cutter last year?'

'I'll not say she did that, inspector, although I've known her to tear the cheek off a man with a mullet hook. Still, Katie Fogarty is no worse than dozens of other women in these parts. Her trouble was with Maie, the big Fijian girl from the Fly River. They quarrelled over some cotton trade that Fogarty gave to one of her people.'

'Six months ago,' he continued, 'Maie came over to the island to make trouble with Katie Fogarty. Maie stood six feet in her sandals, and looked handsome enough, in her grass skirt and ornaments, to turn the head of a mission-house saint.'

'Well, Katie Fogarty happened to be strolling along the beach with her baby when Maie jumped from her canoe. I was passing by the pier with a load of fish when Katie hailed me.'

'Hake,' says she, 'be a white man for once in your life, and hold my baby.'

'What for?' I says I, pulling up.

'To give my arms a chance while I teach a lesson to this black beauty in the grass overcoat. I'm goin' to uphold the dignity of white women in these parts, Hake.'

'I took the baby, inspector, and there's no need to harrow your feelings with what happened between Katie Fogarty and Maie from the Fly River. Both were strong women in the pink of condition, but I must say that the woman from Ireland made tatters of the grass skirt, and turned Maie's beautiful headdress into a conglomeration of birds' nests and flying feathers.

'Beside being umpire, I was commissioned to hold the baby,' went on Hake. 'And that eight-mile beach wasn't big enough for them to turn when they began swinging each other by the hair.

'The water-police heard the noise at the jetty; they came up in the launch, and clapped handcuffs on both women and bundled them off to the lock-up at Thursday Island.'

'And the baby?' questioned the Inspector. 'Even the Queensland police will not deny a prisoner her baby.

Hake flushed to his ear-tips. 'I, too, have found the police kind to women,' he answered. 'But the officer who arrested Kate knew nothing of her baby. The boat was across the Straits, before Kate herself remembered'

'Well, she and Maie got three months', each for creating a disturbance' on His Majesty's foreshore, and for bringing a British port into disrepute and contempt. I was fixed with the child, anyhow; and I felt like a jape, walking through, the town with it in my arms.

'A crowd of loafers followed, and each one asked me to do -my duty by it and behave like a man. One advised me to go to the Dutch mission-house, and offer it to the little fat minister as a Christmas-box. Another said he'd provide the crowd with drinks if I could carry the baby for three hours without getting' cross or quoting poetry.

'The baby got heavier as I tramped through the town, and the boys kept asking if I was the man who was walking round the world for a wager. The leader of the mob declared that I was an advertisement for a quack doctor with a wagon-load of babies' mixture for sale.

'Black Fogarty, as you know, sir, was away on the new bank, at Sunday reef, working his luggers in double shifts. No one expected him home for months. And the fathers of families grew indignant when I asked them to take Fogarty's baby until Kate came out of gaol.

'So there was nothing to do but bring the brat home to my wife Janet. I sat for an hour under a tree before I could make up my mind, for I knew that my wife regarded the Fogartys with no friendly eye.

'Where on earth did ye get the bairn?' says she, when I walked into the tout 'Isn't your own big mouth hard enough to fill without finding another!'

'That was Janet's way, but she had a sweeter manner at times. While her tongue scolded she warmed a bowl of milk on the fire, and rigged a cradle out of a new shell-basket lined with platypus skin.

'Instead of going to M'Kee's whisky shanty that night, I sat with my pipe listening to the wife singing and talking to the bairn in her arms.

'You'll be losin' some of the fun at M'Kee's, Morton,' says she, walking up and down the room with the child. 'The boys'll miss ye.'

'Let them,' says I 'It's aisy I'm feeling all the same.'

'And so the weeks ran on till the monsoon came and work grew slack. The boats lay idle inside the bay, while the wind slammed the praus and junks against the rotten pier. Jordan, the storekeeper, turned a sour eye on me when I asked for favours in the way of bread and a little sugar.'

'And milk at a shilling a pint,' broke in the Inspector, with a sudden show of sympathy.

Hake nodded grimly. 'The bairn threatened to drink the township dry of milk,' he went on, 'there being only one cow on the island, and that the property of a Chinaman.'

'There was a report current at the time' (it was the Inspector who spoke) 'that your Janet stole into the Chinaman's paddock every morning before he was awake and helped herself to the milk.'

'True enough,' laughed Hake; 'and the bairn thrived like a young seal, although there was small butter on Janet's bread those mornings. People thought we were crazy not to hand in the brat at the lock-up to its rightful mother.'

'But Janet thought different. 'Tis only a month or two to wait,' says she. 'And we'll keep the little one from the black shadow of the gaol, where the bad men from all the islands are crowded together.'

'And so we kept Black Fogarty's baby out of the fever-trap of a cell, where its mother lay through the bitter months of the monsoon. But the bad season passed, and one morning before daylight Janet crossed to Thursday Island in our boat and waited by the big gaol gate for Katie Fogarty to come out.

'At six o'clock the warders opened the spiked door, and the first to come forth was a lame Jap with a bandaged head. Then a couple, of kanakas, came out, singing with joy as they felt the clean air from the sea blowing in their faces.

'Janet kept close to the big stone wall until Kate stepped from the gaol gate, her wild eyes looking right and left down the empty road. Janet called

her, and they stood for half a minute watching each other like a couple of ewes. '

'I have something for ye, Kate Fogarty,' says Janet at last; 'and but for my man, Hake, it's the number of its grave I'd be handin ye.'

'Kate sat by the road hugging the bairn, and walking with it up and down, talking, babbling, like a human being let out of a cage. Janet cried, she was sorry for the rough, ill-tempered woman who had been locked in a stone cell with a crowd of ruffians and cut-throats adjoining her.

'They parted friendly enough, but Janet suffered most when she returned home and looked at the empty shell basket. A week later came news of Black Fogarty and his pearling-luggers in from the banks at Sunday Island. Men talked of nothing else but Fogarty and his wonderful, haul of golden-edge shell. Whisky flowed through the town, until boys and old men lay drunk at the pier-head.

'Janet sat beside me at the hut door brooding over the bitter, foodless days we had passed, and, worst of all, the little empty basket in, the corner. For she had grown to regard the little one as her own during the long wet nights of the monsoon. A fisherman came by with news of Black Fogarty's wild ravings about his wife, and the baby that had been stolen while she lay in gaol. I was certain that a lot of drunken nonsense had been told to Fogarty talk likely to set him at my throat after all the good we had done.

'On the night after Fogarty's homecoming, we heard a step outside the door. Jane looked out, and then, faced me white and trembling.

'Fogarty lying in wait outside in the scrub,' she said.

'I stood up, and passed to the door.

'Take your rifle!' Janet called to me, 'The animal you're going to meet is mad with liquor!

'I can kill him without my rifle, Janet.'

And put I went into the mangroves to Black Fogarty, the man who had, shot half a tribe of aboriginals six months before on the Gascoyne River. He was standing in the shadow of a crooked tree that had arms outstretched far over the water. A giant of a man he was, with the hands of a gorilla and the stoop of one.

'Ye took me cub, Hake,' says he, without shifting. 'I'm here to pay yez for the throuble ye went to.'

'If you paid him with most of your black blood, Fogarty, you would still owe him a debt!' cried Janet from the hut door. 'Go, hide your bad face this night!'

Fogarty shifted, and I heard his breath come and go. I threw myself forward to stop his mad rush, for I knew him to be the toughest fighter in the fleet



'Twas the tree shadow bothered me as' I saw his hand go down to his knife-sheath.

'The women hereabouts have tongues,' says he at last, 'but this I'll, give ye for the service rendered.'

'Tis his joking way of giving me the knife, I thought, as I stood ready to break his knee with a straight kick the moment he leapt out.

'His fingers fumbled at the knife sheath, as though his thumb was digging for something at the bottom.

'This for a Christmas greeting, Hake; hold it tight man, for 'tis worth the eye of a king.'

'Twas 'not a knife-stab he offered for a Christmas gift, sir, but a pearl as big as the knuckle of your hand— a pearl that was full of milky whiteness and matchless orient.

'Take it,' he says, 'and tell Janet to come and see the bairn sometime.'

'He was gone before I could speak. We did not see him or Kate again. Still'— Morton Hake. rose with the nets hanging from his shoulders, and smiled in the face of the Inspector— 'the pearl was more than we expected, sir. The price it fetched bought us a new boat and set of sails.'

Hake accompanied us to the jetty, where Janet, a tall, good-looking Scotswoman, sat knitting in the bows of a newly-painted fishing yawl.

We saluted her deferentially, marvelling at the unexpected impulses that guide these rough toilers into paths of humanity aid forbearance.

A babel of voices reached us from the slow-drifting pearling fleet, where the sun turned the oily waters into gouts of crimson and opal. Hake and his wife stood in the bow of the yawl, waving their hands until the great oyster-bank shut them out

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## 17: A Chinese Whale

*Southern Star* (Bega, NSW) 24 May 1911

HIS HUT stood on the southern shore of Twofold Bay, overlooking the whaling station at Kiah. Dense mulberry bushes and jungle-like creepers concealed the eerie wind-racked shanties that leaned over the hillside. Grease and blubber smoke had evidently preserved the timbers of the whalers homesteads against the fierce Antarctic winds that sweep over the southern limits of Australia.

Peter's hut stooped against a bullock-proof fence which marked the eastern boundary of a deserted cattle station. The skeleton of a whale-boat peeped from a roofless house. A broken-hafted bomb spear and the scrap ends of a disused oil-tank added to the general litter, and suggested a once thriving industry.

Peter was sitting near the hut door, his bare feet and sea-chafed hands half covered in the folds of a trawling net. Below, in the surf-trenched hollow, an ancient yawl pressed her weary shoulders against the hip of a red sandbar. Myriads of gulls and mallee-hawks clung to the wave-worn reefs beyond the trying-out sheds.

Peter's voice was a shrill soprano at times, but beneath it ran a bass note that could lift itself when required above the music of the humming white squalls that spin up from the southern Ice Limit.

'Fifty years ago'— his old sea blown eyes puckered humorously— 'we stowed our rum under the oil tanks, and ran it to the Victorian goldfields when the boys were ready. 'Twas smart goin' in those days, an' the troopers always enjoyed a plate of prawns when they looked in at the whaling shed.'

Peter's skin was blue where the salt-water sores had newly healed. There was a light in his eyes as nimble as pointed steel.

'Many an enterprise has vanished at the click of a trooper's bit and chain,' I ventured sorrowfully.

Peter rolled some tobacco in his palm thoughtfully, while his ferocious black-bowled pipe dived and scooped into it until the weed hung beard-like over its charred rim.

'I was thrapped wanst almost red-handed, here in this hut, between five tubs of spirit and a Chinaman named Wong Hoy.

'Twas the night the *Dunbar* split up on the rocks, and 'twas black as the thimble of a funeral party. God save us, 'twas north Atlantic weather, with wind from the pack ice, but a good night, me son, for overlandin' rum. Five tubs in the corner beyond: Barney Cash and Ennis waitin' for the cart to lift it away. Cash an' Ennis were good lads, foot, hand an' eye.

'D'ye hear the wind?' says Cash, huggin' the fire. 'Tis like the feet av mountains sthridin' over the sea.'

The rain tore through the shingles; the tide was at the door soppin' the flure where we sat. Ennis lay on the table listenin', his small eyes half shut, a revolver under the cuff av his coat. The ears av a rat had Ennis, an' the eye av a thracker whin circumstances provoked his sinsibilities.'

'Hush!' says he, kickin' Cash wit' his toe; 'the ghosts are walkin'.'

The door opened, an' the wind licked us like the wet tongue av a wolf.

'God spare us!' says Cash. 'Fwat is it?'

The face iv a Chinaman came through the door: the rain was dhrippin' from his bald head: the eyes av him looked at the three iv us.

'Come in,' says Ennis, widout movin'. 'Fwat brings ye on the bache tonight, John?' says he.

The Chinaman looked scared av somethin': 'twas like as though a thunder-clap had shaken his bones. The wind roared in upon us, an' the lightnin' jumped blue across his old eyes.

'He was travellin' along the coast towns wit' fancy goods and joolery. 'You let me stay here little while?' says he. 'Welly bad night outside.'

'Be seated, John. We wouldn't turn a dog adrift in such weather," says Cash.

'Or a throoper either !' And Ennis put away his gun wit' a laugh. We shook up the fire an' brought the cards. We played an' waited for the cart to take away the illicit spirit in the corner. The Chinaman lost an' won at euchre. The money stood in a small heap in the middle av the table. At midnight we heard a thrimingus noise outside; 'twas like Hell's horses draggin' the drowned ship from the bed iv the sea. We took the hurricane lamp an' ran out, and the waves flew upon us in a blindin' smother av brine.

'Mother av Hivven!' says Cash, swingin' high the lamp. 'Look! Look and behold!' says he.

We stood by watchin' an' listenin' to the blowin' av it, as the walls av surf batthered an' slammed it ashore. Mud an' flyin' shells cut the air fn front oi us. Twas like a giant thrashin' the beach wit' a bullock's hide, it rowled and fized and slashed the sea in halves. An' through the roar av wind an' water we cud bear the breathin' av it.

'The killers had dhriven it ashore , a half-murdered bull whale swimmin' in its own blood an' gtease.

'Are ye game to hit it under the fluke wi' a harpoon?' says Barney Cash to us.

'I am not, says Ennis, dhrawin' back. 'Time enough to sthrike whin the sea goes down an' the sun is up.'

'The big wounded bull whale lay there while the surf thrashed it into a blind spoutin' heap. Goin' back to the hut we heard the rattle av the cart over the hill yonder. Jim Cash, whip in hand, came in, his face black as thunder whin he saw the Chinaman sittin' over the fire. '

'Ye yellow scut,' says he, 'I saw ye connivin' wit' a throoper at Bega awhile ago. Ye damned spy, get out av this!'

'The five tubs av spirit stood in the corner av the hut. An' Wong Hoy made a bad defence whin we pressed home the charge of spyin'. The devil got hold av him as we threw him from the hut. He struck Jim Cash wit' his shut hand, an' the two brothers knocked him to the ground. 'Tis strange how a small clip under the ear will make a Chinaman lie still. '

'He'll pull round prisintly,' says Ennis, pourin' whisky into Wong How's open mouth. Barney an' Jim Cash sat by the fire howldin' their chins an' suckin' their lips. 'He will wake up,' says Jim, lookin' over his shoulder at the big stiff body on the flure.

'At the Judgment trumpet,' whispered Barney. 'I struck too hard,' hie pttyc, stoopin' over the fire. 'Too hard an' too quick.'

'Wherewill ye bury him?' asks Ennis widout looking up. 'If he was in the pay iv the police they will follow him here.'

'The black thrackers will run straight to his grave whether ye bury him on a hill or in the sea!' cried Jim Cash. 'A man may cover his sins, but 'tis hard to hide the dead.'

A dead Chinaman is poor company ou a wet, howlin' night. An' the fear av the black police set our minds goin'. The five tubs of illicit spirit an' the dead Chinaman was enough to hang us all.

Barney Cash was first to see an end av the trouble. He stood up wit' the firelight in his eyes, his dhry lips crackin' wit' fear and divilrv.

'D'ye not see how 'tis to be worked? Come wit' me, b'ys. while I conduct ye to the grandest funeral iv the century.'

He took Wong Hoy iu his arrums an' walked into the blindin' wind an' rain.

'Come to the funeral,' says he, looking back at us. 'An' for ever howld your tongues.'

'Twas no business av mine to follow those men. Ennis took a spade an' ran after Cash. There was no need to ask what was done. Anyone could guess.

'They found the big bull whale gaspin' in torment on the beach. Ennis levered the jaws open wit' the spade, while Harney Cash rammed the dead Chinaman into the gullet.

'Twill be the Big Sea mystery if the thing is found out,' says Cash, slappin' the whale on the head wit' the spade. The tide will cover our tracks, an' the police will kape a mile from the whale whin the sun comes out.'

'They came back to the hut an' dhrank to the health av the whale an' the Chinaman, while the cart waited by the door an' the five tubs av spirit stood like five publicans in the corner beyant.

'If I'm thrapped carryin' the stuff over the hills,' says Jim Cash, 'they'll hold me in gaol till Wong Hoy is founud.'

'Then,' says Ennis, 'let us hide the five tubs in the belly iv the whale until mortification sets in an' drives the constabulary out iv the district.'

'Barney Cash seconded the motion, an' we dhrank to the health av all good strong whales that kape away poor wane puiitcuicu.

'We took the tubs to the beach one by cue, and cut a tunnel under the big fluke wit' an axe an' blubber spade, an' lolwcd the illicit spirit fair into the belly av the brute; Barney was a bricklayer by thrade; he tuck-pointed the corners iv the whale an' but for the dead Chinaman stretched in the dark gullet, he wud have planted threes an' a verandah to cover up the openin'.

'We slept through the next tide an' the next, until the hammerin' av the throopers at the hut door woke us.

'Good mornin', Cash,' says Sergeant Cunningham easily. 'Have ye seen an owl Chinaman about here lately?'

'Twould puzzle one to see anythin' smaller than a camel this mornin', sergeant,' says Barney rubbing his eyes. 'Have ye seen the whale, sergeant?'

'I have not,' says the throoper, holdin' up his head. 'I have learnt sobriety in me time, and I have learnt,' says be, 'how to begin the day wit'out seein' whales.'

An' away he rode wit'out spakin' another word. '

'Ennis said no word, but stared open-mouthed across the beach.

The high tide had swept it clean as a well-broomed flure. The whale was gone, tfhrawn out by the big under-tow.

'Two hundred pounds' worth av oil, an' five tubs av spirit,' Say Ennis bitterly. 'Twas worse than dhrownin' a goldmine.'

'Twas a chape funeral, anyway,' says Barney Cash.

'No more was said, although 'twas mighty harrud to think that so much good liquor should go asthray.'

A MONTH afterwards I met O'Donnel, the whaler, in the pub at McCrossan's. From his top boots to his greasy guernsey he was covered wit' flies— big brown whale flies that followed him from the beach.

'Did ye hear av the catch last week?' says he, 'near Cape Dromedary?'

'I did not,' says I.

''Twas the best thing in the season,' says he, drawin' a blubber fly out av his beer. 'A dead bull whale dhriftin' north wit' a crowd av sharks bitin' their way

clane troo the middle. We gave them harpoons for lunch, an' cleared them off. We took away eighteen barrels av pure oil an' five tubs av whisky!

'A quare kind av whale, O'Donnel,' says I. 'How dy'e account for the whisky?'

'Twas a Chinese whale,' says he, flickin' another fly from the beer. 'An' ye'll say no word to the boys whin I tell ye that it was thravellin' wit' a long pigtail sthreamin' from the blow-hole ?' '

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## 18: The Box of Opium

*Sunday Times* (Perth) 17 Nov 1912

THE SWEATING line of caravans moved steadily across the flat. A screen of red dust shrouded the two harnessed camels in front, a dust that choked and grew bitter on the palate. The central wagon held a dozen performing dogs that yelped at intervals with, their muzzles against the iron bars. The mammoth circus tent was housed upon a car. In the rear, drawn by a dust-coated elephant, came the tiger's cage. An Afghan driver squatted on the elephant's shoulder, his head swaying from side to side as the great beast strained forward over the wind-piled drifts. Occasionally the outswEEPing trunk curled upward toward the dozing Afghan, breathing a mournful request that sounded like wind in a chimney. In response the turbaned driver permitted his goad to pinch its huge frontal bone.

"Water wantest thou! *Wa Allah*, am I a mountain spring for thee to suck? Lift thy ugly feet, for thou weariest me and the son of Bengal behind!"

The elephant flinched at the mahout's words; a long-drawn sigh escaped in the still hot air.

A sudden halt, occurred in front. The dust-shrouded caravans had reached the main road which followed a dry creek bed into Crushing Flat.

At that moment a boy wearing a blue flannel shirt and knickers dropped from the steps of a rear van and ran hurriedly towards the elephant. Meeting the Afghan's eye, he saluted with mock gravity, then raised his voice above the din of shouting drivers and tent hands.

"Say, Ahmed Khan, father wants you to lend him a nickel: He's going to buy a dog when we get to the Flat."

The boy wore a circle of dust under his eyes, and his milk-white teeth flashed good humoredly. He was the son of Jim Marken, the tiger-tamer, and the Afghan regarded him with a friendly eye as he searched in the folds of his long blue garments.

"Thy father oweth me a dollar already, Chris Marken, but I will yet lend him another nickel. Tell him there will be no interest. I cannot accept interest from thy father."

With the skill of a conjuror he spun the coin down into the boy's palm.

The proximity of the tamer's son affected the elephant strangely. Its great ears seemed to stiffen suddenly as it rocked nervously to and fro. The sharp-eyed mahout was not slow to observe the animal's unrest. He stared shrewdly at the grinning boy.

"Thou hast been teasing my beast, thou!"

The tamer's son retreated nimbly from the elephant's swaying trunk.

"It wasn't me, Ahmed Khan!" he declared vehemently. "It was Nick Cassidy's kid that dropped a live locust in Sultan's ear last night. My... I wouldn't go near your beast, Ahmed!"

"A live locust in the ear of my prince! By Allah, how wouldst thou like a flea in thine?"

The Afghan leaned over, eyeing the boy closely. "Thou little thug, take a care how thou tease my mountain of strength or he may kill thee and the Cassidy brat."

The mahout's sternness relaxed by degrees. "I have a son like thee beyond the Kyber, but he is not so fair."

He balanced his goad above the elephant's head. "Go to thy father, Chris; thou hast the dog money. By the Prophet there is not much iced beer in a nickel. Yet... he may send to me again when the thirst returns."

The goad smote tenderly on the wrinkled flesh behind the great ear", and the elephant swung forward in response, hauling the big ring cage toward Crushing Flat.

By midday Hakeman's Hippodrome had camped near the edge of Battery Gully. A half-holiday had been proclaimed in the township, for it was years since anything larger than a variety show had ventured there.

Hakeman, the proprietor, was an American, who had once worked, as an underkeeper for Barnum. In his younger days he had thrown meat to the lions at the big Coney Island shows, while in England he had played the parts of clown and ring-master for Myers and Saugers.

Hakeman worked like a giant among the shifting folds of the mammoth tent. Stepping hack into the road, he wolfed a cigar between his teeth and surveyed the chaos of flags and vans with a darkening eye.

Some men find pleasure in politics, or in the manipulation of stocks and shares. Hakeman breathed only when the big tent hung straight, and the American flag flaunted over it. The crack of a whip, the scent of a sawdust ring, were as oil and perfume to the wheels of his mind.

At that moment a range-rider appeared on the brow of a near hill. For a period of his heart-beats he remained motionless as an image in the hot sunlight, while his questioning eyes picked out the caravans sprawling in a semi-circle below. A half-heard exclamation broke from him as he gestured fiercely to an unseen comrade in the background. His horse fairly leaped out of sight.

Immediately from the scrub-lined road beyond the hill-crest came the loud rattle of whips, followed by the hoarse bellowing of cattle on the run. Three frantic stock hands galloped into view in their mad effort to head off the



onrushing herd. They were too late. A squadron of foaming beasts thundered over the hill and down upon the outspanning circus. With them rode the furious stock hands, sending back volleys of sounds with their snake-like whips, and cursing the carnivora smell which had struck into the nostrils of the cattle mob.

Hakeman in his shirt sleeves, sud-denly observed the tempest of hoofs whirling in his direction. With a snarl he spat away his cigar and turned to where the high-roofed tiger cage stood in the centre of the road.

"High, you Ahmed, the elephantn man, you're in the way of those blamed cows." His voice was as the blast of a be-fogged liner.

The mahout looked once at the red tornado of dust and onrushing beasts and then with a stroke of his iron drove his elephant toward the inner circle of waggons. And not a moment ton soon. A hundred dust-blinded steers crashed past, flinging hoof-torn earth and stones in the faces of the petrified circus hands. A bullock with a broken horn and a blood-smear on its chest rolled from the swerving mob and stared dumbly at the cages. Then with a moan it fell under the elephant's flanks.

The elephant trumpeted hysterically, but Ahmed Khan, with the courage of his kind, smote his beast with iron and words.

"Stand steady, thou child of Jehannum! By Allah, a goat would frighten thee. These be only kine. Look to it that no harm befall our royal charge. The son of Bengal is a beast of price!"

Hakeman strolled among the members of his company,\* freshly-lit cigar in his mouth.

A sun-tanned stripling rode from the near cottonwoods where the last crazy steer had vanished in the red whirlwind. There were triple-barred initials on his horse's shoulder, indicating its famous Montana breeding camp. He loped in among the huddle of waggons and shook his fist at Hakeman.

"See what your menagerie's done for us! We're from Medicine Hat, and we never lost a horn till we met with your camels and caged horrors fit to frighten the Almighty!"

His head fell forward almost to the saddle, and his loud sobbing was heard far down the circus. Hakeman approached him, a look of genuine re-gret in his eyes.

"Be ghade, boy, I'm real sorry. I know the cows don't enjoy the smell of a tiger. You see. I can't carry a semaphore to tell cattlemen that we're camping out with our lions. And cows haven't got no sense of humor nowadays."

NIGHT CAME to soothe the nerve broken party of circus people on the flat. The distant hills seemed to breathe under the star-whitened firmament like a

woman resting from the intolerable heat of noon. Troops of miners with here and there a few excited women and children from the outlying townships hurried into the huge tent to take their seats around the thickly-sawdusted ring.

At first they gaped at the sleek Indian wolves sidling from corner to corner of their dens, at the sloth bear lolling against its greasy bars. The hyena which never looks man in the face, concealed itself in its house, refusing to exchange glances with the scoffing, bronze-hued denizens of Crushing Flat. But the joy of the evening was the large, kindly elephant picketed near the ring entrance.

A small tent, pitched in one of the dark recesses between the waggons, was occupied by Jan Marken and his family. Herr Marken was the most important member of the company. It was his duty to enter the tiger's cage and compel it to leap through a burning hoop. Tiger taming, considered as a profession, is no more dangerous than whaling, or any other deep-sea trade. But some tamers take their business seriously, and they are apt to become over-abusive when the striped man-eater will not come to heel. Constant friction with half-trained animals had brittled Marken's nerves; he had become sullenly watchful; the clash of a falling bar or a sudden shout set him a-quiver. In his younger days he had entered cages with the air of a sportsman, and he was never slow to drive his boot against a lion's jaw when it ran counter to his will. In later years he was inclined to temporise with beasts, and they grew subtle in attempts to kill him.

Harkens turn was almost the last item on the programme. The applause from the circus broke upon him with deafening insistence. Two fair-haired children crawled about the tent floor, and struggled occasionally for possession of a heavy-thonged, brass mounted whip, while the tamer and his wife played cards to fill in the long wait.

Marken was a heavy-shouldered Hollander. The flesh under his eyes was slack and livid. The company of acrobats, who slept in the adjoining tent, complained that Marken shouted in his sleep. The tamer's hand shook as he threw down an ace, while a sudden cage-like odor drifted in upon them. Madame Marken rose quietly and pulled down the tent-flap. The smell of beasts was intolerable to her.

"Der animals vas excited tonight, Jan. Dey haf not forgot der cattle dot come round us to-day. It vas a horrible sight."

Madame resumed her seat on a biscuit box and took up her cards.

Marken frowned. "Der vas something to excite dem. My beast vas put out, I think. De fool Ahmed left der ring cage standin' in der road. Ahmed haf a soft yob; the elephant gif him no trouble."

"Der lascar man always get der soft jobs," said Madame pettishly. "It vas us white peoples dot haf to pull der tiger's tail. Ahmed haf a softer yob than us, Jan." With a caressing movement she smoothed back the grizzled curls that clung to his brow. He glanced at her and coughed.

"Der vas a man in dis circus who vas after my yob, vrouw. He vas always pokin' about der cage. He say to me yesterday, 'Jan, I wish you would let me go in mit you some day.'"

The tamer played on steadily. Madame watched him, a nameless dread in her eyes.

"I tink you vas gettin' nervous, Jan. You smoke too much, und de coffee you take vas always black."

"Hush, vrouw! You must nod let de circus people hear you say dot. Hakeman would not like it."

The two children crawled outside unnoticed, to the flaming lamps where Ahmed Khan sat smoking at the circus entrance.

The boy in the moleskin knickers and blue flannel shirt crept noiselessly into the tent and lay on the ground at his father's feet. "Been 'elpin' to water the ponies," he said in a half whisper. "My word, that piebald stallion can kick!"

"Time you vas in bett, Chris." Madame glanced at the boy over her cards.

He wriggled his bare toes into the earth. "Let's stay up, mother, ti!! father does his turn; I want to 'ear the band play."

"Let him stay up, vrouw." The tamer shuffled the cards and dropped them on the floor in his nervous haste.

"One of the grooms says Tommy Bates, the underkeeper, 'll get father's job some day. The keeper's tellin' the whole circus that father has to sit on the whisky keg before he goes into the cage."

The tamer glanced sharply at his son; then his brooding eyes fell on the cards. He made no reply.

Madame's lips quivered. "Dey vant your father's yob, every one ob dem. Und dey haf no little childrens to keep. To-morrow I shall tell dem my mind. De fink of noding but de oder man's yob."

"Say nodings, vrouw," Marken gestured heavily. "Where vas the childrens?" He looked round the tent suddenly. "I did nod see dem go out."

Madame put away the cards hurriedly. "I fink dey vas in de circus, Jan. I cannot see dem when dey creep from here." She slipped out and hurried toward the mammoth tent.

Marken rose heavily from his seat, his large hands resting on his hips. He stopped near the swinging tent lamp and adjusted it carefully. Afar off he heard the ring manager's voice calling to the performing dogs. Re-turning to his seat, he sat down again and listened. A soft pad-pad from the adjoining cage

caught his ear, then the sound of a paw striking the bars rang dully across the dark open space.

"Hear him, father." The boy lay with his head to the ground, his right arm thrown lazily forward. "Listen! He knows his turn's comin'. They fed him early to-day. He got an extra piece of bullock for his share, an' he ran round an' round his cage tearin' it to pieces. Hear him now?"

From the darkness outside came the whoof whoof of the breathing tiger as it padded ceaselessly across the cage. In the silence that followed they heard the man-like cough of the hyena, the clatter of a bone jerked noisily from the corner of a den.

"Dis vas a horrible trade!" A look of unutterable hatred came into the tamer's eyes. He crept swiftly from the tent, stooped under a cage awning and stared through the bars at a pair of fireballs that seemed to await his coming.

"Hell-dog, be still!" The fireballs appeared to retreat a little. Marken turned away. In a flash the tiger flung- itself against the bars. Its claws striking within a foot of his sleeve.

Marken flinched. The fury vanished from his eyes. His tongue grew dry against his palate, but the sudden hate which sometimes lifts a bulleted soldier to his elbow seized him."

"By Himmel!... you shall see yet!" He nodded at the fireballs. "You shall see who is afraid," and he smote himself across the heart with his fist.

"Jan, where are you?" Madame stooped from the small tent and glanced along the avenue of dark cages. Marken staggered into the light, his clenched hand resting on his breast

"Vat is der matter. Jan? Someding haf annoyed you?"

"I vas alride, vrouw. Get my uniform. Id vas my turn in a minute."

Madame sighed as she brought his spangled clothes from a bag. Carrying them to the opening in the tent, she brushed them carefully. "Dey smell of der tiger, Jan," she said, placing them before him.

He appeared not to notice her. "Get my whip, vrouw." His voice was hoarse.

His hands trembled as he tossed the contents of a portmanteau on the floor.

"What are you looking for, Jan?"

"For der leedle box, der leedle black box; vere is der leedle black box?" He cart away the bag in nervous haste, and thrust his fingers into a half-open trunk on the floor. "Vere is der black box, vrouw?"

She saw with a woman's keenness the sudden flash of despair in his eyes, the hatred of a work that chained him to a jungle beast.

"I do not remember the leedle box, Jan. Does it matter so much?"

His jaw slackened. The skin of his face seemed to shrivel and age. He stared into the trunk as one looking into a grave.

A boy in circus livery came and peeped inside the tent. "Hurry up, Marken," he said briskly; "they'll be waiting for you in a minute."

Marken struck the air with his empty hand. "Someone has been here, vrouw... my needle box; someone has stolen it."

The noise of wheels went past— slow, grinding wheels that broke upon Marken like the sound of artillery. The Voice of Ahmed Khan rang clear in the darkness as the yoked elephant swung into the ring, drawing the Bengal tiger into the full glare of the light .

The ring manager cracked his whip cheerfully while the clown somersaulted to and fro across the sawdusted arena.

"Why do you hesitate. Jan? Why do you not go at de call?" Madame half-pushed him forward. "Go at de call. Dey will say things about you."

In their sixteen years of married life Madame had never known him to flinch from his duty. Always Jan had gone forward at the word. Something had happened, she knew not what

The small orchestra struck up the "Star-spangled Banner" as the tamer staggered into the ring. The tiger, erect in its cage, stealthily watched his approach, for it had learned to hate the scorching hoop and the dreadful human voice that shouted in its ear.

Marken saw the thousand eyes turned toward him, and to-night each face stood out with revolting distinctness His sick brain received a savage impression of the blood-greed that quivered in the nostrils of the multitude. The tiger, its ears flattened, seemed to move on its belly as he drew near. Jan halted in the centre of the ring to adjust his bootlace. A taste sour as of death took him like a bullet in the throat

The cage steps seemed high a mountains. He was subtly conscious of the manager's footsteps in his ear of his peremptory voice calling his attention to the business in hand, a metallic numbness gripped his knees he tried desperately to ascend the steps, and as he stood near the iron door he heard the manager again at his elbow.

"Marken, you've been drinking. You are spoiling the show." The words were snapped in his ear.

The acid taste in the tamer's throat increased beyond endurance. He restrained the impulses to tear at his collar and strained his eyes to see in the fast-gathering red haze which obscured a distorted world.

Two spots of wavering green light shone out clear and unmistakable. They were the eyes of the waiting beast he must bully. The tiger that had issued its dumb challenge only a few moments before.

Jan drew himself up on the second step and turned his livid face to the throng. "It was a lie, sir, a lie—!"

Harken heard a dull murmur slowly rising from the dim sea of faces which bounded his narrow horizon.

He thought he stood there ages, and wondered why the manager did not curse him into action. His fingers grew slack on the iron gate; he pitched forward into the saw-dust at the manager's feet.

THE DOCTOR said the cause of death was heart failure: and he told the shivering Dutchwoman that Marken ought to have left the taming business ten years before.

A crowd of sympathisers gathered around the small tent. Ahmed Khan, bearing one of the tamer's children on his shoulder lounged forward and placed it inside.

Then he salaamed. "I found thy child playing in the dust with this."

He handed a small black box to Madame. She stared at it dully and remembered.

"The box is full of opium," whispered the mahout. "It is not good for thy child to play with it."

He swung from the crowded tent and crossed the ring. Bates, the underkeeper, followed hungrily in quest of information.

"Say, Ahmed!" he called, "it was pure funk that killed poor Marken—nothing but funk. I knew it all along."

"Liar, thou!" The mahout stalked toward the elephant's quarters. "He was the bravest of us all!"

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**19: Cleopatra of the Coyotes**

*Sunday Times* (Perth) 22 Dec 1912

A FINNISH SAILOR named Borka owned Bill. He carried him, one night, aboard a plug-headed schooner wedged in a forest of spars and groaning lighters at the wharf end. The bull-dog never quite accustomed himself to the light of the in-rolling tramp steamers or the hootings of the fog-bound liners creeping like frightened mammoths from buoy to buoy. In time, however, he neglected to growl at the launches that shrieked and made cat-noises whenever he was seen sleeping on the schooner's bows. Every greaser and engine-room up-start considered it his duty to blow a pound of steam at Bill when passing.

Bill hated noise and music. A fo'c's'le hand with Norwegian eyes, and an unpronounceable name once tried to amuse Bill with a fiddle. The bulldog walked away with backward glances of protest. The Norwegian followed, indiscreetly filling the salt air with resinous discords and Viking sonatas.

Everyone on deck laughed at the dog's misery. The Finn, Borka, alone protested.

"Ah tank it ees not goot business to hurt Beel mit a fiddle," he interposed.

The Norwegian began rendering a series of Norse melodies, his body bent over the bulldog's tortured ears. The crew howled when Bill slunk to the galley for refuge, but the fiddle pursued with maddening strains from its two-dollar-fifty interior. What happened afterward no one could state with precision. It is a fact, however, that the Norse melody ended abruptly in Bill's six-inch mouth. The bulldog gripped the violin and masticated the end of the song.

No Italian maestro ever conducted a theme to its final close as Bill did. He shredded and tore until the fiddle resembled a pile of hair combings. The cook afterward lit his fire with the violin shavings while Bill, thoroughly aroused, hunted round the schooner for any part of the Norse melody that might have escaped his observation.

Bill's past was somewhat of a mystery to Borka. It was known that the dog had won for his former owner many a hundred-dollar wager at the ringside. Fighting dogs with classic reputations had gone out of the business after a brief study of Bill. No one had ever accurately gauged his temperament. He had romped with children while they pounded his ribs and rolled him in the dust. He had also fought and chased into obscurity every wharveside cur between Cape Caribou and Los Angeles.

One night Bill beheld a strange scene on the schooner's deck. Three Finns sat around a cask of rum and began to drink. There was a moon on the starboard quarter, a long stretch of forest-clad coast on the port. From time to

time the Finn at the wheel addressed the drinkers sternly, but they regarded him sombrely, and held up their glasses in derision.

Later, a wild and horrible fight began that interested Bill, because the man Borka, who fed him most, was attacked by the others. Bill remained neutral until Borka's sudden cry for help decided him. Pinning a scuffling giant by the neck he brought him howling to the deck.

A temporary peace was arranged to allow the wounded Borka and the dog to be put ashore. Some food and water were placed in the boat, and they were landed at the mouth of a sandy inlet and left on the beach.

The Finn crawled into the sand licking his swollen lips. A big knife cut gaped on his bare dark chest. He wiped it sulkily with his hand and looked at the dog.

Bill slunk away and lay down. The schooner picked up the boat and stood away on the skyline. The Finn regarded the coast with dull, unseeing eyes. Black stretches of forest-clad ridges filled the north and south. The surf broke in loud, thunderous heaps at his feet. He lay down and closed his eyes, but the pain of the knife wound kept him awake till dawn.

"I am not well, Beel," he said huskily.

The dog regarded him steadily. A collie would have bounded over at the sound of his voice, but Bill only watched the hurt man and blinked.

The surf beat through the heavy coast mist. A jagged cape sloped toward the surf line: the dull booming of the waves marked each moment of the desolation.

"Beel!" The Finn crawled to his elbow, and fell back gasping. "I vas hurt, Beel."

The afternoon wore on. The pain of the knife cut grew large until it gripped his arms and breast like a stream of molten lead. His head became a volcano of activity, but at dawn the furies left him, taking with them the red children of pain, that bite with lion's teeth. A bark heaved across the horizon, then put about and sailed toward the rising sun.

Bill moved uneasily in the sand; a hoarse whimper broke from him. With uplifted paw he tapped, tapped the Finn's breast. Then he ran back and crouched on a wave-worn ridge.

The receding tide left the beach white and desolate. Gulls drowsed aimlessly about a wet sand strip.

The dog returned and rifled the package of food with his nose, then stopped suddenly and looked at the Finn. A big yellow fly swung ove Bill's nose: then another and another. A savage impatience came over the dog. He ran to the surf edge to drink, but the water stayed bitter in his mouth. He lay with panting sides in the cool, wet sand.



A red moon swam with theatrical stealth across the distant mesquite. It stood over a forest-clad ridge for a moment, like a clock with its face to the sea.

A tremulous howl stole from the Dante-esque hill. It ran in fleet sobs through the distant hollows and across the hill overlooking the beach. Bill with his nose in the sand, made no movement. His small ears pricked forward slightly, but his breathing was slow and regular as a sleeping athlete's.

The howling ceased. A pack of gaunt shapes lined the sandhill above. Their spindly shadows flashed here and there. Eyes that grew livid in the moonlight ran in skirmishing order from point to point.

A sudden tigerish resentment settled in Bill's eyes. He stood up almost imperceptibly, his big chest half imbedded in sand. A sound like a human sigh came from him.

Three lank shapes trotted toward the beach, and drew up stiffly within stone-throw of the supine Finn. Bill raised himself about two inches, and they vanished with flying strides.

Five gaunt shadows now approached the Finn. One, a long-snouted ruffian, with shark's eyes, dashed in, unmindful of the white, plug-shaped thing sitting at the Finn's head.

Hunger presided like a live god in the salt night air. The loping coyote shape swerved from his brothers, and as he swung past the supine body he snatched like a jackal. Then something seemed to knock his legs from under him, and he rolled ten yards, with Bill tearing his throat away.

The moon grew white as a tortured face. Across the long shadow-clothed ridge sat the spindly marauders, and they howled at Bill. At dawn, when the hunger-god pinched tied incidentally on the sand ridge: Bill shook water from his back, and rolled on the hot beach.

He slept with his jaw on the Finn's boot. The sunlight showed through his thin white ears, and the keen, wind-driven sand stung him like duck shot. Lifting himself suddenly, he settled on the lee side of the Finn.

Silently the wolflike gang appeared on the hilltop and watched Bill. A council of spindly legs was formed to discuss the unreasonableness of Bill. They roamed the distant beach in circling groups: they made crude feint attacks to draw him from the Finn; Bill's body twisted occasionally so that his nose-always faced them.

Then they regarded him with stiff ears and friendly eyes. Two of them approached with ambassadorial frankness. They trotted near as though anxious to put forward certain views in a friendly and lucid spirit. It was distinctly understood that there was to be no fighting.

Bill appeared overcome by such generosity and refinement, and when the nearest ambassador loped near the Finn's exposed hand. Bill seemed to leap from his ears across Borca's body.

A sharp howl of dismay broke from the council on the hill. The sight of their ambassador rolling in agony with a white plug attached to his throat was distressing to their coyote nerves.

Bill, with a red gaping mouth, slunk to the water, and lay with heaving sides until the waves lapped over his back. Then he returned to the river and settled down.

A sudden calm came upon the coyotes. They receded from view and Bill whined uneasily. With pointed ears and half-closed eyes he saw a sleek yellow shape sidling toward him across the beach.

A coyote slut with alert eyes and finely-rounded head picked her way through the drifts with great precision. Her eyes were soft and full of pity for Bill. She stayed in a wave-worn margin to wash her paws and lick back the soft hair under her throat.

Bill looked confused, and for no particular reason sat up and growled. The new ambassadress pricked her ears. She gave a soft whining note that seemed to depress Bill. Thrusting his nose into the Finn's sleeve, he watched her with a policeman's eye.

She was not afraid of Bill. She regarded the blood on his jaws with tender melancholy. There was no hurry in her movements; elegance and sympathy were her crowning virtues.

Bill was impressed. She was standing over him, her lean sides quivering with excitement, her ears drooped forward. She began slowly to lick the blood drops from his shoulders and flanks. Bill rolled lazily in the sand while she bit him softly on the ribs. Bill affected a sudden rage and sprang up, his tail moving like a thin lash.

The elegant one lay on her side and kicked sand over him. Bill barked hoarsely and invited her to go with him into the water. He rushed in, tearing round and round, swimming strongly against the tide.

She shook herself on the water's edge, but would not wet her feet. She trotted after him, whining lamentably, as though afraid he would drown.

Bill suddenly remembered something, and returned hastily to where the Finn lay in his shroud on the sand. The little she-coyote sniffed suspiciously, wandering in a wide circle round the body; then trotted off gently towards the hill.

Bill stood up in surprise as she halted, her ears thrown forward, and called him. With an uneasy glance at the Finn, he followed. Arriving at the hilltop, the pair looked back.

A hump of sand indicated where the Finn lay. The sun had set behind the illimitable forest.

A moment later and the pack had raced round the side of the hill toward the beach. The old coyotes led the way. Behind them ran the stiff-eared yelping cub.

Bill watched them with the grief of Antony in his heart, while Cleopatra, with the long ears and the tender eyes, licked his face.

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## 20: Murra the Wild Cat

*Sunday Times* (Perth, WA) 16 Feb 1913

TERROR of the great eagle's presence on the range was not confined to Marvin the shepherd and his family. It had spread through the sun scorched canyon where Murra the wildcat lived. Murra herself preyed on the softbreasted wood pigeons and squirrels that sometimes ventured near the rocky shelf where her two kittens played.

For all her beautiful coat and velvet-footed approach Murra was a clawing mass of venom and fight when the chance offered. Even the imperial panther was interested in Murra's movements when she chose to range the canyon "after hours." For even the lordliest of jungle fighters does not wantonly fly in the face of the howling little mother cat.

For two whole days Murra had filled the air with sounds of rage and grief. Marvin heard and speculated on the peculiar noises a sleepy man may hear before dawn. The weasels and foxes left the canyon for an airing, while the coyotes and civets went wide of the palpitating cries, preferring the cooler spaces of the big lake that was fed from the rain-channelled hills in the north.

Little Murra was unhappy. Her midnight lamentations threatened to empty the canyon of other furry dwellers. including a peace-abiding bear and family of squirrels.

The cause of Murra's grief was not far to seek. Two dawns before, a swift black shadow with eagle head and claws had alighted with a roaring of wings on the rocky shelf. A kitten had vanished with the eagle into the blue of the hills. Murra had only just returned from her food hunt at the canyon head when the blood drops of her young one pelted down on the dawn-whitened grass.

Murra had a queer sensation of those wind-shaken drops of blood. She stayed where they fell, her twitching nose and eyes following the flight of the swift-vanishing raider.

One more kitten remained in the nest, and Murra went hungry for a whole day rather than leave her retreat. Then her mother-sense moved her to carry the soft, purring kitten to a lower shelf of rock where the stiff pines promised shelter from a too hurried descent of the enemy. She knew instinctively that the falcon-headed marauder had been driven from the lambs by the shepherd's gun, and would seek food wherever it could be found in or about the canyon.

Murra lay still on the far edge of the sun-heated shelf, her paw outstretched lazily to the gamboling kitten beside her. Slowly, imperceptibly, the

memory of her lost offspring was leaving her. In a day or two all recollection of it would have passed.

A scent of lake water and pine drifted down the canyon. Wind that was swift with the breath of the dawn sky brushed the long blue grass below and drove a pair of copper-hued pheasants whirring to the cover of a thicket beyond.

A dark ball moved over the sun's eye and stooped nearer. The momentary flick of shadow caused Murra to look up. In a flash her basking playfulness changed to one of ferocious vigilance. The furry paws of the kitten stroking near her plump body rolled and twisted to no purpose. Murra's eye was hypnotised by the planing wings of the eagle as it sailed and inspected the canyon.

Then it fell nearer by a hundred feet, poised lazily for the millionth fraction of time and cleaved down in a bristling, flashing heap upon the sun-warmed ledge.

Murra had once been in the grip of a hungry kite when a point of difference arose concerning the ownership of a half-dead skunk. The kite was convinced instantly that cats were things invented by man for slicing and maiming the guileless birds of the air. And the kite had gone its way with a neck and wing that required skilled attention and advice.

But Murra was not prepared for the avalanche of leathers and bombarding wings that flung her, stunned and blinded, to the far corner of the shelf. The kitten, alive to her peril, rolled under Murra's body, away from the slashing wing blades and pouncing claws.

Murra saw in a flash that the pine tops were no bulwark against scouting eagles. She experienced the rending clasp of the taloned foot, and then a single buffet of the wings that cleared them of the ledge. And a moment later her flying fur was being blown through the sun spaces in the canyon below.

Murra felt the wild ascent, the sudden rush of cold air beneath. Pine ridge and canyon were shut out by driving mists. The grasp of the taloned foot bent her supple body until her teeth met in the warm, pulsating breast above.

The eagle seemed to shriek in mid-air as the great wings hung stiff to allow a fresh grip on Murra's body. A drop of blood big as a prune fell to earth.

Incidentally the taloned foot of the bird closed on the cat's throat. Murra stiffened under the stranglehold: the muscles of her puma-shaped jaws relaxed slightly, it seemed as if the eagle's foot had squeezed the sobbing strength from her body. The shock was purely momentary. Inch by inch the cat twisted from the talon clasp until her sinewy forepaw struck the soft, downy breast above.

*Whauk! Whauk!*

The touch of the paw was like a bayonet thrust. The huge bird bristled under the shock and sought with incurved wings and beak to stun or rend the clawing little devil with the jaguar's hold.

The cat's neck was gripped by a single talon that strove to force her between the slamming wings. Her conflict with the kite had impressed upon her the necessity of lying close-hauled to a bird's breast when the wings were sabering the air. Against the pressure of the talon she gained a sudden leverage with a kicking hind paw that dug and scarified the shrinking feathered bosom.

*Whauk! Whauk!*

The wings drew in sharply as the hind claws gave strength to Murra's panther-like hold. A cloud of feathers blew downward, tiny puff balls of gossamer over the wind-shaken pine tops.

The cat experienced a slackening of the talon about her throat, but only for a breath-giving space. The wings began their trip hammer blows. But Murra had found the warm white flesh that inched and throbbed with each beat of the eagle's heart.

*Whauk! Whauk!*

Wings and talon now sought to make piecemeal of the cat. The beaked head smote down, but failed to reach the close-hauled fur ball beneath. In another majestic instant the pair became a bristling, shrieking circle in mid-air, with the placid surface of the lake swinging nearer, nearer.

A flock of wild duck rose in alarm and trailed away to the south, it was as if a miniature tornado had invaded the morning calm.

*Whauk! Whauk!*

The pair whirled down a sheer hundred feet. Murra knew that the eagle was striving with all its swift strength to shake her loose and then would follow and slash her to death as she fell.

The cat's response was a howl of pure delight. It was clinging between talon and breast, its teeth closing deeper and deeper at each swerve of the eagle's body and wings. Once upon a time she had bitten the foot of a coyote and had found it lean and hard, but this quivering bird flesh that covered the wildly beating heart was easier to rend than a prairie fowl's.

Wind and blood scoured Murra's eyes as they flogged down. The eagle's wings had lost their fury: they sagged and planed spasmodically, the great neck straining upward as though to escape the rending teeth at her breast.

*Whauk! Whauk!*

The lake below reflected their flurrying, down-scrambling shadows. Big crimson drops reddened the air. Murra saw the water leap nearer. Yet... she

must hold to the last, for even now with air space beneath them the wings might still saber and kill her if once she released her hold.

They rolled another hundred feet, breast to breast now, the cat huddled close in as the huge wings collapsed and then thrashed wildly in a blinding mist of spray and water.

They struck the lake near a clump of willows on the left bank, the cat still worrying the soft warm space between the wings and the heart.

The shepherd stared and blinked at the ruffled surface of the lake until he detected a wet feline shape emerge from the water, near the willows, and crawl away slowly into some cottonwoods on the right.

"Shu! You can't kill those cats," he grumbled.

Later, when the sun's red eye stared over the canyon, a dead eagle drifted out leisurely into the deep silence of the lake.

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**21: The Tiger's Bank**

*World's News (Sydney) 30 May 1914*

THE NIGHT WIND bore a cloud of dust from the plains into the mammoth circus tent, dust that showered through the canvas slits upon the sleeping camels and giraffes. The quadrille horses had long finished their turn and had been led by the grooms to the stalls beyond the elephant's quarters. Near the deserted pay office two clowns were playing cards. Somewhere beyond the half-circle of waggons came the sound of a hose shooting water into the big stone drinking troughs. Later, a great stillness fell upon the circus, broken only by a savage-voiced clown whenever a well-played card threatened his last coin.

The German tiger tamer was searching the empty circus for his dog. He whistled pathetically under the forms and seats, then took a lantern and inspected the warm monkey-house, carefully pushing aside the crowd of huddled apes to see if they were covering the white body of his fox terrier.

"Sharlie, Sharlie, vere you get to?" He cracked his heavy whip over the elephant's hay, and the drowsy beast rocked and blinked at him in the half-light. "By crikey, Sharlie, I gif you someding if I catch you!"

A man dressed like a Broncho Bill peeped from a side waggon at the tamer, and waved his hand. "Hey, Dutchy, don't you know about that hyar dog? Ain't you heard the news?"

The tamer eyed the man in the waggon sullenly. "I cannot shleep ven my dog vas not in my tent, Ike. He haf been lost three days. I hope de leedle fool haf come to no harm!"

Ike made further signals from the waggon, then lowered his voice suddenly. "Come heah, Dutchy. I'll tell yer about the derved funeral. S'h!" He held up a finger warningly. "There's a bad bunch in this hyar circus, fellers from Coney Island and the East side. Sit on the steps, Dutchy, I liked that hyar dawg of yourn!"

"Nobody vud hurt him!" The tamer growled. "He vas such a goot leedle feller!"

Ike lit a cigarette carefully, and the match flame showed the deep lines about his scarred throat and face. "In the first place, Dutchy," he began in a whisper, "your dawg got the habit of barkin' outside Fatty Grice's tent at night. Fatty's got the dope habit, an' the yap hit him on his nerves. See!"

The tamer nodded thoughtfully. "I am sorry if Sharlie kept Grice awake," he said after awhile: "Dis vas the first time I hear about id."

Ike seated himself beside the tamer on the waggon steps, while the muffled sounds from the dark circus increased as the night wore on.



"This hyar dawg tragedy happened the night before last," he went on. "I was havin' my last smoke back of the tiger house, an' I must say, Dutchy, that that hyar beast of yours has got a double-barrelled gurgle in his roar. He's—"

"Tell me about my leedle dog, Ike. Der tiger vas alride."

Ike wriggled on the waggon step, and the sound of his shuffling feet set a bright-eyed lemur scurrying round its cage. "Well, this hyar Fatty came stridin' past the camels with a chaff bag in his hand. The bag wob- bled an' shook as he walked in a most suspicious manner. 'There's a chicken in that hyar bag,' I says to myself, 'or a dawg.'

"Patty hurried past the cages until he comes to the lion, that was standin' up a-stretchin' itself against the bars over yonder. The clown looked round pretty sharp to see if he was bein' follered, then slipped his hand into the bag an' hauls out your little dawg, Dutchy!"

"Gott in Himmel!"

"Just hauled him out, Dutchy, an' waved him like a derner saveloy at the lion. 'Here, you Sultan,' he says, 'here's a feed f'ye.' Now yew wouldn't think it, Dutchy," Ike went on placidly, "but that hyar lion turned away with a blamed sniff from your dawg and walked into the recess!" The tamer sighed deeply, his great hands outstretched over his knees, a listening blindness in his deep-set eyes. "Sultan vas friends mit my leedle dog." he said quietly. "Sharlie hunt der mice from his cage, and do old lion haf a goot memory. He would hot hurt my Sharlie!"

Ike nodded grimly, and suppressed a smile.

"The blamed clown put the dawg back into the bag," he continued blandly, "and took another look round the show. Your tiger's cage is almost next to Sultan's, so he goes quite close to the bars an' swings your little dawg right under the Bengal's nose. 'Here y'are. Stripes!' he calls out. 'Nice little pup just off his milk. You take him now, Stripes, he says, shakin' the dawg in front of the bars, 'before he gets any older!'

"The tiger jumped at Fatty, reaching for him with both paws. The clown side-stepped an' bolted as though Jack Johnson was out for his purse. He didn't stop runnin' until he fetched up with a bang against the dark hyena house. That derved hyena house has got an odor. Dutchy, that destroys all earthly joy. The spontaneous effluviar waved itself over Grice like a bad man's blessing."

The tamer threw away a half-smoked Havana and groaned aloud

"You know those two hyenas, Dutchy. They chawed their way into the monkey-house last year an' cleaned up quite a nice little family of monkeys that never hurt anyone. Wa'al, they both got up when they saw Grice coming with the dawg, an' they began to fawn an' kow-tow like a pair of boardin'-house touts.

" 'Evenin', gentlemen!' says the clown, holdin' the dawg well up. 'I've brought you the makings of a nice little supper. The infant will roast, stoo, or bile. Now's your chance, gentlemen!'

"Those two hyenas cuddled together as if they were goin' to sing a nursery rhyme. The clown moved the slide bar an' then pushed little Charlie into the cage. The big hyena with the cast in his eye got a grip on the dawg's neck, while the other fellow did the killin'. Poor little Charlie!" Ike concluded dismally. "He'd have had a better chance with a pair of crocodiles!"

The tamer's eyes became suddenly luminous; his chest labored painfully. "Gott, dot vas a blackguard ting to do! Dot dog vas a leedle friend to me. Id nefer harmed no ones. Und it vas murder to trow a puppy to those hungry carrion!"

The tamer shook himself savagely as he crossed the dark circus ring. Turning slowly, he looked back at Ike as though about to speak, then, changing his mind, walked heavily in the direction of his own quarters.

The two clowns. Grice and Grimaldi junior, sat over a brazier fire in the centre of the ring. It was past midnight, and most of the circus hands had retired. Grimaldi sucked a corn-cob pipe pensively as one weary and sick of his nomadic life.

"Boss goes east next month, and the show will get a rest at Coney Island." There was a comic yap in his voice, attained through years of jesting with mules and frock-coated horse- trainers. "Dutchy and his tiger go with us, of course," he added with a side glance at his companion.

Grice nodded, his hands held over the brazier fire. "Guess I wouldn't have the tamer's job at a hundred a month," he volunteered hoarsely. "These tiger men all come to a bad end. I don't say Dutchy boozes, but the Bengal is making his hands shake."

Grimaldi hugged the fire cage because the frosty night air drove in gusts under the sagging tent. A speck of paint shone vermilion on his nose. "Have you noticed how sharp Dutchy gets, lately, when anyone goes near the tiger house?" he hazarded.

"Why?"

"Because he's got a plant inside near the top corner, right hand over the door!"

"Dollar bills?"

"His savings since last trip south. He draws a hundred and fifty a month, and puts away most of it. The money is in a little tin box between the door and the roof of the tiger house!"

"Ain't there no banks?" Grice demanded critically. "Even Dutchy knows what interest on money means!"

"I guess so, but he hasn't forgot how that twenty per cent. bucket shop in Oklahoma swallowed his pile last year. No more banks for Dutchy. He's satisfied to keep his money away from the spring-heeled bunks who keep the safe deposits. The tiger house is smelly, but it's a first-class repository for a man's savings, my son."

Grice looked up quickly. "Then why don't you go for it?" he questioned suspiciously.

Grimaldi's jaw assumed a hard square expression. "D'ye think I haven't lain awake at night, thinking of that infernal money, planted within arm's reach, without sizing up the chances of a hold-up. The Bengal lives in the house. There's no recess. And if you want to borrow Dutchy's savings the tiger's there to see you do it. And, between ourselves, Grice, the brute doesn't like you or me."

"Poison it!" Grice sat very still before the fire. The unwashed chalk on his face appeared to grow livid in the uncertain light. "A bit of arsenic would give him a pain where he most needs it," he added viciously.

"You'd have to give him a joint of meat with it," Grimaldi objected. "You'd have to pass it under the bars when Dutchy and the keepers were in bed. And seeing that the Bengal raises Cain every time he's fed, the boss and Dutchy would be round wondering what was up. We had a puma poisoned lately and they haven't forgotten it."

"There's no other way," Grice muttered under his breath.

"Of course there isn't unless you can find someone who'll oblige by taking the tiger for a walk, some night!"

Grimaldi yawned, shivered, and went to bed.

Grice stayed near the fire until the cold night air pinched his toes. He distinctly remembered having noticed a small tin box fastened to the wooden ceiling of the tiger house, and within arm's reach almost of the door. And he saw with a gambler's inspiration that it must be the place where the tamer hoarded his savings. Masses of figures coursed wildly through his brain. If Dutchy had been hiding his salary for six months there would be nearly a thousand dollars at least. Enough to allow a man a comfortable rest at a seaside boarding-house. His gambler's heart yearned for a lengthened stay in New York. Too much clowning had made him ill-tempered and sour. Often he was compelled to ride a fiendish mule round and round the circus while the spectators cheered and laughed whenever the animal threatened to break his neck or kick the life out of his ring-weary body.

He rose slowly from his seat near the fire, and listened to the wind noises among the flapping canvases and rope guys overhead. Somewhere down the dark avenue of waggons the sound of a wolf lapping from a drinking trough

reached him. Grice followed the sound, and saw the fire-lit eyes and whimpering head as it padded up and down the long narrow house.

A dozen steps took him past the lion's quarters, past a drowsy, moulting eagle that clinked its foot chain and blinked as he passed.

"Three, four, five." He counted his steps and halted in the black square shadow of the tiger house and listened. His trained ear and eye told him that the big Bengal was lying full length across the floor of the cage, half on its side, its jaws resting in the curve of its large padded foot. Tigers, as Grice knew, are invariably heavy sleepers, and a long experience of travelling hippodromes had taught him that a soft-footed man may venture quite close to a certain species of sleeping carnivore.

For ten minutes the clown sat peering into the high-roofed cage, his courage stiffening at sound of the animal's guttural breathing. Then, with a heart that could not breathe, he permitted his hand to rest on the latch of the big iron gate. The gentlest of movements revealed to him the startling fact that the gate was unlocked!

It seemed incredible, unthinkable, that Dutchy should neglect so vital a precaution. Yet a moment's reflection told him that the thing had happened before and would continue so long as tamers regarded their beasts with impunity. Of course he had not expected to find the gate unlocked. He had been merely impelled by curiosity to gain a glimpse of the little tin box fastened somewhere overhead.

The situation was almost tantalising. He became wildly certain, as the minutes flew, that with both feet once inside the house, he could easily draw out the wad of bills from the tin box. He had been climbing and leaping all his life, and the task of stretching upwards a few inches was not a difficult one for him.

The gate moved back at the touch of his trembling fingers in a way that filled him with terror. It had been recently oiled until its hinges dripped. The clamorings of his heart were stilled by the knowledge that stiff hinges on a lion or tiger's house might mean serious delay in the tamer's exit. Dutchy was unduly careful in that respect, no doubt on account of his animal's uncertain temper.

With the gate opened the clown stood, stifflimbed, inside the dark house, the surge of a hundred fears cannonading his heart.

A sickly warmth floated up from the sleep-ing tiger that turned sour on the nerves of his palate. A sudden hypnotic fascination to peep at the great striped head seized him. He stopped and drew back sharply.

"If he wakes now, if he wakes.... He'll have me sure!"

His momentary flash of courage threatened to desert him. A slight, almost imperceptible sound reached him from under the house. Turning nimbly to the half-open gate, he saw a naked hand stretch upward and close it softly. A key was thrust into the lock and swiftly withdrawn.

The clown stood rooted, his fingers clutching wildly at the gate lock. "Is it you, Grimaldi?" His futile fingers tore at the cage bars. Someone was playing a joke, a horribly insane and wicked joke. He had been decoyed into the cage through a silly rumor of hidden money.

It seemed a piece of madness, now to stand upright inside the house. If the beast woke it would see him instantly. He lay on his chest six inches from the locked gate, and, in a whisper, again addressed the shadow lurking below.

"Grimaldi, I haven't a chance if this beast wakes. For heaven's sake don't be a fool."

There, was no response. The shadow seemed to recede under the wheels of the house. Grice lay perfectly still, and as he choked and stifled his inner cannonadings, he heard, in his fear, the beating of the tiger's heart.

Suddenly the cracking of a whip filled the circus with pistol-like echoes. "Hoop-la! hoop-la! hooya! hoop!" The tamer leaped to the cage front, his whip smiting through, the bars. "Hoop-la!"

The tiger lay forward, its ears flattened, watching with flaming eyes the rise and fall of the whip. A short horrible snarl escaped it. The curling thong seemed to draw its glance around the cage as the tamer darted to and fro.

"Hoop-la!" He smote again, and the clown, crouching far back, felt that the huge cat would leap on his shoulders.

"Hoop-la!" At the third stroke of the whip, it bounded across the greasy floor, hatred of the voice and thong in its burning eyes. Round and round it leaped, striking the clown with its flank and breast, mindful only of the punishing thong that licked cleverly and with force through the bars.

Grice squeezed back to avoid the tiger's buffeting shoulder and hips as the beast bounded from corner to corner. His soft body quailed under the sledge-hammer strokes of the flying paws. Up and down the huge Bengal pounded, its snarling head often brushing past his face. A blood-mist obscured his vision. Sick and faint, he rolled near the cage bars, gasping and clawing with his fingers.

"Hoop-la!" The tamer paused suddenly, waited an instant until the tiger halted in his flying turns, at the far end of the house, and then, opening the gate with a snatch, hauled out the half-conscious clown.

"Vat are you doin' in my beast's cage, Grice?" he demanded as the clown staggered blindly to his feet. "I thought one of dose young lions had broken in!"

Grice shook himself dully, rubbing his bruised arms and legs as he hobbled down the avenue of waggons. The tamer followed leisurely, a grin on his broad face.

"You did not see my leedle dog; Sharlie, anyveres, Grice, I suppose?" he inquired carelessly.

The clown had no voice to answer. He reeled blindly to his tent, like one who had drunk deep of a tiger's breath.

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## 22: Two Thieves and a Thunderbolt

*Freeman's Journal* (Sydney, NSW) 17 Dec 1914

'I WOULDN'T risk my boots inside a Hindu temple for a piece of common ironmongery,' said Captain Vance Shallo. 'Not me, sir.'

'The nature of its composition has not yet been determined,' the shipping master declared. 'Our confidential agent who recently passed through the Gerah valley described it as containing thirty per cent of radium.'

'Piece of sawed off gaspipe more likely,' growled Shalto. 'Some of these baboo I agents wouldn't know a pound of radium from a tin of beans.'

'My dear Captain Shalto, I am merely I suggesting che excursion as a means of filling in our time. What with the suspension of your ticket and your constant demands on our exchequer, we thought you might appreciate the, er—'

'The gift of a nice little thunderbolt,' broke in che old seaman gruffly. 'Give me a month to think it over, sir. I find the streets of Calcutta a hard place for a white man to live comfortably. All I ask,' he paused and scratched his head doubtfully while his town-weary eyes fell upon the faded morrocco upholsterng of the office furniture. 'All I ask, sir,' he went on, 'is that my name be kept out of the papers. Scuttling ships and stealing thunderbolts is more than any man's reputation will stand.'

The offices of Gardroy and Smith were the seediest that could be found between Howrah and FuKa bridge. Their reputation as a firm of shipping masters had suffered of late, owing to certain charges of bribery and corruption instigated against them by the Hoogli Port authorities in connection with the sinking of the *Koo Loon*.

Newly painted vessels flying their house flag had been discovered staggering out to sea under a bill of lading which showed rich cargoes of silk and opium, but which in reality consisted of nothing more valuable than dockyard lumber and pig-iron ballast. These rich cargoes were usually consigned to some far away port that was never by any chance reached. The insurance companies had complained and were striving with nerve and brain to obtain a conviction. The Port authorities in the meantime were displaying a feverish desire to curtail the firm's gamble in ships and human lives.

Captain Vance Shalto had come to them shivering, so to speak, from his last marine enquiry whereat the Port authorioies had threatened dire penalties if his presence on the bridge of an outgoing ship were ever again suspected. They had proved him a scoundrel of the first degree, a past-master in the art of

scuttling a 2000-ton tramp steamer without leaving a trace of vessel or crew on the face of the water.

In his day Shalto had plundered half a score of insurance companies, British Indian mostly, with a few high-handed lootings in the direction of certain Chinese banks. And all in the interest of Gardroy and Smith. Being much harrassed by vindictive firms of Parsee underwriters Gardroy and Smith were naturally anxious to get rid of the genial Shalto whose presence in Calcutta was an eternal menace to their business prospects. The man who had scuttled ships at their bidding was likely to prove offensive while out of employment. Moreover, they could not guarantee him a ship while his name remained black-listed in every mercantile office east and west of the Hoogli.

A story had come through the telephone, from one of their forwarding clerks, stationed at the Terai Ghat, concerning the existence of radium within a dilapidated temple situated somewhere near the Gera valley on the Ganges. Within a ruined recess, the agent affirmed, stood a bronze image of Indra, the thunder god, holding in his uplifted hand a huge bolt weighing seventy or eighty pounds at least. It was the strange appearance of this bolt which had excited the clerk's curiosity. A hurried inspection of its parts had revealed the presence of gold and silver in large quantities with an admixture of a peculiarly radioactive metal which hinted at the presence of radium.

Gardroy and Smith were inclined to scoff at their clerk's report. The business of insuring unseaworthy ships was sufficiency precarious w.f.thonb courting fresh risks in the way of temple smashing— a feat likely to bring the Calcutta police buzzing around their office once it became known that they were pilfering strange metals from the sacred shrines of India.

