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# Seibert of the Island

BY

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**DAYS OF '49, ETC.**

**GROSSET & DUNLAP**

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*Dedicated to the memory of*

**MIDDLETON MANIGAULT**

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# Seibert of the Island

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# CHAPTER I

## 1

When Dan McGuire, ripened by years, was quite convinced that modesty, which he seems to have somewhat lacked anyhow, was as burdensome as other virtues, and the least useful of all, he wrote out the notes that have been worked up into this story; and being more or less confused, as authors frequently are, in how to start his story, he began in the middle and tried to go both ways at once, like a crab that scurries ahead backwards. He said plainly enough that it was not his story he was trying to tell, but he nearly made himself out as a hero.

He was vain of his friendship with Williams, the famous sea captain, much talked of some years ago throughout the South Pacific. He said that Captain Williams did not really have much of a place in a story about Seibert of Puluotu. This, however, is hardly true; for, though Williams very soon disappears from the scene and does not reappear, it is what he has done, and what people think he can do, and what they would like to do to him, that greatly influences the narrative at critical times.

McGuire came to know Seibert of Puluotu better than he was known by anyone else. McGuire did not like Germans—"Dutchmen" he called them.

Though this enigmatic German and his affairs were almost forgotten years ago by even the island planters with the longest memories, McGuire remembers Seibert as a sort of prophetic figure whose grotesqueness of character—the mingling of sentimentality, brutality, odd simplicity, and indomitable bull-headness—somewhat typified the nation that in recent times brought disaster upon itself, upon nearly the whole world.

Any one of many incidents, widely scattered as to time and place, might have been taken as the beginning; but McGuire chose a San Francisco dance hall riot out of which he and the young stranger with whom he had been talking escaped before the police got there. Soon they came to a chowder house and went in.

The young fellow was a newcomer to San Francisco. He said that his name was Paullen—John Paullen. McGuire had liked him at sight. He was thin, straight, slight, with square shoulders, rather pale, unduly sober for one of his years, and grey eyed. His eyes were a little too much as a girl's ought to be, with lashes so long as to be the only lashes McGuire ever before noticed on a man's face. He was the sort of boy that women love almost instinctively.

Said McGuire, "Many such men in the world, and most o' them are worthless—or worse."

But Paullen had a quiet, unmistakable air of manliness; there was no softness in his features to bear out the unworthy suggestion of the eyelashes.

Now he was no longer neat or even clean. Coat lining showed through the mouth-like rip under his arm. A trousers leg was split at the knee. He looked thoughtfully down along his clothes, brushing half-heartedly at dirty splotches.

Presently he began searching his pockets, taking everything out, and feeling about with the detached intentness of a man whose whole attention is at his finger-tips.

"What's gone?" asked McGuire.

"I—it's gone—gone all right. It must have dropped on the floor back there. I have—have left—forty cents," he said, examining the few coins scooped up from a pocket's depth. "It's gone, and——"

Paullen smiled as best he could.

"Know anybody here?"

"No."

"You can get along somehow till you write home."

Paullen shook his head, and quietly said "No."

He was the sort of boy that must have had a home, that couldn't have come from anywhere but a good home; the mark of hearthstone and roof-tree was on him.

"But there's somebody on earth you know."

"No. Paullen—Paullen isn't my name."

McGuire eyed him appraisingly. McGuire was a redhead with a burned skin, freckle-black. Always he had—or tried to have—a manner of laziness, a sort of misty good-nature. His wide mouth was usually fringed by an expression that was almost like a smile, yet not quite detectable. His long, pointed nose gave an odd, whimsically impertinent cast to his face; and the blue eyes, coloured with a sort of a childhood blue, were partly hid by sleepy, drooping lids. They seemed innocent eyes, though they had looked upon just about all the uglier shapes of sin.

"Who are you, then?"

"Nobody. Just that. At least, to all the people that used to know me. It makes no difference where I go—what I do."

One of McGuire's weaknesses was curiosity. "Who are you, then? What's the matter with you?"

With reluctance Paullen said: "My father is an army officer; I was expelled from West Point. He told me to go away to some place where I wasn't known and take another name, and never to let him hear of me again."

"He gave you some money—an' you've lost it?"

"Yes."

"Umh!" McGuire appeared to be reflecting. He liked the boy. "Paullen, the South Sea trader I work for needs a man or two." McGuire got up from his chair and laid a dollar on the table. "Here's a dollar; you eat chowder till I get back. I'll go get some money to stake you till he sails. You wait."

McGuire went out. Paullen saw his blurred, shadow-like form pass along close to the moist window, and vanish.

## 2

Outside fog-dimmed gaslights spotted the street, and the yellow flames burned dispiritedly under their glass housings.

McGuire cut across Pacific Street, then hurried along a narrow alley into which rickety stairs opened, with faint blots of light lying at the entrance-ways. Behind half-opened street doors women's figures stood with motionless patience. He went along swiftly, but lonely watchers from the doorways glimpsed his shadowed passing, and called to him with quick words.

He went on, twisting and turning through the blurring fog-haze. On the outskirts of the coast—Barbary Coast—within sound of St. Mary's bells, also within sound of the jingle-banging music from gay houses, he turned up a low flight of broad stone steps and pushed at an oaken door, broad and barred with iron hinges, studded by nail-heads, as if to keep out feudal raiders.

The house had been originally built for a lucky miner, who wanted plenty of breathing-space in his rooms and halls. Like other houses near by that had formerly been pretentious, it had fallen into a bad state financially. A shade too close to a wholly respectable neighbourhood to be used as yet by avowed sinners, it was far nearer the bad ones of the city than could be lived in by those who wished to appear good; and so, for all of its remnants of grandeur, it had become a sort of second-class rooming-house, much used by officers and masters of ships—fellows who seldom care a rap for what landmen think of their goodness or badness.

McGuire entered into a hall—once a reception-hall; now nothing but unprofitable space in a rooming-house. Stairs wide enough for three people to have climbed arm in arm came down with a slow turn into the hall. The chandelier that hung from the lofty ceiling was as big as a small pine-tree, but it had been denuded of the glassy splendour and shimmering twinkle that once had made the spacious entrance and stairs festive. One thriftily low-turned jet burned at a tip of a bare iron branch. The deep, empty hall disappeared into a gloom from which strange shapes, ghost-like, might well have emerged in the silence that was like an incantation.

Daylight, as truth too often does, showed that the interior was shabby, cold, chill with meagreness. Old heavy wood in wainscotting was dulled and lifeless from damp that was never reached by sunlight, never driven away by heat. Some of the original furniture had been left, and such of this as had been covered with plush now exposed the burlap-like lining.

McGuire went up the stairs and into another hall; not so large, but, if possible, more dimly lighted than the one below. At the front room door he paused a moment to fit a key, then, entering, pushed the door behind him.

A jet with no more than a thread's thickness of blue flame burned over a flat-topped table. By rising on tiptoes he could

reach the jet; when he turned this the flame came up with a flare, causing the shadows to vanish backwards, as if scattered by fright. They clustered in corners and against a far wall, for the room was very large.

There was a wide grate near the middle of the inner wall, where the miner had wanted a fireplace that would be suitable to the home of one who had slept by camp-fires on the mountain-side. Now the hearth was dirtied with partly-burned and charred papers—handbills, discarded letters, the litter of numberless transients that had come drifting in off the seas and departed, unquestioned.

McGuire bent down to the bottom drawer of the table. With a strong tugging pull he drew it half out. Something made a faint click and clink, like the sleepy rustling of timid things when disturbed in the dark; then the light struck shimmeringly down on a scattered heap of gold coins. He knelt, picking out a few of the smaller coins, which are the less conspicuous when being spent.

Everything that McGuire did was with a quiet, almost a furtive ease; the manner was perhaps lazily smooth rather than furtive, but he always moved quietly, as if he did not like the muscular effort of making a clatter.

Suddenly he looked across his shoulder, staring. Nerves that did not reach his ears had warned him, and he saw that the door had been slightly opened. It had not clicked shut when he pushed it as he came in. A nebulously veiled face was peering through.

He half turned, not rising, but shoving with his knee to close the drawer. It would not close. He stood up, placing himself before it, his hands behind him.

He said with an appearance of bold irritation, "Come in. Come on in if you want, or get out!"

The door opened farther, swinging slowly back.

The woman seemed rather small, but she was heavily wrapped, either against chill or as a disguise; perhaps something of both. She made a dark, indistinct figure in the doorway; there was no break between her dress and the shadows in which she stood. All of her was black except the veil, that was like a mist across her face. That was grey. A tingling of strange perfume reached him.

Slowly, watchfully, she detached herself from the shadows and came into the room. Her attitude was that of both fear and menace, as when one comes upon a thief at work. She demanded, "What are you doing?" but she had no doubt of his thievery.

Said McGuire, almost too smoothly to be convincing: "A fine question—in my own room!"

Through the veil he could see her eyes glisten. She was afraid, much as if she had caught him robbing her own drawers; and her attitude was that of a woman who will defend her own property, no matter with how much fear.

"This isn't your room"—her glance fell and rose from the scattered gold in the open drawer—"you thief!"

If she thought him merely a thief McGuire had nothing to fear from her; so, pleasantly, he asked, "Who do you think lives here, if not I?"

"I know who. You put that money right down. I saw you come. I was waiting for Captain Williams. At first I thought you were——"

A nervous stiffening ran through McGuire's slack, indolently loose pose; and, speaking on the impulse, without thought, he said: "You've made a mistake. Three doors down—to the right—Captain Williams. I don't think he's in, but you might try. If you——"

He broke off, abruptly realising that, whatever else was done, the woman must not be tricked away or frightened off until he had found out what she wanted of Captain Williams.

She regarded him with perplexed intentness. The wrinkling between her eyes was suggested, if not visible, through the grey veil; it could be seen that she was much puzzled, and, not suspecting the depth of McGuire's cunning, she was just about convinced of having made a mistake when he, with the gesture of discarding something, said: "You win. I thought I could fool you. This is his room, but mine, too."

"No, I do not believe that. The door was not quite shut, and I saw——"

Her gloved hand pointed toward the drawer strewn with the colour that makes men mad.

She was hooded, veiled, wore gloves, and was wrapped in a long coat of dark fur. The soft swiftness of her voice, rich, full of colour and depth, stirred up misty memories in him that would not take shape. He was sure that she was a total stranger, even to Williams; otherwise it was likely that she would have recognised McGuire as his shadow.

In fact, no one was supposed to know that Williams was in San Francisco. A man or two knew of a Captain Douglas who had come in off the South Seas with a story of pearls and the need of being financed; but Douglas was not a name to be mistaken for Williams.

McGuire absently took a step from the desk. Instantly she half turned and swung the door closed. It shut with a heavy jar. Then she stood against it, facing him.

"You are wrong. I do belong here."

"It looks like it." Her accusing finger slanted down at the drawer.

Something extremely familiar about her persisted in striking against his senses; it was exasperatingly evasive, and again and again seemed right at the point of being recognised.

With all the frankness that he had, and an almost ostentatious air of laying his cards on the table, he said, "Perhaps I could help you. The captain may not be back to-night."

"I'll wait—thank you."

"But I do belong here. Wait all you like. You'll see. Sit down and——"

As he began to pull a chair toward her, she again backed to the door determinedly. When he left the chair she moved to it, dragged it a few inches more nearly between him and the door, then sat down.

McGuire sagged against an edge of the desk, looking at her, studying her, wanting to make her talk, to feel at ease and talk—say something, anything, that would let him catch a glimmer of what she wanted.

"He doesn't like women, so you had better talk to me."

"Yes, I know. I know all about that. But there are some that he doesn't dislike."

"But always the ones that are pretty. He won't listen to you."

"How gallant!" Her hand touched the veil. He could tell that she was smiling. Without trusting him any more, though perhaps almost convinced that he did belong there, she saw that McGuire was not the sort of person of whom one needed to be afraid.

"But why this time of night? It must be important."

Her tone was quick, spirited. "It is—*very*."

"Ah!" said McGuire, as if he saw a bit of light. "We have been expecting important news. Hardly thought it would be brought by a woman, but——"

"Oh, but you have not expected the kind of news I bring!"

"How can you know that?"

"Because if you had expected it, you—or Captain Williams; I know nothing of *you* but what I saw"—she pointed to the drawer—"—would not have waited for me to come, or anyone else!"

"But the skipper and I expect all sorts of things."

"No, not a woman, this time of night!"

"Just give me some idea. I'll tell you whether it is news or not."

"I did not come to tell you. I don't know anything of you."

"You nearly mistook me for—his name isn't Williams, anyway. It's Douglas—Captain Douglas."

"For a moment, yes. It was very dark, and you came to this door. No one would ever take you for Hurricane Williams!"

She was half scornful, somehow, as if with pride in Williams.

"I don't believe you ever saw him. I don't believe you would know him if he came in now—except by the way he would



scowl at you."

"Oh, no, he would not scowl at me. Captain Williams and I are old, very old friends—more than friends. When we last parted he kissed me——"

McGuire turned away, waving an indifferent dismissal. This was absurd. She laughed low, gaily, amusedly understanding.

It was more than absurd, this woman's—any woman's—saying that she had been kissed by Hurricane Williams. For years, up and down and in and out of all the odd places of the South and Eastern Seas, McGuire had been at the heels of the outlawed Williams.

She sat in all the self-assurance of unruffled prettiness. The sharp toes of her small feet were crossed. She leaned with chin to fingers, elbow on the chair-arm, and she seemed amused.

She was someone he had never seen, he was sure of that; but everything about her made him feel that he ought to remember something of her—everything except the strange perfume that came as if in invisible smoke-like weavings; for a moment it could be detected by a delicate sting, then was gone.

### 3

Presently she sat up, her head half turned, alert, listening.

McGuire sagged more heavily against the table, watching the door. He knew the footfall out there; it was not at all stealthy, yet like the soft, firm pad of a jungle animal.

The door opened. Williams appeared. Whatever his age may have been, nothing of youth was left. A short beard, always cropped, but usually by being hacked away unevenly, curled down his cheeks. A glint of the Saxon colour was there, a hint at blondness, but a slight, obscure hint. Even his hair was sunburned. His eyes had the impact that madness gives, and were deep-set and narrowed from much staring into sun and wind. They widened with menace if anything challenging appeared. Tales of brutal work were told of him; and at times he showed an inflexible justice. Once he had been hanged; in McGuire's words, "He gave himself to a woman, and she sewed him on to a hangman's rope—for a tassel!" So it was said, but no one seemed really to know.

Now Williams paused for a moment, then slowly pushed the door behind him; in that silence the gentle click of its closing was sharply metallic. His eyes flashed from McGuire to the woman; they gleamed from under the cap visor, and were piercingly fastened on the grey veil. He stood tense, as if angered; his hands were thrust down into the side-pockets of his dark, square-cut coat, and anyone would have known that the hands were clenched. Moving only his eyes, he looked inquiringly at McGuire.

The woman had stood up and was lifting her veil, pushing it up from the sides of her cheeks, raising it over the tip of her nose. Her large, dark eyes were expectantly on Williams, and the look was intent with admiration, her whole attitude that of preparing a pleasing surprise. She was only a young girl, pretty, richly dark in colouring, and now almost radiant in her excitement.

"Skipper"—McGuire did not take his eyes from her—"she came out of the dark there, looking for you. The devil knows why."

Williams turned slightly, not facing her, but standing as if ready to walk away. His hard gaze went to her from an angle. He said nothing; there was no interest, not even curiosity, nothing but raw discourtesy.

A trace of uneasiness, doubt perhaps, shadowed her face and was gone. She smiled, and, raising both gloved hands half out to him, said in Samoan: "My captain, I am Tom Combe's daughter—Nada!"

McGuire now saw how in vivacity and tone she resembled the island girls, though in appearance she was very unlike a native; and he understood her amused self-assurance, too. He knew of her, of both the Combe girls.

He had seen the other—Orna, Arna, some such name—often out riding, with pretence of solitary stylishness, twenty yards ahead of her liveried groom, who was a small, ugly, impudent native; and she would look neither to the right nor to the left as she passed grinning natives, some of them relatives, as they trudged toward the village on foot with vegetables and flowers and fruit. Day after day, with the quiet *trop-trop-trop* of the slender pony's hoof-beat, the dark, haughty maiden rode by, aloof, remote, unhappily proud.

But when old Tom Combe looked at her he was proud. His daughter—and like that!

4

Old Tom Combe was a curiously humble fellow, with square-cut chin-whiskers and a round-shouldered slump. Almost everyone thought that he was half-drunk most of the time, but he hardly drank at all—a little rum now and then to warm his old bones, and that watered. He was a gentle, helpless sort of secretive old fellow, with a strange haze in his washed-out blue eyes. Life, after a hard drubbing, had surprised him with wealth and two daughters, to whom he gave everything that he had.

Years and years before—twenty-five or thirty—he and two other men known as Brundage and Waller had come to Puluotu. No one knew anything of them; not many people ever learned much, though in the course of furtive whisperings it was said that they were escaped convicts from Australia. Some fellow said that he had seen a scar on Waller's palm that was put only on the worst convicts. A peculiar scar had been on the inside of his hand.

Waller, a gaunt, bony giant of a man, set up as a trader. He had much luck, though some of it was said to be of questionable legality. He was a money-maker, with hard black eyes and a driving aggressiveness that enabled him to do things that were not finely scrupulous. Nobody could impose upon him, and he gave nothing to anybody—yet everything to Combe, who sat about idly, chewing tobacco and dozing in shady places.

Combe married. Some said that Waller picked the girl, a child of teasing sweetness, a native. Waller never married.

Waller built up a big plantation. He saw the increasing demand for copra, and put in groves of cocoanuts—nothing but cocoanuts. He was jealously determined to be the biggest planter on Puluotu, and he built the biggest house on the island—a big barn of a place—where he and the Combes lived together. Everyone with whom he came in contact was a little afraid of him, excepting Combe, who knew him best. But Waller's gaunt frame, his black eyes, the scar in his palm and what it was supposed to denote, together with his aggressive manner, that might easily be taken for menace, caused people to be uneasy about his anger.

For some reason Waller disliked the Germans. He, and everyone in the islands in those days, called them "Dutchmen"—usually "damned Dutchmen." The plantation that adjoined his on the north was owned by a German named Seibert—Adolph Seibert. Waller was reported to have said at some time or other—at any rate the remark was often credited to him—that he was honestly entitled to anything he could get by hook or crook out of a Dutchman; but as he was not the sort of man of whom personal questions were asked, nobody inquired what he meant, or if, indeed, he had said such a thing. The supposition among the Puluotu idlers, who endlessly discussed other people's affairs, was that at some time in his life Waller had been cheated by a German, and bore the race a grudge. Some sort of quarrel, over money or land—perhaps both—existed between Seibert and Waller.

Though Seibert was a large man, fleshy, of powerful body, he had an appearance of perpetual good-nature, even of heartiness, and seemed always trying to be agreeable. Waller had once called him "a white-livered thief" in the hearing of many people, and for a moment Seibert's big, full round face had been black with the rush of hot blood; then he had turned and walked off, and everybody said that he was a coward.

However, it was admitted that Seibert knew more about tropical agriculture than any other planter, and more persistently than any of the planters cleared out the jungle. Waller, with a sombre air of triumph, frequently said that he would live to see Seibert ruin himself because he raised flowers and shrubs, experimented with cotton, tried coffee, grapes, planted corn and cane, and much else besides cocoanuts, which Waller almost fiercely maintained was the only thing that the island was good for.

But Waller's prophecy tragically failed him. While riding on a slippery slope he had a fall that carried the horse and himself, beast over man, down a mountain-side.

Natives plaited a hammock between two poles and carried him along trails and through groves of his own planting to the barracks of a house (he thought it a mansion) where he and the Combes lived, in great rooms that seemed half empty because they were much too large for their furniture.

The only physician on the island, Dr. Lemaitre, expected Waller to die any minute. At the Puluotu Club, where idlers gathered to drink warm champagne, Dr. Lemaitre who was short and rather stout, vowed with excited emphasis that every bone between knees and neck was broken. Yet Waller lived on, day after day. Combe and his wife, the dainty,

dark, and now sad Aiana, moved in helpless distress about his bedroom.

Waller would lie motionless, perhaps unconscious, for hours, even half-days at a time; then for a little while he would know clearly of what he talked of, but often he was out of his head and said strange things. Whenever this began Combe, with a kind of agitated insistence, a sort of fussy, nervous haste, would get out whoever was in the room and close the door on them. Through all those days and nights he hardly left Waller's bedside; and when Waller began muttering it was Combe who grew feverish, and in a way very unlike his usual hazy-eyed manner he would look about with startled anxiety, as if suspicious of what might be lurking in the shadows.

Waller was a big-boned man, one of the indestructible kind, tougher for the storms he had been through. When he appeared to know what he was saying he advised Combe about business matters, warning him to stick to cocoanuts, just cocoanuts, to plant more and more, and to remember how people had gone to ruin by meddling with cotton and other ventures.

At times when Waller was quiet, sleeping, or in a stupor, lying back half dead, old Combe would sit huddled, elbows on knees, and pathetically stare at the table, littered with papers, catalogues, bills, letters. A child among cuneiform tablets could not have known less of their meaning. Combe scarcely knew one letter of the alphabet from another.

## 5

One rainy night, when the wind was splashing among the palms and mournful creaking went on all through the big house, in which three or four families could have lived without crowding, Combe sat with a cold pipe in his hand and dozed in a chair at the bedside. He sat upright, but his head drooped like a dummy's on a broken neck. The lamp was nearly out of oil, and the flame had sunk to a dirty yellow.

"Tom! Tom, that's rain I hear? It is rain?"

Combe sat up with a start, dropping his pipe, and looked quickly about, as if coming out of a nightmare. Waller had been rambling strangely during the day, and now for a long time he lay motionless, listening. His sunken black eyes were full of fever.

"That *is* rain? You're not just saying it? We played a trick on life, eh, Tom? Now she's evening up on me. Damn life, anyway. I got the best o' her. I'm dying rich—in a great fine house!

"It's all yours now, Tom. Everything. People'll try to rob you. Don't ever trust anybody but Brundage and Williams. Don't you believe Seibert, Tom. He says I owe him—no matter what he says, Tom, don't you ever pay him anything. Hear me? Promise that. I swore I would take it out on some Dutchman. I got the best of every one o' them on Pulotu! If he crowds you, Tom, don't fight. You're no manager. You've been right not to try. You just wait till you can get word to Williams. He'll come. He'll never forget you!

"Ah, I'm glad it is rain—like it was that night in the prison yard there, when they swung three o' them at sunset. Came near being overlooked, we heard. Just did get 'em hung that day. Some kind of a slip like they were always making, as when they gave you eighty lashes for the man in the cell next yours.

"In the yard there they hung three o' them. He was the last. Our gang was last, too. One after another they hung 'em, and us standing there in the rain at sundown waiting for him to die so we could cart him off.

"Raining an' getting dark fast. Us with leg irons on, wearing yellow an' black, me with arrowheads sewed on to show that I was bad. There we stood in the mud, you an' me an' Brundage, waiting for him to die. An' the doctor there, jiggling his big watch and cursing because he had to wait for the third man to die 'fore he could go to his supper.

"An' we stood there in the dark an' rain, and him up there like a darker something than the black sky, with lightning all about overhead.

"Then they kicked him off. He dropped—*cr-r-ack!* No other sound like the sound o' bones breaking in flesh. You don't hear it—you just sort o' feel it in your own neck.

"Right off that doctor said, 'Dead an' damned—curse him! I'm late for supper now!' And off he walked, splashing and slipping an' swearing.

"When we took him up all limber there in the dark, and the wet on him made us think of blood, it was you; you whispered: 'God ha' mercy—this lad's alive!'

"The warder he hears an' says, 'He won't be long when we stick him in his hole. An' no more talking, or it's a supper o' cat tails for you, all you!'"

"Then we went slipping through the mud in the dark an' rain. By that pile o' sacks and lumber Brundage he slipped down, tripping me, then you stumbled, and he fell, too—off the cart. Brundage comes up with a sack o' something—oakum, I think—instead of a man. An' I grabs hold. You too. An' no word spoke but the curses to hide our feelings—and on we go, holding our breath that the warder don't step on the body there an' yell out. But on we go, with the warder just swearing at the three of us there in the dark; and we dumped a sack of oakum in the hole an' covered it with lime an' mud! The lime, it hissed like fire. It knew it had been cheated, that lime.

"And he, before morning, he crawled in among the sacks and stuff. For days he hid there. We knew he had crawled away an' was hiding, because if he had been found we would have been beat to death. An' of course nobody was searching for him. A lad we didn't know, an' had never seen before, but we took the chance to do it just to cheat the damned old gibbet an' the lime-hole that we hated!

"And you an' me an' Brundage, we saved bits of bread and dropped it when we'd go by. Hungry we'd go to scatter it around that old lumber pile. He crawled out nights to get it. He watched days, too, and put our faces down in his head—watched an' saw who dropped the food, an' knew by that who'd saved him from the lime-hole. An', Tom, we know he never forgets.

"That morning a year an' more after, when we were breaking rock up the creek for a road—of a sudden he comes out o' nowhere, with his hands on that soldier's neck. Not a shot or a squeak! For weeks, Tom, he'd been waiting, watching for a chance to get us off. That's his way. He took off that soldier's clothes an' put 'em on himself. He took that soldier's musket and marched us off. Guards saw us from a distance and thought all was well. When we were in the woods he got out the chisels and a hammer.

"We cheated life, us fellows, all of us. She's tried to even up, but we got the best of her that day.

"He showed us the way back through the bush, an' fifteen miles up the beach where his schooner was, an' we were free men!

"It was a German, a big fellow like that Seibert, that got me deported. Ten years. But in prison I was bad. They put arrowheads on me an' kept adding till it was life. But I've squared up all round. I've got the best of life, an' of every Dutchman on this island, an' I'm dying rich. And if Seibert crowds you, Tom, you send for Williams.

"That is rain. I like it. Mildew the copra—but that's your trouble now."

He died a day or so afterwards, going out as a strong man goes, without a word for his pain or a groan of fear as he looked across. He had been cursed, whipped, and branded too much to care what lay beyond.

## 6

When Combe, in a puttering, unhappy sort of way, decided to do something handsome for Waller he had the doctor, who was an atheist, and the French padre, who was Dr. Lemaitre's closest friend, help him to order a big tombstone. Combe's idea—and about the only one he had in mind—was to secure something big, monumental. In time the tombstone was sent from Paris.

Onlookers gathered about and made comments while it, covered with grating and packing, was being laboriously hoisted out of the hold and set down on the rickety wharf, already crowded with rum barrels and copra that were to be taken on board.

Black boys from the plantation, with horses, chains, and a couple of wagons, were brought down to the wharf's edge. Combe stood about helplessly, while idling bystanders said what should be done. The boys did little, and that sulkily. There was chattering, insult, and ironical advice.

Adolph Seibert chanced to ride down to the beach on his grey stallion. For his personal use he had big stallions; his weight would soon have injured any but a powerful horse, for he was a heavy man, with a chest like a barrel. Seibert had a big, round, cheerful face and a high, bald forehead, a big voice, big, fleshy shoulders, and a grinning air of worldly success that was like a rebuke to unthrifty idlers. He was not popular at the Pulu Club, where sometimes he would drop into a veranda chair with an air of slight weariness and talk in a way that disturbed the lotus-eaters dozing in their long cane chairs.

Talking with an aimless wave of his big hand, he would tell what he had been doing—of the cinnamon grove he had been experimenting with, of tobacco land he was clearing, of pepper vine holes he was digging and manuring—he seemed to be always talking about manures and fertiliser—of the new hillside that was going into cane; and of how he had ridden or walked or climbed somewhere.

He would have a drink or two on the veranda—not sipped, just gulped down with powerful suction in that hearty, healthy, fleshly way that so exasperated the half-sickly, heat-stricken men about him on their cane chairs; then with a few loud, careless words, a wave of the big arm, a cut of the whip on boot-top to stir himself, as if his legs were a part of somebody else that carried him along, and he would be gone, leaving a kind of gasping irritation behind. People did not believe in his grinning heartiness; and somehow he seemed trying to make everybody feel insignificant, and with that burly, overbearing manner and mask-like grin of his did so. In fact, he was now the big man of the island. Hundreds of cannibal blacks worked on his plantation—and they worked!

On the day that the great tombstone sat at the wharf's end and could not be budged, Seibert had ridden down for a casual look at what was going on. Presently, dismounting, he strode along the wharf and in among the babblers and loafers. Spurs jangled at the heels of his high boots, a long riding-whip swung from a wrist that was thicker than Combe's arm.

"Ho, there is something that is wrong here, eh?" he said loudly to Combe, who looked away nervously and mumbled something about nobody seeming to know what to do.

Seibert grunted. "Huh! Is that so? I will show you somethings."

He began to give orders. A heavy-faced black foreman of Combe's gaped stupidly, pretending not to understand. Seibert, with no sign of anger, struck the fellow across the shoulders with the whip, and said loudly, cheerfully: "There is no interpreter more better than this." The monument moved. Seibert had cleared square miles and miles of jungle, and knew all about moving things.

When the tombstone reached the little mound, already overgrown with grass and weeds, and was set in place where only a stick had been to mark the head, all Puluotu came to see. There was nothing like it anywhere in any of the islands. It had an angel in flowing skirts, who held a long trumpet to her lips; many wreaths had been chiselled; a circlet of pretty cupid faces looked up from lily chalices; there was an open Bible and the tablets of Moses.