Then came the Shalto marine enquiry, and the months of idleness which followed his suspension, leaving them a prey to his ceaseless demands for money. In making his demands for cash Captain Shalto was usually accompanied by his first mate, M'Coy, a full-blooded American negro, who had assisted them for eight years in their nefarious wrecking operations.

To have sent M'Coy and Shalto about their business would have meant further blackmailings together wr.th the exposure of their recent crimp house operations at Howrah, whereby scores of white and brown men nad been taken aboard their doomed ships in a drugged and helpless condition. So...

It was imperative that work be found for Shalto and M'Coy. Sailormen cannot long remain idle in Calcutta without falling foul of the police , and dragging their masters' names constantly in the mire. In an inspired moment Josiah Gardroy (he was a red obese man addicted to heat apoplexy and solar hysteria) grasped the live meaning of India's thunderbolt. It was a genuine



signal from the gods to rid him, for a time at least, of the bellicose Shalto and M'Coy.

A hundred rupees each would start them on a temple raiding expedition, along the banks of the Ganges, where the native police would make short work of them the moment their sacrilegious designs became manifest. Two second-class steamer tickets would carry them from Calcutta to the Terai Ghats, where they would experience small difficulty in finding their way to the ancient temples of India that stood at the head of the Gera valley.

CAPTAIN Vance Shalto glanced over the steamer's rail at the low-lying bunds that flanked the western bank of the Ganges. A few spindly palms marked the hot desolation of the tide-scoured delta. Here and there a vulture preened its moulting ugliness on some adjacent mud-spit. Sometimes the red wall of a shrine leaned over the naked filth of ghat and stream. Everywhere there was smoke from the Hindu fires, smoke that drifted sunward in rancid columns above charnel house and temple roof.

Captain Shalto was a clean-shaved hawk-eyed man with a pair of fists that appeared many sizes too large for his spare figure. In his day he had navigated a dozen worthless hulks to their last resting-place within some reef-bound harbour or lagoon. The sight of a frenzied crew clamouring, at the last moment, for a place in the boat, had never disturbed his vagabond serenity. His first mate M'Coy towered head and shoulders above him on the deck of the little Ganges steamer. The negro had seen service with him for many years. Together they had often faced the pandemonium which always accompanied the unexpected foundering of a ship. The holding back of a score of half-maddened coolie firemen and sailors from swamping the boat was accomplished only by pistol fire and swift bludgeonings— this latter work usually fell to the big negro who appeared to enjoy the task of slogging his way with a broken bridge stanchion through a pack of screaming Lascars.

At the last moment Captain Shalto had decided to visit the temple within the Gera valley and judge for himself whether Indra, the thunder-god, was holding aloft a bolt of gold and radium or a worthless piece of iron or bronze. It appeared to him a much safer business than putting to sea without a certificate. He had taken passage in one of the Ganges river boats, accompanied by the negro M'Coy, together with a pocketful of rupees presented to him by the firm of Gardroy and Smith.

'We're going for this thunderbolt, Billy,' Shalto informed his companion. 'Looks a wild goat proposition to people who don't know India. But after a man's lifted his first thousand rupees worth of silver ornaments from a shrine, he begins to take the game seriously.'

M'Coy was sprawling in a deck chair beside him, a half-smoked cheroot between his teeth. He had more than the average negro's intelligence. Fighting for life on doomed ships had invested him with a certain simian agility. A born pugilist, he had been known, at a crisis, to hurl himself into the midst of a mutinous crowd of crimp house desperadoes, maiming, killing in sheer lust of hate and sport. The prospect of finding hidden wealth within a deserted shrine kindled him instantly and touched with magic fires his childlike imagination.

'Dis is a gilt-edge game, cap'n,' he agreed vivaciously. 'A hundred dollars from Gardroy to help us along. Guess I'm gwine to work myself white at dis business!'

Captain Shalto's chest expanded as he glanced up and down the river steamer's deck.

'We're on velvet, Billy,' he declared. 'No more sea for me after this.' He leaned over the negro's chair and lowered his voice confidentially. 'You've heard of radium, the stuff, that Europe and America is going silly over!'

The negro's upturned eyes sought his inquiringly.

'Why radium's de stuff dey mixes wif kalsomine, cap'n; kind of blue size you git for half a dollar a bucket.'

'Rats! You 'can't buy it, not if you put a tankful of gold on the counter. Everybody wants it and nobody's got any. If you had enough radium to cover an ordinary bunion you could smoke Burmah cheroots till you were green in the face, my son.'

M'Coy was impressed. Lacking Shalto's critical faculties he was content to dream through the hot noon, his mind in a ferment of childish wonder and expectancy.

The following morning saw the little steamer panting inshore towards the Company's wharf at the Terai Ghat. A procession of bullock carts and ticca gharries awaited the small crowd of passengers. For the sum of three rupees Captain Shalto obtained the services of a lean, unwashed Bengali who bargained to carry them in his light cart to the head of the Gera valley some twenty miles away in the north-east.

M'Coy curled himself peacefully on the cushions of the bullock cart and before the first mile was covered had fallen into a sound sleep. Captain Shalto, his nerves tingling at the prospect of the work in hand, walked beside the Bengali driver, seeking at times to draw from him something of the temple's history, and above all, the reason of the thunder god's immunity from the preying bands of temple looters who occasionally visited India. The driver offered little information to his questions beyond a few sullen rejoinders in the vernacular which had no bearing on the thunder-god or its bygone history.

Overhead the sun flared from a windless sky. The country through which they passed appeared to have been riven by some tremendous eruption. The road zig-zagged over stony ridges to a jungle-covered plateau in the extreme north. Flocks of carrion birds circled where the remains of a tiger-mauled elk still rotted in the sun-scorched grass.

It was almost dark when the cart halted at the head of a thorn-covered valley. To Captain Shalto it seemed as if they had entered some scourge-stricken province. From jungle-line to hill-crest there was no sign of human habitation. A mile to the north stretched a chain of treeless hills with the dead city of Gera visible on the western slope. A rain-scarred, squirrel-haunted temple peeped through the cactus jungle, its green columns and crumbling archways leaned drunkenly over the edge of the defile as though the fists of time had bhrsed and shaken it beyond repair.

Leaving the Bengali and his cart to await them at the valley entrance, Captain Shalto and M'Coy pushed forward hoping to gain the temple while the light held. Clambering over an old mud fort they approached the ruins from the western side, halting within the pillared arch of an outer shrine to gaze at the chattering, grey-faced monkeys that blinked at them from the grass-grown walls.

A turn across the chunam paved courtyard brought them to the foot of a sho'pierced watch tower which overlooked the surrounding plateau. Shalto paused suddenly and indicated a formless mass of shadow within the temple gateway.

Peering inside they beheld a colossal outline bulging from, the darkness, a body of weather-encrusted metal. Gargantuan in size, a filament of bronze cloud wreaths carved about its Jovian head. High above the finely chiselled metal work was poised a huge bronze hand holding in its fingers a cylinder-shaped bolt of almost transparent brilliancy.

'The thunder-god!' Shalto whispered. 'Great Jerusalem, look at the head and feet!'

The weather-enamelled torso of the god loomed Titanesque above. The bronze throat and head were drawn back from the elephantine body as though to invest with power and imagery the slim, scintillating bolt gripped in the uplifted hand.

For several moments Captain Shalto stared spellbound at the ponderous mass of metal towering in the dark of the temple gateway. The negro, unaffected by the awe-inspiring dimensions of the Hindu deity, whistled cheerfully as he prowled under the hip of the giant torso.

'By gar he looks to be throwin' de shiny 'plug down at us!' he exclaimed, his eyes drinking in the moving nimbus of light that seemed to glow from the cone of the cylinder-shaped bolt.

'Been going to throw it the last two thousand years I reckon.' Captain Shalto placed his hand on the foot of the god and gazed upwards as though meditating an ascent.

'Give me your shoulder, Billy,' he said at last. 'I'll shin up to the neck of his holiness and inspect that proposition in radium. It might fetch a million sterling or it mightn't be worth a pound of beeswax.'

The negro chuckled as he assisted the wiry Shalto to gain the deity's bulging hip. With ape-like celerity the nimble-handed seaman reached the left shoulder of the god and was soon in a position to inspect the uplifted thunderbolt. The cone of the missile seemed to radiate phosphorescent gleams of light, while, here and there, he caught a glitter as of gold where the fingers of the god entwined it.

'Bronze percolated with gold and radium,' he muttered, reaching along the outstretched arm until his fingers touched the copper-belted wrist; his heart beat fiercely now at the thought of so much wealth lying within reach. It may have been that some superstitious fear had prevented others from looting the templ eyjiOe, how came it that so magnificent a prize had remained undisturbed throughout the centuries? he asked.

His brow grew dark as he thought of the years of strife and hardship through which he had passed... bullying half-starved coolies and opium drugged sailor men, scuttling ships, fighting for his life when his black crews turned upon him at the last moment.

He lay stretched on the broad shoulder of Indra gazing half fearfully at the slim, cylinder-shaped bolt that, would make him rich for life. There would be no more perilous voyages, no more starving in open boats. He paused in his deliberations, and his eye turned downward upon the expectant negro. It was evident that M'Coy had grown a little impatient of his movements. With both hands clasping the knee of the god, he was preparing to clamber up when the baying voice of Shalto stayed him.

'Stop where you are, Billy,' he commanded. 'And keep your boot nails off old Halleujah's ribs, The pair of us won't fit up here.'

M'Coy laughed good-naturedly and remained below.

Shalto was thinking swiftly. He had come far to wrest this priceless piece of metal from the grip of the long-forgotten Indra; and as he looked down at the negro's foreshortened figure, the ape-like head and brow, a wave of resentment swept over him which some men bear towards an undeserving partner who expects to share their hard-won spoil.

M'Coy was no fool and would demand his full share of the adventure, would fight for it if driven; and Captain Vance Shalto recalled, with a sense of his own inferiority, a few of the unholy scrimmages in which the negro had taken part... the killing of five Malays in a narrow foc's'e stairhead once; the holding under water of two Chinese firemen, in the Straits of Sunda, who had tried to climb into the boat after the schooner *Mary Ellis* had gone down with all hands. Such a man was not likely to abandon his share without a struggle.

Turning again to the bolt in Indra's hand, Shalto surveyed it critically and discovered that it had been rivetted to the close shut fist of the god. The work of wrenching it free would prove a difficult task, equipped as he was with an ordinary screw wrench and pocket jemmy.

Planting his toes shrewdly in the hollow of Indra's back he searched the great bronze shoulders for some opening or spring that might assist him in detaching the uplifted arm from the body. A few taps from his wrench suggested a cavity within. Peering under the capacious armpits his fingers closed on a small knob that slid down, under pressure, drawing with it a concave plate of metal which revealed the dark interior.

Striking a match he glanced within and saw that the raised arm of the god was joined to the shoulder by means of a twelve-inch flange, which in turn was held by an enormous brass pin driven through a revolving socket.

Undisturbed by the clatter of metal plates above, the ebullient M'Coy began to execute a cake-walk across the courtyard passing and repassing beneath Indra's uplifted arm. As the dance progressed in its weird variations, Shalto, panting from his labours, cast a sharp glance at the negro's gyrating figure as it leaped and frog-walked from side to side.

'Blamed coon's got no business instincts or he'd stand from under,' he muttered.

Thrusting his head once more into the cavity he tapped the brass pin cautiously and felt it move. A succession of taps eased the pin in its age-worn socket causing the flange to creak and whine as it revolved downward about the hundredth part of an inch.

Shalto wiped the blinding perspiration from his eyes and tasted the bitter dust of centuries that rose from the dark interior as the wrench struck at the half-seen pin above. And at each stroke it seemed to Shalto as though the god were speaking to him in the voice of India's long-vanished dead. Then his ear told him that the voice was only the lip of the flange grinding downward with a flesh-creeping note in its warning.

At that precise moment the negro was engaged in a buck-jumping fantasy below, his heels kicking outward in an ecstasy of mental and physical joy. Shalto crouched back suddenly as the grinding flange revolved slowly to the

jointed cap of bronze at the socket end. Indra's uplifted arm trembled momentarily and then crashed to the floor of the courtyard below. The negro leaped aside with an oath as the mass of metal hurtled past. Shalto stifled a cry.

'Missed, by the Lord!'

And then his eyes caught a smoky flare of light that followed the impact, he heard a deafening roar as though a mountain had toppled from its base, saw the temple pillars shattered to fragments before the blade white flame hurled him from the shoulder of the thunder-god.

THE FOLLOWING statement was taken from the report of the district superintendent, at Terai Ghat, about a month after Captain Shalto and his negro companion had left there, in a bullock cart, bound for the temple of Indra within the Gera valley. The report was addressed to the chief of the Calcutta police at number 10 Lai bazaar.

'Dear sir,' it ran.

'A singular tragedy has occurred here which may bring a certain grim satisfaction to Cawthorpe *bahadur*, who, as you know, enjoyed the honourable position of district headman until a few months ago. You will remember that the temple of Indra was visited by a party of American lady tourists who succeeded in carrying off the bronze thunderbolt originally attached to the god's right hand.

'The affair created some discontent among the pilgrims who annually visit the temple. A great deal was made out of the incident by Cawthorpe's enemies at headquarters, whereat a vexatious enquiry was started at the behest of certain civil authorities who ought to have known better.

'You will readily understand the *bahudar*'s indignation at the report, circulated throughout the vernacular press of India, accusing him of aiding the accursed *ferringhee* in the theft of the aforementioned thunderbolt. Heckled to distraction by an interminable correspondence, relating to a missing thunderbolt, the *bahadur* very naturally resigned.

'Before leaving the district, however, he contrived to substitute another bolt in the god's empty hand which afterwards proved to be a live howitzer shell borrowed from Colonel Tingraiz's mountain battery. Attached to the cone of this shell was a celluloid cover smeared with a quantity of phosphorous and gold leaf which, at night, gave a luminous impression to the bogus thunderbolt.

'I have now to report the discovery of two men within the temple, a white man and a negro. They came ostensibly to carry off the sacred thunderbolt. A recent inquiry proves that during their nefarious operation the arm of Indra

became detached and fell to the ground. The howitzer shell, I regret to state, attended to its business with illuminating promptitude.

'Both men were interred at the expense of the Indian Government.'

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**23: The Professional Octopus**

*World's News (Sydney) 11 Dec 1915*

THE shout of warning which had grown to a roar of dismay was heard far beyond the line of close-drawn pearling luggers. Captain Hayes leaped from his hammock under the schooner's sun awning, and stared across the Straits.

A scene of confusion and panic prevailed along the Vanderdecken Bank. Several helmeted divers were being drawn up in wild haste from the tide-fretted shoal water. A Manila boy swam, shouting, towards a trepang fisher's dory, his eyes bulging with fear and terror. Hayes leaned over the rail, and spoke to a shell-opener belonging to the Dutch Arab Company's fleet.

"Say, Mayar, what's the trouble with the boys? I guess no one's smelt a cyclone coming. The glass is behaving all right!"

Mayar swung his dory under the schooner's side cleverly, his right hand coming to the salute as he caught the white captain's eye.

"Two of your men been scrappin' with a blue-faced devil-fish, near Shinto Reef, cap'n!" he stated hoarsely. "Blamed animal's scared the wits out of your divers. There's goin' to be no more work for a bit!"

Hayes nodded pensively. He was aware that a certain species of octopus infested the reefstrewn channels of Torres Straits. But, until now, he had never heard complaints from the lugger-masters or divers who periodically worked the rich oyster-swathes of the Vanderdecken Bank. The present scare might lead to a stoppage of work among the sixteen shelters in his employ. During the last year he had invested his life's savings in the pearling venture, and had borne the brunt of the Dutch Arab Company's fierce rivalry.

In the struggle to obtain shell; the rival fleets had been barely restrained from using arms. Hayes, who had appeared first on the scene, was known to have cornered the smallest but richest shell-area in the Straits. Cessation of work meant incalculable loss, for once it became known that his divers were idle his Government license was liable to forfeiture.

His white divers had proved particularly sensitive to the presence of marine ocyppda, whereas the Malay and Japanese workers employed by the Arab company exhibited no trace of fear when confronted by sharks or other vicious sea-monsters.

Nodding sullenly to Mayar, he put off in a dinghy, a few minutes later, and rowed towards the fleet of pearling vessels across the Straits. Boarding the nearest lugger, he was met by a group of sullen-browed divers, who stood silently watching the gyrations of a naked boy on the deck.



"Gone mad, cap'n!" one of the divers informed him, in a scared voice. "He went down for shell twenty minutes ago, and sighted a blue sea-devil in the water—"

Hayes laughed hoarsely as he bent over the writhing figure on the deck. The boy was evidently suffering from severe shock, and his hysterical babblings grew louder and more incoherent each moment.

It angered Hayes to see his whole fleet lying inactive when he remembered the weeks and months he had waited before the Queensland Government had thought fit to grant him a pearling license. And now that the rich golden-edge shell was within reach, a striped marine monster bade fair to demoralise his crews.

A drop of brandy, forced between the boy's teeth, steadied him. He looked up at Hayes, while a shiver ran through his limbs.

"Me no dive any more!" he declared with an effort. "One sea-devil with big white eye came by an' blow black poison in my face!"

"You had a helmet on!" Hayes said sternly. "And the derved poison didn't hurt you anyhow!"

Other divers stated that the octopus had emerged from a jungle of sea-grass and sponge-beds within a cable's length of Shinto Reef. Amati, the boy lying on the deck, had been nearest when it attacked them. Only for the deftness of the windlass hands, in hauling them to the surface, not a diver would have come up alive.

Hayes swore under his breath as he returned to the dinghy. No greater calamity could have happened to the fleet. His crews would loaf and idle away the days until the terror of the sea-devil left them.

In the meantime the colored crews of the Arab Company's luggers were scouring the floor of the Straits, encroaching foot by foot on his rich preserves. He rowed sullenly in the direction of Shinto Reef, where the trepang clung like black cucumbers to the spongy floor of the Straits. Among the swaying jungles of sea-grass the remnants of a mullet-shoal flashed past, closely followed by a couple of blue-pointer sharks. A tropic sun flared down on a dazzling stretch of beach in the south. The silence of infinity lay over the heat-fretted coast. Rowing leisurely inshore, his shrewd eyes gathered in the hummock-ridden skyline, the mountainous wastes of sand that stretched in endless leagues to the west. In the north lay the inevitable mangrove-skirted coastline. Hauling his boat high on the beach, his glance was arrested by a blood-red flare in the sand. Approaching, he scooped away the fine coral dust with his boot, and raised a gold wrist-ornament to the light. It was inset with several ruby-colored stones of peculiar lustre and orient. If Hayes had alighted suddenly on a new

continent his amazement could not have been greater. The nearest settlement was thirty miles away.

None of his divers or crews wore expensive wrist-ornaments, and no woman that he knew had ever ventured near the lonely, gull-ridden Vanderdecken Bank. An expert in bushcraft, Hayes's glance went out to the mangrove-skirted headland in the north. A dozen steps took him beyond the beach where the thirty-foot tide had erased all signs of recent visitors. Pausing on the slope, he detected the unmistakable impression of a naked foot in the dry sand. The footprints ran straight for a quarter of a mile and stopped suddenly. Scrub and undergrowth hid them. Hayes's binoculars swept the near woods and skyline until a brown, bamboo-thatched bungalow showed in the centre of a clearing—some half-mile distant. Captain Hayes felt it his duty to follow the owner of the jewelled wrist-bangle. It seemed a much pleasanter task than hunting a spotted devil-fish in the Straits of Torres.

A brisk walk under cover of the scrub brought him to the bungalow palisade. Before he could enter the gate an elderly Japanese woman appeared at the door. Halting, with his hand on the gate, his glance traversed the inner passages of the bungalow.

"I found a piece of jewellery on the beach, ma'am," he began slowly. "Maybe you know the loser, or"— he paused with the bracelet held tight in his palm— "the article?"

The woman's mouth grew tight as a trap, and his sailor's eye told him that she was breathing with difficulty. "Maisola San leaves her things everywhere."

She spoke fluently, but with a visible effort, her shoulders heaving slightly.

"You have found the pearl necklace," she hazarded, "or the diamond locket?"

"Guess again, ma'am." Hayes's grip on the bangle tightened. The Japanese woman looked over her shoulder, into the passage beyond, while a nervous cough escaped her. "Maisola San is very careless with her jewels," she answered slowly. "I cannot say what she has lost or mislaid on the beach."

Hayes opened the palisade gate, the wrist-ornament exposed in his left palm. "You may return it to Maisola San with my compliments. As commander of that pearling fleet over there, I might advise your daughter not to leave valuables on these beaches, ma'am. My divers happen to be in the collecting business."

The Japanese woman considered his big handsome figure thoughtfully, his spotless white clothes and official bearing. Silence leaped between them for a period of six heart-beats, until the soft rustle of a dress in the passage quickened his senses.

He was conscious of a face peering at him from the bungalow interior, a face with jewel-lit hair and ear-pendants. And there came to him, as he stared, a faint perfume of island trees and old remembered frangipani....

Captain Hayes had seen many beautiful Japanese women in his day. Yet, despite the beauty of her face, he knew that she belonged to the coolie class.

The elder woman in the door grew rigid as stone. She took the proffered bracelet, while her strong hand drew the bungalow door towards her.

"I shall tell my daughter, Captain— Captain—"

"Hayes," he spoke from the palisade. "There's no need to thank me for being honest once in a while," he added, with a smile.

He was walking swiftly along the scrub-track before her answer reached him. Once in the mangrove shade, he looked back swiftly and saw the crimson curtains of the bungalow move and close again, but not before the gleam of a jewelled pendant had betrayed the peeping face of Maisola San.

His return to the fleet was almost unnoticed by the crew of idle pearl-shellers loafing under the sun awnings. No word of reprimand escaped him. Neither threats nor promises of increased pay would send them to work. Yet a mile away, on the southern limit of the bank, the naked divers of the Dutch Arab Company flashed in and out of the water, bringing their baskets of shell to the lugger's sides unmindful of the soul-scaring sea-devil that lurked in one of the clear tideswept channels.

THE FOLLOWING morning Hayes sent for Emery, the mate of his largest lugger, the Three Moons. "I want," he began immediately the mate reached the schooner's deck, "all those water-rats you've been trapping lately!"

Emery blinked and stared incredulously, and then, after a breath-giving pause, explained that he had obtained the rodents for the ex-

clusive use of Mick Hennessey, proprietor of the whisky-bar at Deliverance Inlet. It was Hennessey's custom, the mate went on, to give an exhibition of rat-killing with his terrier in the pit, at the rear of the bar, whenever the crews of the fleet came ashore on pay-day.

Hayes nodded patronisingly, and then put his question almost sharply. "How many rats are there?" he demanded.

"About a dozen, cap'n." The mate's eyes were full of unuttered questions that were checked only by the other's abrupt manner.

"I'm going down to interview this octopus, Emery. So... I want you to take charge of the pump and air-lines while I'm in the water."

"Aye, aye, cap'n!"

"Furthermore," Hayes commanded, "when I signal twice you'll be good enough to pass down the rats in that iron cage of yours. Tie on a couple of lead sinkers so that the cage will come to me with a rush. Savvy?"

Emery's congested features spoke of his suppressed amazement and curiosity. There had been times when he had doubted Hayes's sanity, but the maddest trick performed by his erratic commander was sheer comedy compared with the scheme to send down rats to assist in a death conflict with an octopus!

"I've never heard of rats as a cure for sea-devils!" he blurted out in disgust. "You might as well throw a dozen spring-chickens at a blamed boa-constrictor!"

Hayes controlled himself with an effort. "I'm going to oil the neck of that pie-faced mudbat!" he declared. "You watch the blue pieces come flying on top!"

"Got eight or nine necks according to latest reports," Emery stated with a seaman's regard for his commander's health. "Nothing that swims can run a sea-devil for neck, sir!"

The fleet of idle luggers became suddenly aware that their respected commander was about to enter the water, equipped in his own patent diving dress.

Earlier in the morning Hayes had made a close survey of the coral-flanked grotto, at Shinto Reef, where the dreaded octopus had first been encountered. The entrance was choked with a dense sea-growth of mundi-grass and mangrove roots. His lead had registered three fathoms at the grotto mouth, a spot much frequented by his divers on account of the rich golden-edge spat which lined the entrance. He was confident that the cave mouth was the feeding ground of the tentacled invader.

A slant of wind permitted the schooner to wear close to the Shinto Reef, while Hayes, helmeted and dressed, stood irresolute for a moment on the steps of the little port gang-way. A cage containing a dozen long-bodied rats lay to hand. With a final glance at the air-pump and windlass, he descended into the warm, sunlit water.

It rushed green and opalescent past the glass-fronted helmet. Sheafs of waving sea-grass swirled in the eddies caused by his de-scent. The floor of the channel was scored with coral and pumice-like sand worn from the rocky sides by the ceaseless churning of the tides. A pink-gilled parrot-fish looked at him for an instant and flashed away into the green valley of water beyond.

Hayes kicked the coral pavement with his lead-weighted boot. Spurting a stream of air from his tight, rubber wrist-band, he laughed softly at the effect of the bubbling explosions on a pair of eels basking between the reefs.

The mouth of the grotto claimed his attention. Layers of golden-edge shell lined the floors and sides. Guarding his air-tubes from the fouling undergrowth, he peered inside. The water shone almost white beneath the coral reef, indicating to his practised eye an exit somewhere on the eastern side of the bank.

Above him the huge breast of the lugger stood in quaint silhouette as it swayed rhythmically in the ebbing tide. Turning sharply, he was conscious that the water of the grotto had grown dark. It was as if a tree branch had suddenly obscured the light.

He stooped and watched. A black searching tentacle drifted towards him, and then, as he turned, a cyclopean feeler gravitated in the vicinity of his life-line.

Crouching low until both hands rested on the coral floor of the channel, he signalled to Emery.

Eight seconds later the iron cage swept down and was gripped by Hayes. Holding the trap before him he opened the wire-bound door. For a moment the released rodents swam about the grotto entrance, unmindful of the black tentacles that now receded frantically from their circling bodies.

They were gone in a flash, leaving Hayes crouching forward, his lead-shod boots planted within a foot of the retreating devil-fish. In a moment he had lunged forward, his powerful arms encircling the palpitating mass of ten-tacles and feelers. His knife had made a clean, swift stroke at a rubber tube trailing behind the sea monster's girth. For an instant he thought his own air-line had fouled. Then, with a jerk at the life-line he felt himself, hauled quickly to the surface, his arms still gripping the struggling octopus' girth.

A cry went up from the assembled pearling fleet at sight of Hayes dragging the black, writhing monster up the schooners gangway. A stampede followed that was only quieted by their commander's explosions of laughter. With his helmet unscrewed, he sank on his knees beside the quivering devil-fish, and cut away the rubber skin that concealed a live, breathing shape inside.

"I guess you won't play octopus any more, Maisola San!" he said with a laugh. "Just waltz out of this beastly pantomime-rig and explain yourself!"

A final cut at the octopus-like garment revealed the young Japanese girl smiling rather defiantly after her exciting experience. She was dressed in her usual attire, even to the bracelet he had returned only the day before.

"Those ugly rats frightened me!" she admitted with a shiver. "I thought they would bite through the rubber of my dress."

Hayes spoke sharply to the inquisitive crowd of divers who sought to gain a glimpse of Maisola San. Then, leading her to the for'ard deck-house, he indicated a chair briefly.

Maisola sat down, trembling slightly, for she had not been prepared for the sudden cutting of her air-tube and line, a circumstance which had permitted the water to drench her through and through.

"Someone commissioned you to play sea-devil, Maisola San," he began sternly. "Your bit of submarine work wasn't all comedy!"

Maisola's breathing became more regular now that the faces of the divers were shut out. Shaking back her thick, sea-drenched hair, she faced him unflinchingly.

"Last year you caused my brothers Sonag and Okahu a great deal of trouble. Okahu was nearly eaten by a shark because he was forced to jump into the sea from your schooner!" she told him with a flash of anger.

Hayes appeared disturbed. "I was commissioned to recover a Sumatran wedding dress your brother stole!" he retorted quickly. "Okahu went overboard on his own account. And he made a fool of the shark as well as me," he added with a bitter laugh.

She looked up, and he saw a flash of tears in her eyes, "The wedding dress was intended for me, Captain Hayes. I was to have married Sustu Ma, whom I love very dearly. My people regarded the loss of the dress as an ill omen and... there has been no marriage!"

Hayes frowned. "Was it to annoy me, Maisola, that you played the sea-devil?" he asked, a curious gleam in his eyes.

She shook her head, but did not meet his glance. "They told me I would grow rich if I scared your divers. They said you were a very bad man!"

"Who said?"

"The commander of the Arab company!" she answered. "He sent many presents to me and provided the rubber octopus to frighten your men!"

His brow darkened as he heard Maisola confess how the Arab company's officials had bribed her to enter the grotto at Shinto Reef, tricked out as an octopus, to scare his divers. He was certain that she was the innocent tool of the unscrupulous Arabs who were straining nerve and brain to oust him from the Straits of Torres. Doubtless, he argued, she had been forced by her mother to accept the company's bribes... And, after all, she was little more than a child.

It came to him as he stood in the doorway that the men of the Dutch Arab fleet had been encroaching foot by foot on his preserves during the day, glutting their baskets with his precious golden-edge shell.

Turning from the trembling Japanese girl, he bawled an order to the midday watch standing in the break of the poop. A twelve-pounder gun was run out of the open port, and loaded with broken oyster shell. Four luggers belonging to the Dutch Arab Company had pushed their hulls far beyond their own limit.

They were square-rigged, big-beamed vessels working in a dead line with each other's stern and fore rails. Suddenly a blinding explosion shook the still, hot silence: the air became filled with a roaring whirlwind of broken oyster shells that stripped and tore through the Arab luggers' spars and canvas.

The voice of Hayes was heard through the drifting gun-smoke. "Give you eight minutes to take your thief-boats off my line. I'll use the nickel-plated machine gun next time!"

Amid cries of terror from the astonished Arabs, the four luggers trailed like wounded sea-fowl back to their own waters. Satisfied that his enemies would not again venture hurriedly within gun-shot, Hayes returned pensively to the sobbing Japanese girl.

"When I came to your bungalow yesterday," he said quietly, "I saw about three yards of rubber tentacle folded up under the verandah. Some sailormen have eyes, my dear!— and that rubber tentacle gave me an idea. Now," he went on, watching her narrowly, "I want to know the name of the person who worked the air-pump at Shinto Reef, while you played octopus in the water?"

Maisola San wrung her hands, while sudden tears of anguish flowed down her brown cheeks. "Speak up!" Hayes thundered. "I must know your accomplice. I must knock the bottom out of this Japanese fooling. His name; do you hear?"

Maisola shrank from his threatening figure, her hands pressed over her streaming eyes. "It was Sustu Ma, my lover!" she choked. "He helped with the air-pump whenever I ventured into the sea with the rubber dress. Please do not be angry because my people thought you a bad man!"

The buccaneer frowned and took a turn across the deck-house. Then, facing her suddenly, he flung out his question.

"If I send a boat ashore will Sustu Ma come on board this vessel?"

"You are angry and want his life!" Maisola almost wailed. "He is only a boy and does not take these matters seriously. Do not judge him too harshly!"

"I'll judge the pair of you my own way!" Hayes rapped out. Opening a drawer in the locker, he produced a pen and some note-paper, which he placed on the table beside her, "Now, Maisola San, just write asking Sustu Ma to honor me with his presence aboard this schooner!" he commanded.

Maisola pushed away the paper, a sudden defiance in her pretty face. "I will not ask my lover to come here and be shot!" she said firmly. "The spirit of my people is not dead within me, Captain Hayes!"

"I'll shoot the little beggar if he doesn't come, Maisola San. I'll scour those sandhills night and day with my men and kill him where I find him!"

"And... If he comes aboard?" Maisola quavered.

The blind fury seemed to evaporate from the buccaneer's face. He sat down suddenly and lit a cigar: "If he comes aboard it will prove that he's a good boy, that's all. Now, my little woman," he went on in a businesslike tone, "tell me honestly are you fond of priests?"

Maisola's mouth dropped, a look of curiosity came into her dark eyes. "I do not understand!" she gasped. "We have nothing to do with priests!"

"Don't be silly!" Hayes warned her. "Just write that note to little Sustu, and tell him that if he doesn't come and marry you at once I'll—I'll—"

The pen almost fell from Maisola's trembling fingers. "What will happen?" she quavered.

"Why I'll be damned well marry you myself to keep you out of harm's way" he thundered. "Are you going to write...?"

Maisola Sau steadied the wild beatings of her heart as she wrote:—

*"Beloved Sustu Ma,—I am a prisoner on Captain Hayes's schooner. There is some anger on account of the rubber octopus trick. He will spare my life if you will come on board with old Kanio, our priest at Deliverance Inlet. The bad Captain Hayes has told his men that you have not the courage to die for me. Bring the priest, my beloved. Death must be for one of us. Maisola."*

Hayes read the note, while a grin stayed on his big, handsome face. He looked down at the pretty head and patted the plump shoulders laughingly.

"So... you think Sustu might hesitate to come aboard and get married, eh, Maisola San?"

She nodded wistfully.

"But you're dead sure he'll come if you tell him he's afraid to die?"

Again Maisola nodded. "We Japanese are a funny people," she confessed. Then, with a long drawn sigh. "I hope your man will not be long, Captain Hayes!"

Without replying, Hayes took the note aft and placed it in the mate's hands.

"You'll find a little brown chap hiding somewhere about the grotto at Shinto-Reef, Emery. "Give him this note and wait till he's ready to come back with you."

The moon had risen in the south-east when the mate returned. Hayes, leaning over the rail, detected a handsome but rather shame-faced Japanese youth seated in the stern. Beside him was a small, bald-headed priest dressed in native fashion, his uncovered head glowing like polished metal in the moonlight.



"See here, Sustu Ma!" Hayes exclaimed, gripping the boy's hand as he mounted the gangway. "You can be hanged without expense at my yard-arm, or marry your sweet-heart, Maisola San, within an hour!"

Sustu drew himself up with the pride of a Samurai in his young limbs. "There is no prospect here to keep a wife!" He indicated the distant sandhills with a sweep of his hand. "And the Arab company paid us well for our services."

Hayes laughed hoarsely. "I've dusted the Arabs off the sky-line, sonny. So there's no more money or employment from them, Savvy?"

Sustu contemplated the yard-arm thoughtfully, his hands stiff-drawn at his side. "I cannot marry to starve Maisola!" he announced after a pause. "If I hang you will let her go free?"

Hayes swore under his breath at the unexpected turn of affairs, then scratched his head as he surveyed the boy's intelligent face and quick eyes.

He was genuinely disturbed at the prospect of Maisola repeating the octopus trick.

Compelled very often to employ fresh crews, three and sometimes four times a year, he saw his whole pearling venture at the mercy of two mischievous Children of the Sun. And since they had acquired the knack of stampeding his divers, it was like tempting providence to allow them another opportunity.

His hand went out to Sustu's shoulder, while his fingers closed in a fatherly grip. "I can offer you a job in my trade-house at Thursday Island, keeping books and making yourself useful."

Sustu did not remove his eyes from the yard-arm. "The pay?" he questioned unmoved.

"Fifty dollars a month and a bungalow for Maisola. Is it a deal?"

Sustu folded his arms and sighed. "Bring Maisola and the priest!" he said gently.

The buccaneer hurried forward to where Maisola sat waiting in the little deck-house. Outside, he almost collided with the palpitating Emery.

"Perhaps you'd like to give the little octopus away, Bill," he laughed, catching the mate's arm, "borne along!"

"Perhaps," the mate growled afterwards, "I'd be getting me fifty dollars a month too, and a bungalow, if I'd brains enough to be some kind of a sea-devil! There never was such inspiration in my blamed family!"

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## 24: Molly Delaney, The Nerve-Breaker

*Chronicle (Adelaide, SA) 22 Jan 1916*

'IT'S THE last time I'll enter the ring to hit a man, Molly. Let me gather in the stakes for this one fight, and we'll buy an orange farm in the San Jose Valley. I swear to you, dear, that I'll quit bruising for good!'

Billy Madison tramped up and down the narrow strip of beach in front of his training quarters at Point Hamilton, his brain alive at the thought of his coming contest with black Jefferson. Molly Delaney walked briskly beside him, for this was one of the mornings that trainer Muldoon permitted them a few moments' conversation.

The thought of Billy meeting black Jefferson had caused, her many sleepless nights. For many years the negro, had lived up to his press notices as a human tornado. He had cake-walked through men's reputations as fast as the public provided gate money. In the ring he delighted in cuffing a beaten man's ears or holding him up to the gibes and insults of the crowd before administering the final blow. Jefferson had made and squandered huge fortune, and, despite the ease with which he secured his victories, his tendency to humiliate an outclassed opponent never relaxed.

Billy Madison had spent most of his young life at sea, among cargo tramps and whalers. With Billy lighting had become a necessity whenever Dago knife or Malay kris disputed his authority. He had worked in Canadian lumber camps, and had quitted before his muscles had warped and lost their flexibility. The ring had called, and he found men eager to burn money on the negro's funeral pyre. Molly's acquaintance with Billy began six months before he had signed to meet the black. He had been surf-riding on a plank, and the clean joy of the sport had fascinated her. Hitherto she had associated boxers with prehistoric types of ape-men and burglars, until Madison proved to her that modern lighting was a game of brains, and that only good-tempered, clean-living youngsters need apply.

Molly loved Billy. They met in the mornings on the open beach where the Pacific gulls drowsed and cried over the big verandaed training-house. The assistants who were preparing him for the fight with Jefferson found time to praise her sketches of him, for they knew that the bronze-haired Molly lived by selling her pictures to the magazines and newspapers. She had seen Jefferson's portrait on the hoardings, and her woman's instinct warned her that the coming event would be a life-and-death struggle for her lover. The sight of the negro's oval skull, his simian length of arm, the great muscles that, twined like roots about his huge limbs, struck terror into her heart.

'Billy,' she said one morning about a week before the fight, 'wouldn't it be better if you started a 50-acre farm now and gave up this notion of meeting Jefferson?'

He stared at her in amazement, then patted her gloved hand tenderly.

'If the boys thought I had that notion in my head they'd shoot me out of pity. No, sweetheart, we're going to make the nigger sprint for the first time in his life.'

Molly pondered his words for several moments.

'Billy, dear, you couldn't hurt him with a barrel of razors. You are going to fling yourself at a thing that is blind to pain or shock. To you, with your white man's brain and nerve, every round and blow will be a crucifixion. You know the old saying, that even the lion is as cheese in the grip of the anthropoid!'

Billy laughed loud and heartily at her earnestness, then kissed her as she prepared to go, telling her with much tenderness that his trainer, Muldoon, had ordered them not to meet again until after the fight.

Molly entered the railway depot at Chowder Bay, and for the first time that afternoon became conscious of a lank, grey-haired man following in her wake. In the car he sat opposite her, and as the train moved from the siding coughed once or twice to gain her attention. 'You are doing pictures for the Sunday specials,' he hazarded in a low-pitched voice. 'I am a journalist, and like your studies of Billy Madison. They're alive, if I may say so, Miss Delaney. But it's about Jefferson I want to talk.'

Molly would have withdrawn to another seat only that his voice and bearing betrayed a genuine solicitude for her cause.

'I want Billy Madison to win this fight,' she admitted quietly. 'What do you think of his chances?'

The old journalist smiled. 'No white man's punch was ever big enough to beat Jeff. In seven years I've seen twenty Billy Madisons go joyfully into the ring after the nigger's scalp. Perhaps you've heard how most of them left their youth behind. Some got their hearts pulped and jaws broken; some had their brains affected— all to put gate-money into Jeff's bank. Why, it's nothing short of human sacrifice!'

'Please, don't!' Molly gasped. 'I'll try and get Billy to forego. It's horrible!'

He touched her sobbing shoulder gently, conscious that several people in the car were watching them.

'Try your own little hand at smashing the nigger's nerve,' he whispered as the train neared the city terminus. 'Every man in this life has his fear— kings, presidents, and pugilists. One laughs at the surgeon's knife, but shrieks at a white rag in a dark passage. Jeff got his own particular nightmare tucked away somewhere in his mind. He was nearly lynched once for one of his devilries

down South. He's never quite got over his fear of the rope. They say he was hanging for eight seconds before the police broke up the lynching bee. Take it from me, little one, he's mighty scared of ropes. Think over what I've said and rot the beggar's nerve if you can!

'Would that be fair?'

'As fair as his methods. He keeps men waiting in the ring until suspense and worry snap their patience. Then he has a gift of objurgation that fairly rattles a white man. Why his idea of the game is in line with a hyena's. Good-bye, and think it over!'

In spite of her scepticism Molly was impressed. And since Billy refused to forego meeting Jefferson she was determined to find out. whether the negro had nerves to break.

Jefferson's training quarters at Longreach was surrounded by a spacious verandah. The walk of the gymnasium were hung with portraits depicting Jefferson at various interesting stages of his career. There was a picture of Jefferson beating Mike Maffery at Denver City, and another of the black delivering the goods to another tried-out white.

Molly found herself standing near the bungalow entrance watching a thick-necked man promenade the verandah. Inside the doorway sat Jefferson, swathed in flannels, caressing a large bull-pup. For a millionth fraction of time her mind oscillated between doubt and dread. She had conceived the idea of interviewing the negro in the interests of her paper. Drawing a card from her pocket, she stepped lightly to the verandah, and found the thick-necked man barring her way.

'What do you want?' he demanded, abruptly. 'You ought to know that this isn't a summer boarding-house.'

Molly placed her card in his hand. 'I'm from the *'Sunday Sportswoman.'* I reckon you've given all the man papers a look-in. Be good enough to allow a ladies' journal the privilege of interviewing Mr. Jefferson.'

The guardian of the black champion's privacy grinned in sudden amusement.

'My name's Tim Doherty,' he said, after a while. 'You can worry Jeff for just five minutes, providing you don't talk politics. Don't you forget my name's Tim Doherty when you're writing up this interview.'

Jefferson was rolling the pup under his soft sand shoes, his great hands pulping the dog's fat ribs playfully. He looked up slowly at Molly with the basking insolence of a champion in repose.

'Well,' he declared genially, 'what's keepin' you awake at night, missey? Do you want ma picture?'

He settled back lazily in the low cane chair, the dog held between his knees. Never had Molly looked upon such a mass of inert muscle and flesh. She felt that by the merest effort of his long black arm he could reach her, even though she ran to the verandah end.

'You are looking forward to your meeting with Madison ?' she queried, with an effort. 'There is no doubt in your mind concerning the result, eh, Mr. Jefferson?'

He did not reply immediately, but she noted that his fingers closed involuntarily on the dog's throat. He looked up slowly, and she saw the white teeth inside the expanding mouth.

'Billy Madison ain't got grip enough to chew candy. He's just chasin' the limelight, like all the other guys.'

'Why do you hate white men, Mr. Jefferson?'

It was as though naked steel had touched him. He rose suddenly, and she saw the ophidian length of torso, the suave strength of his great body. He stared down at her thoughtfully.

'A crowd of lynchers hanged ma father down on Skeeta Valley plantation fifteen years ago, missey. He was de best hoe hand and cotton-picker in Louisiana. I kin give you ole Colonel Stratton's word for it. Dey took an' hanged ma poor ole fader becoz a white man swore a lie against him. It was 'bout a woman, missey. After ma fader had been dead nigh on a year de whole flainiu' lie was exposed!'

'They say you killed a man in St. Louis,' Molly interjected, softly. She was anxious now for proofs of the negro's villainies.

Jefferson hunched his great shoulders. 'Frisco Joe, a blamed half-breed. Mulligan's backers squared to shoot vitriol into ma face, one night before a fight!' He paused while his big hands went out like a preachers to the young girl before him.

'For seven years men have tried to dope, kill, or poison me, missey. A blood specialist in Chicago said he could provide me wid a kind of leprosy to kill ma punch if someone would persuade me into his operatin' theatre. That's the kind of talk I get for bein' honest!'

Molly shuddered.

'Dey shut me up in a State penitentiary becos dey couldn't hang me once. But, by the Lord, I've smashed a white man's jaw for every week I slep' in jail!' he declared exultantly.

Molly sighed. 'Every blow you strike goes to the heart of some woman,' she said softly.'

The negro's lips sagged suddenly, a soft filminess clouding the dilating pupils of his eyes.

'I nevah hurt a woman. Ef a man climbs into the ring to pinch de gate money I'm gwine to stop him, suah! Where's de woman, anyhow?'

'His wife, mother, or sweetheart!' Molly flung out desperately. 'I repeat that with every blow you bruise the heart of some unoffending woman!'

'Did you come heah to preach dat to me? An'— who for?'

He stood with his feet planted apart, his huge hands resting on his narrow hips. It was as though he had just battered an opponent to the boards and was asking a question of the referee.

'Who for?' he repeated, hoarsely.

'You!' Molly assured him, with a set, white face. 'Some night, in the ring, you will make a mistake. That right fist of yours will end a man's life— a white man's life. And do you know what is going to happen then?'

He stooped to pat the pup between his feet, and she noted that a gleam of moisture had come to his brow. 'I reckon men have been killed in de ring before, missey. I got no time to worry over it, anyhow.'

Molly's gloved hand touched his flannelled arm lightly. The contact of her fingers startled him like a whip-cut, his big, slack mouth seemed to squirm.

'In your coming fight; Mr, Jefferson, you will have the bad luck to kill Madison in the third round!'

His hands came up as though his legs had been shot away. For one terrible moment she thought the clenched fists would crush, and batter her. She bent her head slightly and closed her eyes. Then his thick, sneering voice reached her through the swooning noise in her brain.

'I reckon Doherty ought to give you a nickel foh tellin' ma fortune, missey. You don't happen to know,' he went on, with a hoarse guffaw, 'how I shall come off after giving Billy his passage?'

Molly walked to the door, her hand pressed to ther eyes. He saw that she was trembling violently, and his blatant self-assurance received its first shock.

'Ain't you goin' to tell, missey?' he called out. 'I sha'n't sleep 'till I heah de whole story.'

She faced him at the end of the corridor, lips parted, a swooning mist in her eyes as tbongh striving to visualise more clearly some startling picture in her mind. Her voiceless concentration of manner quickened the animal curiosity in his eyes.

'You're givin' me de clairvoyant touch,' he leered. 'Can't you answer?'

'Not to one who scoffs at his own destiny.' Her voice sounded far away, but each faint word was a hammer-stroke on his wire-drawn nerves. His bulging eyes sought to follow her line of vision until the tension loosened his tongue.

'I'm takin' de guff serious,' he blurted out. 'I ain't de kind of guy to turn down fl hit oi free information. But— say, missey, you cain't see me hittin'

Madison a stiffener on Friday night. Dat kind of future business won't go. Say now?'

Molly stilled the wild beatings of her heart. At all costs Billy must be preserved from this fistic monster, who had never betrayed the slightest chivalry towards an opponent. She pressed her fingers over her throbbing eyes and in the silence she heard the swift beating of the negro's heart.

'I see Madison's trainer with a doctor in the ring. They have failed to bring him round. The police are climbing over the ropes. The crowd has become a frenzied, howling mob. Seats and benches are torn up. Some more police enter the building, but they are powerless to hold back the crowd that are fighting to reach the ropes.'

'Ropes!' the negro echoed sullenly. Molly's white face was thrust out as she continued her blind monologue.

'I see you now, standing in the ring centre. Tim Doherty and several of your friends are beside you as the crowd scatter the police and pour into the ring. Now— wait. It has grown dark, as though someone had switched off the light? Wait— the lights are on again, but the ring is empty! The ropes are gone!'

'Huh!' The cane chair creaked as the negro dropped into it. The dog whimpered softly between his knees. 'That ain't all. What's the crowd doin', anyhow?'

'They are outside in the street, looking up at something swinging from a lamp post!'

'G'wan; who's swingin'?'

'You!'

The negro sat very still in the cane chair, sweat dripping from his brow. Dimly through the red maelstrom of ideas surging through his fear-shaken mind he heard the soft footsteps of Molly as she slipped away.

THE EVENING specials drew attention to the fact that Jefferson was suffering slightly from the effects of over-training. But the civilised world thrilled as the hour of battle approached. Nearly all the seats at the International Club had been auctioned or syndicated at record prices.

At five o'clock in the evening, exactly four hours before Jefferson was due in the ring, Molly stepped out of a taxi a few yards from Billy's training quarters. His manager spied her from the window, and a frown of annoyance darkened his brow.

'A sweet, clever little woman,' he said to an attendant, 'but I'd give a new hat if she'd leave Billy alone until after the fight.'

Billy was lying on a couch inside the big, airy reading-room attached to the gymnasium. At sound of Molly's voice outside he sat up, beaming and alert. A

scent of violets came with her; she carried a huge bunch for the marble vase that stood, at his elbow.

'How do you feel?' she began, arranging the violets in odd corners. of the room. 'I thought I'd see you just before the bombardment begins.'

He laughed and touched her hands with his lips. 'I feel that we're bound for the orange farm, dear. I've just had a sleep, and they were counting Jefferson out when I woke.'

Molly looked eagerly at his clean, straight figure, the hard, pink flesh, the boyish elasticity of movement and poise. Yet her heart quailed at the recollection of the negro's overwhelming bulk. They say Jefferson is sluggish,' she hazarded, her face to the window.

Billy shrugged. 'He'll wake up to the music; but all through the fight I shall feel you calling, dear. His black fists will never hammer the picture of you from my heart.'

'Oh, Billy!' She would have flung herself on his breast but for the manager's sudden entry.

'Remember, Miss Delaney,' he said; u-arningly, 'we've got to keep our nerves for the flack tiger at nine sharp. Take a rest, Billy,' he added pleasantly.

Two hours later his big car took Billy and his trainers to the International Club. From ceiling to floor the building palpitated with its close-packed audience. It was eight months since Jefferson had trounced Kid Despard in the same arena, and the savage yearning to see him at grips with the lightning-charged Madison swept over the crowd like an epidemic. Billy's entry into the ring elicited a hurricane of cheers and greetings from the rows of upturned faces.

'Keep your head, Billy; don't let him guy you.'

'Give him the double-punch where he sneezes.'

Jefferson's appearance roused small enthusiasm. Billy's record was too clean to permit of counter-demonstrations. Although the crowd had often laughed at the negro's antics, they had come to see Madison win.

Near the ring-side, a boy's overcoat buttoned tightly about her, a soft-hat drawn over her eyes, Molly sat through the opening formalities with the courage of a gladiator's wife. She heard the buzz of a gong, the quick patter of feet, and the suppressed grunt of joy from the gaping thousands as the two champions crossed the ring. Jefferson's grin had more nerves in it than merriment. His face bore the impress of sleepless nights, while his eyes betrayed a lack of concentration in their quick, shifting glance at the audience. But, true to the old habit of guying an adversary he spread out his huge, spatulate hands, and essayed a cake-walk across the ring.



With the dropping of his hands came Billy's lightning rush, a quick, chopping blow on the half-turned jaw that turned the Gaby glide into an, ugly stumble for recovery.

'Try Billy with a hen-walk!' a jeering voice called out. Jefferson swung round, his long body swaying rhythmically to the cries of the audience. With splendid ease, his long left stabbed and coiled as though trying to catch and twist Billy's arm out of joint. His anger sharpened at the other's clever evasions, while his python body poised itself for a smashing delivery. It came and Billy endured for thirty seconds a whirlwind of savage rushes and uppercuts.

Molly closed her eyes. Nothing human could outlive the storm, of blows that fell about her lover's head and body. When the gong sounded 'corners,' she looked up with ashen lips at the flash of blood on Billy's cheek. The negro slouched to his chair, grinning, but out of breath.

'It's goin' to be red, suah,' he guffawed.

Billy rested, and his breathing was slow and deep. At the call he left his chair lazily as the negro floated a la Tango towards him. A hoarse peal of laughter greeted the negro's gyrations. Billy appeared amused and dropped his guard, but in the millionth fraction of a thought his young body dashed in under the pirouetting arms. Molly heard two thick sounds, as though someone were battering wood with a mad. She saw Jefferson reel and recover, heard his trainer call out softly: — 'Steady with that funny business. He's getting you!'

A man seated beside her said— 'Two on the jaw and heart. Jeff will be growing daisies under his feet shortly!'

Jefferson steadied himself and shook sweat from his brow. For the first time in his career he had been caught in his fooling. He was now compelled to follow about the ring a man whose science and footwork were greater than his own.

Molly's courage vaulted high at sight of the negro limping to the. offensive. Yet something in the electric stillness warned her that her lover's fate lay in a false step, or the ill-timed swing of an arm.

It came like a thunder-clap. The negro seemed to cover Billy with his whirling hands. For an instant both clinched and then leaped apart, at the referee's warning, only to meet in the ring-centre, Billy's right fist slamming with trip-hammer force against the slanting chin. Jefferson half-turned, and Molly saw his black elbow crash into her lover's face.

The effect was instantaneous. Billy pitched forward into a huddled heap almost at the referee's feet. Pandemonium followed. Cries of 'Foul!' and 'Beast!' seemed to shred Molly's nerves. A thousand faces and fists shouted and threatened the stiff-limbed negro. A struggling, swaying mass of human

beings sought to clear the barriers and ~ chairs which separated them from the ring.

'Pulp the brute! Give him a bullet!'

Jefferson stared at the huddled-up white man. his knees trembling violently. Then he turned to the yelling avalanche of men, sweeping in hundreds to the ropes, and big eyes seemed to whiten in his rage and apprehension.

Snatching a chair from a near assistant, he leaped at the line of heads and shoulders clambering over the ropes. The chair was of seasoned hickory, built to bear the strain of exhausted heavy-weights, and it close and brained the ring-rushers where they hung from the ropes.

With lunatic ease the negro sprang like a tiger at the encircling mob. Sticks and hands sought to trip his feet, but the flailing chair smote and scattered them in dozens.

A couple of firemen cleared the ropes and charged boldly at his legs and throat. Jefferson pivoted with the ease of a schoolboy, and the chair fell with a whoop on the near fireman's neck. The second invader gripped the chair-legs with both hands, calling on the crowd to close in.

The negro's bared teeth were visible for an instant. Dropping the chair, he struck savagely at the fireman's shouting face. In the turn of a foot he was back again in the ring-centre, fighting with both hands, the blood-mist of insanity in his eyes, a slaver of foam on his drawn lips.

Molly prayed for strength to keep her from the fainting fit that would put her under the heels of the stampeding audience. Men crawled from the ropes with gashed heads and broken limbs. A sudden quiet fell upon the hall; for a breath giving pause the negro stood over the inanimate Billy Madison, the chair swung high.

Molly staggered blindly to the ring steps, her arms outstretched. 'Don't—Mr. Jefferson! He fought straight. He's my boy. Don't, oh, don't strike him, for pity's sake!'

The negro glared, white-eyed, a big crucified grin on his slaving mouth. 'Huh! You told me dis stunt! You shewed me de blood an' de rope! An' ye tink I'm goin' to let 'em hang me!'

A long-limbed Westerner had crawled unseen under the ropes, a coiled lariat on his arm. Soundless as a bird it looped the air above the swinging chair. It fell and was jerked tight about Jefferson's body. A short, quick heave brought him with a flying run to his knees. A second later the ring was filled with police and trainers, while the negro strained and cursed the fatal loop that gripped his arms and chest. The swift-raving Molly was first to raise Billy's head from the floor and press her warm fingers to his faintly beating heart.

THE MORNING after the fight Billy Madison sat up in his bungalow chair and yawned with great deliberation.

'I thought someone had straightened my chin with, a gun-butt,' he announced pleasantly. 'I'll never forgive myself for letting it happen.'

'It really looked as though the brute had finished you,' his manager intimated thoughtfully. 'It was the worst case of fouling ever put up. Anyway, we get the winner's share of the gate— about thirty thousand dollars in all— to say nothing of the picture rights, which will prove a Golconda. The movies, showing Jeff batting Gehenna out of the crowd, will paybig divvies for a year or more.'

A silence fell between manager and pugilist that was broken only by the low thunder of surf on the beach outside. Muldoon cleared his throat and continued:

'I know that Miss Delaney wants you to quit the ring,' Billy, especially after what happened last, night. But between you and me there's half a million of money for you to pick up at the game. Jefferson is in hospital, and his recovery is doubtful. Anyhow, he'll never climb into another ring if the police know it. I had aii offer from Mallahan's backers this morning. If you care to meet him in three months time there's another thirty thousand guaranteed. What do you say?'

Billy squirmed in his seat and then turned with a suppressed cry to a white sunbonnet crossing the bungalow verandah.

In a flash he was outside, his hands holding Molly's, his slightly bruised face turned away. She touched it gently with her gloved finger, a little sympathetic shudder passing over her. A moment later he detected a malicious smile gathering about the corners of her mouth. Instinctively his glance turned to her left hand. A big red orange lay in her palm. He flushed and his eyes dropped under her searching scrutiny.

'Billy, she said gently, 'your manager has been swelling your head this, morning. He's been relating, how the world is a i-all at your feet, and that it's yours to kick whenever you want a sackful of money.'

Billy flushed a deeper scarlet.

'He's got an offer for me to meet Mallahan. And I must say, dear,' he went on, hesitatingly, 'it looks like throwing money away to quit the game now.'

In a fraction of time Molly had made up her mind. With her usual insight she divined what life would be for her if his growing ambitions were fostered. Fresh contests would be engineered in his and Muldoon's interests, while she would be placed in a new hell of torment and suspense each time he entered the ring. She could not live to see him broken and battered, his mind affected,

probably, by the savage aftermath of each encounter. No, she had learned something of her power in her interview with Jefferson, if Billy was to be saved from the lure of the ring she must correct the pride of prowess that was hourly destroying him.

'Billy,' she began, softly, 'do you know why Jefferson went to pieces in the second round?'

His shoulders flinched.

'You saw the fight, dear, and you know that my rush took him unawares.'

'Billy'— she patted his bruised cheek affectionately and drew him cleverly out of Muldoon's hearing— 'a week ago I set out to break Jefferson's nerve so that you'd have a chance!'

'Molly!' His hand closed on hers, and the pain of his grip almost made her cry out.

She held herself bravely, her eyes staring into his soul-depths.

'I interviewed Jefferson at some risk to my own sensibilities. As a girl,' she went on, with a tremor in her voice, 'I used to earn four dollars a week in a lady clairvoyant's flat. I saw at once that Jefferson was just a big heap of muscle and superstitions. I gave him a mental picture of the fight with you. I told him that he would kill you in the third round with a blow from the right arm. Of course, it was pure guess-work on my part!'

Billy groaned and covered his face; a dry sob seemed to shake and rend him. Molly held to her task.

'I had to break him to save you, Billy. And I came near to the ghastly truth when I predicted that Jefferson would be hanged from a lamp-post. I left him in a sweat of terror, and the terror stayed with him until he entered the ring. I thought, of course, that it would be my first and last attempt to save you from the clutches of a human beast against whom you had no possible chance. But I find,' she added, with a touch of bitterness, 'that it has only served to keep you in the business!'

'Heavens, Molly, is all this true?' he flung out.

'As true as Jefferson is a babbling nerve-wreck. Moreover, by dear Billy, I've just received a special assignment on the *Morning Star* at a hundred dollars a week. And I'm not inclined to turn it down for the mere privilege of becoming a bruiser's wife!'

Billy Madison took three steps along the bungalow verandah, and in the turn of an eye she saw how she had rent and crucified his vanity. He turned slowly and held out both hands, his voice quivering and broken.

'Molly, let me meet Mallahan. Just to prove—?'

'That you are the best white man living! No, Billy; my assignment won't wait. Good-bye, Billy. I must return to town at once.'

She tripped lightly down the verandah steps, a tiny bunch of half-dead violets pressed to her lips. Madison caught his breath as though a big white wave had smothered him.

'Molly!' He ran down the steps and caught her fiercely in his arms. 'I was a coward to think of breaking my word. I'll quit the game, dear— I'll quit. Please let's go on the beach now, and— and—'

'What, Billy?'

'Eat that big red orange in your hand. We'll go farm-hunting to-morrow.'

'The Billy boy has a lot of sense for his years. But he must not kiss me again, because there's a crowd of reporters coming this way.'

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**25: The Diamond Ape**

*World's News (Sydney) 12 Feb 1916*

HER black funnel smoke oozed over the sea-line shredding the windless expanse from cape to cape. Captain William Hayes, loafing on the verandah of the Sourabaya Hotel, watched her lazily through his powerful binoculars until her snoring length was well inside the bay. Her sides were brown and rust-eaten, where sun and sea had scoured the naked iron. A dozen Indian coolies were gathered on her fo'c'sle, spying out the small island village scarce visible through the dense palm woods.

The buccaneer regarded her suspiciously, her greasy, cargo-littered decks and smoke-grimed funnel, the naked turbaned shapes squatting on the rails and hatches.

"Nose on her like, a beast-boat," he growled. "Guess she's put in for repairs or a set of new boilers. Got an Indian plague smell about her anyhow!"

The rattle of her anchor chains brought small groups of men from the outlying trade house verandahs, discussing in loud voices the strange ship which had come upon them so suddenly from the north-east. Several island traders nodded to Hayes as they hurried past to the beach, for in that lone region everyone desired to be on peaceful terms with the man who had made his name a terror from the Line Islands to the Marquesas.

"Big tramp out dere, Hayes!" shouted a passing German. "She ees down from Rangoon I hears. She haf no cargo vort mentionin'."

"Guess she can load here with alligators if she likes," laughed the buccaneer. "I'd like to fill her with pearl and sell her in Shanghai. It's three years since I borrowed anything over two thousand tons."

Ten minutes later a boat with the captain of the steamer on board put off for the shore. Hayes watched him hurry down the landing jetty, the roll of the sea in his gait, his eyes wandering inquisitively from the beach to the hotel verandah. Halting at the jetty end, he addressed a half-naked pearl-sheller loafing near a pile of nets.

"Seaman by name of Hayes I'm after," he said huskily. "My people said I'd find him hereabouts."

"That big man lying in the silk hammock is Hayes." The sheller indicated the hotel briefly. "And don't wake him too sudden if he's asleep—he's got a nickel-plated bull-dog in his pocket."

"Aye, aye, sonny; his gun won't bite me, I hope." The skipper of the tramp steamer passed towards the hotel and saluted the buccaneer deferentially.

"Cap'n William Hayes, I believe?" he began, smiling blandly.

"If the name was on a ten thousand dollar bill it wouldn't be worth much," snapped the buccaneer. "Is your business connected with drinks or with the police?" he asked dourly.

"My name is Ambrose," laughed the other. "I came out of my way to deliver a package to William Hayes, master of the schooner Daphne. The package was consigned by a gentleman named Sedar Singh, of Hindu habits, living in a one-elephant seaport in the Bay of Bengal. Here's his letter of advice."

Hayes took the note and scanned the misspelt address curiously. "You haven't told me what the package contains," he said sharply. "Sedar Singh doesn't owe me anything."

Captain Ambrose wiped his brow and glanced nervously at the narrow-hipped cargo tramp across the bay. "I ought to have told you," he said in an under-breath. "that the package contains a live black monkey. I was paid handsomely to deliver it to you at this address. Failing, I was ordered to carry it to a man named Hydra Singh at Sydney."

Hayes listened and his face grew dark with annoyance. "If this monkey-sending business is a joke," he broke out, "India isn't big enough to shelter the man who started it, sir!"

Glancing at the letter, he read it slowly, and his face relaxed a trifle; the livid bullet-scar on his left cheek seemed to vanish in the creases of his sun-blackened skin.

*"Sahib Hayes," it ran, "I want you to do me a little service. Draft inside letter for £200 to cover your expenses. I pray you deliver the sacred monkey, Han, to my brother Hydra, in Sydney, who is well known at the Quay. Your small schooner is much better for the purpose than a big steamship, and will save me big expense. I am too sick to travel. Han belonged to my uncle at Benares, who was a priest of Siva— he conducted the worship of sacred animals within the shrine of Hanuman. My uncle died last year and he desired me to send Han to my brother as a token of his love. Do this favour for me, Sahib Hayes, because I helped when trouble and the police were at your elbow.*

*Sedar Singh."*

The buccaneer scrutinised the draft closely, then, with a laugh, turned to the waiting Ambrose. "Sedar Singh isn't figuring as a humorist this time. So we'll forgive him the monkey on account of the draft." Captain Ambrose squared his shoulders and breathed like one in a hurry to be gone. "Give me your receipt of delivery, and I'll get my anchor," he said briefly. "Here's the

coolie in charge of the monkey. He'll be derved glad to be rid of the brute, I reckon. Gave us a hell of a time—"

A Manila boy appeared on the Jetty, carrying a cage on his shoulder. At a nod from Hayes he bore it to where the schooner *Daphne* lay some distance down the pier. Four kanakas and the mate, Howe, were idling about the deck, and, as the boy approached, they leaned over the rail, staring at the black-faced simian squatting inside the cage.

"Always thought Hayes was a bit daft," said Howe wrathfully. "Monkeys above all things—he'll be shipping cargoes of tame devils next."

NIGHT found the schooner running towards the outside reefs before a stiff nor-easter. Hayes, with a bottle of "square-face" beside him, was brooding over a chart in his cabin.

The mate peeped in at the door, hurriedly; his face was deadly pale, his knees trembled violently. "Cap'n," he whispered, "there's somethin' movin' about the schooner, somethin' with a heye that looks clean through ye. It's the heye of a ghost, cap'n."

Hayes looked up from the chart quickly, and frowned. "Get on with your work, my lad, and don't fill the schooner with your ghost yarns, or those kanakas of mine will be jumping overboard. Try an onion before you turn in. It will keep the ghost at a distance."

"Cap'n," quavered the mate, "there's a heye sittin' on' the schooner's rail; a white heye with a face behind it."

Pushing the mate aside, the buccaneer stepped on deck, and halted stiffly. Then he crouched low, while his hair stiffened, and his throat grew dry.

A squat shape was clinging to the schooner's rail— its face lit up by a moon-like nimbus that glowed, alternately emitting yolks of amber flame. Hayes lifted his pistol hand as the thing snarled and leaped across the deck.

"The monkey," he snapped. "How did it get out?" He wiped the sweat from his brow hurriedly. "How—"

A kanaka sprang in the air suddenly, and bolted screaming below. Hayes knelt on the deck, his pistol half raised, and waited. He was not a superstitious man, but the sight of the ape, with the burning face, almost unnerved him. "Don't want any jadoo monkeys on my schooner," he muttered irritably. "The whisky I drink will supply the right kind of face every time."

The monkey was not seen again that night, but during the middle watch on the following day the buccaneer came upon it dozing under a piece of canvas near the stairhead. At the first movement it sprang away and flew chattering to the cross-trees.



Few men would have cared to call Hayes a coward, but if his South Sea enemies could have watched him on his trip to Sydney, shivering by night at sight of the fiery face that glowered at him from the yards, his reputation as a man-fighter and buccaneer would have suffered considerably.

But Hayes brought the schooner into Port Jackson in holiday style. The ape had been captured and caged after endless days of watching and scheming. It was a sultry night as they entered the harbor. An occasional fishing boat swung past the schooner, as she stole to her old moorings at Dawes Point.

Hayes was eager to be rid of his simian passenger, and he promised himself a new outfit as soon as Sedar Singh's draft had been cashed.

"You'd better take the monkey ashore in the dinghy, Mr. Howe," he said to the mate "Anyone will show you Hydra's shop. Don't drop the derved animal overboard, or some-thing might happen at the bank when I'm cashing the draft."

"Aye, aye, cap'n." Holding the cage at arm's length, the mate stepped into the dinghy, and pulled swiftly towards the Quay. Hayes gave a grunt of relief as the boat vanished in the maze of light and moving craft.

At that time the police had no specific charge against him, and he whistled cheerily as he leaned over the rail and counted the steeple-like masts silhouetted against the star-washed sky.

A small boat shot alongside suddenly, and the voice of an old Pacific trader bailed him from the port side.

"Good-night, Captain Hayes! Anybody aboard?"

The buccaneer peered into the darkness, and saw a sharp-faced man in white duck clothes looking up at him. There was no one else in the boat.

"Hulloa, Jensen! Met you in 'Frisco, didn't I? How's the missus and kids, Jensen?"

"Well enough, Bully. I'm glad you're here," answered the other unsteadily. "Been keeping a sharp look-out for you the last week."

"Your face is sharp enough to cut blue ice," laughed the buccaneer. "Don't wear it out looking for me, Jensen," he added huskily.

"No time to joke, Hayes. Is the monkey all right? I got the tip from Calcutta."

The buccaneer leaned with studied elegance against the schooner rail, and glowered at the speaker below. "You got the tip, eh, Mr. Jensen? I'd be glad to hear what that tip might be."

Jensen placed his hand against the schooner's side and breathed excitedly. Something in his fierce impatience warned the buccaneer not to trifle further. "Hayes," his voice had grown sharp, almost hysterical, in its pleading, "it's the biggest thing that ever jumped from a native's brain. The Calcutta papers blew

the gaff a month ago. I heard the news from a Lascar seaman on the P. and O. wharf. There isn't a man in India or Australia besides Sedar's brother who knows the truth about the monkey."

"See here!" interrupted the buccaneer sharply, "don't monkey me on a dark night. Speak out!"

"Is the ape still on board?"

"No, I sent it to its owner an hour ago."

"Yah!" The man in the boat sat back, gritting in his suppressed fury.

"Another chance gone. Oh, what a holy mess you've made of it!"

"Speak out!" thundered Hayes. "What are you jabbering over?"

Jensen was seized with a violent fit of coughing. A minute passed before he straightened his narrow shoulders.

"What's the good of speaking out when it's too late," he rasped. "Don't you know that a lot of Indian papers have reported the theft of the White Mogul diamond from a temple at Udrapore, by a native named Sedar Singh, late of Sydney and Samoa."

"Go on," nodded Hayes. "Didn't think Sedar was smart enough to steal a dead prawn."

"He was arrested," continued Jensen hastily, "but there was no evidence to convict him and he was released. A close watch was kept on his movements night and day. He lived in a bungalow under the fort gate on the Surimpur road within a hundred yards of the temple. He had no friends or relative's, nothing but the one-eyed monkey."

"Two-eyed," corrected the buccaneer. "Stick to facts, man."

"One eye, Hayes, as you shall hear. This Sedar Singh was a taxidermist and made a good living at one time stuffing birds and animals. How he got into the temple beats me. The big diamond went missing on June 20. It was chiselled from the head of the White Mogul, and for live days the priests kept the affair a secret, hoping to trap Sedar Singh the moment he tried to pass the jewel on. Everyone knew that he had been employed by the priests to decorate the Mogul throne with feathers and skins of animals. On June 25 Sedar was arrested privately by the priests and tortured in his own house.

"They applied hot plates to his insteps, and filled his mouth and ears with green acid until the police dropped in and prevented further torture. For weeks after Sedar was watched by Thugs and religious fanatics who were ready to strangle him the moment he tried to pass on the Mogul diamond through the post or by way of a friend. That bit of stone, I might tell you, is valued at two hundred thousand dollars."

"The ape—where does it come in?" interrupted Hayes impatiently.

"There was no chance of Sedar sneaking out of India alive with the stone," continued Jensen. "Transmission by letter or friend was out of the question. The priests had him watched night and day. The fakirs in the bazaars knew him for a temple breaker. Everyone in Udrapore laughed and waited. It takes a Hindu to deal with a Hindu, but they get left sometimes.

"One night Sedar strolled down to the wharf where Captain Ambrose's vessel was loading cargo for Batavia. He knew Ambrose slightly, and, as he stepped aboard, it was noticed by the native who followed him that a black monkey ran beside him and stayed aboard. Ambrose passed the animal to you at Thursday. You know the rest," said Jensen quickly.

"Guess I don't!" snapped Hayes peevishly. "Where is the diamond? And what had the ape to do with it anyhow?"

Jensen pressed his brow with both hands as though his thoughts were beginning to swim and dance through his head. "Great, Scot!" he shouted hoarsely. "I mistook you for a needle-pointed buccaneer. Hayes," he said wearily, "why did you let the animal leave this schooner? Sedar Singh coated the diamond with cat's eye enamel, and set it with the skill of a specialist into the ape's socket— just as you'd set an ordinary glass eye into the head of a man or woman. Then he passed the monkey on from Ambrose to you. See!"

The buccaneer made no answer. In a flash he was beside Jensen in the boat. "Pull," he said fiercely; "we'll have another look at this diamond ape."

The lights of the town showed dimly across the harbor as the boat stole to the pier steps. Voices from the near streets broke in a strange babel upon the ears of the man who had come from the silent spaces of the Pacific. Passing hurriedly from the pier, they came suddenly into one of the main arteries of the city. The buccaneer halted, suddenly attracted by a jeering crowd of larrikins at the opposite street corner, and the familiar figure of his mate Howe brandishing the empty monkey cage in their midst.

The gang of hoodlums broke into shrieks of laughter at the torrent of abuse hurled upon them by the excited seaman with the cage. Hayes divined in a flash that something serious has happened. Followed by Jensen, he pushed through the crowd and hauled the mate aside.

"Come away," he said fiercely, "and tell what has happened."

Howe faced him half-drunkenly, and it was plain that he had spent most of his time ashore within some liquor house or bar. There were lights in his eyes; his red, wind-burnt face glowed like a lamp. "No fault of mine, cap'n." He held up the empty cage as though it was a trophy. "You gave me the Hindu's wrong address. An' these larrikins rushed me an' unfastened the cage while—"

"Where's the ape?" thundered Hayes, hauling him further from the crowd. "What has become of it?"

"Took to the roof the minute the crowd opened the cage door. I broke a lot of winders down the road tryin' to indooce the blame creature to come back. The fire brigade came along an' blew it off the roof of the lock-up with a hose. An' the police took possession of the monkey, hopin' I'd turn up an' claim it."

"Well, why don't you claim it?" roared Hayes.

The mate coughed sulkily. "They'll make me pay for those derved winders if I do. Try 'em yourself, cap'n. You're responsible for the animal."

The lights of the distant police depot were visible from where they stood. Leaving the mate to return to the schooner, Hayes approached the depot carefully until he stood within a few feet of the entrance.

With Sedar Singh's letter in his pocket authorising him to deliver the ape to Hydra Singh in Sydney, he felt certain that the police would not prevent him recovering the lost simian. Fumbling for the letter among a bundle of loose papers in his breast pocket, he turned for a moment, and drew back into the shadows as though a ghost had walked across his line of vision. Two Hindus came from the lock-up and passed swiftly in the direction of the city.

Hayes gasped as the two turbaned figures slunk out of sight. "That fellow with the blue headgear is Hydra Singh!" he choked. "What in thunder was he doing inside the lock-up?"

"Interviewing the officer in charge, perhaps," suggested Jensen. "He must have received a cablegram from his brother in India advising him of your arrival. Beats me how these Hindus pick up the thread of a thing. Funny, eh?"

"Neither of them had the monkey anyhow."

The buccaneer pondered for several moments near the pavement edge, as though the sudden appearance of Hydra Singh had unnerved him. It occurred to him dimly that his movements had been shadowed since the moment his schooner entered the harbor. Howe had been followed, no doubt, by some of Hydra's servants, who had witnessed the attack on the mate by the larrikin gang, together with the ape's flight to the roof of the lock-up. Someone had acquainted the watchful Hindu, who was hourly expecting the arrival of the little black ape from India; and Hayes felt certain that the police had refused to deliver the animal to Hydra or his companion.

Entering the lock-up suddenly, the buccaneer almost collided with a young Irish policeman hurrying down the passage. A swift apology from Hayes followed, but the officer of the law glared a trifle indignantly at the big seafaring man who rolled like a ship in a gale.

"Ye seem in a hurry to thread on people's toes," he said gruffly. "Maybe yez mistook this place for a fighting saloon."

"I mistook it for a garden where civil policemen grow," laughed the buccaneer good-humouredly.

" 'Tis a garden iv thieves ye've walked into, me man. Phwat's your business, may I ask?"

"The monkey you've got locked up, and the two Hindu gentlemen who walked out of here a minute ago."

"Hindu hooligans! 'Tis a month's hard labour one iv them deserves for callin' me names an' tearin' me uniform awhile ago."

"Oh!" Hayes pondered briefly, while a thought flashed through his mind that left him cold and ill at ease. Then his glance fell upon the hot-tempered young policeman. "Did he tear your uniform because you wouldn't hand over the monkey after it had been driven off the roof," he asked.

"There was no question av apes or monkeys between me an' the coolie blackguard whin he struck me outside here. I hov witnesses to prove ut. Meself an' Callaghan arrested him afther a desprit sstruggle. But there was no question av monkeys, sorr. 'Twas for throwin' mud on me uniform an' callin' me names I arrested Hydra Singh."

"I'm a friend of Hydra Singh," interjected Hayes. "I saw him quit here a minute ago. He has been released on bail, I presume?"

"He was awhile ago."

A sergeant appeared from an office at the end of the stone passage, a grizzled old man with lynx eyes and a torpedo-shaped beard. He stood, pen in hand, regarding the buccaneer closely. "We have a black ape in custody," he said in a strangely even tone. "Do you claim it as your property?" he demanded shrewdly.

"I am merely the ape's guardian, with orders to deliver it to a certain gentleman in Sydney. My first officer was commissioned to bring it ashore. And I'm afraid he bungled the job," explained Hayes. "I thought it strange," he went on, "to see the ape's rightful owner walking out of the lock-up without taking the animal with him."

The sergeant looked puzzled and addressed himself in an undertone to the palpitating young constable. A few hurried questions and answers passed between them before the sergeant again turned to the buccaneer.

"The fact is," he began, glancing at Hayes under his thick grey brows, "we felt it necessary to keep the ape out of harm's way until its owner arrived, It gave us a lot of trouble and nearly caused a riot in the Chinese quarter of the town. It was brought in here by Constable Callaghan and a fireman. We were not provided with a cage, so," he paused and smiled as an afterthought, "we put it into our only available cell."

"Then I claim it," said Hayes brusquely. "Here's the letter of advice sent to me by Sedar Singh, of Udrapore. I will pay all damages in connection with the

ape's capture. It is only fair that I should deliver it to its rightful owner seeing that I've been well paid for doing go."

He handed Sedar Singh's letter to the bewildered sergeant, feeling certain now that nothing short of a miracle could keep the diamond ape from him. Glancing over the letter carefully, the sergeant nodded briefly to the red-faced young policeman.

The buccaneer could scarcely maintain his self-control as he stepped gingerly down the passage in the officer's wake. Halting at the cell door, the constable turned a grinning face to the buccaneer— his natural good humour appeared to be overcoming him by degrees. "The coolie mahn Hydra, was put in here along wid the little monkey," he ventured as the cell door swung open. 'There bein' small accommodation these times for blackguards and wife-beaters."

"Put Hydra Singh in here with the ape!" choked Hayes. "I guess you conduct things a bit off-hand in these parts."

"There are three white men in the other cell, an' we cud not put a black man in with him," was the retort. "'Tis the law iv the counthry all the same. An' there bein' only two cells in the lock-up we had small choice between the coolie an' the black ape, sorr."

The gas jet from the passage lit up the narrow cell, revealing two clean-scrubbed bunks on the left hand side of the doorway. Entering, the young constable indicated the silken-haired ape huddled in a far corner of the top bunk.

" 'Tis not meself that cares to handle such things," he said loudly. "The bite av a monkey is worse than poison."

Hayes, with the blood surging from his heart at the thought of the White Mogul diamond, reached for the huddled figure of the ape. Raising it, he peered into the silent face and dropped it with a snarl of disgust.

"The blamed Hindu strangled it, and took out the diamond eye!" he shouted to Jensen in the passage. "What a holy fraud!"

"Ye'll take the dead monkey from here anyway," insisted the young policeman. "An' what d'yez mane by doimond eyes an' the loike?" he demanded.

Hayes did not wait to argue the point; dashing from the lock-up, with Jensen at his heels, he hurried down the crowded street in the direction of the wharf.

One thought remained clear in his mind. Hydra Singh had deliberately brought about his own arrest in the frantic hope of being able to see or handle even for a moment the elusive diamond ape. His colour and nationality had caused him to be placed, for a while, in the one cell available for Chinamen,

Hindus, and other aliens. Within twenty minutes of his arrest a wealthy compatriot had bailed him out, thus eluding Hayes by a matter of a few seconds.

At the wharf Hayes nodded a sullen goodnight to Jensen. "I've still got Sedar's draft for two hundred pounds," he said gloomily. "I ought to be satisfied perhaps."

"We're no match for people who can get into a lock-up and bring away a two hundred thousand dollar diamond!" cried Jensen savagely. "There was too much electricity about Hydra's feet. And there's no two hundred pound draft to soften my feelings. Good-night, Hayes, and remember me next time you are looking along the barrel of your rifle at a coloured man."

Few people would have associated the dead black ape lying in the lock-up at Dawes Point, with the White Mogul diamond stolen from a Hindoo shrine on the Ganges.

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## 26: The Pudding on the Reef

*Sydney Mail, 27 Dec 1922*

BILL HARKISS was part-owner of the schooner *Doris* before she started on a career of mine sweeping in the North Sea. The business was not a healthy one for Bill or the *Doris*. One cold morning in February a jazz-painted cylinder of iron that looked like a chunk of ice floated under the *Doris*'s keel and lifted Bill as far south as the Naval Hospital at Haslar. During moments of consciousness the doctor advised him not to talk about the war or the Kaiser. This young doctor, being afflicted with a sense of humour and a genuine desire for his patient's welfare, told us that Bill might indulge in cheerful conversation on subjects connected with pigs, farming, or turtles. Pig and turtle talk, the doctor inferred, were the most restful topics which the human mind could absorb.

From a civilian point of view Bill was the most wildly ignorant man that ever gripped a mine by the horns. But he knew more about the sea and the islands under the Line than he knew about pigs or haylofts.

The house surgeon and matron at Haslar had only one grievance against him, and this lay in Bill's violent fits of rage whenever he was asked to eat plum pudding.

'I'll eat cheese,' Bill would say, 'that'll climb trees an' hide from its pursuer. But I'll go back and ride another mine afore I touches plum duff. Not me!'

When told by an angry nurse one day that, plum pudding was the food of kings, Bill sat up in his bed and asked for a cigarette. The eyes of the ward were on Bill as he smoked; bandaged heads craned forward to catch each syllable from his lips. And this was his story:

I CAME pretty near makin' my fortune out of plum duff once, nurse. If you took the map, an' looked due north of the Queensland coast you'd see a smudge of islands called the Monday Group. On Thursday Island you get pearls an' them derved turtles the doctor wants me to yarn about. Wednesday Island is full of cockroaches an' rum. Well, about two years afore the war the white people of these islands went without Christmas pudding, because no one had shipped enough flour or raisins for that time of the year.

I had a little schooner, the *Vixen*, lyin' in ballast at Sydney. My first mate was Jim Baxter, an' my second was a big loafin' chap named Mudden. There was nothin' special about Mudden except his appetite, an' when he was properly started he'd beat the rat boy at puttin' the stuff away. His blamed appetite was the only thing he ever owned. The struggle in keep his eatin' a hole in the pantry was hard on me and Jim.



We owed about two thousand dollars for stores an' canvas to old McClusky, the chandler. So he threatened to put a sheriff aboard the *Vixen* if we didn't reduce our account by Christmas.

'They'll be wantin' plum puddin's up Monday Island way,' he says to us one mornin' in November. 'Ye remember how they starved for dough up there last Christmas?'

Jim Baxter looked hard at me.

'That's so, Mr. McClusky,' he says after a while. 'If we could fill up our holds with ready-made puddin's we could trade them through the islands for money or pearls.'

McClusky thought it was a fine idea, and as he had a mortgage on the *Vixen* he wanted to see us earnin' money instead of idlin' alongside the pier eatin' into the insurance money. So McClusky retired to think it over.

Next mornin' a van drove down the pier an' pulled up alongside our, gangway. Before Jim or me guessed what would happen the fellers in the van started to unload hundreds of tins of ready-made plum puddin's in three sizes. There was the eight-pound father plum puddin's, price two dollars fifty, an' the four-pound mother plum duffs at one twenty-five, an' the little baby duffs at fifty cents a tin. All done up in red labels, with Father Christmas smilin' through his whiskers on every label. The van spread the tins alongside, while we worked like niggers stowin' 'em under the hatches.

Next day we cast off with a late tide an' stood away for the north, with a steady breeze stiffenin' our sails. The steady breeze soon threatened to blow the sticks out of us before we sighted the Queensland coast. It was early on the eighteenth that we ran into an old-man cyclone. It struck us from the land side an' raged, for a whole week, until the cargo began to jazz in the forehold like a Chinese birthday party.

All night the father an' mother puddin's kept up the harmony, while the little baby tins seemed to be 'avin' the time of their lives, ispecially when the old *Vixen*, dipped her nose thirty feet under an' almost stood en her head in the sheer joy of life, as the comic papers say.

The situation on the twenty-fifth became worse, an' Jim said we might as well prepare for drownin', as there was no chanst of gettin' away in a taxi at that hour of the night.

The only thing I remembered about the break-up was the awful clout we got from a sea that lifted us on to a submerged reef an' left us there split in halves, with the masts knocked clean out of us.

I kept afloat somehow until I found myself grabbin' some tufts of spear grass that grew down the sides of a low sand-covered reef. I looked up at some

scrubby trees above an' saw Jim Baxter an' Mudden emptyin' the salt water out of their jacket pockets.

'Beat ye by thirty seconds, cap'n,' Jim calls out to me. 'An' that's sayin' nothin' about the tiger shark that wanted to walk the rest of the way home with us.'

'Don't believe him, skipper,' says Mudden. 'The fishes round here wouldn't eat Jim, not if you b'iled him in honey. Let's get on with the wreck.'

We waited till the sun came out to dry our clothes an' look round. We had been washed on to a bare shelf of rock that had nothin' on it but a few spindly trees. There was a big hollow in the middle, full of fresh water from the monsoon rains.

The schooner lay on her side about a quarter of a mile from our reef. She was half-covered in the out going tide, an' it seemed to me an' Jim as if she ripped her keel off on the shoal. A crowd of hungry birds had settled on her rails, but as far as the eye could reach there wasn't a sign of anything between us an' Judgment Day.

We were castaways on a barren reef two hundred miles from the Australian coast, and as far as I could make out another two hundred from the next whisky an' soda.

All of a sudden Mudden started to develop his five barrel appetite, an' the only sign of grub on that blessed reef was a small pink periwinkle stuck to the side of the rock. We had some loaded dice with us, an' I told Mudden we might throw for the periwinkle. But on reflection I ordered him to eat it an' say no more about it. Instead of ixpressin' his gratitood he threw him self into the water an' started swim min' to the wreck. Jim an' me sat down an' waited hopefully.

'He's after that pig's fry we left hangin' in the galley, sir,' the mate laughed. 'Or them two sweetbreads an' sausages we was to have 'ad for breakfast.'

'I hope he'll find 'em,' Jim,' I said. 'But I'll wager my wet plug o' baccy against your nickel watch that them seafowl have cleaned out the pantry.'

Jim said it was no time for gamblin'. He referred to me as a hardened sinner for tryin' to bring the workin's of fate into disrepute. At the same lime he ixpressed a hope that there might be just one little cask of rum left in the storeroom.

Mudden reached the wreck. We saw him climb through the rent in the schooner's side an' disappeai in the direction of the pantry. It must have been half an hour afore he came scramblin' out with a dozen tins of puddin' fastened round his neck.

He almost fell into the water but bein' a good swimmer he battled hard an' reached the reef, where we stood ready to help him out with the puddin' tins hangin' round his chest like derved gasometers.

'Nothin' else but puddin's Dave?' Baxter asked him with a starved look in his eye. 'Nothin' else in all the pantry?'

Dave shook the water out of his eyes an' ears while we broke the cord that held the tins together. He looked at Baxter severely.

'Yer couldn't ixpect me to swim ashore with a bunch of pig's fry round me neck; he said. 'Even if the fry hadn't been swallered by them derved birds, over there.'

We sat down an' cut open with a clasp knife a big father tin of puddin', price two-fifty.

'Let me help you, Dave,' I says, choppin' out a piece of puddin' about the size of his foot. 'An' may you have a hearty Christmas when it comes.'

Dave looked at the piece of hard puddin' for about ten seconds, an' then bit it for all he was worth.

'I'd have brought the sausages if they'd been there,' he says in his downhearted way. 'But just as I climbed into the galley a big bird with feathers down his legs flew out with the sausages round his neck. I hope,' he says, chewin' the puddin' fifty to the minute, 'the sausages didn't choke the beggar. I'm a Christian in that respect. I don't wish harm to man or bird.'

'I won't ask the reason why Dave didn't bring the rum, Cap'n,' the male chipped in. 'It might savour of ingratitood.'

'It would,' Dave growled, with both hands well down in the puddin' tin. 'It would saver of ingratitood to ask me to swim half a mile with a small barrel of licker under my chin. I ain't a blamed Hercules, Mr. Baxter, even if I do relish my food.'

ANYHOW (went on Bill), everybody relished the puddin', an' everybody asked for more; so we broke open one of the four-pound mother tins, price one twenty-five. Things might have been worse, we argued. Ships' crews had been known to die of hunger on these reefs, an' we felt mighty pleased when Dave told us that there was hundreds of more tins in the schooner's hold, ready to be lifted out. All the flour an' meat was in the sunken end of the *Vixen*, and as that couldn't be helped we were prepared to sit tight on the reef an' wait for a passing sail. So we opened a third tin of puddin' an' prepared to let the time pass pleasantly. All we wanted was a mouth organ and a pack of cards, an' we'd have been as happy as niggers at a picture show.

The day grew hot as we fossicked round the reef in the hope that the bird what had stolen the sausages had left a few eggs behind. Nothin' doing. We might as well have looked for a blue rhinoceros.

Finished the rest of the puddin' by night. Dave said he'd swim back to the wreck followin mornin' an' get some more. We slept under a shelf of rock, wih Dave moanin' in his sleep about raisins and dough an' the bird what blew off with the pig's fry. Jim woke him up an', asked him kindly to talk about somethin' else. Dave said he'd try, but only succeeded in ravin' out more pomes on puddin'. A dismal night.

Poor Dave looked worried an' blown up under the eyes when he waded into the water for another go at the wreck.

'There's a keg o' salt beef in the after hold, Dave,' Baxter yelled after him. 'Do yer best, me lad!'

'An' a five-ton iron safe in the storeroom, Jim,' Dave hollered back. 'Don't be stoopid, man!'

He reached the schooner in good time an' disappeared inside lhe break amidships. To our surprise he appeared again pushin' the schooner's dinghy through the openin' in the bows. It had evidently got jammed between the wreckage, but Dave managed to find an oar an' load her up with tins of puddin', on top of which was a fryin'-pan from the galley, some salt in a jar, some mustard, an' three botles of vinegar.

Baxter's face was a study when the boat arrived.

'What became of the beef an' pork, Dave, an' the bananas, an' the tinned fish we stored in the pantry?' he asked.

Dave tumbled out of the dinghy and grabbed the pair of dry trousers I held out to him.

'There ain't no bananas, an' there ain't no tin or iron fish, Mr. Baxter. Being light weights they got blown or washed away. The on'y stuff left is puddin',' he says, pointin' fiercely to the pile of tins in the boat. 'It was so derved heavy the cyclone couldn't shift it. We've gotter eat it or die— tons an' tons of puddin'.'

Dave Baxter looked hurt.

'If yer wasn't a pessimist, Dave, you'd have been President of a Pork Pie Republic. You'd like to be cast away on a desert rock with no end of luxuries at hand, such as lobster maisonettes an' cow's feet jelly. There's nothin' wrong with plum duff if yer eat it in moderation. It's the finest diet in the world.'

I'm not sayin' it isn't provided you've enough turkey an' roast beef to help it down. But, bein' castaways with on'y a fryin'-pan an' some vinegar an' salt, we can on'y do our best from keepin' the puddin' from eatin' us.

We fried it an' we boiled it. On Thursdays we stewed it in vinegar, an' on Saturdays an' Sundays we ate it with salt— cold. Plum puddin', as Dave said, is

the finest diet in the world, especially when you're fresh from school or bein' livin' in one of those boardin' houses where it's a crime to have more than three raisins to every yard of dough. Yes, nurse, I uster like plum puddin' onct, but not on a desert rock. In the first week of our maroonin' we ate half a boat-load of it. After meals Dave uster stagger about the sea front wishin' he was a bird, so's he could fly away to a place where they lived on tripe an' onions. Sometimes we'd make up our minds not to eat any more puddin', an' we'd go for a whole day without tastin' any thin' except a few pink shellfish we picked up on the rocks. Next day, feelin' hungry as wolves, we'd go back to the plum, plum, plum.

AFTER a month of it I got to feel that we were robbin' the whole world of Christmas puddin'. There were birds flyin' about the reef, but they were like the fowls mother uster keep. They never left a single egg about. They were so quick you couldn't kill 'em with a stick or stone Blamed if I'll ever believe the yarns you read about men bein' cast away on islands growin' fat on turtles and birds' eggs. It's my firm belief that if Robinson Crusoe had been wrecked good an' hard like us he'd have been killed for tellin' stories by the pore old goat what uster bake his bread. I believe Robinson would have started to build a railway to carry his chicken food home if old man Friday hadn't belonged to a labour union. Why, Dave an' me was fools enough to try an' imitate Robinson. We picked some raisins outter the dough an' planted 'em in some soil, an' there wasn't so much as a plum leaf grew outter the spot.

I'm tellin' the truth, nurse, not a goat an' fish yarn. An' this tinned plum diet supplied us with more nightmares than would kill a real horse. An' speakin' of nightmares we had a competition as to which of us could dream the prize nightmare. Mudden won easily. One night, after a extra big supper, tin-ditto, Mudden dreamed he was locked in a cage with five lions an' thirty full-grown puddin's. In this nightmare Mudden said the lions usier eat him an' the thirty nuddin's. Immediately after, the puddin's uster come to life again an' eat the lions. Mudden said he had to eat a lion a minute. An' so the nightmare continued, lions eatin' puddin's and Dave eatin' both. Mudden uster wake up with a blown-up expression under the eyes, sayin' he didn't feel disposed for breakfast. He was one of those fellows that couldn't stand lions in his sleep, especially, when they got mixed up with the dough an' raisins an' a blame time-limit.

One mornin', after a terrible storm overnight, a three-masted schooner flyin' the American flag hove in sight, an' seein' our signals bore down an' sent off a boat to the reef.

The three of us yelled for joy, cuttin' capers on the rocks like Fijians in a movin' picture. Well, nurse, up comes the boat, an' out jumps an officer, in clear white spick-an'-span clothes.

'Hullo!' he calls out cheerfully, an' his eyes got busy wahderin' over our fireplace. 'You guys seem to ixpress the simple life from every angle. Is there much furniture an' effects to move, gentlemen?' he says in a matter-of-fact way. 'I'm sorry we can't shift the tin mine you've discovered,' he told me, as he pointed to the mountain of puddin' cans on the hearth.

We all climbed into the boat an' wished off for the schooner, while the American officer eyes us an' all that was left of the old *Vixen*, with her stern stickin' out of the water an' the seafowl climbin' all over the flooded hatchways. '

'We ran short of food,' the American told us, with his eye on Mudden. 'You see,' he says thoughtfully, 'we left 'Frisco with a big consignment of Christmas puddin's for the islands hereabouts some six weeks ago. We'd heard that the whole of the Archipelago was yellin' for puddin's last Christmas; so we loaded up good an' plenty, an' I reckon we're here just in time to stop a famine. You'll agree with me, gentlemen, that it's a wicked thing for people to be deprived of puddin' at this time of the year.'

Mudden looked at me an' I looked at the sky. I started to wonder whether this joyful nightmare belonged to me or Dave.

'An' we ran out of provisions,' the American says in his nice way, 'havin' been blown two thousand miles out of our course. We must be thankful, I suppose, for small mercies in the way of something to eat, although I agree with Captain Anderson that it is a most disagreeable thing to have to broach the cargo to feed the crew.'

'The cargo?' says Mudden, turnin' white at the gills.

'The American looked him hard in the face.

'Our only cargo is Christmas puddin's. I think I mentioned the fact away back on the reef.'

Dave fanned himself with the end of his neckcloth. Dave was too denied polite to have a fit, but I knew that the poor feller was feelin' like one of the lions after he'd swallered the fifth puddin' in the nightmare.

'I'm really sorry you're not feelin' well,' the American says to Mudden. 'Anyhow, here we are,' an' he steers the boat right under the big schooner's gangway. 'I trust you'll all be feelin' better after you've tasted some of our real delicious Christmas puddin'. Come aboard, gentlemen; come aboard.'

The midday meal was bein' got ready. Without wastin' precious moments on ceremony the officer led us downstairs to a cabin, where a table had been laid for four.

'The best service a Christian gentleman can render three castaways is to give them nourishin' food an' comforts,' says the officer, takin' his seal at the head of the table an' wavin' us to our chairs. 'You know, my pore fellers,' he went on, slow an' solemn, 'what day it is?'

I said we'd lost count, an' when he told us it was Christmas Day we fell like pipin' our eyes an' holdin' each other's hands.

Then all of a sudden a steward came in with a big silver tray; on it was four small dishes of curried chicken an' rice, follered by a lavish helpin' of roast duck air turkey.

You see, nurse, that officer had sized up our situation after one look at the wreck an' another at the unholy litter of puddin' tins scattered over the reef. So he reckoned he'd give us a bit of a surprise. He sat back in his chair an' smiled quite homely like, helpin' us one after another to sherry an' port.

We all put our ears back when the steward came in at the finish carryin' the biggest plum puddin' I'd ever set eyes on. It was sprigged with real holly an' covered with almonds an' brandy sauce. The officer's eyes just twinkled as he looked us square in the face.

'Which of you gentlemen will honour the day?' he says, pointin' to the puddin'. 'We have the best cook west of the Golden Gate. Now, please let me help you,' he says, takin' up a silver knife an' spoon.

Mudden closed his eyes as if he was dreamin' about lions.

'You'll excuse me, sir,' he bleated; 'I'll fight a bit of cheese instead.'

'An' you, sir?' the officer says, lookin' hard at me. '

'Just a trifle,' I answered, feelin' that it would be scurvy to refuse. '

'An' you, sir?' the officer says, lookin' quite sudden.

'As much as you like, sir,' Jim says promptly. 'Mother always uster say plum puddin' was the right stuff to give a sailor man.'

Well, he got a piece about the size of a baby's hat, an' Jim ate it to the last raisin.

So that was the end of our trip, nurse. If ever I'm wrecked again it will be with a cargo of curried chicken an' ham, with plenty of bully beef in the forehold.

'The moral of the story, nurse, is that there ain't nothin' wrong with sage custard until you're axed to live with it. Then a feller starts wishin' he'd been married to some other kind of puddin'... D'ye see, nurse?'

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**27: Three Black Pearls**  
*Sydney Mail* 5 Sep 1923

ALL the morning little Wong Chat had been watching a pearl thief at work. From the tiny window of the schooner's galley he had observed the Malay diver's movements in and out of the water. The schooner rolled in the wash from the Kee Wi Bank, where the forty-foot tide-drop often turned the narrow channels into hell gates of galloping brine. In the far south sprawled the Great Barrier Reef, a sinuous snake-length of islands that festooned the glittering sea wastes for more than a thousand miles.

Marul, the Malay skin diver, had come out of the water feeling 'seek.' Feeling 'seek' in a pearling schooner implies the need of a rest and stimulants. With leisure to go ashore and see a white doctor, maybe.

Marul was a giant in his class, a pocket bull weighing nearly two hundred pounds in his sun tan, with the appetite of a circus elephant. In eight days he had collected five bags of shell. The other two boys from Manila had scraped together four bags between them. Marul was 'seek' and had gone to his hunk below, leaving the two Manilamen at work and little Wong Chat combing his wits in the galley.

Little Wong Chat was steward, cook, and general providore of the twenty-ton pearling schooner *Martha*. The owner, Norry Dane, had gone ashore earlier in the morning to meet his buyers at Thursday Island, and to settle some accounts due for stores and gear.

Norry Dane had discovered the Kee Wi Bank after an eight weeks' survey of the little-known cluster of atolls that lie due north of the Sunday Group. Hitherto the shellers from Thursday Island and Broome had given the Kee Wi Bank plenty of surf room. The tide rip had scared them; the immature spat lying on the Bank hardly seemed worth the risk. But Norry in his twenty-fifth year had faced a bread line in New York, and it held more terrors for him than the slogging pinchgut waters of the Bank. He had come upon a shell-hatchery that promised big results.

Almost at once he discovered that he was exploiting virgin territory. The floor of the Bank was strewn with black lip and golden-edge shell. The markets of the world were shouting for both. It meant work and independence.

Seven hundred miles west, in the Lalanga Group, was Nina Chard. She had gone out with the mission staff a year before. Lalanga wanted teachers and nurses for the plague-ridden archipelago, and Miss Chard had promised that Norry would never be out of her thoughts during the two years' hard work she had planned for herself.



IN the meanwhile little Wong Chat was keeping an eye on the companion stairs that led to Marul's sleeping quarters. The sudden dipping of the sun into the flaring skyline brought the two Manilamen from their work, dripping and sore from contact with reef-fangs and coral spikes that strewed the Banks. Casting their baskets on the shell-heaps stacked abaft the swinging boom-sail, they passed the Chinaman in the galley and descended the companionway.

'Hi yah!' they called to the sulking Malay. 'You bin like long vest. Where's boss?'

Marul, coiled in the top bunk, stared at the two small divers like a stalked tiger.

'Boss gone ashore to pay debts,' he informed them. 'Me long way fed up with that Chink man upstairs. He watchum me alla day. Think um me catchee pearl. My word, I catchee his dam neck one time!'

Norry returned in the launch an hour later. A glance at the Chinaman peering from the lamplit galley touched his nerves like a blade.

'Hullo, Wong' he greeted thoughtfully. 'If you can fish up a nice beefsteak, I'll swim round the ship for it after I get rid of those glad rags,' he intimated, with a swift glance along the deck.

He strode the narrow length of the rolling vessel, with the little Chinaman wagging doglike in his shadow.

'That feller Marul, sah, him play about allee day on um Bank. He hide um shell one long time. Him slick plenty wool in his ears. Me savvy him takee pearl below. Bymby he wanted go ashore to see a doctah. Yah. him big wouser thief!'

Norry Dane paused to stare at the Chinaman's passion-lit face. During the whole cruise he had found the Celestial honest in all things. And there was no mistaking his earnestness of manner. Dane's anger blew white and red. Privation in the past had keened his wits. Everything had been staked on this pearling venture. He had borrowed from his friends and mortgaged his soul to fit out the *Martha*. His last dollar was in the piece of rope that lay coiled at his feet. And... here was a big hidebound Malay he had discovered lying senseless outside an opium joint in Macassar prepared to filch and get away with the first heaven-sent bit of profit the sea had shown them!

Norry had come aboard tired and heat-fretted after his day ashore aiming squabbling agents and shell profiteers. He hated trouble, and Marul the sullen was as full of it as a cask of gelignite.

'Him go away in the dark,' Wong predicted. 'How you goin' to stop him?'

Norry Dane was too wise to answer the question. Upon the integrity of the two Manilamen he could not depend. He could not even honestly accuse the

Malay of theft. And if it came to a fight little Wong could not defend the wing of roast chicken in his pantry.

He stepped forward and placed his right hand on the traplike door of the companion stairs.

'All hands on deck!' he shouted. 'Lively, now; and one at a time, please.' Dane waited with a face that was white, and tense.

There was no reply, except a furious shuffling of bare feet in the close-walled fo'c'sle below. The soft gutturals of the Malay were audible as the purring of a tiger. Not a foot moved towards the stairs.

Dane measured the risk as he stepped below to investigate. The door at the foot of the stairs swung back at his touch. Inside the fo'c'sle it was almost dark. A smoky oil-lamp swung from an overhead beam, hi the top bunk Marul reclined, naked to his loincloth, his reef-scarred arms flung back under his head. The two Manilamen were seated at a slide-up table shuffling a pack of cards. They did not stir as Dane entered.

Marul looked down at the white man, his coppery skin glowing strangely in the half-light. The long, sheathed muscles of his great arms bulged like tree roots. Some betel spray showed on his thick lips.

'I gave an order just now,' Dane flung out. 'We're going to see it through the jazz line or eat it!

Marul leaned from the bunk, his eyes emitting the sulphur glow that is seen in the king snakes of the Malayan peninsula.

'Tuan, I rest. I am seek. I get stung one time, yessiday, under de Bank... De big stingray reach for me.'

'Get up,' Dane ordered quietly. 'This is no place for a sick man. Lie in my cabin if you like. The air's sweeter. I'll bunk on deck under the awning. Let's see the sling.'

The big Malay closed his eyes after the manner of a dozing tiger. The card-players laughed softly. There followed a silence that sometimes precedes a murder act. For the first time in his life Norry Dane slid an automatic into line with a man's face. He was morn than angry now. Marul was not sick. He did not want to go on deck and be kept there while the fo'c'sle was searched.

'Up those stairs, Marul! Keep your hands up while you run!'

The Malay diver sat up yawning in his bunk, then very softly got out. His huge hulk filled the fo'c'sle. Dane noted the fact that his left hand was lightly clenched.

'Before you go on deck, Marul, I'd like to see you open your hands. I'm curious.'

The Malay stood erect, lips parted in a malicious grin that expressed nothing. Then his body seemed to catapult past the white man, like a bull

bursting from a pen. He gained the stairs and was up with a leap. A second later the trapdoor at the top closed with a bang. Dane heard the outside bolt shoot into the socket.

The two card-players rose quickly and faced the slow-breathing Norry. The saffron hue of their cheeks had changed to a sickly pallor.

'That feller shut us in, sah! He got um three black pearl. He promise share to us. Now he'll sink this ole schooner on the Bank!'

Norry gritted at the trap into which he had fallen. Marul was now in command of the vessel. He could fire it or run them on to the shoals, where the tide-race would pound them to matchwood!

And... those three black gems!

Dane ascended the dark companion, paused at the top to feel for the square trapdoor. Then he fired where the bolt and socket were fitted.

The tropic starlight showed through the splintered framework. He made a sign to the Manilamen below.

'Hand up that stool by the bunk, and watch out that Marul isn't waiting with another when I break through.'

In delirious, panic-driven haste one of the Manilamen passed up the heavy oak stool to the waiting Norry. A couple of heavy thrust split the panel in the trap door. Dane tore away the shattered woodwork, then with his automatic held low he charged through the opening and gained the deck.

A CURIOUS situation developed before Dane's bewildered eyes. Marul was standing near the galley door, his hands held up. On the port side of the schooner the blazing cabin lights of a police cutter were bounding towards them.

Marul's voice, soft and pliant as usual, brought the young pearling master to a sense of his position.

'Police boat come alongside, sah. Me see him long way off. You take pearls, sah. No good let them see 'em. You gimme share as promised long while back. Savvy?'

The big Malay dropped three stones into Dane's palm as the police cutter swung alongside, her binnacle lights revealing four armed officers of Territorian constabulary standing in the forepart. Their hooks gripped the *Martha* in three places. The voice of the chief officer boomed unpleasantly on Dane's ears.

'Ahoy, there, Mr. Dane! We're coming aboard to inspect.'

'Inspect what?' Norry flung back wrathfully. 'I've my license.'

'You've got no license to fish in these waters,' the officer sent back.

'They're closed and sealed, sir! We're entitled to treat you as a poacher. You'll

come with us to Thursday Island and hear more about it from the commissioners. We'll give you a tow. Stand by, please! '

The intimation was final and beyond argument. If the Torres Straits Pearling Commissioners had declared the Kee Wi Bank closed, his operations must cease. Without ado he helped to make fast the towline cast over by one of the police. In less than a minute the schooner was ploughing and rolling in the wake of the fast-travelling cutter. Dane turned to the Malay standing beside him and spoke under his breath.

'You did the right thing, Marul. Let's forget the misunderstanding below. These fellows may give me trouble. They're probably shepherding the bank for some of their friends and pals. Until we surveyed and worked the place it was a roosting-ground for sea-hawks and sky-fowl. Same old story!'

By the light of his cabin lamp Dane was able to examine the three black pearls. Nestling on the white tablecloth they glowed darkly and iridescent as diamonds. Never before had he viewed true black gems at close quarters. Like blood-drops they showed in the lamp flare. Of their value he could only hazard a guess. Flawless in colour and shape, he readily conceived a six-figure offer being eagerly made for them in Amsterdam or New York.

Taking a notebook from his pocket, he tore out a leaf and wrote hurriedly in pencil: —

*'Dear Nina, — I am in trouble here over my pearling rights. The case may drag on or peter out in a few hours. In a small cardboard box I enclose three black pearls from the Kee Wi Bank. With the exception of half a ton of ordinary shell they represent all we possess in this life, as our schooner and outfit may be confiscated. Three divers and a Chinese cook share profits with us. NORRY.'*

Outside the cabin Dane addressed Marul and the others in an undertone. He told them what he was doing with the gems, and how unsafe it would be to hold them in view of the law's unfair attitude towards them. Nina Chard, at Lalanga Island, would return them when the present police proceedings had ended. Marul and the Manilamen agreed that the black pearls would be safer in the keeping of a trusty friend than in the possession of the police. The question was how to post the cardboard box if the police arrested them all at the landing stage.

The pigtail of little Wong Chat came suddenly into the discussion.

'I postum lille box, sah. I sign on to cook, not to catchee oyster. Police no bringee charge against cook for trespass. My brother Sam he keep lille shop at Thursday Island. Sam helpee me any time. You give um me pearl, sah; I give urn you my word.'

Dane threw an appraising glance at the little Chinaman. Up to date the white and brown men of his acquaintance had played their own game, with streaks of dishonesty colouring every transaction. At every pinch it was Wong Chat who survived the acid test.

'We're going to trust you, Wong,' he said with a smile. 'But if the police smell out black pearls they'll add other lines to that of poaching, and we'll all get pitched into a filthy gaol.'

A SMALL CROWD awaited the arrival of the police boat and schooner at Thursday Island. The news had gone abroad that Dane and his crew were raising immature shell from Government preserves.

Norry breasted his way through the horde of Asiatic trepang fishers and schooner captains, escorted by two officers of the law. Marul and the Manilamen followed, while a guard was placed on board the *Martha* pending a decision of the Fisheries Commission.

The brown horde of watchers seemed to engulf Wong Chat the moment the schooner touched the jetty. Like an oil drop he floated through and out of the fish-smelling, rum-drinking throng. In face and dress he resembled a score of other Chinese boys hurrying along the Parade. Scarcely a head was turned in his direction as he entered the shop of Sam Chat that overlooked the straits.

Sam Chat sold Chinese bric-a-brac, baroque gems, glassware, and occasionally a little opium to the nerve-racked shellers in from the distant channels and bays. He peered swiftly at little Wong in the doorway. He a faint grin of recognition creased his lemon-hued face.

'Son of my father!' he greeted. 'What has happen to the *yuen-lai*, Dane?'

'The police, brother of my heart. I have been followed here. Take these for a little while and put them among the glass beads in the window.'

He slid Dane's note and the three black pearls into his brother's hand almost at the moment a white-coated figure dashed into the shop and laid an angry fist on his shoulder.

'You skipped pretty lively from Dane's schooner, my son. I guess you'd better come back with me,' he intimated with decision.

Wong Chat shrugged and nodded to his brother behind the counter.

'Put pearls in small box,' he said in soft Cantonese. 'Address them to Nina Chard, Lalanga Island. My word has been given to the *yuen-lai*. My honour.'

Sam Chat lit a cigarette and palmed the three black pearls into a dish containing a hundred pink and white baroque stones.

'Your honour, son of my father, is mine.'

'Stow the kybosh,' the detective interjected, his eyes boring through and over Sam's small stock of oddments. With bent brows he look up the dish of

baroque stones, his expert fingers sifting and grading with the spirit of a bargain hunter until the three black gems lay under his thumb.

'How much for these?' he inquired easily.

'Two-dollar fifty,' Sam told him with scarcely a muscle twitching. 'Two dollar to you,' he retracted with Oriental sweetness of manner.

Mick Sheldon, pearl expert and thief-herder, returned the dish to the counter with a frown.

'Your shop is full of German punk, Sam,' he declared. 'Punk pearls and punk beads. There's nothing to eat in your stall.'

He turned with a savage gesture to Wong. 'Lift your feet, kid. There's a cool gaol slicking out of the sand heap over the way. Try a stroll.'

The eyes of the two Chinamen met for one fleeting instant: the next saw little Wong trudging beside the red-necked sleuth in the direction of the Police Commissioner's desk.

ON a sultry afternoon in September a small cardboard box containing three black pearls was delivered, per postal schooner, to Nina Chard at Lalanga Island. The sight of the rare, dark gems almost frightened her. More than Norry she realised their value and also the danger of keeping them in her unprotected bungalow. Lalanga was the hunting-ground of pilfering coolies and spying native women. Within a year of her coming she had lost nearly every article of jewellery she possessed. The old padre at the Mission House had warned her against the light-fingered callers who ransacked the bungalow during her absence at the little school in the village.

The padre was also a sufferer. Eight months before native boys from the Nukarama Islands had entered the church and stolen the communion plate. His two dogs were his only guards, White Witch and Bruno. White Witch, a heavy-shouldered, soft-eyed animal, carried a strain of the bloodhound. Bruno pulled the scales at one hundred pounds, and was related to a prize-winning boarhound up north. Since their coming the thefts had ceased, for while the plantation kanaka will club and rob a priest or sleeping trader he jibs at entering a palisade to meet the silent fangs of the *papalagi's* hounds. Instinctively Nina felt that the gems would be safer in the padre's keeping. He accepted the trust reluctantly, telling her to keep the matter secret.

A WEEK later a rat-ridden copra schooner from Nukahiva brought an influenza patient to the island. Three days after his arrival Lalanga was in the throes of the scourge. The disease swept in from beach to mountain top with the celerity of a cyclone.

Nina closed the schoolhouse and placed her tiny charges in quarantine. Medical service there was none, except the few crude remedies contained in the padre's oak chest. The ascetic padre, whose daily diet consisted of cooked bananas and goats' milk, succumbed; at the first onslaught of the schooner-borne plague.

His death came like a thunderstroke to Nina, battling alone with her own batch of patients. His one remaining servant, Hona, broke the news.

'He die very quiet, Missey Chard. Very tired ole man. Wit' his las' breath he give me a message. It is in dis letter, Missey.'

With eyes that scarcely saw the last scrawled message of the old priest she dimly made out its heart-flung meaning: —

*'Dear Little Sister Among the Dying and the Helpless,  
I have not forgotten your trust. I would have sent for you if there had been time and a messenger at hand. Even a priest does not care to die alone. Yet... God's will be done! Almost at the last I put the three sea stones into a baby purse that belonged to Sister Teresa, fastened it to the collar of Red Witch. There was no other place of safety, Little One. Only with her life will she let it be taken. Pray for me!'*

Nina's blurred eyes sought Hona, the boy messenger. He was a nerve-shaken, scourge-gripped Line Islander. His loud coughing in the doorway seemed to shake the rafters of the bungalow. She measured him soul and eye as she thrust the padre's letter into her pocket. How much of the letter had he read and understood? she asked herself. She turned to him quietly.

'Hona, we must attend to the father's last wishes. Will you go back with me to the Mission House?'

Hona's quaking knees betrayed the result of the island epidemic. His dark eyes reflected the panic delirium begotten of sleepless nights.

'Hona die on the floor if he go back, Missey! Las night I slep out in the woods because I hear de debil-debil move in the padre's room. But... I can get one big feller from Sunda Island. He come wit copra ship tree days ago.'

'Who is he?'

Hona leaned his shaking limbs against the verandah. 'I link 'is name is Marul. He come here to get work in the banyan field. If I tell him be will come here to help, Missey.'

Nina drew a breath of relief. The thought of being left alone with the sick and the dead had stolen upon her like a nightmare.

'Find him, Hona,' she almost begged. 'Bring him here. Then you may rest in this place until you are well.'

MARUL was squatting on the deserted jetty, a couple of well-rolled cigarettes behind each ear. All the morning his roving eyes had followed Nina's movements in and around the bungalow. He stood up slowly when Hona limped near, coughing and gesticulating. The Malay's soft eyes were aglow with health; his coppery skin radiated like hammered metal in the brilliant sunlight. Nodding, he followed the padre's boy to the verandah of Nina's bungalow.

Her eyes widened at sight of the herculean Malay, the bull-neck, the elephantine torso. Never in her life had she gazed on so soft-footed a Goliath. He reminded her of a huge black squid she had once seen sliding over the floor of a lagoon. Like the squid, his flat, outspread hands seemed ready to touch and grip. Almost she guessed his calling— a blind groper on the sea banks, ready as the giant octopus to attack or retreat.

Marul grinned as Hona crawled away to the compound at the rear of the bungalow.

'You want me?' he said, and waited. Nina held herself with difficulty. The devil and the deep sea were her familiars. Between this softly odious Malay and herself depended the sick, the dying, and the unburied dead. She could not send him away: his strength was as precious as gold. Yet he loomed upon her like a monster driven in from the sea. But... there was the padre, and the children crying in the quarantine area.

A far-off baying in the woods told her that the two hounds were running loose, seeking water, no doubt, since Hona had not attended them for many hours.

He raised his head quickly at the sounds 'Big dogs belonga padre?' he challenged softly. 'Why for they runum lika dis?'

Nina blanched at so direct a question. What had the boy Hona told him?

'You know the padre is dead,' she answered quickly. 'Let us go in the Mission House and bury him quietly. I will see that you are well paid. Come along; never mind the dogs.'

He followed her down the pandanus skirted path, his bare feet crunching in the soft limestone, a tattered red sarong drawn lightly about his waist.

A terrible stillness enveloped the Mission House. Not a living thing moved about the plantations or compound. Above, in the sapphire vault, the sun launched its fierce rays over the dry hills and parched fields.

The sacred task which Nina had set herself was easier of accomplishment than she had imagined. Like most missionaries in the South Seas, the old padre had prepared his own funeral arrangements. The cedar coffin had always been in readiness. Within the little purao-sheltered cemetery were several newly-



dug graves. Into one of these Marul lowered the coffin with scarcely an effort, while Nina in a steady voice intoned a prayer. The earth fell in showers on the coffin under Marul's terrific spadework. He was in a hurry. The baying of the dogs seemed to unsettle him.

'They bin come here?' he questioned, with a curious side-glance in her direction.

Nina reflected swiftly. Unless Red Witch and Bruno had gone mad through lack of water she did not fear their coming. Often she had caressed them in the padre's presence, although Red Witch always proved more difficult to handle than the more tractable Bruno.

'Go to my bungalow,' she ordered fearlessly. 'You will be out of the dogs' way there. I shall stay here awhile; there is work for me to do.'

She was thinking of the three black gems in the purse attached to Red Witch's collar: she was thinking of Norry Dane toiling and fretting within the tide-scoured channels of the Kee Wi Banks.

Marul walked down the path, and then halted to look back at the house, at the white-faced girl standing beside the newly filled-in grave. Their glances met, and in the sharp impact, of their exploring eyes she realised that he knew everything. When she looked up again he had disappeared in the pandanus scrub.

THE quick tropic darkness blotted out the beach and hills. Then came a big white stage moon to mock the parched hills and rainless gullies. The fierce bugling of the hounds in the distance keened her senses, put sinew into her melting brain. She half ran into the desecrated Mission House and entered the kitchen. The small open window overlooked the guava plantation.

'Bruno! Bruno! Bruno!' She leaned from the open window and called across the moonlit stretch of stunted bushes. Then, taking a wooden bucket, she filled it with water from the house cistern. Raising the bucket to the window-sill, she listened for the mad rush of the famished hounds.

'Bruno! Bruno!' A hoarse yelping, followed by a scrambling of heavy bodies through, the pandanus scrub, was the instant reply. Neck-and-neck the two dogs raced across the clearing for the open window, the scent of the water beating into their parched throats.

The flopping ears and jowl of Bruno reached the bucket five yards in advance of Red Witch. Clawing the wall in its thirst agony, the big dog would have torn the bucket from her grasp. Dexterously she held the bucket so that Red Witch could drink near her hand. In the shift of an eye Nina saw the tiny baby purse dangling from the collar of the smaller hound!

'Good old doggie! Good old girl!' she whispered soothingly to the lapping head. With the point of a knife that stood ready to hand Nina nicked the strand of twine that held the purse to the collar.

'Good old Witchie!' The purse fell to the ground outside. She paused to pat both dogs gently; relieved of their fierce thirst, they fawned upon her hand. Opening the kitchen door, she allowed them to enter. In one of the cupboards she discovered some cold meat and biscuit left by one of the servants. Both dogs ate ravenously as she plied them with other scraps of food.

Leaving them for a few moments, she closed the kitchen door and stepped outside. A tall coral tree flung deep shadows around the open kitchen window. Beyond these shadows the dazzling moonlight almost blinded.

Stooping in the darkness of the window was Marul. Fear whitened her: but behind this fear was the blazing wrath of finding him there. He straightened under the scorn of her eyes.

'I guess you're the meanest worm that ever crawled into this garden,' she declared hotly. 'Out of it, and drop what you've got!'

An amused grin lightened his big face; his left hand was closed over the little purse.

'You pretty clever, Missey, wit dat water bucket just now. You come bit closer,' he added persuasively.

Nina drew back from his luminous eyes, the flat squid hands that seemed to reach for her body. He saw her terror and laughed; and again the squid-like hands moved in her direction, as they had often moved over the pearl banks and bays in search of gems. She waved him off with the frightened cry of a child beating away a bloated insect or fly. His swiftness of action was greater than hers. His long arms caught her in an octopus loop, his flat right palm closing over her mouth.

'Stop callin', Missey,' he warned. 'Stop—'

Something heavy and ungainly flopped out of the open kitchen window. Bruno, of the long stride, loped across the coral shadow, and in the bat of an eye had gripped the Malay below the knee.

Marul flung Nina aside, his great hands closing over the hound's neck.

'*Malepam!* Hell dog!' he choked, and sought to pulp i.ind batter the fighting mass of muscle that was attacking his tender knee. Bruno had fought boars in the Lalanga woods, and on a dozen occasions had settled domestic differences with in-straying headhunters from the north. But Marul of the. Kee Wi Banks had been trained to ward off giant congers and eels that clutched like pythons. It was a question of a dozen blows on the neck and spine and Bruno would cease to trouble.

'Ah, *chepan*, I keel you like dis!'

With his huge shoulders humped, his legs wide apart, he tore the dog loose from his grip and held him for an instant at arm's length. Sweat streamed from his coppery skin; the cords of his quivering arms stood out in leonine knots as Bruno wriggled and fought to close with him. A fearful curiosity held Nina to the spot. Her numbed heart could only pity the dog that had come to her aid. She saw it raised like a doll in the air, the thug hands of the diver strangling the life energy from its body.

'*Baticha!* You thenk to break my knee an' hold me up? *Alo!* I break you on my shin instead.'

Another shadow slipped from the open window, a red shadow with flaring eyes and feet that leaped. The big fawn head of Red Witch crashed under his upraised arms. It was like the blow of a hammer, and the diver reeled and staggered with Bruno breaking from his grasp. His naked heel twisted and slipped on a loose stone. He pitched backwards, with both hounds on top.

Nina ran towards the bungalow calling for help. A schooner's toplights blinked across the bay.

There came to her a sound of white men's voices— the voice of Norry Dane asking the way to her bungalow. A sick islander lying under some tarpaulin on the jetty pointed the way. It was growing late, but Norry felt that the passing minutes counted for years in his life.

He found Nina on the verandah of the bungalow, sobbing and distraught. He held her in his arms until speech came to them. The Fisheries Commission had quashed the charge against him, leaving him free to join her. Marul's presence on the island and the story of what had happened at the Mission House struck Norry with biting force.

Knowing that Nina would be safe in the bungalow, he crossed the plantation hurriedly and entered the Mission House grounds. In the tree shadow at the rear of the house he came upon a huddled figure that still moved and breathed with difficulty. The dogs had disappeared.

Marul was lying on his chest, his left hand tight clenched. He stirred at Norry's approach, and raised his eyes. His sarong, torn to shreds in the path, spoke of the fierce battle of fist and fang, of blows that missed and the jaws that held.

'I bin hurt, Tuan,' he groaned. 'Dam dogs take me for a buffalo.'

'They mistook you for a hen thief,' Norry informed him. 'You are not as clever with dogs as you are with stingrays, Marul.'

He raised the Malay into a sitting position. The Malay's left hand opened convulsively; a baby purse fell into Dane's palm. A spasm like a grin crossed the diver's face.

'Dem pearls have got a devil, Tuan,' he confided hoarsely. 'A devil ray was sittin' on de Bank where I found de shells wit de black pearls. I split him up wit my kris I when he smoder me wit black poison. Dat's how I come to lose my kris,' he added sorrowfully.

NINA resigned her post at the mission school when medical aid arrived for the children in quarantine. Later on she joined Norry at Thursday Island. Little Wong Chat drew his dividend from the sale of the three gems in New York. Marul was lucky to return to Macassar with the Manilamen, with ten thousand dollars placed to their credit in a Chinese bank. Norry found the prettiest pearl of all in Nina Chard.

And despite Marul's sinister warning the devils in the black pearls never returned to trouble them.

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**28: The Lookers-On**  
*Sydney Mail 27 Feb 1924*

'IF YOU raise your voice, Priscilla, it will reach Iris. Let's be reasonable,' James Enderby almost begged his wife. 'Give me your lawyer's letter. I'll read again carefully.'

Priscilla Enderby placed the letter on the study desk while her pale eyes emitted flashes of indignation that were not without a suggestion of panic terror. James Enderby steadied his shaking hand as he perused the letter:

*Dear Mrs. Enderby*

*Following your instructions of August 24, we have made careful enquiries into the family history of Miss Iris Maple, the young lady engaged to marry your son Philip. We trust that our disclosures, which concern her father only, will in no way prejudice you against us for having made them. They are as follows:—*

*Mr. Burge Maple, the father of Miss Iris Maple, was at one time a professional pugilist—a successful one, we may add. Comparatively recently he met and defeated in a fierce encounter a fighter known as Chikawaukee Joe, of Klondyke. Other contests include his victories over Mike Connolly, of Bathurst; Tom Wilkes, New Jersey; Gaston Lecroix, France.*

*Whether your sensibilities will be affected by these disclosures we cannot say. Of Miss Iris Maple, we know that she bears an irreproachable name amongst the people in which we have been referred.*

*Yours faithfully,  
 Gilder and Cross*

Mr. James Enderby returned the letter to his wife with a slightly trembling hand.

'And that's that, dear,' he commented in his noncommittal way. 'Iris engaged to Phil, and we're now connected, so to speak, with the gentleman who knocked out Chikawaukee Joe, of Klondyke, after a fierce encounter, to say nothing of Wilkes and Connolly.'

Mrs. Enderby sat very still in the study chair. The faculty of speech as dead within her as though a twelve-inch shell had ripped out the roof and mooring of her house.

The Enderbys owned a string of ancestors dating from William the Norman. Priscilla Enderby was related to a peer in England, while her husband, James Enderby, was a director of a big Australian bank. Her son Phillip had met Iris Maple at the house of a well-known theatrical manager. Iris was regarded as one of the most beautiful girls in Sydney. Until now her father had been kept discreetly in the background.

Priscilla Enderby had never met a professional pugilist. Occasionally she had seen pictures of them in the papers, but she gathered from other ladies in her own set that the profession was mixed up with bar parlours, dog-fights, and the films.

Of course, the engagement must be broken at once. A few hundred pounds would keep Iris and her pugilistic parent quiet. At all costs Phillip must be rescued from so debasing an alliance. It was unthinkable that their only son could be drawn into an atmosphere that reeked of Chikawaukee Joe and other shoe blacks!

The happy laughter of the young couple reached them from the near drawing-room, where Phillip was attempting one of his popular revue songs at the piano. Iris was applauding with the enthusiasm of a first-nighter. Priscilla recognised that Iris was the most lovable girl she had ever met. It was one of those unspeakable tragedies that so promising a debutante should be linked to the brute world, she thought. Nothing could alter the fact. The lines on Priscilla's brow grew sharp as hatchet strokes as she brooded over her son's folly, his lack of discrimination in the big things that mattered.

JAMES ENDERBY rose from his seat, as if impelled by a sense of his acute misfortune, of the sudden shadow which threatened to blight the honour of his house. James Enderby stood for the steadfast virtues of his family name. As a financial ruler he had often played the part of a friend to many of his less fortunate associates. He was proud of his son Phillip. The boy had wit, culture, brains, had the stuff in him that counted for social and commercial greatness. Never in his life had he known the boy waste a day in foolish games with bat and leather. No, by George, there were higher games in life worth playing!

The hour was late. From the study window overlooking the marble-fronted terrace Enderby saw a sabre slice of moon edging above the pepper-trees at the extreme end of the grounds. A soft breeze stirred the foliage that clung to the walls of the old Georgian house. An aroma of dew-drenched eucalyptus stole into the study, James Enderby hated the scent of eucalyptus, he could think of nothing but the ex-champion bruiser who had somehow gained admission to the inner sanctuary of his life, had squeezed his bullet head in at the window.

'I'm afraid, Priscilla, we're in for it,' he ventured deliberately. 'Yet Iris is the most charming girl of our set. I remember how she spoke out before his Excellency at the garden party given to the Poor Children's Association. She collected a half of money for the brats. Whatever her father may be, she isn't afraid to face our society tigers.'

The sharp, hatchet lines around Priscilla's mouth puckered to a malicious smile.

'Wait till some of our tigers get a glimpse of the victor of Chikawaukee Joe,' Priscilla intoned. 'Positively I can see the man!' she added, with eyes half closed, as one peering into space. 'A huge, ungainly brute with that brow and a pair of gorilla arms! Wait, my dear James, until that brow protrudes into one of our garden parties, or at the wedding breakfast. He's bound to turn up sooner or later!'

A sudden hush seemed to fall on the old Georgian house as Phil Enderby, accompanied by Iris Maple, entered the study. Both were flushed and still humming the song which had been rendered a few moments before.

Phil was twenty-two, with something of the lean, untried athlete in his easy pose and manner. A second glance revealed an unaccountable softness of touch, mingled with a dangerous flexibility of movement. He suggested taking Iris home in the light landaulette. It was a lovely night for a spin; a night of stars and strange voices singing across the harbour. What a sin to be indoors!

'I expected my father would lake me home,' Iris intimated happily. 'He goes a good deal to his club, but generally he goes to bed a little early.'

'No doubt he acquired the habit when he was— er—' Enderby senior paused, hoping that Iris would finish the sentence.

'When he was a young man,' Phil interposed quickly.

A slight, imperceptible sound in his rear turned him round. Facing him from the half closed study door was the dull black sheen of an automatic pistol. A voice addressed them sharply, threateningly, from the hall.

'Sit still, or this gun will make noises! Maybe I'll keep you here a few minutes, maybe not. A friend of mine is at this moment inspecting your old pile of a house. Being a quick worker, he generally fools the clock. Sit still, please!'

The tones were every bit full of the deadly menace that is rarely heard behind footlights or in high comedy. Half a glance revealed the situation to Phil Enderby. The man behind the door was asking them to remain still while his confederate ransacked the rooms upstairs and appropriated what ever valuables lay to hand.

Anger blazed in his young veins at the thought of remaining inert, under the cold bluff of an automatic pistol. His father had sunk quietly into an armchair, his eyes fixed in hypnotised agony at the levelled weapon. Priscilla seemed to shrink into a terrified bundle of clothes, her fingers grasping restrainingly the sleeve of her son's coat.

'Don't do it, Phillip! All the money in the house isn't worth it. Shut your eyes: that horrible thing will go off!'

Iris Maple remained outwardly calm, her hand stretched to Priscilla's reassuringly, although a strange battle light flamed in her beautiful eyes. 'They will soon make off,' she whispered. 'The pity is we've got to sit still.'

There were sounds in the passages outside. The hushed clatter of servants retreating before the softly uttered threats of a light-fooled invader. Doors were locked with professional promptitude and snap, a fact which revealed that the housemaids and attendants were being held prisoners in their rooms.

'No end of bills and notes and valuables of all kinds lying about my room!' James Enderby groaned under his breath. 'And we've got to sit here like oysters in a stew until everything's bagged!'

Again the quiet of midnight fell upon the house, broken only by the soft, lightning movements of the thief upstairs as he flitted from room to room, from drawer to drawer.

'Keep your temper, sir!' the voice behind the automatic warned, as Phillip shifted from foot to foot in fierce impatience. 'You won't get anything by jumping at this bit of iron, except an extra one in the neck. Keep your confounded feet still!'

'For heaven's sake, Phil, mind what you are doing,' his father pleaded, 'Let them take what they want. It's my fault for not banking the jewellery and papers.'

Little by little the man behind the automatic revealed himself to the tense drawn group in the study. Heavily built and thick-set, he leaned his strong figure against the door jamb. Phil had measured his chance of a sudden leap at the automatic in his right hand, only to tell himself that failure to reach his man might bring death or injury to the others.

'My rings and pearls, my diamonds strewn about my dressing-table!' Priscilla moaned with a sudden recollection of her own carelessness. 'Oh, the shame of it!'

Just here the owner of the automatic caught a sound in the outer hall that caused him to shift his position. A second later he was out in the passage at grips with a figure in evening dress.

Phil Enderby heard the sound of smashing blows given and taken with the precision of hammer-strokes. From the midst of these hurricane impacts came the voice of the man in evening clothes.

'Keep away, everybody! This is my job. And I hit these fellows to kill!'

Iris threw out her hands to Phil.

'That's Daddy: He came to fetch me. I knew he would.'

Outside the struggle between Burge Maple and the holder of the pistol was short and savage. A short-armed blow to the jaw that seemed no more than a push jolted the burglar to the wall, his knees sagging. Another stiff push



sent him face down to the floor. Burge Maple stooped and picked up the automatic which had been knocked from the fellow's hand in the struggle. He turned to Phil in the doorway and nodded briskly.

'Please look after this fellow, Mr. Enderby while I collect his pal upstairs.'

Priscilla Enderby, palpitating and speechless in the doorway, saw for a fleeting instant the profile of a fine-chiselled face, a brow square and broad enough to have delighted a Greek sculptor, as Burge Maple mounted the stairs. In a moment he had disappeared along the heavily-carpeted passage, switching off the electric light at the top. A shot rang out, followed by the sound of short, quick blows. Again Burge Maple's voice reached them, but this time it was addressed to the trapped invader.

'You thief in a lady's room! I'd sooner hang than be caught at such work.'

The thief's reply came in a quavering undertone, only half heard by Enderby and his wife.

'Don't hit me again, boss: I've had enough. My baby punch has gone to sleep. I'll go quietly.'

Iris had slipped to the telephone in the hall and had called up the local police station.

'Please send a couple of men to Mr. Enderby's house. We've got some burglars waiting. Thank you, thank you!'

There was hardly a flutter in her breath as she hung up the receiver, while Phil stood guard over the crouching, dazed figure on the floor.

Three plain-clothes police arrived in a car and walked swiftly up to the house. A short interview with the two captured men proved them to be long-wanted house breakers and jewel thieves. They were promptly handcuffed and driven to the station.

AFTER THEY had gone Burge Maple surveyed James Enderby and his son with accusing eye. Priscilla could not help contrasting his sculpturesque figure with that of her husband. James had gone to flesh: there were tiny pouches under his eyes, and when he moved hastily the effort caused a violent fluttering of the lips and heart. Maple had spent his life keeping fit: James had passed the years at a desk, rustling papers and dictating letters to pretty girl typists.

Priscilla started in alarm at the sound of Maple's voice. He was addressing her husband and son.

'I am not going to tell both you gentlemen that you ought not to be left unprotected in a big house like this: but the safety of my daughter, Iris, is a matter of concern to me when she happens to be in a mix-up of the kind that has just happened.'

There was a note of sorrow in his voice as he contemplated James Enderby's stout, overfed figure. His voice softened at sight of Priscilla's agitation.

'I strolled along this evening, feeling that it would be nice to bring Iris home. I happened to see those two chaps sauntering in your private grounds. A thief is sometimes known by his walk, so I just hung round and stepped in after them.'

'I— I am deeply indebted for your timely interference.' James Enderby found voice to say. 'Upon my word. Mr. Maple, you have saved me an incalculable loss, and— er—'

'Don't mention it,' Maple, interrupted with a smile. 'But you will forgive me for saying that people who have wealth and responsibilities should have the strength and courage to look after them.' He turned to his daughter with a beam in his eye. 'We'll say good-night to your friends, dear. It is later than usual.'

'Please don't forget that we were menaced with a pistol,' Priscilla interposed, conscious of her husband's uneasiness.

'Mr. Maple look his chance, like I might have done,' Phil broke in, a flush of shame darkening his cheek.

Burge Maple laughed good-naturedly in the doorway.

'When you next call for my daughter, Mr. Phillip. I'll make sure that you are in a condition to protect her and yourself. I have a rooted prejudice against the lookers-on in the game of life. I should not like to think that my own safety and that of my daughter depended on the timely interference of other people. Gentlemen, I wish you good-night.'