A bystander remarked, "With all that on him, he'll have the devil of a time crawlin' out when Gabriel toots."

Old Combe thought that it was beautiful. The ornamentation had been left entirely to the Parisian firm, and the firm with extravagant courtesy had tried to do enough. The one thing that was slightly wrong was in the name. Life, as a final wallop, had taken advantage of the dead man. The name deeply cut into the stone was "WALTER," but as Combe could not read he did not greatly mind the error. Everybody knew who was meant, which was enough.

From that day on Seibert showed an aggressive neighbourliness for Combe. The big German rode over every day, and soon had just about taken charge of the plantation. He gave advice, and brought over men from his own grounds to see that it was followed. He told Combe, who knew nothing of accounts, that his affairs were in a bad mess; moreover, that he wasn't getting what he should out of his groves, out of his sales, out of his blacks; that the best thing would be to let him manage the plantation, giving statements and figures of what could be done that way. But Combe's muddled head was useless, though Seibert was patient and cheerful—always cheerful—about explaining.

Combe, sure that Seibert planned to rob him, had, with the vague idea of somewhat baffling his enemy, one night gathered up all the papers and books and records Waller had used and hid them.

Then at this time an evil-hearted Fate made life worse for him. His pretty little dark wife took consumption, and its fever ate her rapidly. Combe, old enough to have been her father, went about in pathetic dejection, trying in a fumbling, gentle, silently anguished way to be of help. By the time she was buried Seibert had put his own overseers on the Combe plantation, carried off all the papers and accounts he found, and announced, as if the matter was settled, that Combe ought to be pleased that the management was in good hands.

Combe complained to everybody in Puluotu. He was told on all sides what he already believed—that Seibert was after his property, which was to be the property of his two small daughters. About the only fellow that stood up for Seibert was a labour recruiter, a man that furnished blacks to planters, and his own reputation was not of the best; but he said that the half-cracked Combe was lucky to have a man like Seibert take charge of things; that he himself had had lots of dealings with Seibert, and asked for nothing better than the German's word. But this recruiter was known to be pretty much of a ruffian, and it was known that Seibert was not very particular about how his blacks were obtained, for he was

perpetually in need of labourers. Besides, Seibert was not popular on Pulu. His grinning and heartiness were not convincing, and, though he was always talking of his experiments with an air of triumph, it was pretty generally known that the only thing he made much money on was coconuts.

7

One hot, sultry afternoon two strange men appeared at Seibert's house, which sat well back in a large tropical park, where a gravelled driveway wound up from the road through trees and along terraces until, half circling a spread of lawn, it passed the wide veranda.

A native boy tried warningly to tell them that the big master was taking his after-dinner sleep; but the lean, taller man took the servant by the ear and said, "Lead on"; and they were led.

Seibert in a darkened room lay on his back, breathing heavily and perspiring. His big, round, darkly-red face was moist; his undershirt was wet.

The tall, lean man, with a sort of authoritative roughness, prodded him in the side, saying, "Wake up, wake up, Seibert. We're here on business with you."

Seibert grunted in a kind of confused anger and sat up, staring blankly, with a sort of slow-witted daze, and apparently with wrath gathering at the back of his head. He often had dealings with hard-faced strangers; that was the way he got many of his black labourers; but nobody had ever taken insulting liberties with him. These fellows had the aspect of ruffians; there was a quiet but unmistakable air of menace about them.

The tall, lean man, with the shaven and more sinister face, introduced himself abruptly as Brundage, Tom Combe's new manager; adding: "We've come for a settlement!"

"You are scoundrels!" Seibert shouted, standing up in dazed wrathfulness. "I know you, you Brundage fellow!"

"And we know you," Brundage replied coldly.

"You are a scoundrel, too, like that Waller was!"

"Quiet!" the other man said, with a sharpness as startling as the unexpected discharge of a gun.

Seibert for the first time gave him a careful look, and recognised him, partly from descriptions, and perhaps partly because inter-island rumour frequently connected Brundage's name with Captain Williams, who was a sort of pirate, greatly disliked by planters owing to his practice of taking what he needed in the way of stores and equipment from "blackbirders"—recruiters that furnished labour for plantations. Nearly all the plantations winked encouragement to rascals that sailed under the American, or German, or French flag, so they would not have to obey British labour recruiting laws. Williams was said to have caught recruiters and made them even put their black cargoes back on the beach; it was also said that he was mad; that he hated white men; that he had been more or less casually hunted and chased so many years without success because cannibals everywhere regarded him as a friend, and he could safely stop in remote bays and be supplied with food, water, and wood where only a heavily armed vessel would have dared to drop anchor.

"You have been a thief," said Williams, his eyes like the polished muzzles of two rifles.

Seibert's big body appeared actually to swell, to enlarge, as if anger had a distending force; his round, darkly-red face grew purplish; and his hands, crumpling into huge fists, came half-way up. He shouted: "That is a lie! A lie, you pirate Williams!"

At that, Brundage, who had a lean, cold, sinister face, cast an apprehensive glance at his captain; but Williams remained motionless as, with almost the rapidity of repeating the multiplication table, he began to check off, from memory, the amount of copra Seibert had sold from the Combe plantation, when and to whom, and the inadequate sum he had returned to Combe. It showed that he had, in some way, checked up on Seibert with amazing precision.

Several times Seibert appeared trying to interrupt. His big mouth, with its coarse, stiff lips, would open, gape, close, re-open, as Williams went from fact to fact, speaking without gestures and in a low, hard, cold voice.

Brundage had turned to a pigeon-holed desk that was in the room, and with the careless swiftness of a thief, indifferent as to the state in which he leaves things, began to go through the papers.

"Here! Here, you keep from that!" Seibert shouted, taking a step toward the desk; but Williams placed himself before Seibert, who then glared blankly, as if he had suddenly lost what he had in mind and must search through all of his thoughts to find it again.

With almost a roar, as if the idea had come propulsively back into mind: "Waller he owed me more than what I took. For years I must wait to get my money. I made money for old Combe, who is a fool, to pay myself back too. Look how I cleaned his groves and spread manure!"

"Why not?" said Brundage grimly across his shoulder. "At the rate you were going you would have owned it all in a year or two!"

"Waller owed you?" Williams demanded. It was evident that he did not believe such a thing.

"*Ach!* It was a Yankee trick."

"Waller was a friend to me. Prove his debt and I'll pay it."

"Bah! You think in a swindle he would give me proofs, that fellow? No, not that fellow. That money he owed me twelve years, then he died!"

"Tell your story."

"You I will tell, though I have told nobody. He come to me and he said, 'Seibert, you have been looking for a schooner.' 'Yes, that is everybody's business. They all know it.' 'Seibert, there is one young trader over in town, and this fellow needs money bad. His schooner—she is over a hundred tons and five years old—is in the bay. I have here the option on her. You need a schooner to carry all your copra to Apia.'"

"So I do need a schooner."

"Waller he says, 'I paid him one thousand dollars for the option. The price is fixed at four, and that is cheap. He is a fine young fellow, and needs the money quick. I don't need a boat, so you I will let have the option for just what I have paid.'"

"Waller he showed me that option, and I know that four is cheap for a schooner like that. I need that schooner, so I pay him one thousand dollars. With the option made over to my name I go to the bay to find my schooner. In the bay it is all right—in the bottom of the bay. That trader fellow is gone to Apia. She had bumped herself on the reef. To that rascal Waller I take myself."

"'Waller, that was a fine joke. Here is that option thing, and I want my thousand dollars.' He says, 'Oh, is that so?' and he takes the option. Then he says, 'I am glad you think it was a good joke. So do I, for I have made another damn Dutchman squeal. Besides, that young fellow needed the money, and I couldn't afford to lose the thousand I give him.'"

Brundage, with his hands full of papers, turned and chuckled grimly: "Clever, clever, Seibert. You lost a thousand, and you have taken four from Combe in six months. You grow rich by such losses."

"To good interest I have the right. I lose that money for twelve years when I need money. I told Combe, too, I must have something too for my making him some more money. I put my labourers over there. I took ten per cent., and in two years I would have made his yield bigger than twenty more. In a few years by himself he will have no things left but beetles and weeds."

"Strange, Seibert"—Williams was speaking with slow intensity—"that you never told anyone of that until now."

"Think I want to be laughed at for a damn fool? I keep my mouth shut when I have troubles."

Seibert appeared to have lost his anger, and he seemed almost good-natured, agreeable; there was even a trace of awkward heartiness in his slightly rueful manner of relating the trick that he said Waller had played him, as if he wanted to smooth matters over; and his attitude was not convincing. He was a big, powerful man, round-faced, coarsely featured, with front teeth as large as an average man's thumbnail, with no ease of manner or smoothness of gesture; and his effort to be pleasant at this time appeared almost grossly affected.

"Why didn't you make *him* pay? Why steal it from poor old Tom Combe over a man's grave?" Brundage sneered coldly. Brundage's face was lined and lean and hard.

"Bah! That would have been a fight, and I am no pirate, to kill somebody for some money!"

"No," Brundage answered contemptuously, "but you steal it from a poor, broken-down old devil."

"Nothings I steal, you Brundage! I take what is mine and make no troubles."

Williams answered with finality, "You have lied."

Seibert made a hoarse, deep-throated noise—something of a grunt and growl—and half lifted one of his thick arms. His face now became, not purplish as before, but vividly red, as if shame mingled with anger; and for a moment it appeared that he was about to strike at Williams, who remained perfectly motionless, his hands at his sides, and he met Seibert with a challenging glare that had in it the strange look of madness.

Presently Seibert lowered his arm, and, turning away, dropped bulkily into a chair, where he sat with downcast sullenness, seemingly a little dazed, his face otherwise heavy and mask-like.

He said nothing more, and it was only at parting that either of them spoke to him again; then Brundage said: "Seibert, hear this and remember it. Keep clear of old Tom Combe, whether I stay on the place or not. And if you try to make trouble over this, every white man from Apia to Sydney will learn just what kind of a low thief you have been!"

Seibert sprang from his chair, rising with remarkable quickness for one of his great size; his arms flew out, and the muscles of his thick, heavy face worked as if he was being strangled; but a moment or two later his manner changed abruptly; discretion, self-control, fear, whatever it was, influenced him, so that almost in an instant his arms fell, and his face again became dully expressionless, his eyes a little dazed.

## 8

That afternoon old Combe walked moodily about his house, up and down the veranda, in and out of doors, all through the great, lonely, barn-like building. When night came, and his friends had not returned, he grew afraid that something had happened, and walked out among the trees to the road. The stars danced overhead in twinkling multitudes.

Combe was sure that something must have gone wrong. Seibert was a powerful man, with servants about him, and overseers that went armed.

For all of his years as a convict, Combe had never hurt anything more than a few hares in his boyhood poaching days, for which he had been deported; and though there was no sternness in his nature, his helplessness was not due to a lack of courage, but rather to a fuddling uncertainty of purpose. But now, as fears increased, and dread gave stimulation to his imaginings, he suddenly wished there were no children in his home; then, with a chill, ague-like feeling all through his body, he upraised his trembling arms in the shadows and swore that if his friends had come to harm, that he would take a pistol and go to Seibert and shoot him. The excitement of thinking such a thing caused him to shake from head to feet, and his mouth became so dry that he could not speak his oath aloud, though he tried.

Presently he heard the soft clatter of hoofs—the *cloof-cloof, cloof-cloof, cloof-cloof* of men riding rapidly and easily. Dark forms emerged against the skyline as the road along which Combe peered came over a rise, and he saw that they were returning.

They swung themselves from the saddles, and, without speaking, walked rapidly to the house, where Combe, shambling nervously, went before them into the "office," saying that he would make a light.

This had been Waller's bedroom, and the bed remained. He had built a house large as a barracks, and used but one room of it.

Combe fumbled with a lamp, breaking two or three sulphur matches that he tried to light; and when the wick took fire he puttered for a time, trying to trim it by pinching with his fingers, then couldn't recall where he had set the chimney; and searched from table-top to the floor. He adjusted and readjusted the chimney, doing what he could to delay facing about, for he was sure that they had failed or they would have spoken.

Then Brundage, with long, unhurried step, crossed to the desk and threw down a package of papers as he said in dry, hard tones: "Tom, you're a damned old skinflint. Seibert says he'll pay, just to be neighbourly, but if he'd known this was the way you were going to treat him he'd never have come near you. He won't any more, ever. He said so."

Williams said nothing. He was grim, silent, alert, waiting to go. Combe stood tremulously—the lamp was behind him—looking from Brundage to Williams, trying to say something, wanting to offer something, to give up something; but there was nothing that he could offer, and little that he could say, for his was not a glib tongue.

With an air of putting himself out of the scene, Brundage sat down in the chair by the desk, stretched out his long legs,



leaned back, and, scratching his leathery chin, looked with a glint of amusement at Combe's troubled awkwardness.

He took two or three aimless steps forward. His stoopshouldered silhouette was blotted against the lamplight, so that the agitated old fellow appeared grotesque.

He said to Williams, "You know how I feel, but it don't matter 'bout me. I—I——" His voice got away from him and squeaked. "I—I'm old—but——" Again the squeak. "It's *them*. I want them to have what money gets. I want——". An idea came. His voice rose shrilly. "I'll get them—it's for them to thank 'ee!"

He shuffled to the door. His arms hung loosely, as if tied to his shoulders, and jerked shakily as he walked. He opened the door only a little, and edged through hurriedly, as if slipping away. He called, but no answer came. He went along the wide, dark hall, calling.

From far off through the gloom there was a child's thin answer.

"Come here! Come here! Or'na dear, Nada darlin', come t' daddy!"

A hurrying patter of bare feet over the mats, then two lithe little shapes emerged from the darkness with a bound, and grasped him, clinging fast, holding on with impetuous expectancy, demanding why he had called. He often tried to surprise them in this way with something that they wanted.

He brought them along with him down the gloomy hall. They were at once a little awed by the silence and strangeness in his manner, and held tightly to his arms. He seemed so changed that it brought to them the feeling that their mother had died again.

He opened the door wide and urged them in; but they timidly held back, peering through with animal shyness at the stranger, grim and motionless, his grey eyes on them.

Combe coaxed anxiously, but they would not move except to shrink more closely against his legs, until Brundage, from across the room, spoke. They crossed to him with a breathless little scurry, and Oreena, the younger got around behind him, but Nada stood between his knees. She felt companionable with Brundage. Very few persons ever did.

The ill-trimmed lamp fretted smokily, so that shadows bounced and leaped about the room like bodiless devils trying to dodge through the light. The children gazed with a kind of wide-eyed shyness at the strange, roughly-bearded man, whose eyes alarmed them; and Brundage leaned back with a half-smile at Combe, who, now near the centre of the room, felt the need of making something of a speech, of saying what would impress his children so that they would always remember this moment, and something, too, that would be valued by the sternly silent man of whom Combe himself was always a little in awe.

"Children—Nada, Or'na dear—I want you—here——"

He gestured boldly, forgot what he meant to say, paused with bearded mouth a-droop, waiting for the next word to come through, and it did not come.

After a moment's hesitation he blurted desperately: "He's done more for you than your old daddy's ever done——"

This made the children open their eyes a little wider in distrust, for there are few things that childhood resents so much as a rival to one that is loved.

"No matter what we ever do, we ain't begun to pay him back——"

It was painfully like a hopeless, dreary debt that would follow one down to the grave, and old Combe's voice was pitched to melancholic shrillness.

Brundage smiled that hard, lined smile of his, eyeing Combe.

"We wouldn't ha' had no house 'r home but for him, an'——"

Williams showed something very like a trace of discomfort. He shifted his feet slightly, raised a hand no higher than his shoulder, and, glaring with disconcerting severity, said in an abrupt, unchallengeable way: "Combe, I'm leaving for the bay and need another horse."

Combe, relieved by an excuse to get away, almost stumbled over his own feet in hurrying through the door as he went to call up a horse for the hard climb across the ridge to a well-hidden bay where a little black schooner lay concealed.

Then with a slight gesture, and "I'm off," to Brundage, Williams turned to go. They knew each other too well to need

handshakes and fair words at parting.

But Brundage called, "Skipper, here are these two young ladies that want to meet you. Children, this is Captain Williams—Hurricane Williams."

Their father—it had been like him to do just that—had neglected to say who this stern, forbidding man was; but at the sound of his name they knew him for that half-legendary personage always mentioned in their home with praise and a touch of awe. He was to them like a remote guardian, a powerful, just man, associated in their childish fancies as an equal with many figures in historical stories.

Under the pressure of Brundage's hand, Oreena, a slim little thing of seven, edged forward as the patient, heat-faded governess had taught her, making a dainty curtsy which looked very odd in that nickering lamplight, coming from a bare-legged little maid with loose hair flowing down her back.

Williams, half stooping, looked at her with an intentness like great hunger; but before he spoke she had backed away, afraid of his eyes. Nada the impetuous, the elder by two years, swept at him with arms out-reaching and closed on his neck.

Straightening, he raised her, held her, looked at her, pressed his face to her cheek, and put her down without a word.

Abashed by her sudden daring, she darted back to Brundage and hid her face against his breast.

Williams did not speak, but turned and went from the room.

Now, something over ten years later, Nada had come to him in a San Francisco lodging-house.

## 9

Nada, eagerly half-smiling, waited expectantly for him to speak. The veil had been bunched in cobwebby layers on the red velvet hood, exposing her face, rich with dark colouring. The black strings of the hood were tied in a bow at one side of her chin.

Williams looked at her with piercing intensity, as if he was trying to get through the years that overlay this woman and see again the child of ten years before. Now he saw a girl of small, shapely body, dark eyed, with full, soft, flexible lips, and every curve and line of her little amber-tinted face hinted at a merry impulsiveness; but he looked at her so long, so penetratingly, that she began to feel a little uncertain, and her pretty face clouded.

Afterwards, when he knew her well, McGuire said, "A child then, with no harm in you. And you'd come back to him a woman, something he dreads, hates, is afraid of. The ten years between were half your life. To him they were hardly more than the wakeful passing of a night. An' he didn't know what you wanted—just to have somebody killed, or another kiss."

At last, making quite as much statement as question of it, Williams said: "You are in trouble?"

Nada's lips burst into a smile, and a little gloved hand darted out at him, as quickly she said: "No; you are!"

He was stiff as an iron man, and watchful; far from sure of her, though she was from among his friends.

"How!" he asked, without interest.

A moment before her lips had flashed into a smile and her eyes had sparkled; this instant her face was slightly shadowed, and a glow of sadness appeared far in the depths of the dark eyes, as if there was something unpleasant in why she had come. Her glance turned inquiringly toward McGuire, then again to Williams. No one spoke or gestured, but she knew then that McGuire, too, was expected to hear whatever she had come to tell. He had edged back upon a corner of the desk, and waited with an appearance of idling.

"To-night I came here straight from Alan Penwenn——"

McGuire straightened, turning quickly toward Williams; but not a flickering of surprise had crossed Williams's face, and he merely continued to look at her and wait.

Penwenn was the owner of many ships. It was through the great wide doors of his firm's warehouses that much of the Orient's exotic merchandise came into the States. The fortune of the Penwenn family had been founded by a hard-boned Scotch grandfather, who had been a great sea-gambler and married the daughter of an old Spanish family. Young

Penwenn, as his father and grandfather had done, occasionally turned from regular business to buy up wrecks, listen to tales of lost treasure, and he liked a bit of a gamble—a wee little bit of a gamble; not much of one, for he was cautious, and thought himself a far shrewder man than his father had been.

"'Nada,' Alan said to me not two hours ago, 'you are a little South Sea savage, and you have heard of Hurricane Williams?'"

"'Heard of Hurricane Williams!' I said, and would have told him what I really knew, but he gave me no chance.

"He said, 'The Penwenns are seamen, Nada, and right now I am to windward of that rascal. I've got him—just like *that*!"

"And he pressed his finger and thumb together right up against my eyes to show me how he had you, Captain Williams.

"He said, 'And it is Alan Penwenn that will have his name in all the papers for capturing that blasted pirate. It's in the Penwenn blood to do things on the sea. That old grand-dad of mine made it lively for rascals. Then won't you be proud of me, Nada?'"

"Then I most surely did not tell him anything! I got him to talk, and I came at once here to tell you. Look out for him, Captain Williams!"

In some way hardly visible, Williams's expression toward her had changed without softening. It may have been that his feeling was sensed and nothing seen.

McGuire liked her, liked the flashing movement of her pretty lips, the impulsiveness, the emotion in her; the little body was vibrantly intense, and her small hands had flown about in expressive gestures, acting out her scorn.

## 10

This was how Williams had come to have dealings with Alan Penwenn.

In his prowling and dodging about, criss-crossing from one out-of-the-way place to another a little more out of the way, Williams had from time to time found oyster-beds well worth fishing. Fine shell was as good as gold ore if got to market; pearls better than nuggets, and far more scarce.

Williams had made trouble for many persons, and as he was known to most of them by sight he could not very well go into port himself and sell his shell, and if he turned it over to a trader on a share-and-share basis the chances were that the trader took what care he could not to meet with Williams again.

Now, feeling an unusually strange need for a comparatively large amount of money, Williams had ventured on a new plan. He hid the pirate under Captain Douglas, South Sea trader, and hoped to interest some man that had large affairs on the sea, and who could easily dispose of shell in whatever quantities it might be brought. As he was more likely to be recognised in an Australian port than elsewhere he had come to San Francisco, bringing a hundred pounds or so of good specimen shell.

He called first at the office of Penwenn, Penwenn & Co.

An old, one-armed fellow with a roll in his legs and bright buttons on his coat took the name of Captain Douglas to Mr. Penwenn; and after a long time he came back with an air of humbleness to say that Mr. Penwenn would see him at once.

The one-armed man led on, rolling down the wide hall like a dismayed clipper in a seaway. They passed an open door, where bareheaded men with pens behind their ears lay peeringly against a high, sloping desk, as if grappling and pinning down the ledgers before them; and still another doorway, that showed a cavernous store-room in which queer odours mingled, swirling the thoughts to far Eastern market-places. A row of closed doors, then one with a highly-polished brass plate: "Mr. Penwenn, Jr."

Mr. Penwenn, Jr., had become the only Penwenn; but the firm's name remained unchanged, and "Jr." stayed on the brass plate, which was shined by the one-armed sailor every morning.

The office was small and filled with big chairs, worn slick by the heavy bodies of sea captains, for a captain just ashore sits in a chair with much more weight than can be accounted for by gravitation. Many dust-covered things were set about on the shelves—a broken nautilus; a small jade god—or demon perhaps; a lacquered box or two; a chunk of sandalwood; and strange plumes from an unknown bird. Under glass was the model of a Penwenn ship, and about on the walls were pictures of other ships and shipping scenes. On the top of Mr. Penwenn's desk the photograph of a pretty

young woman smiled perpetually through a heavy silver frame, through which the faces of other women, one after another, had peered, and listened to the strange jargon of sea-trading, echoes of storms that had smashed things, mutterings of unruly crews more dangerous than the storms.

A tall, slightly stooped man, somewhat above thirty, got up cordially to meet Williams.

Mr. Penwenn was something of a polished man, though when out for a pleasurable evening—and he went out frequently—he liked the gaiety to have a good deal of noise. His rather long face was angular, with all the bones showing. The light eyes—a chilling blue—were steady as bits of crockery, and as lifeless. His fingers were long and bony—very long, yet not without a certain grace in their movement.

It was told of him that he never forgave an injury. His grandfather had been a granite-headed Scotchman, and the Scotch blood had come down to him mixed with Spanish. In his dealings with men he was smooth of manner, a little overly gracious at times, yet proud of his inner contempt for them. Socially he presented a smoothly careless aspect, engagingly polite, but somehow ironic except toward women that pleased him. He was fastidious, very careful of his personal appearance, and with a poise that suggested a rather supercilious air when he was not deliberately courteous. His friends knew that he had a weakness for ideas that seemed shrewd; that he liked to be praised, even pretty thickly, and talked about favourably; and that if his vanity was hurt he was implacable.

He said with a thin-lipped smile that he was pleased to meet Captain Douglas. Would he not sit? And have a cigar? Penwenn flipped open the lid with a generous flourish. No? Ah, excellent tobacco though. And what could he do for the captain?

Williams told him in few words, and showed a small handful of pearls, each wrapped separately in a little chamois bag, and an ounce or so of seed pearls. He mentioned the specimen shell on the *Islander*, out in the bay. He knew the elder Penwenn had occasionally gone into ventures of the kind, and Williams offered to show the way to the grounds and get the shell out if Penwenn would do the marketing and furnish a ship.

It was, if a little unusual, not an unreasonable offer. The main thing was that Penwenn could market the shell at a better advantage, and sell what pearls they found at three or more times the price a trading captain could demand, since such a captain would be at the mercy of swindling buyers; also Penwenn could furnish a hold that would bear off more than a little trading schooner, and the grounds could be stripped the first trip.

Mr. Penwenn was remarkably easy to interest. He spoke of his pleasure in taking a chance on out-of-the-way ventures. His father and grandfather, he said, had put ships to sea. It was in his blood.

Mr. Penwenn's interest soon grew to enthusiasm. The next time that Williams called he was even more cordial, and extended an invitation to dinner, hinting that it would be a lively dinner; and Williams, with no grace at all, refused.

To bind the bargain between them, Penwenn gave a cheque and took the pearls; this was accepted, cashed, supplies bought for the *Islander*, and the remainder of the money Williams threw into the desk drawer.

Penwenn had said that they would have to wait until the *Molly McDonald*, overdue with grain and wool, from Sydney, arrived. She would be the ship for the clean-up.

Williams had waited; and McGuire, dipping from time to time into the drawer, loafed about and drank more than would have been good for two men.

This very day the *Molly McDonald* had come. A Penwenn tug met her outside the bay, took her by the nose, and, impatiently hustling her through the Golden Gate, shoved and bumped her into the dock where she belonged, and, lazy hussy, should have been long before.

Nada, at the eleventh hour, came to them with the story of Penwenn's treachery.

## 11

"What does Penwenn intend to do?" McGuire asked.

Nada answered, but addressed Williams: "He said that if you were arrested here, in San Francisco, a policeman or two would get all the credit. It is the credit he wants. He likes to be talked about.

"He told me that at first he planned to go on the *Molly McDonald* and when all the shell was on board to take you

prisoner. He thought it would be a great joke, he said, to keep the shell and pearls and get the reward, too, for capturing you."

McGuire made a slight, queer, chuckling sound.

"But he said that would take two months at least, and he said that he could not take so much time away from his business. So——"

"So?" This from McGuire. Williams continued to listen as if it was of someone other than himself that she talked.

"So"—her lips moved like little ripples in the wind—"for fear you might grow suspicious or try to go away on your schooner—just slip out some night—he got you to tie up at one of his wharves. Now, he says, you can't slip away without pulling into the current with a rowboat, and he has men watching the *Islander* to stop you if you try to do that. And he isn't going to use the *Molly McDonald* at all. He is going to tell you to start first on the *Islander*, and the *Molly McDonald* will follow, but his yacht is out in the bay, and he says that it is the fastest schooner anywhere on the Pacific Coast, and he has put cannons on his yacht. 'Six pounders' he called them. And about two hours after you are outside the Golden Gate he intends to follow on his yacht, the *Flying Gull*, because he wants to catch you on the high seas. He told me that you did not have a cannon on your *Islander*, and that it would be easy."

Harshly, with distrust, Williams said: "You have his intimate confidence, it appears."

Nada's face flushed, and a wounded look came into her eyes before they glanced down for a moment to her hands. Her fingers plucked nervously at one another. Then, lifting her head, she replied: "He knows that my father is a planter, and that all planters hate you, Captain Williams. And he *does* like me." Quickly, defensively: "But I never, never have liked him—much. Now I *hate* him!"

Williams nodded once, slightly, but what he meant no one could have told; and he looked at her steadily, recalling the photograph that he had seen on Penwenn's desk.

"But how the devil," McGuire cried, "did he find out the skipper was Williams?"

"The doorman—an old sailor—knew him."

McGuire swore a mild oath, striking his knuckles against the desk top. "Your usual luck, skipper!"

Williams looked at him, then at Nada; but he said nothing, and a moment later walked away, while they followed him with their eyes. He went to the end of the enormous room and was lost in the dimness.

"What will he do?" Nada asked breathlessly.

"He'll come back pretty soon as though nothing had happened. That's about all—all you'll see, anyhow."

A small gloved hand reached McGuire's arm, gripping it; and she demanded eagerly, in whispered excitement: "But what will he do—just *what*?" From her early childhood she had heard stories of his daring.

McGuire smiled mistily, shaking his head and casting a gesture toward the end of the room: "There's no knowing what he is going to do—ever."

"But what do you think he might do? He will do something!"

"Oh, yes, he always does something. The *Flying Gull*—he knows her—is out in the bay. She is fast, isn't she? Nobody is watching her, is there? Three or four sailors on board, perhaps, but not expecting visitors, are they? Well?"

Nada's dark eyes stared at him, questioning his meaning, expecting that he would continue, say something more; then she glimpsed the idea, and cried softly: "Oh, he will steal the yacht." She was almost gleeful.

"No, no, oh, no! No—oh," said McGuire. "The skipper wouldn't do that. But since Penwenn's taken such a fancy to the *Islander*—why, Williams might trade with him. I've seen him do a little trading that way now and then."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm Dan McGuire."

Nada regarded him with admiring surprise. She knew of him, but could never have imagined that the McGuire who sailed with Williams would be like this lazy-mannered, half-clownish fellow with a long, slightly twisted nose and drooping eyelids. In an instant he was like a friend, an old friend; he knew her island and the people that she knew, and soon she was telling him of herself. Her grey veil lay like mist on the red of the velvet hood, so demure of shape and

flagrant in colour. Her voice was vibrant, eager; the words sped along as if blown by gay breath.

"Oh, dear old dad is all broken up. I haven't been home in so long I don't know what all is the matter. The first letter in months came a few days ago. He can't write, you know. Dr. Lemaitre wrote for him. Oreena married to some man that he doesn't like—I've been away so long——

"You see, father—we *were* little savages; I was, in any case!—sent us to Virginia, to a young ladies' seminary. It was terrible! They called us 'niggers'—those sweet, delicate Southern girls; would put handkerchiefs to their noses and turn away. Oreena nearly died, but she wouldn't say a word. I said a word—lots of words—you can just be sure! I called them—I had read in history—no Southern history though, I should say not!—how their great-great-grandmothers had been dumped on the beach like spoiled fruit because they were—well, just *that*! Then they almost died, those sweet, delicate girls that called us 'niggers.'

"Poor dear old dad hadn't known any better. Some stranger he had drunk with at the club had told him that we ought to be sent to Virginia, that there's where the finest ladies were. Oh, father did so want us to be ladies. I believe that man must have known just what a joke it would be for us to go there. It *was* a joke. I have laughed over it myself since. But Oreena, it almost killed her. She wouldn't let them know that it hurt so much, but she nearly died. I didn't cry at all. I talked back to them in good plain beachcomber English—about their grandmothers.

"We had to leave, of course. But it took so long to write father and get an answer, and they just couldn't throw us out in the street. We came on here to San Francisco and stopped with Mrs. Collins. You know of her, don't you?"

Anyone that Kate Collins liked had a good friend. She was a San Francisco woman of prominent family; and though in her younger days the family had made all the trouble that a prominent family can make when it sees the favourite daughter throwing herself away on a mere nobody, she married a young sea captain and sailed with him. When she liked anyone the world could go hang before she would change her opinion for its approval. She had often been at Puluotu, knew the Combes—knew all about them. Oreena and Nada had visited her on their way to Virginia; they stayed with her again on their return. The sisters were much alike in appearance, but Mrs. Collins loved one and intensely disliked the other. By some such artifice as only a resourceful woman could have imagined, she had induced Oreena to want to return home, and had persuaded Nada to stay on with her. This was accomplished without at all offending Oreena, otherwise Nada, who had always given up anything at any time for her sister, would not have remained.

"Oreena went home and wrote me how miserable she was. I should have gone, too, and kept her company, but I've had the most wonderful time. Kate Collins is a darling. I haven't heard from Oreena for a long, long time, but she is married—been married for months. Poor old dad is all broken up. Oreena was the pride of his life. She was so much like a fine lady, and she married a German. How father does hate Germans! Feels toward them as I do toward Southern ladies. But this one—he feels Seibert married my sister to spite him."

Nada stopped on becoming aware of Williams, who had approached unnoticed. His hands remained in his side-pockets; the visor of his cap still shadowed his eyes; but in some way, though it was by no change of expression, she knew that he was pleased with her.

McGuire turned toward him, and, half laughing in an odd way, said: "Skipper, Oreena Combe has married Seibert at Puluotu."

Williams barely nodded. He had overheard that much.

"Dr. Lemaitre wrote to me—such a funny little letter. But father is all broken up."

"He would be," said McGuire. "He'll be more broken up than that when——"

He looked toward Williams significantly, and a little amused; there was no response in the short-bearded, hard, bronzed face, and McGuire left his sentence unfinished.

McGuire thought the queer patterns that Fate made as she pushed people about were often ironically amusing; he now grinned aimlessly, merely through seeing how, because of Seibert, they had come to Penwenn, and because of Penwenn Nada had come to them, and by her coming they learned of Seibert's incomprehensible marriage. One more arc was added to this intricate circle when Williams, with a manner of stern kindness that meant a great deal from him, asked if there was now anything that could be done for her.

At first she smiled a little, and thoughtfully said, "No, no, I think not," as if wanting it to be evident that she had been moved by no impulse but that of loyalty to him, and his friendship with her family; then suddenly, without a thought

before the words were out, as if the idea was flying up from a secret place within her, she cried eagerly: "Yes. Oh, let me go home with *you*! I am so homesick I shall die here, and I never, never can look at Alan Penwenn again! I want to go now—with *you*! You will take his *Flying Gull*, won't you? And—please, you must let me go too!"

Ever since Dr. Lemaitre's letter, and without hardly being aware of what she was doing, Nada had been thinking of her island, of her childhood, of how she and Oreena would scramble together on a pony's back and go splashing across the stream in a runaway gallop down the palm-pillared roadway; and of how they had often climbed to the base of a hilltop rock, and lay dreamily watching the big waves that crumbled on the reefs; far-away hills would be wrapped in purple haze; below, a hundred palms would rustle their heads together, passing from one to another among themselves the gossip as told by the wind. Nada had once believed that trees talked to each other, and often lay very still, breathless, trying to overhear what they said. And her father, puttering anxiously about when he found that no one knew where the children had gone—it had been fun to hide and make him poke about and call. The great rambling house, always lonely and depressing, would now be more so; and with Oreena gone there would be no one there but her father, and the servants never paid attention to him. Nada wanted to go home.

Williams regarded her with inscrutable severity, unaware, of course, that McGuire had suggested the *Flying Gull* to her. Perhaps he felt that her readiness to discover the way that he would leave confirmed her right to go, and it may be that he also had Penwenn, and Penwenn's chagrin, in mind when his head moved faintly toward her, nodding assent.

## 12

The *Flying Gull* was easily secured. Being in their home port, some of her crew and all of her officers were on shore as usual the next evening when Williams and five of his native sailors from the *Islander* came alongside in a rowboat. He was on board, with a gun at the head of the man on watch before that fellow could do more than cry out; and though other members of the crew came running out on deck, they were not expecting anything like piracy in a peaceful bay, with vessels all about; and they, having no arms at hand, were quickly subdued without being hurt. An hour or two later McGuire, two other native sailors from the *Islander*, Nada, and the boy John Paullen, came on board. Williams then took advantage of the tide and darkness; and strong rowers towed the schooner from among the ships anchored off the city; then, making sail, crept to the Golden Gate, and were ready for the dash to sea as soon as the *Flying Gull's* sailors were released in a rowboat. It was from them that Penwenn, and the city at large, learned what had been done.

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## CHAPTER II

### 1

In shape Pulotu had rather the appearance of a German sausage nibbled by rats, being long and narrow, with pieces pounded out of the shore-line. The town was known by the island's name. Traders came to sell to the agents of the big German firm, Godeffroys, then celebrate, loaf for a time, outfit, and go again. A wharf like a big centipede, all legs and backbone, straddled out into the bay. Among the frond shadows a thin semicircle of houses peeped, as if a little afraid of the big, squat, sheet-iron warehouses and centipede.

There was a tall flag-pole on the beach; but this pole was never used, because Pulotu, being "independent," had no flag; and each of the three or four consuls—present less for consular duties than to keep any one of their number from establishing a protectorate—would have regarded with avowed suspicion and distrust even the temporary presence of any flag but his own. It was not that Pulotu was important as a spot on the map; but it was important to each European Government that no rival should have successes anywhere on the map. Everybody knew that sooner or later some one of those Governments would establish a protectorate, or something of the sort, as a preliminary to ownership. That was the reason there were consuls, armed with unusual, vague, discretionary powers, at so inconspicuous an island as Pulotu; and the reason why warships called with impressive frequency; and why also, in a miniature fashion, off on this wayside spot of the earth the pawns played among themselves at the diplomats' chess game.

The Germans had wedged themselves in, as they were crowding through the islands wherever there were commercial chances. There were, of course, some English. There always are, no matter what the loneliness and distance. And a twinkling of French presence remained. Where the French have planted seed the lotus has the sweetest flavour, and deadliest.

Everybody in the town took an interest in the arrival of every craft, and any news that she brought was haggled to pieces for days. Whenever a ship swung around the treacherous, low-lying horn of the bay, deeply thrust into the channel like a dagger, all the town knew of its coming. On the cool twilight side of the club veranda men would stir faintly on long cane chairs, and mutter among themselves; the house boy would be sent off with a telescope, and from his description of her rig the eaters of the lotus and drinkers of the highball would dispute without energy and without anger, bet this or that, usually in champagne; then with the slow, stiff listlessness of corpses getting off their slabs, these idle shapes in ghostly duck would pass through their cool shadows, and come into the sun, where they mingled with other shapes from other shadows, on the way to the beach.

### 2

Williams did not enter Pulotu bay. He landed through the surf on the other side of the narrow island, about a mile below the slope where Waller had built his house.

McGuire had never been so miserable on a voyage as on this one, but he had only increased misery by the way it ended; and all because of John Paullen.

"What of him?" Williams had demanded, with the merest jerk of a thumb, toward Paullen in the dawn of the first morning out of San Francisco. He had been watching Paullen. The boy then stood amidships, with something of the loneliness in his face that the landsman feels when he sees the shore-line vanishing for the first time.

"West Point, skipper. Kicked out—head first. Family chopped him off. Oo-ey—git! Just that way, like a stray dog. Father told him to take some other name. Just what he did I don't know—yet. But you see for yourself, skipper, he's the sort that wouldn't cheat at cards, steal a horse, hurt a woman. He must have thrown a book at a teacher. Well, he was on the waterfront without a friend or a dollar. Hell-ward bound in any case. I thought he might as well come along with us."

"You told him?" Williams's eye struck hard.

"Not a word!" said McGuire quickly, sensing trouble.

"He thinks all ships go to sea by being rowed out in the dark."

"You, you knowing he runs the risk of imprisonment—and worse!"



"But, skipper, time and again I've brought men aboard when we could use them. And I thought——"

"Not his kind!"

"If I had told him he would have come, anyhow. He isn't the kind that quits if——"

"If you had told *me* he would not have come."

"But *you* let Nada come, and——"

"That was to pay Penwenn in bitter coin. He loves her. With less than half the truth told, no court would hold her. But this boy——"

McGuire then told Paullen the truth—who the skipper was, the ship he was on, the risk he ran by being there; and Paullen accepted the circumstances, not with any degree of cheerfulness, but at least without a word of reproach. But McGuire every day increasingly felt that he had lost favour with Williams.

Then Paullen one day, jumping aloft in a squall—as he really had no business to do, being the greenest of sailors—had a fall that nearly knocked the life out of him, and which did fracture a rib or two. Though he was carefully stowed away in a bunk, with Nada to wait on him, Paullen did his best to sicken and die; and, being a stubborn young fellow, he nearly succeeded. At least, that was how it appeared to McGuire.

But one of the witchcraft-like mysteries of the sea has to do with sick men such as Paullen, who very often, for not much of any reason at all, will turn up their toes and waste away unless a land breeze freshens their faces. They grow wistfully indifferent, for Death is a kindly old hag in some ways, and often she makes the sick man like a hungry child, eager to be snuggled to even her empty dugs.

True, there were Paullen's ribs; but these knitted away as young bones do. He had the land-fever, and his sense of disgrace worked on his spirits, so that much of the time he was out of his head and talked of home.

In order that Paullen might as soon as possible be detached from any connection with piracy, Williams from the first day at sea had intended to put him ashore at Pulu; but, after the boy became ill, McGuire was given to understand that he, too, would be put ashore.

Williams as much as said: "You got him into this. You go on shore and see that he gets out of it, too. Stay by him. A boy such as he would waste his life by settling down on an island like Pulu, so you see that he keeps clear of that sort of thing!"

McGuire understood perfectly; but he tried to point out that Paullen should not be ashore at all; that Nada would have him all to herself, flat on his back, helpless. Williams glared and made a gesture of impatient dismissal.

McGuire had always got along so easily with the rigorous Williams because of a nearly complete understanding of his character, and he had known that a boy of Paullen's type would at once engage his sympathy, but he had miscalculated its extent and nature.

McGuire did not like the outlook. He had no eagerness to go through a month and more of the dirty, stinking work of oyster fishing, for Williams was going on after shell since he had a debt to pay, and would pay it as best he could; but Pulu was not even a good place to loaf. However, it was the best place at which a sick boy could be put on shore that the *Flying Gull* (now no longer the *Flying Gull*, but the *Hans Haasbruck*—for Williams often used the name of another ship, as it did much to confuse those who searched for him) for many a long month perhaps would be near. It was bad enough to be responsible for one who was sick, but he foresaw that Paullen was sure to be much harder to look after if he got well; and his mission, the place where he was going, with its great, dark, rotting house and uncared-for grounds, his separation from Williams, and almost every condition that he anticipated, dispirited McGuire.

### 3

There was no anchorage off the beach where Williams landed, and McGuire was at the wheel while the schooner was being brought to.

Nada came on deck, dressed for a triumphant landing, though it was to be through the surf, and she must tramp a mile pretty well up-hill before astonishing her household. She felt a little ridiculous in such preposterous finery as a hat aglow with flowers and feathers, glittering with rhinestones, a tight-fitting jacket sort of waist with a row of large

buttons down the front, a long, full skirt that both hands could hardly keep from trailing, white gloves that reached to her elbows; but she knew how her father would have pride if she came in such an array, and how the servants would gape. Her sparkling, polished shoes were tied together, and hung across her shoulders. For the walk up the trail she wore flat-footed slippers.

When McGuire from behind the wheel first saw her he said unkind things about her appearance; but she knew that he was in the dumps, and forgave him with laughter that was calculated to make him feel worse. Already they understood and liked each other well enough to pretend to quarrel.

Five natives were at the oars of the boat that took Nada and McGuire ashore; and it shot the surf with bound on bound; and when its bottom scraped, the largest of these natives, Sanniuu, carried her twenty yards over the dry shingle. She gave his bare shoulders a rewarding pat, and was placed down with hardly a drop of spray having touched her.

The boat went back to the schooner, returning with Williams, and Paullen on a stretcher made of sail and oars.

Nada was excited by the familiar landmarks, and she pointed about, talking rapidly. Everything that she saw meant something. Childhood came back with a rush; for a little while it was almost as if she had merely dreamed of the places and people known in her absence.

"There. Ooo-oo! Right there, out of that tree, I saw a *pili* fall on a man—a white man, too! I was standing by father, my hand in his, here where we are now! The man laughed, and killed the little lizard. You know, its touch is the warning of death. He went on down to the beach—this very beach. He was a good swimmer, but what of that? The surf broke him on the coral. They carried his body up—right up this trail as they are now carrying——"

"Stop it!" said McGuire. "You're a heathen."

"I wasn't more than six—so big——"

"Are no older now. An' less civilised!"

She ran aside with beskirted clumsiness to a flowering tree, soiling her gloves and snatching at sprays, getting her hat twisted and awry in the branches; then put the sprays in the litter for Paullen to smell. He smiled at her.

"Your hat is spoiled!" said McGuire, with an air of satisfaction.

They came up into the grounds, and though it was a bright, warm day, gloom and dilapidation that was like a chill, as if the place had taken on something of old Combe's puttering shiftlessness, pervaded everything.

On three sides of the immense old house a wide veranda ran under a covering of thatch; and this shut out light from the rooms that were always dark, and where voices and footsteps resounded with echoing hollowness. The second story was thrust among palms; their leaves fumbled like blind men's fingers against the roof, and at times of storm beat ragefully, as if the blind men had lost patience. One of the veranda posts was broken, and the roof sagged. The bottom steps that led on to the veranda had long ago rotted. Trees locked their branches and laced their leaves together, as if to keep the sun from finding out what went on below. An echoing emptiness answered their voices, even outside the house. A shout through a doorway, to rouse up whoever might be there, was like a voice down a rain-barrel.

"So changed," said Nada dispiritedly.

It was really less the change than the fact that the gloomy dilapidation to which she had been imperceptibly accustomed from childhood (after Waller's death) seemed to have all taken place during her absence, since now for the first time she realised its run-down and dismal condition.

No one appeared to welcome her. Quite bewildered, she looked about from across the veranda rail. Her polished shoes dangled from over her shoulders; it had not seemed worth while to put them on. She laughed nervously, being that near to crying; and she said almost hopefully, "There is no one here," as if that would give her an excuse for not remaining.

Williams disappeared inside the house. The big Sanniuu and another native vanished hurriedly, looking for somebody, anybody. Sanniuu had the determined air of a pursuer, and presently came back with a fat native woman. He walked slightly behind her, like a suspicious warder, afraid that she might try to get away. The woman was sullenly curious, a little uneasy, and still looked sleepy.

Nada rushed to her and stopped short. She did not know the woman. The woman did not know her. Nada's thwarted eagerness changed to an expression of pain; and bad news from an old, astonished, loving servant would have been less shocking than the doubtful answers of this dull creature, who stared with misgiving.

"Where is my father?" Nada cried, almost accusingly; and, without pausing, asked of her sister, and for name after name of old servants.

The fat woman was in a loose wrapper that had once been red, but was now merely dirty. Her hair was down. She stared distrustfully at the strange girl in American finery, and was fascinated by the hat. Her dull black eyes went doubtfully again and again toward McGuire.

Mr. Combe, she said, was at the town. He was there most of the time. Mr. Grinnell, the manager, was over there—and her heavy hand moved vaguely. Miss Combe was married. She did not come to the house any more. Nobody lived here now but Mr. Combe.

"Who are you?" McGuire asked.

"I am Lily."

"Well, flower of the English hedgerow, what do you do around here besides eat and sleep?"

"I am married," she answered, with unruffled dullness.

"An' your sisters an' brothers an' uncles an' aunts—where does the family stay?"

The woman uncomfortably recognised his familiarity with island ways; there was rather a lazy swarm dependent on Lily and her husband for provisions from the Combe kitchen.

With dignity she replied: "My husband is a white man, as you are."

Williams reappeared on the veranda and called up some of his sailors. They moved a bed to the veranda and rigged a mosquito netting above it. Paullen, relieved of the sickly rocking of the sea, had already fallen into a sleep, and was placed in the bed without fully awakening.

Williams might have sent a message to the town, some eight miles across the island, for Combe; but he had nothing necessary to say to Combe, and it was important that he go on his way.

All of the parting that he had with McGuire was: "Paullen will be up and about in two or three weeks. Urge him to go home—to his home, wherever it is, for whoever his father is makes no difference. There is no sternness that can resist the return of a boy like that. There is honour in him, and courage. Take care of him, McGuire. You wait here till I come."

"Aye, skipper," said McGuire.

#### 4

It was dark when Combe arrived home, and, wondering at the lights he saw in the house, came shambling along the veranda. Nada ran to him and threw her arms about his neck; and he stood bewildered, unresponsive, pushing feebly to get free.

"Why, father!" she cried, stepping back, sadly astonished.

"I'm glad 'o see you, Nada—I'm glad 'o see you. You're all I got now, child. Or'na she's not my daughter any more."

He shook his drooping head.

"Don't say that! No matter whom she's married she's still *my* sister!"

"I won't have it! I won't! Don't you go going over there, Nada. I won't have it! How'd you get home here anyhow? Ah, McGuire, *where's Williams?*"

He almost screamed the question, half-triumphantly.

"He has gone on," said McGuire, coming forward.

"Gone?"

"He put Nada ashore and a sick boy."

"But he knew Seibert had stole Or'na. He knew it! You tol' him, Nada? You tol' him what Dr. Lemater wrote you? Wasn't *that* why he come? An' he didn't stay to see that feller——"

It was incredible. Combe simply could not believe it.

Most of his time he loitered in colourless misery at the Pulotu Club and complained of Seibert, the big, hearty man, his son-in-law. It had become so that the languid idlers would stir and vanish at the sound of his melancholy voice. Combe drank little or nothing himself, and seldom stood drinks, which made the idlers feel they had been cheated after an hour of listening to his unending lamentation.

The club loungers would, in pretended sympathy for the son-in-law, often repeat all that Combe had said, and more, in the hope that it would annoy Seibert; but the old fellow's mumbling and grumbling might have been a fly buzzing for all that he seemed to care.

"His place it is going all to weeds and rot," Seibert would say, grinning with mask-like cheerfulness.

Which was largely true. Combe, shuffling, vague-eyed, made out as best he could in the gathering and splitting of cocoanuts with whatever superintendent it pleased the Lord to send him; though the one he now had was sent by Brundage a year or two before. This was Mr. Grinnell, one of England's younger sons—very young—who knew but little of his work, yet remained honest and sober.

Mr. Grinnell, like many of the younger sons of England, had been pushed from the nest and told to fly. After some awkward fluttering about he had landed flat on his back in a hot, wet, dirty, Santa Cruzian village. There a tall, grim old man with a sinister face had taken charge of Mr. Grinnell and set him on his feet. A Yankee trader came along, and the lean old man put Mr. Grinnell and his traps on board her, paid his passage, and gave him a letter to "Tom Combe, Pulotu."

After shifting from one trader to another two or three times, Mr. Grinnell finally reached Pulotu, and found Combe on the club veranda. Combe seemed so peculiarly mild and helpless that Mr. Grinnell's first impression was that the old fellow must be awfully shrewd. He presented the letter.

"Read it," said Combe. "I ain't got my specs."

He unfolded the letter, and with blinking surprise read:

"TOM,—Give this boy a try. He can't be worse than anybody you would pick to run your business.—BRUNDAGE."

"A'right," said Combe, as if nothing unusual had taken place. "You're my manager. Come on out an' go to work. Jake Brundage was always saving of his words."

"Most extr'ordinary!" said Mr. Grinnell.

"Un-hunh, ain't it? I got a manager out there now, an' he's no good. Drunk all the time, an' wants to fight. You go an' kick him off the place an' take his job. I got to try out your executive 'bility," said Combe, with a gentle, wary effort at being business-like. He could not discharge anybody. He had no fear; just a helpless shrinking from any kind of clash.

So Mr. Grinnell, believing that "his chance" had come, went out and found a squatty thick-faced Englishman asleep in a hammock. The squatty Englishman blustered and showed temper; but Brundage had seen the backbone down under Grinnell's fever-stained hide; so the squatty Englishman, in a profane way, called heaven and earth to witness his joy at being done with the blasted plantation. He then seemed determined to weep on Mr. Grinnell's neck out of sheer sympathy for the misery that lay before this "poor young 'un."

"Let's 'ave a drink to show no 'ard feelin's," said the ex-manager.

"No," said Mr. Grinnell. "I'm a teetotaller!"

The squatty Englishman eyed him in amazed disgust. Evidently he had never seen a teetotaller before. It was as if Mr. Grinnell had said, "I am a cannibal."

"God blime me!" he cried. "I knowed some'at were wrong with yer!"

He edged off in a wary circle, insultingly making believe that he thought Mr. Grinnell might spread a vile contagion, like small-pox. But at a distance he turned and shouted through the gloomy grounds, "If you stay sober th' worry o' it will kill yer!" He had weakened into giving the young fellow the best of his parting advice.

At the end of nearly two years it had nearly killed Mr. Grinnell; but he was chock-a-block with Dr. Lemaitre's quinine, and in a state of preoccupied worriment over weeds, bugs, failing crops, the lack of manures, the ineradicable laziness

of labourers.

The one point of conflict between Combe and his manager lay in Mr. Grinnell's opinion of Seibert; for the young fellow, having that backbone Brundage had seen, bluntly told his employer:

"Seibert knows more about tropical agriculture than any man north of Australia. And he works harder. Pulotu loafers all hate him; they jolly well hate anybody that gets ahead."

When Combe turned to a fretful iteration of his unending grudge, and told of how Seibert had tried to get hold of the plantation years before, Mr. Grinnell would answer: "Been a tiptop thing for you if you had taken him on as partner!"

The night of Nada's return, as long as she would listen, her father talked on and on in a way that was very like drunken maundering about Seibert. He had stolen Oreena to get the plantation. Seibert knew that Brundage was dead; that was why the fellow had dared to steal his poor little daughter. But she was no longer his daughter. He would not own her. Seibert was a rascal. He wore grins to fool people. And Williams—and Williams, knowing his troubles, had gone away without again settling with that fellow, as if a daughter could be returned by force. And didn't Williams know that Seibert was his worst enemy, talked against him all the time, contributed to the reward got up at Apia after Williams had run off with a shipload of recruits and took them home?

The club idlers, full of whisky and soda, occasionally revenged themselves a little on Seibert's worldly success by bringing up the story of how Williams and Brundage had visited him. They may not have really believed it, but they could quote old Combe and ask Seibert how about it.

Seibert at times would sweat like a squeezed sponge, but he never got angry. Always that air of heartiness that did not convince. His hide seemed thick as a cocoanut husk. It was unmanly, positively unmanly, not to lose one's temper at times. In the tropics, and a Dutchman at that! Some of the idlers said that he had a nest of devils in his heart.

## 5

The next morning Dr. Lemaitre came bouncing out from town, with saddle-bags a-flop, and nearly fell off his fat pony to see old Combe, who had sent word that he had eaten crab meat again and was dying, shuffling back and forth at the gate.

"Well, well, well, well!" cried Dr. Lemaitre, getting off his pony. "You are so near death you come out to get your powders the quicker. I wish so much sense was in everybody!"

"My daughter has come home. Did that fool boy go an' tell you *I* was sick?"

"Your daughter! She has made the escape from Herr Seibert!" Dr. Lemaitre nodded rapidly, as one who has known all along that the thing must happen. "Let us hasten. The poor child!"

At the mention of Seibert Combe began to pour out his woe. Dr. Lemaitre patted him gently, as one pats an aged dog. His poor friend was a little cracked.

"No, Dr. Lemater. Or'na ain't my daughter. Nada, she has come home."

"Oh, oh, oh! Nada! Yes, little Nada. I had not heard. Those rascals that get sick so far from the town—I must let them die without my help. I am away so much that I do not hear half the news. Not half! Little Nada is sick. Tuh-tuh-tuh!"

Addressing his pony, "Hear that? Little Nada is sick! You shall gallop all the way back to make up for your pokiness. A physician should have a thin horse, then people will think he comes quickly."

Combe explained that she wasn't sick, either. A trader who had not had the time to come down the other side of the coast had landed her on the beach, and landed one of his seamen. It was the seaman who was sick. Combe was secretive, though ever since Waller's accident Dr. Lemaitre had been his close friend.

Dr. Lemaitre was the only physician on the island excepting a young, blear-eyed veterinary that Seibert kept to look after his stock—and blacks. The little doctor was round, and had the look of cherubic gentleness, though he was a terrible atheist, with his untidy house full of wicked books.

Now he bustled along rapidly, the worn black bag so full of powerful mystery to the natives in one hand, and the panama in the other and flopping at his warm, red face. The doctor was growing bald and grey together, as a hilltop is harvested as the grain ripens.

McGuire kept out of sight, but Nada, who knew him almost as well as she knew her father, rushed into his short arms,

kissing his red face and bald head until he was puffing happily, though a little flustered.

He made her stand off and turn round, exclaiming in amazement that she was a woman! Tuh-tuh-tuh! Who could believe it? Little Nada was just so high only yesterday!

Indeed, it seemed such a few years before, such a very few, when the gaunt Waller himself had come riding through the rainy night, leading a horse on which Dr. Lemaitre was to go back with him. What a ride! He had held on for dear life with eyes shut—it was too dark to see in any case—galloping through the rain over a slippery road. His legs had not been long enough for the stirrups. They beat and flopped, those stirrups, as if the devil with a club ran behind and urged the horse on. Dr. Lemaitre clung to the saddle, eyes shut, teeth clenched, hands desperately tight. What a ride! For months, especially after an evening of a little too much Monsieur Voltaire, roasted fowl, and Burgundy, Dr. Lemaitre would think of it in his sleep and struggle half the night to keep on the bounding saddle.

At the end of the ride, while Combe, old even then, shuffled about outside the room, muttering prayers that had the sound of curses, Dr. Lemaitre had helped Nada to crawl into this ragged, topsy-turvy world.

In the way that doctors do feel toward those they have helped to grow tall in life, she seemed partly to belong to him; but he did not have a feeling of quite the same kind toward her sister.

Dr. Lemaitre, with Nada on his arm, went to Paullen's bed.

He yanked up the mosquito netting, which kept flies off in the day, and, bending over with a pleasant smile and cheerful greeting, searchingly scanned the boy's face. Right off this little doctor seemed to understand something, and he removed his iron-rimmed spectacles, wiping them briskly and peering down at Nada, who busily adjusted the coverlet.

He then examined Paullen's ribs, where only a little tenderness remained, then his tongue, pulse, took his temperature, and said: "Orange juice, all that he can drink"; after which he doled out some white powders, a half-dozen pills of a deadly green, and used a few pharmaceutical words by way of assisting the handsome boy to believe in him.

"Yes, yes, yes. He is all right," Dr. Lemaitre told Nada when she went with him to his pony. "Such a nurse. He has pleasure in being sick. That is what is the matter!"

Laughingly she blushed.

## 6

Nada had discarded the finery of her homecoming; and, having ransacked the moth-proof boxes stored with clothing, her own and Oreena's, and choosing a dark divided skirt with a brilliant sash-belt (Oreena always used a side-saddle, and would never touch a divided skirt), Nada immediately after lunch mounted a horse Mr. Grinnell chose for her and went galloping over the road that led northward.