Burge Maple passed from the house with Iris sobbing quietly on his arm. James Enderby stared blankly at his wife, anger, humiliation. stripping him of speech and gesture. Phil Enderby dropped into a chair beside his mother, Maple's parting words sinking like bullets into his young brain. And Iris had heard him, had blanched under them, as he was blanching now.

But happy young muscles have a knack of waking to life at the right signal. The signal that woke Phillip Enderby to a sense of his own illness had come from Burge Maple. Rightly or wrongly, the ex-champion cruiser-weight had denounced him as a looker-on in the game of life, a fellow content to sit still while efficient and kindly-disposed athletes head off midnight prowlers and people with guns.

The following day it took Phil Enderby half an hour to discover the address of one Chinney Smith, champion heavyweight boxer of Australia. During the summer months Chinney basked in the luxurious surroundings of a mountain bungalow, attended by a sparring partner and minor. Phil learned that the

champion's services were not to be obtained as a mere instructor in the noble art: but when Enderby presented a letter of introduction from the secretary of the National Sporting Hub the mountain bungalow, including Chinney, became his own.

From that moment Phil Enderby took a new leap at life. The men he met and trained with, boxed, rowed, and ran with, did little more than reveal his own strength and plasticity of action. His length and limberness soon made him the champion's favourite sparring partner.

'That young feller,' Chinney hinted to his manager one morning, after a three round whirlwind encounter with Phil, 'is going to beat the next best man to me. He's got somethin' on his mind when he's shootin' for your chin. He crossed me the other night, and I tell you it made me feel liked a tinned crayfish. I ain't sayin' it because the lad's got money— it's one of the things a champ's got to take notice of.'

'Sure. Chinney, sure,' the manager agreed.

One day Phil received a letter from Iris. It contained her reflections on life as experienced by the daughter of a retired champion.

*'I don't know what has come over my father. He hardly allows me out of his sight. He is continually suggesting that I ought to marry a man of his own profession. When I go out he insists on young Kid Johnson accompanying me. I don't think it would be safe for you to come to the house, dear. At the present moment a ruffianly lout named Bender is camped in our drawing-room smoking the most awful tobacco. I really believe he is here to watch and prevent you entering during father's absence. Of course, Phil dear, I find it very dreary without you, but what is one to do!'*

THAT settled Phil Enderby. She was the sweetest and most lovable girl in the world subjected to the constant surveillance of bruisers and racecourse bandits. He pictured Iris seated, alone with Bender, forced to breathe his poisonous smoke and listen to Bender's stories! The thought stroked him like a whip. After a light dinner at his club that night he told his chauffeur to drive him to Vine Row Lodge, Rose Bay, the home of Burge Maple and Iris.

Vine Row Lodge was suburban. It had always suited Burge Maple to live near the Big Town. Phil knew the house: he had often escorted Iris to the gate after a dance or theatre party. A single dim light was visible in the front room that over looked the road. Usually the Lodge was the best-lighted house in the road, for Burge loved cheery, inviting rooms in which to entertain his many friends.

Touching the bell, Phil waited in the hope that Iris would appear. A stealthy step in the hall was followed by the shooting back of a bolt. The door opened slowly, and Enderby found himself staring at a big-eared, stooping-shouldered ruffian of the comic opera type. His small, squinting, eyes made rapid valuations of Phil's clothes, personal effects, including the light landaulet in the road.

'Whatcher want?' he demanded in a hoarse effort to appear polite. 'Burge ain't home. I'm in charge.'

'I want to see Miss Maple.' Enderby intimated briefly. 'Be good enough to take in my card.'

A wave of nausea swept him at the fellow's proximity to Iris. After all, he had mistaken Burge Maple for a gentleman, one of the old school of sportsmen who put a lady before everything, including wealth, honour, and pride.

Yet here he found this one-time beau ideal of the arena compelling his daughter to associate with a creature whose presence would not be tolerated in a third-rate bush hotel. The rage of impassioned youth smouldered like a dynamite fuse in Enderby. Blows hard and fierce he had taken of late in his desire to prove worthy of the woman who had once witnessed his humiliation in his father's house. He restrained himself with difficulty as he again appealed to the keeper of the door.

'Miss Maple will see me if you say Mr. Enderby is here. Do you understand?'

The man shook his head.

'My name's Bender. I got orders to keep everybody out. You're out.' he added with a toothless grin, 'and out you keep!'

Phil's elbow and heel hurled back the slamming door in Bender's face. A volley of oaths emerged from the passage as Enderby squeezed through. Long after the event Phil told himself that the spat-eared man struck him twice before he had crossed the threshold of Burge Maple's house. Using his long left he thrust Bender staggering down the unlit passage. But only for a fraction of time. The spat-ears returned to the assault with the speed of a charging boar. Phil took a blow on the throat that might have sickened him a year before. It merely steadied him now, and brought home the fact that the fellow was fighting to keep him from Iris.

'Keep away, Marne,' he called to his chauffeur at the door. 'This is my obligation.'

It was. But the dark, narrow passage rendered the obligation difficult and open to savage reprisals, pitted as he was against an unknown tiger of the slums.

'If yer come an inch nearer, me gold tipped friend, I'll beat yer to sleep and give yer nice clothes to the poor!' Bender challenged from the darkness. 'Stay out and lick yer diamonds fer a change.'

Phil poised himself an instant in the doorway and then dashed in.

It was stiflingly dark inside, and in the swift grapple that followed his entry Phil remembered Marle's good-humoured taunt, about the lookers-on. And the strength of his clean young manhood shook off the garrotter's hold that was being fastened on him in the pitch black atmosphere. His right fist smote twice the bristling chin and ears of the gutter pugilist. Again and again his lightning left smashed between the pair of gorilla-like arms that sought to clinch and strangle.

Up and down the passage they swayed and struck and grappled blindly. The end was swift and unexpected. Youth will be served, and sometimes quickly. Bender rocked dizzily from a blow between the eyes: his knees grew slack as he lay against the wall.

Phil breathed in the doorway, waiting for the other to speak. There was no response: only a slight gasping, followed by a groan. A door on the landing above opened suddenly. Iris Maple, holding a candle above her head, peered down the passage.

'Is that Daddy?' she called out softly. 'Something has happened to the electric light.'

In reply Phil mounted the stairs and took her in his arms. Iris suppressed a little cry of joy and alarm.

'I'm expecting Daddy,' she told him, her cheek resting for an instant against his lips.

'I want to see your Daddy, Iris: I want to ask him to provide you with a more picturesque satellite than the fellow downstairs.'

A sudden thought crossed Phil as he watched his chauffeur assist Bender into a side room. For an instant he paused between doubt and certainty.

'I had a rough-and-tumble trying to get in,' he whispered apologetically. 'And I've a suspicion that Bender is here for a particular purpose.'

Begging Iris to remain upstairs for a while, Phil descended and exchanged glances with his chauffeur. In a flash he was beside the bruised and breath-shaken Bender, seated in a wicker chair.

'Tell us about it!' he demanded abruptly. 'Are you a bailiff in possession of Mr. Maple's house?'

Bender drew himself together with a painful effort as he wiped the dew of battle from his brow. A forgiving leer illuminated his bristling profile.

'I mistook yer for a jazz dude,' he confessed hoarsely. 'About that little scrap I bears no malice. I was picked for the job of takin' possession of Burge Maple's house on account of him being a fighter.'

'Then you are acting for his creditors?'

'A matter of six hundred pounds odd, sir. If the money is paid now the distraint is off an' I walks. If it ain't paid his home goes into the auction room to-morrow. I'm sorry for Burge: he's down on his luck through helping others.'

Phil pondered swiftly, and then drew a cheque-book from his pocket and filled in the amount the bailiff had mentioned.

'This deal's you out, Mr. Bender; and this'— he thrust a roll of notes into the grimy fist— 'puts us right. I'm sorry you missed me so often in the dark. Better luck next time.'

The bailiff grinned in appreciation. 'There might be a next, sir: but there won't be me! I know when there's an egg in my hat, an' I know when to beat it.'

With a final nod he passed from the house.

PHIL returned to Iris with the knowledge that Burge had not made known to her the secret of Bender's presence in the house. Instead of feeling depressed over the incident, Phil was overcome by a sense of relief and joy at the opportunity which had allowed him to dispose of the strangle grip on Maple's belongings.

'I hope Bender didn't hurt you, Phil?' Iris regarded his awry appearance in consternation.

'I'll get hurt any time I like,' he assured her with the air of a twelfth century martyr. 'I'll get hurt and raise Cain every time your father tries to keep me from the house. I'm going to fill my pockets with slick fast stuff and giant cement to keep us together. I'll lend you some.'

'Hush, Phil! Someone is coming.'

It was Burge Maple, changed in appearance since the night he had disarmed the burglars in James Enderby's house. He stood silently surveying Phil and Iris in the candle-lit doorway, a well-cut but despondent figure, a victim of his own kindly impulses.

Irresistibly Phil was drawn to the man whose well-meaning utterances could not always be ignored or resented. He held out his hand for a moment before speaking.

'I took the liberty of ejecting a curious bird I found nesting in your house, Mr. Maple,' he explained somewhat shyly. 'One of those blue birds that ought never come back. I hope you'll forgive me,' he added, with a meaning glance in Iris's direction.

Burge sighed softly as one relieved of a nightmare.

'I met the bird going home on three legs,' he said slowly. 'Looked as if someone had been using him to stop a train!'

His glance went over and through Enderby in rapid appraisal. 'When you handled Bender, Mr. Phillip, you took on the, toughest, heavyweight of his time. I tell you honestly he could have kept me out.'

Phil considered the statement in modest silence. Then, before Iris could divert his attention, he put a thought-out query to the ex-champion.

'Suppose we start a high-class gymnasium to train fellows to break through occasionally?' he ventured with a boyish grimace. 'I'll let you in as director at your own salary. My father will take up most of the shares. He owes something to the game,' he added with real meaning.

Burge Maple looked up quickly.

'That settles me, my boy. But how about this little looker-on?' He was bending very gently over his daughter. Iris kissed his troubled cheek as she noted the glint of moisture in his eye.

'Now you're satisfied that Phil can drive away blue birds. Daddy, don't you think we ought to keep him with us?'

'I'm as good as most fellows,' Phil implied meekly.

Burge Maple's handgrip fully endorsed the latter statement.

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## 29: The Happy Forger

*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 2 Feb 1929

OLD DAVE Gordon leapt with joy the news that his daughter Margaret had escaped in No. 6 boat from the ill-starred *Araluen*. He swallowed with many gulps, however, the tidings that the *Araluen's* rich cargo of camphor and silk, cinnabar and sandalwood was lying in seven fathoms of shoal water, seven hundred miles west of the Sulu Sea. But Margaret, his Margaret, was safe.

The solitary wireless message made it clear that only No. 6 boat had got away after four others had been swamped. The boat had been in charge of Derek Hamilton when picked up by the *City of Canton*, now on her way to the port of Songolo, where Gordon's big trade-house overlooked the bay.

For the life of him old Gordon could not account for Hamilton's presence on board the doomed *Araluen*. Margaret had been on a visit to the British Consul's wife in Macassar, and had occupied the *Araluen's* private state-room amidships on the return trip to Songolo. Hamilton was his clerk and man of business. He had been sent to Batavia to purchase some rubber land. Gordon had given him a bearer cheque for eight thousand pounds, drawn on Gilderman's bank in Batavia to facilitate the deal. With the cash on the table Hamilton should have had an easy task talking to the impoverished owners or the estate in question.

It became evident to old Gordon as the hours wore that Hamilton had successfully terminated the deal, and had, either by chance or design, found a both for the return passage on the same vessel with Margaret.

It was late that night when the *City of Canton* steamed slowly into Songolo, where David Gordon and a madly-cheering crowd of planters and traders awaited the landing of the *Araluen's* twenty-five survivors.

Gordon was first to greet Margaret and the score of native women and children Hamilton had succeeded in packing into crazy No. 6 boat. Came Hamilton himself down the *City of Canton's* crowded gangway, sun-seared, wind-burnt and hatless, and grinning boyishly at the excited groups of men and women straining and swaying for a grip of his oar-blistered hand.

Margaret's eyes still reflected something of the last-minute light on the *Araluen's* boat-deck, where two hundred Malay planters and pilgrims had disputed Hamilton's authority to nil the boat with souls of his own choosing. All the other boats had capsized or been swamped in the black millrace of water that swirled round the reef-battered *Araluen*.

For a seat in No. 6 boat two hundred dark-haired, fear-blinded Malays fought with sticks and knives, pieces of broken cabin furniture. Mick



Flanagan, the famous fat skipper of the *Araluen*, had been struck on the head by a flying bulkhead stay, and had gone down with his ship, other officers had perished in the swamped boats. Derek Hamilton, with Margaret in his arms, was part of the crowd surging and clamouring for possession of the last boat. As far as Margaret could remember, that was all— that unforgettable picture of the long-armed, sea-burnt Hamilton, his back to the rail, a flat-faced automatic revolver speaking the only language the Malay boat-rushers were ever likely to understand.

'Stand away, there! Only the women and kids get past! Sternly, you rat-faced banana chewing bimboes! Women and children I said!'

Then Margaret recalled his last spoken words on the boat-deck of the foundering *Araluen*.

'This way, little mother! This way for Hampton Court and the swans!'

Old David Gordon was one of the silk kings or Songolo. He had smashed the Chinese guilds and tongs, had built his own ships and pontoons, and carried his own cargoes to the four corners of the earth. His only child was Margaret. Since the death of her mother, eight years before, he had put a score of trained servants at her disposal. He had filled the palatial trade-house with the art wonders of the East, so that she might escape the paralysing loneliness that so often entered the lives of isolated, companionless girls.

Hamilton had come to Songolo in a cargo tramp 18 months before. The old silk king had liked the boy's appearance, liked his well set, rangy figure, fresh from a college playground, the kind of youngster always in a condition to tackle a boatload of sulking Arabs or Chinese coolies.

He had given Hamilton a job in the trade-room with the intimation that business was business in the East, and that one had to fight for it among the slick-handed compradores and silk jobbers of Songolo. The firm had to buy and sell often at throat-cutting rates. Hamilton had listened to the old trader's instructions, had gone about his tasks with alacrity and good humour. And David Gordon, master of a thousand fates and careers, had gone about his own numerous duties and had promptly forgotten Hamilton's existence.

And then the news of the *Araluen*'s foundering had reached Gordon. For a moment sick terror gripped him. Always things were happening in these warm seas, mutinies, cyclones, the havoc of pestilence. He stood rooted on the tradehouse verandah at the mere suggestion of Margaret fighting for her young life among the black gangs of coffee and sugar planters, coolie firemen struggling to reach those accursed boats. Lucky for Margaret that the level-brained, quick-footed Hamilton had secured a berth aboard the *Araluen*. Lucky for them all that his cabin stood between her and the stinking gangs of ghost-footed Mahommedans. Not often a slender, grey-eyed with the English peach

bloom in her cheeks came into their lives. And they had watched her slightest movements about the deck of the ill-fated ship. Even with Hamilton beside her the vessel had a thousand eyes for her. Arab eyes, alive and glowing with the wonder of her presence.

At the moment Gordon and Margaret were about to enter the trade house, a native runner handed him a message. David glimpsed hurriedly, then read it a second time, a serious look of unbelief in his pinched eyes.

Margaret came to life instantly.

'What's wrong, daddy? she asked, holding his shrinking arm.

Gordon crushed the cablegram in his burning fingers, put the crumpled piece into his pocket.

'A fool has played me false; that's all, child! I won't be long finding out the truth.'

Margaret barely tasted her food that evening. Her father's buckled brows, his continued silence, suggested one or more business calamities, bound to follow on the loss of the *Araluen* and her uninsured cargo and hull. Gordon owned the vessel, it was a curious but not uncommon oversight which had caused his native agent in Macassar to neglect her re-insurance for the return voyage. Even Gordon could hardly survive the blow. Ship and cargo meant a dead loss of nearly half a million sterling!

Margaret felt that Hamilton ought to have dined with them that night. Her father's moods disturbed her. Conscious of his overwhelming affection, his one desire to make her life a dream and a delight, she was secretly pained to think that Derek had not been thanked for his desperate stand against the boat-rushers on the fatal night of the wrack.

'Oh, yes, I'll pay my respects to Hamilton,' Gordon announced, almost guessing the thought in Margaret's mind. 'I'll find him in his bungalow.'

He rose from the table, looked back from the cool draughty doorway to the wistful-eyed Margaret in the slender, high-backed chair. Hamilton did only what a dozen other fellows would have done. Every man's a hero when a rich man's daughter is in danger!

There was bitterness and gall in David's words as he passed to the rear of the tradehouse where Hamilton's bungalow snuggled among the banyans and magnolias.

Margaret sat very still in the high-backed chair, a lovely, sad-eyed figure in that spacious, exquisitely arranged dining room, a ghost at her own banquet. How lonely and remote her father had made her life, in spite of his wealth and good nature! The soft-fooled Goanese servants flitted in and out, bearing away untasted dishes, wondering in their gentle furtive way why this tall English lily,

the lovely child of the great tuan, did not dance and sing as her beautiful mother had done.

GORDON PUSHED open the door of Hamilton's bungalow and stood breathing heavily in the warm darkness of the room. There was a sudden stir on the camp bed, under the open window. The light was switched on. Hamilton almost staggered to his feet. He had been asleep. For sixty hours he had manipulated a heavy steering oar in the crowded lifeboat, scarce daring to shift his glance from star or compass. On board the *City of Canton* he had failed to snatch an hour's rest, the cabins were packed, the decks noisy and—'

He met David's scowl with a sleepy grin. He had been dreaming of the whimpering, close-huddled shapes at the bottom of the *Araluen's* lifeboat, the unforgettable, praying voices of the native women as the boat heaved and fell down the mountainous slopes of brine. Gordon was speaking.

'I want to thank you, Hamilton, for lifting my little girl out of that unholy scramble, the other night. It was touch and go for you all. Margaret wishes me to say as much.'

A bald and empty offering that hardly reached Hamilton's tired brain. He smiled sleepily but was not unmindful of the great man's presence in his scantily furnished 'bungalow.

'Things might have been worse, sir,' he managed to say. 'I think those reefs off the Mindanao channel call for notice on our Admiralty charts. Poor old Flanagan wasn't to blame!'

'I've a suspicion he was drunk at usual. All my silk and cinnabar at the bottom of the sea! half a million's worth, reckoning the *Araluen* herself!'

A silence.

For the first time in his young life Derek Hamilton felt his nerves leap and twitch. He knew what was behind this old trader's bitter grin of rage. Gordon had smelt ruin in the loss of his big ocean freighter, bankruptcy, annihilation.

'I'm sorry sir,' Hamilton, said and waited.

All the pent-up anger in David's breast named out now.

'Sorry, ye damned forger! When I dug you out of that old banana tramp that brought ye to Songolo, I thought ye had a grain of gratitude somewhere in your make up!'

Snatching the crumpled cablegram from his pocket he slapped it on the table for Hamilton to read.

*Your cheque for eighty thousand pounds was tendered by Hamilton. We paid under extreme pressure. We now suspect cheque has been altered. —  
Manager Gilderman's Bank.*

A bland but weary smile lit up Hamilton's tired face as he read the message. Gordon's fist hit the table like a sledge hammer. If Hamilton imagined he could carry on his criminal exploit on the stretch of his recent work aboard the *Araluen* he was in for the shock of his life.

'I gave ye my cheque for night thousand ! I trusted ye!' The muscles of the old trader's jaw worked convulsively. 'Ye took the cheque and wrote a letter after the word eight, ye added a nought to the figures. The bank paid out, curse them! And now where in Gehenna is the seventy-two thousand ye stole? The money that would now stand between me and perdition!'

Hamilton stood, white-lipped, silent as one not sure of his own explanation. Moreover, lack of sleep had for the moment unsettled him. He wished that old Gordon had waited a day or two longer.

'Ye make no answer!' Gordon volleyed, stung to the point of insanity by Derek's silence. 'To-morrow, at noon, you'll show where the money is or by the powers I'll hand ye to the black police—'

Perhaps it was the thought of Margaret, sitting alone among the phantom-footed servants, kept Gordon sane. He did not look back once as he flung from the bungalow into the soft night air of the magnolia scented night.

The fragrance of wild lavender and broom blew about the tradehouse. From across the lantern-lit bay came the strumming of a mandolin. The sound brought him to his sense, and to the fact that ruin, bleak and pitiless, now stared him in the face. With the money Derek had taken from the Dutch bank in Batavia he could have held off his creditors, the hordes of yellow and black traders who would howl for their dues the moment it became known that his agent in Macassar had neglected the *Araluen's* re-insurance.

AT BREAKFAST the following morning Margaret heard with consternation that Hamilton had disappeared. Gordon had gone up- river in the tradehouse launch in the hope of arranging a temporary loan with one of the foreign banks in Taluan. An hour before noon came news that Gilderman's bank had suspended payments. Consternation swept through Songolo. Thousands of small traders and compradores would be ruined. Gilderman's agencies and branches extended through the Archipelago.

Margaret met her father the moment he stepped from the launch. One look at his drawn face was enough. He had failed to negotiate a loan, owing to the collapse of Gilderman's. Margaret followed him to his office overlooking the bay where fleets of rice-laden junks and sampans crowded past their steel pontoons. Trade was flowing from them now. In a night the word had gone forth that the great white tuan had lost his best ship and his money. He was

now a beggar in his big tradehouse by the beach. He would need a rich old husband for his daughter now, The young men had no money, Allah knew. The heart of the tuan was broken. He had leaned on a reed and the mud was about his ears. All the blood had drained from Gordon's cheeks. Margaret's hand went to his shoulder.

'What is the real trouble, daddy?'

'That snipe Hamilton!' he burst out, unable to control his wrath. 'It doesn't matter now. Gilderman has failed; my money would have gone just the same. It's the fellow's ingratitude. I gave him a roof and a chance to make good. He has robbed me of seventy odd thousand pounds!'

Margaret's face grew deadly white.

'Derek told me all about that cheque, daddy. I thought the idea was splendid!'

'Splendid?' He bent shoulders straightened with the jerk of a lashed steer. 'To take seventy-two thousand, eighty in all, from Gilderman's and smash him? Splendid ye call it.'

Margaret's eyes sparkled suddenly. It was evident that Hamilton had flung off leaving the details of his business trip unexplained. Her father had been over hasty with him. Derek needed handling properly.

'Listen, daddy, please. Derek told me everything while he sat together in the lifeboat. Arriving in Batavia he heard from one of our own compradores that Gilderman's bank was tottering and could only just meet its day to day liabilities. Derek knew of the large sum you had on deposit there and that there was no time to consult or warn you, so, he took a chance, altered the cheque, and, oh, daddy, they paid him!'

'Where's the money?' Gordon choked.

'Paid to your credit in the new English bank on the Malay Avenue, less the eight thousand he paid for that splendid rubber estate. Last night daddy, you shouted and threatened a poor, nerve-broken boy who hasn't known sleep for a week. He— he was simply waiting for Gilderman to crash before plucking up courage to tell you what he'd done. He only wanted to give you a glad surprise.'

A WEEK before the monsoon when the sun stretched like a fiery blade across the tamarisks, Lalum, Margaret's Singalee man called excitedly from the garden path.

'Look, O Light of Day, the young tuan has returned.'

Derek Hamilton presented a somewhat dishevelled appearance on the flower-decked lawn on the house front. His clothes were black with grease of

the engine room, his shoes torn on one who had carried loads over jagged reefs and shoals. David hailed him from the office door.

'Out of bedlam, by the look of ye!'

He stepped down from the verandah to survey the bedevilled figure of the young clerk. 'You've come back for your job, I hope?' he added, as one anxious to make amends for his past harshness.

Hamilton straightened his tall, labour-hardened figure, shot a glance in the direction of Margaret's open window, and then found his voice.

'Wasn't aware I'd left my job, sir!' There was an oddly humorous grin on his boyish face. 'It occurred to me the night you cut loose in my bungalow, that our biggest asset was likely to be overlooked if we started quarrelling.'

'Asset!' Gordon pondered, as one who had raked together every available shilling to meet his obligations. He knew of no further assets on which to put his hand.

'I mean the *Araluen's* salvage, sir. I chartered Van Estman's fleet of sampans and junks for seven hundred pounds, and got to work on the wreck. We've salvaged nearly all the cargo, silk, sandalwood, bullion and cinnabar—about two hundred thousand pounds' worth up-to-date. There are twenty junk-loads in the harbour, and more coming.'

MARGARET did not meet Derek until two hours later. He came into dinner with her father, wearing a silk shirt and borrowed dinner jacket

'Ye may talk to Margaret,' Gordon announced with assumed gruffness. 'Tell her I'm willing to give ye a share in my business if ye'll promise not to develop the habit of skying my cheques!' he added with a short laugh.

'It was a happy forgery for us, daddy!' There was a light in Margaret's eyes. 'You ought to say something nice to Derek.'

'Well, girly, here's to a handsome penman and a good sailor to boot! May he find—'

'Say no more!' Margaret laughed, touching Hamilton's wineglass with her own. 'The toast is drank!'

Hamilton did not respond. To him the warm touch of Margaret's fingers was more delightful than words or wine

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### 30: The Gay Adventure

*Chronicle* (Adelaide) 14 Nov 1929

THERE wasn't a house near the river that they could afford to live in. Hetty wanted a garden and a boat. And all that Dennis could promise at present was a roof and a gas ring. Leaving out the gas ring and the roof Hetty felt that life could be nude and endurable in an open hay waggon, provided Dennis was somewhere among the hay.

Dennis was poor and young, and a bit of a dreamer. If only he could have dreamed Hetty and himself into a riverside bungalow, with a garden and income thrown in, he might never have studied the movements of one Captain Giggs, owner of the yellow painted boathouse, the tennis lawns, and noble Georgian house, half hidden among the towering elms and oak in the distance.

From ten in the morning till noon Captain Giggs fished from a punt or the steps of his boathouse. Never once had he raised his eyes from rod or line to exchange a glance with the young dreamer, watching him closely from the opposite bank of the river. Again and again Dennis Chard had sought to attract the old sea captain's attention in the hope of striking up a conversation. But Giggs had never blinked an eye or bestowed the slightest sign of encouragement on the coughing, gesticulating figure in flannels across the water.

'He's a director in a big shipping firm,' Dennis told Hetty, as they sat near Boulter's lock, watching the gay procession of launches and punts passing up river. 'If I could only shake him out of his morning trance he might take an interest in me.'

'Might find you a stool behind an inch of plate glass window,' Hetty sighed, 'among those other boys who draw ships on blotting pads until lunch hour. I believe he's stone deaf and hates young men.'

Dennis merely smiled at Hetty's lack of understanding. Then an unusual frown darkened his young brow.

'I'll shoot myself with a pound of pepper, Het., if you refuse to concentrate on my plans for making a place for myself in commercial history. Please stop being funny.'

Hetty's mouth crinkled strangely. Then her face became grave.

'I'm listening, Dennis, dear. Tell me your plans for making this old seabird take an interest in your future. Couldn't you shoot him out of his trance with a pound of gunpowder tea. You'll never wake him with that gentle cough of yours.'

It was some time before Dennis replied. Of course it was foolish taking Hetty too seriously. He managed, however, to say that once he and Captain Giggs became known to each other anything might happen. The difficulty lay in making Giggs aware of the existence of Mr. Dennis Chard, late of Magdalen College, and at present seeking new worlds to conquer. Something would have to be done to distract Gigg's attention from his infernal hooks and fishes. Couldn't Hetty bring her woman's wit to bear?

After much reflection Hetty felt it was in her power to make any porpoise-like gentleman sit up and take notice of them both. If she failed there was always the aforementioned roof and gas ring until Dennis found a directorship within the Bank of England.

CAPTAIN Cornelius Giggs fished a little earlier than usual from the steps of the boat-house. Passing river craft annoyed him at times. Fresh young men in punts cast their advice on the waters concerning the kind of bait in use for kippers and jellyfish. But Giggs merely sighed and continued to fish.

He became suddenly aware of a disreputable-looking skiff which had become entangled in some boat lines, attached to his private launch, a biscuit throw from the steps. The skiff was piloted by a pretty girl in striped flannels. At a glance Giggs realised that a dangerous amateur was adrift among his precious house craft.

'Ahoy, there!' he warned. 'You're fouling my lines. Back water! Can't you see a rope when it's under your pretty nose?'

The girl in the skiff stood up suddenly as the prow of her frail craft struck the launch amidships. It was a glancing blow that caused her to sway and lose her foothold. In a moment she was in the water, struggling desperately to reach the line attached to the boat-house.

Captain Giggs was heavily built and slow of movement. He rose unsteadily from the steps of the boathouse, beckoning frantically to the splashing, choking girl in the stream.

'Get hold of that line, you little fool!' he roared. 'I'll throw you a buoy!'

The lifebuoy bung within the boathouse, twenty feet from where he stood. In a flash he saw that she was in difficulties, having missed the line attached to the bow of the launch. Moisture clung to his brow as he hurled his great bulk in the direction of the buoy. Snapping it from its holding, he turned to cast it near the wildly struggling girl under the bow of the launch.

It was just here that a youth in spotless white serge appeared in midstream, swimming easily but swiftly towards the drowning girl. A dozen powerful strokes carried him alongside the fast weakening girl. In a trice he



was supporting her, and without a glance at Giggs on the boat-house steps, turned to a spot down-stream where a landing could be effected.

Giggs beckoned heatedly from the steps.

'Come in here, you simpleton! There's mud and reeds to drown an elephant where you're going. Avast!'

Stooping from the boat-house steps, he assisted the dripping pair to land, glad enough, in his bluff, surly way, that an unlooked for tragedy had been averted.

'You gave me quite a shock,' he confided after a breath-giving pause. 'Like most sailors, I never learned to swim.'

Then, as the young girl shivered slightly in her wet flannels, 'Come up to the house, both of you. We'll have you dry as a couple of sunbirds in half a jiffey!'

A gravel path led from the boatshed to the old Georgian mansion among the elms. A number of people were seated in deck chairs on the wide lawn facing the house entrance. At sight of Giggs and the dripping pair beside him they rose in a body, uttering strange, half-audible comments. Several men in rough tweed suits hovered near.

'Never mind what those people say,' Giggs whispered, leading the young couple towards a side entrance. 'We'll get your clothes, dry and then have a bit of lunch.'

The kitchen range did the drying, Giggs hovering near the young pair in genuine paternal solicitude. He explained that the strange looking people on the lawn were guests of the establishment over which he presided.

'Don't be annoyed if they shout funny things after you when you pass out!' he told the now smiling young girl in the hall doorway. 'I'm sorry you'll have to leave alone because I'm anxious to have a word or two with your gallant rescuer!'

She laughed merrily, thanking Giggs and the tall, quiet-voiced youth who had come to her assistance. A lucky thing for her, she confessed, that strong, brave swimmers were available on the river.

The young man merely blushed, his face to the window overlooking the lawn.

Cries and shouts followed the young girl as she made her way to the big iron gate leading to the road. In spite of the efforts of the men in the rough tweed suits, several of the strange looking guests ran after the departing girl, calling on her to stay with them.

'A mermaid from the river!' one screamed in her wake. 'Where is your comb and glass?'

'Stay, stay, stay with us!' a woman with black streaming hair called shrilly. 'We are tired of this desert island. Send a ship to carry us off!'

An attendant slammed the iron gate on the heels of the disappearing girl, waved his arms gently and sorrowfully at the woman with the streaming hair.

'She'll come back to the island after a bit,' he soothed. 'She's just run home to tell her mother.'

Captain Giggs studied the young man with the shining eyes and the dry serge suit as they passed to his study at the end of the oak-panelled hall. He had been singularly impressed by his smart handling of the recent boating mishap. Seated at his writing table he addressed his young guest in a kindly, appreciative manner.

'There's a vacancy in this establishment for a clever lad of your type. I've a lot of correspondence that needs attention. If you'll promise to stay on I'll make the salary worth while. My guests,' he paused to meet the young man's shining eyes, 'will like you in no time. They've taken to you already.'

The young man with the shining eyes decided at once to accept the post.

Giggs grasped his hand feelingly.

'I'd like to mention a particular guest of the establishment,' he said, after a moment's reflection. 'You'll meet him shortly. He's the Sultan of Sarawani. He is docile and sweet-tempered; quite different from the Princess of Patagonia. She throws' hair brushes around, and writes letters to the Emperor of Japan. You mustn't mind her.'

I won't,' the young man answered cheerfully, as he prepared to undertake his new duties.

A BELL in the turret struck six as, Dennis crossed the lawn for a breath of air, after five hours of letter writing in Giggs's office. The grounds were deserted, except for a sleek-haired, middle-aged man, wearing a silk hat and immaculate frock coat. He twirled a gold-headed walking stick as he paced the lawn. At the sight of Chard his eyes brightened unexpectedly. He beckoned holding out a platinum cigarette case invitingly. Smiling Chard advanced as one approached royalty.

'Good evening, Highness,' he greeted, accepting a fat Aleppo cigarette from the platinum case. 'The air agrees with you, I trust?'

There was no doubt in Chard's mind concerning the identity of the man before him. The Sultan of Sarawani leaned on his gold-mounted cane, exploring Chard with restless brown eyes. It was some time before he spoke; and then his voice was low-pitched, almost a whisper.

'Nothing agrees with me while I am being hunted to death, young man. I dare not show myself in the town. The moment I venture from this house I should get it here!'

The Sultan pointed to a spot an inch below his heart, his face betraying unusual mental agony.

'Poison darts!'

Dennis nodded in swift understanding.

'Spies from Borneo and the Malay Peninsula?'

'Rebels of the Kawara dynasty,' the Sultan explained gravely. 'To-morrow I will tell you the reason of my flight from Borneo. In the meanwhile,' he added, pausing to study Chard's handsome young face thoughtfully, 'in the meanwhile you may tell me something of your own troubles. You are poor and need help. I am all powerful and wealthy. It is possible we may be of use to each other. I could make you rich. Go on with your duties and see me again!'

That night Dennis wrote Hetty concerning his new post: —

*At last I have arrived! I sat at the typewriter to-day while the Princess of Patagonia dictated four offers of marriage to various celebrities, including the Mayor of Chicago, and the champion heavyweight boxer of the world. Also I am on friendly terms with His Highness the Sultan of Sarawani, owner of vast sapphire mines within the Landang peninsula. See where our little adventure has led! I fully expect Sarawani will make me his prune minister when he returns to Borneo. In the meantime keep smiling. I feel that a palace of ivory is growing about us, a palace with peacocks in the front garden!*

Hetty read the letter carefully, a tiny frown on her brow. Sultan of Sarawani! The Princess of Patagonia! She recalled instantly the crowd of more or less bedevilled people she had seen on the lawn of the old Georgian house.

A rather tired smile broke over her pretty face as she put away the letter.

'THE SULTAN is one of my best paying guests!' Giggs told Chard. 'Try and amuse him. He's beginning to like you.'

Dennis was sure he could manage the Sultan. That evening he sat beside him in a quiet part of the grounds listening to his story of his desperate escape from his implacable enemies. His fat, dimpled hand rested on Chard's knee, his dark eyes unusually animated as he spoke.

'I was hunted for my jewels, my priceless collection of sapphires and rubies from the Min Moug mines at Mandalay. There seemed no place where I could hide them in safety.'

'You hid them, Highness?' Dennis ventured with a show of interest.

The Sultan of Sarawani turned his head to make sure they were quite alone. Then in a whisper.

'They are worth a quarter of a million sterling; tiers and tiers of water blue sapphires from my estates at Landang. There are rubies and emeralds with the warm blood of the East in their veins. Matchless!'

Dennis regarded the Sultan thoughtfully. 'Why didn't you go to the police?' he questioned, stifling a yawn.

'I could not trust my priceless collection of jewels with any police.' Again his voice fell. 'I hid them in an old garden hose!'

Chard sat up in his deck chair, and stared at the wind-stirred elm branches above their heads. For a moment he was too startled to speak. Something in the Sultan's voice blazed a thought in his brain.

'Listen,' the Sultan went on. 'I feel you are to be trusted with the fortune of a poor hunted rajah. The garden hose belongs to Captain Giggs. It was put aside, last year, as useless. It hangs in the loft above the old stables, over there!'

He indicated a low-roofed building, some distance from the house, a place almost overgrown with laurel and creepers.

'Splendid!' Dennis applauded in a whisper. 'No one would dream of going there.'

The Sultan's answer startled him.

'I want you to go there. There is no one else to trust. Go to the stables to-night and get the collection. You will then take them to an address in Charing Cross, where my sister, the Maharanee Kalaja, lives.'

Chard nodded approvingly and waited.

'The Maharanee will pay you the sum of three thousand pounds for your trouble. You will do this for me?'

Chard pressed his hand.

'Trust me, Highness,' he answered steadily. 'I'll shake out that hose the moment it's dark!'

IT WAS quite dark when Dennis entered the old stables, a candle and matches in his pocket. At the top of some creaky, dust-blackened stairs was the loft. Lighting the candle he saw a weather-rotted coil of hose hanging from a peg in the wall. Lowering it, he cut it in several places with his knife, and then shook the pieces violently to and fro. There followed a shower of small bright stones to the floor of the loft. In the dull glow of the candle light he beheld a stream of greenish white sapphires fall about him, a patter of softly iridescent rubies and emeralds until the small heap at his feet scintillated like the jewels in the stable of the Magi.

Five minutes later he had left the old Georgian house, the collection of gems in his breast pocket. At Henley a taxi took him to Scotland Yard. To Chief Inspector Crowley, Dennis revealed the hoard of sapphires and emeralds he had taken from the garden hose.

The inspector examined them critically.

'Stolen from the mail bags of a Hatton Garden dealer,' he announced tersely. 'They were consigned to him by his agent in Batavia. We suspected a notorious mail robber named Briggs; a sleek chap, with fat baby hands; always smartly dressed, frock coat and all that. We scoured the country for him; we even searched our jails, knowing we'd find him in a most unlikely place.'

'You might have tried some of our private lunatic asylums!' Dennis laughed. The inspector stared in amaze.

'By jove; that's a corker. Is that where you found him?'

Chard shook his head. He was far too young and sentimental to play sleuth against a man whose fate was already sealed. The inspector was too much a tactician to press his question immediately. He informed Chard, however, that a reward of £5,000 would be paid him by the Hatton Garden dealer for the safe recovery of the jewels.

In a West-End telephone booth Chard rang up the Sultan of Sarawani, at Gigg's.

It was some time before the well-known voice reached him. It was full of anxiety.

'My precious stones, Chard?'

'Gone to their owners, Highness. Tomorrow the Flying Squad will be here. And I've decided to give you a flying chance.'

'Thanks for that, Chard. The trouble with me was I couldn't pass the stuff to one of my pals. And the Yard was after me day and night. So I chanced sending the stones with you. How did you know I was here?'

'Saw you accidentally from the river one day, after I'd been studying your picture in a newspaper, after the famous mail robbery. Good-bye, Highness!'

'Good-bye, Chard! Thanks for giving me a chance.'

'I'd give a cat a chance, Highness, if it covered up as you did. Kind regards to the Maharanee!'

Dennis's second call was to Hetty to say that he would meet her the following day with a view to acquiring a bungalow on the river.

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### 31: A Face in Amber

*Western Mail* (Perth) 5 March 1931

THE night was hot, with a big red moon over the date palms. Elsie Findlay sat alone on the wide verandah of the tradehouse, where the Hafiz-road brought strings of camels from the everlasting sandbelts, of the Northern Sahara.

From the rear of the tradehouse came the fragrant smoke of burning olive logs, the bivouac fires of the Arab horse-boys and cotton-buyers.

Ever since she could remember Elsie had listened to the prattling voices of Algerian cameleers, the camp fire talk of the white-gowned traders from Jaffa and Constantinople, vendors of perfume, ivory and bergamot.

Her father, Dan Findlay, depended on the cross-desert traffic for a livelihood. He bartered English goods for oil and francs. He sold the snow-white twill and sheeting that is made into Arab *cheche* and burnous. In time Dan had begun to regard this lonely desert outpost as his own territory.

Only one white man had challenged Dan's right to annex the Jaffa-bound desert trade. His name was Bede Templeton, an inexperienced youngster from an English public school. From a seemingly inexhaustible supply of funds Templeton had built and stocked a commodious trade depot within a short ride of Findlay's stockades.

Templeton's smile had not deserted him in the months of neglect, and failure that followed his appearance in the Hafiz district. But the smile of trusting youth is not equal to the abysmal cunning of the desert.

He had returned, one night, after a ride in the sands, to find his trade house a blazing ruin. Everything was burnt to the ground.

IT WAS A crushing event for Elsie Findlay. Templeton had been so likeable. Her father said it was Bede's own fault. The boy didn't know a real sheik from a henna shampoo. Always he allowed beggars and cadging old women about his gateway, when he might have used a whip

Any one crone with a tale to tell of her starving brats could pull the goods from Bede's shelves. Dan Findlay recalled Old Nabbon, the witch woman, to whom he had given clothes and even money. Money! And because of a little rain and cold the young fool had allowed the infernal old witch to camp in his yard! Fire, medicine, blankets and milk!

No wonder the sheiks and traders had kept away. And then a gang of Algerian bullies, from the French military depots, cleaned out his store and then applied a firestick to his walls. Witches and beggars!

Bede Templeton had gone away in the dark without a look or a word from the people he had helped.

In the long hot months that followed, Elsie heard nothing from the boy who had cast away his inheritance. An Arab perfume-dealer, from Fezzan, reported that Bede had joined the Legion, and was fighting the Riffi somewhere in the Bibane hills. They never came back, these young asses. Praise Allah, there was plenty of sand to cover them! the perfume dealer intimated.

ELSIE LISTENED to the sounds outside the high stockade, the faint, far-off tinkle of camel-bells, the soft chanting tones of a Mahomedan at prayer. Her father had gone to Makaran to negotiate some credit. Times had changed since the war. Dan found himself at grips with foreign competition, Belgian and French. He would not return till past midnight.

Few people visited the tradehouse after dark. Once or twice during the last month a District Commissioner had called in reference to Bede Templeton's disappearance. Consulates rarely sleep on such matters, although the history of North Africa is well listed with the names of young Englishmen who go missing in unadministered territory.

Lilith, a soft-eyed Eritrean girl, who worked among the fabrics in the deep shadowed trade room, slipped noiselessly across the verandah and whispered a dozen sing-song words in the vernacular.

Elsie put aside her book and stood up to peer across the palm shadows beyond the high stockade. A team of camels had halted silently a hundred yards from the gate. The yielding sand gave no sound under the slouching tread of laden beasts. But the harsh voices of the Arab drivers were audible.

"It is El Manek, mam'zelle!" Lilith intoned. "The Amber Sheik!"

Elsie stared at the black shadows moving hither and yon about the date palms.

Her father had often discussed the notorious El Manek. From Biskra to the Great Lakes his caravans collected ivory and skins in return for amber and francs. His name had been linked with the slave-runners of the old Sudan.!

Lilith stood back in the shadows of the verandah, whispering in sharp, frightened sentences to her young mistress.

"Listen mam'zelle! He is coming up the path!"

The Amber Sheik came slowly up the path, halted where the tall, singularly wistful figure of Elsie was silhouetted in the lights of the house.

"The night is with thee, Flower of the! Sands!" he grunted in Arabic, his glance leaping beyond the startled English girl to the cedar-panelled

traderoom, the open windows that revealed the scanty stocks of cotton and woollen goods.

His eye was caught by the soft glow of an unusually fine piece of amber that lay on Dan Findlay's open desk. His trained glance missed nothing of its wonderful colouring and almost crystalline clearness, the unmistakable fragrance that spoke of the cold Baltic tides, the salt of the Great Belt. The news of its presence in Dan's trade room had been carried far and wide by envious Arabs.

Elsie spoke. "I'm sorry, El Manek, you have come at this hour. My father has gone to Makaran. It will be late before he returns."

El Manek drew a *suliu* leaf from his belt, rolled it dexterously about a twist of green tobacco. His grunting voice came through the acrid fumes as he smoked.

"Hear me, Daughter of the Dawn!" he commanded. "It is not thy father I seek. Let thine eyes rest on the tall white man out there!" He jerked in the direction of the moving shadows of his followers out-side the stockade. "Look well, for he is easy to see among my desert pigmies!"

Elsie leaned from the verandah, staring wide-eyed at the circle of camel drivers. In the centre of the circle stood a tattered, travel-mired figure, A long camel-halter about his waist and wrists. Bare of foot, his face revealed the scars and bruises of a long and terrible journey through sand and cacti. On his breast, gleaming faintly, was the tiny cross of the Legion.

Bede Templeton.

"A prisoner?" It came from Elsie in a suffocating under-breath. "How dare you put a rope about a white man?" she demanded, her warm breast swelling with anger.

The Amber Sheik stooped towards her, his bright earrings quivering in the moon-light.

"He is known to thee! Thou knowest also that his sword hath been turned against the great Abdel. He was wounded. I found him in the sands of the Maghri, two hundred miles south of the Hammada Homra. His life is mine. The award of five hundred pounds, offered by Abdel, for every soldier of the Foreign Legion brought to him, awaits me!"

A silence.

Elsie Findlay was listening to the beating of her own heart. Why had he brought Bede to her? Why had this old slave-runner traversed the unending leagues of desert and mountain to show her the beaten body of the boy who had thrown away his chances?



El Manek spoke. "I am not cruel, Daughter of the Dawn. I seek only to trade. This man, whom thou knowest, is worth five hundred pounds to me if I hand him to the agents of Sultan Abdel!"

Five hundred pounds! Elsie remembered her father's almost desperate financial position.

"Yet money is not my need," El Manek went on, his tiger-brown eyes shifting again to the glowing lump of pure amber, lying on Dan's desk within the trade room.

Elsie knew what was coming.

"Give me the piece of amber," he went on, indicating the shining, glowing mass on her father's desk, "in return for this prisoner! Then I will go my way leaving him in thy care."

Elsie's fingers closed about the verandah rail. In the dark of her young brain was the knowledge that this slow-voiced Arab was demanding all that stood between her dour, hard-pressed parent and practical ruin. The cash for its purchase had been borrowed at almost ruinous interest from an Assyrian trader.

The thought blanched her.

He seemed to read the cause of her hesitation to accept his offer. By Allah she needed a spur! With the speed of a wolf he turned to his followers at the gate.

"Move on with this white dog! Then is nothing here for us! Elsewhere his body will bring the reward!"

El Manek was outside the gate now, adjusting his big riding saddle, shortening the long halter that bound Templeton to his pommel.

The camels grunted protestingly as the drivers swung their rawhide whips once more to the moonlit sands of the Algerian Sahara.

All the blood drained from Elsie's cheeks. Templeton turned for a moment to the lights of the tradehouse as a drowning mariner looks at a fast disappearing ship. Every step into the desert widened the gap.

This time there could be no return!'

The rope jerked him to his knees as El Manek's big camel plunged forward. Not a sound escaped him. His fine eyes seemed steeped in misery, his chin sunk to the little cross on his breast.

He had seen Elsie's slim figure in the trade house lights. He could not even guess what had passed between her and El Manek. All he knew was that one's dreams never came true.

Ahead lay thirst, blows and finally a bullet— if his lucky star held. His young teeth snapped as he flung into line, with the swinging, lashing pack beasts in his rear.

God! Why had they revealed his hopeless defeat to a woman with pitying eyes?

A WHITE SHAPE was running in the wake of the fast disappearing camel train. It was Elsie's voice that called across the hoof-trodden sands.

"Stop! I was wrong to let you go. Here is what you ask!"

El Manek halted his camel, slipped from the saddle and stood before the quick-breathing girl. In his hand was the glowing, honey-coloured piece of amber. He took it with a grin, and then, with a slash of his knife, severed the rope that bound Templeton to his saddle.

Elsie's hands went out to his swaying shoulders as the disappearing camel train left them alone in the moonlit sands.

The fragrance of her hair stole into his fainting blood as they reached the stockade gate. Elsie led him to the cool room where she had waited and dreamed during the long hot summer for a sign of his return.

El Manek uttered an Arab oath at the moment Elsie and Templeton gained the tradehouse. A black, clawing figure had risen from the sands and was clutching his driving rein.

"Nabbon!"

He glared down at the old witch as the team halted, the drivers staring in superstitious amaze at her furious fingers and flaming eyes.

Her long black fingers had closed, over the piece of amber in his fist. He had raised his rawhide to strike her from his path. Something in her furious cat-like writhings checked him. He was conscious that she had torn the amber from his paralysed grip, that she was holding it to the powerful rays of the desert moon.

"Thief!" she accused, her long bony fingers playing over the luminous surface of the amber "Turn thy evil eyes into this well of light!" She held up the glowing mass to his frightened stare.

"Gaze into the heart of the light, jackal of the sands! Maybe thou wilt see the face of thy dead son whom Abdel's butchers led away!"

El Manek would have struck with his rawhide and flung the writhing sorceress into the drifts. But she was holding the spheroid of moon-whitened amber above the whip, was clinging to the neck of his camel with the tenacity of a panthress.

Hypnotised he glared into the depths of ghost-pale amber, half-dazzled, awed, but cursing under his breath.

Was it the moonlight or her twirling black fingers that gave life to the glowing sphere of amber? Within its smoky depths leered the faces of dead

slaves and hunted women, the streaming eyes of fear-crazed native children. Hundreds and hundreds of them, and then—

The witch thrust the amber closer to his blanched eyes, as the face of his son showed in the fuming depths of colour, the boy who had gone with the Sultan's armies to fill a grave on the Oureq.

At his sick gesture she drew away the amber.

"Begone!" His lips barely shaped the word. "Thou devil-cat"

The old witch stood firm under the white glow of the desert moon.

"Begone, thou, El Manah! Cover thy wicked head. Tempt not devils when they bid thee go in peace!" she retorted.

The drivers in the rear sheltered their eyes from her baleful stare, from the whitely glowing mirror of death in her shaking claw.

At a sign from El Manek they moved on. Once or twice he looked back apprehensively at the old witch, hobbling across the sands, the piece of magic amber in her shut claw. *Inshallah!* It was not a thing to have in one's tent! Yet he prayed that the Prophet would scourge her body before many dawns had passed,

IT WAS VERY STILL on the trade house verandah where Elsie sat with Templeton settled in a low, cushioned chair. A little food had acted like magic on his overwrought senses. Already in his boyish exuberance he was inclined to laugh over the bitter hardships he had recently endured.

What was it Elsie had given to El Manek that had caused the old slave-runner to cut him loose? Elsie evaded the question. It was nothing, she said a piece of mineral stuff Manek had begged her to give him from the store. Often these Arabs set value on a piece of worthless stuff lying on the tables.

Elsie's joy at Bede's deliverance was not without misgiving. The thought of her father's dismay and anger at the loss of the precious amber began to cheat the moments of their aching delight. If she had given away a piece of cloth, a bolt of silk, Dan might never have guessed. She saw his buckling brows, his scowling surprise when he found the amber gone from his desk.

A crunching of feet in the path warned Elsie that her father had returned. His bent shadow slanted across the verandah. The rifle he carried was slammed into the hall rack. Behind him came Mr. Drummond, the District Commissioner. The Commissioner's glance went straight to Templeton in the low-cushioned chair.

But Elsie had eyes only for her father. He appeared fretted and worn. His visit to Makaran to raise money had failed. Her heart gave a little twisting leap. Mr. Drummond's voice, as he leaned over Templeton's chair, barely reached her.

"Gad, boy; we'd given you up! Of I course, we're sorry your father's gone. The estate is, er, unentailed if I may say so. There has been no litigation. Everything goes to your good self, a matter of fifteen thousand a year. Dammit, boy, you've given the consulates no end of trouble!"

He shook hands violently with the dumb-founded boy in the chair.

Dan Findlay emerged suddenly from the traderoom, a haggard look in his face as he signed to Elsie.

"The amber's gone!" he flung out. "I forgot to lock it up!"

Silence that was like an unspoken tragedy froze Elsie as her father turned with a sick gesture from the room. How could she explain?

Templeton was listening to the loud voice of the District Commissioner. Yet he heard Elsie's soft breathing beside him, felt something of the sudden anguish that had come upon her.

And then a black claw was thrust through the dark foliage beside the verandah, where he sat. A lump of shining amber fell into his hand. The voice of Nabbon, the witch, came from the shadows.

"It was the price of thy life, effendi! Only for it thou wouldst now be on thy way to the execution grounds of the Red Sultan! Never, never must thou forget that!"

A long drawn sigh escaped Nabbon as she vanished in the shadows of the Hafiz road.

Templeton stood up with Elsie's half-fainting form drawn to him. His voice broke the almost savage silence.

"Ahoy, there, Findlay!" he called. "Are you looking for a lump of amber?"

The startled face of Dan Findlay appeared in the doorway of the room. His eyes leaped towards the precious object in Templeton's hand.

A sharp pause.

"You see, Findlay," Templeton spoke at last, "I want to come into your business. And this piece of amber is going to be my first gift to Elsie. Will you let me come into your business, Dan?" His voice was oddly wistful.

The District Commissioner broke in unexpectedly. "You may draw on the Consulate for ten thousand pounds, to-morrow, Templeton," he said, lighting a big cheroot, "The money's there!"

The beaten look went out of Dan Findlay's eyes as Templeton drew Elsie closer to his breast. Perhaps Dan's answer did not matter, after all. The fragrant night was too full of the melody in Elsie's heart to heed other sounds.

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### 32: The Shawl With Pockets

*Sunday Times* (Perth, WA) 31 May 1931

HAREM shawls! A gay display within Dan Merriman's palm-shadowed trade-room. The colour and fragrance of a sultan's courtyard lay in the carefully folded bundle at the end of the counter.

Teddy Craig, Merriman's white assistant, had bought them at the sale of Ras Tandra's household goods. Tandra's army of creditors had forced the auction, and Teddy had got the six blue and gold embroidered shawls for the price of one dinner at the Hotel Casablanca.

Ras Tandra had disappeared, leaving his retinue of frightened servants to face the gangs of in-storming creditors and police agents. And those poor, half-demented ladies of the harem! He had seen them peering down from the shuttered windows into the courtyard below, at the rabble of negroes and Arabs gathered about the chattels of their runaway lord.

"You'll get used to these harem auction sales, Teddy," Dan Merriman predicted from his desk by the open window of the trade-room. "Rough on those ladies, no doubt, to be cast adrift in North Africa, after a sheltered life inside the palace walls."

Craig, as usual, was silent. Perhaps he was ashamed of his weakness, displayed in his bitter indignation at the conduct of the native police and agents, during the sale of Ras Tandra's goods. The rooms of the women and children had been stripped bare, the weeping women and little ones cast adrift with ruthless jibes.

Well, he had stood it for a while, and then, in the face of the Government agents, had handed an Ethiopian trooper one on the jaw for luck. The jar of that one smash on the jaw was still in his long left arm. And he had been joyously ready for more if any of those other Algerian skunks had stepped out.

Old man Merriman was speaking again from his desk. "You don't get anywhere in this country, Ted, for slamming yourself at these black soldiers. They don't understand an Englishman stepping out to protect Ras Tandra's rag-bag crown of women and kids."

Another silence. June Merriman had entered the trade-room to inspect the harem shawls. June was Dan's only child, and was engaged to marry Preston Lancing, the junior partner in the firm. Lancing had been absent on a business trip for nearly a year. When he returned old Dan would turn over the business to him, and take a rest.

Merriman had made money in Bourazai when the caravans halted under the red walls of the desert town. Those shouting Algerian cameleers and horse-

men fairly yelled for his cotton goods and cutlery. Now they asked for petrol, and parked their big, smelly waggons in the very shadow of the old sultans' courtyards.

"Nice lot of shawls, June!" he called to his daughter. "Belonged to Tandra's women-folk. Nobody in Tangier wanted 'em. They're supposed to be unlucky."

June was fingering one of orange and purple silk, embroidered with ivory-tinted lace, a priceless thing that had taken years to complete. The fragrance of bergamot and oleanders greeted the touch of her caressing hand.

Craig, in his shirt sleeves, his young athletic body, bent over a crate of imported hardware, was guilty of a shy glance at her slender, lovely figure beside him. Only for an instant did their eyes meet. Craig went on busily with the unpacking.

"American tourists buy these harem shawls," she intoned almost sadly. "A hundred dollars each, eh, Dad?" she added, with the ghost of a smile. "The price of some little slave mother's tragedy!"

Craig bent tower over the heap of brassware. The day was insufferably hot; the voices of the donkey boys and cameleers, bivouacked within the trade-house gateway, threatened to become irksome.

The price of some little slave mother's tragedy! How well June summarised things! Teddy's fists bunched again when he recalled the sneers and insults aimed at the little group of forlorn women at Ras Tandra's.

Dan Merriman had met him on a West Coast tramp steamer, and had brought him to the store at Bourazai. Craig liked the work and the red-tiled bungalow in the nest of slanted palms, facing the Tangier road. Dan had given him the bungalow to live in.

The trade-house needed more help. For this reason Dan had grown impatient of Preston Lancing's protracted business tour. Preston's failing lay in the belief that fortunes were to be made within the Arab towns of the Algerian Sahara. Gold, silver, jade, and amber. The lure of it kept him from his proper place in the trade room.

Yet old Dan had faith in Lancing. The man had imagination and energy. He could handle refractory Mohammedans with the tact of a Lawrence or a Kitchener.

"Lancing will do things, Teddy," Dan declared when June had left the trade-room. "He knows the Sahara from Chad to El Rif. He'd go anywhere on a blind camel and get business where another man would only make trouble. Strikes the right note everywhere."

It may have been that Lancing stood for all that Dan had missed in youth, the joy of boundless adventure in a land where romance still flaunted her scarlet cloaks and blades.

"One of these days," Dan concluded from his desk, "Preston Lancing is going to bring the bacon home. Then maybe, I'll take a spell at Brighton or Torquay. June and Preston can carry on over here with the niggers and the nightingales."

Often, in the silence of his bungalow. Craig wondered whether lucky Preston Lancing would ever return. June was difficult to read, and always busy with her own tasks. Lancing's name never came to her lips, although Dan never allowed it to be forgotten. It was a name to make history in North Africa. Every servant and porter within the trade-house was made aware of the fact.

Night brought a red moon that floated like a huge lantern out over the sands. A lone jackal fluted eerily beyond the cactus-covered drifts. The sound of the brass hammerers in the distant village beat on the sultry air.

The light in June's window had gone out; but there came a fragrant drift of air from the dark Algerian roses beneath her casement, to ease his troubled mind.

In a little while the gay adventurer Lancing, would carry her away to one of the picturesque Mediterranean towns, Cannes, Nice, or Monaco. Craig was sure that Preston would never remain at Bourazai among the sand-dunes. Preston had spoken of buying a yacht for June, the moment his plans matured: a yacht and a garden, among the wistaria-covered slopes of the French Riviera.

Lucky Lancing! Teddy Craig tossed restlessly on his camp bed. Nothing seemed to come out of his own hard work in the factory and trade-house. All Dan's thoughts were centred on the man who had gone forth to grapple with fortune and bring her to heel.

Yet Teddy was glad he had met June Merriman, glad he had experienced the dizzy pleasure of escorting her through the village under the envious glances of stately Arab horsemen and military patrols.

The soft grunt of a camel under the palms, outside, woke Craig from his troubled sleep. With his hand on the door he stared across the moonlit compound, at a shape moving towards the bungalow. For an instant the shape halted in the dazzling white light of the desert moon, his face upturned to June's window. But only for a moment; the next saw him blundering, muttering under his breath, to the bungalow verandah.

Here he swayed, pitching to his knees before the dumbfounded Craig.

"Lancing!" Teddy stooped over the sprawled-out figure, raising him with almost womanly tenderness into an upright position. Preston's fingers tightened about his arm.

"Thanks, Craig." His voice seemed to come from unutterable depths. In the brilliant moon glow his face was a twisted agony. "Let me spell here, awhile."

Craig!" he' begged. 'I'm at the end of my work. Just a couple of hours rest, before I move out again!"

With astonishing ease Craig raised him from the verandah and bore him to the camp bed inside the bungalow. The Merriman household was deep in slumber, and the sound of Preston's camel, munching *bersim* within the open stalls across the compound, told him that jaded beast was attending to its own dire needs.

Craig lit an old lamp, drew the curtains of the windows closer, for it was evident that Lancing wished his return to remain a secret from old Dan and June. He had once envied Lancing's debonair appearance, his flashing, wit and handsome bearing. He found himself looking down at a desert-blانched, food-starved ruin of a man, a gray spectre from the living hells of the Algerian Sahara.

For a moment he held a flask to the clenched teeth of the trembling man on the camp bed, and then; gently forcing him back to the pillow, waited for him to speak.

It was not long. Lancing shivered, wiped the dew of agony from his brow as he lay breathing like a spent animal.

"I thought I'd return to Dan and June with banners flying," he almost choked. "If Dan hadn't been a dreamer, too, I might have nailed myself to my job in the warehouse and piled up a fortune. I wanted easy money. Craig. I wanted it in the shape of tusk ivory, Arab silver, mines and land concessions from the chiefs. I thought my arm was strong enough to make my dreams come true."

Again he huddled back on the shaking camp bed, his blanched lips quivering in the effort of speech. It seemed a long time before he spoke again.

"It doesn't take the Arabs long to size up a man," he went on at last. "In a month they had plucked my thoughts and jeered at my ambitions. They told me frankly I would never find power through them. But they found a use for me."

"A use Lancing?"

"I was offered two things; and if I refused they promised to feed my carcase to the jackals. One of the jobs was to run drugs from the nearest port to a rendezvous in the Air Mountains." Preston paused to fetch an-other heart-shaking breath into his lungs. "The Other commission, was slave running in the interests of Central African planters and traders."

Instinctively Craig shrank from the camp bed, from the tortured, soul racked adventurer, who had pitted muscle and brain against the cunning of Africa.



"To save your own skin, Preston, you struck at the lives of others!" he declared bitterly, for he was thinking of June and the old man who had pinned faith in Lancing's ability to run honest and play the game.

Lancing wriggled on the camp bed like a man with invisible irons about his waist and ankles. He spoke again with less difficulty.

"Luring hunky niggers from their idle lives in the jungle, and putting them to useful work on the rivers and fields, didn't. I confess, appear so much of a crime as it is represented. I was promised a huge fortune if I succeeded in carrying on for they realised my value in the matter of bluffing white District Commissioners and getting by with my black *battues*.

"So you see, Craig, how my romance got mushed up? A romance that turned to the rounding up of niggers for the slave warrens of El Marut and Dinggaan."

"There was work here in the trade house," Craig reminded him sadly.

A silence followed in which Lancing appeared to be fighting an unseen adversary. It seemed ages to the watching Teddy before he spoke.

"Ras Tandra was our agent in Tangier for the dope traffic. He got the stuff through Egypt and Other places. We passed it on by camel into the interior. Ras is now on the run. Our supplies cut off. I came up from Fezzan to see him. Unluckily for me the police picked up a letter I wrote him a month ago, concerning a big packet of heroin and cocaine. The police have, therefore, transferred their affections to me. To save my name, also June's and Dan's, I must get back to my Arab stronghold. Will you do me a last favour before I go. Craig?"

"What is it?"

"Go to Ibrahim, in the Street of the Cobbler, and ask him to give you the musical box addressed to me, I must have it."

Craig hesitated awhile, then, with scarcely a sound, passed out to the sleeping village at the end of the sandstone road. He was back in half an hour after a brisk and lively interview with the angry, sleepy-eyed Ibrahim.

"You got it?" Lancing asked hoarsely from the camp bed.

"After threatening to clip his whiskers and ears if he didn't open the door and hand over the goods," Craig told him.

Preston took the box of sandalwood, inset with tortoise shell, and in his eagerness to open it tore away the gimcrack handle attached to a bogus musical cylinder inside.

A single glance at the contents within almost blanched his eyes. "Only six shots!" he gasped. "The miserable hound! He's stolen half my ammunition."

"He said it was all he'd received," the puzzled Craig informed him.

Lancing suppressed a savage outburst as he drew the box on to the bed. Then he sighed wearily to the expectant Teddy.

"Let me sleep here for one hour, Craig." he begged. "I'll ask no further favour. At dawn I'll go my way."

Teddy hesitated before leaving the room. "Why did you come here?" he asked without heat.

"The camel had to be fed and watered," was the snapped-out retort. "And then I was going to ask old Dan to lend me fifty pounds. Ras Tandra ran off with a packet of stuff that was worth a fortune to me. I go back to the Arabs empty-handed. The stuff Tandra took was the key to the Arab's heaven. And now it's all gone."

Teddy withdrew to an outer room disconsolately. From his coign of vision he observed Lancing sit up and draw a small brass lamp from the sandalwood box, a couple of brushes, two long needles and a metal rod. Lying back on the camp bed he dipped the end of the rod into a black tarry compound, held it over the brass lamp until it sizzled. Plugging the fuming drug into the pipe and holding the cup-like bowl of the pipe to the flame of the lamp, he inhaled deeply, greedily, filling the pipe a second time until he had smoked a mace.

Then Lancing fell back on the camp bed murmuring softly, hands stretched out to an invisible shape that floated down from invisible heights.

"June!" His voice cracked horribly. "I want to make it all come true."

THE DESERT moon had crossed the palms when Lancing woke. Craig was beside him with a cup of black coffee. A faint sob broke from the man who had inhaled the dragon's breath. He reached for the coffee hungrily.

A few gulps seemed to revive him. Crawling from the camp-bed he stared from the open door to the ghostly camel, standing in the grey dawn light. Then his smoke-blanching eyes turned to June's window.

"Wasn't she worth striving for?" Craig asked bitterly.

Lancing made a terrible gesture as he staggered towards the camel. "June is always in my dreams. Craig. But I like now for—"

"The pipe?"

Lancing squirmed as he climbed into the saddle of the kneeling camel.

"I've lost touch with realities, old man. Africa makes a quick kill of her victims, I'm only fit for the lotus gardens of the south. The thought of ledgers and trade-rooms is like poison to me"

In the saddle he fingered the sandalwood box uneasily. "Only five shots left," he grumbled. "Six might have seen me through my journey."

"Six smokes, Preston?"

"Six breaths of Paradise to carry me over six stages of hell. Craig, I can't do it on five," he quavered. One shot more would have made it safe. Just one more shot!"

"Don't go!" broke from Teddy. "I'll hide you until I can get you out of the country."

But the camel had lurched forward to the road that stretched like a drawn line to the desert. Craig followed clutching desperately at the driving rein. In the drawn light Lancing was holding up a small red button of the Legion.

"If I don't reach Marut, Craig, the camel will find its way back here. It's June's animal. Every bedouin in the Sahara knows the beast. They will send it home. This red button will be in its headstall if— if I can't get through. Tell June I missed the trail."

The Camel raced forward into the deep drifts with its drug-shaken rider. Craig returned to the bungalow.

June was in the trade-room before her father had finished breakfast. Craig found her inspecting one of the harem shawls lying at the bottom of the pack. A slight frown touched her brow as she weighed it on her arm.

"Too heavy," she sighed, returning it to the counter. "And the others are so light."

Craig's expert fingers dosed about the richly embroidered shawl, and, without ado, disclosed a belt like pocket sewn through the whole length of the material. A pair of scissors opened it, allowing a stream of tar-like pellets to fall to the counter. In a corner of the pocket was a note addressed to Lancing. June read it eagerly over Craig's shoulder

*Allah be with thee, effendi! Here you will find medicine for sick Ameers and slaves. With it you will buy camels and land, many wives and much ivory. By our agreement, effendi Lancing, I take half.*

*Ras Tandra.*

"Just a wicked consignment of opium!" Dan Merriman had entered the trade-room unnoticed and had taken the letter from the unresisting June. He crushed it fiercely in his palm and stumbled to his desk as one whose hopes had been blasted by the stroke of an Arab's pen.

A BLACK sandstorm had raged for days. Craig was staring from the trade-room window at a solitary camel staggering in from the wind-swept road. Before he could reach the door June had crossed the compound and was leading the weary beast by its rein. When she entered the trade room she was holding a small red button between her finger and thumb.

"I know all about these little symbols," she began, with slightly paling lips. "Mother Sahara has taken our Preston!"

Craig was manipulating a heavy bale of silk in the passage. He was silent.

"The trouble was," June went on steadily, "Dad thought he'd discovered a commercial genius in Lancing. I could have told him that poor Preston was just a modern Aladdin looking for somebody's lamp to rub. Was I right, Teddy Craig?"

Not for naught had Craig suffered loneliness and disappointment in Dan Merriman's trade-house. Hurling the huge bale of silk into its place he met June's straight glances.

"I shall not need a lamp to win the woman I want," he said with desperate courage. "Dear June," he had taken her in his arms, "a man who cannot afford even a lamp will marry you. All he possesses is strength and a wish to work for you until he dies."

June's cheek was against his lips, her hands resting on his strong breast. But there was a flash of tears in her young eyes.

"I'll marry that man, Teddy, dear, to show Dad that romance did not perish in the desert with Preston Lancing !"

And June Merriman kept her word.

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### **33: The Honeymoon Crime**

*Chronicle* (Adelaide, SA) 3 Dec 1931

MARGARET'S hour had arrived. Judd was due about midnight. The steamer would berth at the pier for twenty-four hours, allowing time for their marriage at the little chapel of the Magdalen Sisters, at Monsoon Point.

She had not seen Archie Judd for three years. The tragedy of her position lay in the fact that she had almost forgotten him. Her work at Payne's Silk House, on Malay avenue, had so pleasantly and completely absorbed her young thoughts. On her desk lay Judd's big, red sealed envelope, delivered by the morning Indian mail. It contained bank notes to the value of five thousand rupees. Judd insisted that the money was essential for the purchase of her travelling outfit, she could buy everything on Malay avenue.

It went without saying that during her three happy years at Payne's she had saved little. Judd had been her father's secretary in China, until the endless revolutions had broken the old man's heart and fortune. There had been an almost insane deathbed agreement, wherein Judd had eased her father's last moments by promising to 'see her through' after he had made enough money to start a business on his own.

Archie Judd was nearly forty, and had thrown in his lot with a trading group in Calcutta, while Margaret had gone to Mrs. Maltby, the widow of an old army officer in Songolo. Mrs. Maltby owned a red-tiled bungalow at Monsoon Point. It was through her good offices that the sixteen-year-old Margaret had found employment at Payne's big silk warehouse on Malay avenue. The palatial showrooms attached to the mammoth silk emporium were controlled and owned by Norry Payne, the youngest and most inscrutable of Songolo's silk rajahs.

Payne was barely in his twenty-sixth year. A shy and somewhat elusive type of merchant prince, he had nevertheless fought his way, unaided, through the continued opposition of native guilds and tongs, with skill and daring. Margaret had grown accustomed to his shy, quick glances whenever he passed down the bale-littered passages where the native clerks sat on their heels, or perched on high stools before their ledgers and invoices. From his morning survey of his well-organised staff he would pass to the seclusion of his fan-cooled office, where he worked alone.

How careful Norry Payne had been to avoid undue favours or attentions, despite the fact that she was the one white girl in his employ! Sometimes in passing he would pause to emphasise a clause or point in regard to a recent business communication from a foreign buyer. Yet in the moment of leisured

intercourse the eyes of a hundred watchful clerks would focus her, the lovely, aloof memsahib with the dreaming face and eyes. Well, she was going to forget it all, forget the three years of wistful dreaming within the secluded walls and gardens of Songolo's inscrutable trader, Payne. Margaret had sent in her resignation the moment Judd's letter had reached her, had left the office with the intention of completing her outfit at the imposing general store owned by Hop Sing, at the far end of the town.

Of course Norry Payne had received her letter, had probably read it, and forgotten it as completely as if she had never existed. Every day in the year someone was resigning. He had no time to feel sorry for the domestic comedies and tragedies of the wayward ones who peopled his little kingdom on Malay avenue. And, be it noted, the men and women who resigned comfortable positions in the house of Payne never returned. Not once had the rule been broken.

Norry Payne stayed late, that afternoon, in his office. Margaret's letter of resignation was on the desk before him. So the girl with the eyes of a Ridi madonna was gone, the Margaret he had taken under his house-flag, when disaster and death had overtaken her father, had slipped away without a nod or a good-bye.

Well, it had not been his custom to jump from his desk and farewell every man and woman leaving his service. They left with a year's salary and as much silk as they wanted. Yet, he reflected, Margaret might have just looked in for the last time. After all, his own days were pretty lonely. That fellow Judd from Calcutta! Would Margaret find happiness with him? Archie Judd! Good lord!

The telephone at his elbow rang. Hop Sing was speaking in his fiercest pidgin.

'Lissen to me, sah!' he raved. 'One big swindle just bin put on me! You hear, Missah Payne?'

'I hear, Hop Sing,' Norry gave back sternly. 'Don't shout at me, please. Who is the swindler?'

The Chinaman was breathing savagely as he answered, 'One of your people, sah, Missey Margaret Blake. She hand five-thousan' rupee to my cashier to pay for goods she just take away. Five thousan' rupees!' he almost screamed. 'I callee police now! You heah, sah?'

Payne sat frozen at the receiver. 'Wait a bit, Hop Sing,' he answered at last. 'I'm coming to your store. There's been a mistake.'

HOP SING received him with dangerously gleaming eyes. With scarcely a word he led the young silk merchant into his private room. On the table beside

an open safe was a pile of banknotes. The Chinaman took them up, beat them with his open hand.

'Missey Blake come hear to buy wedding clothes. My people treat her with much politeness when she order leather bags, amber beads, jade an' silver bottles of perfume, sah. Allee welly expensive things foh Missey Blake's honeymoon. An' she pay us with these dam notes. All forgeries, sah? Not worth five annas!'

'Easy, Hop Sing!' Payne remonstrated. 'The notes were sent to her by her promised husband. Archie Judd, of Calcutta. Miss Blake knows nothing about Indian currency.'

Hop Sing stared at him. 'Judd has been robbin' everyone on the Peninsula foh years. Allee poor Chinaman planters, allee Malay shopkeepers. Nobody able to catchee him. He welly clever sendin' bad money to Missey Blake to cash.'

'He's a bad man,' Payne agreed readily. Hot anger kindled in him at the thought of Judd's criminal manipulations. Margaret had been used to foist the notes on traders in the hope that she would be clear of the town before the fraud was discovered! Here was a honeymoon tragedy for Margaret. Moreover, once her name was mentioned in connection with the affair life in the East would be impossible for her.

'See here, Mr. Sing,' Payne went on earnestly. 'I'll take over all those bad notes and give you my cheque for the amount in return. You shall not lose a penny on the transaction.'

Hop Sing was guilty of a bitter retort as he slammed the package of counterfeit notes into the safe. Then he faced the young silk rajah menacingly.

'Keepee your money, sah' You wantee hush hush the mattah. Allee bad notes come from your house. You onderstan'? Flom the house of Missah Payne. How muchee bad money you bin passin' lately, eh? Missey Blake your servant. You pay her to do this an' that. I wish yo' good day, sah. Me velly busy!'

Payne realised instantly as he left the Chinaman's store that Sing desired to bring calumny on his house. Once the word was passed that the forged notes were circulating from Judd via the English silk house, incalculable harm would follow. More than this, Payne was moved by the thought of Margaret having to face a charge of criminal conspiracy with her fiancé, Judd.

Back in his office Payne reflected swiftly. It was going to be a fight for more than one life and reputation. He had seen English traders ruined by the stroke of a Chinaman's pen. The fight was here and now. His fingers tingled as he took up the telephone receiver. In a few moments he was speaking to his wharfside superintendent.

'We are storing several cargoes of fine fabrics belonging to Hop Sing. There's more of his stuff unloading from the junks and lighters. Tell my stevedores not to handle any more of his goods. Turn all his merchandise out of my godowns! I want the space immediately. I've no contract with Sing to store and shelter his goods. Up to the moment it's been a matter of goodwill between us. Throw everything on to the wharf!'

'Very good, sir.'

Payne sat back in his chair and waited. Within half an hour of Norry's declaration swarms of lightermen and coolies were seen casting piles of rare and priceless fabrics on to the open wharf, under a blazing sun. Masses of Chinese furniture, delicately fashioned, lacquered screens, and costly trays were strung out in the full glare of the destroying heat waves. The whole town stared in horror. Always these cargoes of exquisitely fashioned goods were handled with infinite care. Worse still, the long delayed rains were spreading east. The barometer had been steadily falling.

A shaven Buddhist priest stared from his ricksha at the growing mountain of spoilable goods on the pier.

'Here be half a million tales' worth of riches to fade and blister in the sun! There is madness somewhere! Or a woman?' he lamented.

A scream of rage was heard on Malay avenue as Hop Sing tore frantically in the direction of the pier. He was met by Payne's overseers.

'Build your own godowns, Mr. Sing,' they told him. 'The rains are coming and we've our own cargoes to shelter. Sorry, but it seems to be each for himself in this town!'

At three o'clock that afternoon, while Hop Sing's coolie gangs swarmed hopelessly about the mile-long line of scattered merchandise, in their frantic efforts to improvise cover, Norry took up his receiver and called up the half-demented Chinaman, The first big raindrops were thumping on the iron roofs of the adjoining warehouses;

'Hello, Sing! Had enough?' A short silence, and then— 'I nevah think you play such a trick on me, Missah Payne!'

The Chinaman's voice quivered with suppressed wrath; for he was sure the young Englishman was laughing at the other end of the wire.

'When I start to trim a pigtail, Mr. Sing, I always cut at the roots. Have you had enough? it's beginning to rain!'

There was no doubt about the Chinaman's answer. 'I am coming to you now, Missah Payne,' he wailed.

'Then bring those false notes. I'll pay you for them. Try any more foolishness and I'll bankrupt you in three months!'

In half an hour Payne had Judd's collection of forgeries within his own safe.



Scarcely had he placed the key within his own drawer when his house boy entered the office with no more sound than a ghost.

'The sahib Judd, from the ship at the pier, has come,' he announced in a whisper.

Norry Payne stood up as though naked steel had touched him. The outer door of the office opened, bringing the sound of rain and wind into the dusk-dimmed room. A lean squall-drenched figure wearing an oil coat and topee entered. He favoured the young silk merchant with a patronising grin

'Hello, Payne! My name's Judd. Sorry to barge in at this hour. But the fact is I expected Margaret to come aboard before we adjourned to the little old chapel somewhere off Monsoon Point. I got tired of waiting.'

It was some time before Payne spoke. Anger died in him as he surveyed the man who had come to carry Margaret away to his own spheres of life, to use her as he had used others in his soulless forgeries.

'Margaret left here this morning,' he said quietly. 'Only by an effort did I prevent her arrest on a charge of uttering these!' He opened the safe quickly, drew out the pile of counterfeit notes while a slow grin touched Judd's hard mouth.

'There's nothing for you to worry about, Payne,' he sneered. 'The thought of a few dirty chinks and Malays being done in doesn't keep me awake at night. It's easier than slaving in a shop!'

'Ten years for you, Judd, the moment the word goes round you're in Songolo! There's a place in the chain gang over on the island ready for you. Somehow,' he paused an instant as though listening to the storm outside, 'I feel that Margaret will not be waiting for you at the chapel of the Magdalen Sisters. Go and see!'

Judd swallowed a bitter retort as he slunk from the office. Norry heard him go, heard the roar of the rain on roof and palm as the outer gate slammed on the heels of the note-layer.

Five hours later a report went through the town that a party of Chinese and Malays had kidnapped a white man waiting near the chapel at Monsoon Point. It was known, later, that the white man had been taken by his captors into the Lindang hills.

The following morning found Payne at the office earlier than usual. The rainclouds had blown inland. Over the palm-skirted beach the sun rode in tropic splendour. Norry stared from his window down the wide avenue where cinnamon and scarlet merged with the blue and gold of streaming shawls and turbans. Ever and ever the soft prattle of native voices rose above the boom of surf on the breakwater.

Where was Margaret? Had she returned to her work? For a while he was afflicted with a sense of pride, a feeling that his boyish dignity might suffer if he traversed the long, coolie-thronged passages to her cubicle. Always these native clerks followed his slightest movements with the avidity of expectant children.

Unable to bear the strain of waiting, he rose steadily and passed down the chattering line of native clerks to her cool little office. on the north side of the tree-shaded warehouse. The fragrance of rain-washed earth and flowers blew in from every window and gate. At Margaret's door he halted as one caressing the last moment of life.

Then he opened it briskly and entered. There was upon him an almost suffocating fear that she had gone; vanished with the shame of Judd's treachery crying within her. The window of the tiny office was open. A sheaf of madonna lilies filled the window space. At the small desk in the centre of the room Margaret sat, head bent over a pile of native correspondence. He could scarcely see her face, but in one swift intake of breath he knew that her world had gone to pieces.

As one awakened from a dream, she became aware of Payne's presence. Her face showed no sign that she had not slept. Her eyes told nothing, except that fate's messenger had whispered something over-night. She looked up into his inscrutable face, and all the stories she had heard of his relentless attitude towards resigning employees came back to her. And she was afraid.

The East loomed cruel and menacing now. Alone, she shrank from the possibility of dismissal, the facing of new ordeals, new masters and perils. If only—

The sound of her own voice was disturbing. 'I have decided to stay on, sir. But knowing it against the rules of the house I— I—'

A silence. It was as if he were forcing her to her last rampart, as if he were waiting for the fullest and most humiliating confession. He took up the sheaf of Madonna lilies and examined them critically. Then his glance went out to the long winding avenue in the north, visible from the window where he stood.

A surging mob of Chinese and Malays appeared suddenly on the crest of the hill. Came a tornado of beating drums in their wake. From every part of the native quarter surged men and women carrying sticks and bamboos. They hurried forward in the hope of striking something that ran and dodged each blow aimed at it from the screaming, pursuing Malays and Chinese. Nearer and nearer came the runner, naked to the waist, his face a twisted agony as he made for the ship at the end of the distant pier.

Payne leaned from the window as the runner drew near. Archie Judd! Judd's eyes held the glare of a maddened beast. On his brow was the imprint

of a tattooed-bank note, for India to see. A hurricane of empty bottles crashed in his path as he hurtled towards the quay. The screaming voices reached Margaret at her desk. She rose, white lipped and trembling to the window.'

'What— what was that?' she begged.

Payne barred her view.

'Just a crowd of coolie rats chasing a bazaar thief. They'll be gone in a minute and the town will be quiet again.'

The screams and shouts died away as the tattooed fugitive gained the protection of the pier and the vessel's gangway. Payne came away from the window softly, bent over the chair and the sobbing shoulders of the girl who had missed her fate by the breadth of a hand.

'The thief has gone!' he said quietly. 'Never to return.' And then, 'You are free of all rules in my house, Margaret. I want it to be your sanctuary, dear, your garden of dreams and mine!'

All that Margaret knew was that the thief had vanished, and that Norry was holding her to his breast.

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**34: At The Café Dundee**

*Sydney Mail*; 7 Dec 1932

BARTHOLOMEW looked hard at the girl before him and tried to recall her case without referring to the typewritten notes on the desk beside him. She had entered his private sanctum before the office-boy could call out her name: 'Miss Olivia Thane!'

He hastened to greet her, his muscular fingers closing in a friendly way about her slender hand. People who knew Bart Angell said he used two separate hand-grips— one for jewel thieves and runaway husbands, the other for women in distress. The one he gave Olivia Thane was sweetly reassuring. Her case leaped to his mind while he held her hand. It interested him more than he cared to admit.

She had been engaged to marry Brunton Kennerly more than a year before. Brunton had gone to Darwin with the intention of stocking some land he had acquired from the Government.

Brunton was fresh from school, athletic and ambitious in a political land-owning way. His land lay south of Daly Waters. There were a five-roomed bungalow on the property, a couple of drays, some bullocks, and other relics of its former owners' pioneering days. Olivia Thane and Brunton had arranged to be married at Darwin. The date had been fixed. And then Brunton had been found shot through the heart outside the homestead rail of a young settler named Arcos. Some stockmen from the Roper had found the body, and had promptly notified the police. White police and black-trackers had failed to bring Brunton's slayer to justice. A spirit of hush-hush had settled over, the crime.

Outside the Territory no one had heard of the killing. Of course, the police were at fault and offered little or no information concerning local feeling in the matter.

Olivia was not more than twenty, with soft dark eyes that mirrored something of her mental agonies. Yet, despite her youth and gentleness of manner, Bart Angell diagnosed a slumbering wrath against the mysterious killer of her fiancé.

'Mr. Angell, I can't understand why Brunton's murderer was not brought to trial! He had no enemies,' she declared, covering her face for a moment. Her soft, inaudible sobbing disturbed for a moment the iron composure of Bart Angell. Above his desk was his own bold advertisement, known and approved by many a suffering client':—

UNLESS THEY ARE IN HEAVEN, BART ANGELL BRINGS MISSING PEOPLE HOME. TELL HIM YOUR TROUBLES. BAD PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE BART ANGELL.

Bart was fifty, iron-grey, with the vulture eye that could beam or grow moist at some unfortunate's story of cowardly neglect or bitter deception on the part of fleeing man or woman.

'Let us be brave, my dear Miss Thane,' he begged her. 'It is not always wise to probe these inscrutable acts of violence too closely. At first I was frankly unwilling to make the faintest thrust in the direction of the crime. Perhaps'— he paused to consider the lovely contours of Olivia's saddened face— 'perhaps, Miss Thane, my first conceptions were justified. But after a while it grew upon me that the truth of Brunton's— er— misadventure should be made manifest.'

Olivia looked up quickly.

'You have found out?' It came like the cry of a hurt child in that narrow, high-walled office.

Bart Angell studied his hands for a space, then stared long and sorrowfully at the ghost-faced girl opposite him.

'Found out and put in place,' he assured her without a gesture. Followed a nerve-stabbing silence.

'The Gulf gives up her secrets,' he intoned at last. It was as if the loud beating of Olivia's heart had penetrated him, disturbed the even flow of his words. 'The Gulf gives up her secrets,' he repeated, 'to those who watch and wait, Miss Thane. Somewhere the truth is always written in the sands.'

In the throbbing silence Olivia felt that here at last she was face to face with her little tragedy, a tragedy the vastness of the Northern Territory had threatened to engulf. And before her was the iron grey man who had made the desert speak. She stood up, swaying slightly, breathing like a prisoner before the verdict. His voice sounded far away.

'We must keep our courage, Miss Thane. Life is full of cruel surprises.'

'Is the second part more cruel than the first?'

He scanned her afresh.

'Daly Waters has returned the answer. Although I cannot measure your capacity for absorbing pain, or feel what you feel, I may say that the second part of your tragedy is not without its sting. The man who shot Brunton is in Sydney.'

The dark iris of Olivia's eyes blanched.

'In Sydney?'

Bart Angell nodded. 'Sounds strange, I confess, Miss Thane. But all the facts are to hand. It has been a long and conflicting investigation,' he confided after a pause, 'on account of the distance, the bad roads, and the weather. The

difficulties encountered would have broken the heart of an ordinary inquiry agent. There was the grave of Brunton the police had dug, but little or no information of the tragedy from old Sergeant Hannan, who had been in charge of the inquiry.

'My agent saw the two black-trackers, Combo and Paddy, who had worked with Hannan. They had nothing to say beyond the fact that a mob of cattle had passed over the ground about the time of the shooting and destroyed the tracks. Hannan had picked up the drovers at a place called Powell's Creek and subjected them to the usual cross-examination. Nothing came out of that lot.'

Bart Angell lit a cigarette, while a pleased grin suffused his tense, drawn face.

'We picked up the tracks of the slayer at Burketown, across to Normanton, and on to Cairns.

'We followed him aboard a fruit beat to Brisbane and down to Sydney.'

'Is he an old man?' Olivia's face was drained white as she waited for the answer.

Angell's lips tightened.

'You may soon see,' he declared, with the ghost of a smile, 'unless the unforeseen happens again. At the quay he managed to give us the slip.'

'You lost him?' Olivia flung out, with her first show of impatience.

An odd smile touched Angell's lips.

'Not quite, Miss Thane. Sydney is not always an easy place in which to lose oneself, especially for one unused to its ins and outs. We located him at Manly, but the very breath of our man's body seemed to reach him. He was gone again before we could obtain even a camera shot of him.

'All this time,' Angell paused to remind Olivia, 'you were haunting this office for information and more information. I purposely withheld everything. To be quite honest, Miss Thane, it is never good policy to allow impatient clients to join a chase. I felt positive you would never refrain from denouncing and attracting the attention of the police to the slayer of Brunton Kennerly.'

'It does not matter now,' Olivia, said with humility. 'We can deal with him piecemeal in our own way.'

Bart Angell smiled strangely. 'He is your bird, anyhow. And you'll find him in a very pretty cage. Probably the fool has realised by now that the Gulf was a much safer place for him than Sydney.'

'His address?' Olivia demanded, unable to control her rising impatience. The master of many mysteries leaned back in his chair like a head-hunter at peace after the long, successful trail.

'I am going to hand you this person's address, Miss Thane. My commission is complete.'

'And the proof of his identity?'

'Is contained in the notebook he took from Brunton's pocket after the shooting. It is still in his possession. For some unexplained reason he still clings to it. There is no doubt whatever of his identity. You may go to the proper authorities if you must. But it is doubtful if the notebook in his possession is sufficient evidence to start a prosecution in this country,' he warned her.

'I shall go to no one, Mr. Angell. Please give me his address.'

Bart Angell sat up. The warm glow of the successful head-hunter became the frozen stare of the public accountant. 'You will appreciate the very considerable expense we have incurred in this case, Miss Thane. One of the most difficult enterprises in the history of my bureau.' 'How much?' Olivia interrupted.

The eye that was not of the elated head-hunter explored Olivia's expensive jewellery, the diamond-studded wrist watch, the cluster of almost priceless pearls peeping from the folds of her furs. He coughed easily, drew a long memo from the drawer beside him, frowned, and placed it before her like one in need of instant nourishment and fees.

'Three hundred pounds!' she exclaimed softly.

'The Gulf is a far cry,' he sweetly reminded her. 'Half-a-dozen air journeys and two of our men badly touched with Gulf fever. I assure you, Miss Thane, I would not undertake a similar commission for ten times the money.'

From her handbag Olivia drew out a cheque-book, filled in the amount with a pen from the desk, crossed it, and placed it on the blotter beside him. Bart Angell scrutinised the figures, then placed the cheque in the drawer. From a pigeonhole he took an envelope, passed it to her in silence. On it was written—

PHILIP CHANNING  
THE CAFÉ DUNDEE  
PITT-STREET  
SYDNEY.

'He is English!' Olivia stated almost bleakly 'I imagined him to be a foreigner.'

'His name stands for nothing, Miss Thane. He is probably half foreigner. It does not matter; Philip Channing is your man. As a matter of precaution we'll send one of our men with you.'

'I'll go alone,' Olivia decided, with a set, white face. 'No man shall come between me and the murderer.'

Olivia walked slowly in the direction of the cafe. The place was familiar enough to her. For the moment it was regarded as a rendezvous for people with a flair for picturesque Australian backgrounds. An alleged stockrider with

a whip was visible at the end of the palm and eucalyptus installed entrance foyer. Inside the cafe itself the floor was covered with a layer of sand. The white ceiling and walls were decorated with picturesque incidents in the life of a bushman.

The tame stockrider within the foyer greeted Olivia's entrance with a single word of welcome. It was past midday in the slack period between two and three o'clock. A young waiter of doubtful nationality conducted her to a small table within a palm-sheltered recess. The recess smelt of heavy bad cigars, patchouli, and stale food. A mirror, set in the Moorish panel above, showed the faint scarlet of her cheeks, the almost ghostly brilliance of her eyes.

Almost mechanically she sat at the little table, while the slow young waiter fussed over the paper serviettes and glasses beside her. He was probably twenty years of age, clumsy of foot and hand, for he broke a wineglass in his nervous haste to produce the bill of fare. His apologies were profuse and uttered in the hoarse jargon of the Levant. Was this Philip Channing?

For several moments Olivia allowed herself to picture the huddled-up figure of Brunton near the sliprail at Daly Waters, blood oozing from the bullet-hole in his breast. The picture grew clearer as the heavy-footed young waiter brushed the splinters of broken glass into a copper tray. He seemed to forget her presence in his almost panic anxiety to hide the evidence of his clumsiness.

Not a born waiter, Olivia told herself.

He disappeared with the tray, returning with another glass. Then he stooped over her, his hot breath touching her cheek as she blindly stared at the menu. Slowly and with some difficulty she looked up into his face.

'What is your name?' she inquired steadily. A wan smile creased his dark features; his clumsy feet shuffled uneasily on the sandy floor.

'Jose Andreas, ma'mzelle. You tak'a leetle wine, ma'mzelle?' he almost begged. Her glance wandered again to the gilt-edged menu.

'There is a waiter here named Philip Channing. I would like to see him, Jose.' A coin slipped from her gloved hand into Jose's palm.

Again the wan smile as Jose hurried away to inform Philip Channing that a very noble lady desired the pleasure of his company.

A terrible silence seemed to brood over the deserted cafe, that almost suggested the murderous loneliness of the Gulf, wastelands. It was the trumpet call of her mission that stirred her to life. She must not miss this opportunity. The long shadow of the stockman slanted across the foyer, where the faint wintry sunlight seemed to enshrine him, adding to the illusion of her surroundings. It seemed incredible that here, in the heart of a great city, the slayer of Brunton could hide in security.



She heard a door close very softly at the end of the passage where Jose had disappeared. A current of air that was like a breath from a tomb stirred the palms beside her. It was as if a door of the unseen had opened and shut. For an instant her brain grew dark. Something with velvet feet had approached her chair, was standing behind her chair. A desire to scream, to dart from the alcove, seized Olivia. Instead she sat frozen, not daring to look up, because he was speaking.

'The signorina has sent for me? How may I serve the signorina?'

Olivia related briefly what had happened, while the old veteran sat back with brows buckling, but inwardly amused.'

He moved round the small table and stood before her, a wine napkin draped over his left arm. He was not more than twenty, with blonde eyes and the face of a child. Olivia regarded him in stark amaze, doubt and anger striking for mastery in her overwrought mind. 'Your real name is not Philip Channing!' she found courage to say.

'You come from a farm at Daly Waters. Your true name is Arcos!'

In a flash the waiter's pose was gone. He was standing erect, eyes illumined, head flung back. Then for an instant the childish softness returned to his face, a softness that was guilty of a single tear.

'I beg the signorina to spare me!' he pleaded in a low tone. 'If I am caught in this place the hangman will do the rest. Your pity and consideration, therefore, signorina.'

Olivia's small hand lay clenched on the table. She had another mental picture of Brunton lying under the sliprail.

'You will understand, Signor Arcos, that I have taken infinite pains to seek you out. It was on the night of December the fifth you shot my fiancé— for no reason and without a chance to defend himself!'

He stared round-eyed, his limbs trembling slightly.

'The signorina overwhelms me! It is true I belong to Daly Waters, that my father and mother owned a farm and a few cattle. It is true also that I shot an Australian named Brunton Kennerly.'

'You coward!' He shrank away as if naked steel had touched him, but it was the action of one unafraid of steel.

'The signorina will never understand,' he said with difficulty. 'It is for that reason. I ask the signorina's forgiveness.'

'You shot him from the shelter of the scrub!' she accused. 'He hadn't a chance!'

He was tall and slender as a girl, but some unknown pain had burnt his eyes. In her young life Olivia had dreamed of boys and things that lived in the shadow of their cross. In a single phrase, a glance almost, he conveyed

something of his crucifixion. He was speaking in a voice that seemed to come from the northern solitudes.

'I found Brunton's grave the night after those blacks carried him to the resting place.... Some day you will see the white cross I put there. Some day,' he intoned with a painful effort, 'you will see another cross near by. It also marks the resting-place of a loved one, of the flower of all human beauty.'

'Your wife?' Olivia leaned forward. His gesture was an ample response. Olivia huddled back in her chair. She waited as women often will for the knife to strike again. His voice was steady enough now.

'While I was away, looking after some cattle at Pine Creek, my thoughts were full of the woman who had given up so much to share my poor life at Daly Waters.'

He paused at sound of the dressed-up stockrider's steps in the passage, as though in fear of being overheard. After the stock rider had settled in the doorway of the cafe he spoke again in rapid undertones.

'My wife's name was Zelia. She was but seventeen years of age. I thought of her day and night in the camp at Pine Creek, and I prayed that my mother at the homestead would not scold or bring bitterness into her life. The weather was hot and my mother's temper was not the best. She might not understand Zelia, and the heat of Daly Waters was often more than she could bear. I prayed, too, that Zelia would overcome her fear of the loneliness, for she had been bred in a gay city.

'But my prayers might have rested, signorina, had I known that she had discovered a protector in the Australian Brunton, who had come to Daly Waters with his money and smart clothes. I did not know, signorina, because there was trouble in my camp at Pine Creek— two horses poisoned through an accursed plant that grew on the edge of a gully. And then I was deserted by the black boy who had promised to help me with the cattle. Weeks after I returned to Daly Waters alone.'

He stood away from the little table, his boyish face disturbed by a paroxysm of coughing. He put up his hand as though a drop of blood had welled to his lips.

'Go on.' Olivia sat limply in her chair now, her beautiful face a death mask.

The blonde eyes of Arcos hardened to steel, although the tremor remained in his voice.

'A few miles from the homestead I met a swagman from Daly Waters, an old man who had helped me with some branding a year before Brunton's coming. He told me it was a pity Zelia was spending so much of her time with Brunton; even the blackfellows: had noticed it, he said. He heard that the Australian cattle-owner was wearing her portrait next to his heart, that he

wrote her letters when business took him to Port Darwin. Body of God! It was the talk of the Gulf townships. The overlanders, the drovers, and blacks were jeering at mention of my name.'

Olivia stirred wearily in her chair. Her lips were ashen.

'And so, on the word of an old swagman, you took upon yourself to stalk these two, took upon yourself the foul—' Olivia's voice broke into a dry sob. She covered her face.

He stood over her for an instant, his face bloodless, his eyes drunk with misery. Then he tore a bundle of letters from his inner pocket, placed them beside her on the table. Followed a silence in which he heard the loud grind of traffic outside. It was a long time before her hand stole out to the bundle of letters; then, as if overcome by nausea and revolt, she thrust them aside. He sighed, nodded in swift understanding as he returned the letters to his pocket. But it was Olivia who spoke.

'You judged them guilty?' was all she said.

It was a long time before he answered. His chest heaved, his breath came, through his clenched teeth.

'Some day, signorina, you may want to see the letters when your mind has healed, and the anger has gone from your heart. I pray you have pity on those two. I pray you have pity on them and me!

'They said he was promised to a sweet girl in Sydney. And I could not understand why such a man should steal my love from me, the love that cried like a child in my heart when I shot her by the lagoon beyond my mother's farm!'

OLIVIA stood up, while the bush pictures in the wall seemed to spin around her. Reaching the outer space, she turned and looked back at his sobbing shoulders within the palm-sheltered recess.

'God forgive you!' she said slowly. 'I do not want to see his grave or the cross above the poor little woman who broke your heart and mine.'

A moment later she had swept past the stockman yawning in the doorway, had gained the street without interruption. Here the warm sunlight stayed on her ice-cold cheeks and hands. It was some time before she recovered herself. With half-seeing eyes and her mind grown numb from the shock of her interview with the young waiter from the Gulf, she hailed a taxi and drove to the headquarters of police.

Arriving, she entered the office of a district inspector. He glanced up from his desk with a curious nod of recognition as she entered. Pushing aside some papers, he indicated a chair beside him.

'Was just beginning to wonder whether you wanted any help with your Angell,' he said with a smile. Then he regarded her troubled face for several moments. 'Nearly a month since you made your last report, Miss Thane. I hope you are going to like your work,' he added with kindly restraint.

He was nearly sixty and still fond of the game.

'I like it immensely, sir; but there are times when the Angells are a bit trying. And I've been treading so nice and softly, sir. He took me quite seriously. Never batted an eye when I handed him his costs.'

The inspector nodded briefly. Each hour brought dozens of more or less interesting problems to be solved, and there were times when the clever schemes of Sydney's restless criminals were apt to cloud his sixty-year-old brain.

'That fellow Bart Angell is a bad penny,' he stated, bringing his thoughts to bear again on Olivia's case. 'If I remember rightly, you undertook to impersonate the fiancée of a young stock-breeder who had been shot dead somewhere up north? You invented the whole story and took it to Mr. Bart Angell.

'After the usual preliminary fees and refreshers he agreed to solve the mystery surrounding your fiancé's death and put you in touch with the assassin.' The inspector leaned back in his chair. 'Well?'

Olivia nodded gravely.

'Angell found an actor named Philip Channing, who gave adequate reasons for shooting a fiancé I did not possess.'

'How much?'

'Three hundred pounds, sir.'

The inspector whistled softly.

'A very dark Angell indeed. And how they fall!'

Olivia related briefly what had happened, while the old veteran sat back with brows buckling, but inwardly amused.

'Good!' he broke out when she had finished. 'This lad Channing is evidently a finished artist, a born squire of dames and master of pure comedy. But let me say at once, Miss Thane, that although we're in a position to gaol the crowd I'm still guessing how Bart Angell attracts business— where he gets his clients.'

Although Olivia's eyes betrayed weariness after her recent ordeal her answer was to the point.

'He carries on a lot of straightforward inquiry work— divorce cases, letter-stealing, and the obtaining of keyhole evidence. He has a big clientele. But we are concerned with the poor pigeons, sir.'

The inspector favoured her with a sharp scrutiny.

'There are pigeons and pigeons, Miss Thane. Please make that point quite clear now.'

Olivia smiled a trifle sadly.

'The world is full of people, lovers and parents, who exist on make-believe, sir. They prefer the pleasant illusion to the raw facts of life. Bart Angell gets clients from the most unexpected quarters. Some time ago he met a wealthy brewer whose son had gone on a big-game hunt in Upper Nigeria.

'It was recently reported in the press that the boy had succumbed to an attack of sleeping sickness at; a place called Mabwana. The news was brought by his native carriers and cabled home. Exact details of the boy's end were not forthcoming, but the carriers maintained that he died at Mabwana.

'You will realise at once, sir, the agonies endured by the father of the boy until Bart Angell took up the case. He sent an agent to Nigeria, a clever rascal who mailed back the most comforting letters for the wealthy brewer's benefit.'

BART'S agent in Nigeria threw doubts on the story of the boy's death by quoting lengthy reports obtained from the various tribes in the vicinity of Mabwana. In a little while the agent was able to assure Sydney headquarters that the boy had just been heard of at a trading post fifty miles north of Ganda, on the river. The boy was rapidly regaining his health.

'Of course,' Olivia concluded wearily, 'the brewer is paying the piper and for a while, at least, is enjoying Angell's weekly bulletins from the African wilds.'

Although Olivia could dilate on Angell's dubious methods, she was still thinking of her encounter with Philip Channing at the Cafe Dundee, of his childlike eyes and sobbing shoulders. She was thinking of his story of the two graves within the Gulf solitudes.

The voice of the inspector dispelled her mental pictures.

'We'd better get busy on Angell, Miss Thane. We'll make him wish he was in Nigeria by the time he comes out. As for Channing, we'll put him away for a couple of years to give his imagination a rest. You've done well,' he added, patting her hand lightly. 'It's your first real scoop since you joined us. Keep it up; we need your cleverness and vision. Go home now— you need a rest. You'll hear from me soon.'

OLIVIA returned to her little flat, a feeling of weariness and depression overcoming her after her exciting labours.

It had all seemed so real, so convincing. She had few friends in life. Although her parents had left her comfortably provided for, her restless nature craved for work but of the beaten track. She had gone to the chief of police

with a burning desire to distinguish herself in the hunting down of criminals. The district inspector had been very patient. One or two unimportant missions connected with women and children had been assigned her.

Her entry into the Angell case revealed an amazing series of frauds. Late that evening Bart Angell was arrested while enjoying a big Spanish cigar within the perfumed seclusion of the Café Dundee. Philip Channing was nowhere to be found. A fortnight later a disgusted inspector of police received the following note from Olivia Thane:—

*'Dear Sir,— I beg to resign my post as a member of the police. The work is really too trying for my nerves. Let me add another confession of feminine weakness. The artistic side of Philip Channing's nature has impressed me. He is not a criminal; he is merely a brilliant young actor fallen among thieves. I can vouch for him becoming a useful member of society. On Tuesday last we were married at a registry office. 'OLIVIA THANE.'*

'Damn!' muttered the old inspector. 'I've lost the only real lady detective that ever entered this department.'

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### 35: The Praying Wheel

*Sydney Mail* 2 Dec 1936

HIGH tide with a mountainous surf plunging over the outer reefs of Vanua Island! A tradehouse stood on the cleared rim of the lagoon beach which fronted the open Pacific. A seaman in a white canvas suit sprawled in a chair on the verandah end. Occasionally he rose and stared through a pair of binoculars at a tiny rag of sail that staggered over the knife-edge of skyline. Dimly he made out the lines of a shrouded figure at the helm. In the forepart a woman crouched, her face towards the palm-dotted islands in the south.

The sailor in the canvas suit whistled softly, wondering what mischance had driven the pair to venture alone on the open Pacific.

Later, when the sun-warped boat entered the lagoon, he moved to the strip of beach to welcome his foolhardy visitors. The boat crashed high and dry into the soft warm sand. The woman in the forepart clambered ashore, the mists of the ocean solitudes in her half-fainting eyes. With the feel of hard coral under her dainty feet, she steadied herself as the big man in white canvas confronted her.

'We're sorry to invade your territory, sir,' she began with painful deliberation, her glance wandering from his powerful frame to the wide-verandahed tradehouse within the pandanus belt. 'My name is Branscombe. My husband ran a store in Levuka until calamity overtook us.'

The shrewd eyes of the big man in white went over her and settled on the half-shrouded figure seated in the stern of the boat. A pair of dark sun-glasses protected his eyes from the intolerable glare of the reefs. He was not more than twenty. The vestments he wore belonged to a Chinese religious fraternity, a Buddhist monk in all probability. A torn mariner's chart lay at his feet. It was evident that the brief passage through the reef had unnerved him.

'Why didn't you make Dine Island instead of coming here?' the big seaman questioned. 'It's two days nearer Levuka. I wouldn't trust myself on a duck pond in that shell of yours.'

It was two years since he had looked at the face of a white woman. The very sound of her voice invested his sea-girt atoll with a new sense of homeliness and charm. He had never heard of the Branscombes at Levuka.

Then his fine eyes narrowed suddenly. 'I may tell you, Mrs. Branscombe, that you've called on a particular kind of ruffian an' outlaw. My name is Hayes— Bully Hayes, if you like. My only visitors are the foreign gunboats. And I'm wondering why you came?'

SHE was young, with a touch of fire in her wind-lashed hair. The scour of the driving seas was on her finely cut clothes. Overwhelmed by a sense of her own misfortunes, she appeared not to notice the big man's reference to his character and standing.

'I have come to beg your help, Captain Hayes. Last month my husband and eight natives perished in his schooner off Hurricane Point. Everything went with them— money, stores, and cargo. Nothing was insured. The tradehouse was in debt. I was left penniless.'

She paced the narrow strip of beach in an agony of doubt and uncertainty. The buccaneer's stiff bearing relaxed, although his restless eyes wandered again to the shrouded figure seated in the stern of the boat.

She followed his bleak questioning stare and hastened to explain.

'That is Doctor Lin Toy, my husband's dearest friend. He is a student of philosophy from the University of Peking.'

'Proud to meet him,' Hayes declared with sudden warmth. 'He's welcome to stretch his legs here, anyway.'

He beckoned the silent figure in the boat.

'Come, along, Doc, I guess you're feeling cramped after your long trip!'

Doctor Lin Toy stood up and with an effort that revealed his weariness of body clambered from the boat. Stooping to the thwarts, he dragged a piece of tattered sail from a churn-shaped object and with, difficulty hauled it to the beach. The buccaneer watched critically.

'One of those machines you make cheese with, eh, Doc?'

Lin Toy straightened his shoulders, a wan smile on his sea-burnt face. 'It is a praying-wheel I rescued from a fire in our little temple in Levuka. If fortune favours I intend offering it to one of our chief priests in Sydney. It belonged originally to the Buddhist shrine at the Yamen Gate, Hankow. It will be treasured by my countrymen in Sydney.'

'Sure it will,' the buccaneer agreed as he led the way to the house. 'But I'm game to bet, Doc, that a bit of roast chicken and pork will make you feel chipper than all the praying-wheels from here to Hullabulloo.'

HAYES was not without imagination. He knew what this boy student had endured during his three days' vigil at the helm of his frail craft, days of burning sun and drenching nights, with the shadows of man-eating sharks plunging and gliding under the keel of the boat. His square-rigged brig, *Leonora*, was visible from the northern end of the tradehouse verandah.

He paused only a moment to scan her as she rolled in the wash from the incoming tide. The lagoon was shut in from the ocean breakers by glittering walls of coral. Flocks of surfbirds planed over the vessel's yards. One or two



figures were visible in her waist. The sound of a sea-chanty drifted across the lagoon.

Hayes beamed contentedly.

'Those boys of mine are the happiest in the 'pelago,' he told his visitors. 'They're diving for shell just now. Pearl is fetching big prices in Sydney.'

Mrs. Branscombe stared longingly at the brig's snow-white deck, the neatly stowed top hamper that needed only a brief trimming to put her in seagoing shape. Inside the spacious dining-room of the tradehouse there was rest and comfort for the two weary voyagers.

It was not the first time that Bully Hayes had proved himself a better host than a man-killer. Under his roof a woman was as safe as a cloistered nun. Roast chicken and soup, bread, and wine appeared at the second clapping of his hands. His Chinese cook, Jim Ling, was the best in the islands. The two visitors ate like famished penguins, while Hayes drank in the shimmering loveliness of the bent head of his lady visitor. Blondes were as rare as amethysts among South Sea beauties. Brunettes, he told himself, were as plentiful as coconuts and just as hard.

'It's good to be alive!' he exclaimed genially. 'I've ate here alone for a hundred nights with only my ugly shadow on the wall!'

THE pensive eyes of Mrs. Branscombe went through him. She knew he had killed men and laid islands waste when the grim beast of plunder took possession of him. Yet never in her life had she felt more secure than when he raised his wineglass to toast and pay homage in her hour of misfortune.

After the meal Doctor Lin Toy drew a sheet of thick waxed paper from a pocket in his monkish cloak and wrote on it slowly with a fine pencil. The buccaneer watched closely until Mrs. Branscombe offered an explanation.

'A mere act of courtesy, Captain Hayes. He is invoking a blessing on you and your house.'

'Who gets the note, ma'am?'

'It will go into the praying-wheel, in the hope that the attentions of his spiritual ancestors will be drawn to you.'

The buccaneer sat silent in his chair for a space. 'You mean that he will put it in the wheel and then wind it up, ma'am?'

She nodded.

'The praying-wheel saved us in storm and stress, Captain Hayes. It will save you too, if you will only have patience. The spirit of Doctor Lin Toy is as chaste as the morning star.'

Hayes knew more of the morning star than he knew about Chinese praying-wheels. A man had to get used to Chinamen and their ways. And the Doctor seemed a rather inoffensive chap. What next?

The question was soon answered. Mrs. Branscombe had to reach Sydney. Her father was a wealthy wool broker who would gladly pay Captain Hayes £150 if he landed her safely at Farm Cove or Dawes Point.

In spite of his temporary pearling operations, the offer of £150 for a passage to Sydney was tempting. For an hour or more he considered it in all its bearings on his past and present, and then decided to risk the trip. At sunset they went aboard the *Leonora*, and within a few hours were heading for the open Pacific.

IT was a slow, uneventful voyage to Port Jackson. Mrs. Branscombe kept to her cabin amidships, or sat for a brief spell under the fore'ard sun-awnings while Hayes and the men in the foretop kept a sharp lookout for prowling gunboats of the Thespis and Daphne class. Their commanders were commissioned to intercept the square-rigged *Leonora* and escort her to the nearest Queensland port, where Hayes was due for an inquiry into his last raid on the beaches of Malicolo, which had resulted in the kidnapping of sixty 'boys' for the Bundaberg sugar plantations.

Doctor Lin Toy filled in the days poring over an ancient vellum-bound manuscript that dealt with various aspects of the Confucian philosophy. The praying-wheel had been installed in his cabin. The mate, Emery, who slept in the adjoining cubicle, complained of the constant shuffling of the prayers in and out of the wheel. The Doc was trying to do good, no doubt, but it would take an eighty-ton flying-wheel to put the skipper right with any kind of a recording angel.

A hot westerly was blowing off the Heads when the *Leonora* entered Sydney Harbour. Running past the various landmarks, Hayes made fast to a buoy in Farm Cove. Mrs. Branscombe was ready at the rail, with Doctor Lin Toy beside her. She held out her hand to the buccaneer.

'Good-bye, Captain Hayes. You have saved me from misery and hardships.' She stepped lightly down the gangway to the dinghy waiting below.

Doctor Lin Toy hesitated with his hand on the buccaneer's arm.

'Please accept this as a token of my gratitude,' he said, slipping a narrow sheet of heavily glazed paper into the other's hand. It was a piece of the paper on which he wrote his prayers! Hayes was too dumbfounded to reply.

Anger, amusement shook him as he watched the Doctor clamber into the boat beside Mrs. Branscombe. The young philosopher waved from the stern.

'Thanks for the prayer!' Hayes bellowed from the rail. Lin Toy's answer was scarce audible above the stroke of the oars as the boat shot away.

'Wash it in warm water and dry it in the sun,' he advised.

'Mad as a hatter!' the buccaneer choked, carrying the paper into his cabin, away from the silent sniggers of the crew.

DAY broke in warm splendour. Flocks of gulls hung about the Leonora's galley as Hayes, after a sleepless night, carried Lin Toy's gift of praying paper on deck, where he soaked it in a pan of warm water from the cook's stove. With the craft of a gold fossicker washing pay-dirt he swirled the water over and around the paper before stretching it in the hot sun to dry.

Of course, Lin Toy was crazy, he reflected, watching the steam rising from the tightly stretched strip of thick paper. But even fools had to be listened to at times.

A grey scum became visible on the surface of the paper, that blistered and raised itself with the crackling sound of goldbeater's skin. Through this sudden transparency the face of a stiff-haired man with whiskers became suddenly visible in the left-hand corner of the under-strip of paper. Beneath the whiskers was the printed legend:

*New York Trust and Banking Corporation. Pay Bearer Ten Thousand Dollars. Waldo Fiske.*

With ineffable care and precision Hayes flattened the dollar bill on the rail of the wheelhouse until every wrinkle and crease disappeared in the warm rays of the sun.

A POLICE launch slipped alongside the Leonora. A couple of men and a detective -sergeant squatted in her brass-railed stern. The sergeant hailed the buccaneer cheerfully.

'Hello, Bully! You're a stranger in these parts! What have you been doing lately?'

Before answering Hayes threw a handful of choice cheroots into the hands of the nearest officer.

'Doing!' he guffawed at last. 'I've just finished washing the face of a bank president.'

'I guess some of 'em need a wash, Bully. But joking apart,' the sergeant went on, 'you don't happen to have seen a couple of wild geese from Batavia down your way?'

'Geese?' The buccaneer's smiling face was visible through the fumes of Manila smoke. 'Give 'em a name, Briscoe?'

'Barney O'Shea and his pal Kitty Molloy.'

'Tell me some more, Briscoe? I'm a bad guesser.'

The sergeant's eye went over the trim decks of the brig, the mask-like faces of the crew gathered in the waist. Then:

'The Department's got an idea, Bully, that the two birds flew here on this hooker of yours. O'Shea worked in the American bank at Batavia until he got the run of the safes. Kitty worked with him from outside. Last October he vamoosed with half a million dollars' worth of bills and exchequer bonds.'

'Ain't the bills numbered?' Hayes demanded from the brig's rail, his fingers caressing the ten-thousand-dollar note in his trousers pocket.

'It was O'Shea's job to number them,' the sergeant told him. 'But the numbers in the book are all wrong. All the ships from Sydney to Shanghai have been gone over, and no sign of 'em. They couldn't have joshed through the ports up north with all those bills on 'em?' the sergeant hazarded.

'Chinky ports are easy, Briscoe.'

'Are they? You can't hide bills behind mirrors and in double-bottomed bags, Bully, when you're running through the Chink Customs. They'd pick out a stolen dollar if you hid it in the eye of a needle. Can't you give us a tip?'

'Just a little one, Briscoe. I brought a young Chinese student and his lady companion from my place and dropped 'em here last night. His little pigtail was made of horsehair.'

'Any baggage?'

'An old praying-wheel.'

The sergeant blinked thoughtfully. Then his eyes sharpened to a glare of dismay. 'You let 'em go?' he bellowed.

'Sure I let 'em go. Anyway, they left the old praying-wheel behind.'

The sergeant swore under his breath. 'A praying wheel's about the only piece of furniture these northern Customs would leave alone. Did you squint into it?'

'It was as full of prayers as a Mormon Sunday. Believe me, Briscoe, I never interfere with a man's private beliefs.'

The men in the police boat consulted in low tones. The geese had flown and there was no charge against Hayes pending in Sydney.

'Good-bye, Bully!' the sergeant snorted as the launch sped away. 'I hope they left you something?'

'Just an old bloke with a pair of whiskers,' the buccaneer sent after him. 'I'll now finish washing his face.'

'Always thought Bully was a bit nutty,' the sergeant growled.

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**36: Thrills For Teresa**

*Sunday Times* (Perth, WA) 26 March 1933

"MISS CHANTRY!"

Rordon's hand fell on a pile of typewritten notes beside him.

"Show her in," he instructed the sleek-haired office boy.

Bayley Kordon had two separate handgrips for clients— a hard one for cringing, shadow-hunted jewel thieves, a soft, close-fingered one for women in distress, accompanied by a gentle, reassuring pat on the arm. The one he reserved for Teresa Chantry was fatherly, but firm. He saw at a glance that she had been crying.

Her case was outlined in the correspondence beside him. James Ambrose, her fiancé, had gone to Palestine, a year before, with the intention of starting a business and acquiring some land. Ambrose had been found shot through the heart within the walled garden of a Greek moneylender named Zapolis.

Consular reports of the affair were vague and contradictory for political reasons, it seemed to Rordon, the crime had been hushed up. Zapolis had powerful friends in Beirut and Damascus, while "Jimmy" Ambrose had probably been regarded as one of the many adventurers whose sudden exit was of small moment.

Teresa Chantry thought otherwise. She was barely in her twenty-second year, and she seemed to have known Jimmy since she could remember. Despite her almost childlike sweetness of manner, Rordon, the mystery man of Shadowland, diagnosed a slumbering wrath against the slayer of her fiancé.

"I am sure James had no enemies in Palestine," she told the stiff-jawed detective. "And this Greek. Zapolis, was allowed, you say, to disappear after the crime. Why didn't the police go after him?"

Rordon's fist opened and shut above the piles of correspondence on his desk.

He was fifty, with iron-grey hair, and the vulture's eye that could grow soft, or flame with the lightning of indignation at the news of police neglect and unpunished crimes.

"It is not always wise to press these matters too closely, Miss Chantry. I've been silent for a long time in order to spare your feelings. But now"— he paused to consider the lovely contours of Teresa's grief-stricken face— "you shall hear the truth"

"I want to hear!" In that narrow walled office it came from hi.- like the cry of a hurt child.

He was silent for a space. Then:

"It has been a long, heart-breaking task, Miss Chantry. Palestine is a long way. The difficulties we experienced in getting at the facts would have disorganised the average detective agency. We found nothing but lies and silence. One of my men discovered the grave of Ambrose, in the Christian cemetery at Beirut."

"But this miscreant, Zapolis?" broke from Teresa.

"Left the country in secret. Despite the fact, Miss Chantry, that Ambrose was regarded as a gentlemanly filibuster by many Arabs and Jews, alike, he was an Englishman; and the friends of Zapolis felt that sooner or later the British would get him. It might take a year or ten. And so Zapolis, disguised as a Mohammedan priest, made his getaway on an oil tanker, the 17th day of April last. It has taken us six months to locate him here, in London!"

Teresa Chantry sat very still in her chair, a strange dreaming blindness in her young eyes.

"In London!" she said at last. Then she put out her hand, the fingers clenched almost to the bone.

"Give me his address, Mr. Rordon. Give it to me, please!"

The master of many mysteries leaned back in his chair like a hunter at peace after the long successful trail.

"In good time, Miss Chantry, I will band you Zapolis' address."

"And the proof of his identity?"

"Is contained in the note he took from Ambrose's pocket, after the shooting. For some unexplained reason Zapolis still clings to it. Probably it contains evidence of some value to the Greek. Anyway, there's no doubt about Zapolis' identity."

"Give me his address," she repeated.

Bayley Rordon sat up. The warm glow of the successful hunter became the frozen stare of the public accountant.

"My expenses have been very heavy, Miss Chantry. You see?"

"How much?"

Rordon's eyes explored Teresa's expensive jewellery, the platinum wrist watch, the rope of pearls visible below the collar of her sable coat. Then he drew a long memo from the draw of the desk, and placed it before her with a sigh.

"A thousand pounds!" came from her.

"Beirut is a far cry," Miss Chantry. "Half a dozen air journeys; two of my men badly hurt by those infernal desert Arabs. Believe me or not— I wouldn't undertake another case like it for twice the amount."

Teresa, drew a cheque book from the gold mesh bag she carried, and filled in the amount with a pen from the desk. Crossing the cheque, she placed it before the heavy-browed detective.

He scrutinised the figures before putting it in his desk. With a flick of the finger he thrust a card before her. On it was written:

ANTONIO ZAPOLIS  
c/o Mr. Wong Kee,  
Salter's Wharf,  
Limehouse.

"In the house of a Chinese!" she gasped.

"His last refuge. Miss Chantry, and a pretty safe one, under normal conditions. If you feel you must see Zapolis, I'll send one of my men with you."

Teresa reflected a moment. "I'll go alone," she told him after a while. "No one shall come between me and the slayer of James Ambrose."

LATE THAT AFTERNOON Teresa's car pulled up at Salter's Wharf, opposite the restaurant of Mr. Wong Kee. The damp, steamy windows were half-hidden by pale yellow curtains of oriental pattern. A cheap eating house, a refuge for the turban and the pigtail, the opium-runner, and gunman.

Teresa swallowed her fears as she stared at the greasy windows. A policeman passed her leisurely, paused to kick a piece of orange peel front the pavement before moving on. The sight of him gave her courage.

A number of tables filled the dingy restaurant. The place was empty. In a little while it would be filled with the dock-pilings and riff-raff of the river side. She entered, her heart pounding within her. There were some stairs leading to overhead rooms. The smell of bash and stale food assailed her. An old Chinaman in a blue blouse and floppy shoes emerged from screened recess at the end of the room.

"You likee cup of tea, lady?" he intoned with a toothless grin. A screw of wet towel hung from his ann. He nodded, pushed a chair near one of the tables, his slat eyes devouring the sable coat of the young visitor.

He brought the tea, and stood waiting further orders. Teresa had made up her mind. Her hour had struck. She met the Chinaman's stare with a set, white face.

"A man named Zapolis is living here. Will you bring him to me?"

The grin vanished from the Chinaman's lips: his thin yellow finger took refuge in the wide sleeves of his blouse.

"Why fo' you wantee see Anty Zapoli?" he questioned. "No good for you to know Zapoli."

Teresa put a pound note in his palm "I won't keep him long," she promised "Bring him to me, now!"

Wong Kee nodded like a spring fitted image as he shuffled to the foot of the stairs to inform Antonio Zapolis that a young and beautiful lady was waiting to see him.

A terrible silence seemed to fill the Chinese den while Teresa waited for Wong to return. In that silence she allowed herself to picture— again— the huddled figure of Jimmy Ambrose within the walled garden of the Greek money-lender, Zapolis, the bullet hole in his breast, the look of stark agony on his young face.

The picture grew clearer as the Chinaman came down the stairs. Wong Kee spoke at her elbow. "He is comin'. Not keeps you long."

Teresa felt she dared not look up as she waited. A door above her slammed softly; then came heavy steps, the sound of someone breathing heavily. Zapolis was standing beside the tame.

"You have sent for me," he said, quietly. His voice had the oily intonation of the Levantine, trader. A black and red scarf muffled his hairy throat. His hair was matted and grey; heavy gold earrings and a faded, grease-stained dressing gown completed his alien appearance.

Teresa found courage to meet his hawk-like stare. The shadow of the policeman halted a moment outside, and he passed on. She braced herself quickly.

"I want to ask you why you shot James Ambrose in your garden at Beirut? I want to know the truth before seeking the aid of the police."

Zapolis' mouth opened and shut as one who had been struck unawares. Wong Kee had receded to his screened cubby at the far end of the room. Zapolis was breathing like an animal in pain. It was some time, before he spoke.

"It is true I shot Ambrose in my garden at Beirut, madame!"

"You coward!"

"Listen, madame. I bore the boy no malice. You hear that? For a leedle while I loved him like a son. But there are some things, madame, a Greek cannot forgive. I could not forgive the coward blow he struck at me!"

Zapolis' claw-like hand, went up in a gesture of pain, his whole body seemed torn by savage recollections—

Teresa sat frozen, watching him in dumb amazement. A moment ago she could barely restrain herself from handing him to the police. Now she remained silent and inert, waiting for the news to come.



The Greek money-lender loosened the scarf about his throat as one ridding himself of a hangman's knot. His face relaxed, his eyes softened strangely as he bent near her.

"Have pity, thou, for one who has suffered. I am an old man, broken in health, living in this vile den of opium thieves and smugglers. Yesterday I was happy in my rose garden, my leedle daughter, Helen, my house, and treasures. All gone, all gone!"

Teresa had heard men weep, but not with the stifling agonised restraint of the Greek money-lender. She waited ages it seemed, until he recovered. With both hands resting on the table, he spoke with face half-averted, the clatter of the Chinaman's dishes drowning his hoarse voice at times.

"Ambrose came to Beirut and made many friends. He was poor, yet there were people ready to help and finance his schemes for the new treatment of oil fuels. He came in the evening to sit in my beautiful garden. He taught my daughter, Helen, a wonderful game of tennis while I looked on, content and happy. "

"I was rich, madame. I lent money to traders, oil men, the poor people of the caravan routes. I loaned money at good interest to merchants in Jerusalem and Damascus.

"My name was good; my house was respected by the sheikhs and carpet-makers with bills to exchange and discount. I robbed no one. In Jerusalem I built an alms-house for aged Christians and destitute children.

"My daughter, Helen, was not pretty, madame. She was dark, with skin the colour of an olive. Men did not bother her or send her roses and sweetmeats. A simple child who could not remember her mother long dead— long dead."

Zapolis walked from the table, his long fingers twisted in the black and red scarf about his throat. He returned with a muttered apology for his womanish displays of emotion.

"I saw, madame," he went on slowly, "that Helen loved this Ambrose. I felt he was an English gentleman. What did it matter? Let them love, and I will go to the wedding,' I told my friends.

"Everyone laughed, and said it would be fine for me to exchange my money for good English blood. I did not laugh at that, madame. I was arranging, just then, a big loan to a syndicate of merchants. The money was in American dollar bills and English notes.

"I came home from Damascus late one night, to find Helen gone. My safe was open; everything taken! An Arab told me that Ambrose had been seen with Helen eight miles from the town. I had borrowed heavily to provide the loan for the merchants. I was now bankrupt."

Zapolis paused to wipe his brow with the end of his scarf.

"A week afterwards," he went on, hoarsely, "they found Helen dead on the beach, with an empty bottle of chloral beside her!"

Teresa put up her hand as though a drop of blood had welled to her lips. Zapolis drew a bundle of letters from a pocket in his greasy dressing gown.

"I am keeping them for the police to read," he declared, holding them before her. "Look at them! They are from Ambrose to Helen!"

Teresa pushed them aside, her face white and miserable.

He grunted an inaudible word as he replaced the letters in the folds of his gown. "So be it, madame. It is better that you should not read them,"

She spoke with difficulty now.

"How did James come to your villa the night you—you—"

Zapolis hunched his narrow shoulders, his toes in-turned like the paws of a wolf.

"The night Helen was found on the beach I heard someone moving outside. Helen was lying between lighted candles, dressed, in her mother's wedding garments, her face dark in death. I went outside." Ambrose was there, the man who had stolen my money and broken Helen's heart. He had been drinking at a cafe, gambling with American oil men and Jews. All the money was gone!

"Madame, I led him into, the room where Helen lay between her seven candles. While he looked down at her I got my rifle and waited for him to come out. When he saw the weapon in my hand he closed with me. We struggled in the garden... the rifle exploded; he fell into the road, where I left him."

Teresa rose from the table, the fumes from Wong Kee's kitchen stifling her heart and brain. Zapolis leaned against the stair rail as one done with life, anxious for his hour to strike.

It was drizzling rain when she reached her car at the end of the by-way. She wished she could have cried like Zapolis the Greek, and buried her torment in the fumes from an opium jar.

In spite of the fact that she had inherited a moderate fortune at the death of her father, her life had been rather lonely. It was going to be lonelier in the years to come.

Poor, deluded Jimmy Ambrose! The air of the East had poisoned his young mind. She had recalled their quarrel a few days before he left England. He had begged her to go with him. She had refused. How much better if she had given way and gone with him. Not a single letter had passed between them!

Leaving her car at the garage, she entered the hall leading to her flat within the five-storey mansion overlooking Hyde Park. The lift-boy muttered a word she could not understand as she ascended. Her brain had grown dark. She was hurt and sick and blind with terror.

In the corridor above was an oak settee. Seated on it, his hat tilted at the usual rare angle, was Jimmy Ambrose!

The sun had tanned Jimmy a biscuit brown. His clothes were expensive, his shoulders bigger and broader, his smile was the gayest thing since Henley. This was not the crawling, drunken Jimmy of Zapolis' nightmare story! The hands that were drawing her gently to his breast were not the hands that had dipped into the money-lender's safe!

Jimmy Ambrose was holding her very much as a big boy holds a crying child.

"Well," he demanded briskly, "what's been hurting you? Aren't you glad I'm home again?"

It was some time before the swooning, drumming noises faded from her brain, or the picture of Helen Zapolis lying between seven candles melted into thin air.

"When did you return from Beirut?" she asked faintly.

"Beirut?" He regarded her in stern bewilderment. "Don't know the place. I've been working for the Zambesi Electric Power Control since I left England. Where's this old Beirut, anyway? Do they have snow there, or is it one of those places where they grow lemons?"

Teresa went to her telephone and rang up the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard. In the past she had conferred with the department in connection with Jimmy's "disappearance."

Spellbound, Jimmy listened as she spoke to the listening chief.

"This morning I gave a crossed cheque for one thousand pounds to Mr. Bayley Rordon, private inquiry agent, for putting me on the trail of a Greek moneylender, Antonio Zapolis, Salter's Wharf, Limehouse."

"Well?" curtly.

"Zapolis said he shot my fiancé, James Ambrose, at Beirut, about six months ago, for reasons which almost justified his act."

"Oh, yes. Any more?"

"Only that Mr. Ambrose is here looking the picture of health, but slightly freckled. He's never been in Palestine. What shall I do?"

Came the answer from the C.I.D.:

"Go to a theatre and enjoy a real play, Miss Chantry. I promise you Rordon will be here in twenty minutes wearing our latest thing in handcuffs. We want him for getting money out of people anxious to trace missing friends and relations. When a husband, son, or lover goes astray and can't be located, he frames up a clever story, like the one he told you, probably, and collects his fee for expenses incurred."

"The chap, Zapolis," the chief told her, "is a broken-down actor with a flair for emotional parts. He's Rordon's star performer. We're not tin-smiths down here. Miss Chantry, but you may rest assured we know how to can pearlies like Zapolis and Rordon. They're both due for five years' hard labor. Thanks for your information and good-night."

Jimmy Ambrose made a wry face as Teresa put up the receiver.

"London's got Africa beat for thrills!" he declared. "I'll give it another by going to Limehouse and knocking fight bells out of that actor, Zapolis. I'll—"

"Don't be silly, Jim!" Teresa rang for her car. "We'll follow the Yard's advice and go to a theatre. If you hurt Zapolis you might have to run away and hide yourself in the African jungle. I don't want to start looking for you again."

They went to a theatre.

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### 37: Sir Claud Hears the Cuckoo

*Townsville Daily Bulletin (Qld) 27 July 1935*

'I'VE LISTENED to lions in the bush,' Sir Claud told his daughter, 'but that cuckoo clock, up there, makes me jump.'

'Richard thought it would make a jolly surprise for everyone,' Margaret explained. 'I won't let him give me expensive presents. He can't afford to. And why does my little cuckoo make you jump, dear?'

Sir Claud reached absently for his box of Burma cheroots.

'It was this way,' he said stifling a yawn 'Coming home from Durban, once I was foolish enough to tell some fellows in the card-room of the liner that I was looking forward to hearing our English song birds, after an absence of ten years In the Transvaal.

'They were a smooth-faced gang in that ship's card-room,' Sir Claud growled. 'Polished and manicured like Riviera gigolos. They handed me all the bird jokes imaginable. They told me that the shepherds on the Sussex Downs kept cuckoos to welcome home-coming ships. And silly stuff like that.

'Well, girly, the night we entered the Downs someone slipped into my cabin and handed me three clouts on the head with a loaded slick. When I came round, the next morning, my valise holding a parcel of rough stones from the Witterwalden claim, had disappeared.'

'Poor Daddie.'

'Believe me, girly, I've had cuckoo noises in my head ever since that loaded stick hit me for three. So you see. I'm not very grateful to your friend Richard for sending the clock He's dog poor; and these times a woman needs a man who'll give her a little six-cylinder instead of a cuckoo!'

Sir Claud Bamber was a director of the Witterwalden Diamond Mining Syndicate. He owned a small service flat in Park Lane. Butlers and unwieldy staffs of servants were no part of his daily life. He had seen rich men overwhelmed, their routine work crippled in town houses by crowds of superfluous menials plodding in and out of rooms. He was a club man. Margaret spent most of the summer in the country houses of her friends.

The manager at the Witterwalden had just written him concerning a magnificent stone which had been sent to Singman of Amsterdam for a rough-out. It had been christened The White Planet on account of its unusual size and brilliance. The big gem was now on its way for his private inspection.

A detective from Scotland Yard, accompanied by Singman's confidential agent, arrived at the Park Lane flat. Sir Claud received them in his study, and

after a brief examination of the costly gem, handed the usual receipt to the agent.

'I shall return the stone to Singman for finishing.' he told both men. 'In the meantime I want to show it to some of our shareholders in London.'

The agent and detective each pocketed a five-pound note as they left the flat. Ten minutes after they had gone, a small two-seater car snailed along on the park side of the lane, halting some distance from Sir Claud's flat.

A thick-set, poker-faced man of forty, in evening clothes, alighted somewhat languidly. His langour took the form of a wide-armed yawn almost in the face of a slowly-striding policeman.

'No more dancing for me, Billy!' he called to the driver of the two-seater. 'Three whole bally nights of it and a fourth coming!'

The policeman grinned as he passed towards Marble Arch. Always dancing time for some people, he reflected. For others it was just trying doors and stepping through the mud.

After the policeman had gone the man who found dancing a bore spoke again.

'Keep this roller skate twenty yards or so from the house, Billy. If Lefty doesn't hurry up I'll handle the crack without him. I told Kerry to send him here at nine sharp,' he complained in an undertone.

'All right Spotty!' Billy answered from the two-seater. 'You can never depend on Kerry keeping his word. Wouldn't be surprised if he hasn't sent Lefty on another job. You can never tell till the last minute.'

Spotty Shane fidgeted near the kerb, his restless eyes slanting occasionally on Sir Claud's rooms. He had arranged with the notorious Kerry to raid the safe known to be in the baronet's study. Although the Press had been silent in regard to the transfer of the White Planet diamond from Amsterdam to Park Lane, there were certain trade journals which had revealed the fact to Spotty and his friends.

Spotty was an American crook, as yet unknown to the London police. For a while he had been content to work with the badly-wanted Kerry, burglar and flat robber, a shifty, unreliable pal, as Spotty had discovered.

Almost at the last moment Kerry had signified his unwillingness to participate in the Park Lane job. But as a salve to Spotty's outraged feelings he had definitely pledged himself to send Lefty Logan to the scene of action. Lefty was a flame and dynamite artist who had been known to blow open a safe without so much as disturbing a music lesson in progress at the time, in an adjoining room.

Spotty had been attracted by Kerry's description of Lefty. He was little more than a boy with a perfect passion for good clothes. It was Spotty's

intention to see how he worked on this safe and then take him to New York where artists and craftsmen came into their own.

No sign of Lefty. Spotty swore as he glanced at his watch. It was on the stroke of nine o'clock. A minute lost on the well-regulated Park Lane beat often spoiled the most delicate calculations. Where was Lefty?

Shane waited exactly fifty seconds. Then, with a lightning glance at Sir Claud's windows, nodded briskly to Billy in the two-seater.