She would have known, without remembering landmarks, when she passed from her father's ground to Seibert's, that rose and fell up hill-slope and valley, with ordered fields and groves rigidly spaced, like great bodies of soldiery, stationed at strategic places, menacing the jungle.

As she clattered over the corduroy bridge across the ravine that divided the plantations the horse shied, and with a sidling jump and snort came to a stiff-legged stop. A dozen black, half-naked shapes with cannibal faces looked up from the roadside. They were clearing weeds. A man in a dirty white suit, with a blue handkerchief fluttering at his neck, stared at her from under a pith helmet—a man from somewhere near the far Baltic, blonde-bearded, blackened by the tropic sun—one of Seibert's overseers. He was on foot, with the reins of his horse carelessly across his arm. An open holster sagged on his hip. Two heavily-jawed dogs lay resting in the shade. It was the man that growled, and the blacks with sullen slowness stirred their long hoes.

Nada clucked coaxingly, with a gentle handstroke to the horse's neck, and the horse with wary step edged past the suit of dirty white and fluttering handkerchief, then bolted.

She rode on. Everywhere men were at work, or had left the signs of where they had been at work. Even the untamable spots of jungle had the appearance of having been crowded down cliff-sides or to sharp hilltops, like the last refuge of something vanquished. On her father's side the jungle was creeping back in through much of the land from which Waller, gaunt and powerful, had driven it; but he had never cleaned with the relentless hewing and grubbing and burning and ploughing and hoeing of Seibert, who used all the blacks that he could get. A recruiter could sell him a cargo that he

wouldn't have dared to take even into Peru; and some of the incorrigible natives from other plantations on other islands were brought to Seibert.

As Nada entered the grounds about Seibert's house she pulled down her horse on the white coral-built roadway, caught her breath, and cried, "Oh-o!" She rode along slowly, looking from side to side, and was enchanted by the terraces, the paths and winding drives, the rows and masses of flowering shrubs, the beds of flowers, and she faintly heard the sleepy murmur of running water, and passed along a small stream that was fed from hillside springs.

"Oh-o! I don't blame her!"

Every step of the way seemed to add explanation of the puzzling wonder that she had felt ever since learning of Oreena's marriage to Seibert, whom Nada remembered as a huge, ugly man. She had seen him only a few times, then at a distance; that is, since she was more than a child.

The driveway came out before a broad, low, white house, vividly white, with blue trim; the house was almost covered with clustering, cool vines, and sat before an open space of neatly scythed lawn.

No one was in sight. She felt a slight tremor of loneliness, and wondered if she should have come without having sent word.

As she approached the house a bareheaded man raised himself into view. Without coming from anywhere, he simply appeared behind the balled bay in a large urn on the veranda. He was a huge man, with no hair near his forehead, and a round, fleshy, reddish black face. His coat was off. The open collar showed a thick, strong neck with folds of flesh. He was in stockinged feet, and the spurred boots lay on the floor by the jack. The man's body was big, with the muscular curves that bulls have. He held spectacles in one hand and a paper in the other, and remained motionless while she rode up. Two or three dogs came out of the shadows and peered at her, then lazily disappeared. They were trained to bark at blacks and blacks only.

Seibert stared at her blankly; then, partly by her resemblance to her sister and partly by recognising where the horse she rode belonged, he knew who she was. His lips came back over the big, strong, white teeth, and for a moment his mouth was opened, as if he had forgotten how to speak; the corners of the blue eyes wrinkled, and a big, half-bare arm, went into the air with an open-handed, welcoming gesture. The arm waved about vaguely, even after he had shouted: "Thunder of heaven, Miss Combe. My sister—ah!"

Then he called loudly, with hearty mastery, summoning servants: "Ho, Lalua—Lalua! Your mistress, tell your mistress her sister has come—her sister!" Cupping his hands, the big voice boomed across the grounds: "Tono! Tono! Tono!" From far off a faint answer came. "Here, take this horse. Come! Fast, you lazy loafer!"

His voice was loud with good nature, yet one knew by the thin, quick answers that he got, and by the running gait of the little black man who had a bandage on his face and came for Nada's horse, that something more than good nature ruled here.

He showed a hearty pride, a flourish of pride, in calling up servants and booming through the silent grounds. There was no pretence at not being proud. At once he was demanding what she thought of it all. His hand swept out and circled before him, as if laying it all before her; and at the moment she noticed how awkward his gestures. Fine, wasn't it? Wouldn't think it possible, would you? Hundreds of varieties of trees—rare trees—sent to him from all over the world. All done right in the heart of the jungle! Nothing but jungle! People had laughed. Now look! She had seen as she rode along. What did she think? Great, wasn't it?

All morning he had been out in the pepper field. Was going to put out thousands of pepper vines. They would do well—this time. He had experimented. Five thousand holes, five thousand poles to be set—and manured.

He shouted all the while he sat down on the couch where he had been lying to read and got into his boots, and while he stood up, stamping heavily to set his feet. The spurs clicked when he stamped.

Then he strode to the veranda steps and greeted her.

To Nada it seemed more like coming home than the return to her father's house had been; but she had arrived a little suspicious of Seibert, and had expected to be watchful of him and keep aloof. She had felt that she owed that much to her father; besides, because of her father and the old enmity she had hardly expected Seibert would want her to come. Germans, she knew, could be brusque in their displeasure.

But with both hands—muscular, uncalled, huge hands—out-thrust, with massive shoulders thrown back, and his

whole face in a grin of welcome, he took her little gloved fingers and shook them, patted them with snap and slap that almost stung as he gazed at her with frank enjoyment; and he told her, just about as he had told her of the peppers, that she was beautiful—as much like her sister as two flowers from the same gardenia.

With a big hand under her arm he pushed her along the veranda. His spurs jangled. He talked. The voice was loud. The free hand waved about in hospitable flourishes.

She saw servant faces peering at her from beside moving curtains; then Oreena appeared in a doorway.

Oreena's little face was perfect as a cameo, and coloured as if the cameo was cut in amber. She had been sleeping, and now for a moment she looked with a puzzled, unseeing stare into the sunlight. Her small body was wrapped about from chin to heels in blue silk, and the gown's long, wide sleeves fell below her hands.

"Eii! Nada!"

Floppy slippers dropped from her feet, and she made a running leap for Nada, and there was an instant's tossing of tumbled hair, the streaming flash of blue silk as it swept away from her small, lithe body. She clutched Nada's neck, springing at her, on her, as if mad with joy. Only the fact that Seibert's hand supported her kept Nada from being thrown backwards. He laughed loudly, approving. The pat on Nada's back that he gave was like the affectionate slap on a horse's shoulder, and almost knocked out her breath. Oreena, too, seemed trying to squeeze her to death.

Nada had never seen her sister so tempestuously affectionate, and she was made delightfully happy.

"Come in," cried Seibert. "Come into the house here. A great fine house we have. Eh, Or'na?"

He stood massively. A big arm held open the door, and he grinned broadly as the entwined sisters went by. He followed them.

## 7

Oreena sat cross-legged like a little Hindu on a divan, and every few minutes would snatch Nada to her in a smothering embrace, questioning and scolding, and all with so lively a play of tongue and gesture that one who had seen Oreena only in her haughty posing would not have thought it could possibly be the same small person.

Seibert sat close by, watching them, listening, smiling broadly.

The first moment that he was across the big room, anything like out of earshot, Nada asked, "You are happy?" and inclined her head significantly.

"Finest man in the world!" said Oreena quickly.

Nada, eyeing the back of the finest man, who had gone for a cigar, saw his massive shoulders stiffen in pride.

"Nothing he doesn't do for me. Like a great, fine dream, Nada. A great, fine dream," she repeated, with meditative lowering of her voice.

Seibert, when his cigar was smoked, left them. He must go, he had said, to see about the new tobacco field. One field hadn't been successful. Now he had cleared the jungle out of a low, hot valley. New seed was coming from Havana. He told Nada approximately how many tens of thousands of years the jungle in this valley had been dropping leaf mould, preparing the soil for him.

"This cigar"—he held up the smouldering stump—"is of leaf from Vuelta-abajo. I can raise as good as they do in Cuba."

He struck his chest, as if pointing out who he was; then, with a parting handshake, making her feel as heartily welcome as when she came, and telling her to come often, to stay, to live at their house, he strode out. His big shoulders were squared. He seemed to know that the women were watching him go. As soon as he got beyond the rug his spurs jangled importantly; then he stepped on a mat in the hall, and the jangle was lost. The heavy screen slammed on the veranda. Seibert was gone.

Oreena instantly raised both hands in a sweeping gesture, and sighed. Her little face was comically wry.

"Why—this?" Nada mimicked her.

"Shh-hh." Then Oreena called softly, sweetly: "Lalua?" There was no answer.



Quite stealthily she got up, and, slipping to a curtained doorway, jerked back the curtain. No one was behind it.

"You can never tell—until you have looked," she said. "That Lalua, she is part Chinaman or something. And she hates me. I know she does!"

"Who?"

"Just a servant."

"Why keep her?"

"The others are as bad."

She threw herself on Nada, clutching her, and whispered fiercely: "Why did you let *me* come from San Francisco? Why did you let me leave you? I should have stayed, too."

"But you were eager to come."

"No. I knew you didn't want me with you, and——"

"Oreena!"

"Oh, I've thought of you a thousand times a day—and the men—men have loved you. And I—here! Remember how we used to spill rum on sugar and watch the flies get drunk? I wish I had men like that over me. Oh, Nada, if I had only even a fly to love me!"

"But aren't you happy?"

"Happy? Me—here!"

"But you said——"

"I knew he'd hear. I said 'a great, fine dream.' That's just it. Now I am awake. Love *him*? Why, he's a fat old man—and sweats! He says it's healthy to sweat. And fertiliser. Talks about manures at breakfast, manures at dinner; at night manures. He smells of them. I'm so sick of it all I've wanted to die! Honestly, I've wanted to kill myself—to jump from a rock and die!"

"But he loves you, Oreena! I can see that he loves you."

"You just say that to put me in the wrong. Oh, Nada, I thought from you I would have sympathy."

"Oreena."

"I hate him. Love—with hands like that? You call it love to be grabbed and—you can't move! If I try to tease, 'Don't be a fool!' Other men aren't that way."

"You don't know men, my dear," said Nada, perhaps pretending to a little more wisdom than she had, in the hope of being consoling.

"No, I don't! I've been penned up on this wretched island, and you—it must have been wonderful for you in San Francisco. All I can do is go up by the waterfall and cry. Nobody can hear me cry with all that splashing, and cold water is there to wash my eyes when I am done.

"He knows that I go there—I say I like the place—and now he is making plans to dig it up—the bank, you know—and put in some of his old flowers. He is always going up there, just to decide what to do. It isn't for me. I know it isn't for me. He likes digging and planting. Oh, I hate these gardens and groves, all in rows, as if waiting to march. I want to get off in the jungle. It is the native in me. Don't you ever feel that way?"

"No, I should say not! I hate the jungle!"

"Then *you* should have married him. So does he. But *you* can't know how *I* feel, for you have been loved all your life. Everybody has loved you. I used to say, 'Nada is a little fool. She listens to anybody that says, "I love you."'"

"Oh, nothing of the kind."

"You did. And I wish I had. I haven't even friends, Nada. What friends *can* I have here? The natives I won't look at. I never would. You know that. The whites, down in the town, they won't look at me—not the women. They think I feel above them, and always did. Oh, I have paid for my 'airs,' as those seminary wretches called——"

"But why did you marry him? There are other men, and——"

"Oh, listen, Nada. When I first came home there *was* a man. Black hair and black eyes he had. When I was riding I used to see him watching me. Out of the corners of my eyes I could see how he stared. Then one day he got on horseback just so he could meet me. He couldn't ride, but he wanted to talk to me, so he had come on a horse. He rode right up, and just began talking. Oh, it was wonderful! He said, 'Look here, you're the prettiest thing I've seen, and I've looked at 'em all from Singapore to 'Frisco, 'Frisco to hell an' back!'

"That was what he said! To me! I nearly fainted. Oh, it was wonderful!

"'Miss Combe'—he had learned my name—I've got a ship and a sack of dollars. You come with me, and we'll take this old world by the tail and whirl it over our heads. These fools around here say you are cold; they don't know a red-hot heart when they see it!"

"Oh, Nada, for one wild minute I wanted to do it! But I froze my lips, and I rode by him. I did not even speak. If I had opened my mouth I would have said, 'Yes!' He wasn't handsome, but I liked him. If he had been handsome I might have done it. I wish I had. I learned afterwards that he was a wild one. I wish I had!"

"Why, Oreena, what has got into you!"

"I never see anybody, not a soul—I mean to speak to. Once I pretended to be sick. I thought Dr. Lemaitre would come. I was just hungry for somebody I had known all my life. Mr. Seibert sent for him. He really did. I afterwards gave the boy a dollar to tell me honest, and Mr. Seibert had told him to bring Dr. Lemaitre, but he wouldn't come. He sent back word that there was a sick baby he couldn't leave. That made me so angry that I pretended to be worse. And then Mr. Seibert brought in a young idiot that he has to doctor the *blacks* and *horses*! Manure smell was on his clothes, too. The fool held my hand, pretending to feel my pulse! Oh, but he is an ugly thing, with glasses thick as my thumb. When Mr. Seibert wasn't looking the wretch kissed my hand! Oh, how I slapped him! It sounded like a shot. Mr. Seibert turned around. My, but that fellow was scared! So was I. I clapped my hands together, as if I was in pain, and moaned. I don't know why I did it. I just did it. Mr. Seibert would have killed him, and I wouldn't have cared, but I clapped my hands—like that!"

The little palms came together—*smack*!

Oreena laughed nervously; and Nada smiled, trying not to show that she was vaguely saddened.

## 8

Oreena told everything that Nada asked to know; and she told much of it with cynical frankness.

Seibert from the first had seemed old to her; and he was not handsome, with his huge, fleshy body and sunburned redness, big white teeth always showing in unconvincing cheerfulness; but he had a heartiness very like contempt for all people, and this had satisfied her dislike of them; he drove his blacks and their overseers, and this was like mastery; his groves grew in straight rows that climbed hills and down again, which was wealth.

Northward lay destiny; and she trotted forth from her father's dark, gloomy house and advanced over Seibert's well-made roads, deliberately to find him.

On the first day that they met he spoke, sweeping off his broad-brimmed panama, showing the hairless, sunburned forehead. She answered aloofly, but she answered. Then with a flaring gesture of a big muscular arm he put the road at her feet, and mentioned the outlook from the hilltop three miles farther on. She thanked him, and rode on until she came to the sweeping view of the great estate which seemed fitting to her hopes.

Not regularly, but often, she rode on his land. They met from time to time. Presently she knew that he was watching out for her. They began to ride together, he boasting and pointing, always respectful; but soon she was aware that he had determined on ownership, and somehow it made her uneasy; she had obscure doubts, felt hesitant, ached for something unknown. Nevertheless, she continued now to ride across to him every morning, though she dreaded the big hands that waved and groped in air, as if blindly reaching, and some day must close. She was a little puzzled by the delay, since by the signs which a woman only can read she knew what lay ahead.

Then one day down at Pulu a great quantity of crated stuff was taken out of a ship and put on the wharf for Seibert. Wagon-loads of it went creaking up the roads and to his house, which had been enlarged and freshly painted, with blue trim. Sweating and shouting, but delighted in a big, ponderous way, he stood about, ordering this and that into place. He

had brought out half a shipload of furnishings. Then he offered it all to her.

She trembled with refusal, but could not speak. Something about him—she didn't know what, but something in the beaming red face and big roundness of body—made her physically dread to refuse.

She had dropped her head and leaned against him. He laughed good-naturedly, and the big, muscular hands closed.

They were married by the dark, consumptive missionary who was brought out from Pulu. That was all; and Seibert became her husband—a big man, with no youth, wearied day after day by riding and climbing and striding among black labourers that shrank instinctively.

In the morning he would go over accounts and reports, swearing with abruptness, but somehow unangered even when displeased; then he rode out to see for himself what was being done. Always he rode a powerful horse. It had to be powerful to carry him.

After dinner he would doze over a cigar and snore, sweating as he slept in the heat of the day. After supper he smoked and dozed and snored. The house was pervaded (she said) with stable smells, the odour of soil and stale tobacco.

Sometimes he would say, "Come here," and she came. He was not gentle and not rough, and would often stare at her with a sort of stupid dullness, as she had seen him staring at flowers.

When he ate a roasted fowl at the table, he would take it by a leg in each hand and tear it open good-naturedly.

"I've looked at picked bones on his plate and shivered, I don't know why. He treats me like a child, and I am a woman—older than the jungle that he hates, and a part of it!"

Seibert had a peculiar liking for blue, and this was everywhere apparent. There were borders of blue lobelia, and great masses of blue hydrangeas; but it was in the house that his preference for this colour was especially seen. Oreena was inescapably shut in by blue; she would have liked something more blazing; but even in her room it was his taste that dominated. There was a daintiness about blue and white that was difficult to associate with a man so gross in appearance, and even more so in manners; and in this room that she used more than any other as her "very own" (Seibert thought it foolishness that she should want one room to herself when the entire house was hers) the colour was chillingly blue; or, at least, Oreena felt that it was chilling.

True, in this room there were many other than blue objects; but she thought these absurd, all excepting the cuckoo clock, which she liked. On the shelves, on the table, on the stand before her mirror, were many pieces of German ware fashioned to represent little boys in bright clothes, a Gretchen or two with long, plaited, golden hair, odd little men in strange jackets with staffs in their hands and standing beside hollow tree-stumps—all strangely clean, meaningless, and to Oreena colourless. These were things of a sort that Seibert had admired in shop-windows years before, and remembered when he set about furnishing his house for her.

For all of his apparent good nature—and he was always beaming when near her—Seibert was as hard as iron. Whatever he wanted done was done. There was no flexibility about his wishes, even those inspired by a desire to please her, as in the matter of colour, and the waterfall, where she wanted the jungle roughness of overgrown foliage. He knew how such things should be landscaped. He really did. And what he thought best had to be done; always, and in just the way that he wished.

"I hate him! I want to be loved, and he makes me afraid. He smiles like——" She grinned, mocking his cheerfulness.

"You never know when he's angry or happy or what. Always——" She savagely repeated the caricature of his grinning.

## 9

Nada, in telling of various people and happenings, told of Paullen, whom McGuire had said was a gentleman ("which," said McGuire, "will handicap 'im all his life"); of how he had been hurt and his sickness, and of how handsome he was.

"You love him!" Oreena cried instantly.

"No. Indeed not! He had been sick, that's all."

Oreena asked questions about him with unabashed intensity, demanding to know his age, how he looked, how ill he was, who he was, and whatever else she could think of.

"I see no one," she wailed petulantly. "I am dying for a glimpse of something human. You will bring him, you will, won't

you? Just once, anyway? Promise! You will, won't you? Poor boy—in *that* house. I would have died if I had stayed longer. I know you haven't a decent servant. I have a China boy I can spare. He's a fine cook, and just the one for an invalid. I'll send him over with you right to-day. And anything else? What do you need? When he can ride, you will come by this way some time, won't you? Just so I can wave at you. Won't you?"

When Nada rode home that afternoon a hairy little pony jogged dispiritedly along behind her with a Chinaman on it. Lu Lung he was called. As he intoned a sort of grunt to whatever was said in his presence, and gave hardly any other sort of answer to anything, the name did very well. His cheeks were full; his eyes were dark and expressionless. He was a well-fed Chinaman, as those who do kitchen work usually are. A peaked, stiff-strawed hat sheltered his coiled queue, and he wore a loose black blouse and short, tight trousers. A bundle no bigger than a husked cocoanut, done up in a clean dark cloth and tied by the four corners, was fastened at the saddle-horn, which he gripped with thin, yellow, womanish hands.

Nada was glad to have him; and he was glad to go from the white house with the blue trim, though before leaving he had stopped by the bed of slender lilies, whose fragrant clusters seemed merrily ringing inaudible chimes as they swung to the rhythm of a soft wind. He had looked down for a furtive moment, as if something had been lost there; then he went away.

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## CHAPTER III

### 1

Within a few days Paullen had begun taking slow, wobbly walks up and down the veranda, sniffing the tropic strangeness, with Nada at his elbow. A week later he was meandering through the grounds, and being pampered at meal-times by the cook Oreena had sent. Wherever he went, Nada was his shadow.

McGuire saw clearly enough how things were going, and he let them go. He idled about, dreaming away the hours with wastrel ease. Nothing troubled him except the approaching shuffling scrape of old Combe's heavy feet. The vaguest sound of these made McGuire jump, and duck off the veranda like a surprised thief. But sometimes he dozed and was caught, and must listen.

Every day Tono came over with a bottle of wine or something from the Seibert pantry; often with flowers, too, and always with a note.

Tono had been Oreena's groom. Seibert did not like him. He was an impertinent little old fellow, who had been spoiled by her. To Seibert's way of thinking he remained worthless, but at least he had learned to do as he was told, and quickly. Tono now wore a bandage on an eye where he had been slapped for giving himself airs. Hardly a bluish sign of the blow remained, but Tono wanted everybody to know that he had been struck.

The note invariably asked Nada to come to-morrow, spoke of how lonely it was, and asked about the young sick man.

Every two or three days Nada would ride over to see her sister; but only once did she again meet Seibert, and he welcomed her with gusto, asking why she did not come to their house to live. He appeared to mean it. In fact, Nada rather liked him, though she understood her sister's dislike. As a husband he would be unlovely, so huge and sunburned, and he *did* smell of fertiliser. He was more than fifty; fifty-two Oreena had said. Still a young man, he called himself, with an outward thrust of chest, which he smote with a big fist to show how solid it was.

Paullen, before he was strong enough to try to ride, had looked at the horses on the place with the interest that a man has for something he knows about; and he smiled, but Nada felt not quite happily, as he said, "I almost had a saddle for a cradle. My father used to hold me on before him. He was in the cavalry."

Mr. Grinnell very seriously, and with approval, told her that "the boy" (he was probably about thirty months younger than Mr. Grinnell himself) was quite intelligent on horse-flesh. This pleased Nada more than if Mr. Grinnell had told her that she was pretty. Mr. Grinnell did not tell her anything of the sort. He had his hands full of other troubles than women.

The *coccus* had got into the cocoanuts, and Mr. Grinnell had already cut down and burned more than a hundred trees. He said to Nada, "Some time, when visiting your sister, you just ask Mr. Seibert what's best to do with that damn scale after it's gone this far. I've jolly well tried everything I know or have heard of. It just seems to fatten up the pest—all I do."

Nada promised, and meant to do as asked; for wasn't it her property? She never did.

Nada had talked of her sister to Paullen, of the house and gardens, of Oreena's loveliness, of Seibert's hearty welcome (Grinnell had talked of his fine horses); and she said that as soon as he could ride they would go over.

In this they had pretty much the air of innocent conspirators, for old Combe grumbled at any show of neighbourliness. His objections weren't important to Nada, but they were annoying. Her father maintained, in his futile stubborn mumbling, that as long as Oreena was Mrs. Seibert she wasn't his daughter. He loved her more than anything else on earth; it was the love that hurt and made him stubborn.

It was not long before Paullen was on horseback and riding about on the Combe plantation; then the day was set for visiting Seibert's.

Mr. Grinnell, younger son of good family and sober, with the tenacity that an educated Englishman has everywhere, had held to good clothes, which are somehow or other a symbol of caste, and keep up self-respect, even when packed away and growing mouldy in airtight boxes. In the generous, embarrassed way of a man offering something to wear to an equal whom he does not know very well, Mr. Grinnell placed his wardrobe, full of creases and camphor in a sheet-iron covered box, at Paullen's disposal. The dark Lily laid aside enough of her dignity to do a washing in the pool of running water, where, for all her laziness, she bathed every day; and by the help of Lu Lung's hot iron in the kitchen Paullen was fitted out.

Then he and Nada vanished among the shadows of upland roads.

## 2

Their horses were plodding and nodding at a walk, coming up to the highest point reached by the twisted road where it rounded under the crest of a bluff that men had gouged and half blown away to make room for passers-by. Then the road again bent waveringly down into the valley.

"Look!" said Paullen, as he raised his arm ahead.

"I know. It took my breath the first day. It was all jungle."

"No. See? There is someone."

Much farther on and above them a man on horseback was at the edge of the road under the gouged bluff. Below him the country was diminished by distance until it lay like toy-land. In a far-off haze of silver the ocean shimmered restlessly.

"That is Seibert."

"I thought it must be," he said.

The road curved before them, and when they came in sight of him again they were much nearer, but he had not yet seemed to notice their coming.

They watched him, not the view. As if by some accidental trick of position, some chance arrangement of bluff, vista, and the sky, the motionless horse and rider were massive in outline, without details, the figure without personality, and seemed more than a big man on an enormous black stallion; they seemed something monumental, something fittingly expressive of the conqueror, looking out across the hills and slopes he had broken to the plough.

They were quite close before Seibert turned to look at them, and he appeared to be surprised that anyone was near. He pulled back into the road, flourished an arm over his head, and shouted, "Ho-oh there!" as though they were a mile off.

From afar an echo caught the shout and threw it back with impudent mimicry: "O-o-there!" as if the echo knew something that ought to be mocked.

Nada lifted her hand in the flutter of a reply. Already, before they could have spoken, Seibert was talking in a loud, rapid voice. With a flourish he pushed his hat far back, showing the hairless red forehead, dotted with sweat.

Paullen thoughtfully regarded him. He had heard of Seibert from everyone. His personality stirred people. Mr. Grinnell was an admirer, and wouldn't deny that the man did boast, but he had jolly well done something to spread himself a bit if he liked! McGuire, in a sort of indolent perverseness, took the other side to what anybody said. Nada had told him something of how her sister felt, and why; but she was really a little sorry for Seibert, which was the last feeling in the world anybody would have thought he could inspire. Out of painful courtesy Paullen had even listened clear through old Combe's complaint; though, true enough, that had been before he could walk very well. He had expected that Seibert would be full of perfectly transparent brutality, and that he would dislike him intensely on sight—and he did. After the first thrill of the powerful horse and motionless rider, Paullen suspected that Seibert had seen them coming far below and waited as he did just to show off. This idea deeply disgusted Paullen, and seemed to justify, somehow, all the dislike that he had heard expressed.

Seibert's stallion was an ill-tempered beast near other horses, and now champed his bit, rattled the bridle chains, pawed, tossing his head with eyes ablaze, threatening to rear or bolt.

Seibert talked loud. What he said was important enough in a way but he spoke with loud-mouthed emptiness, waving an arm that did not have the least gestural force. The whip that he never rode without dangled from his gauntleted wrist not unlike a symbol.

He had been thinking, he said, of his first climb to this very spot. Twenty-two years before—and looked down on jungle, nothing but jungle. *Ach!* how time goes fast! Every tree down there, every year, was fed fertiliser. His secret: roust the weeds and use manure!

The stallion backed clear off the road, so close to the edge of the bluff's shelf that a hind foot loosened small rocks. They went rattling down for hundreds of feet.

Seibert gave a swinging cut at the flank and drove in his spurs—these spurs that jingled so when he walked. The stallion bounded, then was jerked back on his haunches in the middle of the road. Seibert kept on talking. Between Bismarck and his rider there was no doubt as to which of them held the reins.

"Showing off!" thought Paullen, who recognised horsemanship—a bit brutal, but nevertheless horsemanship.

In grudging honesty he later said to Nada, "That horse would kill an ordinary man"—pause—"but perhaps he's the bigger brute, that fellow."

Paullen did not like the way Seibert's eyes and thick-lipped grin beamed at him: "So this was the sick sailor? From the *Hans Haasbruck*, yes?" To him, this heartiness was unconvincing. He noticed, too, that Seibert's expression had a way of dying out for a second or two, as if his thoughts slipped away, even while he was gesturing, almost while speaking.

"This view, I made it!" A big fist struck against his chest.

There wasn't a tree he hadn't personally inspected when he set it out. Not one. And fertilised. That was the secret. Take any man, even of good stock, that had to have his fingers all the time groping about like little roots for food, just to keep himself alive, barely alive—never bore good books, good music, good pictures, that fellow! Same with trees, if they had to hunt for food. Look at the races that were hunters, all savages. *Gott*, yes! Civilisation was a matter of the food supply. Food a matter of manure. Eh? Well-fed people ruled the earth. Trees had to be of good stock, otherwise a waste of manure, like feeding savages.

He rode along with them for a while, then with a preoccupied flourish and a big, empty-voiced good-bye turned off toward where many black shapes were moving slowly as crippled ants at their unending work; ugly creatures, with the leer of hatred in their faces.

Paullen and Nada, as they went on, almost lost their tempers over dissimilar ideas in talking of him. Paullen put down the blatant heartiness and vague flourishes of the big arm, with that ominous quirt dangling, to a crafty insincerity.

"It's just a mask. He's hiding something. I *know* it!"

Nada tossed her head; the little lips moved rapidly. "Nothing of the kind. He's just proud of what he's done—can you blame him?—and wants to be liked."

"And *you* like him."

"I don't! I—my sister isn't happy. That's enough to keep me from liking any man."

"He's appallingly conceited."

"All men are!"

"Some have good manners, at any rate. There's Mr. Grinnell, who wouldn't——"

"Who can't even get rid of a few cocoanut beetles, and"—hastily, without really any wish to disparage Mr. Grinnell, but because she had a point to win—"I don't see that Mr. Grinnell has anything to be conceited over."

"You *do* like him."

"I don't!"

"You stand up for him."