'Tell this guv Lefty I've gone in alone!' he snapped. 'Tell him I couldn't wait.'

Shane thrust into the car and drew out a German-made acetylene lamp. It fitted easily into the wide pocket of his stylishly cut overcoat. He threw away his cigar like a duellist about to face the steel. The door of the house was opened by a porter who evidently lived in the basement. Shane emphasized the importance of his visit by walking into the hall-way. His very gesture implied the urgency of his mission. In a little while the door closed with Shane inside the house.

Outside, Billy, in the two-seater, chuckled aloud. Shane was capable of the most barefaced frontal attacks. It was a treat to watch him work. He was one of the new school of confidence crooks, a linguist, a rubber-gloved gunman ready to kill, burn or drown his victims, if need be.

The door had scarcely closed on Shane when a tall youth in a velour hat and dinner jacket visible inside the immaculate dust coat he wore, lounged into view. He cast a furtive almost guilty look at the windows above, and then at Billy, in the two seater across the way.

Billy beckoned almost frantically. 'Come here, kid!' he called softly as he took in the young man's faultless attire. 'Are you one of Kerry's boys?' he asked as the velour hat came nearer. 'Lefty Logan?' he added confidentially.

The shadow of a frown crossed the newcomer's face. His glance went over the toy car and the strained tenures of the hard-chinned man at the wheel.

'Sure, I'm Lefty!' he confessed guardedly. 'And what about it?'

'Only that Spotty's gone in after the big blinker you've heard about It's registered as the White Planet and worth a dozen country houses. Kerry promised to send you along to put the dope on the safe. You're late and Shane's on the jump. The stone came through from Amsterdam today. This particular beat is crawling with cops,' Billy warned. 'You can go in now or run away home!'

His debonair manner took flight at the invitation to run home. He turned to the house with something of the panther in his movements.

'You'd better slip in,' Billy rasped gently 'Old Sir Bimbo's alone. But I'm game to bet that opening safes isn't Spotty's strong card. In with you. boy!'

Lefty tightened the collar of his coat with professional celerity as he stepped across the road and touched the door bell. The porter opened it. Lefty presented his card somewhat nervously.

'I must see Sir Claud,' he declared, but not with Shane's assurance. 'He's expecting me.'

The porter's half-smile was not reassuring.

'Sorry, sir! Sir Claud's engaged with a gent already. If you don't mind waitin'—'

'My business won't wait,' Lefty told him as he slipped by and gained the stairs. It's a conference of three. I'm the third man,' he stated apologetically from the top of the stairs.

The porter stared after his vanishing figure undecidedly. Sir Claud was certainly in the habit of holding impromptu meetings in his study, at all hours. If there were going to be any complaints about people crashing in Sir Claud would have to make them to his friends, the porter growled, as he retired sulkily to the basement.

Halting at the door of the study, Lefty Logan knocked lightly. There followed a series of sharp movements within, followed by the unmistakable throb throb of an acetylene blowpipe.

'Come in! It was 'Spotty' Shane's voice, slightly husky, now, as though from suppressed anger or excitement.

Lefty opened the door as one caressing each moment of life. Inside the study he remained rigid, staring at what he saw. In a tiny pool of blood Sir Claud was lying face down on the carpet. Beside him lay a heavy-cropped hunting whip. There were signs of a sharp, savage struggle. 'Spotty' was kneeling beside the open door of a small safe, his acetylene flame directed against a locked steel drawer within. Under his right knee was a big automatic revolver. The ugly weapon was there for speed and convenience. A mirror on the wall above him revealed Lefty's almost petrified figure in the doorway.

'Shut that door!' he snarled without turning from his work. Lefty obeyed and again waited for Shane to speak, while his glance went down to the supine figure on the carpet. Shane's voice jerked him from his speculations concerning the murder hazard which had obtruded into the night's work.

'You're too late for your job, Mr. Lefty!' Shane assured him, pressing the flame well within the safe. 'I've no time for people who can't keep an appointment.'

'It was Kerry's fault.' Lefty's hypnotized eyes moved in genuine horror from the outstretched figure on the carpet to the powerful automatic under Shane's knee.



'I took the key of this old meat safe from Sir Kybosh,' Shane explained, 'after I'd belted him on the nut with my gun. The key opened the safe, but not this inner drawer. The old fox hid the key; but it's opening now!

Using a short steel stool deftly, Shane prised open the flame-softened drawer and drew it out with a grunt of satisfaction. On a wad of cotton wool lay a white diamond of perfect shape and lustre; a jewel with a thousand fires within its icy circle. A ribbon of blue silk was knotted around it adding charm and contrast to its lovely contours.

Shane's eyes snapped as he held it between his finger and thumb. Then he turned to the spellbound Lefty.

'You'd better hook it!' he flung out 'I'll meet you outside.'

Lefty remained bent over the old man, his kerchief pressed to the blood bruise on the brow.

'Righto,' he agreed at last turning to the study door. With the suddenness of a panther he whirled over Shane's kneeling figure, his six-feet of boyish muscle and sinew enveloping the older man. With a clever left-arm hold on Shane's throat he reached down for the automatic pistol. Completely off his guard Shane crumbled under the unlooked-for attack. But only for an instant.

All the tricks of alley-way fighting, learned in youth, came to aid him now. He felt the long slim fingers of his opponent close in a deadly grip on the automatic.

'Let go! ' he choked. 'That porter downstairs will hear us!'

Over the carpet they writhed and fought, Lefty striving to tear the automatic from Shane's grasp. And Shane knew that the pistol was all that stood between him and the insatiable greed of the double-crossing Lefty. The fellow would stick at nothing to get the big white jewel, lying where it had been knocked from his grasp, near the safe door.

'Let go, Lefty!' he begged hoarsely, as he worked his broad back against the safe with the intention of shooting his heel full at the boy's face. 'I'll go 50-50 on the night's work. I can hear that big wop downstairs moving.'

Lefty's arm still formed a strangle hold on Shane's bull-throat. Slowly and with infinite skill he worked the diamond stealer's head down to the carpet, his fingers digging inside the other's grip on the automatic.

Shane experienced a suffocating blindness as Lefty's arm increased its deadly pressure. But he had just one little trick up his sleeve. It had saved him before when a rapacious pal had turned on him. His free hand shot inside the open safe and clutched the softly spluttering acetylene lamp. With a savage twist of his powerful body he brought the blow-pipe full on to Lefty's naked-wrist above the automatic. A slight thumb pressure on the nickel-plated clip in

the elbow of the blowpipe spurted a tongue of colourless fire against the white flesh.

In the hands of Spotty Shane this tongue of colourless fire had turned the finest chilled steel to putty. Lefty's coat sleeve had become up-drawn in the scuffle, exposing the soft twining muscles and sinews. And the thin blast of flame struck clean and straight.

He realised that to let go the automatic meant a swift bullet in the throat. In the shift of a shoulder his fist smashed across Shane's out-thrust chin. It was a snort-armed blow, snappy as a whip cut.

Lamp and automatic slipped from Shane's paralysed grasp. His chest sagged as he rolled on the floor, the points of his fingers twitching spasmodically.

Switching off the dangerously buzzing flame of the lamp, Lefty paused to wipe the perspiration of agony from his brow. The struggle, together with the shock of the acetylene flame on his wrist had brought him to the point of collapse. Blindly he stooped to the fallen jewel near the safe door, a sick inertia gripping his brain and nerves. A curious sound outside the study window reached him as he clutched the big South African gem.

Billy, of the two-seater, was making his way up the drain pipe outside. Tired of waiting and suspicious of a double-cross on Shane, he was about to investigate matters from his own angle. He could not risk a forced entry by the front door. Cat-climbing was his specialty.

Lefty saw his own peril. In the blink of an eye Billy at the study window would size up matters by climbing in. A man of few words he would make a savage bid for the White Planet and disappear as silently as he had come.

Lefty half crawled into the adjoining room and braced himself with an effort as the window of the study was forced by the up-climbing Billy. Dizzy and sick he leaned with his fire-blazed arm against the mantelpiece.

Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

A moment or two later he had pitched face down on the hearth rug.

IT WAS late when Margaret entered the flat in Park Lane. She had been on a visit to Lady Saltern in Hampshire. Her sudden return was the result of a wire from Scotland Yard notifying her of the burglary at the flat. A nurse accompanied her into the room where Sir Claude lay propped between pillows, his head heavily bandaged. Commenting on the lateness of the hour, the nurse retired to wind the clock which had run down since the burglary.

Margaret kissed her father tenderly and soon learned that the blow he had received was not serious. He was cheered by the reflection that he had put up a fight with his old hunting crop when Shane came in.

'I'll admit the worst and then forget it!' he told her briefly. 'The White Planet, loveliest of diamonds that ever came out—'

'Gone, Daddy?'

He nodded gloomily.

'A couple of plain-clothes men had been keeping an eye on the place. They saw a chap climbing the wall into my study. They nabbed him and took away the fellow, Shane, who got in here and belted me on the head with his revolver butt.'

'Shane must have taken the diamond,' Margaret hazarded. 'There was no one else?'

Sir Claud shrugged despairingly.

'Shane and the other chap were thoroughly searched. Nothing was found. Anyhow, one of the gang is still in the flat. A lad that Shane addressed as Lefty.'

Margaret stared. The old baronet fingered his bandaged head gingerly. 'Lefty proved a decent sort. He stopped Shane finishing me off, I'll swear. He got the other fellow's gun. The scrap between them was something to watch. I was half conscious all the time. Shane turned a gas flame he was using on Lefty's wrist to make him let go. Scissors and smoke! I'll never forget it!'

Margaret listened to horror. 'You hid Lefty from the police?' she queried.

'He was worth hiding. Not a bad looking lad. Take a peep at him,' he added with a grin. 'He's a bit feverish, but will be fit enough in a day or two.'

Margaret stole tip-toe to the door of the room where Lefty was lying on a couch. His arm was swathed in bandages, his drawn face revealing the effects of his recent fiery ordeal.

Margaret's cry or amazement reached her father, 'Why... it's Richard!' she gasped. 'What does it mean?'

The young man with the bandaged arm made no attempt to avoid the soft cool cheek pressed against his own.

'I was strolling past the flat,' he confessed, after a while. 'I saw Shane's pal, Billy, waiting close by in a small car. He mistook me for Lefty, another member of the gang. So I walked in and introduced myself to Shane and his blowpipe.'

'The cur!' Margaret exclaimed in tears. 'And the White Planet disappeared!'

Richard's brow was twisted in an agony of thought.

'I took the stone from Shane,' he confessed at last. 'I'm quite fuddled about where I put it.'

'Can't you remember, dear?'

His young eyes were still bright with fever. He seemed to be battling with his thoughts.

'I was scared of Billy,' he said with an effort. 'He wanted the diamond worse than Shane, and wouldn't have stopped at killing to get it. So, I was driven to—'

Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

The tiny gate of the clock on the mantelpiece clicked and opened. A strangely bedraggled bird popped through the opening. Margaret held herself from screaming. Suspended from the blue silk ribbon around its neck was the big South African diamond.

Richard rose to his elbow on the couch, a sudden gleam of recollection in his eyes.

'I put it there to cheat Billy!' he explained. 'The blessed bird happened to pop out of the door the moment I felt myself going!'

'SEE HERE, Richard!' Sir Claud intimated, two days later, at dinner, 'I'll cast a friendly eye on your future visits to this flat if you'll keep quiet about hiding my famous White Planet stone where you did.'

'Why, Daddy?' Margaret laughed.

'Because I don't want my priceless gem to be known as the Great Cuckoo Diamond! Its market value would be seriously affected. Anyhow.' he added, raising his wine glass to Richard and Margaret 'here's to a little bird!'

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**38: Tess**

*Sydney Mail* 1 Dec 1937

TESS belonged to the circus. She was the cleverest collie that had ever entered a ring. But since the birth of her two pups she had become a lady of leisure. The circus was on the track again, was wending its weary length from Coolabah to the railway trucks at Gundygong.

To-day, followed by two fat furry balls on wobbly legs, she had been allowed to wander from her caravan and the man whose job it was to look after her. And being what she was Tess had gone far into the bush. It was the pups' first real outing. She scouted for them, stalked rabbits, staged imaginary battles. Through her veins raced a madness caught from the strange warmth of the September air.

A line of dust rose in the distance. Tess paused in her digging at a wombat-hole to give a yap of recognition at the driver of the last waggon, struggling through sand and spinifex a mile behind the others. The two pups, sitting on the rim of the wombat-hole, their bright eyes shining with curiosity and delight, brought her back to more important matters than yelping after the sleepy-headed driver of a caravan. Tess's worn claws fairly flew into the sandy soil. The last caravan was forgotten.

Out of a clump of tea-trees a hundred yards away a lean brown body skulked and peered. Tess stiffened. The ruff of hair about her throat bristled. Alone, she would have gone on digging without a second thought for the dingo. But she was not alone. That hidden thing out there in the tea-trees made war on the young, the crippled, and the dead. He could slink through the matted undergrowth, belly to the ground, without sound or movement of twig, could leap like a streak of livid lightning upon his helpless prey.

Tess growled a low command to the pups and turned. The circus had camped two miles away. She must make it at all costs. The pups toddled bravely along, their little red tongues hanging. The slow procession moved over the scarred ridges and claypans, through gullies and dried water courses. The pups began to lag. Occasionally a throaty growl rumbled from Tess as she caught glimpses over her shoulder of the brown, stiff-eared thing skulking fifty yards behind.

The tedious march dragged through a quarter of a mile of dust. They came upon the tracks of the circus waggons. The camp was not yet in sight. Tess stopped. Her glance swept the dreary sand hills with quick comprehension. The bushy tail drooped a fraction of an inch; for just a second her brown eyes

faltered. The two balls of fur waddled up whimpering softly. She lowered her muzzle to lick the tiny noses.

Once more they plodded on, mother and pups, on the wide tracks of circus caravan and dray. The slinking brown thing in their rear stopped once to emit a fluting cry that seemed to go back to the ranges in the west.

Skirting a gully and still clinging to the caravan tracks, Tess tried to quicken the pace. The cry of the dingo had filled her with alarm. One red dingo was enough when one had babies to mind. The thought of more took the strength out of her weakening body.

Crossing a Sandhill lined with saltbush, the pups suddenly stopped. Their weary little legs had collapsed. Tess squatted on her haunches. She looked at them with troubled eyes. The first, her son, bore the marks of the pure collie colour of tan and black; shapely ears, erect and slightly pricked; slim, clean muzzle; deep, narrow chest, powerful hind-quarters— a lad to be proud of. But the other one, her daughter, was not so shapely; low-hung, folded ears, heavy dewlap, and flabby-skinned face. One of the two must go with her.

Again her glance went back to the red slinking shape hiding behind the merest stick of timber, watching its chance like a thief in ambush. When Tess moved the dingo came on. Always its ears could be seen above the sun-blasted undergrowth.

Tess stood over the two pups. She must save one of them— the ugly daughter or the finely marked, deep-chested son. One must go, one must stay behind. The choice puzzled her more than any of the tricks she had ever been asked to perform in the circus. She had often picked out a certain horse from a mob of fifty when asked. She had yarded sheep in a way that made her name famous throughout a continent. What was she going to do now, with her body tired and the camp away over the skyline? It was getting dark, too. From the ranges came the low fluting sound of the dingo pack. They were coming: The brown fellow in the shadow of the gidyea answered blithely. The scent was warm.

Tess rose from the warm earth, opened her long jaws, and closed them firmly about the neck of her son. The lips spread outward, half covering the head as if she were about to swallow him. Carefully she tested the hold of her worn teeth, swung the little fellow clear, and stalked away without a second glance at the second pup.

An hour's forced march. She and her son would be in safety. A hundred yards she went before she heard the faint, terrified wail of her second baby. She wheeled and charged, a savage rush that carried her straight at the throat of the slinking brown dingo. The dingo swerved, shook himself free, and vanished. Ruffled, bristling, foam flecking her jaws, Tess picked up her ugly

daughter and marched defiantly to where she had deposited the first pup. Again she sat down to look from one to the other, her babies, both equally precious. She must save both— carry them one at a time. Resolutely she set to work in the thickening dark. Short runs with her little son, and then back in a flash to the whimpering, comfortless ugly daughter spraddling among the tufts. Sometimes she made thirty feet before the warning rush of the dingo sent her back in a whirling fury in time to snatch up one of her babies.

Tess's double trips to and fro grew laboured. Her tongue lolled from a hot mouth, the skin about her eyes was crimped in set wrinkles. Crossing an outcrop of stone she stumbled on a jagged spur. To save the pup she twisted her body and took the weight of the fall on her left shoulder. When she rose to go on the leg moved stiffly. And always, fifty yards behind, the tireless dingo followed warily, howling softly at times to the oncoming pack.

It was now pitch dark. Tess lifted questioning ears in the direction of the distant circus camp. The two pups, limp on the ground, were strangely silent. A soft wind went sighing through the coolabahs. Something in the dry, cracked earth seemed to suck the life from Tess's wet body. Eyes filmed and shrunken, she turned slowly on her side. The odds had been too heavy. This was the end of the race. On the lee side of a stunted bush she curled, the pups snuggling close with weak murmurs.

Fifty yards away the brown thing reared its length, lifted its nose to heaven, and emitted a series of quick yelps. The quarry was run to earth.

The ugly pup awoke shivering. The breast against which she nosed, the breast that had been warm, held a clammy chill. Her brother was whimpering dolefully. Her little eyes tried to pierce the darkness where there was movement— a brown shape dodging here and there, but always in their direction. The ugly pup yawned over her sleepy-eyed brother, rooted again at the cold nipple of the out-sprawled Tess, but was not comforted.

There was a sudden stir where the dingo sat watching, its ears stiffened in the direction of the pups. A plug-shaped object came shuffling over the reef. A forty-pound bulldog was silhouetted against the rising moon.

The bulldog belonged to the circus, travelled with it from town to town, but unlike Tess had never been billed as a star performer. He was a rouseabout and a hanger-on. Men had tried hard to fit him into some kind of a job, only to discover that he was never there when the whistle blew. They called him Bill and forgot him for days on end.

Since dusk Bill had become conscious of a certain beef bone the circus cook had discarded, hurled into the scrub in the most wanton manner. Nobody in the circus objected to Bill going out after dark. It was too busy feeding itself and its dependants, horses, mules, camels, and clowns, to worry about his exits

and entrances. Bill tipped the beam at forty pounds the morning he stripped for his memorable fight with Andy Finneran's classic ring-sider Hindenburg II, an undefeated champion in the bull-terrier world.

The fight took place in the dawn light, on a strip of beach, at Botany Bay. Local fight fans admitted reluctantly that Bill let the gas out of Hindy in the third session, sent him home in a delivery van, wrapped in towels and sponges.

Following a circus and dusting round in the bush had given Bill the waistline of a professional cruiserweight. Anything from an Irish boar-hound to a Barcelona bull might have had a second look at Bill. Considered as a fighting unit there was nothing amiss in Bill's armament.

Bill was thinking in terms of beef-bones when he mounted a hummock of sand the caravans had skirted hours ago. The soprano yells of a dingo pack blew across the flat. Bill hated musical wild dogs. He had only seen their tails at odd intervals when they scouted for lambs on the edge of a run. Shuffling over the sandy rise, he came suddenly upon a blurred heap lying beside a stunted she-oak. Bill nosed in.

Instantly a warm, furry ball rolled under his feet, then another. Tess's pups! He remembered them, had ridden in their caravan only the night before. Ouf!

He stood over Tess and found her stiff and cold. The pups were not cold. They rolled against him, bit his legs softly, while he pondered darkly on the ways of collie mothers who led their offspring into the wilderness before they died. It wasn't a bit clever of Tess!

The low, sobbing howls ran nearer until they joined their low-lying brother among the dunes. A red moon swam across the ranges, and stood like the face of a clock on the peak of a cathedral. The tremulous howls gathered about the sand-hummock, a cluster of stiff brown tails versed in the art of rounding up ewes and lambs, and gorging where they killed.

Bill looked down at the pack. The smell of their hides blew over him. In the red moonlight they seemed to dance like blackfellows in a corroboree. Their spindly shadows leaped in and out in devil-devil style, approaching by inches the she-oak where Tess had made her last run. Bill stared down at their tails and ears, then cast a furtive glance over his shoulder to where the smoke of camp-fires lifted, a mile away! The pups were under his feet, whimpering softly; the old terror was upon them again, the throaty sounds from the dingo pack belonged to the wolf and the jackal. They were on the rise now, a ruffianly gang with stretching necks and gaunt bodies. Pure warrigals from the vast solitudes of the Never-Never, scourges of the great cattle-runs and stock-routes.

There was a legend among the squatters of the north-west of a dingo pack led by a black dog the size of a mastiff. Stockmen had failed to reach him with



poison bait or rifles. The crack shots from the outlying stations had tried to get within a mile of Black Barney, as they called him. A price was on his head. There were fame and friendship in the district for the man or dog who could bring in the scalp of the big, devil-dancing dingo.

Bill's feet were planted like a rock above the two pups; a cruiser-weight facing a murderous rabble, sheep-killers, manners of cattle and defenceless mothers. The black leader sized up Bill and the two pups. Hitherto no animal on the Australian plains had offered resistance to attack. The flocks of bleating ewes and lambs were easy meat; the kangaroo, when caught, simply flopped its paws and fell and died like a calf in a cow pen. Nobody thought of fighting. Bill had a feeling that this black and yellow pack had run Tess to death. The two pups began to cry. They knew something.

'Yeow! Get out!' chorused the black and yellow pack, edging closer in. 'We saw 'em first. Be off while there's a chance. We'll let you go.'

The offer was made strictly to Bill, who had some how sneaked into their night's foray. Why didn't he go while there was time? Hunger presided like a live god over saltbush and plain. Dingo meat was scarce. The, poison baits up Coolabah were as thick as the prickly pears. The sheep runs had been made unsafe with men and guns. Here was a safe and easy kill.

Black Barney sprang in with the ease of a flat-racer. Bill watched him come straight for the daughter of Tess. If Bill had moved an inch to the right, the long snout of the black dingo would have lifted her from the ground and whisked her off. Bill moved to the left and received the impact of Barney's shoulder. It was as if an overweighted puffball had been fired at a battleship.

In the past Bill had always practised a knee-cap grip which generally put an opponent out of the running in the first ten seconds. Barney had never been conscious of his knee-cap until Bill's jaws slammed over it, rolled him in the dust, and snapped it like a twig.

The easy, sheep killing life had been bad for Barney. His yell of agony was heard by a camp of timber-getters on the far side of Coolabah. Even as he reduced him to a hank of hair and bone, Bill's slight effort's carried him only a few inches from the two blubbering pups. Tearing himself from the soft throat of the supine Barney, he was amongst the devil-dancing legs of the pack with the speed of a tiger dispersing impudent jackals.

The pack melted and Bill sat with the pups, feeling that his mouth would have been better for the squeeze of a sponge. The moon grew white as a tortured face. Across the long, shadow-clothed ridge sat the spindly dingo pack, watching, waiting, howling at Bill.

A council of spindly legs was formed to discuss the unreasonableness of Bill. They roamed the distant scrub, made crude feint attacks to draw him from

their quarry. Bill sat tight, dreaming of a beef-bone the circus cook had wasted. The black dingo stirred convulsively for a moment, rolled away, and lay still. A singer from the hills had gone his way. Silence brooded over the sand hills.

There was a sharp nip in the dawn wind. The two pups cuddled closer to Bill as he woke from his dreams of vanished beef-bones to discover a circle of spindly shapes and pointed ears trotting near. The pack appeared anxious to discuss the situation with him. By their friendly bearing it was understood that there was to be no more fighting.

Bill appeared overcome by their peaceful intentions. His stump of tail patted the earth encouragingly as two of their number approached within ten feet of the recent disturbance. One of the two ambassadors of peace made it known that if Bill would step aside with him further needless slaughter might be dispensed with. The second dingo was anxious only to assist in the discussion, and to assure himself that the two dear little pups were not in need of a guide and philosopher. This second dingo was the most polished member of the pack. His manners fitted him for the guardianship of orphans, stray lambs, or small defenceless creatures in search of a home.

He advanced very close to Bill in order to assure himself that the two babies of the late Tess had passed a good night. His long, smooth snout almost touched the blubbering son of Tess. Bill seemed to kick himself from the ground to the soft white hair under the throat of the solicitous dingo.

Bulldog and dingo whirled together in the dawn light with the sound of two stripping machines in a gale. It has been said that two curs united in thought and deed can manhandle a champion of champions. The two sheep-killers of Coolabah missed their moment, the one skulking back to the pack in haste, leaving its companion to whatever honours it could extract from the conflict.

Dingo-fighting, as Bill soon learned, began in a whirlwind and ended in a summer breeze. And as there was no purse attached to the fighting he flung loose from his pulped and well-gouged adversary to sit beside the pups and consider the situation. He licked both their ears to prevent them brooding overmuch about breakfast or the follies of a mother with a flair for leaving camp when she ought to have stuck to her milk and biscuits. That things were going to happen Bill was certain. A dingo is a dingo, and has never been known to run far from a three-course breakfast.

There was a feeling of stir and bustle in the dim distance. The circus camp was moving on. A feeling of utter desolation seized Bill. He wanted to go, too, to be with the men and horses and hear the voice of Sam, the cook. He sprang up and half ran down the long sandy drift to the clump of spinifex at the bottom. He paused to look back at the two flop-eared babies beside the dead Tess. The ugly daughter was making desperate efforts to follow. Never did a

puppy realise how hard things were going to be without Bill. Why couldn't he give them a lift as mother had done? A big strong dog like Bill! She fell over in the sand complaining bitterly. The son watched from the ravaged dust heap above, whimpering a little, but not disposed, to leave the sprawled-out collie mother with the sunken eyes.

Bill walked back glumly, licking his dry jowl, while the sun mounted higher and higher, a huge red cinder, full of heat and thirst for them. Clouds of carrion crows quorked and hovered above the drifts. Bill dug his body into the sand, the pups crowding close. It was going to be a hot day, devoid of water barrels and beef-bones. And to make matters worse, nothing was going to happen.

A SLEEK brown dingo came down the range side, picking her way through the drifts with the air of a queen in distress. Her eyes were soft and full of pity for Bill and the pups. She walked daintily where others had loped and galloped. Not another dingo was in sight as she fretted nearer.

Bill met her approach in baleful silence. He did not spring out, as he had done to greet the others. His short hair did not brindle, his jaws bind in dynamite rage for once. He could be calm when the occasion warranted. He sat still, blinking his small eyes as she paused to lick the soft ruff of her throat, to shake her head as though she only needed a collar and bells to make her queen of the wilds. Bill sat up and growled hoarsely.

The new ambadress pricked her ears in surprise and emitted a soft musical note in response. Thrusting his head over the two cowering pups, he watched her with a policeman's eye. Nearer she came, pausing every ten yards to adjust her ruff, to smooth the velvet brown of her delicately moulded throat with a lick of her small red tongue.

Bill was impressed, remained still as a stone dog as she stood over him, her lean sides quivering as she began slowly to lick away the blood drops from his big shoulders and flanks. Then he affected a sudden rage, sprang up, his stub of a tail moving like a lash. The elegant one ran in circles, kicked sand over him, invited him to race her across the flat below.

Bill suddenly remembered the pups and trotted back slowly to their side. She did not follow. With ears thrown forward to the ranges she made off slowly. Bill watched her go. She knew where water trickled down through the rocks into fern covered gullies. She could lead him to quiet, cool places and something to eat. He stood up again. He could almost sniff the water in the hollow where she was going. There would be no harm in going a little way with her, just to stretch his legs.

The dingo pack watched them from the boulder-hipped summit of the range, watched the bulldog leave the two pups to amble beside the sleek-

haired queen, in the opposite direction. They streamed in a body down the range side, silent as snakes, hungry and swift. It was the loud crack of a stockwhip halted them; a second pistol-like echo sent them back to the cover of the hills.

TWO horsemen rode up to where the pups dozed in the fierce sun-glare. They reined in at sight of the collie mother, out-sprawled beside them.

'Poor old Tess! Look over there! Three dead dingoes, by the holy! And that big black one! Who did the killing? Not old Tess. The big black fellow would have skinned her alive!'

The dingo queen had vanished with the others, but not before both men had seen her. They also saw a heavy-jawed bulldog waddling back in their direction, a hurt expression in his small eyes. Both riders grinned as they stooped to pat his ribs in grim understanding of what had happened. They had come out to look for the missing Tess, not for Bill.

'The little brown girl nearly got you that time, Bill! Nearly got you away from your two little pals. Wake up, you poor old mutt, or you'll get left behind!'

The two circus hands rode back to the camp, the pups held in front of their saddles. Bill made heavy going in their dusty wake. It was a hot day with few bouquets about for tired bulldogs.

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### 39: The Keeper of the Pearls

*Central Queensland Herald* (Rockhampton) 5 Feb 1942

WONG FOO'S ISLAND was three days east of the Navigators. Sailors who knew black lip from golden-edge shell insisted that Foo was a born chemist, who had learned the trick of shaping pearls to his own design.

Thieves and jewel agents of sorts had visited Foo's island without profit. Yet in one year eight freak gems had left his hands for the sum of fifty thousand dollars! And each year his fame as a pearl-designer blew in loud gusts about the financially desperate men who haunt the quays of Sydney and San Francisco.

Captain William H. Hayes had just emerged from an unprofitable marine inquiry when the news of Wong Foo's latest achievement reached him.

His schooner *Daphne* was anchored off Dawes Point at the moment Foo's latest consignment of pearls was being shown in the windows of Meyer, Ganstein and Co., the Australian representatives of the big Hatton Garden and New York firm. The schooner had enough stores to carry her east of the Navigators, and Hayes figured out that by the time he reached Foo's trade house another parcel of gems would be ready for shipment.

"Boys," he said, stepping aboard from the dinghy, "there's a Chinaman with a head as big as a gasworks living east of Manihiki. They call him the Pearl Wizard, but between ourselves, he's just a low-down acid expert who tricks oysters into creating the right shape stones."

"Guess he isn't the first one," the mate growled from the dark of the open hold. "Knew a pearl-hatcher up in Thursday Island who tickled oysters with opium and strychnine until they delivered the goods properly. Name of Sing Lee. He had a face like a blamed tortoise, but he produced a thing they called the Eye of Cleopatra that was auctioned in Amsterdam for 17,000 dollars! Guess I never heard of your Chinaman, anyhow."

Hayes lit a cigar and peered down at the mate in the greasy hold.

"Your chow had a necklace of gunboats to decorate his interests, my son. You forget, too, that he was financed and guarded by various syndicates and gun-holders. My particular heathen depends for protection on a little brass Joss about the size of your nose. All the same, we'll get our anchor when you've sweetened ship a bit."

It was midnight when the *Daphne* cleared the Heads. Hayes spent the following day and many others over a big Admiralty chart that magnified ordinary island groups to the size of continents. He pin-marked and pencilled

atolls and archipelagos that bore no name until he had separated a particular pear-shaped speck from a cluster of sister reefs and coral pinnacles.

"We'll call it Last Chance Island," he said to the mate. "And if Foo happens to beat us at high thinking when we get him— well there isn't enough money in the locker to keep us out of gaol!"

A MOUNTAINOUS surf was running over the reef ends that gridironed the entrance to the lagoon. The atoll itself was like a huge saucer in the smother of in-breaking seas and dazzling beach sand.

The schooner raced like a frightened bird through the surf-whitened passage, Hayes gripping the wheel with the courage of his despair. The whirlwinds of water caught the schooner's keel, flinging her almost broadside on to a jagged line of submerged coral. The next moment she had responded to his swift appeal, and with a leap, that was almost human gained the still clear water of the lagoon.

The low rumble of the anchor chains brought a cloud of hawks wheeling over the schooner's yards-eager, hungry creatures, ravenously alert to seize the slightest morsel that fell from the pantry window.

The mate, standing near the rail, indicated a hut of palm logs, scarce visible through the distant jungle of lianas and terns. Ten seconds later a fat, sleepy-eyed Chinaman appeared at the door, a pair of old ship's glasses held to his eyes.

"Wong Foo, or his blamed understudy!" Hayes declared. "Looks as if we'd got him unawares!"

The Chinaman appeared to be addressing someone inside the hut. His gestures were rapid for one so heavy of movement; yet not for an instant did his face betray more than a suave curiosity at the schooner's unexpected entry into the lagoon.

The dinghy took Hayes ashore, leaving the mate and two of the crew on the beach to await his return. Strolling leisurely over the rough coral-strewn shingle, the buccaneer approached as one caressing each moment of life. What lay beyond the jungle line he could not guess; he was certain, however, that the atoll contained a dozen or more native divers armed with shell-knives and with maybe a rifle or two inside the dark woods on his left.

"I'm the head of a geological survey party," he announced briskly. "My name is Twickenham, and it pains me to record the fact, sir, that the sub-aqueous super-structure of this island is causing European diplomats much uneasiness and alarm!"

"Twillicum," the Chinaman nodded pleasantly. "Welly glad to see you, sir."

"I was going to mention," Hayes went on genially, "that some of my assistants are coming ashore with shovels and picks to examine your stratas. We'll dig round your hut and inside it perhaps. One can never tell how these sub-glacial torrentiferous surfaces run," he added impressively.

A native boy, wearing a necklace of shark's teeth flitted from the rear of the hut into the dense shadow of the puraos beyond.

"Nicked!" Hayes swore softly under his breath, but without a sign of chagrin in his eyes.

"You welcome to dig up my house." the Chinaman assured him blandly. "Me welly intlested in jollogy, mistah Twillecum. You come in!"

Hayes followed into the hut with a suspicion that the native with the necklace had slipped away with the pearl hoard. The hut contained a single bunk and sleeping mats, together with an empty gin case that stood for a table. The buccaneer sniffed scornfully at the odours of stale fish and cooking that exuded from a little compound at the rear. He divined in a flash the hopelessness of his quest. To have shot the disappearing native would have been a deliberate act of murder that made no appeal to his rough nature. To acquire the pearl cache by force or cunning was his idea.

Sauntering into the open, he glanced back at the watchful Chinaman in the doorway. "I'm going to examine and report on the nature of your igneous subsoils, sir. Probably you'll tell me who the spring-heeled boy is who quitted the back door?"

The Chinaman's face was a study in sup-pressed scorn and derision. "That boy named Esanon," he grinned. "Him welly flikened of jollogists. Me no stop him run away!"

"There's one thing," Hayes declared, as he swung in the direction of the puraos, "he can't run far on this coop of an island, I'll get the beggar before sunset if he doesn't get me!"

THE THIN BELT of puraos screened the atoll from the south-eastern trade. The waters of the lagoon gleamed turquoise in the noon sun glare. The tide was racing out through the narrow entrance, revealing the naked sandbars and ridges of coral. Descending a narrow track that led to a basin like hollow on the right, Hayes came suddenly upon a strongly built, palm thatched trade house in the centre. At a glance he saw that the doors had been shut to prevent a too sudden entry. He scratched his head doubtfully.

"Johnny Shark necklace being in there," he muttered, "he isn't likely to come out unless I perpetrate a sudden conflagration. And a fire risk isn't good business when the pearls ain't insured!"

Strolling round the trade-house out of gunshot, Hayes became suddenly aware of a shark-tooth necklace moving delicately through the scrub on his right. Without sound the buccaneer had crossed the boulder-packed space, and in the turn of the track found himself eye to eye with the boy Esanon. Slowly, deliberately, the buccaneer covered him with his big navy revolver.

"Esanon," he said sorrowfully, "I want eight or nine little geological specimens you're carrying. I guess you know the meaning of this lump of steel in my hand?"

Esanon trembled violently, his brown hands thrust out as though to shield his face from a bullet. Hayes stepped nearer until the barrel of his weapon touched the boy's cheek.

"You took some pearls from your matter's hut just now. Where are they?"

Esanon sank to his knee, his fingers seeking to touch the white captain's feet. "They kill me if I speak of the *oonati* (pearls)." He indicated the trade house in the hollow. "They are strong men and they have knives and guns, too, O Captain, I cannot speak here."

"Have you got the pearls?"

"I will tell where they are, O captain, but Esanon must go from the island to your ship. You must wait till the dark comes," he whispered in the vernacular, "or they will kill us both if we stay here—"

Something in the boy's horror stricken eyes warned Hayes of some instant peril.

Seizing Esanon's trembling wrist he re-turned swiftly to where the mate stood waiting by the dinghy.

"I will tell where they are, O captain, enough water to float the schooner. Without a word to the wide eyed expectant crew, Hayes led the quaking Esanon to his cabin and pushed him inside.

"You tell me all about it, my boy." Hayes spoke softly now, for he saw that Esanon could put the game in his hands if he chose. "How many pearls are there, and who's holding 'em at the present moment?"

Esanon held up his right hand and one finger of his left. "Six little ones, O captain, and a seventh that is like *jariski* (the star of morning). It is the colour of milk and blood, and it is shaped like the dove that is painted in the mission house at Ponape."

"Another freak gem!" Hayes growled. Then, in a kindlier voice: "Who holds it, Esanon?"

The boy's frightened glance went to the open porthole for a moment before answering. "The blue shark has it now," he said with an effort. "It will not come back to this inside water until your ship has gone!"

Hayes almost glared at the boy.



"See here, Esanon," he snapped, "none of your witch doctor talk! Speak plain; there is a bullet in my gun for every little lie you tell!"

Esanon put out his hands desperately, while a shadow of terror crossed his shifting eyes.

"It is Wong Foo's shark, O captain, the big man-eater with the hammer nose. It comes into this *lu-gan* (lagoon) for the rich food my master gives it, once, twice, three times a month. Like the hungry pig, it has learned to come and go from its feeding place, O captain."

Hayes sat on the locker wiping the big drops from his brow. "But the pearls, Esanon," he demanded. "What has this hammer-nosed shark got to do with 'em?"

"The master, Wong Foo, is very wise, O captain. Many thieves and bad man come here to steal his pearls. No place is safe to hide them. One time he kept pigeons, and when the *papalagi* came in their ships to steal and rob, the master tied his pearls in silk to the pigeons' feet and let them go."

"Phew!" Hayes muttered. "That's the limit!"

"But the hawks and carrion birds killed the pigeons sometimes," Esanon went on. "And my master lost many pearls that fell into the sea. So he became very wise and made friends with the big man-eater shark," he added quickly.

"How does a man make friends with a man-eating shark, Esanon?" the buccaneer inquired with a touch of sarcasm. "I guess you can't fool me all the time!"

"The shark is like the pig," the boy insisted stubbornly. "It soon learns where it is being fed very regular. When the master ties a Tanna boy to the post that is driven deep far out in the *lu-gan*, the shark knows!"

Hayes caught his breath fiercely. "Does the master tie up people to a post in the lagoon, Esanon?"

"Only when he wishes the hammer-head to come into the *lu-gan*," the boy answered innocently. "Then the master keeps the shark in by placing logs across the *naru-tal* (passage). The hammer-head cannot go out until the logs are taken away, O captain."

"But what's the use of the beast when you have him inside the lagoon?" Hayes flung out, his face congested in fury and disappointment, for he suspected that the boy was merely beating time to allow his master some way of escape from the atoll. "The tide runs out and leaves your man-eater floundering in the mud. Where's the sense, I ask?"

Esanon clasped his hands and made signs in token of his own honesty and good faith. "The master is not afraid of the hammer-head, O captain. After the tide has gone out and it lies in the deep mud he fastens a *ning-gar* (copper

wire) round the body where it grows narrow at the *vani* (tail). The master has the pearl divers, Amati, Oke and Sunda, to help him."

"No lies !" the buccaneer declared hoarsely, his big hand resting almost threateningly on the boy's shoulder, "or by the gods of your people I'll nail you little brown ears over my cabin door. Now tell me what it is that's fastened to the copper wire?"

"A metal tube!" Esanon chattered, his eyes bulging at the threat. "The pearls are kept inside."

"And you tell me," Hayes almost snarled, "that your master lets that hammerhead go out to sea with a blamed metal box fastened to it!"

"I have see it with my eyes!" Esanon quavered.

"And the master gets it into the lagoon again by offering it a live boy or man! Is that the yarn?"

Again Esanon assured him that it was so.

"This morning at sky-break, he added in a whisper, "my master's canoe, with Amati steering, saw your ship very far away, three, four, five hours before you entered the *naru-ta* (passage). It was low tide, and the hammerhead was in the mud and sand at the far end of the *lu-gan*. It was then the master became afraid that you were some wicked *papalagi* come to steal the six pearls and the Star of Morning he had prepared for the German buyers. The divers held fast to the hammerhead with sinnet ropes while the master fastened the wire and tube very tight."

Hayes decided in a flash that the boy was lying. Controlling his anger he shook him by the shoulder roughly. And the hammer-head went out to sea with the pearls this morning, an hour or so before I came into the lagoon! Do you swear by that?"

Esanon crossed his breast, while his eyes showed signs of tears and reproach. "The captain can bring in the hammerhead to-night at full tide. He has only to do what the master does. I have spoken the truth!"

IT WAS quite dark when Hayes locked the cabin door, leaving Esanon inside. Going on the schooner's deck he called softly to the mate to lower the whaleboat. "Bring some rifles and a rope!" he added hoarsely. "We're going to interview Wong Foo."

A few minutes later the whaleboat, with six new Plymouth men at the oars, hit the shingles a few cables' length from the trade house in the hollow. A heavy surf was run-ring on the outer reefs, yet scarcely a breath of air moved the line of stiff-crested palms in the south.

A single lamp burned in the trade-house. Followed by the mate and four of the boat hands, Hayes approached and rapped softly at the heavy teak door.

A slight stir inside followed, and then the voice of Wong Foo.

"What you want, Twillecum?" he demanded sleepily. "Me got nothin' for you heah!"

"I've got a barrel of tar and a firestick if you don't open the door, Foo. Quick and lively now!"

There was a pattering of sandalled feet on the floor inside. The Chinaman's shadow slanted across the blinds for a moment before the door bolts were drawn. Hayes waited until the big yellow face appeared in the dimly-lit entrance before speaking.

"You are coming in our boat, Foo," he announced gently. "Make a fuss and you'll eat a bullet for every boy you fed old hammerhead with!"

The Chinaman's slant eyes glinted, while his huge frame seemed to palpitate with fury.

"My boy Esanon tell you one lie!" he rasped. "You come here an' say you one jolligist. Now you wantee my pearl. You no bluff me, Twillecum!" he added, defiantly.

"I'm going to see if there's truth in Esanon's shark story, Foo! And those black divers of yours can show up now if they feel entitled to a scrap, savvy!"

A sudden scurrying of feet within the tradehouse followed the buccaneer's statement. A moment later the door was slammed violently and bolted.

"Sounds as if fighting wasn't in their line!" Hayes commented jeeringly as he thrust the struggling Chinaman forward in the direction of the boat.

Rowing steadily across the lagoon the boat collided suddenly with a high post that stood gibbet-like in the swirling waters. Hayes gripped it with the boat-hook, while the mate made fast with the painter.

Wong Foo squirmed in his seat, the sweat of terror illumining his heavy features. The buccaneer observed him narrowly, a cigar flattened between his teeth.

"How many boys did you tie up to this post, Foo?" he inquired suavely. "The truth is going to help you some; a lie will only hurry the funeral. Speak up!"

The Chinaman humped his shoulders sullenly, then looked into the faces of the men beside him and shook his head. "Esanon make a fool of you!" he rasped. "I no tie lille boy up to post. No fear!"

Hayes considered a moment, then whispered to the mate. Without haste or violence the Chinaman was stretched in the thwarts, his arms and legs securely roped. With some difficulty he was heaved into the warm waters of the lagoon while deft hands gripped and lashed him to the upright stake.

The water rose slowly about the Chinaman's waist as the whaleboat drew off. It came with a crisp bubbling flow full of its own voice and the bitter taste

of the ever-lasting outer seas. Foo's Mongolian eyes became rooted in their stare. Not once in the slow passing minutes did his glance lift a millrace through the lagoon passage.

Once or twice in the long night his head fell forward as though listening to the thunderbolts of surf on the far-off atolls. Then his glance went out to a white wedge of phosphorescence that appeared like a lantern flash at the mouth of the channel.

A soft, indistinct word escaped him. For an instant he fought with maniac strength to free his wrists and ankles from the post, only to drive the lashings deeper into his soft flesh. Then from the darkness of the distant reefs a voice boomed across the water.

"Look out, Foo! Keep your chin up!"

The Chinaman's glance went out again to the white wedge of light trailing indolently in the blue underflow. It cut here and there with the precision of a torpedo scout, its huge length remaining inert as it gained the lagoon centre, as though the Chinaman's shadow had disconcerted it. Swerving it flashed nearer, and again stopped a fathom length from the pig tailed head with the bulging eyes.

The whaleboat shot suddenly across the trail of phosphorus. Hayes grunted softly as the barrel of his Winchester slanted into view. The wedge of phosphorus receded, and then with incredible swiftness turned and shot with open jaws at the wide-eyed Celestial.

Hayes fired twice in quick succession as the grey-bellied monster flashed by. A sudden silence followed, and then a terrific threshing of water where the hammerhead shark gyrated to the surface. Ten seconds later it was floating idly within a few feet of the post.

Driving the boat-hook into its still throbbing flesh, they towed and beached the huge carcass with the craft of fishermen. In the half light Hayes discerned a band of copper wire attached to its tapering length. His knife slashed it loose, and with a grunt of satisfaction broke away a small metal cylinder fastened to a finger ring at the end.

"Leave Foo where he is!" Hayes commanded, the cylinder held tight in his palm. "The kanaka divers will fetch him at day break. I want to get aboard my schooner and apologise for calling little Esanon a liar!"

Esanon was brought on deck and stood before Hayes, a look of expectation sharpening his clear cut features. His lips twitched strangely at sight of the metal tube.

"See here, sonny!" the buccaneer began, with a hearty laugh. "Everything's turned out as you said. The only thing that puzzles me is how to open the box.

It's sealed up both ends, and I don't want it rough handled for many years. Can you open it?"

Esanon took the cylinder, examined it by the binnacle light, and then with a sudden twist in the centre opened it. Six grains of Indian corn trickled into the buccaneer's waiting palm!

A snarl of rage and disgust filled the schooner. The mate caught the boy in a savage grip and bore him to the rail.

"You're part of the whole blamed fraud!" he thundered. "You lying little beast!"

Raising him in a baresark grip the mate flung him over the rail. Esanon struck the water with his feet, rose swiftly, and looked back at the angry faces peering at him from the schooner's side. A moment later he ducked to avoid impact with the metal cylinder flung at his head by the mortified Hayes.

"I'd give the little beggar a bullet only I'm not sure whether he's a fraud or not! The buccaneer walked aft wiping his perspiring brow.

Esanon rose to the surface, drew breath warily, and dived. Thirty seconds later he re-appeared a few yards from the beach, the metal cylinder clutched in his fingers. Crawling to the shelter of the puraos he sat down and drew a verdigris-covered pin from the false bottom of the cylinder.

A single pearl of matchless orient and shape fell into his palm. There were no others.

AT DAWN the schooner made for the reef entrance, Hayes at the wheel. His scowling eye turned for a moment from his survey of the whitening breakers outside to a plug-shaped object squatting on a reef and a cable's length ahead.

"It's Esanon!" he called out to the mate. "What's he after?"

Esanon stood up suddenly, his arms flung out in a last appeal. "You no leave me here, O captain ! My master who deceived me will kill me when you are gone!"

Hayes swore under his breath.

"What do you want?" he bellowed. "I can't waste my life in the blighted hole!"

Esanon spread out his hands in frantic haste as the schooner moved to the passage. "My mother lives at Honolulu, O captain. If you take me to Latanga, in the Navigators, I may get there by another ship. I am a sailor and a very good cook. And there is my mother!"

Hayes turned a scowling face to the mate standing near the cuddy door.

"Get the dinghy. We can do with a blamed cook. And I guess his old hay bag of a mother will be glad to see him!"

She was.

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#### 40: Sweet Nell— The Brumby's Story

*Sydney Mail* 10 Jan 1906

NOT ONE of us carried a station brand; Silvertail was the only filly that had seen the inside of a stockyard, or felt the pinch of bit or spur. We were a band of outlaws hard-living, sure-footed, kings of the ranges. There was grass in the gullies, and we drank our fill where the steep torrents thundered into the pine-shadowed ravines, none but 'stayers' could live with us. The wasters were generally cut off and yarded by the men from Yarabba station.

We were not flat racers or hurdle-jumpers, but we took the gullies as we found them, and they were rough enough to sharpen the horns of a goat. We trooped warily through the morning mists, the dams with their foals running behind or in the centre of the mob. Sometimes our leaders skipped round on the edge of a spur, with ears flattened and eyes staring across the grass country below.

Rock wallabies and hawks about us, dwarf oaks and bottle-brush. The coast wind lifts into the face of our old Gulf-leader, Beno. Lowering his head he browses on the edge of the range. All is well.

Twenty miles away, where the bush sprawls like a blue haze, we see the mail coach trundling up the thin red road that lies like a wound under the waist of the hill. Too far away to hear the lead bars or the rattle of whip and chains, but each brumby feels the heart of the mail horses beating at their work.

Jim Jams, a dish-faced outlaw, whinnied peevishly.

'It's galling work for those fools hauling that coach, all the year round,' he said. 'I'd sooner work for an undertaker— a horse does get a change of scenery and a few nice clothes.'

'What's that sneaking up the hill?' coughed little Silvertail, with the white chest and the Arab head. We swung round in a body and sniffed the wind. A strange horse was creeping up through the boulders like an old mountaineer.

'It's a camp horse,' neighed Beno, from the look-out. 'I can see his brands— two bars across W. What's he after, I wonder?'

Gambolo, a fiddle-headed Riverina outlaw, poked his face to the front, and stared at the approaching stranger.

'Looks a bit of a warrior,' he whispered. 'Pretending he's got string-halt. Hush, not a whinny!'

The camp horse walked up and up, picking a bit of grass here and there, without seeming to notice us. Shoulders, thighs, and buttocks, he was fit to carry 17st. There was a star blaze on his face. He smelt of saddle-sweat and men's clothes; there were blood-gouts on his sides, where the spurs had been.

He looked at us sorrowfully and sighed. 'I thought there were a few bunches of sweet grass up here,' he said, flicking his short tail. 'I've met nothing but boulders and blowflies so far.'

The band of brumbies gathered round him curiously. Jim Jams lowered his ears wickedly.

'I've seen you cutting out cattle, my good fellow. I've heard that you drive horses from the Queensland pastures, and yard them for the sales. You deserve to be branded on the face,' he snapped.

The camp horse flicked his ears. 'I've no sympathy with cattle,' he said. 'I've been gored in the yards and trampled on. Besides, I like a bit of honest work. Honesty is my strong point.'

'Don't deny that you have rounded up horses so that they could be broken to bit and saddle,' cried Jim James.

The camp horse shuddered.

'Some of you fellows would round up your own mother if you were ridden by a man with a hand of iron and heels like swords. Wait till some of you taste whip and steel.'

'Traitor!'

The mob of outlaws wheeled round him in a circle of thundering hoofs. 'You have caused hundreds of free horses to be yarded and branded like sheep. You shall not eat grass with us.'

The camp horse remained quite still watching the foaming brumbies with tired eyes.

'Kick the traitor into the gully!' snorted little Silvertail. 'He is only fit for dingoes.'

The smell of the saddle sweat and the blood on his girths made us sick.

'Why does he come here with his station airs?' shouted the mob. 'The star-faced renegade!'

The camp horse shook himself wearily. 'Gentlemen outlaws,' he began, 'I am a horse with feelings like yourselves. For ten years I have carried a hulking 14-stone drover. Up and down, through big scrub and plain, from the Diamantina to the great southern cattle routes. In my young days I brought beef to the goldfields store mobs from the Flinders to the Castlereagh. My fetlocks ache now through stumbling about the spewey camping grounds of the Gulf. I have crossed the Poison Country, where the plant killed hundreds of sheep and cattle. I have galloped through black spear grass that would have lamed a buffalo. Don't be too hard on a comrade,' he grunted.

'Do you know where there is any sweet grass, sir?' whinnied a colt from the rear. 'I'm tired of eating wood and stones.'



'Sweet grass!' The camp horse shook his tail. 'I could take you to a place where it lies fetlock deep and sweet as lucerne. I only strolled up here for a breath of air.'

'Why didn't you say so before?' Silvertail pranced round and round excitedly. 'Is the sweet grass inside a sheep wire fence, or just open country near a creek?'

'It isn't half an hour's run from here,' said the camp horse reflectively. 'When I come to think of it the grass is more like barley than lucerne.'

The brumbies followed him eagerly down the ranges. He never skipped or stumbled once.

Beno and Jim Jams didn't like leaving the hills. The camp horse had an oily tongue they said. But they ran behind him sulkily until they came to a creek where the water lay stagnant between rocks and ferns. On the opposite side we saw sheep wires running towards sunrise.

'Where's the grass?' demanded Beno, 'that stands over your fetlocks and is more like barley than lucerne'

'Half a mile down the creek,' sighed the camp horse. 'You never tasted such grass.'

'Taste the sheep fence,' sneered Jim Jams, 'and the stockwhips. Yah!'

He flew round suddenly with a neigh of disgust. At that moment a couple of boundary riders mounted on clever station horses almost leaped from the scrub towards our flanks.

'Trapped!' screamed little Silvertail. 'Back to the hills!'

'See where the star-faced spieler has led us!' cried Beno. 'The foals and dams are goners. Look out for yourselves!'

I ran with flying strides side by side with Silvertail, hoping to reach the hills. As I turned, a long snake-like whip struck me across the face. The sound was like a pistol shot, and the pain almost blinded me. I turned with the clever station horse on my flank and the long evil whip boomed on my ears and hips.

'Yarded and done for!' choked little Silvertail. 'They are driving us towards the wings of the yard. To-morrow we shall be branded and flogged. Good-bye to freedom and the hills.'

The station horse and the snake-whip clung to us until we reached a gully. I followed Silvertail down the jagged slopes over boulders and fallen timber. Down, down we leaped, with never a falter or spill; stones flew past, boulders rumbled after us, but neither wombat holes nor gaping fissures could stay us. The station horse and the terrible whip were left far behind.

As we ran up the opposite slope we saw 20 of our brother outlaws being yarded at Yarabba station. We had lost most of our dams and yearlings.

That night, as we crossed to our lookout on Blue Spur hill, I heard the mothers crying for their foals. A brumby soon forgets a lost comrade. We had no time to lament. A big drought was over the land, and we had to travel far to find safe water and grass.

WE CAME UP with a silk-coated riderless mare one night, running like the wind at the back of the hills.

'Ho, ho, my little lady!' shouted Silvertail. 'Where are you going?'

She was a beautiful creature, if I am a judge of a lady. She was bitted with a silver-plated snaffle; her saddle was the smartest bit of pigskin work outside a gentleman's stable.

'Where's your owner, my pretty friend?' snorted Jim Jams. 'Why are you running about the country with a saddle and bridle on?'

She pulled up, curving her pretty neck and pawing like a picture horse.

'Oh, dear,' she whinnied, 'I didn't see you in the dark. I was stolen from Gunoon Downs yesterday. The black police captured me and Dick Manners this afternoon. I'm so sorry for Dick. He isn't a bit like a horse thief.'

'Thought he might have cut you out of a picture,' sniffed Jim Jams. 'What did he steal you for— the photograph trade?'

'Don't be rude to a lady.' Beno lashed out at Jim Jam's ribs. 'Is it likely she'd be scampering about the hard ranges with her pretty clothes on for fun, eh?'

By this time the little lady had quietened. She merely champed her bit and shook her head violently.

'I'm called Sweet Nell,' she said. 'Dick Manners is only a boy, not 20 yet. He knew me when I was a yearling. After I was broken to saddle I got quite used to him. He is a gentleman and a friend of Nat Howit, the station manager. Both of them are in love with Phyllis Chalmers, a girl who lives over the Victorian border. Dick was always worrying old Howit— he was 60— to sell me to him. But Nat Howit wouldn't sell; he wanted me for Phyllis, across the border, and he knew that Dick wanted me for the same reason.'

'Dick used to come into my box and whisper in my ear, 'Nell, Nell, some day I'll steal you— steal you; you shall go south and see Phyllis.'

I would have kicked anyone but Dick, poor Dick.'

'I'd have torn his arm off if he'd put a bit in my mouth!' cried Jim Jams passionately.

Sweet Nell shook her head and danced from side to side, her pretty trappings ringing like bells in the cold night air. 'You don't know what it feels like to be thoroughly broken,' she said, 'to hear a human voice calling you by name, to feel yourself flying across the earth, to be fed and groomed until your blood sings for work and pace.'

'Give me freedom,' snorted Silvertail.

'Freedom,' whinnied Sweet Nell, 'you are only prisoners after all; wandering like terror-stricken rebels from gully to ridge, shirking your duties and living the lives of dingoes and wild cattle.'

'Tell us about the boy Dick who stole you,' put in Beno.

'Ah, Dick' she went on, 'he came to my box at midnight after the station hands had turned in. He unlocked the door, saddled me without a word, and we stole away towards the south.'

'We halted at daybreak and refreshed ourselves at a bush hotel. Towards afternoon we heard a couple of troopers coming behind. It was no use racing them, there were others ahead. They came up quickly and arrested Dick for stealing me. We were taken to Yarraba in the hollow below.'

'The black tracker threw my bridle over a post outside the lock-up. I switched it off while they were reading out the charge against Dick inside. And,' she struck fire from the rocks with her shoes, 'here I am.'

'Dick will get five years, and you'll be an old lady by the time he comes out of gaol,' tittered Silvertail.

'If they haven't got me how can they prove the charge?' she asked piteously. 'I don't want Dick to get five years, because he is so young,' she whimpered. 'And Phyllis— oh my, oh my, I think my heart will break!'

She fretted round and round the hillside, her stirrup irons pounding her sides mercilessly. 'Five years in gaol will break his heart and Phyllis.' He used to read his letters to me. Oh dear, oh dear, I'm only four years old myself, and his voice was more loving than anything in the world.'

'You're worth 50 guineas anyhow,' yawned Jim Jams. 'What's your best time for a mile?'

'One minute fifty seconds. But what does it matter. I can't run as fast as a telegram.'

We wandered through the gullies, and Sweet Nell followed with her clinking snaffle and stirrup irons. Her pace was different to ours. We sprang and jolted over the ground, she bowled like an India rubber ball, and passed us easily one after another.

'Her time's all right,' panted Beno. 'No fuss about her pace either. Wonder if she would steal the Summer Cup?'

All that night she fretted over the bleak ranges, nibbling a bit of grass here and there, and pawing the hard ground with her tiny feet.

'Worrying about that young scoundrel, I suppose,' coughed Gambolo. 'Doesn't know when she's well off.'

'He stole her for his sweetheart,' snapped Beno. 'Can't you distinguish between a common horse-thief and a cavalier?'

It was a long and bitter night-watch. I seemed to grow old waiting for the mists to roll inland with the dawn. My long coat kept me warm, but I knew that the dainty stable-bred Sweet Nell was quaking with cold.

Giant clouds stole up from the East, black and sullen, and heavy with rain. There was no sun that day. The storm broke across the hills in pelting slopes of rain. The earth grew soft, and the torrents sprang down the hillside in loud murmurs.

'The ducks are making for the back creeks!' shouted Gambolo, 'which reminds me that I put my foot into a mallee hen's nest last year. Couldn't stop to apologise. I'm sure my foot was all over egg-yolk. Why don't those mallee hens put up a notice board?'

Sweet Nell champed her silver bit, and fretted all day like a Queen in love. One moment she was standing near the look-out staring at Yarabba gaol, the next found her nipping the grass and whinnying all over the ranges.

The night came up black and squally; the rain spilled over us in sheets. At midnight the moon broke through the banked-up clouds, and lit up the hills.

'Listen to the creeks!' whispered Silvertail. 'Flood, flood, lap, lap, that's how the water talks; all the animals and insects understand— the ants, the snakes, the little bears, and the 'possum. I don't know how the rabbits get on, but the wild geese knew all about this rain three days ago. I heard them preaching the news when the sky was grilling like a fire bar.'

'Whinny, ninny!' screamed Beno, from the look-out. 'Something's in the wind.' He trotted round and round with ears twitching and nose in the air.

'Someone is coming!' gasped Silvertail. 'A man, I can see his white skin through the boulders.'

'Cooley!' The sound broke faintly up the steep hillside, and died away in the gullies beyond.

Sweet Nell bounded forward like a Cup starter, her head towards the voice.

'Cooley.'

It came again, clearer, and almost at our feet.

'I'm off,' gasped Silvertail, 'No more men for me. It's a stockman sooling those villainous camp horses round the hills to trap us again.'

'T'sh!' Gambolo whisked round uncertainly. 'Let's stay and see the fun.'

Sweet Nell stood apart from us: then she began to pick her way down the hill, stopping at times to listen.

'Nell, Nell!' It was a boy's voice that called. We saw him climbing among the boulders. His face was white, and the rain had drenched his hair until it hung like a wet mask about his brow and eyes. He listened for a moment until he caught the clink of curb and bridle. Then he stood like a gnost on the hillside watching her.

'Nell,' he whispered. 'My pretty Nell. Steady, my girl, steady.'

She flew round with the white moonlight in her eyes, and the rain flashed on her silky coat. The rebel madness was on her. What horse can speak with us without getting it in his blood!

'Ah,' coughed Gambolo. 'He's done for anyhow. Broke gaol, I suppose, and now he's putting his trust in a horse, like many a man before him. He, ho, he!'

The boy stood white-faced and irresolute on the hill side, not daring to breathe. Then slowly he took a half-step forward, his stroking hand held out.

'Nell,' he whispered, 'give me a chance, old girl. I swear they won't take us again. To-morrow we'll be over the border. My people will make things right with Nat Howit. Steady, whoa, Nell!'

He half-crouched to the ground, and held up his hand. Down below we heard the sudden champing of bits, the voices of troopers scrambling up the hillside. We were watching Sweet Nell, and I saw the boy creeping towards her.

'Nell, Nell,' he choked, 'for the sake of Phyllis give me this one chance. It's gaol or the border for me now. They are coming. Listen!'

She stood like the statue of a racing queen, her Arab head bent towards him.

'Gee Wilkins and Kafoozelum!' snuffled Silvertail. 'Look at that, now!'

The boy's fingers stole to her quivering flank, then his bridle hand touched her mane, and in a flash he was in the saddle.

'Heigho for the troopers!' guffawed Beno. 'I don't know much about the tracker's mount, but I'm game to make a bet.'

We ran with Sweet Nell until she cleared the boulders.

'Oh, those troopers! Look at 'em!' cried Gambolo. 'They won't give the little lady a chance!'

The troopers swept across the hillside in full cry; their hoofbeats rang like axe strokes on the basalt slope. Down, down they thundered, then we heard the cry of a man and horse plunging forward over a wombat hole. The moonlight streamed over the plain; beyond the wide patches of silver grass we saw Sweet Nell racing south for the Victorian border.

A solitary trooper crawled down the hillside; his horse limped, and after examining her feet, he returned to the hills to pick up his fallen companion. From our lookout we saw the last of Sweet Nell. The boy turned in the saddle, looked back at the hills, and waved his hand.

'That's good-bye to us,' coughed little Silvertail. 'I suppose she thought us a rough lot. Hang it, I hope they get through all right.'

'These youngsters get into awful scrapes over horses,' laughed Gambolo, 'we aren't worth it.'

'He nearly got left, though,' said Jim Jams, spitefully. 'The breaking of a stick would've sent her skeltering across the mountains.'

'Take a pull, old dry-as-dust,' chuckled Beno. 'That was only the way of the lady!'

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### 41: Rabbit Vengeance

*Daily News (Perth) 20 Aug 1909*

FOR TEN MONTHS there had been no rain in the Baronne district; on hillside and flat the gaping, deep-fissured earth protested against the relentless November sky. The drought-stricken trees creaked their sapless bouses in the dry, hot wind; a band of crow's wheeled over the ipped-up cattle bones that marked the camping grounds of the famishing Queensland over-landers.

George Henderson's team crawled through the last cutting on the hillside, the dray squealed as the brakes answered, causing the sixteen bullocks to slow down on the perilous grade. Seated on the dray was a sun-tanned woman with a baby; a man's felt hat jnmth'ed about her ears. In front was packed some household furniture with a parrot cage fastened on top. Henderson rOda beside the bullock train, his long-handled whip making pistol-like echoed In the hot silence. Far away on the distant flat the woman beheld u small homestead sheltered from the dry winds by rows of close-planted pepper and myall trees.

The dray descended the mountain track slowly, and the lean, black bullocks. seamed to scent the grass as the moist irrigated paddocks surrounding the homestead came into view.

Henderson whs about to take possession of 'Jika' farm; he had purchased it a month before from a settler named Blythe, who had been compelled to sell on account of his wife's ill-health. Seven hundred pounds was the price paid for the holding, and Henderson knew that the following year would see a five-fold increase in value. There were 3,000 acres of black-soil land with 200 acres of lucerne on its creek frontage, and In that year of drought and famine lucerne was as gold in the land.

From boundary to house-gate the holding was a maze of dog and rabbit proof fences. Henderson rubbed his hands with the joy of a land-hungry man as the bullock dray swung into tho narrow bush track leading to the slip-rail, The homestead was a seven-roomcd bungalow having two underground tonka and a windmill for pumping and Irrigation puposes.

Mrs. Henderson glanced round with the eyes of a born bush .woman as she alighted from the dray, and entered the cottage with the child. Their new purchase was certainly an oasis in a drought-stricken land. Its green, well-fenced paddocks contrasted strangely with the wind-blighted, sun-sccorched flats around. Inside the creek paddock were 70 head of cattle and 200 sheep. Blythe, the previous owner, had gone in for mixed farming— wool and lucerne, with a bit of choesQ and beef thrown in to pay the blacksmith.

After dinner Henderson strolled towards the southern boundary with a sense of ownership thrilling his blood. A magpie chortled from the distant scrub, and Henderson wiped his hot face as he examined the bullock-proof fences that protected him from the marauding drovers swarming along the ftyngan road with their mobs of straying cattle.

Henderson pinned his faith in good fences. Experience taught him that some men will stop at nothing when the lives of their perishing flocks are at stake. And the man who has 500 acres of grass must guard it in the famine years with rifle and dogs. It is pitiful to watch a big mob of sheep nosing their way through the blinding hoof-dust, their gaunt eyes fixed oh the pastures beyond the wire-netted enclosures.

Henderson halted suddenly and pointed to where half a dozen starved horses were feeding hungrily along the edge of the lucerne.

'They're not ours,' he called to his wife. 'How did they got in?'

The presence of the six starved horses in his lucerne- paddock seemed to fill Henderson with unutterable rage. In spite of every precaution to guard his grass from the famishing things outside, here were six useless scrubbers, devouring his substance.

Returning to the homestead, he reappeared with a rifle and walked swiftly towards the lucerne paddock.

'George!' shouted his wife from the verandah. 'Don't shoot those poor brutes. Some one has let them in.'

'Shoot them!' He glanced back through the sun-glare, shading his eyes. 'Isn't every squatter in the district shooting all the starvers that break through his fences, Isn't It a mercy, and do you expect me to feed all the unbranded cattle in the country?'

Without heeding his wife's remonstrances he passed hastily to where the six gaunt animals were tottering along the edge of the creek. Mrs, Henderson covered her eyes as the loud crack of the rifle echoed again ana again across the paddock. She did not speak when her husband returned and placed the rifle on a shelf in the kitchen. The parrot squawked on the verandah, and the shrilling of locusts filled the hot afernoon air.

Night brought no relief from the stifling heat; swarms of black mosquitoes invaded the house and drove Mrs. Henderson to bed and the shelter of the curtains.

'They'll die off when the cool weather comes.' Henderson lit his pipe and strolled up and down the verandah thoughtfully.

Long after midnight they heard the fluting note of a dingo in the ranges, and the farm dogs near the kitchen whined fretfully in response. Later— it



seemed years to the woman with the heat-fretted child— the dawn brought a sudden coolness and a scent of wattle from the hollows.

Shortly after daybreak a man rode up to the sliprail and called to Henderson. His face was sun-blackened, and his hair grew in matted coils about his throat and ears. There was a nervously hostile look in his deep-set eyes; he slouched over in his saddle, his brown, sap-scalded hands resting on the rail.

'Six hawses of mine gone astray!' he bellowed to Henderson. 'Three darkles, a couple of bays, and an old grey leader. Haven't seen 'em, I 'spose?'

A sudden exclamation where Mrs Henderson was peeping from behind the window curtains. Her husband paled slightly as he approached the sliprail.