"I hate him!"

At which Paullen dropped his hands in sarcastic helplessness, much like surrender. He was not quite old enough to understand that a woman does not need to mean what she says to win an argument.

### 3

Oreena expected them, and for a long time had been watching through the grounds from the veranda's swing. Yesterday Tono had brought word that this was to be the day. As they did not come as soon as she had thought they would, she pulled the mirror many times from under her cushion for a last look.

Oreena knew that her face was flawless. She had pleasure in seeing day after day, a score of times a day, that her ripe little lips curved adorably, that her nose was straight and not in the least thickened by her native blood, that her dark,

moist eyes were filled with light; her hair had a silken bushiness, her skin was of a deep, rich sun-brown.

Anybody's visit would have been exciting. Nothing happened from one month's end to another. Seibert had his groves and jungle, and for him something was always happening, even in the flower-beds. He would go stamping in his spur-studded boots along the gravel walks to look at the bud of some carefully-nurtured plant the gardener had petted from a seedling; and perhaps he would say: "Ah, to-morrow it will bloom." No doubt the plant would overhear; by to-morrow it was sure to be in bloom. There was passion in him for flowers—and fertiliser.

One flower was not exactly like another to Oreena, for she thought that some looked better than others in her hair; but she had quickly become indifferent to flowers except as flowers, and did not ever greatly care for the artificial arrangement, the walks, terraces, clumps, masses of bloom, which were Seibert's pride.

She felt that he regarded her as something of an odd, pretty little plant. It was pleasant to be admired, but she wanted love; and not from him. She wanted the strangling, fiery caress of youth to youth. There was no youth in Seibert.

Any attempt to disturb his heavy weariness when he did not feel like being disturbed was "foolishness," and so called. She resented his dominance, which came so naturally to him that he did not recognise it as dominance.

Now for a long time her attitude toward him had been that of a woman who is trying to make a good showing in a doubtful bargain; but young women, full of life and love-hunger, when they have been bad bargainers seldom possess the worldly wisdom to realise that food, shelter, bodily warmth, and a man indifferent enough not to be cruel are not wisely to be gambled away for even love.

Oreena was as ready to have a hand reach up for her as a pear dead ripe—any hand, preferably not too muscular or soiled by stable odours.

John Paullen was a name given to her fancy when it was ravenously empty. She made reveries about him, began to fashion his face in her mind; at times, as she walked, her little body swung in the thrilling play that this young stranger stood by and looked at her. She was determined to be loved; and a certain physical fastidiousness was her nearest approach to caution. Less has saved many a girl's soul. More would not have saved Oreena's. A tropic girl, half uncivilised at birth and still nothing but a child, she was mad for love.

#### 4

Oreena looked up from her mirror. In the distance, through the latticed space of tree-trunk and shrub foliage, she could see them coming. The horses walked idly, as if dozing between steps.

A shadow of petulance fell on her face; slim little fingers closed into fists, grasping and holding something not there. She was waiting impatiently, and had been waiting a long time; and they loitered, as if pleased enough with each other not to be much interested in where they were going.

This tingle of jealousy revived a sense of unfairness in things, like desperation. Tears came out, venturing almost to the edge of her dark eyes. Oreena was about to drive them back, since beauty is not at its best when dampened; but she was caught by an intuitive subtlety as she bent to her mirror and peered at her saddened expression. Neither gaiety nor aloofness had ever made her face so appealing. This was something that she had never before realised.

Oreena convinced herself in an instant that it was so, that she *was* miserable and saddened, a chilled plant in the shadow of something unlovely and unmovable.

So it was that Nada first called out gaily, then, anxiously jumping from her horse without touching Paullen's extended hand, she hurried with outstretched arms toward Oreena, asking what was the matter, what had happened, what was wrong?

Oreena smiled, spoke sweetly, seemed glad, but not happy. She denied that anything was wrong, but her denial was in such a manner as to confirm her sadness. Her greeting of Paullen was subdued, without eagerness; but the soft, deep dark eyes stayed lingeringly on his face in a way that made him feel that she was quite dispirited, and made him sure that he knew why. Nada had told what purported to be "all about" her attractive sister, but he could not imagine how Nada had been so unseeing as to say that Seibert seemed to be good to her. Unhappy, yes; Nada had admitted that of the marriage; but not without what appeared to be almost a liking for Seibert; certainly a kind of respect was included in her opinion of him.



At this very first exchange of glances with her, Paullen recalled the powerful horsemanship that had set the stallion on his haunches. That jerk and dangling whip were connected, if only symbolically, with the furtive sadness in Oreena's face; and he pitied her.

Lalua, a tall, straight, immobile native girl with slanting eyes, shuffled out in grass slippers, and brought a tray set with glasses of cool wine and little cakes sprinkled with aniseed.

Seibert had an arrangement of canvas and dripping water that very well took the place of ice. He had grapes on a sandy slope, and from these he made wine—not this, but a less delicate wine. Once the blacks had got hold of some soured casks. For half the night there was a dreadful time—yelling and rushing about; big fires going. Some of the blacks went off into the bush with a dog they had killed. She had heard one of the servants say that it wasn't a dog at all! Seibert expected eventually to make grape brandy. There was a market, he thought, throughout the South Seas for grape brandy, cheap and strong. He was trying now to get more blacks—another hundred or two. She hoped, almost, that he would not be able to get them. Much work was planned, and could not be carried on for lack of labour.

Oreena told them all this as they nibbled cakes and sipped wine. She tasted the wine lightly, and with dainty nervousness moved a little cake about on her plate with the tip of a small finger. She did not raise the cake to her mouth. Her excitement was intense. A crumb would have been choking. Yet she spoke quietly, with now and then the slow smile of a tired child that really wants to be gracious.

Nada tried to think of a way to have her alone for a few minutes and find out what was wrong. Oreena had never been like this—just sad.

Presently Nada suggested that someone show John (she had been calling him John for many days) the stables. These, she said, were really wonderful stables, and he was interested in horses.

Tono was sent for. "Poor Tono," Oreena murmured, as they saw him coming. Nothing more was said, but Tono's story as to why he wore the bandage had been told at Combe's.

As he stood up to leave them, Paullen asked: "That night when the blacks were loose, what did Mr. Seibert—how did he manage?"

Oreena felt that much of her future depended on her answer. He was asking, not to know what had been done, but what to think of Seibert; it was the difference between generalship and personality. She sensed the importance of the reply.

Her eyes fluttered to the little cake, gazing thoughtfully there while she tapped it, as if hesitating to say. And she was.

At last: "He put overseers and natives that could be trusted on guard around the buildings. He said that he did not want any of the labourers hurt—that he needed them. We had a terrible night, knowing that the men on guard were not expected to shoot!"

Nada, reaching for more cakes, casually put in: "That was sensible."

Oreena lifted her glance doubtfully to Paullen, and was thrilled. He did not know it himself, but his grey eyes were lighted with a protective earnestness.

He then went away with Tono, who began to talk importantly in a rapid mixture of pidgin-English, as if the horses were his own, the buildings of his designing, and that but for him Seibert would not know how to manage his affairs.

The two sisters, waiting for him to get out of hearing, watched Paullen as he walked off down the winding drive; and they were for some moments lost in reflective silence, each with her thoughts.

A slanting shaft of sunlight reached their feet. Somewhere at the other end of the veranda the canaries awakened from their long midday rest and began a throbbing trill. Lalua, the immobile, withdrew after she had brought more cakes, and let the screened door slam by way of gently conveying her dislike of Oreena. Away off a man shouted vaguely; he had given orders from afar to some workmen. Tiny lizards, running between doubtful pauses, flitted across the sunlight on the floor.

Nada started to speak, but at the first word, as if she had awaited a signal, Oreena leaned across the table's corner, overturning a glass, and caught hold of her sister's arm. There came a whispering rush of words: "He's mine! He's *mine*! You must let me have him! I won't give him up. You—you said you didn't love him, and—and I do!"

Nada was disconcerted, and secretly appalled. Her love of Oreena was wound up in the intricacies of an affection that had never denied her sister anything, however selfish the demand.

"But, Oreena, you haven't known him an hour!"

"I have waited all my life!"

"Oreena, you—you are married."

"I am not. I am a plant—a potted plant. And I won't bloom—not here. I won't!"

"But, dear, what would you do? What can you do?"

"Make him love me. I can! He almost does now. He's sorry for me. Oh, isn't he a darling! Such soft, bright eyes—and long lashes! I wish I had those lashes. Nada, you will help me, won't you? You don't love him—you said you didn't love him."

"No, of course—I—I like him."

"Oh, you couldn't help liking him. But he is mine! I will have him! Didn't you see, he's sorry for me already."

"Oh, so that was what you—— Oreena! You wanted him to feel sorry for you? 'Nada felt somehow cheated.

"What else could I do? And he ought to feel sorry for me. Everybody ought to feel sorry for me. I'm here—just stuck here in this—this flower-pot of a place, and can't move. And you have seen *him*. So big and thick, with that awful red forehead that is bare as nakedness, like something indecent. Always the smell of sweat. And so old. I can't be expected to love him."

"But, Oreena, that isn't his fault—his appearance. And you set your cap for him. You said so!"

"I believe *you* love Mr. Paullen!" Oreena countered quickly.

"I most certainly do not."

"Then why do you talk this way? Why don't you help me? Why do you try to make me feel I am doing wrong? I won't feel that wrong! I am not. I am going to have that boy for my very own, and——"

"Shh-hh, Oreena!"

Oreena's little hands waved out in gestures of desperate indifference.

"I don't care who hears! I don't care! He would kill me; but he *is* killing me. I won't endure it. And you, Nada, you *must* help me!"

"But what can *I* do?"

They fell into silence at the idea of what could be done, and sat absent-mindedly gazing into each other's face. Oreena's small, bushy head had thoughts scurrying about in it like a nest of spiders, weaving futile little webs that were at once thrown away. This moment of her life seemed of supreme importance, and she must do something at once cautious and desperate—the usual dilemma of the woman who loves.

Nada afterwards told McGuire that her sole sensation at this time (she would not admit love for Paullen) was dread. She saw, she said, those big, muscular hands at the throat of her sister, and wanted to put her face down on her arms and cry.

Presently Oreena said, "There is a back trail to the waterfall. You can ride in that way without anyone seeing. I often go to the waterfall. Some time soon, in a day or two, you must come that way, and let me be with him alone. You will do that, Nada?"

"But, dear, it is dangerous!"

"But, darling," Oreena mimicked feverishly, "I do not care!"

"It mustn't be done that way. I am afraid. No, no, no, Oreena!"

Scornfully Oreena hissed, "*You* won't be hurt. It is my throat he would choke! And if you won't help me I'll get caught that much quicker, and then——"

"Oreena, you have gone mad!"

"I have! I am going to have him. I am going to make him love me. I would do anything in the world to get him and keep him."

"But where will it end? How can it end? John was nothing—not even the ship, not even the sack of dollars, like that other man."

"He has two strong arms and the sweetest mouth in the world! I love him!"

It was with the strange, eternally feminine disregard of man's volition that they talked of John Paullen, as if their plans determined his desires. It did not occur even to Nada, who resisted the idea with her every thought and hope, that Paullen might not be fascinated as Oreena wished; and this must have been tinged with some bitterness, as with her he had not shown a sign of anything more than companionable affection, an unfailing quiet courtesy.

Oreena, on the other hand, could make a rush at him; and in the pretence that she was miserable, perhaps hoping for escape from Seibert, whatever boldness she used would seem that much more of an appeal for sympathy, and even protection.

Nada realised this, and thought it almost like cheating. She spoke of it, however (to McGuire), as cheating Paullen. Seibert was an unlovely man, thick-bodied, heavy-featured, with nothing apparent in him to awaken tenderness; but he had never been abusive. He always kept whatever promises he made. He even observed his contracts with the blacks. And it was like cheating Paullen to give such a terribly wrong picture of Seibert. It was worse than cheating; it was putting him in danger.

Nada had no choice but to submit or to warn him.

## 5

Seibert had cut the back trail with the intention of laying a road that passed the waterfall. From lack of labourers and press of work elsewhere he had then drawn off his attack on that part of the jungle, which, like the last foot-hold of a hill-dwelling tribe, was, after all, hardly worth the fight to clear it out. Some day he meant to send in his axemen and grubbers, dynamite and fire, powerful horses in tandems of chain harness, and ant-like swarm of blacks, for his twenty and more years of warfare was not to be made inglorious by anything so like a survival of the enemy on the unfertile hills behind him.

Creepers had sneaked back to the trail, winding and binding themselves into the torn soil; trees lowered branches from above those that had been lopped; and the unresting jungle, in its sleepless, cautious way, moving with the furtive slowness of savage things that venture again where the white man has passed, was trying to take possession and obliterate the trail.

The following day Nada rode over alone to see her sister and try to dissuade her from her passionate folly; but Oreena would not listen, and was ready to be angry, and threaten to do things even more desperately foolish. She knew that Nada would give in. Nada had always given in to her.

Oreena rode with her to the waterfall, and part way on the trail, which Nada then followed alone until it came out of the bush on the road that led to Puluotu.

Nada felt creepy about being alone in the jungle; and she remembered that blacks often ran away from Seibert and stayed out in the bush until they got tired or hungry, or were caught. If one of them should have jumped out, the ground was so uneven and tangled that the horse could not have run; and this thought made her uncomfortable.

Besides, she was troubled about Paullen. She thought, "I will not come this way again. I will not bring him." But even while saying it she knew that she would. She knew that Oreena would not stop at any sort of madness if she felt that Nada was trying to circumvent her.

The next day she told Paullen that she knew of a pretty trail, and asked if he would like to take it. He said that he would.

They had not ridden far, and were fighting to keep branches from their faces, while the horses hesitated and stumbled, when he said, "This is a beautiful trail! Why on earth did you come this way?"

She wanted to say, "Let us turn around and go back." But she said there was a waterfall up along the trail and they must see that; so they went on.

When they were not far from the waterfall he said, "Listen. I hear it. Like the sound of wind coming through the tree-tops."

They stopped a moment and listened. Then Nada said, "Oreena often comes to this waterfall when she feels unhappy. She says it is the best place that she has found to cry in."

Nada's tone was vaguely sarcastic; but Paullen did not notice. He said, "Oh?" He had not paid any attention to the way she had spoken; all he heard was that Oreena must find a place far from her house in which to ease her wretchedness.

Presently he asked, "Nada, repeatedly you have stood up for Seibert and showed that you like him, yet you know that your sister is unhappy. You told me that she was."

"I don't stand up for him. I only say that he isn't as bad as some people think!"

"The thing I can least understand," Paullen continued, "is how a man such as he ever coaxed her into being his wife. She is—is dainty and—and *so* innocent!"

Nada wanted to say, "She came over here and snared Mr. Seibert. And now she is waiting for us just to show you her tears, so that you will be sorry for her"; but she did not say anything.

Soon they came out of the trail's tangle into a small open space and looked up at the fall. It was a thin stream of water, but it fell a long way, and the spray hovered there, so that in the sunlight it was a mist of colours, as if broken rainbows were hung all about.

Oreena was waiting for them. She wore a thin, gauze-like dress of light blue silk, the last sort of garment which one would ordinarily wear for a ride in the bush. Her hair was studded with camellias, of which Seibert had great masses. She pretended surprise at seeing them, and Paullen was not in the least suspicious.

When she kissed Nada she whispered: "You will leave us together, won't you, right away?"

This pained Nada. It was not only that there wasn't a word of appreciation, but Oreena appeared to be afraid that Nada would not feel that she was in the way, and disappear.

Nada led her horse down to the stream to drink, then said: "Oh, I see a flower there that I want," and she crossed over. She walked a little distance until she was out of sight, then mounted again and rode farther, stopping in a warm, grassy place, where she dismounted and let the horse crop, while she sat and thought of Paullen and Oreena.

She said to herself, "Nada, if you were married to a man like Mr. Seibert, and one like John Paullen came near, you would do everything you could to get hold of him. You know that you would!"

Which was not true, for even while unmarried she was letting Paullen slip from her without doing anything.

She recalled what Kate Collins used to say in San Francisco: "One man is so much like another that it doesn't make much difference which one you have as long as you keep him in love with you." Mrs. Collins, in her brisk, amusing way, also maintained that a girl could be far happier with a man that loved her than with one she loved.

That day Nada remained out of sight until she saw it was toward the end of the afternoon, then she rode back; and as she drew near she sang to herself as loud as she could so that they might hear her coming. But the waterfall prevented her voice from reaching them. From where the trail dipped down to the stream she looked across, and they were in each other's arms. They did not see her until the horse had splashed right into the water.

Paullen was surprised, and blushed, and tried to put his arms away, but Oreena held to him, and she was crying. He looked so helpless and confused that Nada felt almost sorry for him, and vaguely angry at her sister; and she asked, a little stiffly, "What is the matter?"

Neither of them noticed her tone, or, if they did, must have put it down to embarrassment. Oreena looked up with tears on her face and laughed a little and said almost impudently: "I am happy! *That* is the matter!"

Paullen and Nada rode home together, but said hardly anything. Paullen appeared a little ashamed without being sorry, but he was uncomfortable.

The following day Nada said, "I don't feel like riding."

"Nada," he said soberly, looking at her earnestly, "I don't want you to think wrong of me. Your little sister is miserable and afraid of that Seibert. She is the most beautiful woman in the world, and the moment I saw her I knew that her life was a torment."

"But she is married, and it is dangerous for you both!"

"But why?—why did she marry him? You know that she did to keep Seibert from crowding your father! She is a little martyr. I knew all the time there must be some strange reason or she would not have married such a man."

"Oh! Oh, I—I understand."

"Of course you understand. And you must go with me or I can't go. If Mr. Seibert discovered me there without you, Oreena would be—well, he is a big brute! I feel like I was hiding behind your dress, and I don't like that, but it is really for her sake that you must go. Somebody, some one of those servants, might see us, and tell him that I was over there without you, and when she returned home he—he might do anything, and I would not know of it until too late."

"I will go with you," said Nada, looking away.

## 6

For the next two or three weeks McGuire, who had a sort of genius for being idle, loafed about and kept out of sight as much as he could. Because of his close relations with Williams some one of the consuls at Puluotu, if informed of his presence, might want to lay hands on him. He did not feel any special danger. Formerly, when on the island, he had loafed about the town itself; but he had been forced to dodge away rather suddenly, because the German Consul had decided to seize him. However, the German Consul was now absent from Puluotu. But at any rate McGuire thought it best not to be seen or talked about.

Every day Nada and Paullen went riding; and McGuire said nothing, did nothing. He at this time did not know what was really happening. He had a very strong affection for Nada, and liked Paullen thoroughly. Being uncomfortable on horseback himself, he preferred a chair to a saddle; besides, there was no reason for accompanying them. They very obviously wished to be alone on their rides. McGuire had from the first decided that whatever Williams found in the way of a tangle on his return he could straighten out to suit himself. So, believing that it was perfectly apparent that Nada and Paullen were very much in love, he grinned to himself, and was amused at their somewhat constrained air toward each other about the house. This, he thought, showed how silly young persons could be in hoping to hide the fact that they were in love, though they rode off, to the Lord knows where, every day, and were gone for hours.

Late one afternoon Nada rode into the grounds alone.

McGuire, loafing motionless against a pillar, idly watched the gentle sway of her body as she went by. Then he became aware of expecting to hear the throbbing hoof-beats of the other horse that should have been racing to overtake her, and of not hearing anything.

"Where'd you lose him?" McGuire called.

Nada was riding at a walk and looking toward the ground. Now, when he spoke, she dropped her head still more, and, turning away, gave the horse a cut. He went in a jolting trot for the stable.

"They've quarrelled," said McGuire, grinning.

The afternoon was still and hot. He could hear the squeaking of the saddle as she slid off before the stable door; where, careful to keep from looking toward him, she lifted the bamboo bar and jerked on the reins. The horse threw up his head and made as if to pull back; then horse and girl disappeared into the building.

McGuire now listened attentively for Paullen's gallop. It did not come.

Then suddenly he recalled that for many days, during what little he had seen of them together, they had been more quiet, on a strain, politely subdued toward each other. The nervous flush of one who feels that he has been missing something important touched him.

"Oh ho! They've been cooking up this quarrel for a week—right under my nose!"

He kept his eyes toward the barn, waiting for her to come. With an empty pipe in his mouth he whittled at a nubbin of tobacco, but watched that she didn't slip out and get around to the other side of the house. It would be dark in a few minutes, and if she didn't come soon he meant to stroll over to the stable.

After a long time she reappeared, and began walking toward the house, as if she had not seen him and did not intend to see him. She had taken off her soft straw hat that fastened under her chin with broad black ribbons.

"Nada, come here!"

She approached in unexpected submission, with head down and slow step.

"You've lost a perfectly good young man somewhere, or else thrown him away. Which?"

She said nothing and did not look up.

"Crying!" said McGuire.

She stood on the ground below him. Her dark, bushy hair had been swept securely in under the teeth of a broad comb, and earrings twinkled through the misty wisps. Her riding skirt, divided in the Hawaiian fashion, but much shorter, had a broad girdle that was edged with black and gold braid.

He leaned on his elbows against the veranda rail and blew big puffs of smoke into the still air. Already it was twilight.

"Crying!" McGuire repeated, with a sort of big brother's scorn.

Nada raised her head, making no movement but that. It was nearly like the upturning of a suppliant face. She was not crying; she had not been crying; but she suffered dumbly, without anger, reproach, and without hope.

"In heaven's name, what's the matter with you?" he said, astonished, speaking kindly, but still under the impression that she was making too much of a lovers' quarrel.

Her eyes closed slowly, then her head fell, moving a little from side to side, meaning that she would not tell.

The darkness of oncoming evening was just enough to have blurred a page at half-arm's length. He sank a little lower against the rail, touching it with his breast and peering down intently.

"What happened, Nada?"

The tightening of her small body gave the impression of a shudder.

"Where's Paullen?"

"I don't know," she said, without looking up, and there was a shade of untruth in the low tone.

"What's the trouble? What did you quarrel about?"

"We did not quarrel."

"No?"

She shook her head without lifting her eyes.

Heavy shadows had slipped in through the grounds, darkening the gloom that was always there. The silence was like stealth. It was the hush of the great pause that Nature makes when she has finished with the tropic day and has not yet quite slipped into the garments of night. Gentle scratchings went on fitfully in the veranda thatch, where night-sleepers were settling into bed; and insect sounds, as from impatient musicians trying stops and strings, piped shrilly and died. Far off the earliest of the fireflies passed among the trees like fairy lightning. Twilight was gone.

"Where is Paullen?" he repeated.

"I don't know. I left him——"

She broke the sentence and did not go on.

"Where? Where did you leave him? Tell me."

"At my sister's."

"At your—Seibert's?"

Already they were talking through darkness. Her face was blotted out. Only a form of indistinguishable outline was below him; and, though she nodded her head, that was no answer, since he could not see.

"At Seibert's?"

"Yes."

"What the devil were you—you left him with Seibert?"

Disturbed thoughts suddenly jostled for McGuire's attention. Seibert had heard something, and suspected the "trader" that

had brought Nada and left two sailors, one of them sick? Seibert was trying to find out about that "trader" who didn't have time to go around to Pulu'u? The big, hearty German with his careless air of well-being was shrewd. Perhaps word had been received in Pulu'u regarding the theft of Penwenn's *Flying Gull*? Paullen would be no babbler; but if questioned, such a son of gentlemen would have no genius for lying.

McGuire's worst suspicion rose up, and convinced him then and there. Seibert had discovered who McGuire was, and would want to take him in hand, perhaps a present to the German Consul.

He was not disturbed. He did not like the physical exertion of having to run away, and that was about all. Still, Williams was returning to Pulu'u; it would be ironical indeed if Seibert, having got wind of this, should lie in wait and catch him, or cause him to be captured at such a time. That would be Williams-luck!

Nada had come up on the veranda. He could hear her step and dimly see the suggestion of her form.

"Well, so that blasted Dutchman's found out something, eh?"

"No! No!" she cried, so poignantly that he was startled.

"Nada, what *is* the matter with you?"

She spoke through darkness, and with weary hopelessness, "But he will! Oh, Dan, he will find out! I—I kept him to-day—kept him from it—but he will find out, and oh, then——"

"But don't cry about it! Wait until he does find out. Then we'll both cry."

"But she loves him!"

"Yes, I know how you feel. He is a big brute for a brother-in-law, but——"

"No!" Nada's hands clutched McGuire. "No, not him! It is John Paullen—she loves John Paullen. They are mad, those two. And he will kill them! I know he will kill them. He would have found them together to-day, but I—oh, I—I stopped him—ugh!"

She sank heavily against McGuire, and he could feel the shudders trembling through her body.

## 7

They went inside the house.

Nada had said, "I will tell you from the beginning, but not in the dark."

The wick gave a lifeless, smoky flame to McGuire's match. He lifted the lamp and shook it, listening for the swish of oil, but it was empty. He then felt his way to the tin box and got one of the candles kept there, because the lamps were usually unfilled. When placed on the table, the dim candleflame trembled, as if afraid of the shadows that crouched in every corner.

". . . and so after that, every day I would ride on to the same grassy spot and let the horse nibble while I read, or lay half asleep, thinking and wishing that I had never left San Francisco—though it would be awful to see Alan Penwenn again.

"To-day I felt terribly wretched. It was so hot, and I have grown tired of going there day after day by myself and doing the same thing. I said, 'I will never come again; it is not right that I should.' And I meant it.

"I was lying down with a book open before me, and I must have been asleep, for all at once I became aware that Mr. Seibert was on a big grey horse, and looking down from almost on top of me and grinning.

"I was so startled that I was sure I *must* be dreaming, and sat up, rubbing at my eyes.

"He laughed and he said, 'Ho-ho! That is better than what I thought! I thought first it was your horse that had knocked the little girl off. You looked dead.'

"I wished that I had seen him in time to pretend that I had been hurt; but there I was, looking silly and rubbing my eyes, with an open book on the grass.

"'What are you here for?' he asked, looking at me as he does sometimes when he seems to be talking from behind a mask.

"I was frightened half to death. I almost felt that he knew I came there every day.

"I said, 'I was riding over to see Oreena, and stopped here. It looked so soft and inviting. And I must have fallen asleep.'

"And that nice boy Paullen, where is he? You like him, eh?"

"No! No! Oh, I don't!" I cried. Then suddenly I was afraid that he *knew* and was playing with me. He grinned, and stared in that queer way so you cannot tell what he means.

"Oh, is that so, heh?" he said, as if he did not believe me. 'He is a fine boy, that fellow. My wife, she likes him.'

"I came near fainting. I wanted to jump up and scream that it wasn't so; but I looked down at my book and closed it. I took a long time to close it, because my fingers felt as if they were frozen, and the book dropped from them when I picked it up.

"You come from that way?" and he pointed in the direction of the waterfall. 'Over my trail?' Then he waved his arm, and the riding-whip swung like a snake hanging down from his wrist.

"I said, 'Yes.'

"He put out his chest and struck it with a gloved fist, and said: 'Ha! That trail is there so the jungle will know some day I will clean him out—and put in nutmegs. *Ach!* those nutmegs are the devil to make grow on Pulotu. Good-bye.'

"He was as abrupt as that; and he started right off, and I saw that he was going toward the waterfall.

"I shouted, 'Oh, Mr. Seibert.'

"He pulled up and looked at me in that strange, almost stupid way he has, but you just know that it isn't stupid. It is only his way. 'Don't go—please!' I said.

"Then I grew frightened that he might be suspicious, and then nothing could have stopped him.

"Please stay—and—and talk to me.'

"He rode back slowly until he was almost on top of me again. I don't know why he came so close, but I didn't move. I couldn't!

"What the matter is with you?" he asked in his queer, blank way.

"Oh, I am *so* lonely.' I *had* to say something. I *had* to stop him. I had to *keep* him. I had to make him turn back, and I was never so afraid in my life.

"You go over and see Or'na. She tells me all the time that she is lonesome too.'

"No, I don't want to see Oreena.'

"You don't want to see Or'na? Then who is that you want to see? That fine boy Paullen?"

"No!"

"Well, I got something else to do besides talk now,' and he pulled at the reins and turned his horse.

"Oh, please, *please* stay and talk to me!"

"He looked at me in that empty-faced way a long time, as if he was trying to understand something that was puzzling; then he said: 'All right. You stay here, and I will talk to you when I come back.'

"No, no,' I begged. 'Please don't leave me—*please!*'

"You with me ride to the waterfall then. I show you somethings. *Ach*, yes.'

"That would have been terrible, for I couldn't have made them hear us coming because of the falls, and you can see way down at the bottom of the falls before the trail drops. I thought that I was lost, that there was nothing I could do to save them. He looked so big and strong and brutal. His arms were terribly thick, and I—I cried:

"Oh, please don't leave me this way. Look, don't you see I have been here day after day? See where my horse has cropped. I have been *waiting for you!*'

"I said that, and I could not look at him again. I was hot and cold and sick, and I looked down at the ground, and almost died of fear that he would laugh at me and ride on; and yet the thought of having him get off his horse and sit down beside me frightened me so that my throat was so dry I did not see how I could ever speak again.



"I knew that he was looking at me, and I would have given anything, anything, at that moment to know just *how* he was looking; but I was afraid to turn around for fear it would be just the kind of expression that I most dreaded. He is such a gross, beastly sort of man when you are so close to him! I forgave Oreena everything in that one appalling minute.

"You have been waiting for me?"