'I am the owner of this land,' he said coldly, 'I happened to shoot six unbranded scrubbers yesterday that were eating my lucerne. I mistook them for brumbies.'

'Shot my six hawses!' The man seemed to reel in his saddle. 'Good God!' He put up his sap-scalded hand, as though the sun were hurting his eyes.

'Why don't you brand your cattle!' broke in Henderson passionately. 'And why do you keep six horses when you can't feed one? It was a mercy to shoot them— the poor skeleton bags,'

The man looked at Henderson, and his very muscles seemed to bind themselves in the fierceness of his rage.

'You— you swine! A poor selector's got no chance against you,' he choked. 'I'll make you sweat for each hawse you shot. I'll mark you afore the summer's gone.'

He rode away into the scrub, looking back again and again at the little bush homestead.

'That's Mulligan from Black Rock,' muttered Henderson, as he entered the house. 'One of those thieving free selectors who never buy cattle feed. I hope he isn't going to give us trouble.'

'If a bush fire started on our boundary to-night it would serve us right for killing his horses,' sobbed Mrs. Henderson. 'It was a bad beginning to make in a strange district.'

'I'll teach these bushies a lesson anyhow,' growled her husband. 'He put his horses in here to fatten. We'll have to watch our grass, Kate; maybe we'll have to fight for it,' he added. 'We're the grass-lord in a famine district. Please don't forget!'

The paddock fences were in excellent condition; the five-feet close mesh wire defied the wallabies and starving sheep ever ready to swarm in and consume the precious herbage and grass. Henderson's struggle to keep out wandering cattle was incessant. Day after day, during the long months of

drought, he had to guard his boundaries against the Queensland drovers hurrying south with their starving mobs.

One broiling day in December a Queensland squatter, accompanied by two drovers, halted on the Nyngan road and, offered Henderson a hundred pounds for permission to pasture his perishing stock within the grass paddocks of Jika. His five hundred big-horned steers swept up to the homestead gate moaning sullenly at sight of the near grass. The owner looked haggard and weary; there was a look in his eyes that spoke of long night vigils while pawing through the big drought regions.

'We'll allow you a feed for your camp horses,' said Henderson quietly. 'But I can't allow that starving mob in here at any price. I've got my own cattle to keep alive.'

It was curious to watch Henderson standing rifle in hand at the homestead gate as the drovers entered with their eight camp horses, while the great hungry mob of steers stood ready to charge in upon the grass as the gate opened.

Slamming and locking it swiftly, Henderson climbed on top with the air of a priest guarding a temple of the gods. And Henderson was merely typical of his class. There are times when squatters and farmers will give freely of money to hard-pressed overlanders, but one must not ask them for grass during the drought season. And the drovers knew better than press Henderson on the subject of letting in their hungry mob.

They left at sundown after thanking him sullenly for his hospitality. True to his calling, he followed the slow moving mob, his four dogs at heel, until they were well off his boundaries. Even then he rode round his fences uneasily until long after dark, as though expecting a sudden return of the gaunt, hunger-stricken cattle.

A sudden shift of wind turns the dry Australian night into one of delicious repose and peace. Through the clear air the large white stars seem to droop at the length of one's arms. Henderson smoked until late, talking somewhat feverishly to his wife about the prospects of the big starving mob ever reaching grass and water.

Shortly after midnight he was awakened by the dogs barking wildly about the paddock. Slipping to the verandah, he glanced towards the long dry cattle pad which flanked his eastern boundary. At first glance, only the spindly trees were visible through the darkness, and the dogs leaping to and fro as though enjoying some rare sport. Suddenly his eye was attracted by innumerable flecks of white dancing across the lucerne beds.

Slowly, very slowly, the white flecks spread fanwise across the grass until they resembled a line of surf racing over a flat beach. A hard dry lump seemed

to gather in Henderson's throat; his eyes bulged as he leant, half hypnotised, across the verandah rail.

'What is it, George?' His wife's querulous voice sounded close to his elbow. 'What is it?' she repeated. Instinctively she followed his glance to where the ruffling, white-topped wave rolled towards the homestead.

'The rabbits— they're in!' There was a curious, frightened whimper in his voice like the cry of one awakened suddenly from a nightmare. His big hands gripped the verandah rail; his eye followed the white crests as they swarmed and floated over his pastures— the wave of devastating vermin that no human power could fight or check. They were not afraid of man or dogs. They had come in from the arid west, from the sand hummocks and drought regions beyond the Castlereagh. They ran under the house in hundreds, and over the verandah and kitchen; hunger had made them tame, and Henderson tripped over them as he staggered from the house.

'How— how?' he cried. Speech failed him as he turned home again groping foolishly for his rifle. The dogs romped joyously, leaping and barking among the in-rushing waves. It occurred to Henderson that his wire-netting had been tampered with. Taking a lantern from the kitchen, he floundered through the palpitating rabbit swarms until he reached the five-foot wire mesh which guarded the southern wing.

Crawling along the fence he arrived at an opening thirty feet wide where the mesh had been unfastened and rolled back. The flux of rabbits pouring through the gap resembled a mill-race. Pressed from behind, they flowed in. He kicked at the squirming heaps in his futile wrath and flung the lantern among them with a bitter malediction.

Insolvency and ruin stared ahead now: a bush fire could not have been a more terrible misfortune, for the rabbits, once in, would not leave a blade of grass for his cattle and sheep. Mechanically he gripped the wire net and strove to draw it across the wide gap. Calling to his wife to bring hammer and nails, he hauled the mesh across the instreaming rabbits and held it fiercely against the post, Mrs Henderson hurried to his assistance with a tool-chest, stumbling in the darkness over the fifty pests that leaped across the pain.

Henderson killed them in dozens with the hammer as he nailed the net to the posts, but not before the wave had piled itself in a smothering heap on the outside. Returning to the homestead, they watched the rabbit army moving like a scythe-blade over the wide grass paddocks.

The dawn revealed a strange sight to the haggard-faced man and woman seated on the verandah. Hundreds of lucerne-gorged rodents lay in heaps about the hollows and flats, but the main army still moved and fed riotously.

The dogs had grown tired of killing, and they lay panting near the house with fur-covered mouths and crimson jaws.

'Rabbit for breakfast, I suppose,' said Henderson bitterly. 'To-morrow we shall enjoy a plague of blow-flies that will drive us from the district.'

Mrs. Henderson did not answer for a few moments; her eyes flashed strangely as she surveyed the rabbit-invaded farm.

'It seems to me there's a more money in our paddock than ever,' she began slowly. 'Get your horse and bring half a dozen men from the township. Last week's paper gave the market price for skins at fifteen shillings a hundred. It's a good thing we drew the wire back into its place,' she added, 'or we'd have lost grass and rabbits too.'

Henderson gaped in surprise; then, without a word, hurried from the house, and was soon on his way to the little railway township situated in a hollow beyond the ranges. He returned before midday accompanied by a small crowd of professional trappers. The work of killing; and skinning the pests began. Henderson, assisted by a couple of men, dug a big trench and buried the carcasses swiftly. By sundown a great pile of skins stood in the centre of the paddock.

For a whole week the work continued; pile was added to pile until the dried skins stood almost level with the homestead roof. Henderson worked feverishly, loading the drays and carts and escorting them to the railway siding.

A month after the skins had been consigned to the Sydney buyers Henderson returned from an early visit to the township post-office and placed a cheque for three hundred pounds before his wife.

'There's a war demand for rabbit skins just now,' he said cheerfully. 'The Sydney dealers wired asking me to let them have more.'

Mrs. Henderson placed the cheque in her purse carefully, then glanced shrewdly at her husband.

'You'd better send that fellow Mulligan thirty pounds for the horses you shot. Tell him he can let in as many more bunnies as he likes.'

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## 42: The Yellow Flag

*Sydney Mail* 3 March 1926

MARGARET was singing in the new trade-house that overlooked the white thunderbolts of surf. The natives of Rosary Island called her *tamamalu* (singing bird). What they called her father, Dan Jevons, does not matter, since his money was good and his skin white.

The lagoons and reefs of Rosary Island brought wealth to the tight-fisted Dan. His weatherboard tradehouse was packed with fabric from Manchester and Sydney. The kinky-haired natives gaped longingly at the tiers of tobacco piled on the high shelves, at the turkey-red twill and gay shawls that Margaret handled so deftly when the chiefs brought their women to trade.

The slim-waisted girls of Rosary brought coral and copra to the store, laughing and pushing each other in the doorway, decking their hair with scarlet, blossoms before the little cracked mirror inside. Although numbers of nickel-plated scissors and knives had a trick of disappearing before her eyes, Margaret rarely scolded these light-fingered daughters of headmen. For every yard of pilfered dress goods, Margaret was sure to receive presents of handsome mats, seed pearls, or plumes from the heron hatcheries. A few books for the schooners' captains decorated Margaret's shelves. Once a month these trade-blown adventurers dropped in for a pow-wow with Dan Jevons. Accounts were squared, and the habits of some shiftless copra-maker discussed.

'The missions have sp'iled 'em, Dan,' was the dark lament of the latest visitor, Hake Jamieson, from Sud. Est. 'I remember when Rosary was sendin' eighty barrels of oil a month to Sydney. Now it's like squeezing blood outa bananas to git ten barrels for a schooner's hold.

'It's disciplin' they want, not prayers.'

'The discipline of a Bully Hayes,' Margaret interrupted from her counter at the end of the trade-room. 'When the chiefs sulked and kept, back the copra Hayes used to fire the villages and carry off the boys and women to the Fiji plantations. That was a great help to struggling traders!' she added scornfully. 'The mission's job is to doctor the sick and feed the native children in time of famine.'

Margaret retired to her white walled room on the beach side, of the trade-house. She was eighteen, and tall as a young bamboo. She loved the cool, deep-shadowed verandah, the wonderful nights when the moon sailed like a giant, breadfruit over the glittering spike-crested palms.

THE wind had gone down with the sun. Margaret placed a reading-lamp on a table, beside the hammock on the verandah. All along the beach the surf was breaking in flakes of white. From the trade-room there came the high-pitched, complaining voice of Hake Jamieson as he tumbled one piece of trade calico after another across the board. The sound of her father's slippered feet reached her when he pattered in and out after his missing box of cigars.

'Why, it's the talk of the islands, Dan,' Hake went on, while the sound of a match striking told Margaret that the cigars had arrived. 'That lad, Gif Arliss, Dan. Lived at Pentecost. You ain't forgotten him?'

'Me? I'll never forget, that kid,' Dan assured Him, coughing away some smoke. 'Did all I could to wake up the consuls. But that crowd at Noumea was, too strong for us. They hid the lad in the nickel mines, gave him a number, and told the deputation of white traders to saw wood when they demanded Arliss's release.'

Silence followed. Margaret put aside her book. Her heart ceased to beat as she listened. Gifford Arliss! Three years before, a party of French surveillants from Ile Nou had come upon Gifford Arliss fishing from his lugger within a prescribed shell area off St. Jean's reef. The lugger and Gifford, aged eighteen, had been towed into Noumea to be dealt with by the Marine Tribunal. Later young Arliss appeared before the Procurator of Justice, but official anger had been fanned by the recent raising of valuable shell from the Government preserves by the unauthorised visitors. The Procurator's verdict was never made public, but it was known that Arliss would never again repeat his poaching exploits within the sacred waters of the Administration.

Margaret, had known Arliss, the leggy, sea-browned young diver of Pentecost Island. He sold shell to her father, spent the proceeds generally on the thankless native children of the mission house. To scare Margaret he had often fallen from a schooner's topsails into the shark-infested water. But, though Arliss had always proved too nimble for the swift-moving man-eaters, he had somehow failed in his perilous enterprise off St. Jean's reef.

The sound of Hake moving about the trade-room again roused Margaret from her brooding. Her father's voice was quite distinct on the hot night air.

'There's nobody listening, Hake. The two servants are away. There's only Margo on the other side of the house.'

'It's disciplin' they want, not prayers.'

Hake's peering shadow receded from the window of the trade-room. The clink of a gin bottle against a glass was followed by the creaking of a chair as he subsided among the cushions.

'It's this, Dan. Three days ago I crossed the Bulari Passage, outside Noumea Harbour. The fort gun was barking the news that some poor devil had made his

getaway. Seein' that there was seventy evasions a month among the eight thousand prisoners scattered over the islands, the old fort gun works a lot of overtime,' Hake rumbled from his chair. 'Coming into Rosary this morning,' he went on hoarsely, 'I passed that old schooner *Auk*, out from Invercargill and loaded for Batavia. Old Jim Petrie was on the bridge. You remember he was Arliss's father's partner, back in the 'eighties. Old Jim Petrie. When I came up to the wind Jim leans over the rail to yell but that Gif Arliss had got away on a raft of sticks from the island of hell. Better still, a schooner had picked the lad up without asking any silly questions.'

Margaret inhaled a deep breath of the fragrant night. Her young body remained still as death in the silk tasselled hammock. Arliss had beaten them at last! There was a flash of tears on her cheek. Hake's voice boomed again after what seemed an interminable silence.

'Well, Dan, it's fine weather for the young cocoanuts,' and time I was movin'. I'll get this tide, and bring you some letters next trip. Good night, an' don't forget to save me a dozen cases of the old square-face. The beetle's pretty bad in the north,' he added, stepping from the verandah to the beach. 'Plenty beetle means no dam copra, no oil.'

His voice died away in rumbling protests as he stumbled towards his schooner alongside the jetty. An hour later his foretop light was winking over the star-blazed horizon.

MARGARET sat up in the hammock and listened. The dusky head of Naura, daughter of the headman Goa, was peering at her from the creeper lined trellis. Naura belonged to the Loyalty Islands, and was a constant visitor to the trade-house. But never before had she ventured to call after dark.

'Why do you come here, Naura?' Margaret questioned gently. The girl's sharp breathing filled her with uneasiness. Not for the love of nickel-plated scissors or the lust of enamelled hairpins had Naura stolen to the white girl's side.

Leaning through the flower-covered trellis, she spoke ten vowel-filled words in the vernacular and was gone, leaving only a faint tinkle of wrist ornaments on the stifling night air.

Margaret was beyond crying out or calling the shamble-footed father within the trade-room. She lay very still in the hammock, repealing to herself the unbelievable message flung to her by the terrified Naura.

Ages seemed to pass before her father shuffled to his room and to bed. She watched the lamp go out. Stepping uncertainly from the verandah, she turned towards a palm-screened promontory at the north side of the island.

SHE had dreamed of a vessel bearing Gifford Arliss beyond the reach of Procurator Generals and their decrees. It had comforted her to know that friendly hands had reached for the unlucky boy, that someone: had bridged the. lonely, seas and carried him back to life.

Rosary Island was surrounded by a necklace of emerald-dotted atolls. Here and there a channel cut through the necklace in gleaming shears of foam. It was a nest of islands and sleeping forests. Outside this belt of reefs and lagoons a twenty-foot surf raved and spouted eternally.

Margaret was too young to feel the unutterable loneliness that afflicted older people. She saw only the immeasurable beauty and wonder of these tiny island kingdoms, the white-crested reefs and shoulders of coral that peeped like sheeted virgins from the mirrors of a hundred lagoons.

The moon was high in the glowing void of the Pacific. Beaches and atolls seemed to blaze in the crystal clearness of the tropic midnight. The tide played about her feet like shawls of silver. Slowly she moved from shoal to shoal, turning at times in the direction of the trade-house at, every fresh sound in her wake. In the shelter of a coral bank she came upon *it* with dramatic suddenness. It was the crouched-up figure of a half-naked youth, arms outstretched, a coloured rag bound about his head. Bare of foot, his scanty canvas rags seemed to have been torn from his body by the force of the wind and sea.

Margaret had never forgotten the slender poise of Arliss's active figure, his bare, shapely feet, the very lines of his chin and mouth. All fear left her as she stooped beside him, her S warm, fingers clasping his pulse. She had seen dead men and boys thrown up on this reef, boys who had often retained the terror of the reef-walls in their wide-staring eyes.

Skilfully she massaged his heart region, drawing back his arms from time to time to fill his lungs with life-giving air. His body was warm and flexible as a live panther's. He stirred suddenly, sat up with a gasp of surprise. The dream mists in his eyes cleared at the sight of Margaret.

There followed a silence, a long silence that often comes between children after years of separation.

'Hake Jamieson's story was a lie,' Margaret said, without stirring. 'He said a schooner had picked you up from the raft, and that you were on your way to Batavia.'

He was guilty of a grin as he pulled the twist of coloured rag from his brow.

'The scheme went wrong,' he said with difficulty, his eyes exploring Margaret's troubled face. 'The schooner had waited for days outside Noumea Harbour to pick me up when I slipped down the Dumbea Passage, She came to me hand-over-fist the moment my bundle of sticks was sighted They pulled me



aboard, and the skipper sent someone below to get me a suit of clothes. The crew handed me cigarettes. I was free, they said. Only the devil or a tidal wave could send me back to Noumea.'

Margaret blanched. 'And?' she prompted desperately.

'The gunboat *Gambelta* was reported off Pentecost,' he told her with a shrug. 'That was enough for my schooner friends. With a rich cargo of furs aboard they were not taking risk of being caught and taken to Noumea, charged with aiding a prisoner's escape. The skipper said he was mighty sorry. All he could do was to run the schooner close in to Rosary at dark and drop me near the beach. There was no doubt about the dropping,' he added, rubbing his reef-scarred shoulders and arms.

'There is no security here,' Margaret cried bitterly. 'Only fools and desperate men come to Rosary. The French guard-boats know every shoal and channel!'

He stood up in the shadow of the reef to stretch his water-cramped limbs. There, were tiny blood-bruises on his brow where the waves had pounded him on the shoals.

'I will not bring calamity on your house Margaret,' he told her steadily. 'Please don't stay here a minute longer. I'll find a canoe somewhere on the beach. Maybe I'll take some finding once I'm clear of Rosary.'

'You wouldn't go ten miles in a native canoe, Gifford,' she prophesied sharply. Her young nerves were on edge now. 'Come to the house; there's plenty of shadow if you keep close to the reef. The guard-boat will be here at sunrise. Let's think of a way to safety.'

'YOU don't get enough sleep, Margo,' Dan complained next morning at breakfast. 'What took you so early, to the mission house?' he demanded over his cup of black coffee.

Margaret ate some dry toast before answering. There was a strange brightness in her eyes, a feverish uncertainty in her movements.

'Another sister has come to the mission house to help old Teresa with the children. She is coming here early this morning. I've asked her to slay a day or two, Daddy. I hope you don't mind?'

Dan Jevons had raised a hard-boiled egg on his fork and sprinkled it with pepper and mustard, as was his custom after few extra glasses of gin overnight. It stayed in the air while he glared at his daughter.

'A sister of the mission coming here!' he exploded, dropping the egg and snapping the chair back in his effort to recover it.

'Heligoland! That's pretty thick, Margo,' he objected sulkily.

'She won't interfere with you at all, Dad,' Margaret assured him sweetly. 'I'm giving her the box-room at the end of the passage, She's from the Convent of St. Joseph of Cluny. The poor thing has been worked to death. I'll see that she gets her meals separate. I think we owe the mission something, Daddy. The natives are better for being able to read and write.'

Dan subsided into a sullen silence. It was a year since he had visited the mission house on the limestone bluff. Some consolation lay in the fact that these sisters kept to themselves.

'All right, Margo,' he said at last, his manner softening at the recollection of the timely help the mission had rendered him in the early days. 'Give her a couple of cases of biscuits and a dozen jars of that German magnesia for the kids. Tell her she can stay as long as she likes.'

Old Dan rose from the table and shuffled out to the blazing verandah. Beyond the distant reefs the sea stretched like the floor of a cloud under the hot windless sky. He was due for a visit to Linbara, the chief at Luluku Island, fifteen miles due north. Linbara had promised him first pick of a cargo of sandalwood and trade coral the canoes had brought in from Espiritu Santo.

After her father had gone Margaret tidied up the litter in the trade-room, and then settled herself to audit the three hundred native accounts entered into the big brown ledger on the desk. The voices of the children singing in the distant school-room reached her. From the open window where she sat she observed a sudden commotion among the swarms of sooty-winged terns squalling above the fees.

A forty-foot launch, flying the *tricolore*, swept into the channel and settled under the high bank out of view of the trade-house. Margaret remained poring over the ledger until the strain of waiting, fretted her swift-racing; thoughts. Passing to the verandah she saw a solitary, figure striding slowly across the beach towards the house. He wore an old military cape; his eyes were almost hidden by a long-peaked cap. In the distance he resembled a giant spider in uniform; the aggressive elbows and jutting sword-point completed the illusion of moving tentacles and claws. It was Chagrat, agent of the Marine Tribunal at Noumea.

Margaret's glance was fixed on the flapping cape, the bony elbows of the man whose name was linked with the detection of unbelievable crimes and conspiracies. Once he paused to scan the recent tide marks across the long sweep of flesh-white sands. The beady eyes beneath the shining peak of the cap seemed to read and explore the scraps of broken coral at his feet. Finally his birdlike face turned to the trade-house. Margaret stood in the doorway, where the white blaze from the sea struck her shrinking eyes. She was conscious of the halting shadow, realised that the boor of Chagrat, the

infallible agent of the Procurator-General, was resting on the step of the verandah.

He bowed low.

'It is the daughter of my good friend Jevons who greets me,' he murmured.

Margaret shrank away. All the blood had drained from her cheeks. It was as though an octopus had come out of the sea to claim her acquaintance. 'M'f!' He sniffed like a starved cat before her.

'I have been on a hunt after my children,' he mumbled with a slit grin. He jerked a thumb to the burning skyline. 'Some of the strong birds try to bend their cage, ma'm'selle. They go mad and flap loose for a leetle while. Would you believe me, they are so clever they can split a banknote; some have the brains to manipulate great schemes, forge letters of credit, practice in medicine. Yet, ma'm'selle, they will trust their lives out there on a few lashings of firewood to see the world again. They have no sense of circumference,' he added, stepping to the verandah.

Margaret held herself in the doorway, a frozen feeling clutching at her nerves.

'What does m'sieur demand?' she inquired steadily.

He bowed again. 'An hour's rest, ma'm'selle, in the cool shelter of your house. I am no longer young. In an hour I shall return to the island to report the success of my mission.'

Margaret's clear eyes answered the subtle challenge in his hawk-like thrust. 'Pray come in and rest awhile, M'sieur,' she invited gently. 'Let us hear about your success.'

CHAGRAT, the man-hunter, settled his sprawling limbs in a rattan chair-near an open' window. A sudden hush had fallen over the island. The low, murmuring voices in the taro fields had died away. The news had gone forth that the agent of the Procurator General was among those nosing the air like a hound at fault.

'M'sieur would enjoy some light refreshment?'

Margaret found courage to say. 'Give me a cigarette.'

He gestured towards a small platinum box on the shelf near his head. With a steady hand Margaret held the box before him, while the sabre-like nose brooded over its half-empty condition. He seemed to be listening to the sounds about the house. Slowly, very slowly, he took out a cigarette and lit it.

'*Dieu!* It is a good one!' he murmured with gusto as the first gulp of Picadura filled his lungs. 'Listen, Ma'm'selle. I have caught more birds with my bails of tobacco than would fill a big ship. *Cre tonnerre!* Men die for it.'

'Five nights gone, Ma'm'selle, two convicts from the Collective put to sea on sticks from pandanus leaves. The mat of leaves served for a sail, a paddle of wood for a helm. They lay flat on this crazy scuttle, and when they unstepped the leetle mast they could not be seen for a mile away.

'Ma'm'selle, I went after them. It is my work. *Sacre bleu!* Do not the planters and people of the islands complain that our cutthroats and forgers are allowed to overrun the villages, steal boats, threaten women and natives?

'I found these two, the one from the slums of Argenteuil, the other a garrotter from Marseilles. Their scuttle had struck the reefs in a place where there was no food, no water. A skeleton island; a boneyard of dead reefs.'

The agent of the Procurator sat up in the rattan chair and batted his lashless eyelids. 'They were asleep in the graveyard of ships, Ma'm'selle, the garrotte and the, man from Argenteuil. Tigers the sea had shaken from her bosom.'

Margaret covered her face. The slit grin expanded on Chagrat's lips.

'Myself, Ma'm'selle, I am all for peace and honourable settlements. They were sleeping soundly after their tussle with the sea. I had not, the heart to waken them. They were hungry, thirsty, Ma'm'selle; they had no tobacco. It is not a fact that the agents of the Procurator are devils; I crept, among the rocks and placed a cigarette tin where it would catch, their eyes on waking. It was a big tin, but it contained but, one cigarette, Ma'm'selle.'

'One?' Margaret echoed bleakly. Chagrat twined his long legs in blissful appreciation of the thought. 'One only, Ma'm'selle. I returned to where my good comrades sat waiting my orders. I told them there was no need to hurry those two poor fellows on the reef. They had a right to an hour's freedom.

'Myself and comrades in the big launch we opened what was left of our wine; we ate a leetle, and lay down to sleep. At the break of day, Ma'm'selle, we heard savage noises, grunts on the reef above us. Never shall I forget those howls! Up and down and across the rocks they fought, fist and knife and claw. Caged devils! The rocks ran red with their tearing fingers, their blows and stabs. Now the garrotter had the tin; then the other, with a lump of coral, smashed in the hairy face of the garrotter, raised the tin, and himself fell in a heap, Ma'm'selle.'

Chagrat rose, and approached the platinum box of cigarettes thoughtfully, sifted them with epicurean fingers, as one recalling the scramble on the reef for possession of the solitary fag.

'We buried them in the coral, Ma'm'selle, those two who had sworn to face death and misery together. We made a cross out of their steering oar, left them to the reefs and the birds. *Allons!*

Chagrat turned very slowly to the white-lipped girl, the platinum box of cigarettes in his hand.

'You do not smoke, Ma'm'selle?' he questioned carelessly.

'No, M'sieur.'

'Your father, I know, indulges in the big fat Manila cheroots.' The agent of the Procurator-General raised his head and turned towards the passage on their right, 'Someone in the house is smoking these,' he challenged unexpectedly, rapping the lid of the box with his knuckle. 'I did not know you had friends in the house!'

Margaret strove to keep her head and feet. It would have been easy to say that Niko or Wauan, the kitchen servants, were indulging in cigarettes. But the frozen fear in her warned that he would not believe it. No trader in the Islands supplied native helps with expensive cigarettes.

CHAGRAT tell back into the rattan chair. A moment ago it looked as though he were about to depart.

'Ma'm'selle does not answer,' he complained with growing austerity. 'I do not come here to rip your roof or threaten your life. I am but the poor servant the Administration. So — I repeat, Ma'm'selle, you have an unknown friend in this house. Who? What name?'

His fist hit the table like a sledge. Margaret stood firm.

'It is Sister Angela, from the Convent of St. Joseph of Cluny. She is resting here for a few days, M'sieur.'

Chagrat appeared impressed by Margaret's statement. A soft chuckle escaped him. 'Ma'm'selle, you have put me in possession of a secret. It is a great joke! Sister Angela!'

A spasm of mirth seized him. Here was a sister inhaling and fuming like a soldier of the legion! It was too much! He seemed to settle in his chair, his mind at rest, while Margaret placed a cool lemon drink on the little table beside him. He sipped and smoked in silence, grinning occasionally at the thought of Sister Angela and the cigarettes.

Lots of people had tried to make Chagrat smile, to lift the bleak, barbed look from his face. Margaret had accomplished the feat. He wriggled and gasped in the rattan chair.

'You are kind, Ma'm'selle,' he confessed, sipping his drink. 'It is years since Chagrat laughed.'

With some ostentation he drew a birthday boot from his pocket, handed it to the amazed Margaret.

'Your autograph, Ma'm'selle,' he begged. 'People say that Chagrat of the island has no hobby. In that leetle book you will find the signature of the

Directress of the Order of St. Gregory. There are many others. Your leetle signature, then, for remembrance, Ma'm'selle.'

Margaret, signed with trembling fingers, returned the book with a wan smile. Chagrat nodded his thanks.

'I will go now,' he stated, rising slowly. In the doorway he wheeled with startling suddenness, the autograph book held out.

'Idiot that I am! Why do I overlook the sweet sister from the Convent of St. Joseph of Cluny? Who am I to make distinctions with the fair ladies?'

Margaret hesitated.

'What does M'sieur require?' she begged in a scarce audible voice.

He leered at her with broken teeth. 'The reverent autograph of our little sister in there, Ma'm'selle.' He wagged a finger towards the shut door at the end of the passage on his right.

With her mind grown crystal clear under his fierce mental thrusts, she took the book and slipped down the passage. Opening the door of the room, she stepped in and very gently secured the little bolt under the lock as she closed the door behind her.

'Those cigarettes did it,' she said in a choking whisper to a long figure stretched on a camp bed under a heavily-curtained window. The figure straightened with a yawn, sat up, tossing aside the nun's hood and veil Margaret had brought earlier in the morning.

'Monsieur Chagrat, from the island, begs your autograph, Sister Angela,' Margaret prompted in a louder voice. 'I know you are tired after your long journey. But— here is the book, sister.'

Gifford Arliss drew away from the proffered book as though its presence poisoned the air.

'I can't touch it,' he assured her in an under-breath. 'The cover and leaves have been chemically prepared. He wants my finger-prints! When you return this book he can tell by his magnifying glass whether I am in this room or not. He will only have to compare the marks with the enlarged photographs he's carrying in his pocket.'

Margaret remained like an image of death beside the camp-bed. Then, taking her fountain pen, she wrote in a disguised hand the name of Sister Angela on the page next her own. She was careful to smudge the thick signature slightly in the blotting. With her trembling hand on the door, she addressed the figure of Arliss near the bed.

'You are very kind, Sister Angela, to oblige monsieur of the island. I am sorry to have interfered with your repose.'

Arliss's murmured reply was cut short as Margaret opened the door. The lank figure of Chagrat in the passage barred her way.

'*Comedienne!*' He snatched the book from her hand. 'I do not treasure forgeries.' His long body projected itself into the room; the grin of the satisfied craftsman touched his lips as he contemplated Arliss.

'Matricule Number 3391, you will return with me to the Collective. Attend!'

He turned with a scowl to Margaret standing in the passage. 'You came near to beating me at my own game.'

A dozen steps, carried the little group to the sun-blazed, verandah. A silver whistle flashed in Chagrat's fingers. Margaret met Arliss's lightening eyes, the question that sparkled in them. She shook her head. A blow might have put this old sleuth out of commission for awhile. It was certain that his followers waiting in the launch would pick up Arliss before he could leave the island. The end was here— the end of two years' patient planning in the nickel mines of Noumea. There could never be another breakaway.

Two shrill calls came from the silver whistle. A sharp silence followed. Margaret put out her hand to the sun-tanned boy with the shut mouth and fugitive eyes.

'Good-bye, Giff. I wish Dad had been here. I didn't want to see you shot like a rabbit, or I'd have let you scrap it out with this—'

'Imp of destiny, Ma'm'selle,' Chagrat snarled as he again sounded the whistle. The slowness of the guards in responding to his call was a matter to be dealt with later. The low thunder of seas breaking on the outer reefs filled the silence. Whirling across the verandah, he stared at the flagstaff inside the Mission House palisade. A yellow flag was flapping at half-mast, the official symbol of bubonic plague or confluent smallpox in the immediate vicinity.

The pink flesh under Chagrat's drum-tight jaws grew livid. It was as though a bullet had struck him between the eyes. He had seen the black scourge sweep over islands in a night, leaving only the sea-birds to watch the dead and dying. The silver whistle fell from his slack fingers. No need to tell him that his launch and guards had blown away at the first flutter of the yellow signal.

'You did not tell me!' he almost screamed in Margaret's face.

'I did not know,' she informed him quietly. 'The sickness comes and goes, M'sieur.'

Chagrat scanned the distant channels in the frantic hope of sighting a passing vessel. His lungs gasped for a breath of the far south. He was not afraid of death, but this rotting pestilence from the yellow north? It ran faster than a wolf!

Margaret walked to the end of the verandah and took up a pair of glasses from the table. A single peep revealed a strange sight within the coral-paved yard of the Mission House. A native child of seven was squatting at the foot of the flagpole, the halyard twisted in its brown fingers as it hauled the symbol of

death higher and higher in the slowly rising wind. And just here Margaret observed the generous outline of Sister Teresa dash suddenly from the school entrance to the flag-hauling brat across the yard. Sister Teresa's cane fell with a whack on the meddlesome fingers. Margaret read the lip movement of the sister as she scolded the mischievous pupil.

'Child, who gave thee the flag?'

The culprit pointed to an oak chest within the vestibule of the church, explaining with alacrity that the visiting *padre* had shown the children how to hoist the Union Jack. This pretty yellow flag had been found at the bottom of the box. Margaret recognised the little fellow as Bambas, the brother of Naura.

The agent almost tore the glasses out of her hand. One peep at Sister Teresa and the little flag-puller was enough. His rage was not unmixed with relief.

'Fume of death! But I would make that infant smell rope for a week of Sundays. Cholera and plague flags!'

Peals of sudden laughter came from Margaret, laughter that stung the agent to his nerve-roots. He whirled on her angrily.

'Ma'm'selle, this is no time for school-girl fits,' he reprimanded.

Margaret sank into a chair as one enjoying the effects of a priceless bit of comedy.

'Many apologies, M'sieur.' She indicated the silent Arliss merrily. 'Your prisoner will take back a fine story to the island; he will say how a child with a string and flag scattered the sacred guard of the Collective! Be sure the Procurator-General will enjoy the story over his wine. And how those poor fellows in the cobalt pits will treasure it.'

'Name of a name! What was there to do?' the agent flung back.

'Run away,' Margaret answered sweetly.

Chagrat rubbed his bristled chin reflectively. This laughing-eyed girl was right; Noumea would never forget the story. His picked guards from the Algerian depot had bolted like rats at the fluttering of a flag. *Parbleu!* It was the end of Chagrat's unsullied prestige among the hidebound officials of the Administration! The agent continued rubbing his chin.

Margaret sighed.

'But the brave M'sieur did not run away,' she intimated consolingly. 'With the flag of death hanging from the signal halyards at Rosary Island, he pursued the missing Matricule, Number 3391, tracked him to the forests, where he found him dead of the scourge. The very gallant M'sieur Chagrat stayed to bury the unfortunate man before returning to Noumea.'

Margaret stood up, her beautiful eyes swimming.



'That is the story the Commandant and the Procurator-General will hear. It is the story that will live forever and ever. And not for all the wine of Burgundy would I be in the shoes of the runaway crew when the honoured Chagrat submits his report to the Tribunal!'

Chagrat stared at the sun and the reefs. He looked away from Margaret and the slim boy standing beside her. How those fellows had left him. He tightened his belt, while his brows buckled in thought.

It was Arliss who broke the tense silence.

'I am ready, M'sieur,' he stated with humility.

Wrath blazed in the agent's eyes.

'Soul of the Pit! How can you return with me?' he bellowed. 'There would be no stopping your mouth.'

'M'sieu may depend—'

'Nothing!' Chagrat snarled back, his mind now fully alive to the fact that, his reputation would never survive the story of the flag-pulling infant and the runaway guard. The tale would never perish. He signed to Margaret.

'There is no boat for my return to Noumea,' he rasped. 'What?'

'There is a serviceable launch in the shed, M'sieur. It will carry you to Marchand Island, where the good traders will lend you something bigger to complete your journey.'

Chagrat gained the boat-house hurriedly.

With Arliss's aid the launch was run down the skid into the channel. The motor was in good condition. Margaret slipped a bottle of cognac near the helm as Chagrat leaped aboard. For one blinding instant he met her glance, paused to note the flash of tears on her young cheek.

'Stand away!' he roared to Arliss. 'You can never return to the island. You are dead, for did I not bury you in the forest? Plague!'

THE yellow flag was still flying when the launch sped seaward despite Sister Teresa's efforts to untangle the halyards. Chagrat saluted it with his sword in token of the fact that it was flying when he left the island.

'*Sapristi!*' he growled, buttoning his cape against, the wind. 'It was my poor mother who said that the young birds always beat the old.'

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### **43: Runaway Gold**

*Sydney Mail* 6 Aug 1924

DARREL TRENT was back in Sumala. And the beach roared under his tan shoes where the surf fell in sliding avalanches of water and spume. Darrel was regardful of his tan shoes as he stepped over the slimy reefs to get a better view of tiny village beyond the glittering basin of the lagoon.

Sumala was the largest island of the Felice group. Moreover, it was the richest. For fifty years it had been the paradise of adventurous schooner captains, copra kings, and shell experts. Within the shadows of the forest-clad hills lay uncounted acres of sandalwood and camphor laurels. In the eastern extremity of the island were deposits of guano that would have gladdened the heart of many a London cargo-hunter.

Coffee and tobacco nourished along the western slopes, while the plantations sang with life and the voices of contented workers. Darrel inhaled the blossom scented air with a sigh of relief and boyish delight. In the five years spent at an Australian school he had learned to look back on Sumala as the playground of his wild boyhood. In the roar of Sydney's traffic he had remembered the soft-voiced people in the palm hatched huts, who spent their lives in canoes, spearing trepang, snaring game in the hills, or culling out a tusker from the boar-herds that roamed the valleys of the interior.

So Darrel was back in Sumala, with the little trading schooner that had brought him from Port Darwin fading over the skyline. It was the unexpected death of his father that had brought him home. Old David Trent had been capsized off the reef while visiting a barquentine at anchor off Hurricane Point. It was during the fishing season, and the monster sharks were cruising in force beyond the breakers. And for that, reason David, in his red shirt and cabbage-tree hat, never got back to his trade house on the jelly.

It was estimated that David's income from various trading concessions had verged on the princely. It had enabled him to send Darrel to Sydney, and to add half-a-dozen vessels to his already nourishing copra fleet. During Darrel's absence in Sydney old Trent had acquired a partner in his trading ventures in the person of Captain Mike Corrigan.

Mike was a relic of the Bully Hayes school of thought, when men carried the charter of slavery to the peaceful islands under the Line. Kidnapping and murdering without let or hindrance.

The islands are full of reformed buccaneers and men who sought safely under various trade-house flags. Corrigan smell of barrack rooms and sweating hatches, of the silver dollars that shine for men's and women's lives. But in

Sumala his past was forgotten. A new generation had sprung up, and old Dave Trent regarded Corrigan as a shrewd business-getter; a man to handle refractory chiefs or force a deal when sulking headmen were holding back the goods.

The ten-mile bell of Sumala surf sizzled and boiled in the tropic sun-glare. Across the distant taro-patches came the low, sweet voices of women at work. A small jetty thrust its barnacle nose into the gleaming welter of sapphire. Half-way down this jetty a white-roofed trade-house flaunted the Union Jack. In the doorway stood a white man dressed in sailor's serge. He was sixty and bleached to his hair roots. The bones of his lanky frame bulged under the serge. Darrel looked across the jetty and halted.

'Hullo, Corrigan,' he hailed with boyish enthusiasm. 'I'm coming to see you.'

The breath of a hundred cyclones had blown through Corrigan's gaunt frame. Fever had grilled him until his voice sounded like the squawk of a guinea-hen. He peered under his shaking hand at Darrel Trent walking quickly down the jetty, at the tan shoes and spick-and-span clothes, until a faint gleam of recognition puckered his jaundiced face. His pale eyes narrowed to slits as though a weight of iron had suddenly descended on his monkey brow.

'Dave's kid, by the holy!' lie snapped. Amazement held him stiff-jawed for a period that ached like eternity. Then, noting the broad grin on the boy's face, his manner became deadly in its slow, piercing intensity.

'What the deuce brought you here?' he demanded in a scarcely audible voice.

Darrel scanned the gaunt figure, in some amusement. Corrigan had almost passed from his memory as an interesting survival of the bad old days when men shot each other on the beaches, or burned each other's schooners at the pier-side. But he noted now that the shaking hand of the old buccaneer carried two or three gold rings that had once belonged to his father.

'I'm here because it's my home, Captain Corrigan,' he said, holding out his hand. 'To be quite frank,' he added, with the ghost of a smile, 'I found it rather inconvenient to stay in Sydney after— after my father's death. All remittances had stopped, and universities are not run on a credit system,' he concluded, with a faint flush in his cheeks.

Corrigan's face had become livid. In his slit eyes burned the fires of his slumbering wrath.

'There's nothin' for you here,' he broke forth, 'but debts an' lawsuits your father contracted. I've enough trouble with the natives without havin' to carry a young upstart like you on my back. There's no money! it's all gone— blew away,' he almost shrieked.

Darrel flinched at the words. A deep shadow crossed his eyes. His father's trade had been considered prosperous: his shipments of teak, vegetables, ivory, and oil had been the envy of neighbouring traders. If David had a business fault, it lay in his secretiveness, his almost savage passion for concealing his wealth. Long residence in the islands had made him suspicious of foreign banks and commercial agencies. Yet for Corrigan to say that David had left debts unpaid was unbelievable.

LEAVING the irate Corrigan to storm alone on the jetty, Darrel Trent walked down a limestone path towards an ugly flat-roofed rice-mill that hummed and clattered to the tune of a hundred coolie voices within. Trent halted to watch a number of native girls troop out at the sound of the midday drum. Among them was a young whiff girl, slender of poise and with English rose tints in her pretty cheeks. At sight of Darrel standing in the limestone path she swayed slightly, checking the cry of glad surprise on her lips.

'Darrel!'

'Mimi!'

All the dreams of Darrel's young manhood had centred upon this slim-hipped Madonna of Sumala. Among the dark, honey-skinned natives she was as piquant as a tall white flower. Yet in spite of her girlish beauty he noted a certain weariness and anxiety in her manner. 'But this— this rice factory is no place for you!' he found voice to say at last. 'It is the last refuge of the island coolies! It is not the hive for you, dear little bee,' he told her with a forced smile.

Mimi recovered herself as they walked from the precincts of the mill. After five years' separation there was much to tell. Her father, who had worked in David Trent's luggers, had disappeared only a few weeks ago. It was said he had gone on a pearling cruise to the Paumotos. Mimi was not sure. But in the meanwhile she had been forced to enter the mill as a bookkeeper to help her aunt and sister, who lived in the old Mission House across the valley.

As a boy Darrel had known Mimi's father, Bull Fleming, one of the wildest members of his father's pearling fleet. Yet in spite of his roving, turbulent nature Mimi's parent was the one honest man who had stood by David Trent in times of stress and difficulty.

Darrel fell now that his father's trade connections were being jeopardised in Corrigan's interests. A difficult task lay ahead in discovering how matters stood. Young Trent was no fool. He had returned to Sumala to carry on in his father's name, and to extend the business beyond anything yet attempted in the islands. Ambition burned in him. Yet here he found a sandy-eyed old reprobate in charge of his father's estate, bleating about debts and lawsuits!

And, worse than all, here was Mimi of his dreams and hopes inhaling the miasmas of a coolie rice-mill! The thought scourged him like a whip.

AT the door of her aunt's house, Darrel left her, promising to see her as soon as his own difficult task was accomplished.

The news of his return had spread like wildfire through the island. The son of the beloved David had come home. The shouts of welcome that greeted him from every hut and trading canoe only served to depress him. Darrel Trent was shaken to his depths. His fortune was gone. The child sweetheart had become the slave of Corrigan's mill-agents! In those remote islands it was often difficult to fight unscrupulous trade partners. Once secure, in some dead man's shoes they defied God and man to shift them.

Each moment revealed the position with greater clearness. A man-eagle named Corrigan was squatting inside his father's trade-house, collecting copra and oil from the natives, shipping coffee and sandalwood to the four corners of the earth, and receiving gold and silver for his own credit.

From the doorway of a filthy hovel on his right a tattered shape, emerged and beckoned him silently. It was Huo, the witch doctor, who preserved his ancient customs in spite of missionaries and their doctrines. The face of Huo was so old that it had become white and bloodless as the reefs of Sumala. Around the loose skin of his throat was a string of shark's teeth, with an assortment of dried thumbs clustered within the arc of the necklace.

Darrel followed him into the hut. The black foulness of the, interior blotted out everything except the sting and grip of cooking fumes. Huo squatted on the floor after his first salutation in fluent Sumalan. In his day the witch doctor had been of service to the dead David, helping to govern and control the natives by his crude appeals to their superstitious terrors. In return David had rewarded him with food and favours.

'Listen, son of my friend.' he began from the blackness of the floor. 'Too long hast thou been away from thy inheritance. Corrigan is like the green octopus, tua — he gets and keeps. I heard that he threatened thee a little while ago about the money he could not find.

'Where is it?' Darrel demanded frankly, for he was thinking of Mimi, her tired face, and the mill gates she must enter until old age gripped her. 'Who look the money, Huo?'

The witch doctor chewed betel for a heart-breathing space. Then his voice rasped on Darrel with its bitter message of cunning and hate.

'Thy father feared Corrigan, who is a born man killer and robber. But in thy absence this man-killer worked his own will in the trade-house. And thy father had grown old and foolish, as men do in these islands, he became a child again,

and talked to me of thee and the gold he had saved and hidden for thy use when thou should'st return to Sumala.

'Aie! There, was much money. But thy father began to hide it in pots and cooking vessels. Everyday his servants discovered his fresh hiding-places. To dig and bury money is foolish. But thy father had lost many thousands of gold dollars in the Chinese banks of Sumatra and Saigon, and thou hast not forgotten the bank of the German *papalagi* that swallowed his money as the sharks swallow a little, child. Thy father would have no more banks.

'But here was Corrigan and his coolies smelling the air like dogs. Gold was like blood to them. And thy father was an old man with shuffling feet. His memory had gone.

'Yet thy father saw that his gold would run like water from the pots unless he found safety for his metal. *Poi ana!* There, was much yellow money stored in those clay jars; gold yen and taels from the compradore banks, gold dollar and English money by the hundred hundred.

'What could thy father do with so much gold? He was thinking of thee in far Sydney at school. He desired that thy days should be free from hunger and sickness. Yellow money was the true medicine for pains and hunger, said thy father.

'But where could he hide the yellow pieces to save thee from misery on thy return to Sumala ?'

A savage silence fell within the slifling darkness of thp witch doctor's abode. Darrel stirred uneasily, while outside the surf thundered and beat over the reefs and channels.

'I spoke to thy father of the danger of hiding money in his compounds,' the witch doctor went, on. 'For was not Corrigan and his coolies searching day and night for hidden pieces of money? The fortune that was to be thine, O Darrel, was melting in the fiery fingers of the man-killer. Each day he came upon a hoard of thy father's wealth, each month he changed the gold into paper and sent it over the great water.

'That was to be the end of thy father's savings, O Darrel. This murder-man had come to Sumala a beggar, a white coolie without a loin-cloth. And my people watched him grow in authority in thy father's business. For years we have watched him swallow the profits and eat the cake! In a little while, O Darrel, all thy father's schooners and lagoons of pearl would pass to this man. Aie! Have I not seen it again and again among these white traders?

'It was the day that Corrigan found the stew pan full of gold yen, under the ashes of the compound fire, that thy father woke from his foolish dreams and fancies. There was a way to hide money, he said, that would defy the meddling lingers of Corrigan and his coolies.

'So he called to his side the Bull Fleming, father of the beautiful Mimi who liveth in the Mission House. Fleming is like the hill buffalo. His hair groweth in his eyes, but his heart is strong and his eyes are clean. Also his love for thy father was like a palm tree in his great body.

'Fleming came at thy father's call. They talked until long after dark, until the sun opened again over the green forest and the sea. They talked of the yellow money, and how they could keep it from the burning fingers of Corrigan. It was a long, cold talk, O Darrel, but it was full of the wisdom that comes to men driven bard by fate.

'Fleming the Bull said that gold was safe only when the hands of a strung man were over it. A live man must hold money day and night, to-day and to-morrow. To steal the gold the robbers must first kill the strong man. There was no man in Sumala who could kill Fleming the Bull. Not Corrigan, nor his jackal, Gada, who ran about smelling the ground for his master.

'They found a way with the gold money, O Darrel. It was to be strapped in belts around the body of the Bull. They sewed it in long strips of goatskin, gold yen and dollars and English money. All the pots and vessels were dug up and the money emptied into the long goat-skin sacks. They stuffed and rolled the hundred hundred yellow pieces side by side into these belts. It was thy father's hands that bound them to the Bull's great body.

'There was more gold than thy father could lift, O Darrel. But the Bull carried it with his head back, his great muscles showing nothing of the stress or weight. Fleming walked out in the dark of night when the village was asleep. He melted in the forest, where no man goeth who loveth his life.

'A great peace came upon David after he had gone, for he knew that the father of Mimi would hold the gold to his body until thou didst return lo Sumala.'

Thee witch doctor ceased speaking as though he had come to the end of his narrative. Darrel shifted uneasily, as one in the grip of a tragic comedy that had passed beyond his control. His voice quivered strangely as he spoke.

'My father was drowned in a fishing canoe, Huo? Where is Fleming now?'

The witch doctor laughed harshly. 'Thy father was capsized by one of Corrigan's people. The island cried over his death. As for the Bull, he is still watching for thy return, O Darrel. It will not be long before he comes to thee.'

A sudden scrambling of feet outside implied that someone had been listening to their talk and had moved away in haste. Darrel darted to the doorway in time to see the naked heels and sarong of a native disappearing in a patch of pandanus scrub adjoining the witch doctor's hut.

'Always an ear to pick up the money talk,' Huo intoned with irritation. 'One of Corrigan's coolies! The secret, of the Bull is out now. If we are not quick, O Darrel, the fingers of the murder-man will yet empty the sacks of gold.'

CORRIGAN sat in his trade-room, with his headman, Gada, standing beside his table. The face of the ex-buccaneer was creased in an ugly grin. His long legs were stretched under the table in an attitude expressive of complete satisfaction. The headman's features also betrayed something of suppressed jubilation. His voice played like music on Corrigan's senses.

'We have been fools, *papalagi*. While we dug like pigs around the old puka hives for the gold the Bull had plaited it in skins round his neck and thighs. Like harness, lord of the sea! This Fleming, the father of Mimi, sleeps in the forest with the money bound like armour about his muscles and chest. These things I heard in the doorway of Huo's house, when the son of the old master was listening to his talk.'

So spoke Gada, Corrigan's lieutenant and native agent in Sumala.

The ex-buccaneer lit a cigar, while his molten brain digested every fragment of the brown man's talk. It was a long time before he spoke: then his words came in little choking gusts of laughter that seemed to shake the fever-grilled skeleton within him.

'So.... Bull and old Dave thought they'd put one over me! Fancy Bull Fleming wanderin' through the woods with all that dough hitched to his carcass. Ho, ho; it's too darned funny him dragging that metal round like a bear.'

Gada waited for things to happen. He knew that behind the spasms of the while man's mirth lurked a poisonous hatred of Bull Fleming for what he had done. Corrigan sat up in his chair, his tufted chin grown suddenly stiff.

'See here, Gada, stick your mind into what I'm goin' to say. This chap Darrel will go after the money that's walkin' about the woods. He's broke, an' he's the breed that fights like blazes on an empty stomach. There's a way to bring Bull Fleming to us. Chasing him with coolies won't do it. Listen — just bring his daughter Mimi here. She's working at the mill.'

Gada flinched slightly. He stared at the lanky, chin-tufted white man in surprise.

'Why Mimi?' he questioned suspiciously.

'Because when I gel her I've got Bull Fleming by the nose. I'll leach him to play the goat with my partner's savings,' he added with unexpected ferocity. 'Get Mimi, an' before you can blink he'll hear she's in my house. Take my word, he's not far away. Get her!'

'The *papalagi* will kill her as a warning to—'



'Never mind what the *papalagi* will do!' Corrigan interrupted sharply. 'I'll show you how to make this gold-bull spill the beans. Tell Mimi I've got a job for her in the silk store at fifty dollars a month. Tell her I'll allow her as much material as she likes to wear. I guess that'll make her jump.'

Of course, Mimi came to the trade-house on the pier. She hated the rice-mill, and if she must be a slave to someone she preferred bondage among the fathoms of pretty coloured silk goods stored within the cool, breezy rooms overlooking the water.

The morning was hot, with, a big surf booming along the ten-mile stretch of beach. Scarcely a breath of air moved the stiff-crested pandanus palms that slanted seaward.

Mimi passed in and out of the hip store-room adjoining the one used by Corrigan. For two days she had striven to familiarise herself with the various kinds of silk and cotton trade goods strewn about the tables and floors. The merchandise of a dozen schooners lay piled in odd corners— glass beads, gilt mirrors, children's toys, and the countless knickknacks that appeal to the native mind. As yet the lanky ex-buccaneer had not spoken to her, beyond a few casual instructions to tidy up the jumble in the big trade-room, where the chiefs' wives had dragged everything from the shelves to the floor.

'Just like pigs,' he had told her with a grin.

MIMI paused occasionally in her task to watch one of the native canoe men scattering scraps of raw meal, into the water at the end of the pier. Within a short space the sapphire-breasted sea had become a thrashing hell-pool of triangular fins and snapping jaws. It seemed to Mimi that all the reef monsters of the Pacific had rolled up to snatch the toothsome morsels flung to them by the laughing canoe man. Everywhere these long-bodied sharks leaped and fought in their efforts to obtain a scrap of fresh meat. The tiny bay seemed alive with their sabre-toothed jaws.

Corrigan appeared unexpectedly at the door of the trade-room, a half-chewed cigar between his lips. His glance went out to the raving, fin-thrashed water at the end of the pier, and then to the Madonna-faced Mimi rolling a fathom of silk into place.

'Say there, Mimi,' he called out in a voice that strove to modulate itself, 'tip out some of those fancy silk beach costumes. I've a buyer for most of 'em in Honolulu, where ladies do dress before goin' into the water. No buyers for bathing costumes in Sumala.'

Mimi brought out several parcels of silk bathing suits and spread them on a table. Corrigan bent over them critically, while a shade of annoyance crossed

his brow. 'Cost me ten dollars a suit,' he said, fingering one of the blue-striped costumes impatiently. 'I'm thinkin' they'll run like the devil when they touch sea-water.'

Mimi was silent, scarcely knowing what to suggest. She naturally preferred the trade-house to the mill, with its dust and crowds of clamorous natives herded under the galvanised iron roof. Her father's continued absence made her position difficult. In the meantime she badly wanted the position in the house of Trent and Corrigan. She wanted to please this ill-tempered, sour-voiced trader.

Corrigan eyed her furtively as he pitched the costumes across the table in disgust. 'They'll stand seawater or they won't,' he grumbled. 'The girl who had your job here used to try these suits in the water. I buy them from a Japanese firm in Yokohama. If the colours are not fast my buyers down south get mad an' I lose business.'

'I'll wash a suit in seawater,' Mimi suggested. 'It won't lake long.'

Corrigan shook his head, 'That's no test. The last girl used to try one or two herself in the water. There's a ladies' dressing-room on the pier,' he suggested dourly. 'And, by the same token,' he added in a softened voice, 'you are considered the best swimmer in Sumala. I'll have a canoe lake you out. to the clear water over the reef. There's no danger for a clever girl like yourself.'

Mimi had watched the sharks at the pier-end, and it was certain that Corrigan had also seen them. As a swimmer she feared neither reefs, surf, nor tide rips. Once over the reef the sharks would not molest her, she thought; they were too busy fighting over the scraps at the pier end.

'All right, Mr. Corrigan I'll be ready in a few minutes.'

Selecting a couple of costumes from the table. Mimi disappeared to the dressing-room at the rear of the trades-house. Corrigan called softly to the native at the end of the pier. Instantly the fellow darted to his side. Almost at the same moment the voice of Gada beat like a flail down the trade-house corridor.

'Hurry, *papalagi*. The Bull is coming this way! He has heard that Mimi is in your house. See, from the window. He runs, falls, and comes on. Look!'

Through the trade-room window Corrigan saw the bull-headed figure of a half-naked white man staggering blindly towards the pier. His great chest and surly brow were bent under the weight of heavy skin wrappings that bound him from waist to throat. The ex-buccaneer turned sharply to the native standing beside him and whispered hurriedly in the vernacular: 'Take her far out in the canoe. Scatter bait as thou goest. The *tibaukas* will follow. When thou art over the reef watch for my signals. When I raise my hand throw her in, for she will not go in when the sharks gather round the canoe. Begone!'

The native vanished.

STRAIGHT to the trade-house on the pier came Bull Fleming. The news of his daughter's presence in Corrigan's store had reached him among the herons and black duck of the inner lagoons. Well he knew that the ex-buccaneer had played his last card to bring him from his hiding-place.

The man who had drowned David Trent would regard the life of Mimi as something to be gambled with or destroyed if the game stayed against him. In the bat of an eye he saw the canoe shoot from the pier steps with Mimi dressed in a blue silk bathing costume. Also, he took in the violent commotion among the shoals of hammer-head -sharks below. He was certain that Corrigan had awakened the blood-lust in these tearing, rending monsters, whose livid shadows were visible all along the beach front.

In the fetch of a breath he understood the game that Corrigan was playing. Few men in the South Seas knew better than Bull Fleming what would happen to Mimi if she entered the water within miles of those fleet, blood-scenting scavengers. He turned to the fast disappearing canoe, waving his arms frantically.

'Come back. Mimi! On your life don't go into the water! *It's alive from reef to reef!*'

The canoe passed on, with Mimi staring back helplessly in his direction. Bull Fleming controlled the black rage that held him speechless as Corrigan approached leering, chuckling audibly at the way he had outpaced the other.

'Hullo, Bull! You seem to be loaded down,' he greeted the staggering, weight-burdened Fleming. In the shift of an eye in-took in the rolls of minted wealth packed within the skin bandages around the sun-blackened shoulders and hips of Fleming. Bull Fleming breathed like an animal in torment as he watched the canoe double round the distant reef-points. His lips quivered strangely.

'I've brought you Trent's money, Cap'n Corrigan,' he grunted, wiping the sweat drops from his brow. 'Every pound an' dollar is here, just as ole Trent left it. You'll be needin' the money, Capn', for your business.'

In spite of his efforts to control his overwhelming greed, the hand of the ex-buccaneer shook like an aspen as he fingered the bandages containing the bulging columns of wealth.

'I just sent Mimi out for a dip,' he stated meaningly, his thumb jerking towards the distant reef-lines. 'Being a hot day thought she'd enjoy a swim.'

Bull Fleming hunched his great shoulders, nodding sullenly, while his parched lips framed his reply.

'Better give that coolie the sign that Mimi is to come back. Cap'n,' he articulated. 'Give it now, while the money's good and sure.'

Corrigan reflected an instant then walking to the pier and beckoned for the coolie in the canoe to return at once. The signal was answered. Fleming nodded, and again wiped his brow.

'You see, Cap'n,' he stated hoarsely, 'I gave my word to ole Trent I'd never give the money to anyone. See? You can take it from me, though,' he added with a dry grin, 'and my conscience will be all right.'

Corrigan guffawed loudly as he unfastened the skin bandages from Fleming's chafed shoulders.

'Sure I'll ease your conscience, Bull. Ye can whisper to your dead friend that I took the money.'

Fleming watched him with a curious light burning in his eyes. 'Put the belts on you,' he commanded coldly, 'or I might change my mind. Put them on and feel what I have suffered, day an' night in the jungle, to save my old friend's money for his son.'

'Sure, sure!' the ex-buccaneer agreed in his fierce haste to humour the sulky-browed carrier of gold. 'Every man dreams once in a while of gettin' away with as much as he can carry, though hell itself is on top of the pile. Give me another belt of it, Bull.'

Fleming added another belt of gold and another, until the knees of Corrigan sagged and quaked under the increasing load.

'Enough, Bull,' he gasped. 'Too much gold is hard on old joints. Stop, stop; I'm crucified with your goodness,' he protested, reeling under the load of metal that Bull had knotted and looped to his body.

'One more an' the last, Cap'n Corrigan,' Fleming cried, clapping a thick sovereign filled belt around his throat. 'One more to make you the richest man in the islands!'

Corrigan lurched heavily and clutched blindly at Fleming to save himself from falling. He was too late. The hip of Bull seemed to touch him lightly, accidentally almost. A shout of despair broke from the ex-buccaneer: his hands clutched wildly at the flagpole at the end of the pier— and missed. His overweighted body toppled and plunged down into the water under the pier.

Bull Fleming remained rooted, staring at the swift-moving shark shoal below. In a flash the creatures had disappeared. Not a ripple disturbed the sapphire depths. Within a few short minutes the water became clear as a mirror.

The figure of Darrel Trent appeared at the end of the jetty. He came with hurried strides to where Fleming was staring into the water below.

'Where is Corrigan?' he demanded sharply.

Then his glance wandered to the glittering depths under the pier. The form of Corrigan was plainly visible, his arms outspread in a crucified altitude, like a man caught fooling with the cross of his fate. The gold had pinned him down.

'The sharks cleared off,' Fleming rumbled. 'He struck the water with a great noise: it scared them like a gun. But... we shall get him when the tide goes out, with all the money that burnt my flesh and bones.'

Darrel Trent understood. He had gone forth from the hut of the witch doctor in search of Fleming, had searched the woods and lagoons without success.

The canoe touched the pier below. Mimi sprang up the steps with a glad cry to Darrel's side. A sense of peace and serenity was in the air. A sudden healing of drums in the village told Darrel of the goodwill of his people, for the word had flashed forth that the evil sailor man had been caught at last by the sea.

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**44: A Bush Tanqueray***(as by "Alba Dorian")**Bulletin 12 Dec 1896*

THE COACH stole round a path hewn out of the grey sandstone, to the road that ran white and bare over the summit of a hill. The driver pulled up. Away down in the smoke-laden hollow a number of men gathered and sent up a faint cheer. Then a shirt of many colors, supported by yellow moles, rose solemnly from the box-seat and made some parabolic gestures in return. The driver touched his leader tenderly on the flank and the coach wound through lichen-covered boulders into a dingy mulga background. Simultaneously the crowd below adjourned to the pub. A mottle-faced old "whaler" peeped in at the door to remark, for the fifth time, that "water was bad, and the road too strnkin' for anything." No one noticed him until, pressed by a great thirst, he hazarded another cast of the die:

"Anybody want to 'ear a song— a real blanky song without funny business? Ever 'eard, 'When Molly marries the Ringer?' I'd sing 'Billy, the Boundry,' only I'm gone in the 'igh notes through sleepin' in the wet without a bluey."

A derisive, withering reply sent him hobbling to the kerb to examine further the grey ridges that bounded an everlasting plain, and the question of his life— the road.

Conversation in the bar turned upon Benjamin Stokes, the man who had just left by coach for Sydney. Everybody admitted that Ben was too reserved and sullen. In the first place, his life had been spent beyond the enlightening influence of his fellow-townsmen, in long night-watches with stamping herds and vicious colts. "And the result," said Tackler, the school-master, "is a product as rough as Nature— his god. Gentlemen," continued Tackler, seizing a gin-and-peppermint, "the man Stokes is a heathen idolator." And Mottle-face went lamely over the hill, his tattered clothes flapping weirdly through a vista of white dust.

BEN'S trip was to last a month, and each week of his absence was duly notched off on the post outside the pub. When the notches grew to ten, and he did not return, the circumstance was referred to in the *Deep Creek Dabbler*.

Ben had never seen a train before; his ideas of city life had been drawn from the rough word-pictures of bushmen. The cause of his prolonged absence was explained in the first page of his new pocket-book —

*Stoping two teeth, one ginny. Millysent Lee— cab— mattrymonal agency, £3 2s. 6d.*

ONE afternoon the coach dropped them at the door of a hut near the creek. The driver shook hands with Ben, winked at Ben's wife, and flogged his horses over the wooden bridge to the township.

A tabby cat brought out several blind kittens for inspection, exhibiting a sinful pride which led to painful consequences, for a few minutes later an anxious mother mewed piteously near the tank, while Benjamin did strange things with her blind offspring in a bucket of water. Millicent threw herself wearily on a biscuit-box and slowly took out her hat-pins. The room was stuffy and dark; the tiny window and the little tin mirror filled her with a profound astonishment. In a corner was a narrow bed that met the requirements of a long, single man, and its presence plainly indicated that the whole wedlock business was unpremeditated. A sporting print on the wall depicted "Jimmy the Biff" going sweet and fresh after ten hard rounds with "Mick the Nipper" from Bendigo.

Through a large hole in the wall near the fire-place Ben apologised for the speckled condition of the nuptial chamber— due, he explained, to the goats and fowls. By-and-bye he might nail up the hole with a bag; it was getting too big. Some night an enterprising cow would squeeze through and breathe over a married couple— he'd nail it up now. He rushed away, and there were sounds of a man chopping wood.

The following day was Sunday, and the new wife hinted weakly about going to church.

"Right, Mill," said Ben, dropping the saw he was greasing, "we'll go now, though I've never been before. Put on your grey dress and the hat with the big black feather."

He chose a seat directly under the pulpit.

"Keep yer 'ead agin the mahogany, Mill; they'll be dyin' to see yer face when they come in; don't let 'em."

The church at this time was empty; but it filled—filled to overflowing.

"Don't forgit the mahogany, Mill," whispered Ben behind his hand.

Their pew remained as sacred as a Hindu cow.

The coach-driver pointed them out from a crowded porch, and his audience appeared spasmodically grateful for the information concerning Mrs. Ben. The driver admitted regretfully that his friend, Sam Hopkins, knew her pretty well, thanks— "wished he knew her as well." Still, it wasn't for him to take away the character of a respectable married woman. Heard that she could cook as blanky good a feed as anybody in Pyers, and if—

The organ took it up, and sent out a moaning "Adeste Fideles." The minister thundered at his stoic congregation, and charged the air with strange,

charitable precepts. At the end he waved a calm benediction over his respectable flock: "Go in peace and sin no more."

The men leered at Ben and Mill as they passed out; young girls gathered up skirts and scattered; obese wives and mothers cannoned in circling, agitated groups.

"Thank God the roof didn't fall upon us this blessed day! The idea!"

Ben lifted his head and eyed the hostile gathering; some of them had known him for years— since the time when he used to drive about Pyers in a billy-goat tandem. A shout of mocking laughter followed them to the gate. Ben shut his mouth; an unknown shame spread to his neck and face; something gripped his arm, and a word hummed in his ear that an ordinary woman never uses at any period of her life.

So they tramped along, voiceless and sullen, through paddocks where flowers nodded to a caressing wind, while the sun warmed perfumes from the moist Spring earth. Mill's right hand bruised her breast savagely; the other held his sleeve.

She glanced furtively at him across the room— his head down, his chin resting in the heel of his palm.

"Did I ever say that I was a good girl, Ben? I ain't, Gawd 'elp me!"

She thrust herself beside him, shaking and trembling. Then Benjamin Stokes listened, almost for the first time in his life, to the commonest story in the world— a betrayal, a little shame, a gradual hardening, a world-defiance.

"The old woman at the boardin'-house said she'd clear me out unless I was obligin' and civil to the gentlemen. So there was presents for Mill, and gloves planted in my bed.... It all helped to take my head away from the damned 'ard scrubbin'. I ain't old— seventeen ain't very old, is it? Gimme a chance, Ben— gimme a chance!"

SOMETHING simmered in the fireplace; plates clattered; a shadowy girl moved about him all the afternoon in a dull, half-frightened way. He stumbled outside to the wood-heap, and the soft-eyed collie hung at his heels for a word.

The sun dropped to the edge of the plains, drenching the far-off hills with yellow mists. A rush of cool air brought the clang of bells; he raised a rough and haggard face and spoke a word to the night a word he used when punching cattle through an overflow. The dog fawned joyously— "Away, you beast!"— and a savage kick sent it howling down the track.

A candle flickered in the little bedroom, throwing a shape across the chintz curtain.

"That bell again!"



He walked a short, distance from the house. How everyone knew now everyone guessed the truth! What had happened at the church to-day would happen again with sickening regularity. He might force the men to respect him with his fists, but that cackling brood in the porch...! He struck a match and groped into the room to fling a word of hate at this Magdalen— and fell into a chair, silenced. The face was so pretty, so weak— prey for every libertine. The minister had said something about a woman who wiped the feet of Christ with her long meshes of hair; nobody believed it, of course; if they did, why was Mill treated as she had been? He sat through the long night, heavy-browed and brooding, until a grey light from the east whitened the window-pane.

"Mill!" She smiled sleepily at the word.

"Mill!" The sound of his voice made her crouch on the rough pallet; she stared at the white haggard face in the half-light.

"Don't be frightened, Mill—don't be frightened ; I shan't hit yer. I've been thinkin' ; and we ain't goin' to church again to let 'em worry us. I'll build another place overat Red Point on the hundred-acre patch; if they come over there to carry on I'll be about to receive 'em."

Her face was hidden from him, but her hand crept into his big palm.