"I could not tell anything from the way he asked that, but I thought it sounded doubtful, as if he didn't understand how I came to be there, and was a little suspicious, you know. I told him that Oreena had said that he often came that way. It was true, but I had never realised how terrible it would be to have him come. I had thought I would see him first, for you can see quite far the way he had come.

"He said, 'But why do you wait for me, heh?'"

"It was awful. He was making me tell him, right out, *everything*. I said, 'Can't you see? Don't you understand?'"

"No, I don't understand that thing."

"Oh," I cried, for I might as well have it over with, 'nobody loves me—and I am *so* lonely. And—and—you—oh, please come and sit by me. Oh, why do you make me tell you? I want to be loved!"

"He made a noise that sounded queer; it wasn't a word, it was—really it was almost like I don't know what. A grunt! I was terrified for fear that he would laugh at me and go on. I simply had to make him get off his horse. I said, 'Oh, please come here!"

"The horse moved closer. One step more and I know that horse would have put a foot on me, but I could not move. I almost wished it would step on me.

"Get off, please get off," I begged. 'I am so—*so* lonely!"

"I would not look up, and he did not say anything. I put my head down and trembled. I was so dizzy that it seemed that he made the ground shake with his weight when he did get down.

"What it is you want, now?" he asked.

"Kiss me!" I almost screamed.

"Oh, I hated him. He was playing with me. He was pretending to be stupid. I was afraid that he knew everything, and was making me go down to the last humiliation that a girl can go to in begging that way, and that then he would laugh. He sat down beside me. The air from his mouth was hot. I felt it on my neck, and shivered.

"I had to keep him there, then I had to make him go away.

"I said, 'You do love me?'"

"Yes. Ho, yes, I love you. *Ach!* such a pretty little girl!"

"He put one of his enormous gloved hands on me, and I was afraid he would close his fingers and say: 'Ah ho! You try to fool me, do you?' and then I would be crushed.

"I had to tell him that I was unhappy and lonely, and that I admired him so much!"

"He said, 'You come over and stay at our house and you will be loved all you want. *Ach!* yes, I love you!"

"His body is so coarse and his hands so heavy. I know just how Oreena has felt all these months, and I am sorry that I ever blamed her.

"You want that I should kiss you?" he asked.

"I said, 'Of course I do!"

"Then I shut my eyes and clenched my teeth. He was all hot with sweat, and when that big mouth of his, like a horse's mouth—his breath was heavy with stale tobacco—went to my throat I thought he was going to bite me, and I wanted to faint, but I didn't dare—I did not dare!"

Nada had almost finished her story (there was yet to be told how she had led Seibert into riding down through the groves, out to the road, and nearly home with her) when Paullen galloped hurriedly into the grounds, and shouted toward the candle-lit room: "Has Nada come?" His voice was piercingly anxious.

Reassured, he then went to put up the horse. It was easier; even in the dark to unsaddle and turn the horse out than to find the stable man. The fellow owned a guitar and a soft tongue; he was much given to the gentle art of love-making; and, like other moths, with darkness went abroad. In the daylight he slept, choosing out-of-the-way places where no search was likely to disturb him.

When she had heard Paullen's voice, Nada's story was broken. As if awakening, she pressed her hands to her face.

"Oh, the terrible, terrible thing is that he said he would see me every day! Dan, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

Then, for fear that Paullen might come in and find her, she hurried from the room.

## 8

When Paullen came in he found McGuire sitting in an armless rocker with his eyes broodingly on the candle, where the tiny moths that had crept through the screens were beating themselves to death on the pointed fire. An opened and partly-emptied gin bottle stood beside the candle.

"Look there," said McGuire, making a whorl of his hand on a loose wrist, imitative of the flame. "That's love—put it out and the little moths are safe enough, but the world's in darkness!"

"Of what are you talking?" asked Paullen, with a disturbed glance toward the gin bottle.

"Ever think how much a corpse is like a snuffed candle, all stiff and white and cold?" said McGuire, kicking a chair around so that Paullen would sit before him.

He had never been quite sure how to feel toward McGuire. It was not distrust of him so much as distrust of his own understanding of a man who for unimaginable reasons seemed often trying to appear worse than he was, but trying in a way that hardly disclosed his intention. His silences were full of hazy amusement, his sentences often cryptic and startling; he was lazy, and he did drink.

Paullen did not want to sit and talk; he wished to be alone; in his own happiness there was much that disquieted him, and he was thoughtful. Besides, he feared that McGuire was a little top-heavy from drinking.

However, there was no escape from McGuire's "Sit down, Paullen. Sit down a minute and watch the fool moths. How'd you come to lose Nada to-day?"

He did not sit down. He put a foot on a rung of the chair and leaned across the back, facing McGuire, but ready to go at any minute. He had the kind of body that never sags, is never listless; and his was a young, well-favoured face that seemed incapable of giving a distrustful sidelong glance. His grey eyes had a youthful, bird-like directness.

He answered McGuire's question in the careful tone of a man who is watchful that the words will not carry more meaning than he wishes; and he explained that Nada had gone off some little distance, out of sight, while he and Mrs. Seibert rode together. When they went to look for Nada she could not be found. He had then thought that perhaps she missed them, and so returned home by herself.

"You and Oreena rode off somewhere this afternoon, did you?"

"We were riding, yes."

"Where?"

"You know the waterfall? We rode downstream quite a distance. It was rough. We went slowly."

"Nobody could have seen you from the falls?"

"We went at least a mile, and—why, what is the matter?"

"Listen! Listen!" said McGuire, who had half started from his chair and cocked his head attentively, an upraised, silencing hand toward Paullen. "Listen! Hear that? Hear it? Don't you hear it? Listen!"

Paullen stiffened, listening attentively. Little static shivers were on his back, frozen there. He could hear nothing but the sweeping rustle of the night wind in the palms, their gentle scraping and clicking against the house, the soft flutter of big moths on the screen. There was nothing else to be heard.

The candle gave hardly any light, and that was troubled by the death-plunges of the tiny moths, dipping themselves into

fire, as lovers do.

"What is it?" Paullen asked. His voice dropped to the whisper that passes between men when they stand paused in half-alarm.

"Laughter. Don't you hear? Ha-ha-ha-ha! Like that. Can't you hear it? Ha-ha-ha! Hear?"

Paullen started back, sending an anxious glance at the gin bottle. This was as near to delirium as he had ever seen anybody; it seemed appallingly near. He tried to say something coherently persuasive about "coffee" and "sleep"—very strong coffee.

"Sit down, sit down!" McGuire cried in unangered mockery. "You'll hear more than the Devil laughing before half this night is out!"

The tone was disturbingly sardonic, and Paullen was immensely relieved by the feeling that McGuire was not entirely out of his head.

"Paullen, this is the first afternoon, isn't it, that you and Oreena have taken a ride down the stream together—just you and Oreena?"

McGuire could see the boy's muscles become tense as he felt the shock of disclosure.

"Nada has told you," he said, tensely quiet. The tone was without criticism. He stood quite straight, erect, slender, boyish, too young for all of his experience to know how tormentingly evil life can be—a wolfish thing, life—too old to be forgiven bad judgment.

"Where's it to end, Paullen?" McGuire asked, suddenly companionable.

"That is about all I think of, and I do not know. We are both unhappy now, so, can't you see, whatever does happen won't make it worse? That really isn't my idea, or wasn't, until Oreena gave it to me. She said that to-day. And it is true, in a way."

"To-day, eh? To-day? Well, you both might have been discovered. Wouldn't that have been worse?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't that be about the worst thing you could imagine?"

Paullen hesitated thoughtfully, and then, without excitement, admitted that he supposed it would be about the worst.

"You haven't much imagination. I can see worse things—lots of them. One of them would be if Seibert made you take her. Where would you take her? What would you do with her then? Could you take her home with you? She's half native, you know."

"I have no home." He said it quietly, as if that helped to solve the difficulty; but his face continued thoughtful. Then: "I might set up as a trader."

"What with? Just a wife? She's half white, you know. Been in a seminary. More than a woman—she's a lady."

"She is a child, just a child!"

"So was Eve."

"McGuire, do you think that anything you can say will make a difference? I don't believe you really do. I don't believe you are thinking of anything but the danger in Seibert's learning that I love her. But you don't want to say that because you think I would pretend not to care about danger. A man must have pride enough not to seem to care about dangers where a woman is involved. Isn't that it? So you talk of things you really don't believe at all. Isn't that so? You see, you should be frank with me."

The simple manliness of this reply made McGuire pause. It gave him a sensation of depression, as when fatality is in the air; he would have been more at ease if Paullen had shown a little embarrassment. At any rate he might have been defensively romantic. But he was being candidly unwise in his folly. It would be as hard to get at him with ridicule as with honest warnings; nor can one warn a man who has asked in just that way: "Do you think that anything you can say will make a difference?"

"Well, Paullen, you and Oreena may as well get ready to do whatever is to be done."

From across the back of the chair Paullen watched doubtfully with that direct, grey-eyed gaze of his, not knowing whether McGuire was prophesying or pronouncing judgment.

"Why? What makes you say that?"

"Seibert came to the waterfall to-day."

"He did! You mean that he knows? He was looking for us?"

"And if he does know?"

Paullen pushed the chair aside and started a fierce gesture with his fist, but the fist opened and the arm fell. He stood in meditative doubt. A slightly questioning look toward McGuire; then: "I could bring her here. This is her home. It is hard to know just what to do. Her father would let her stay."

"And when Seibert and his overseers rode over?"

"Of course, Seibert doesn't know. You gave me a start, the way you put it. He will find out though. So you are right; we may as well get ready. It isn't the thing to joke about, McGuire."

"I wasn't joking, John Paullen. Do you know why Seibert didn't get to the waterfall? No? Couldn't imagine, could you? Well, he met Nada."

"She kept him from coming! Oh, she's trump, that girl!"

"Paullen, you say it as though she could pull him off his horse and tie him to a tree."

"She could talk to him."

"What about?"

"For one thing, fertiliser!"

"And you are just through telling me that we shouldn't joke. Are you sure that you can't hear that laughter, Paullen? She stopped him, held him, and turned him back, and on the one day when he wouldn't have found you and his wife!"

"Couldn't she have made up something, anything, to talk about?"

"What? Just what?"

"I don't know, McGuire. But she must have. You say that she did keep him. How?"

"There is only one way that a woman—almost any woman—can detain a man—almost any man. And Nada thought that you and her sister would surely lose your lives if Seibert——"

McGuire stopped; his hand fell; the gesture was not unlike the fall of an axe.

Paullen gave him a long stare, dropped dejectedly into the chair, then bent forward with elbows on his knees, looking at the floor.

McGuire poured himself a glass of gin; then his fingers tapped a nervous tattoo as he held the glass half way to his lips and said, "It's really like throwing her to the wolves to save Oreena."

"We can't do that, McGuire!" Paullen stiffened, looking up, determined.

"Who do? We? Don't bring me into this, John Paullen. Seibert could have his wife—have ten wives—for all of me. But you"—McGuire paused to gulp down the gin—"you're chivalrous. You rescue beauty in distress. Nada's in a lot more distress than her sister. You have plenty to do, John Paullen, plenty, unless you mean to let that big wolf have her."

"No, I will not do that. I won't!" His gaze was resolute and direct.

"You and Oreena can run off—hide—can't you?"

"How would that help? To run? I can't run away from him, McGuire. Why should *I* run? He abuses her. She is afraid of him. I won't run."

"If you stay in Seibert's way he'll—he will just step on you, and walk on."

"What can I do, then?" he exclaimed impatiently, his eyes brightening.

"Go to Pulotu, get on a boat, and go home—to the States, I mean. If you will get out of the way, I'll look after Nada."

Paullen shook his head. "I won't do that."

"All right, then. Stay and get stepped on."

"I could go to Seibert and just tell him——"

"What?"

Paullen looked distractedly at the floor, suddenly feeling miserably helpless; then, reflectively: "It's wrong, McGuire. Everything is wrong. And Seibert *is* a beast! If he hadn't been, this afternoon he wouldn't——"

McGuire slammed the gin bottle to the floor. The bottle was empty or he would never have used it for emphasis. "Hold on there, Paullen. Hold on! We've got to give even a Dutchman his due. Nada had to practically put her arms to his neck and beg for a kiss before he woke up. He didn't show a bit of eagerness to add a new woman to his belt. This afternoon wouldn't be so bad if it ended there. He was so surprised by her being in love with him that he was half way manageable. But it won't end there. Seibert isn't used to being stopped. To-morrow, and the day after, and the day after that, his big hands will be grabbing at her. And she hates him, loathes him. He needed a shave and was covered with sweat. His body is just one enormous lump. He walks and climbs too much to be fat, but he's nothing but a monstrous lump. Old and half bald and a damn fool, fighting the jungle that way!"

Paullen gazed with questioning surprise; then grudgingly said: "That's the only thing about him. He *does* fight the jungle."

"Bah!" said McGuire. "That shows what a fool he is. For what? Just so he can make one kind of weed grow where Nature put another. And all the while the jungle is deep down in the soil, like evilness in the heart of man. You can plough and plant and sow and reap, but some day the jungle will send in its weeds, then creepers will come sneaking along, and little shrubs that grow into big shrubs, covered with swarming vines; then up stalks a heavy battalion of trees in great green shakos—and the jungle has won again. It always wins in the end. Always wipes man out at last. The jungle can wait a thousand years, ten thousand years, as the desert waited for Babylon!"

Paullen sat up, astonished, a little uneasy. "You are drunk," he said.

"Is that so? Well, you listen to a little piece of sober advice. First thing to-morrow, Paullen, you go bouncing into Pulotu and tell Dr. Lemaitre that Nada is sick. That'll be the easiest way of keeping her out of Seibert's reach for a few days. And if we are lucky something may happen. Don't ask me what. Use your own imagination. Anybody that thinks he can steal a woman from a man like Seibert has plenty—a devil's plenty!"

## 9

Dr. Lemaitre was an atheist; he enjoyed an evening of brisk argument against religion, any religion, the whole idea of religion; but at times, with shy pride beaming through the iron-rimmed spectacles, his voice would drop apologetically as he said: "Every physician is half-priest."

Old Combe came with the doctor up the stairs and into Nada's room, and stood dispiritedly behind him, looking at her with sad, hazy eyes, having nothing to say, just staring with dull helplessness.

Dr. Lemaitre soon saw that his powders were useless. She had that obscure and almost petulant sadness which, often more damaging than disease itself, leaves a physician helpless unless he is the half-priest. He knew that there was something wrong from the way she appeared to dread sun warmth and fresh air, for she had shaken her hair-clouded head, throwing a bare arm across her face at the suggestion of leaving her dark, hot room for the veranda.

Dr. Lemaitre pretended that his spectacles were blurred. He walked to the window and wiped his lenses for a long time, repeatedly holding the glass to the light. Then, with reassuring pats on the back, he sent her father shuffling out of the room and pulled a chair to Nada's bedside.

He had helped her creep into the world. Many nights, from month to month, he had guarded her cradle, watching out for the sly stabs that fever makes at little ones. When she had begun to walk, often he patched up her scratches, giving her cheek a kiss by way of receiving his fee. Many times he had beguiled her into taking bitter stuff from a big spoon, and laughed at the disgusted twist on her pretty face, but praising her for being a brave little girl.

It was not difficult for him to find out what was the matter.

Nada wanted to stay hidden away. She had been almost happy when McGuire explained to her that she was ill, very ill, and had better linger at finger-tips with death as long as she could. And by staying in her room she could evade Seibert and avoid Paullen.

"I hate him!" she had said of Paullen, but McGuire knew what she meant.

It had been quite by main force that he had kept Paullen from going to the door of her room and expressing gratitude, at least through the keyhole.

"But why shouldn't I?" asked Paullen, earnestly puzzled.

"How would you like to be thanked by somebody, even through a crack, after you had tried to commit suicide? Well, that's how Nada feels. You stay away. Understand?"

Paullen was sure that he ought to understand, but he didn't; though he pretended to, and said vaguely: "That is right. I must wait until she is better."

When Dr. Lemaitre had come McGuire disappeared, and remained on the ground below the veranda and smoked moodily, the pipe upside down. Presently, on the veranda above him, he heard short footsteps moving about with an air of stealth. He gazed up doubtfully, then Lemaitre looked over the railing.

"Ho, ho, ho! It is Monsieur McGuire. I can tell by the colour of the hair."

McGuire grinned and remained quiet.

"You are—what you call him?—scamp. It is that you are. A scamper! So you hide all this time from old Dr. Lemaitre!"

"Well," said McGuire, as he stretched himself lazily, "not from fear of you, surely; but I didn't want to distress a conscientious man with information he'd be in duty bound to take to his consul."

He was half-joking; Dr. Lemaitre knew that he was half-joking, but vigorously resented the tiny gleam of truth. Besides, though in his twenty years on Puluotu he had repeatedly served as acting consul, he had an old resident's contempt for consuls.

"Conscience! I have no conscience! If I had a conscience I would give every sick man I find to Death. But I am jealous of him. Monsieur Death is the great physician. Only he can cure this fever we all have. What do I care about consuls? Come up here. Little Nada has told me something."

McGuire climbed to the veranda, and in lazy dejection perched himself on the railing. Dr. Lemaitre patted McGuire's knees, saying with confidential hopefulness, "I know everything—all!" He moved his short arms in a quick, embracing gesture, repeating: "All—everything!"

"So she told you I was here?"

"Ah, an old friend like Dr. Lemaitre. What have you to fear from him?"

"She shouldn't have done it," said McGuire.

"Poor little Nada! You shall not blame her. We became friends the night she was born. Such a night! Such a ride! And when she was born she would not cry. I slapped her. She would *not* cry. I slapped her hard. I said, 'Little child, you must cry. This is the Vale of Tears you have come into.' Another slap—then *wa-a-a-a!* And she began her life. Such a little while ago, and now—tuh-tuh-tuh! If I had not slapped her she would have stayed asleep for ever. It is not I who wish that. No. Little Nada has just said, 'Oh, I wish I had never been born!' She is better now. Such a pretty child! She laughed for me. We talked of the big iron spoon I used to get her to try to swallow. Ah, me! Tuh-tuh-tuh!"

Dr. Lemaitre sighed reflectively, and in that moment's relaxation his cheerful face was shadowed with age, the light went out of his eyes, and he appeared tired and heartsore. Then, with almost a start, he pulled himself back into his usual cheerful briskness, and he said, "We must be rid of that Paullen fellow. Nada will stay sick until he is gone. As her physician I insist. But not in that room. No sun. No air. She will not come down while that Paullen fellow—he looks a good boy, too. Ah, such mistakes as we make. I had thought—but he must be sent away. She hates him."

"No," said McGuire. "But it really amounts to the same thing. She doesn't hate him. She loves him."

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Dr. Lemaitre. "It is worse than I thought! Much worse." He looked quickly all about, then speaking rapidly, as if eager to get something out before he changed his mind and remained silent, said, "Oreena is all to blame."

Any girl that would marry Herr Seibert is not like our Nada. He is the best husband for her. We must not let Oreena have her way. Always it has been her way, and Nada—nothing! Monsieur Paullen is a fine boy. It shows on his face. But he has no eyes! Nada—Frau Seibert! Tuh-tuh-tuh! He is blind!"

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## CHAPTER IV

### 1

Within a week Dr. Lemaitre had gone far down the coast to fight measles that had broken out among the natives; and, as usual, he, the atheist, would pretend to be fighting devils, and mix up his hygiene with a lot of hocus-pocus so the natives would scrupulously do as told.

Old Combe, inexplicably silent and more pathetic than in his garrulity, haunted the town, listening to the burst of chatter from any trader that touched the beach, and taking half of an afternoon to sip his glass of rum and water.

Paullen rode off each morning without saying where he was going, and no one asked; yet Nada and McGuire knew.

Nothing had been heard from Seibert, but his lack of interest seemed amply explained by the fact that he was having trouble with his blacks.

In the evening after Dr. Lemaitre's visit, Mr. Grinnell, smoking a bedtime pipe and walking about to ease his loneliness, had almost fallen over McGuire, who lay motionless in the dark in the hope of not being noticed. He was not in a conversational mood.

"Seibert's blacks took to the bush yesterday. About twenty of the beggars, I hear. Bad fellows, some of them. One in particular, I hear. Some of them had been weeded out of Fiji before their indentures were up, and they have to be jolly bad if a Fijian planter turns 'em loose. Seibert's hunting 'em down. Catchin' 'em. Putting 'em back to work. That man is the biggest planter in the South Seas to-day. Extr'ordinary the way he handles blacks."

McGuire grunted unsociably; so Mr. Grinnell went off to his bed, where there were sure to be a few mosquitoes ambushed under the netting. Always they were there. It was his nightly work to come up out of fretful sleep and hunt them. This was an inescapable part of the tropics, like the sun that wilted, the cockroaches, ants, the itch, the warm, tasteless food, the laziness of natives, and the activity of the cocoanut beetles.

### 2

It was just about a week later, on an afternoon, when Nada and McGuire had the house to themselves, and they sat on the same side of the veranda. She was reading, and he, with eyes only half closed, appeared to be almost asleep.

Rain had fallen during the night. In the afternoon steam boiled from the ground. McGuire said the Devil was cooking dinner. Leaves were motionless, and nothing stirred through the long, gloomy depths of the grounds about the house.

Nada kept up a slight pretense of illness except near McGuire. With him she tried to seem natural, almost gay; but he was not easily deceived, and when she was not noticing he saw the unhappiness in her large, soft dark eyes, and often her smile was cheerless, like the bravery of a consumptive.

He said to himself that love was a bad thing, unless one had the kind that is contagious.

"Nada—Frau Seibert!" Surely Paullen was blind.

For twenty odd years Dr. Lemaitre had called Seibert a "Herr"; why, no one knew; but possibly as a slight and not impolite mark of dislike for him, as was apparent when the little doctor referred to Oreena as "Frau"!

McGuire, through his half-closed eyes, saw Nada stiffen bolt upright and lift her hand in a startled gesture. The next instant she whispered: "What is that?"

He then heard the crunch of hoofs on the pebbled drive. Nada flashed past him and into the house. McGuire thought that Paullen was returning earlier than usual, and settled himself more deeply in the chair.

The horse stopped, then slowly came on. It left the drive. He could hear the softer drop of the hoofs on the moist earth. McGuire started to rise, go to the corner and look; but that would have required effort. Besides, he did not feel like talking with anybody. The horse moved slowly; and he, in a vague fashion, decided that it must be loose and wandering about. He lay on his back in the long chair, with an arm across his eyes; then, hearing the horse come round the corner, he raised his arm and looked up into a big, red, round face.

"Ah-ha!" said a hearty voice. "You people over here do nothing but snooze."



A great hand swept aimlessly into the air; at the wrist a plaited whip dangled, supple as a snake. The man pushed up his large panama hat, and with a palm wiped his forehead of sweat, saying: "Great weather for to make cane grow." Then: "I am Seibert—Adolph Seibert." He stared hard after saying that.

McGuire had never before been close to Seibert, and his preconceived picture of the man went to pieces. He was big-bodied, beefy, muscular, with a preposterously round red moon of a face—the roundness being increased by the hairless forehead and smooth-shaven features—that had an oddly immature expression when he grinned.

McGuire arose with an appearance of composure that he did not feel, and asked: "Want to see Tom Combe?"

Seibert laughed; his body shook with the laughter.

"It is in the club at Pulu I would look for him—him and other loafers."

McGuire sucked an empty pipe and regarded Seibert with a kind of desperate grasping gaze, trying to see into, through, all about inside of this man who puzzled and antagonised everybody, yet was good-natured.

"Mr. Grinnell then?"

Seibert grinned, waving a hand. No doubt he meant the gesture to illustrate the idea of putting Mr. Grinnell completely aside, but the hand waggled meaninglessly, like something set in motion and forgotten.

McGuire did not like his very apparent intention of being agreeable; it left him without knowing just how to take Seibert; and he began to understand right off why people got a kind of irritated dread from this insistent good nature of his, this heartiness; and the odd, immature grin on the round face was so at variance with a certain masterful strength in the man.

"Well," said McGuire, thinking it best to settle the matter that must have brought him, "Miss Combe isn't any better. Can't see anyone."

"*Ach!* that is bad! Just what is that trouble?"

He asked it quickly, with no good nature. He was not suspicious. McGuire's sense of wariness was increased by the fact that Seibert seemed hardly interested, or at least preoccupied. McGuire wondered what this fellow could be up to. Perhaps he knew there was nothing the trouble, or at least no illness.

But McGuire peered into the pipe bowl, prodded the cold ashes with a finger-tip, blew through the stem, then: "You know what her mother died of, don't you?"

"I do—yes. *Gott!* yes!"

He nodded, with prolonged swaying of heavy head, affirming a knowledge beyond McGuire's; affirming, too, that her death was from something different than people thought.

"Consumption," said McGuire challengingly.

Seibert grunted two or three times in good-natured scorn. "It was heart-sickness, not"—he struck his own massive chest a powerful blow—"lungs."

"What do you mean? Heart trouble?"

"That you can call it. Sure. You know how these natives die when they want. Swine-dogs, they lie down and for spite try to die. I have a cure for that!" His arm swept into the air, the quirt in hand, and flourished meaningly. No vagueness in that gesture. The black stallion thought the blow was for his hide, and leaped sidelong. He was caught back and reined in without Seibert taking his eyes from McGuire.

"I don't understand."

"Combe, he didn't know his wife's heart it was under the big tombstone with angels he got from Paris. The convict Waller, she loved him. Lungs"—again the resounding blow on his chest—"that may be what killed her. It is not why she died."

McGuire asked with an acid smoothness, "You say that of your wife's mother?"

Seibert regarded him for a long time with nothing but a dull, heavy, blank expression on his face, as if secretly behind his mask he was slowly turning McGuire's meaning about in his head; and when he spoke it was with a heavy, matter-of-fact voice. "You are a fool. That rascal Waller was good to her like a father. And see here, you McGuire, don't you go saying

things like that about my wife!" At that he seemed ready to be angry; but the look after a moment vanished.

McGuire sucked hard on his empty pipe to keep from grinning; but behind the impulse to grin was the cool wonder if Seibert's head was really as sluggish as appeared or if he chose to seem stupid.

"I come on business with you, McGuire. We will talk, you and me. Yes?"

McGuire glanced rapidly about. The thought of running, of dodging away, came to him; but he discarded it.

Seibert slowly, but easily for a man of his great size, got off the big black stallion, and, first testing the strength of a post that was at hand, made a hackamore of the rope carried on the saddle and tied Bismarck.

As he had dismounted McGuire noticed that he was wearing a big flap holster. He came on the veranda, walking heavily, slowly, and his spurs rattled. McGuire approached him, and with his best air of composure said: "Well, what is it you want of me, Mr. Seibert?"

Seibert nodded; his face fairly beamed. A hand went off into the air. He said: "It was you I come to find. I want that you should go home with me, and stay."

"Me?"

"Sure." Seibert was grinning. "You come off the *Hans Haasbruck*?"

"Yes—yes, I think that was her name."

"Huh-ho, you think so, you do? Well, I know that *Hans Haasbruck*. She is a Godeffroy boat, and if you were on her she was stole by that Williams."

"Did Williams steal her? My, I'm sorry to hear that. Certainly is a rascal, that Williams."

Seibert threw back his head and laughed loud, setting his big body a-quiver. "Ha ha ha! It is you that should know, McGuire!"

"I see," said McGuire, pointing to the holster. "You have come to capture me."

Seibert looked down at the holster as if to see what it was, then laid a big hand on it, as if the thing was something unfamiliar.

"Ho, that? It is for another fellow. One of my blacks—that Gauro says he is part Portuguese. I think he is mostly the devil. He got a rifle—my own rifle, right out of my house. It is gone. If that fellow got it, I wonder how? He shot at me yesterday from the bush. *Whizz-iip!*" Seibert chuckled heavily, grinning, then, quickly snatching off his hat, he thrust it toward McGuire. "See? See that hole? Right there—*whizz-iip*—that's where the bullet went to!"

McGuire was incredulous. "You mean that fellow came near potting you?"

"Potting me? Huh—ho-ho! That is a good joke. You are right. That fellow did come near putting me in a pot. He is a cannibal. You are a fine joker, McGuire."

Seibert appeared really amused as he beamed in a stolid fashion at McGuire, but in a way that no one could have told what—if anything—was in his mind.

McGuire reached out and took hold of the hat, inspecting the crown, looking at the hole. A hole was there, but he had doubts about it having been made by a bullet. He felt that a man of Seibert's type would have shown more anger over it, would have boasted more, talked more. If what he had said was true, then Seibert was a vastly different sort of man to what people thought.

"How," asked Seibert, almost paternally, with an air of suggesting something for McGuire's pleasure, "how would you like to go to Puluotu with me, and when a warship comes you explain to him why you come on the *Hans Haasbruck*?"

"Supposing we try to think up a better idea than that," said McGuire, as best he could without showing what he really felt.

"You will get hung—who-op!" said Seibert, cheerfully rolling his head, perhaps meaning to illustrate a gibbet-broken neck.

"That idea's worse than the other."

"*Ach!* then, down we will sit. To you I will make a business proposition."

Seibert glanced toward his horse, then, testing the chair that Nada had left, gently let himself down into it; and, having cautiously settled back, he sighed, and, shaking out a large blue handkerchief, mopped his clipped head.

The friendliness, almost companionable air about this nearly disconcerted McGuire, who was difficult to disconcert. But there was no menace about Seibert, no eager craftiness. He was glad to sit down, and relaxed as if weary. It was as if he had come on a visit.

McGuire knocked out his pipe and whittled on a piece of tobacco; not because he wanted to smoke, but so that he might be doing something, and thus seem more at ease.

"When you will sit down too we will talk," said Seibert.

McGuire slipped into a chair and lay back, curving an arm above his head, smoking with long, slow puffs, his eyes half concealed under the drooping lids.

"You want to get hung or is it that you don't want to, which?"

McGuire, with his best effort, smiled, as words were not needed.

"Sure," Seibert agreed, while a thick arm went wandering off gesturally. "That is it. This Williams, you will help me catch him. How is that?"

"Fine," said McGuire. "Shall we put salt on his tail or use a butterfly net?"

Seibert reached over and tapped McGuire's knee with a thick forefinger; there was an absurd air of lumbering playfulness in his manner, though the voice was serious. "No joking now. We will have our little jokes some other time. You know where he is."

"Do I?"

"If we been friends, you must quit the joking. Jokes have their places to be in. That is not in business jobs. This Williams, he is catching oysters and——"

"And do you know why?" McGuire exclaimed, sitting up quickly, as if to say something important.

"That has nothings to do with it. We will catch him."

McGuire laughed a little, eyeing Seibert from under the sleepy lids. "That *would* be a joke. You catch Williams while he is pearling now!"

"Sure," Seibert agreed.

"Do you know why he is pearling *now*?"

Seibert stared blankly, then, as if uninterested, as if he suspected McGuire's motives in changing the subject, said, "No. Why should I know that thing?"

"Well not long before he died, Brundage—you remember Brundage?"

Seibert made an odd noise as if he was about to choke, and his face darkened; then abruptly he grinned. He said, "Sure, yes. I remember that fellow all right."

"Well, Mr. Seibert, this is the truth, I'm telling. Not long before he died, Brundage met the trader who owned the schooner that Waller sold you. It was some time before he saw Williams, then he told Williams; and the skipper intends to pay you, compound interest and all. He promised. He never breaks a promise. That's why he is pearling."

Seibert leaned over and laid a heavy hand on McGuire's shoulder, patting it with blows that jarred. "You are a fine joker, McGuire. Ho, ho, ho! What a fine joke if you should talk me into believing that." Then, with an air of seriousness: "But is that really so like you say?"

"Absolutely the truth, Mr. Seibert."

"Ho, that is fine. Then you won't mind at all taking me in a ship I will get to where he is! Ho, ho! Now the joke it is on you, McGuire!" He beamed, chuckling and chuckling.

"You're right," said McGuire, slumping back into the chair. Then, wearily, he asked: "How did you find out all this? Tell me that much, won't you, Mr. Seibert?"

"*Ach!* I know lots of things. Little birds they tell me. Cheep-cheep-cheep. Like that."

McGuire stared searchingly, trying to pierce that silly good nature and to get some kind of understanding of what lay underneath. Seibert wiped his face of sweat again, wiped the band inside his hat, looked at the restive stallion, and then gazed blankly at McGuire.

A moment later, abruptly, he repeated: "Cheep-cheep-cheep!"

McGuire eyed him through a smoke haze. It was grotesque, this silly cheerfulness in a man so heavy and big—a jungle-tamer, a fellow who rode a man-killing stallion.

Then McGuire saw the vague, shadowy outline of an idea, too tenuous to be trusted, but enough of a possibility to be suspected. He stretched his arms lazily as he said to Seibert: "Nothing like having a wife that tells you everything."

With slow heaviness Seibert turned slightly and stared at him. McGuire had as much of an answer as he needed in the blank puzzlement of the big, red face. Seibert was not startled, perhaps not much surprised; but he did appear rather blankly puzzled by McGuire's suppleness in squirming through to a fact that he did not see how anyone could have discovered.

He demanded unsmilingly, without menace, but baffled: "How do you know that thing?"

"Cheep-cheep-cheep!" said McGuire, and sank back sleepily, as if indifferent.

Seibert looked toward him rather than at him, his round, full face covered with a kind of expressionless stupidity, a sort of woodenness. He said, "You are a clever young man, my friend"—a meaningless grin broke out on the thick lips—"and I will just take you over to my place, where I can keep an eye on you, eh?"

Seibert closed one eye in a long, awkward wink, as if illustrating how the other would be given over exclusively to watching.

McGuire could get no comfort from the idea of being a prisoner on Seibert's plantation. He did not like that prospect at all, and liked even less the possibility of being forced to lead Seibert off on a wild goose chase to some oysterless reef—all because the wilful, selfishly subtle little Oreena wanted to get Seibert off the island. McGuire saw that Oreena was much more clever than he had thought.

Then, with that deceptiveness of which he was capable, he began to talk in a way that appeared to indicate a full readiness to join in Seibert's plan—all of it—repeatedly insisting that Williams was fishing shell to repay Seibert; for McGuire saw that his only chance of escape seemed to lie in getting Seibert to trust him a little, or at least in not being closely watchful.

A man in a dirty white canvas suit, wearing a pith helmet pulled down low on the back of his head, galloped round the house from the same direction that Seibert had come; and a big dog, with something of puppy awkwardness still in its legs, ran at the side of the horse.

Seibert had not come to Combe's alone; and this man who had been waiting some distance off knew where to look for him. He rode up, shouting excitedly; but McGuire did not understand what it was all about, for the fellow spoke in German—in loud, rapid German—and flourished his arms.

He was, as it happened, telling Seibert that a messenger had just come, bringing word that Gauro, the runaway black—who had a rifle—had been caught. The messenger, a black boy on a rangy horse, edged rather timidly into view, as if anxious to share in the importance of his news.

However, at that moment something more distracting than the capture of Gauro was taking place. Bismarck had shied from the dog; the dog then immediately began jumping and barking at the horse, and the wild horse began jerking powerfully on the rope. Both men shouted, cursing and calling at the dog, but it seemed crazed in the sport of frightening the big stallion.

The rope was stronger than the post, which snapped like a carrot, and as Bismarck broke loose, Seibert, who with slow, fumbling hand had pulled out his revolver, took deliberate aim and shot. The dog plunged about for a moment, then crawled in a half-circle, and straightened out with quivering jerks. The stallion galloped through the grounds, terrified at every jump by the piece of post at the rope's end, that followed like a pursuer.

It looked as though Seibert would also shoot the man that had brought the fool dog. He did hold the gun, not levelled at him so much as in line with him; and whether this was intentional McGuire could not be sure. But in any case the gun

was pointed directly at the fellow, while Seibert, to judge by tone and manner, appeared to be cursing him. Evidently he ordered the fellow out of the saddle, for the man crawled down, with eyes anxiously fastened on the gun, as intently as if looking at the barrel's hole might let him know what was coming in time to dodge.

McGuire could not see Seibert's face; afterwards he wished that he had been able to see its expression at this time; but, without having looked around, Seibert tramped heavily down the steps, went to the horse, and, with astonishing ease and quickness for one of his size, mounted; then, pointing toward the way the stallion had gone, said something hoarsely fierce, and rode furiously off, followed by the black boy on the rangy horse.

The poor fellow left on foot stared dully after him for a minute, and, jerking his pith helmet down more tightly, started off with determined trudge in the direction that Bismarck had taken, past Combe's stables and down into a grove of cocoanut trees.

Nada looked out of the door. She seemed half dead from fright.

"That shot—I thought——" She could hardly speak. "I was listening. I heard everything."

"You heard? Well, you know I wouldn't turn on Williams. I was trying to appear friendly until——"

"Yes. Of course I know. You must escape."

"I have friends in the hills near here. Out-of-the-way place. I can stay there months without anyone knowing. Could you tell, I had Seibert really believing that I wanted to take him after Williams?"

She nodded. "I know—and I know you wouldn't do such a thing. When I heard that shot, I nearly screamed!"

"Queer fellow, that Seibert. I wonder if he would have tried to see you before he went away."

"He seems to have forgotten me, for which I can't be too thankful. But why would Oreena have told him? I don't understand that, Dan. Are you sure she did tell him?"

"She or Paullen. Take your choice."

"John Paullen wouldn't do a thing like that," she said quickly.

"No. You're right. So who else knew?"

"I can't believe it of Oreena. I am going right over there, and——"

### 3

She broke off as they heard the galloping of a horse entering the grounds. McGuire, thinking that it was Seibert returning, gave Nada a shove toward the door, then crouched at a corner of the house and peered up along the drive toward the road.

In a moment horse and rider came to view. He saw instantly that it was not Seibert, but at first did not recognise Combe, though he did recognise that whoever it might be was riding desperately.

Combe, never a horseman, held to the saddle rather than rode, and was badly jarred at every jump. He could not bring the horse to a stop, and went past the veranda, sawing at the reins, shouting "Whoa!" tugging with arms and legs flying, and himself bouncing almost from the saddle.

"What is it? What's up?" McGuire yelled at him as Combe went by.

Before the horse had fully stopped, Combe, partly by deliberately letting himself fall, got to the ground, landing on hands and knees. He got up stiffly, and for a moment appeared to be pausing to make sure his bones were all right, then in a shuffling, awkward run came toward McGuire, who had jumped the rail and was trotting to meet him.

The old fellow was agitated and out of breath, greatly worked up; he could hardly talk. His effort to shout was a frantic gasping.

"Get away, Dan! They're after you—you an' Paullen an' Nada, curse 'em!"

"What on earth——" said McGuire, hardly alarmed, for he knew that Combe appeared a little unbalanced at times.

"Get away, Dan! Take her an' get away!"

Combe pushed excitedly at him, as if trying to shove McGuire into hiding.

"Surely, I go, Tom. But tell me, what's the matter? What will I be hiding from?"

"They're comin'!" he cried. "They tried to stop me! Them fellers know you come with Nada, an' that she's off Williams's ship. Get away, Dan!"

"Who's coming? Who are you talking about?"

"They come this mornin'—that tall, lean feller—Penwing!"

"Penwenn! Here? On Pulotu? Great glory and hallaluyer!"

"They're comin', I tell you. On the road now. They tried to stop me. I just beat 'em. Get away, Dan. Take Nada, too. They're after her!"

"What is it, Dan?" Nada called from across the veranda railing. She had seen her father's excitement, the flurry of his gestures, his pushing; caught the shrillness of his tone.

McGuire turned and shouted, as if almost, but not quite, amused: "Penwenn's here! It's to the bush for us—both of us! Paullen too."

"They're comin', Dan! They're comin'. Get away, boy. Go—go, I tell you!"

This fussy urgency was as near to forcefulness as old Combe could get. His thin, trembling hands fluttered about McGuire, and his voice was pathetically cracked—now husky, now squeaking, as he tried to be emphatic.

McGuire hurried toward Nada. Combe trotted along, shuffling, at his heels, mouthing over and over his warnings.

"Nada, you don't want to meet Penwenn, do you?" McGuire asked.

"Not on this earth!" she cried.

"What do you know about that fellow coming here? Say! Listen, Nada; he's after *you*. He doesn't expect to find Williams and his ship here, but he knows you came home."

"Then Kate Collins told him."

"His sailors that we put off just inside the Golden Gate described you, of course. He put two and two together, and perhaps he did get something out of Mrs. Collins. In any case, he's here! Go get a bundle of clothes, or whatever you want. Tom and I'll go catch some horse. We must get word to Paullen."

"I'll be ready in two minutes," said Nada excitedly, almost happily, though highly nervous and flushed.

"An' she's sick, too," said Combe sadly, watching the doorway through which she had gone running.

"She's cured," said McGuire. "Let's get some horses."

"But they'll be here any minute, boy! You ought 'o strike right through the bush. What's that Penwenn feller after Nada for? 'Cause she come on his ship that Williams took?"

Old Combe, who was secretive as a mute for all of his garrulity, had been told of the *Flying Gull*, and was proud of his daughter for having warned Williams, but he had not fully realised how she came to have Penwenn's confidence.

Said McGuire, "That's the man she came home to get away from. Now he's full of soured love. He may kill her."

One of Combe's scrawny hands was at his chin whiskers when McGuire spoke; the motionless hand stiffened grotesquely, as if he had pulled his toothless old mouth open; his lustreless, vague eyes appeared more than ever as if they had lost their sight, and were blank as a blind man's. It was nearly like a return of consciousness from a blow when he made a wordless sound, then slowly dropped his hand and blinked.

"Why," he asked, peering, incredulous, "would anybody do that to Nada? They got me to—me to answer to—me——" He shook a tremulous fist, his utter helplessness showing the more plainly in a gesture meant to be defiant.

McGuire answered quickly, smoothly, "Nobody'll really hurt Nada. I used the wrong word. Penwenn'll probably marry her—which will be worse. You see, Tom, no matter what the truth is, it is also a fact that she did help run off with Penwenn's schooner, and that's piracy, even if she is a woman."

Old Combe was not listening. He had begun to stare; then pointed, speechless.

McGuire looked, and saw men coming up through the grounds, leading and driving Seibert's black stallion. Black boys were also carrying someone. The stallion was frightened. He pulled, sidled, plunged against the three men on the long strong rope, one of whom was the young Mr. Grinnell, now bareheaded, scratched about the face, with clothes torn from being dragged.

Old Combe mumbled, "Seibert's been throwed!" He said it dully, without satisfaction, though wondering why Seibert should have been down in that grove.

Black Bismarck did not want to be led, but the blacks on every side watched and urged him on. All were afraid except Mr. Grinnell; he talked soothingly to the stallion, but without effect; he cursed the blacks when one of them waved something, as if about to throw, and it did no good.

McGuire and Combe went toward them. Mr. Grinnell shouted that they were to keep away. Ten devils were in this horse; he had just killed a man!

The stallion, when running away, had whipped the end of the post, on the dragging rope, around a tree near where the blacks were working. The fellow whom Seibert had sent to catch him then came up. He could not speak English. It was evident that he was afraid of the horse; yet he wanted to ride him home. Mr. Grinnell and two of his boys approached, and held the end of the rope while the German got into the saddle; then Bismarck became wild, rearing, plunging, fighting. The German had been immediately thrown, and Bismarck trampled him. The boys let go of the rope; Mr. Grinnell would not let go. Then the braver blacks came to his help.

That was what had happened; and they now brought Bismarck to a tree near the stables and tied him up short. He was shivering, as if with ague; he jumped nervously, champed, pawed, kicked, plunged; his eyes were red and bright. He was a powerful brute.

McGuire pushed between the black labourers and looked at the broken, trampled body.

"He's dead," said McGuire to Combe, who stood behind him but would not look.

"Tell 'em to take him up there into the house, Dan. A man can't lay out in the open, like a dog. Tell 'em to take him into the house, an' you get a sheet or somethin'. I—I always thought that horse would kill him."

"This isn't Seibert."

"No—oh?" The old fellow gazed vaguely off through the gloomy aisle of trees. His voice, always unsteady, now was low, sadly quavering. "Take him into the house, anyway, Dan. Poor feller! It's like that time they brought Waller. I'm terrible sorry. I—I——"

He could say nothing more.

McGuire pointed, speaking rapidly to the blacks in a Melanesian dialect. These labour recruits, volunteers to the plantation work from Santa Cruz, were small, compact fellows, with thick features that appeared to be only half finished; and they grunted among themselves, eyeing him; curiously because he spoke their tongue so well. With uneven steps they walked on, but hesitated doubtfully at the foot of the veranda steps.

"On, on up there." McGuire pointed.

Clustered round the body, they went cautiously, looking from side to side, timid but curious as monkeys, and about to go into the strange, forbidden place where white men lived their strange, aloof lives. They placed their bare feet with tiptoeing stealth, instinctively furtive at moving into the house where they had no right to be; and they turned their heads with short jerks, staring at everything, at nothing; uneasy, watchful, like animals.

The body was brought into the house, into the big room, bare except for two or three old mats, a table, its top splattered with candle drippings, and two or three chairs.

"Wait," said McGuire, and he left them.

When he came back they had not moved, except to shuffle their feet and turn their heads.

A moment later Lu Lung entered with a heavy piece of folded white linen on his arm. He came noiselessly; and he

appeared not to notice anyone but McGuire, and to await his gesture.

McGuire looked about over the floor, then pointed in the direction of a corner. "Over there, I suppose."

Lu Lung moved with unseeing, preoccupied, soundless shuffling, and rapidly shook open the tablecloth. He spread it on the floor, then stepped away, folding his slim hands across his stomach, waiting.

The blacks edged doubtfully toward the cloth, looking from McGuire to Lu Lung, half afraid of magic, suspecting mystery, sure that there was some devil-devil ritual in this laying of the cloth. They placed the body, almost letting it fall, for each was fearful of being the last to have a hand on the dead man, as if the body might clutch up at him to keep from being abandoned by those that were alive.

"You go now," said McGuire.

They pattered out swiftly, glad to get away, and throwing glances from half-turned heads as they went.

Lu Lung stooped, with an air of sensitive respect for the dead, and drew the cloth over the body; then, again folding his thin, delicate hands before him, he went from the room with quick, short, noiseless steps.

At once, as if the dead man would not have his presence concealed, a spot appeared on the cloth above where the face lay.

"Another one that came to these damned islands to make his fortune!" McGuire muttered, as he stood for a moment looking toward the white, mound-like figure.

Then Nada spoke to him from the end of the room where she had stopped, a little uncertain, looking at the strange object near the far corner. She wore the panama tied under her chin, and a cloak to keep off the dew; but her hands were empty. After making a bundle of the things she simply could not do without she had found it too large to carry with ease; then, wilfully hopeless, decided to take nothing.

"What is it, Dan? What has happened?"

"That black stallion killed a man."

"Who?"

"The fellow Seibert sent after him."

"How terrible! I saw that man the first day I went over to Seibert's. On the road, with natives, hoeing weeds."

## 5

McGuire would have done well if he had taken alarm from old Combe's excitability and hurried off as soon as he learned Penwenn was on the island, for Penwenn, with some sailors off the *Molly McDonald*, on which he had arrived about noon, were on their way to the Combe plantation. Nada and McGuire had not said ten more words together before they arrived.

McGuire heard a confused sound, the rush of feet and shouting, and strange voices about the veranda. A moment later the plunging clatter of horses came down the drive. He jumped for the door, peering out. Old Combe and Grinnell were surrounded. The blacks had been scattered away, and were running off, frightened, not pursued or threatened.

The room in which he stood ran clear across the house; and from the doorway on the other side a voice called on McGuire to surrender. He looked around and faced a sailor, one that had been on the *Flying Gull*; and the sailor had a rifle. Another sailor immediately appeared by his side, and he was also armed.

The house was surrounded; and at once men who had been waiting out of sight on horseback until they heard the shouts had ridden down into the grounds. John Paullen was with them. They had come across Paullen on the way to the Combe plantation, recognised him, and taken him prisoner.

The sailors were taking everybody—that is, every white man—for a "pirate." In Puluotu they had learned that two men had put ashore off the same ship that had brought Nada, and Penwenn was sure that they had taken part in the theft of his vessels, and he wanted them. So, in making sure that nobody escaped, Combe and Grinnell were also caught.

Combe accepted his capture with impassive dejection. He would not say a word to the questioning or jeers, for Combe was a weakling, not a coward. Cramming his toothless mouth with tobacco, he folded his hands dispiritedly behind him,



bent his rounded shoulders still lower, and gazed hazily past whoever came near.

Mr. Grinnell was amazed and indignant. He expressed himself forcibly, but looked rather disreputable, with his torn clothes and scratched face.

Penwenn, wearing fresh, crisp, laundered whites, looked down from his horse, and explained with a thin, wide smile that if Mr. Grinnell was innocent he had nothing to fear.

"Fear! Fear!" shouted Mr. Grinnell. "You get down off that horse and I'll jolly well show you who's got something to fear! I want to see my consul. I'm an Englishman! This is an outrage!"

At that moment a fellow came running, pushing his way to Penwenn's stirrup, and cried: "We got the redhead an' that girl. We got her!"

Old Combe shifted his head from side to side without looking at anybody. Mr. Grinnell, with a man holding to each of his arms because, for all the odds against him, he seemed eager to hurt somebody, shouted, "Don't you dare mistreat her!" He said more—a phrase more—a very profane and insulting phrase. A fellow struck him in the mouth, and Penwenn gave a slanting downward glance and smiled coldly.

"Watch these two," he said, indicating Grinnell and Combe.

Penwenn rode up and dismounted at the veranda steps; then he gave a long, slow stare at Paullen, who was still on horseback, with hands free, but the reins were held by a horseman beside him.

"Bring that fellow," he told one of his sailors.

"Get down!" Paullen was ordered.

He swung himself off the horse and stood erect, motionless, head up.

"March!"

Penwenn's sailors—there were some seven or eight of them—were rather pretentiously military; being proud of themselves, they could not help a bit of swagger, and told one another gleefully that it was "great luck."

It was almost sundown.

## 6

Penwenn came into the room with exaggerated slowness. Tall, cool, neat in appearance, very much at ease, he showed a deliberate air of unconcern, but a silent derisive curiosity, in the gloomy, shabby, barren house. He looked all about the walls, at the meagre furniture, along the floor, rested his gaze for a moment at the white heap in the corner, and did not seem to see Nada; he let his eyes wander past McGuire, and ignored Paullen.

Nada clutched her cape about her as if it somehow offered shelter. She was intensely uneasy; and had all the sensations of fear without being really afraid; and she held a direct unflinching stare toward him, though her heart fluttered like a bird between cupped hands and made her breathless.

McGuire grinned slightly, not because he was amused, but to irritate Penwenn.

"Get over there out of the way," Penwenn ordered, his voice icily calm.

McGuire moved to Paullen's side; and as he moved an idea came into his tricky head. Without looking at anyone, he said in Samoan, rapidly: "Pretend to faint—pretend to faint." There was only one person in the room who understood him.

The mistiness of dusk had begun to sift into the room. In a very little while it would be dark.

Penwenn, after a long, doubtful glance at McGuire, then said, "Ah, Miss Combe!" ironically seeming not to have been aware of her presence until that moment. He took off his white pith helmet, bowing a little. She said nothing.

"I was hoping that we might have the pleasure of meeting again, for your departure was quite——"

Nada swayed slightly and fell. Penwenn must have thought that she was trying to trick him, perhaps into a little sympathy. He made no move to catch her until she was too far toward the floor for the quick reach he offered to be of use.

After hesitating, he then knelt on one knee, looking with calm suspicion at her. But she lay perfectly motionless, and

when he believed that she was unconscious he turned toward the man in the nearest doorway and told him to bring water.

"Where'll I get it?" the man asked across the room of McGuire.

"Tell the Chinaman there in the kitchen," said McGuire.

"And have him bring a light. We'll need it soon," Penwenn ordered, without looking around. He remained on his knee, coldly regarding the pretty, expressionless face.

McGuire put a hand behind him and struck Paullen, making him alert for what might follow. Less than ten feet away a man was beside the other doorway with a rifle; he would have heard the lightest whisper McGuire made, and the man was watchful. But, Nada being unconscious, no one had much to say; and so McGuire had his chance to talk.

"That fellow," said McGuire, pointing toward the white object, and speaking for whoever cared to listen, "was killed just a little while ago. You saw the big stallion out there? The horse killed him. Powerful horse. Nothing could stop him. Nothing!"

The man by the door was listening, interested. So were the other men in the room and at the doorways. Even Penwenn turned slightly and gazed toward the dead man, though he gave no other sign of attention to what McGuire said.

McGuire again struck Paullen, and continued: "Fastened him up with a rope out there. I said he'd break loose. Grinnell said nothing but a knife could get that horse loose now."

Again the tap against Paullen, and a moment later he felt Paullen's groping fingers close on the pocket-knife that he had offered.

McGuire said, "Seibert loves"—he jerked his head in an odd way, as if indicating the girl on the floor, but added—"that horse. Would stop at nothing to get what he loves. If he knew the whole truth about how"—pause—"that horse had been abused, or anything else he cares for, he would surely interfere. Lots worse people in the world than that big Seibert. Somebody ought to tell him."

He struck a harder blow at Paullen, and felt an answering bump. The fellow by the door was all ears. Penwenn looked impatiently in the direction that the man had gone for the water.

McGuire continued, as if idly talking: "Paullen, remember how Nada fussed until she got new mosquito netting on the doors and *windows*? I told her we wouldn't be needing it long—that a big moth could go through such flimsy netting. Here comes Lu Lung with water and a lantern."

It was not quite dark.

Lu Lung came shuffling along soundlessly, a cooking-pan in one small hand, a large lighted lantern in the other. He stopped beside Penwenn, holding down the water. Lu Lung's expressionless eyes glanced from Nada's face and fastened on Penwenn.

Penwenn, with slightly hesitant manner, dipped the tips of his long fingers into the water and brushed them across Nada's forehead. He really didn't know just what to do; besides, he half suspected that she was deceiving him, and thought it must be that she was trying to touch his sympathy.

At that moment Paullen stepped swiftly back and plunged like a diver through the netting of an open window.

"Across there! Look! Look!" McGuire shouted frantically, pointing in the opposite direction, and for a second or two causing a confused turning of heads and uncertainty.

The man at the nearest doorway, who had seen Paullen go, stepped forward toward the window, raising the rifle to his shoulder. McGuire shoved him. The rifle exploded at the ceiling. The man flung himself on McGuire, clinching him, holding fast.

There was calling and shouting and running about. No one seemed to know just what had happened. It was beginning to be dark, and besides, those fellows were in strange surroundings, unfamiliar with everything. This added much to their uncertainty, so Paullen had a good start before anyone saw that he was not running away, but was making for the black stallion, tied some distance from the house. Two men let off their rifles in his direction, and three or four gave chase.

Penwenn, swearing coolly, hurried out of the room, and, leaning across the veranda railing, shouted for men to take to their horses, to stop him when he tried to pass them and give chase.

"Stop him!" was a cry that was in the air. Combe and Grinnell were forgotten by the two men who had been watching them, but they remained motionless, absorbed in Paullen's escape.

Paullen frightened the stallion by approaching on the run. Bismarck jumped and reared from side to side as much as he could while tied up short, in a way that caused the attempt to get near him to be increasingly dangerous.

But Paullen made a flying jump for the saddle, catching hold, scrambling at mane and horn, pulling and kicking to get himself up, and terrifying the stallion. By some luck, and the strength that helps anyone that is desperate, he succeeded in setting his legs over the saddle, and, lying along the horse's neck, Paullen groped for the reins. When he had these he sawed at the noose where it crossed the top of Bismarck's neck, so that the horse, in jerking, might pull free as soon as the rope was partly cut.

This took time; Paullen's position was unsafe; over and over again he was nearly shaken off; the knife's edge repeatedly slipped after it had cut into the rope. Men came up, remaining just beyond reach of Bismarck's heels, and were yelling for him to get down, and threatening to shoot.

The horse's frantic tugging broke the rope before it was cut through. He whirled powerfully, knocking over a man that was near, causing the others to jump and stumble backwards, and one or two rifles went off; then Bismarck plunged ahead as if he knew the road.

There was shouting and shooting through the dusk. From the veranda Penwenn fired coolly with a revolver, and missed. Three men on horses blocked the way. They knew little of horses, and nothing at all of Bismarck. The stallion plunged among them with the force of a great boulder rolling downhill, and went on, leaving one horse and rider on the ground; the horse struggling, the rider unconscious. The other horses were knocked or frightened into bounding aside, and the inexpert men on them were helpless, and perhaps more frightened than their horses.

Bismarck fled like a demon on hoofs. Paullen lay along his neck and blessed him.

## 7

Penwenn had not greatly cared about having captured Paullen, for he was merely a boy, and not at all the sort that a judge would have taken any pleasure in sentencing; but his escape, because it was an escape, angered him, so that when Penwenn returned into the room his thin face was tensely set. He was not now ironic, but thoroughly irritated and determined.

Nada sat in a low-backed chair, leaning her head against the wall. Near her on the floor was the lighted lantern. Lu Lung had vanished.

Penwenn, with a long, deliberate stride, came close and stood over her. Anger glistened in the chill blue of his narrow eyes.

"You might have known," he said bitterly, "when you betrayed my confidence, stole my ship, and went off with that ruffian that I would follow you to wherever you were! And now—now——"

He slightly raised a hand, and his fingers worked nervously, as though fumbling for what to threaten.

"He's not a ruffian!" Nada snapped at him. "He's anything but a ruffian! He brought me home. I wanted to come. I wanted to get away from you—you, who tried in a low, sneaking, cowardly way to trick Captain Williams and have him hanged, so people would say what a brave bold man Alan Penwenn is!"

Penwenn was almost staggered. She had spoken rapidly, with flying lips; her dark eyes flashed. He had expected to see her shrink, to hear her plead; he had thought that she fainted to awaken his compassion; but this was astonishing.

He forced a chill, short laugh, and said, "Talk as you please, Miss Combe. It will be most entertaining to hear you defend your Captain Williams in court."

She sprang up with startling quickness, threw open her cape, and darted a hand at him. The movement was so surprising and direct that he unconsciously flinched, taking a step backwards before seeing that her hand was empty. His lean, angular face flushed as he heard bits of repressed laughter at his having dodged, but he would not look around.

Already Nada was talking as rapidly as words could fly; her small hands danced in gestures, and her dark, brilliant eyes glowed and snapped. Her hair, disturbed by her animation, came loose, and settled in misty wisps on her cheeks, and

touched her face. She brushed at it with quick fingers, and threw it back with flashing tosses of her head, and did not pause.