A FEW hours later Ben led a bay horse to the front and hopped into the saddle. She came to the door, her white arms splashed with milk and flour.

"It's a long way to the Point, ain't it, Ben? "

"Yeh!"

She stole nearer— obviously to examine the horse. He threw himself forward and kissed her on the lips.

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**45: The Red Coolie**

*Sydney Mail* 28 Jan 1925

'LOWER a boat, Mr. Langdon, and see if he's alive. These Chinamen often come to life, like oats, when you don't want 'em.'

Jim Balk stared down at the sea of driftwood that collected around the schooner in ever-growing masses. For eight days the *Nancy Free* had battled against the earthquakes, tides and currents that had threatened to engulf them. Captain Balk had not seen a ship for weeks, and was in ignorance of the mighty earth-heave which had submerged parts of Japan and many of the islands lying north of the East China Sea.

But he had seen empires of matchwood floating under his keel, pagoda roof's and temple gates drifting in the debris of a hundred native villages, washed and sluiced from island rivers and estuaries across the sapphire spaces of the Pacific. There had been days in the voyage from Thursday Island when Jim Balk felt that the earth had disappeared. Palm-sheltered coastlines he had known all his life had vanished into the gaping holes of the ocean floor. The seismic giant had sucked down cities and towns, cattle and men, had buried them in a million feet of mud right under his schooner's bows.

And now out of the debris of a hundred drowned villages appeared the bald head of a solitary Chinaman. His long, bloodless fingers clutched a fragment of wood that resembled the roof of a doll's house.

Langdon lowered a boat, and in a trice he had the Chinaman out of the water. Captain Balk stood by the gangway as the young man, with the help of two coolie deckhands, brought the dripping, pigtailed figure aboard.

Now Jim Balk, of the *Nancy Free*, knew more about Chinese than most men know about their wives. He saw at a glance that this driftwood voyager was no ordinary Celestial, certainly not a coolie or comprador. The coat he wore with its sixteen jade buttons was of purest Shantung silk. Moreover, his skin was almost white, the nails of his delicate pink-crested fingers were newly manicured and trimmed. He was still alive when they carried him to the little stateroom aft.

Balk lounged in the doorway watching Langdon's efforts to restore his circulation. Noel Langdon was barely twenty-five. He had signed on at Sydney for the voyage north in the *Nancy Free*, in the hope of finding a berth in one of the big British trading houses in Shanghai. Balk, the owner of the *Nancy Free*, was a dealer in copra and nut oil. His markets lay between the Black Stream of Kuro Siwa and along the islands of the Australian littoral. So far Langdon's experience of the red-haired, fishy-eyed little schooner captain had been

amicable enough. Danger breeds a certain fellowship, especially when the sky and sea are as smoke with the anguish of lost souls and cities.

Hand him the brandy jar, Noel, and clap a hot bottle to his feet' Balk advised from the stateroom door. 'He's coming to'.

Wrapped in a warm dry blanket on the stateroom couch the waterlogged Celestial began to breathe faintly. The long, prehensile fingers had had clutched the doll's house-roof grew slack over the edge of the blanket, but the soft, onyx eyes took note of Langdon's movements and nodded gratefully when the young man packed the hot bottle against the soles of his waferlogged feet.

Balk grunted in the doorway, lit a cheroot, and returned thoughtfully to his trick at the wheel. Langdon, remained beside the couch like one in doubt. It was the first time he had ever pulled a man from the sea, and his heart was filled with the gentle pride of achievement. Yet as he stared down at the waxen face and purple lid's of the Chinaman's eyes he felt that he had been too late. The Chinaman's lips parted slightly; his finger twitched as he looked up into Langdon's sunburnt face.

'Thank you very much,' he whispered faintly. 'Me too long in the water. My heart not big enough to come round. Come hear.... one little word, boy. I am weak. I fall, into the dark....'

Langdon bent near the moving lips, and his eyes widened as he caught a word here and there from the faintly moving lips. He glanced up suddenly from the relaxing face and glazing eyes on the couch to the tiptoeing figure of Balk beside him.

'WHAT'S he say?' the captain demanded hoarsely. 'Been talkin', has he?'

Langdon straightened the blanket over the still grey face; his own had become almost ghastly white.

'He's dead,' he intoned quietly. 'How these Chinese slip off! I was sure, he'd pull 'round,' he added, with a note of genuine regret!

Captain Balk stared down at the jewelled fingers of the dead Celestial like one who had somehow missed a stroke of fortune.

'But he said something to you, my lad. The last words of a Chinaman are generally his best. What did he say?'

Langdon shook his head. 'Said he was too weak to fight it out. Then he spoke in Chinese. I couldn't get his meaning at all. Poor fellow, he wasn't strong enough to bear up against the tide.'

Balk brooded over his words, nibbling the end of his cheroot and staring fixedly at the cluster of emeralds set in the heavy flat rings on the dead man's forefingers.

'All right, my lad,' he said at last. 'You can take the wheel for a spell. I'll sew up the Chink, and we'll drop him over at sundown.'

Langdon nodded and passed up to the wheelhouse.

IT was easy to see that the schooner had been caught in the washdown of earthquake-riven towns. The shifting currents altered their course a dozen limes a day. The horrors of the Honjo, the fire and misery and desolation that had gripped the northern islands, had not readied them. Before them lay an endless vista of silling channels, floating jungle, covered with screaming birds and ravenous sea fowls. All around them the sky was a typhoon yellow 11ml. Balk had seen in the storm areas of the China seaboard.

To Langdon at the wheel it seemed as if the world had come to an end. Beneath the frail schooner he could feel the deadly hiccuping of submarine craters as the gaping chasms of fire and lava burst through the tides and filled the air with choking infernos of steam. 'We'll find shelter or we'll drown,' Balk slated from the schooner's waist.

'I don't know what's happening, but I know the bottom of the sea is changing. We're likely to be smothered in one of these boil-ups.'

Ahead of Iliem loomed a tangle of flood-wrapped palm scrub. On a naked sandbar they saw a breast-high shoal of dead fishes, cast by the tide from the larva-poisoned depths below. Above the gleaming silver of the dead shoal screamed myriads of gulls and black-billed hawks, with here and there the shadow of a cruising shark to feast and gorge on the mighty banquet the sea had spread.

'The Lord be merciful!' Balk muttered. 'Only the birds have escaped.'

His eyes wandered north and south with superstitious terror. 'This place was a city once— a Chinese port with banks and shops... gambling hells. All gone!' he almost choked. 'Men and women by the thousand. Over there,' his shaking finger indicated a sea of mud that still supported a wilderness of roof tiles and broken tree-tops, 'over there was an avenue of planted trees, and a temple the size of St. Paul's. All gone!'

Once more his fish eyes fell on Langdon's boyish figure at the wheel. 'You're sure, my lad. the dead Chow didn't say anything about his affairs?' he questioned. 'Not a single word, eh?'

A faint flush mantled the young seaman's ruddy cheeks, that might have spelt anger or surprise at Balk's insistence on this point.

'I gave you my answer a while back, Mr. Balk. The last word spoken was in Chinese, and the language is foreign to me.'

It was just here, that both men uttered a shout of wonder. Out of the rising mists of the drowned city bulged a gigantic image of Buddah, its huge smiling

face turned to the east. It was all that remained of the vast temple winch had once raised its coppery dome above a splendid avenue of palms and magnolias. The Buddah itself was the size of a small house, and rested on a square stone platform that had once been an altar. Beyond the image, in the centre of some piled-up house wreckage, a girl was signalling frantically with the torn half of a trade-house flag.

'In the name of Mike!' Balk blurted out, 'is this a show or the home of the creeping Willies?'

'It's a live white woman,' Langdon responded quickly. 'We'll have to reach her somehow.'

'You'll get her with the dinghy,' Balk snapped, eyeing the girl through his binoculars. 'She's English or French, by the look of her clothes. Funny how people manage to keep alive in these hell holes,' he added with sudden ill-humour.

LANGDON navigated the dinghy through drifting shoals of debris with the skill of a Canadian lumber jack. Once or twice, he came perilously near his own end as the shifting current jammed his frail craft between the fallen timber of a native joss house. He reached the pile of wreckage at last, and scrambled from the dinghy to where the girl was standing almost to her waist in water. Her eyes explored his eagerly, for death had been so near to her that she could have cried out at his coming.

Langdon fanned himself with his white cap in an effort to appear at ease. He saw at a glance that she was the daughter of some well-to-do merchant or trader, the one survival probably of a prosperous British colony.

'Thank you for coming,' she said faintly, her pale cheeks showing the effects of her terrible privations. 'Nearly everything has disappeared, as you see,' she told him with an effort.

Langdon drew breath sharply as he look in her plight.

'Yes,' he answered slowly: 'the water is over most of this old peninsula. You'll better come almad. Miss—'

'Ingram,' she told him. 'My father was a dealer in art ware.'

'Dead?' Langdon questioned gently. Her lips said yes, and he felt that he had been a fool to ask her. He braced himself and turned slowly to the dinghy. He was conscious of her hand on his shoulder and her soft sobbing as she rocked to and fro.

'It came like a whirlwind over the islands in the north. My father said if might not reach us and refused to leave the town. But the seas broke over us and destroyed everything. Not a soul escaped.'

The dinghy, with Miss Ingram aboard, gained the schooner, where Balk awaited them at the gangway head. Pity was no part of his slock-in-trade. For the last few hours he had scented salvage among the ruins of these coast towns. Somewhere, beneath the shifting sandbars lay unlimited treasure, the gold and silver of the rich Chinese merchants, the silk and gems of the local *yamens*. He had no time for castaways. In a few hours the British and Japanese destroyers would be patrolling the submerged areas. The pirate gangs would be down in their infernal junks, stripping and looting. No one would have a chance.

All his life he had hoped for something like this to happen, something to get away with in his old age. For thirty years he had swealed in Chinese and Australian waters far wages and meals. And here was his fifty-ton schooner straddling over the wealth of a hundred opulent firms, Chinese banks, temples, and godowns stuffed with priceless commodities. He looked at the pale, terror-stricken girl with unseeing eyes. She had brought nothing to his schooner to repay him for his trouble, not even a handbag or a purse.

He returned chafing to the bridge, while Langdon escorted the dry-lipped girl to a spare cabin in the schooner's forepart. The night came swiftly enough, with a few misty stars to pierce the Stygian gloom that shrouded every landmark from view. Balk was in no hurry to be gone. A man never knew his luck, he told himself. The floor of the sea was still in travail, with undreamed-of wealth sifting and silling beneath his feet.

'Maybe I'll salvage a gold toothpick or a copper frying-pan, if I hang round long enough,' he muttered ironically under his breath. 'I'll put that dead Chinaman overboard new,' he added thoughtfully. 'Like as not it'll bring luck to the ship to have him out of the way.'

LANGDON remained in the doorway of Miss Ingram's cabin like one in doubt. She had seated herself on a locker, her hands slightly clenched, a look of unuttlerable pain and dismay in her dark eyes. Noel Langdon belonged to the sea. The flint of the cities had not yet entered his young soul. Hard work and bitter taskmasters had not robbed him of his clean visions and readiness to serve. And Miss Ingram's bearing was that of one accustomed to ready service. Her voice and gestures revealed a spiritual beauty often seen in the white women of the Far East.

'I'm afraid of that man upstairs,' she said after a while. 'He isn't honest.'

"Why?" Langdon inquired with studied calm. Slio looked up, and her eyes were gleaming and wet.

'He is wearing rings that belonged to a priest of the temple in Songolo. The priest who lost his life, helping the perishing children and women! I saw the

rings on his hand when I came aboard — emeralds set in flat gold, with Chinese characters embossed.'

Langdon was silent. He had not noticed the rings on Balk's fingers. He swore softly under his breath. 'I could not prevent the sacrilege,' he vouchsafed after a silence that hurt. 'The good priest, died in my arms. We found him clinging to some wreckage.'

Miss Ingram's face became suddenly alive with interest. The tears on her lids had burned dry. She looked up slowly into the young seaman's face. 'The priest was Mahal Tong, one of my father's dearest friends,' she told him. 'He was the *huza*, or abbot, of the Imperial Temple of Buddha that stood a little way from here. It was so strongly built that, my father thought it would withstand anything.'

Something fell into the water with a heavy, thrusting sound on the port side of the schooner.

Langdon bent his head for a moment. He did not speak.

Miss Ingham rose softly from the locker; a strange perfume floated about her, the odour of frangipani that carried with it a tang of Eastern shrines and the warm incense of tropic flowers.

Balk's footsteps sounded again on the bridge above as he paced to and fro. The schooner was lying in the shelter of a mud-flanked bay out of the track of downdrifting lumber. For two nights Balk had not slept on account of the currents and driftwood. In a little while he would turn in. It was sheer waste of effort staying on the bridge; Langdon would keep a lookout.

'Drat that, girl! Always these women to turn a young fellow's head from his duty,' he told himself as he passed to his cabin.

Miss Ingram returned to her seat on the locker as Balk's footsteps died away aft. Langdon remained in the doorway, while the Cingalee cook prepared a hurried meal for their unexpected passenger. Langdon was thinking of the dead Mahal Tong and the heavy splash on the port side.

'The typhoon and the earthquake cleaned up Songolo?' he hazarded after a while.

'Even a Chinese temple has its weak spots.' Miss Ingram sighed as the Cingalese cook brought in some coffee and a few slices of cold chicken from the pantry. Langdon poured out the coffee and gently drew her attention to the food before her. 'You'd better eat a little, Miss Ingram. If Mahal Tong could have ate that chicken there wouldn't have been a splash just now,' he added under his breath.

It was evident that Miss Ingram did not hear his last remark. She ate slowly, but drank the coffee almost greedily. A little colour came to her cheeks, and Langdon felt, that a few days' rest would work wonders. At the moment her

eyes carried the shadow of terror and disaster. Her lips still quivered as she spoke.

'When the storm broke my father selected a number of rare porcelain pieces and artware he had acquired from the collection of the Dowager Empress at Peking. None of it was insured, although a Sydney firm had just-cabled an offer of six thousand pounds for six water-blue Ming bowls and a bronze statuette by Ko Chwan, of the Fifth Manchu Dynasty.'

'A fierce price,' Langdon murmured from the doorway.

'Only half what my father paid for them,' she assured him wearily. 'So when the wind had unroofed our show rooms Mahal Tong begged my father to place this one collection from the Palace at Peking within the stonebuilt Buddah temple at the end of the Avenue of the Sacred Spirit. The water was driving over the beaches across the town.'

'Our Chinese shopmen carried the collection to the Buddah temple. My father ran to the assistance of the hospital staff in an effort to get some of the sick children to the higher lands in the south. Poor Daddy forgot the collection. I— I never saw him again.'

She sat very still on the brassbound locker, while Langdon turned his face to the dark, typhoon-ravaged shoreline, where a city and its people lay buried in a thousand fathoms of sand and lava. Noel had a dreamy, introspective eye at times. He had been moved to silent anger when Balk's shoulder had turned away from this luckless girl. Her clothes were rags, her sufferings had been unendurable amidst the hellish commotion of flood and earthquake. His generous mind could only see her as the daughter of the far-famed Baring Ingram, Oriental art connoisseur, lapidary, and dealer in Imperial treasures. It needed no strain on his imagination to tell him that her life had been one of cultured ease, and refinement.

He remained tight-lipped in the doorway of the cabin, as one feeling the finger of Destiny plucking his sleeve. He looked down at her bent figure on the locker, the delicate hands and face, and his mind leaped back to the last whispered message of the dead priest. He thanked his stars now that he had kept that whispered message from the ferret-faced Balk.

'Miss Ingram,' he began steadily, 'Mahal Tong gave me a sign, a message, before he died. I am satisfied that you ought to know.'

She looked up slowly, her eyes grown luminous, strained. She tried to speak, but her voice fell away to an inaudible cry of pain.

'He said,' Langdon went on quietly, 'that Buddah held the life blood of his dearest friend, his treasures, his fortune. The name Baring Ingram was plain on his lips. He asked me to find your father and to just say that.'

Barbara Ingram rose steadily from her seat, and her hand fell on his arm.



'I can guess his meaning,' she said with an effort.

'So can I,' he answered. 'The one big thing that survived disaster in these death lands is that amiable old Buddah over there.' He gestured across the flood waters to where the smiling stone statue of Buddah remained intact on the flattened out landscape.

'The old priest meant that your father's collection of art ware from the Imperial Palace is somewhere inside the Buddah.'

She put her hand to her lips, as though a blood drop had welled from her lieai-l. Langdon passed along the deck with a back glance in her direction.

'Wait,' he called in a whisper. 'I shan't be long.'

THE dinghy was at the fool of the gangway. Heavy breathing inside Balk's cabin told him that the fishy-eyed captain was asleep. Langdon pushed off from the schooner, a lighled hurricane lamp stowed in the thwarts. The darkness around him was like a wall. But here and there a few stars showed through the fume driftsd revealing the gargantuan outlines of the Buddah in the distance. Langdon approached it cautiously, for he knew that in times of flood and stress all kinds of reptiles and animals sought refuge in the vicinity of deserted temples and shrines.

Raising the hurricane lamp, he peered up at the statue's dark, sullen outlines before stepping out of the dinghy. The floor of the altar on which the Buddah rested was of white Manchurian stone. The image itself was of hammered copper, and towered fully twenty feet above the young seaman's head. A score of sea-fowls roosted above on the sloping, elephantine shoulders of the Buddah, but beyond a drowsy fluttering of wings they made no attempt to abandon their resting ground. Langdon was anxious to inspect the back of the huge image. That a cavity existed within the capacious interior he was confident. At the north side of the altar he drew back with a stifled exclamation.

Squatting on the extreme edge of the altar was a half-naked Chinaman. His face and eyes went towards Langdon, particularly the eyes. The young seaman's nerves had been aleap for the unexpected. A turn of the hurricane lamp in his hand revealed a small sampan moored alongside the altar. Then his glance went back to the immovable Chinaman.

'Hullo, Sam,' he called out with an attempt at pleasantry. 'Trying to cool yourself after the big blow-up, eh?'

The wolf stare in the Chinaman's eyes passed over the young sailor to the lamp in his band. Not a muscle of bis naked body moved. His swart, talon-like hands lay on the handle of a straight steel blade, notched in places, but shining in the soft glow of the hurricane lamp like the weapon of a craftsman.

'You heard me?' Langdon insisted, holding the lamp so that every feature and limb of the Chinaman was revealed. Around his naked torso was a belt of brass covered with Chinese inscriptions. It was his uncanny length of limb that impressed Langdon. Never had he seen such long, snake-like arms that suggested a certain feline capacity for gripping things by the throat and hair. He yawned suddenly, revealing a number of broken teeth and a parched white tongue.

'Peace, thou!' he rasped in harsh Mongolian. 'I am waiting for the dawn.' Then in pidgin English he made his inquiry. 'Why you come heah to the Sacred One? Why you come at this hour?'

Langdon flinched. It was as if a huge toad had addressed him. In his day he had encountered all sorts and conditions of Chinese beggars and coolies. But in the crouch and gaze of this mysterious vagrant he saw something that filled him with an unnamed loathing. The length of the fellow's body reminded him of a giant lizard as he sprawled forward on the altar floor. And Langdon remembered with regret that his automatic pistol was lying in his cabin drawer. Otherwise he might not have bothered to explain that he had missed his way back to his schooner, and would have to wait till daylight before he could move.

The wolf stare of the Chinaman went over and around Langdon: it looked in the dinghy and the circumstance of Langdon's extreme youth, together with the fact that he was unarmed. Yet he seemed uneasy at the proximity of a schooner that might at any moment spill half-a-dozen white men across the altar of Buddah.

He rose from his snuggling altitude like a frog in search of a fly. Langdon noticed for the first time a knotted band of red silk stuff about his right arm. Above the red band was a tattooed skull that marked him as a Government official of some kind.

'I was fool enough to fo'get my lantern,' he stated almost threateningly, as he indicated the dark sampan alongside the altar. 'I must, takee your lamp to do my work.'

He paused, watching the young seaman narrowly, his long steel blade slanting into the light.

LANGDON had never been anxious to quarrel with Chinese bandits or professional swordsmen. Moreover, he was not certain of the fellow's real business in the locality.

'The lamp is yours for the evening, Sam,' he said with a laugh, as he passed the ship's lantern into the Chinaman's snatching hand. What followed was a lesson to Langdon in the art of entering a Buddah image by way of the back

door. In vain the young seaman's eye had searched the straight, smooth wall of copper at the back of the statue in the hope of locating a door or passage to the interior. He had seen none. Raising the hurricane lamp to the smooth wall of copper, the Chinaman peered along the face like one reading small line of type. In a moment Langdon's young eyes had focussed a number of microscopic Chinese letters clustered about a slit no larger than a child's tooth. The point of the Chinaman's blade pressed and turned the slit with the precision of a screwdriver. Instantly six feet of smooth copper panel swung forward, showing the dark interior of the Buddah.

The aperture smelt of the dead centuries, of priestly vestments and vanished incense. For a millionth fraction of time the Chinaman remained poised in the aperture, his eyes blazing under the glow of the hurricane lamp, his mouth agape. Across the floor was scattered a small bundle of ancient tapestries that carried the seals of a dozen dead emperors. Wrapped in their perfumed folds were the water-blue Manchu and Ming bowls, inset with emeralds and sapphires. There were vases of ivory with ruby-studded handles, statuettes of soft, untarnished gold, jewelled fans, and miniature peacock thrones that would have dazzled the eye of a George-street dealer.

The Chinaman merely snarled over the heap like a jungle cat that had come upon its kill. Words escaped him that were full of z's, like the buzzing of a pit saw. Some of these z's penetrated Langdon's understanding. He was also conscious of the long steel blade poised within an inch of his throat to make the language clearer.

'You helpee me move evelyting into sampan. You savvy, quick. By cli', I slice you up like one dam chicken if you no hully up!'

Langdon was thinking of the sweet-faced girl seated in the cabin of Balk's schooner, not a biscuit-loss away. If he risked his life now in a scrimmage with this eel-like assassin, Barbara Ingram would face the world with not enough to pay for a meal! Noel had seen bold, bare-handed men tackle armed Japs and Chinamen for the price of a drink. The results were more or less disastrous to the barehanded men, as the British consulates and foreign hospitals could testify. Langdon had tumbled into a bad corner, and wisely his young brain jumped instead of his muscles.

'All right, Sam,' he cheerfully agreed as he stepped inside the Buddah-pit. 'This stuff wants careful handling. The stone floor outside is pretty slippery, so we'll take our time and avoid breakages,' he added, as the hurricane lamp revealed fresh piles of porcelain and art ware within the dark bay of the image.

Only for a moment did the Chinaman exhibit a tremor of superstitious fear at the thought of his sacrilegious act in removing the priest's collection from the Buddah. The next saw him scurrying in and out the opening, depositing the

fragile pieces of porcelain among the rich tapestries in the thwarts of the roomy sampan. He worked with the feverish lust of possession that reminded Langdon of a starved jackal he had once seen at the dead carcase of a sheep.

The sampan's waist, was soon filled with the heaped-up collection from the Buddah. Not once did the Chinaman lay aside his steel blade, not once did his slat eyes shift from the young seaman.

Langdon knew what was coming. When the last of the precious hoard was placed aboard the sampan he would be asked to unfasten the rope that held it to the iron post rail of the altar. The moment he stooped over the knotted line the long blade would descend with professional promptitude on his neck. It was an old trick among the river bandits and junk men, and prevented discussion anent the just division of the spoils.

Langdon felt that his lonely little drama had been played to no purpose. He had hoped for a chance to close with this human jungle cat, but the chance had not been allowed. He saw the brief and horrible scramble that must now take place across the floor of the slippery altar, with Noel Langdon dodging hither and yon to avoid the flashing strokes of the long steel blade. The dinghy offered no means of escape. For an unarmed man it was a death-trap, with a panther-limbed robber striking at him over the gunwale.

Two or three small articles remained within the Buddah. The hurricane lamp had been placed on the altar floor to show the way in and out. The Chinaman was swindling near the sampan, his thumb caressing the edge of his steel weapon. His glance darted from the sampan to Langdon bending over the last article within the Buddah.

'You one long-time in there,' he squalled impatiently. 'Why fo' you no come out?'

Langdon felt that he had guessed right as he emerged from the Buddah interior in the direction of the slanting steel. In his hand were seven sovereigns, the first wages paid to him by Balk in Sydney. There were times, he argued to himself, when seven English sovereigns could do the work of gun or steel.

'Look!' he shouted excitedly. 'Found 'em in the Buddah. There's probably millions more under the floor.'

He thrust the sovereigns into the Chinaman's outstretched fist. 'It's a crime, Sam, to leave so much wealth behind for the coolie rats to dig out. The goods you've got in the sampan will need a buyer. But this English money is the stuff that talks.'

A moment before the Chinaman's eyes had been eloquent of murder. The sight of the gold coins strained his nerves to the point of hysteria. He weighed them, bit them in wolfish haste. A moment later he was inside the Buddah,

crouching over the cracks in the stone floor, prying the age-old cavities with the point of his blade.

'Where, where?' he screamed. 'Come an' show, come—'

Langdon side-leaped to the copper door, his brain sobbing, his throat burning like molten glass as he slammed it from the outside. The copper panel fell swiftly into its groove. Langdon leaned heavily against the panel for a few moments, in the full knowledge that it could only be sprung open from the outside. In the turn of a wrist he had cast off in the sampan, with the dinghy trailing at the stern.

Day was breaking in mists of turquoise and saffron. The schooner loomed titanesque through the breaking fog. The craning neck of Captain Balk became visible over the port rail.

'What the hell you got there?' he snapped at sight of the tarpaulin-covered sampan.

'Salvage, by the holy!' he added with sudden glee. In the matter of a schooner captain's rights to salvage Balk was a legal expert. His eye fell on his own dinghy that had been used in the operation.

'Avast there!' he commanded as Langdon brought the sampan under the gangway.

'Whose property, and whose orders?' he bellowed.

Noel Langdon was full of the meekness that getteth the soft treatment. It was a woman's life and future he was handling.. At another time he might have put Balk in the galley and locked him among his own pots. But this was an affair of the high seas.

'Miss Ingram's property, sir. Didn't like to disturb you last night, cap'n. It's just an assortment of old chinaware and oddments that was put aside for the young lady.' Balk's glance snapped over the tumbled collection of faded tapestry and bric-a-bric in the sampan, while a look of boredom crept, into his eyes.

'Confounded rubbish,' he growled, edging away to the forepart.

Barbara Ingram appeared at the gangway head. In a flash she took in the contents of the sampan. The touch of her hand on his sleeve told Langdon more than signs or expressions of gratitude. With the help of a coolie deck hand the contents of the sampan were transferred to Miss Ingram's cabin.

A sudden shout came from Balk as he indicated the flood-encircled Buddah in the distance. From the gargantuan mouth of the image appeared the head and shoulders of the Chinaman.

Wriggling and cursing, he dropped from the aperture, to the altar and turned his saturnine face to the schooner. Barbara Ingram shrank back at sight of his features, the red bandage, and glittering length of steel in his right hand.

'That man is Zang Ho, the Red Coolie,' she declared faintly.

Balk stared in blank amaze, his binoculars leaping into line with the red bandage and the tattooed skull on Zang's quivering bicep.

'Guess I've heard of that fellow,' he declared hoarsely. 'Belongs to the Songolo prison stockade. I'd know the yellow hound by his badge. He used to rob his prisoners under the threat, of using a blunt decapitation sword unless they assigned their valuables to him. The miserable cur!'

ZANG HO waded to his chin in the flood waters, and then, with a snarling oath, struck out for the schooner's side, the steel blade held between his teeth. Langdon took a cutlass from the fist of the Cingalee cook and stepped to the foot of the gangway.

'There's a good time coming, Zang Ho. You're swimming right into it,' he called out invitingly.

'Come along!' A suppressed scream escaped Barbara as a long grey shadow glided into the channel, its triangular fin slicing the surface of the water. The scream of terror reached Zang Ho. He turned to meet the pair of swinish eyes racing towards him, his steel blade clutched in his long, sinewy hand.

A cloud of screaming gulls and seafowl hovered above the naked Chinaman in the water. The blood cry seemed to wake the dormant hawks on the distant sandbars. The air bristled with swooping wings and hungry beaks.

Zang Ho's eyes clinched as he treaded the water, the blade held like a dagger in his fist, his slat eyes measuring the torpedo-shaped shadow beneath him. The shadow turned as the blade struck down; its spiny length seemed to double across the Chinaman's body with the pliancy of a flogging cane. Zang's blade missed; his shout of dismay was drowned by the squalling of the reef-hawks overhead. Ten seconds later the water was thrashed into a whirlwind of red and white brine where he had disappeared.

Balk wiped his hot face with a kerchief. 'These derved reef sharks are the limit,' he confessed aloud. 'First, time Zang ever missed a neck— and the last,' he added cheerfully.

The freshening wind caught the schooner's sails. In a little while she was racing south from the earthquake belt to the open waters of the Pacific.

Peering towards the for'ard cabin he saw Langdon and Miss Ingram sorting and readjusting the collection of chinaware from the Buddah.

'Always cooing time for some people,' he grumbled as he sauntered up to the wheelhouse. 'Just plain schooner time for others.'

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#### 46: The Bell at Christmas Reef

*Sydney Mail* 17 Oct 1928

'SOMEONE has stolen my bell!' the Reverend Mr. Hammond announced from the step of the mission-house. 'This time last year, you remember, Cherki, the trepang fisher, took our whaleboat and burnt holes in it.'

Malatonga Island shook under the hurricane blasts of brine that thundered across its glittering beaches. The mission-house stood while and square on the lime stone bluff where the slanting palms broke the rush of the south-east trade-wind.

Joan Hammond, in her pretty overalls and peach-like complexion, was vexed over the loss of the bell. Always these native trepang fishers and taro planters strove to add an extra laugh to holiday festivities. How quickly they forgot the periods of famine and plague, when her father had fought single-handed to keep the children alive!

A mile from the mission-house was a commodious trade-room and bungalow, owned by two Sydney boys, Noel Tempest and Carson. They bought copra and oil from the chiefs, trading cotton goods, tobacco, and knick-knacks in return.

Billy Carson was dark-haired and big-limbed, and had fought his way through the rough-house gangs of Honolulu and Frisco before settling finally in Malatonga. Tempest was his partner, a slim, student-faced youngster who loved the island nights and the sound of the seas breaking under the trade-house window.

Their venture with the trade-house had been a success. The chiefs respected Billy Carson as a man who would fight rather than drink or dance. They sent him their best mats and the pick of their sandal-wood cargoes. Their daughters brought seed pearls to Tempest in exchange for coloured fabrics, bottles of perfume, and nickel-plated scissors. But Noel's thoughts were never far from the slim young figure of Joan at the mission.

DURING the early part of the day there had been a rush of native girls to the store. Carson had sold every scrap of turkey-red twill to the insatiable but laughing-eyed daughters of the headmen, who came with garlands of red passion vine in their hair and the fragrance of vanna forests on their shouting lips. They brought gifts of amber and rare coral from the outlying islands, beautifully woven mats, paradise plumes of raw blue and rainbow, vermilion and shimmering sapphire. In return they had taken all the biscuits and nickel-plated ware, the enamelled hairpins, and silver-washed pocket mirrors.

During the first wild rush for bargains things had been stolen, for it was impossible to keep these chattering, laughing island beauties from the enchanted cases of pink and ruby glassware, the brass thimbles, and the funny little picture-books.

The morning was stiflingly hot. The beach under the trade-house verandah was a white blaze. Tempest, in his spotless twill, was attending to a crowd of Tapanua girls, all screaming for lengths of blue shantung.

'Lo, *tafanga, papalagi*. You must gif us blue shan-tun'. Why yous breeng alla thees grey black cotton trade to our Malatonga? These colours are very dead. *Te mate!* You must gif us more colour.'

'I've got to take what those boozy schooner captains bring us,' Tempest retorted with a laugh. 'All the black checks and left-overs. Never mind, girls. You shall have a boatload of blue shantung and gold brocades soon,' he assured them. 'Just now there isn't a yard of blue this side of Sydney.'

He threw the rejected checks back to the shelf and lit a cigarette. 'But I'll give ten yards of yellow twill to the girl who'll tell who stole the mission bell.'

A dead silence. The whispering hush was deepened by the unexpected entry of Naura, only child of a poor Samoan planter. What Naura lacked in dollars and rich mats was more than balanced by the loveliness of her tall, slender figure and face. She was fifteen; her heavily braided hair was drawn away from the Madonna-like brow. She wore a cheap Russian smock and woven grass sandals. Her complexion matched the little ivory crucifix she wore on her breast. The silence grew more deadly as she stepped lightly to the board where Carson was unrolling the last of the turkey twill.

'I want, if you plees, Mr. Casson, enough of blue shantun to complete me a gown.'

Naura followed her order by gently slapping a five-dollar bill on the board.

Carson turned sharply, and seemed to catch his breath at sight of Malatonga's peerless beauty. All the morning he had heard the screamed-out demands for blue shantung from the twenty girls and women who had come in from the surrounding atolls for their holiday bargains. Tempest had told them pleasantly but definitely not to yell for any more. They seemed to eat the stuff. And there wasn't a yard left. And now here was Naura with her little five dollars asking for Heaven.

Carson glanced covertly to where Tempest was bending over the checks, and then drew a deep breath.

'Just five yards I want, if you plees, Mr. Casson, to complete me a gown,' Naura repeated with childlike persistence. 'I hope you have kep' me just five yards?'



The last sentence was uttered in a voice that would have produced water from a burning rock. Billy made secret efforts to reply by lip movements only. But Naura of Malalongi was not inclined to conduct her buying with undue secrecy. She was anxious to show her twenty rivals how to pull shantung from under their devouring eyes.

'Listen, Naura,' Billy began in a craven whisper. 'I've got a piece, but can't hand it you now. That flock of birds watching us will lynch me.'

Naura did not want her blue shantung by stealth: she did not want it passed to her from a back window when no one was looking. She would have it now or never. Noel Tempest looked up from his board as Billy stooped under the counter. On the face of Tempest was a look of stark understanding. The starkness did not fade as Carson, under the fire of twenty pairs of burning eyes, drew forth a short, shimmering length of the unobtainable shantung.

'I give you my word,' Billy blurted across the counter, 'I wasn't aware we had another yard in stock. Take it away!'

Rolling the material hastily into a parcel, he thrust it into her hand. Naura accepted it languidly, stooped to dust away a couple of pink sea-shells that clung to the toe of her sandal, and then stepped out to the beach. A few moments after she had gone the store was empty. Tempest wiped his hot face, and then fumbled for a cigarette.

'That's what I call dirt, Billy,' he proclaimed in an even voice. 'You're allowing this kid Naura to beat us out of our business.'

The blood was in Billy's cheeks now.

'I had to give it her, Tempest,' he confessed haltingly. 'You know how dog-poor her people are.'

'About half as dog-poor as we'll be if we trade on your fancy lines, Billy. We depend on the goodwill of the parents of those girls who saw you hand the blue stuff to Naura. You heard me refuse little Mariana, the chief's daughter, when she begged for shantung. Mariana's old man is worth three thousand dollars a year in trade to us. She couldn't have shantung because you hid it for Naura!'

Carson busied himself among some packing-cases. But Noel of the long legs and dreaming eyes was beside him.

'Another thing, Billy,' he commented pleasantly, 'Naura's engaged to that half-caste fellow Cherki. A big, nasty chap who tries to sell us all that rotten shark oil. He fishes night and day off the reefs. They say he tortures even the sharks. Wraps red-hot stones in his bait, and then watches the poor brutes twist and thrash in their agony. He's bound to hear about the blue shantung from the girls who didn't get any. And I'll conclude my sermon, Billy, by asking where in this island of butterflies she got that five dollars?'

'Her father earns something,' Carson retorted, and went on with the packing-cases.

'Blessed if I saw you take the money,' Tempest murmured under his breath. But Carson did not hear the remark.

Joan would laugh when she heard about the shantung. Everyone petted Naura. Even the dour old Scotch minister thought her the loveli-est creature from God's garden. But there was a limit to allowing Naura to ruin their trade. Billy hadn't the tact of a horse.

They ate their mid-day meal almost in silence. Joan had promised to join them, but at the last moment the loss of the bell had caused confusion at the mission-house. The native congregation had little or no idea of time. Without their bell Joan would have to go round to the huts and plantations and round them up for the evening service. The booming note of surf beat in upon these two lonely young traders. Myriads of sooty-winged hawks planed and drowsed above the reefs.

Billy Carson sipped the one glass of wine he allowed himself on holidays. His mind was troubled over the blue shantung and the thought of Naura. Tempest's reference to Cherki had touched him on the quick.

'What's the matter with Naura?' he challenged, after an unbearable silence. 'You seem to think she belongs to the woolly-haired crowd we had in the store to-day. What you said about her engagement to Cherki has got to be contradicted, old boy. Naura looks for someone of her own complexion.'

'Yourself, eh, Billy?' Carson moved uneasily in his rattan chair. 'I'll answer that, Tempest, in the friendliest way. 'She's better than I am, with my past record for street fighting. In the name of Mike, why am I supposed to be superior to her? Is it because my skin's the colour of a fried pancake, or because my father laid bricks and kept out of gaol?'

Tempest laughed heartily. 'I'll say she's better than either of us, Billy. I shall always think of her as the gamest kid in the islands. Mr. Hammond told me that the week before we arrived the whole settlement was down with flu and whooping-cough. There wasn't an ounce of medicine or quinine in the archipelago. The children in the village were in a terrible state. Old Jimmy Kidson's schooner, loaded with stores and comforts, was lying off the island, scared stiff of the surf and unable to make the entrance.

'The island was dying,' Tempest went on. 'Hammond was down; Joan was at her wits' end with the village threatened with extermination. And old skin-flint Kidson, afraid to risk a boat in the surf, smoking his big cheroot and spying at the village with his German binoculars.

'And then this kid Naura! She trips off to the end of the reef, kicks off her sandals, and shoots like a little fish through the big smokers and fetches up under the gangway of Kidson's schooner.

'Mr. Hammond told me she made Kidson fill up the longboat with stores and medicines, jollied him into lending four boys to man it, and then took a steering oar and brought that longboat through Five-Fathom channel without shipping a pint of water. And now, my dear Billy,' he concluded with a boyish grin, 'you are at liberty to sketch out all the other virtues that surround our little comrade Naura.'

Carson flushed to his hair-roots as he pushed the cigarettes in his partners direction. 'I say she's too good for a roughneck like me.' he growled. 'But if I thought she'd got to marry that black stiff Cherki I'd carry her, sandals and all into the mission-house and ask Mr. Hammond to get busy on us.'

Tempest sighed. In the security of Joan's affections he felt it would be priggish to deny Billy the one spark of romance ever likely to enter his life.

THE night came up black at the length of one's arms. Tempest sat reading beside the naphtha lamp on the verandah. Carson was strolling with a hurricane lamp round the boathouse and outbuildings. Often in the dark he had stumbled over gangs of native boys removing the lids of biscuit cases left on the store-room verandah. Candy jars and boxes of glass-ware had a trick of vanishing into space.

Turning from the store-room to join Tempest, he stood rooted for a moment at the far-off stroke of a bell. It came from the far side of the island in the direction of Christmas Reef, a lonely spot avoided by the natives on account of the spirits from the drowned ships that dwelt there. The bell tolled softly, stopped, and began again.

The effect on Billy Carson was electrical. Never before had he heard a bell toll on that lonely shelf of tide-washed reef. He saw Tempest's shadow in the doorway of the trade-house, bent forward to catch the sound.

'The mission bell, for sure,' Billy called out, with a laugh. 'The heathen is pulling our minister's leg!'

Tempest, was silent, annoyed. If these black clowns thought they could humiliate the sturdy old minister they were mistaken. They could be taught to respect the man who had given them a lifetime of service. The bell notes sounded clearer as the night wore, Carson could stand it. no longer.

'Come along, Noel; we'll give it a look-over. Somebody's hitting the derved bell!'

Tempest followed along the beach and through the dark pandanus, as a huge white moon, the size of a ripe breadfruit, tipped the forest line. Once

clear of the pandanus scrub they came to a low line of glittering coral that formed a barrier across the northern end of the island. It was an eerie spot. The strong moonlight turned the expanse of coral peaks into, a graveyard of leprous whiteness. Crawling to the extreme edge of the shoal, they beheld a sight that drove the blood from their hearts.

STRETCHED on the lip of the shoal was Naura. The Russian smock had been torn from her shoulders; her lissome young body was covered by a cage-like structure having an opening on to the water. Across this opening hung the mission-house bell. The tide being at low ebb, both men were puzzled to know what had moved the bell. Naura's hands and feet were securely held to the reef by a sinnet line passed through some iron staples driven into the coral.

Stooping, Billy Carson tore away the wire cover, while Tempest cut the line, from Naura's quivering ankles and wrists. Her body was warm, but limp from terror and exposure. Speech fell dead between the two men. As yet neither was accustomed to the ways of the Malatonga fun-makers.

Tempest could see nothing but barbarous folly in pinning down a young girl to a bare reef. The presence of the bell was more mysterious than ever. With ankles and wrists bound to the staples it had been impossible for Naura to touch the bell. Yet it had been rung at regular intervals.

'Bellamy.' All the blood had drained from Carson's face as he massaged the trembling limbs of the girl in his arms. 'Be a pal and carry this kid across to the mission. Don't worry Miss Joan or the old man about the bell part of the story. Tell them I'm keeping watch on Christmas Reef for the nigger with the funny ways.'

Without question Tempest took the slim Samoan girl from Carson and stepped lightly across the coral shoal in the direction of the mission-house lights. Joan would be there, glad and eager to succour her unfortunate little friend. He could depend on Billy Carson dealing with the fun-makers of Malatonga.

BILLY lay flat on the reef, his slow-moving mind seeking to probe the meaning of the uncanny situation in which he had found Naura. Through it all he began to detect the sinister hand of Cherki, the shark-fisher. It would be some time before Naura was sufficiently recovered to tell the story. They would have to wait. And then—

Billy's teeth clenched as he turned face down on the cool, spray-drenched reef, he had sworn a year ago never again to raise his hand to a man. All his life had been spent fighting beach crooks and mutinous schooner hands, keeping in place the white bullies who tried to live on the women and girls of these far-

flung islands. In his island home he would fight only for peace and the happiness of the simple traders, who were often at the mercy of drunken schooner captains and labour recruiters.

The sound of a paddle dipping near the reef stirred him. A small canoe shot alongside where the bell still hung above the dismantled wire. Billy flattened his body in the shadow line of the shoal. The canoe hung motionless in the full glare of the tropic moon. The tall figure of Cherki stood in sharp silhouette, a long fishing lance in his right hand. Stepping from the canoe, he made it fast to a boulder of coral. For an instant he stood transfixed at sight, of the torn cage, the strands of cut sinnet rope. Then his glance went across the shoal, and, with the unerring instinct of the tracker, rested finally on the dancing lights within the mission house.

A soft Polynesian oath disturbed the warm silence of the reefs. He turned almost, fiercely to the canoe as Carson whirled to his feet with the speed of a tiger.

'Hello, Cherki,' he saluted with a frozen grin. 'How's the fishing to-night? Plenty of lobsters, eh?'

Cherki drew away as one avoiding a discussion. He was thirty, with the limbs of an athlete and the neck of a bull. The long flat muscles of his naked arms and torso seemed to respond to the blind, jealous fury that began to surge within him.

'I come to feesh, Mahster Casson. No business of yours, sah. This reef belonga me as well as you, sah.'

Billy held himself in check. He would make this fellow speak about Naura and the bell, or fasten him to the reef with his own sinnet ropes.

'I'm going to ask you a question, Cherki. You can answer it or scrap. Who on this island appointed you chief torturer of girls and animals? Who gave you this reef to tie up my friends and play the witch doctor?'

Silence.

Carson knew by the deep, slow breathing of the half-caste, the soft crunching movement of his bare feet on the coral, that he was bunching his huge body for a spring.

He came with a rush and a stab of his long fishing spear, striking full at the white man's breast. Billy Carson hated spears and poison darts. A bullet put a man out of his pain, but the barbed point of the lance in Cherki's grip made wounds that never healed. So Billy bounded away and around the moonlit reef with all the old skill of his ringside days. He knew that the half-caste had more than the ordinary native's daring, and would fight like a panther while the winning chance looked good. And Billy was determined to have Cherki's chance look good— to Cherki.

Round and across the reef they whirled, the half-caste seeking to drive Billy to the extreme edge and into the water, where the white man would have no chance whatever.

'You teenk,' he snarled, pausing and tightening his grip on the spear, 'you can gif blue shantun to Naura, an' make de oder gels laff at me. I show her what I teenk. I show you now, Mahster Casson, how I keel white feesh for a joke!'

He followed Billy along the reef edge as a tamer follows a caged lion. 'I will show you how I tickle de big white feesh, 'Mahster Casson.' They stood almost foot-to-foot now, and Cherki measured his thrust with the precision of a big-game hunter. Billy saw it coming. His iron-shod boot shot out lightly to the knee-joint of the bending half-caste. The kick was unexpected, and, delivered from a stooping angle that disturbed Cherki's aim, spoilt all chance of a direct, thrust.

The half-caste was jolted almost to his knees, which was enough for Carson. Toes dug in the coral, his long left smashed on the half-turned jaw of the lance-man and again as Cherki fought to recover his balance.

'You big black wop! I'll dig the truth out of your heart. Stand up!'

But Cherki had crumpled like a shot beast under a hurricane of head blows. He lay still as death, knees updrawn, eyes staring vacuously.

'All right, my bimbo,' Billy grinned, staring down at the semi-conscious figure. 'Just say why you put that wire net and bell over Naura. Say it quick, or I'll turn you into shark-bait.'

No answer.

Billy reflected swiftly. Then, with scarcely an effort, he dragged the sprawling figure to the iron staples that had pinned Naura to the reef. Kneeling on the flinching body of the half-caste, he fastened his wrists quickly with the sinnet rope, drew them over his head, and ran the ends of the rope through the staples. Roping the half-caste's knees together, he looped them tightly to the two staples near the overhanging ledge of reef. Billy then pressed the wire cage into place over the straight-drawn body of Cherki, so that he lay in a wire tunnel opening on to the deep water.

The bell remained in place.

'You can keep your mouth shut, Cherki,' Billy told him quietly; 'but I've a notion that your patent fishtrap is going to speak for itself.'

Cherki writhed at his bonds, but Billy's head punches had sapped his strength. In a little while he lay still.

Carson stretched himself in the shadow of the reef and waited. He lit a cigarette; yet, in spite of his assumed carelessness of manner, he realised that the shock of his life was somewhere at hand.

THE night had grown stiflingly hot, and Billy was inclined to doze with the gently-crooning tide in his ears. He was roused to a sitting position by a sudden stroke of the bell. Crawling near Cherki, he stared into the moonlit water directly under the reef. Ten yards away a gigantic sea flower seemed to rise from the bed of the channel, spreading its dark stems in the direction of the opening in the wire cage. With almost human intelligence it thrust a searching tentacle into the opening of the cage, brushing aside, the bell violently as it reached for Cherki's ankles. The bell swung back, and was again tilted away as a second tentacle made play in the vicinity of the lanceman's fleshy calves. And again the mission-house bell protested.

A sharp howl broke from Cherki; then a savage struggle to free himself from the fleshy fingers took place, while the pair of searching tentacles sought to tear him from his holding-ground. Billy watched the terrific struggle in silence, Cherki fighting desperately, grimly, to save himself from being dragged piecemeal from the sinnet ropes by the gouging, slimy fingers of the monster under the reef. The branch-like tentacles withdrew leisurely, allowing the huge, dish-shaped body of the monster to, float for a moment on the ghostly surface of the tide. From the centre of this dish-shaped mass a single eye stared at the struggling man inside the arch of wire. Then it sank again, leaving only a single tentacle clawing under the bell.

A bitter oath stayed on Carson's lips. He saw now what Naura had endured each time the fear some creature thrust at her unprotected limbs. Cherki's wail of terror broke the death-like silence.

'This feller octopus, him get me, Mahster Casson, if you go away. You please stay here, Mahster Casson.'

Billy thought of Naura's sufferings and shook his head. 'It's a nice warm night, Cherki, for you and your friend. You'll find those ropes pretty tight. Let the derved fish keep on pulling; he'll soon get tired. Good-night, Cherki; I'll try a stroll.'

ONCE clear of the reef Billy walked quickly towards the mission-house. At the head of the limestone path he came upon the old minister pacing up and down the avenue of palms. He held out his hands to Billy.

'I'm glad you've come, Carson. That poor child Naura has been asking for you. She is talking wild nonsense about her wickedness in taking blue cloth from you in the presence of other women. She says she has been justly punished.'

Billy hung his head, and was about to enter the room where Joan was comforting the distracted Naura. The minister's hand stayed him.

'Perhaps it would be better to wait,' he begged. 'She is wonderfully recuperative and vital, and will forget her adventure in a couple of days. Let her rest a little.'

Just here the muffled clang of a bell reached them. Billy raised his head and beckoned the minister.

'Perhaps you'd like to see the new bellringer, sir,' he ventured, with a sub-humorous grin. 'I met him on Christmas Reef, and had the choice of killing him or allowing him, so to speak, die in the arms of his own little joke.'

In silence the old minister followed across the moon-whitened coral, through the black-shadowed palm scrub, until the breakers of Christmas Reef burst over the high pinnacles of the shoal.

The bell had ceased suddenly. A ghostly hush fell in the interval of the crashing surf. Cherki was breathing hard inside the wire cage as both men knelt beside him. The minister noted a wan smile on his twisted lips.

'Well, Cherki?' Billy greeted with rough good humour. 'Rings on your fingers and bells on your toes. Had enough?'

'Plenty, Beel, plenty!' the half-caste sighed. 'Enough to lasta me alla my life. Listen!'

He jerked in the direction of the lagoon across the reef. 'I hunted um big feller shark in there awhile back. He tore my nets, he smashed a good canoe that costa me a year's work. He drove alla my feesh, my mullet, my schnapper out to sea. So I been hunt him before you catch me an' out me here.

'Just now,' the half caste went on, 'the big feller shark begin to wonder where I have gone. He then smell plenty drops of blood from my ankle that the tua devil make run down the side of reef here. The blood run into the water, into the gills of big shark. So I saw his shadow creep along here a minit ago. He came right up to the *tua* devil, pulling at my ankle.'

'Good lord!' the old minister exclaimed, staring across the water to where the black trail of the octopus was visible on the surface.

'The big shark tore heem in half!' the half-caste chuckled. 'But it was a great fight wit me listenin' here. The damn octopus thought I was his meat.'

Billy cut the rope from his wrists and ankles and then, without ado, began to massage his numbed limbs.

'And... what, are you going to do if I let you return to your village?' was Billy's thought-out query.

The half-caste sat up, nodding gratefully. 'I shall put back the bell,' he promised with a timorous stance at the old minister's averted face. 'And then go to Levuka, where my brother lives. You will see Cherki no more.'

'Get up,' Billy ordered. Cherki stood up. while Larson handed him his spear from the ground. The half-caste accepted it meekly.



'But before I go to my brother in Levuka,' he confessed thoughtfully. 'I must keel the big shark who tore up my canoe and drove my mullet back to the sea. If I do not keel heem,' he added with another glance at the minister, 'he will haunt these reefs when he hears the bell strike in the church.'

They let him go.

AT the door of the mission house Joan met them. She drew Billy aside, where he found Naura in a wide-armed chair, her dark eyes fixed wistfully on the door as it opened.

'Seems to me,' Billy announced cheerfully, 'it's going to be fine.'

It was slightly warm, as the weather experts are fond of saying; visibility good, with prolonged periods of sunshine.

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**47: The Chinese Cat**

*Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney) 12 Dec 1906

CAPTAIN HAYES was loafing on the verandah of the Sourabaya Hotel, an unlit cigar in his mouth. A cable of black smoke lifted across the Straits; later, a bull-headed cargo tramp staggered across the sea-line, steering a southeast course for the island. Her sides were brown and rust-eaten where sun and sea had scoured the naked iron. She hooted her way from buoy to lightship, like a thing in dread of reefs and oyster banks.

The sudden clatter of her anchor chains startled Hayes.

"Looks as though the sea had punched her ugly nose," he muttered. "Rides like a sick man, steers like the drunken end of an iceberg. Guess she is in for a grease up."

Bully Hayes was not an inquisitive man. In sober moments he desired peace and quietness, with an occasional song and a well-vamped piano accompaniment. But the sight of a strange ship coming in from an unknown sea acted like magic on him. He watched her narrowly through his glasses for several minutes.

Shellers, black, brown, and white passed the hotel verandah. Each nodded a good day to the man who had made his name a terror from the Marquesas to the Marshalls.

"Big tramp out der, Cap'n Hayes," shouted a passing Dutchman. "She was down from Rangoon, I hears. She haf no cargo, anyvays."

"She can load here with alligators and drunks," grinned Bully. "I'd like to fill her with pearl, and pawn her in Batavia. Bit uncanny," he added, "to see a big beast like her moving from sea to sea without a cargo. Maybe she's loaded with emigrants for Queensland."

Hayes lit his cigar, and watched a boat put off from the tramp to the island pier. Half an hour later her fat, red-faced skipper plunged along the Jetty, the roll of the sea in his gait, his eyes wandering from the sun-smitten beach to the hotel verandah. Halting at the plorond, he addressed a beachcomber loafing near the rail.

"Seaman by the name of Hayes I'm after," he said, huskily. "Friend of mine; reckoned I'd find him at Thursday."

"He's up on the pub verandah," answered the beachcomber, lazily, "a-drinkin' of beer an' eatin' of Manila cheroots. Don't speak too loud when you shakes his 'and, Cap'n," advised the beachcomber.

"Aye, aye, sonny." The skipper of the tramp passed towards the hotel, and saluted Hayes deferentially.

"Cap'n James Hayes, I believe," he began slowly.

"Guess if my name was on a 10,000 dollar cheque just now, it wouldn't be worth much," laughed Bully. He stooped and shook hands genially with the little fat captain. "Hope you're not after my scalp," he said gently.

"My name's Clint," explained the other, huskily. "Come out of my way to deliver a parcel to you, consigned by a gentleman named Jim Lee of Chinese habits, living at a one-elephant seaport in the Bay of Bengal. Here's his letter, I'll moleton up while you read it."

Hayes took the letter mechanically. "Better drink with me, Captain Clint," he said hastily. "Guess you're thirst has a head on it if you're in from the Bay of Bengal. What's the Chow sent me in the package?" he asked, curiously.

Captain Clint wiped his hot face and grinned. "I ought to have told you at first that it was a live black cat, Cap'n Hayes. I was paid handsomely to deliver it to you at Thursday Island. If I missed you, I was to carry it to a person named Sam Lee, at Sydney,"

"A black cat!" Hayes turned swiftly, a sneer on his lips. "I guess India isn't big enough to shelter a Chow who plays live cats on my wicket." He opened the Chinaman's letter morosely, and spelt through the crooked writing

*My der friend Bully Hayes,*

*I want you to do me one kind favour. Cheque inside letter for £200, payable to you In Sydney. You deliver my poor cat to my brother Sam, who Is well known in Sydney. You will ask why I trouble to send one dam cat so far. Very easy explain. Me too sick to travel much these times. Cat belong to my dear mother in Hongkong, She die little while ago, and ask me to send cat to my brother in Sydney. You kindly deliver cat, Bully. I know you long time in Samoa. Hope you very well.*

*JIM LEE, Hydrapore.*

Hayes scrutinised the cheque closely, and buttoned his white coat.

"I ought to tell you," he said to the waiting Clint, "that Jim Lee is an old friend of mine. Saved his bacon one night in Samoa when a black policeman was throttling him under the pier. By way of gratitude he pays me £200 to carry an old black cat to his brother in Sydney. Well" — Hayes laughed sharply — "I've carried pigs before today."

"I'll take receipt of delivery and the aforementioned drinks," said Clint. "Then I'll movo back to Batavia."

Hayes' 150-ton schooner was rubbing her seaworn shoulders against the pier. Four Kanakas and the mate (Bill Howe) were loafing uncertainly about the dock. For some weeks past business had been quiet with Bully, and since his last dispute with the authorities at Noumea had ended in a bayonet thrust that hurt him badly — he had fired upon a white-helmeted *surveillant*, at the Quai

de la Transportation— he had decided to live the life of a respectable trader in futuro.

A Manila boy walked down the jetty, carrying a small cage on his shoulder. Calling to Hayes' mate he handed it aboard the schooner carefully.

Bill Howe glared at the ticket nailed to the cage, and then at the black moon-eyed cat asleep inside.

"Always thought Bully was a bit daft," he said, sourly. "He'll be shipping cargoes of white rats next."

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Howe."

Hayes stepped aboard half-stealthily, and the loafing kanakas bounded from his treacherous boot ends. "I'd carry a consignment of wild dogs and emus, if it paid," he said to the sulking mate. "Business up here is dead, anyhow. We'll clear for Sydney as soon as my white shirts come aboard. Seems to me, Bill," he added, looking hard at the mate, "that white shirts don't blow on your line these times."

The listening Kanakas broke into loud laughter. Hayes turned swiftly, and spat away his cigar.

"Pass a hose over the deck, you skulking man-eaters, and keep a dry space round that cat, d'ye hear?" As the water swished over the deck he watched them closely. "If I hear the cat sneeze through getting its feet wet, I'll sew a cargo of buttons down your ugly backs," he shouted.

Night found the schooner running towards the outside reefs before a stiff nor'-easter. Hayes, with a bottle of square-face beside him, was brooding over a chart in his cabin.

The mate peeped in at the door, hurriedly; his face was deadly pale, his knees trembled violently. "Cap'n," he whispered, "there's somethin' movin' about the schooner, somethin' with a heye that looks clean through ye. It's the heye of a ghost, cap'n."

Hayes looked up from the chart quickly, and frowned. "Get on with your work, my lad, and don't fill the schooner with ghost yarns, or those Kanakas of mine will be jumping overboard. Try an onion before you turn in. It will keep the ghost at a distance."

"Cap'n," quavered the mate, "there's a heye sittin' on the schooner's rail; a white heye with a face behind it."

Pushing the mate aside, Bully stepped on deck, and halted stiffly. Then he crouched low, while his hair stiffened, and his throat grew dry as a sandpit,

A squat shape was clinging to the schooner's rail. Its face was lit up by a moon-like nimbus, that glowed alternately, emitting yolks of amber flame. Hayes lifted his pistol hand as the thing snarled, and leaped across the deck.

"The Chinese cat!" he snapped. "How did it get out?" He wiped the sweat from his brow hurriedly. "How—"

A Kanaka sprang in the air suddenly, and bolted screaming below. Hayes knelt on the deck, his pistol half raised, and waited. He was not a superstitious man, but the sight of the cat, with the burning face, almost unnerved him.

"Don't want any jadoo cats on my schooner," he said, savagely. "I guess the whisky I drink will supply me with all the faces I want to see."

The cat was not seen again that night, but the following day Hayes came upon it sleeping under a piece of tarpaulin near the pantry. He regarded it curiously, and called the mate. The strange, flat head rested with tigerish stealth on its near forepaw, its long, silken hair glinted in the sunrays. Hayes bent nearer to examine, the hidden claws in the heavily-padded foot, and it awoke suddenly, and blinked feebly at the buccaneer.

"Guess it's only a common tabby after all," he laughed. "We'll let the brute rip. There are one or two old men rats below that want eating out. Poor old puss!" He stooped to stroke its silken back gently. In a flash its claws shot out—a tiny blood mark stayed on his hand.

"T'sh!" He wiped it uneasily. "I'd sooner be bitten by a snake than bled by a cat," he snapped.

Few men would have cared to call Hayes a coward, but if his South Sea enemies could have watched him on his trip to Sydney, shivering by night at sight of the fiery face that watched him from the yards, his reputation as a manfighter and buccaneer would have suffered considerably.

But Hayes brought the schooner into Port Jackson in holiday style. The cat had been captured and caged after days of endless watching and finesse. It was a still sultry night as they entered the Heads. An occasional fishing boat swung past the schooner, as she edged to her old moorings at Dawes Point.

Hayes was eager to be rid of his feline passenger, and he promised himself a new outfit as soon as Jim Lee's cheque had been cashed.

"You'd better take puss ashore in the dinghy, Mr. Howe," he said to the mate. "Anyone will show you Sam's shop. Don't drop the derved animal overboard, or something might happen at the bank, when I'm cashing the cheque."

"Aye, aye, cap'n." Holding the cage at arm's length, the mate stepped into the dinghy, and pulled swiftly towards the Quay. Hayes gave a grunt of relief as the boat vanished in the maze of light and moving craft.

At that time the police had no specific charge against him, and he whistled cheerfully as he leaned over the rail, and counted the steeplelike masts silhouetted against the sky.

A small boat shot alongside suddenly, and the voice of an old Queensland trader hailed him from the port side.

"Good-night, Captain Hayes! Anybody aboard?"

Bully peered into the darkness, and saw a sharp-faced man in white duck clothes looking up at him. There was no one else in the boat.

"Hulloa, Hanks! Met you in Bundaberg, didn't I? H'm, your face comes back like a dream full of sugarcane and Kanakas. How's the missus and kids, Hanks?"

"Well enough, Bully. I'm glad you're here," answered Hanks unsteadily. "Been keeping a sharp look-out for you the last week."

"Your face is sharp enough to wear the edge off a lightning conductor," laughed Bully. "Don't worry over your debts, man. Brighten up, and be friends with the bailiff."

Hanks waved a hand impatiently. "No time to Joke, Hayes. Is the cat all right? I got the tip from Calcutta."

"Ah!" Bully, leaned with studied elegance against the schooner rail. "You got the tip, eh? What might the tip be, Mr. Hanks?" he asked carelessly.

Hanks placod his hand against the schooner's side, and breathed excitedly. "Hayes," his voice was a sharp whisper now, "It's the biggest thing that ever jumped from a Chinaman's brain. The Calcutta native papers blew the gaff two months ago. I heard the news from a Lascar seaman on the P. and O. wharf. There isn't a man in India or Australia besides Jim Lee who knows a word about the cat." Hanks glanced appealingly to Hayes. "Before I say more, tell me if the cat is all right."

"Look here, my son," said Bully, sharply. "Don't come catting me on a dark night. I'm as nasty as the business end of a pig boat. Speak out and don't wear the paint off my clean schooner, sir."

"Is the cat aboard, Cap'n?"

"No; I sent it to its owner an hour ago."

"Yah!" The man in the boat sat back gritting with rage. "Another chance gone."

"Speak out!" thundered Hayes. "What are you jabbering over?"

The man in the boat was seized with a violent fit of coughing. A minute passed, then he sat up, his eyes shining like points of fire.

"Indian native papers reported in June this year the theft of the White Mogul diamond from the temple at Hydrapore by a Chinaman named Jim Lee, late of Sydney and Samoa," began Hanks.

"Fire away," said Hayes sullenly. "Didn't think Jim was smart enough to steal a dead prawn."

"He was arrested," continued Hanks, "but there was no evidence to convict him, and he was released. A dose watch was kept on his movements day and

night. He lived in a hut under the fort gate on the Surimpur-road, within a stone's throw of the temple. He had no relatives in India, no friends— nothing but that one-eyed Chinese oat."

"Two-eyed cat," corrected Hayes. "Stick to facts, Hanks!" he said, harshly.

"One eye, Cap'n, as you shall hear," continued Hanks. "Jim Lee, as you know, made a living stuffing birds and animals, and a clever worker he was at the game. The big diamond went missing from the temple on June 20, but the priests kept the news dark for five days, hoping to trap the Chinaman when he attempted to pass the jewel on. No one had seen him enter the temple, but he might have got in disguised as a low-caste Jat or Jain. A priest had been stabbed on the night of the robbery, but before dying he had scrawled a half-decipherable message on the temple wall, which pointed to the Chinaman as being the thief. Where had he hidden it? The priests visited him at night, tied him to the floor, and fire-spitted him, but he shut his mouth, and bore it without a squeal. After that they watched him like dogs, ready to strangle him the moment he attempted to pass on the White Mogul diamond by hand or post. And the Indian guide books value that bit of glass at something like £50,000, Cap'n Hayes."

"The cat, the cat!" grunted Bully, impatiently. "Spit it out, or shut up."

"There was no chance of the Chow sneaking out of India alive with the stone," continued Hanks. "Transmission by letter or friend was out of the question. The priests had him set night and day. The fakirs in the bazaars knew him for a temple breaker. Everyone in Hydrapore watched and waited. It takes a Hindu to deal with a Chow; but they get left some times.

"One night Jim Lee strolled down to the wharf where Captain Clint's vessel was loading cargo for Batavia. He knew Clint slightly, and, as he stepped aboard, it was noticed by the native who followed him, that a black cat ran beside him, and stayed aboard. Clint passed the animal to you at Thursday. You know the rest," said Hanks quickly.

"Guess I don't!" snapped Hayes peevishly. "Where is the diamond? And what had the cat to do with it anyhow?"

Hanks pressed his brow with both hands as though his thoughts were beginning to swim and dance through his head.

"Great Scott!" he shouted hoarsely. "I mistook you for a needle-pointed buccaneer. Hayes, Hayes," he said wearily, "why did you let the cat leave this schooner? The Chinaman Jim Les coated the big diamond with cat's eye enamel, and set it with the skill of a specialist into the cat's empty socket— just as you'd set an ordinary bit of glass into the head of a man or woman. Then he passed pussy on from one friend to another. See!"

Hayes made no answer. In a flash he was beside Hanks in the boat, his revolver bulging from his breast pocket. "Pull," he said fiercely; "we'll have another peep at the Chinese cat."

Afterwards Hayes only remembered the rush of water as the boat sped to the landing steps. All his life he had fought and connived to grip fortune by the heel, only to discover that a bigger brained man was needed. More often than not he was the tool of unscrupulous traders, Chinamen, Island chiefs, and lying Germans. They used him, as he had learned to use others, for their own profit and convenience.

"For Heaven's sake, Hayes, don't make a scene in the streets of Sydney," gasped Hanks. "If the cat is in the Chinaman's house you can easily get it."

"But Sam Lee will know all about the diamond," snarled Bully.

"Not yet. The Chow in India would hardly blather the thing through the post when it might get read by sharp-eyed *babus*. But it won't be long arriving, you bet!"

Both men turned from well-lit street into a side lane. A drunken larrikin was singing with his back in the doorway of a Chinaman's shop. The door was closed. Hayes looked at the name written over the window, and nodded to his companion.

"The shop," he said quietly, and knocked at the door. It was opened almost instantly by an 18-stone Chinaman, who grinned affably at the two white men.

"Good evening, Sam Lee," began Hayes. "How are the police treating you lately?"

The Chinaman wagged his head with sudden despondence. "Things welly quiet; nothing do anywhere. Wha you want?" he asked politely.

"Fact is," said Hayes, "I sent my mate here with a black cat about two hours ago. I'm a bit anxious about him. Drinks like a fish. I s'pose—" Bully looked hard at the Chinaman. "I s'pose he delivered your cat all right?"

The Chinaman raised his head suddenly; his dull eyes sparkled. "Sailor man bring welly ni' cat to me from my blother Jim. Me welly fond of ni' cat," he said.

"One of the loveliest cats I ever saw!" cried Bully enthusiastically. "Skin as soft as a peach, eyes like a girl's. I hope," he said in a loud pleasant voice, "I hope you ain't going to lose it."

The Chinaman remained rigid in the doorway, smileless as an image. A faint light came into his dazing eyes. "Cat run into back yard lille while ago. Me feed him all li; him come back again bymby. Goo' ni!" Nodding absently, he closed the door softly.

Hayes almost bounded into the back lane, revolver in hand. It was a noisome rear entrance, overhung with ricketty bedroom verandahs and littered with ash tubs. Turning sharply, Hayes looked up and held his breath.



Perched on the wall above was the cat, its big black body nestling close to the wall.

"If it falls inside the Chow's yard we can smash open the gate."

Hayes, with a buccaneer's prayer on his lips, fired.

The black-whiskered face snarled at him for a moment, and clung like a limpet to the wall. At the second shot it pitched down almost at his feet. He stooped, glanced swiftly at its moon-shaped face, and dropped it.

"Gone!" cried his companion bitterly. "Gone, gone!"

A light appeared suddenly at the back window; the face of the Chinaman showed through the blind. Hayes picked up the black cat and flung it with terrific force through the window.

Hayes remained silent for a moment. "Up to me to get licked this time," he said, hoarsely. "The Chows were always a bit too big in the head for me."

Both men heard the sound of door bolts being shot home, and swift upon it the loud laugh of a Chinaman.

**End**