"Captain Williams—tell the court? Do you know what I shall tell—tell the court and everybody, of him? I'll tell you now! You listen!

"More than forty years ago a young man—a mere boy—was caught one night in an English lord's park with a snared hare in his hand. It was a cloudy night, but the moon blazed down for just a moment through a rift, so that a keeper saw him. For taking that one little miserable hare this boy—my father—was sentenced by a man in a big powdered wig to be deported for six years to Australia!

"He was put on a convict ship, filled with prisoners—men of all the terrible kind. Soldiers with bayonets on loaded guns stood watch over them. One morning at sea the most desperate of these convicts, who had plotted together, sprang at the sentries. They killed some and got their muskets, and then, seizing whatever would serve for a club, they tried to capture the ship. It was a terrible fight! But the soldiers were courageous, and fought until the convicts saw that it was hopeless to resist. Some of these men then leaped into the sea, drowning themselves rather than face the long years of prison life that were before them.

"Someone of the ship's officers saw my father bending over a sentry that had been knocked down and who never became conscious again; and this officer swore that he saw my father strike the sentry as he lay on the deck. Oh, I'm sure that officer didn't realise how greatly he was lying, for my father is the tenderest hearted man in the world, and he had stooped, and only put his hand to the poor fellow because he moaned. But on that officer's word this mere boy who had caught a hare in a park was sentenced to prison for life! And for twenty years he wore irons and lived in a cell, and was made to work like a slave on wretched food, and right now his poor old back is scarred and cut by the scores of beatings from prison whips.

"Then one dark, rainy evening some men were hanged, and my father was one of three convicts detailed to bear the dead away. They found that one body they were bearing was alive! They hid it in a lumber pile in the dark, and took up a sack of something and buried that!

"The hanged man came to consciousness and later escaped. That hanged man was Captain Williams—a woman who had killed her husband said that Captain Williams did it, and he was hanged for that. And it was Captain Williams who, with the greatest daring you ever heard of, afterwards got those three men who had saved him out of prison, and he brought them here to Puluotu.

"All these years he has been a friend to my father, and I have known of and loved Captain Williams from the time I could walk! He is one of the finest men in the world!

"And you—you big, rich, ugly coward—you pretended to be his friend, and all the time you were planning to follow his unarmed ship a few miles out of San Francisco, with cannons on your ship, so you could have people say that you—*you* were a brave man, and had caught Hurricane Williams on the high seas!

"That's what I will tell in any court you take me to, and of how you had been drinking at dinner at Kate Collins's house, and boasted to me of what you were going to do, so that I had the chance to warn him and come home with him because I wanted to get away from *you*!"

## 8

Penwenn remained motionless, hands to hips and feet apart, looking steadily at Nada; his face was as white as a sleeve of his laundered jacket.

Shadows were banked against the walls of the room. Motionless men stood in the dimness where they had listened watchfully, tense from the dramatic recital that she had made; they did not understand all about it, but they did understand much, and now looked at her, fascinated.

"It is since I came home—only a few days ago—that my father told me of his life," she said absently, with a far-away look, as if remembering the hour and her father's pathetic manner of talking.

Penwenn had said at Puluotu before many people that he would bring Nada back with him, and turn her over to the consul on a charge of piracy with such men as he could find as had taken part in the stealing of his ship. He now knew that he could do nothing of the kind. He had expected to find a frightened girl who would cry and beg, and, being a vain, proud

man who never gave himself a cold, impartial scrutiny, he had not realised just how unpleasant his crafty stage-plot sort of plan for capturing Williams could be made to appear. In the planning he had thought that, even if the truth should be known, everybody would take it as a clever trick and joke on Williams himself. He now saw that this wasn't at all the way the world would regard it; not if Nada got the chance to tell her story.

Penwenn slipped a thumb into a side-pocket of his jacket, and, without shifting his feet, slowly turned more than half around, glancing about the room without a pause from man to man. He said coolly, "You men go out and be ready to start back." An extended finger motioned slightly at McGuire. "And don't let *him* get away. Better tie him up." McGuire appeared unconcerned, and was hazily smiling. Then, without addressing anyone in particular, Penwenn said: "That Englishman and the old man—they are to be released."

Nada sat down, and, pulling the cape about her, looked after McGuire as the men went out and into the grounds, where they immediately built a small fire on account of the darkness.

Penwenn's thumbs were hooked into the side-pockets of his jacket; the fingers opened and closed with writhing vagueness—long, bony fingers, usually with an odd air of daintiness in their movement. He appeared now to have a little more of a stoop than usual; his long body bent in a sort of angular rigidity, and his head was thrust forward. He looked at her steadily for a long time before speaking. He had liked Nada; he had been attentive to her; he had put her picture in the frame on his desk, which was about as much of an honour as he ever gave any woman.

"Why, *why*," he demanded coldly, as if this, more than anything else she had done, had injured him, "didn't you tell me in San Francisco?"

"It would have made no difference."

"If I had known he was your friend? Yes, it would have made a difference. Of course it would. You know that——"

She shook her head quickly, saying, "You would have laughed—I know how you would have laughed. Been amused. Everything amused you. You were greatly amused by your plan to capture Captain Williams."

"And what could I think when I knew that you had gone off with this outlaw sea captain, on my ship?" he said with just a suggestion of softened reproach.

"Kate Collins told you, didn't she?" Nada answered rather sharply, not liking the change that had come into his tone.

"Yes, she did tell me, finally, that Williams had been the friend of your family."

"I don't see that it made the difference you just spoke of? You came here to capture him, and me too. You have me, so take me to Pulotu. Take me back to San Francisco. I want to go. I want to be put into that court you have just threatened me with."

"I am not going to take you, Nada. You ought to know that. You ought to know that I wouldn't do a thing like that to you. I felt that you had treated me outrageously, and I was angry and hurt. That is why I came. And I lost the finest schooner in Pacific waters. But if I had had any idea of what Williams meant to you, I would have helped him get his pearl shell and sell it. But you know his reputation. That is all I knew of him. You have hurt me in a way that I can never quite forgive. And to-night, before all those men. You might have waited until we were alone. Considering our past friendship that would have been very little for you to do. You might have known that then——"

"How you talk!" Nada flung at him. "You come riding in here to my father's house with a lot of wild men, shooting and shouting. That is all our 'past friendship' meant to you. It means nothing to me. I only mention it because you did. And who suggested that I defend Captain Williams, if I could?"

Penwenn eyed her severely, freshly angered; but there was nothing he could think of to do, and her tongue was so sharp and rapid that he hesitated to say anything more. Yet he was furious, and his cold proud poise was strained to almost the breaking point. He took his hands from his pockets and put them behind him, weaving the long fingers together. Without straightening in the least, he turned and walked a few steps, crossing between her and the lantern.

Outside where the men had made a small fire to scatter the darkness, light played dartingly among the drooping palm leaves, and sometimes reached to the room's windows in a soft vanishing flash like distant lightning. From about the fire drifted the broken mumbling of voices; now and then someone called to another not far off. Horses stamped, and two or three times neighed piercingly.

Penwenn stopped beside her, and one of his long hands hovered for a moment in air as if about to gesture decisively as

he declared some angry intention; but the hand drifted back to the side of his jacket, where it hung lifelessly, a thumb hooked inside the pocket. He said bitterly: "All right. Now I'll leave you to remember that I have done the best I could toward you, though you have made me the laughing-stock of San Francisco, and made me lose one of the finest boats I had. Good-bye, Miss Combe!"

He turned abruptly and started from the room.

Instantly she jumped up, doubtful of his intentions, and demanded: "Wait! What are you going to do?"

He turned. His face was feverish, but he said icily: "I shall return to Puluotu, with McGuire, and turn him over to the American consul—as a pirate."

"You mean to take Dan McGuire?"

He answered with sardonic slowness: "Most assuredly I do. Wherever Williams is known, McGuire is known. Does it happen that he, too, has rendered some indispensable service to your family?"

"If you take him, you take me!" she cried, all aflame.

His anger broke in an instant, and his poise was gone. He advanced toward her, and a clenched hand swung up; he shouted: "Then I will take you! Who are you, anyway? The daughter of an escaped convict! Your Williams—hanged for murder! A fine lot! Tell your story wherever you damn well please, in court and out of it! I have been a fool to treat you with any respect. You are going with me, right now!"

Nada was astounded. She had been too sure of her triumph; but after the first moment's bewildering shock, she accepted the turn of fortune with a proud, silent, challenging air that was, however, largely forced, for she was now really aghast at realising how thoughtlessly she had revealed her father's secret. He had not told her that she must never speak of it, but only because he had never imagined that his daughter would.

## 9

"You'll want to take something with you, clothes or something," said Penwenn, coldly but in a way that indicated that he was rather making a point of his courtesy at such a time.

Nada answered without interest: "There's a bundle on the floor in my room—by the bed. You can call Lu Lung if you don't want to trust me to go for it."

Penwenn went to the dark inner doorway and called sharply: "Lu Lung!"

Almost at once he heard nearly noiseless rapid little steps and Lu Lung, with hands in sleeves, came through the door to the edge of the lantern light, where he stood humbly, not unlike a small good-tempered slave of the lamp. His black plaited queue lay coiled around his head and glistened.

Penwenn told him what to do.

Lu Lung made two bobbing nods, accompanying them with the sound of "Yessa-yessa," and backed soundlessly from the doorway, simply fading backwards into the darkness.

He came again unexpectedly soon, as if with genie-like ease he had passed through walls and air. He wore a hat, and by the way he held the large bundle it was evident that he meant to come with them.

As they left the house Lu Lung carried the lantern ahead to light them down the steps. It bobbed and swung in his hand, and when the light struck across Penwenn's long face its angles were sharpened and shadows deepened, and his deep-set eyes appeared hollow as in a death's head; yet this same light, passing at the same time across Nada's face, made no vanishing disfigurement, but gave to her erect bearing an aspect of resolution and fearlessness.

Lu Lung held the bundle on a shoulder, and advanced with steps that were like soft rapid stamps; he swung the lantern to and fro and its glowing circle swept about with shadowy swiftiness. The light spread itself flat over the ground, but leaped suddenly up along every object that it met, momentarily stripping the darkness from whatever object that it reached. The men, appearing merely like blackened lumps at the outer edge of their own fire, were touched into individuality for the instant that the lantern's ray swept across them, and they vanished when it had passed. The horses, with ears pricked uneasily at the moving light, were brought into view where they stood hitched to wheel spokes and seat springs of the small wagon in which some of the sailors had ridden out.

There began at once a mildly confused bustling in the darkness, with the lantern that had been taken from Lu Lung swinging about and being called for here and there by some one or other who fumbled unfamiliarly at the harness.

Penwenn unhurriedly moved from place to place, distinguishable in the darkness by his laundered whites, like a lean ghost in vague shadows. He saw to it that McGuire was well tied and had him placed in the back seat of the spring wagon. Nada was helped into a front seat, by the driver. Lu Lung, holding the bundle, perched himself in the rear, sitting in the bed of the wagon, with his feet hanging over. The lantern was made fast to the side of the wagon.

The guard left Mr. Grinnell and Combe and took a place in the wagon.

Then they began the return to Pulotu. Penwenn, on horseback, was just ahead, and his form showed like an object that had been whitewashed. The wagon creaked, the wheels raspily cut into the pebbles. Men on horseback rode behind, and hardly a word was spoken.

When they emerged from the gloomy grounds they could see that the stars were out; but here trees overhung the road, and except where jagged holes in the foliage let through an occasional glimpse of sky, their way was densely black on all sides beyond the moving pool of lantern light.

## 10

If they had been horsemen instead of sailors they would have sat up alertly at the first slight lift of a horse's head. As it was, about the first they knew of anyone's presence was a deep hearty voice out of the darkness, saying: "Oh ho, my friends!" And McGuire knew, though he could not see, that a big hand was gesturally waving somewhere above Seibert's head.

The sailors were completely surprised. They now saw that the road before them was crowded by vague forms, so indistinctly perceived that the blackness on all sides took shape as riders that seemed to have assembled noiselessly.

On his way to the Combe place with his four or five overseers, Seibert had seen from afar the light crawling along the road, and waited.

Some of the sailors had even laid their rifles in the wagon bed. There had not been a thought about meeting danger on the road, and they felt more secure by having both hands free to help with their riding than by going armed. They had no feeling of real danger now, a slight uneasiness perhaps, but nothing alarming.

It did not at all occur to Penwenn that this might be a rescue. His instant thought was that his party had chanced to meet some planter that doubtfully regarded so numerous a company on the road. He then, with the Penwenn air of slightly aloof easy assurance, told Seibert who he was (this with carefully spaced accents) and what he had been about. He really expected a little commendation.

Seibert had come closer, emerging from the darkness on a broad-chested horse; horse and rider appearing larger because of their indistinct outline under the open space in the foliage. He shouted, not so much with anger, if angry at all, but as if his voice was a physical force: "That is a lie! You are the man Nada ran to be away from in San Francisco. My men they have shotguns—we waited here for you!"

It was as brutally simple as that. The surprise, the dread of shotguns in the hands of dimly guessed at forms amid the darkness, the bulk of Seibert and his horse, so huge and vague, stung the imagination of the sailors and they remained quiet.

Penwenn had never been so addressed in his life; the "lie" hurt like hot poison; the intimacy implied between this man and Nada and the overbearing protectiveness in his tone caused Penwenn to be instantly furious.

He demanded fiercely: "Who are you? And what do you mean by interfering with me in the——"

"I—I am Seibert. Adolph Seibert!"

The sound of a mighty blow, as when fist strikes flesh, was heard in the darkness. Seibert had smitten his big breast, and no doubt grinned with unconvincing cheerfulness as he peered at Penwenn's thin whitewashed form.

Another horse and rider appeared almost at Seibert's side; and somehow, though hardly by anything he could see, Penwenn knew that this was Paullen.

"You rascals will pay for this!"

"Sure," said Seibert, cheerfully. "To me you make your big bill out, eh?"

That was how Penwenn, the lean unrelenting aristocrat of the counting-house, met with Seibert, the stubborn baronial jungle-tamer; and though they were face to face in the night-time, their instinctive antagonism was at once like a life-long feud. The feud between them was indeed older than their lives; it was a conflict of types, ordained among the dark mysteries of Nature, and now, with Nature's usual dramatic malevolence, embittered by the presence of a woman.

Paullen loosened the lantern, and from horseback held it high above the wagon. Its glare whitened the features and blinded the eyes of those it fell on. Nada lifted an arm against it, veiling her face under the cape.

Seibert then rode alongside, and reaching over, took her into his big hands as easily as he might have lifted a sack of grain; and swinging her up as if she were a child, one that he loved, placed her on the horse's neck, and enfolded her against him.

The next moment he had jerked his horse around, and shouted: "So you take a woman off her sick bed—so sick she cannot see people—to make her go to jail! Why it is you didn't tie her up like that McGuire? Heh?"

Paullen swung round the lantern—McGuire's rope had been cut and he was climbing down—holding its light for a moment on Penwenn, whose long face was distorted by the shadows of its angular features that were themselves now strained and distorted by a helpless rage.

McGuire went in among the Germans, who had shotguns in their hands, and found the extra horse that had been brought. His way of getting on a horse was about the same as his way of going up a rickety ladder; and as he reached up, climbing for the saddle, he felt a lift on a dangling foot. It was Lu Lung helping him.

Lu Lung handed up Nada's bundle, then scrambled up as McGuire helpfully pulled. The Chinaman seated himself astride the horse's rump, and then put both arms around McGuire's waist, holding on tightly.

Paullen turned in his saddle and held out the lantern toward the driver, but the fellow would not reach for it; so Paullen tossed it at the roadside. The lantern struck, turned over, flickered dimly and went out.

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# CHAPTER V

## 1

The next morning McGuire slipped quietly out to Seibert's veranda, edged about with clean blue paint, for a breath of the air that still had a tang of dewy coolness, and a few puffs of his pipe.

McGuire was a little weary, still half amused, but weary because the night had been sleepless for him; though Paullen shortly before sunrise had fallen back across his fresh white pillow and gone to restless dreams.

Almost at once a tall native woman in a long loose one-piece dress, shuffled out with a slow, unhurried manner that was almost stately. Her naked feet were in grass slippers; her black hair, caught by a single ribband, hung down her back. While she spoke she stared at him. There was something slumbrous in her long dark almost Oriental eyes; slumbrous, but as if waiting half alertly to be called up by any man that admired her.

She said that Mr. Seibert wanted McGuire and his friend to breakfast with him. She spoke of Seibert as "Master," and her voice was oddly soft and smooth.

McGuire replied in Samoan; and she told him that her name was Lalua, and that Mr. Seibert was already at the table, from where he had seen McGuire on the veranda. A strange, wide slow smile crossed her mouth and hung there; and McGuire, after watching her for a moment with the drowsy suspicion that she knew something or other that she should not know, turned away and went to shake Paullen off his pillow.

## 2

From across a pile of smoking pancakes, flanked by brown sausages, Seibert welcomed them jovially. He was replacing a tall glass syrup jug on the table as they came in and waved it with a flourish as if it had been a stein. His elbows were spread on the table; he spoke with his mouth half full of cakes, cheerfully pointing to chairs.

McGuire, and especially Paullen, who had a guilty conscience, were doubtful as to what this hospitality might mean. The night before, like unimportant guests being hurried out of the way, they had been put into a small clean room, Lalua's; and then with lowered voices they had wasted the hours, talking, wondering at their position, at what Seibert had done and would do. Now, most astonishingly, they were called to breakfast like favoured persons.

Paullen now looked tired and sleepy, and was embarrassed by his conscience, but he sat stiffly erect and sipped at a big cup of black coffee.

"From my own beans," said Seibert, with a proud flourish at the coffee urn.

He was particularly attentive to Paullen; and dropped his fist to the table in a way that started the silverware, as he bragged to McGuire of how this boy had ridden Bismarck home.

Paullen blushed uneasily and burned his mouth with scalding coffee.

"Second man that horse had killed. Nobody before ever rode him but myself!"

It was as if he was proud of having himself equalled, as he was proud of the black stallion's deadliness.

The fellow that had been killed over there (his hand, holding a knife that dripped syrup, waved vaguely), was a numbskull, anyway; always in trouble. Men with a cart were going over after his body this morning, and would hurry back. There was to be something important take place about noontime.

"*Ach*, yes! That Gauro, I will shoot him—*cluck, cluck!*"

He levelled a forefinger first at Paullen, then at McGuire, cheerfully clucking to indicate the report of a gun. Paullen, sitting in that stiffly straight way he had, gave a slight shivery start; and Seibert laughed loud.

"This man *is* a brute!" Paullen affirmed to himself.

Seibert was saying: "Every man will be there. It means I lose a half day's work from them, but I teach a lesson. That Gauro, he has been a rascal. While he was loose he topped thirty fine cocoanuts trees, the scoundrel! Just to hurt me. Hurt my trees."

Not a word about Gauro having shot at him. McGuire really had doubts about this; so he mentioned it. "And he tried to kill you, didn't he?"

"Yes, yes," said Seibert, a hand vaguely going toward the top of his head; "but he missed me. He did not miss my trees. And he made other men run away. He makes trouble no more, that fellow, you bet!" He then drew a semicircle on the cloth with a knife-blade, which he now used as a pointer: "All my blacks will be there; my overseers, there; Gauro, here. I stand right here, and I have my Dr. Hausen, who understands cannibal talk, to tell them all what Gauro has done and how he will not work. Then—*cluck!* They will remember that lesson!"

"What about your consul?" McGuire asked. "And the missionaries? Won't they dance a jig?"

"That for them!" Seibert shouted, driving his great fist into a broad palm with startling crack. Blood rushed into his round, sunburned face; his breast heaved with deep, audible breathing; the thick, powerful arms struck out in unrelated gestures, as if groping for something intangibly baffling to close on and crush; yet—McGuire was watching closely—there was an unfocused expression on his face, as if a kind of rigidly repressed bewilderment was peeping through. Seibert's blue eyes seemed looking at nothing as with renewed smack of fist to palm he damned consuls and missionaries.

They, he said, came out to the islands and meddled. They would stay a year, two years, four or five at most, and do nothing! He—for a quarter of a century he had been here, tearing out the jungle, working, planting. All that meant nothing to those meddlers. They would, would they, make a big to-do because for the good of his plantation he shot a fellow that had tried to incite his blacks to burn his buildings, destroy his trees, then raid the villages all about! Meddlers! That Gauro was a bad one. He had been a bad one on other plantations. The recruiter that had brought him said Gauro was bad. This recruiter happened to be his friend, or (Seibert said) no recruiter would ever say that of a black he was trying to sell.

Just let the consul-meddlers interfere and see how much he cared. Once before, many years ago, some consuls had tried to meddle because he had a woman whipped——

(At this Paullen shuddered, and gulped down more of the bitter coffee.)

Because it was the second time she had killed a baby of hers. But there had been a German gunboat in the bay, and the German captain knew what was what.

The German captain had stood up for Seibert, who was trying to make a plantation on Puluatu that would equal in richness the great Dutch estates of Sumatra. What did the Dutch Government do with meddlers? Threw them out—*out!*

Then Seibert leaned forward, spreading his elbows, with a quietness as sudden and seemingly as unnatural as his anger had been. He sank for a moment into an attitude of vacant staring as he said:

"Almost I went to Sumatra instead of coming here. *Ach!* everything there grows. Here, nothings but those damn cocoanuts!"

McGuire settled forward, leaning on the table, and with cautious gentleness, as if trying to draw out answers without disturbing him, asked "Peppers?"

"Not much. No. But I'm trying again those things."

"Tobacco?"

"All bite and no flavour. I am getting some new seed, though."

"Cotton?"

"Bah! Little frizzled staple, like that! It grows, but where will it sell? Nowhere. I burned my field for fertiliser."

"Coffee?"

"Some, but not much good." He indicated the coffee-urn. "Coffee trees come fine up so high. Nursed each little tree like he was a pet, with little tents of fern leaves for him to grow in and get strong. They failed me, too, those coffee trees."

"Vanilla, then?"

"Thousands of those things I tried. They had sickly little blooms, then—*pussh!* Orchid things won't do fine here. I tried to make them, but they won't."

"Sugar cane?"

"My mill it makes a little money, but the nights are not hot enough, like in Queensland and Sumatra. *Ach!* that is the place, that Sumatra!"

Then Seibert straightened up quickly, and, throwing out his broad chest, laughed loud, unconvincingly. His eyes for a moment had an almost startled gleam in them, and his heartiness was almost alarming, insistent, loud, like something desperate. He shouted, "But nowhere you can find such a place like I have here! The jungle, I have beat him, like a general runs off the mob. And the flowers—see?"

His extended arm settled vaguely in the direction of the window. "Everything of flowers grows for me. Flowers, *ach!* they are wonderful things."

He sighed, inhaling deeply, swelling and swelling his lungs until the huge chest had a comic inflation, as if he wanted to show how broad and full he could appear; but this was accompanied by an intense stare, dull, stupidly empty; his face was like a coarse red mask.

McGuire saw, however, that his eyes, for all their vacancy, were looking directly through the window at a foaming billow of camellias, where hundreds, swarming hundreds, were massed in a long bed trimmed with a low-cut hedge.

Then Seibert again began to talk.

Lalua came in quietly, bearing on her upturned palms a broad, flat, black pan containing at least a dozen eggs that were still steaming. She was tall, and moved with an unbending air that somehow suggested a kind of willowy ease; her dark eyes had a watchful steadiness; their shape was oddly long and narrowed, but in their depths was the sombre glow that Samoans have, and this did not conceal the faintly luring half-challenge, half-appeal, that was also in her eyes. Excepting for the obliqueness of her eyes, her features were those of the common natives, a little thick and flat, with a wide mouth; but she had the inescapable grace of her people, and something more in the way of strange composure added to that. The long, one-piece dress of white muslin, her dark hair, combed back across her shoulders and tightly tied, the short sleeves and brown, slim arms, and that slow, nearly stately air with which she shuffled on her grass slippers, made her appear not unlike a proud captive reduced to servitude.

She held the pan before Seibert. Without pausing in his loud talk, he took four of the eggs and began breaking them into his tumbler. She moved to Pullen, and her eyes a little furtively lingered at their corners, still on Seibert. He did not notice her at all while she was in the room.

Seibert's talk had got to Penwenn, and was about the night before. He was flushed with a feeling of good fortune, and boasting of what had taken place on the road. His face beamed, and turned more and more red, as if blushing under the praise of his own words. He poked McGuire with a thick forefinger, and said that he should be grateful for having been saved "a hanging."

"I am," said McGuire. "I would rather be your prisoner, and breakfast off pancakes and eggs."

Seibert leaned over and smote McGuire's shoulder with approving, jocular pats. He ate with gusto and talked in a hearty, rumbling, loud voice, once or twice banging the table, and once smote his chest, holding the knife in his fist.

### 3

The night before Seibert had evidently thought that Nada was dangerously ill; in which case he had made enough stir and fuss to have wrecked the nerves of any sick person; or else he had chosen to treat her like an invalid, and turned the house upside down just to show how attentive he could be.

He had ridden with Nada on his horse; and after they came into the house he continued to hold her, carrying her about as easily as if she had been a small child, but also much of the time as if he had forgotten what he had in his arms. Amid hurrying and loud talk and trampling, a bed was taken down and set up where he wanted a bed set up on the veranda, with certain specified covering got from certain chests and placed in a certain way, and a white linen spread with blue fringe was laid over all.

Seibert (carrying Nada, who could hardly help laughing, though at times she was uneasy, and begged half indignantly to be put down) had followed first one and then another of the native girls, seeing what she was about, hurrying her up, telling her this or that to do, pausing to demand of another what she was doing. Oreena had cried at him to put her down.

Nada had asked to be put down with almost every tone that a woman can use excepting one that was tearful. Seibert had appeared simply not to hear, perhaps had not heard; that is, it had not reached through his excitement of preparing the household for her comfort.

It was comic, but in a way that had made McGuire (who looked on from an out-of-the-way corner) hesitate to laugh. Like almost everything else that Seibert did, there was something like a hidden presence under his manner, some sort of reason. If, in his awkward, hearty, mannerless way, which had not the faintest trace of graceful courtesy at any time, he had wanted to prove to Nada that she was welcome, loved, and would be cared for, he might have gone about it in just the way he did; but the sight of it made Paullen angry and McGuire doubtfully wonder just what might happen to Nada before she could escape from the house.

The bed had been put out on the veranda; Seibert had placed her on it, and called up all the screens in the house, then arranged these about her bed. He saw to it that she was given a glass of wine. She had not wanted wine. But (he told her) it was fine wine, from the last bottle of a vintage he had always saved for officers of German gunboats when they were his guests. It would be the thing for her—just what she needed.

Seibert then detailed one of the native girls to sleep on a couch at the foot of the bed in case Nada wanted something in the night; though Nada declared repeatedly and rapidly, almost at the point of showing temper and half laughing in spite of herself at the absurdity, that she was not sick, that she was all right, and that she wouldn't want anything in the night except to be left alone!

"*Ach!* she is feverish!" said Seibert, as if he believed it. Perhaps he did.

Even after Paullen and McGuire were in the bed that had been given them they could hear him stamping about from room to room, calling on first one and another servant, demanding if something or other had been done. His voice had been brusque, but somehow as if he thought of one thing and spoke of another.

Then the house had quieted down. Occasional voices spoke with a sound of murmuring. Now and then there would be passing footsteps. Then stillness. But the stillness was soon broken by Seibert's raucous boom from afar to the girl that had been sent to sleep at Nada's feet:

"If she gets bad, remember, now, you call me. I'll get Dr. Hausen!"

Dr. Hausen was the bleary-eyed veterinary that looked after horses and doped blacks.

Then Paullen had whispered to McGuire, "He's been showing off. He knows she isn't that badly sick. Anybody could see that. But he wants her to see and hear how attentive he can be—and he keeps Oreena afraid of her life! He's a big brute!"

Said McGuire to Paullen in a waspish whisper, "What are you growling about? If he wasn't a big brute would *she* love *you*? Ungrateful chap, you are."

#### 4

Now, after their breakfast together, Seibert, stamping on one foot then the other in a way that kept his spurs tinkling, took up his broad hat, with the holes of which McGuire was dubious in the crown. The riding-whip was coiled down inside the crown like a sleeping snake; and, fitting this to his wrist, he said, addressing Paullen, "Bismarck will be expecting us. Always I say good morning to him. Now you are his rider, too. *Ach!* you are a fine boy, my Paullen! My wife she likes you, too."

He stared at the boy and grinned, slashed the whip across his leg, and stood expansively, full of good warm food, with elbows out from his body, feet wide apart, beaming; and to Paullen, who was suddenly sickened by dread, his beaming appeared sardonically malevolent.

McGuire, too, was a little startled, though he had within the hour begun to feel that he understood Seibert pretty well.

An instant later a vacant look drifted across Seibert's face, momentarily leaving the grin stupidly fixed, as on something lifeless—a mask or a huge dummy; and the eyes for a second or two were dulled, as if his mind had lost connection with his features.

Then, as if arousing himself, he said, "*Ach!* that damn Gauro!" and with a great flourish of the whip snapped it against his boot, and renewed his beaming at Paullen.

"Come, we go now to the stables."

Paullen cast a questioning, bewildered glance at McGuire.

McGuire held a long, black, excellent cigar to the tip of his lips, and, with his odd, lazy air of being at home wherever he found a place to lean, had a shoulder propped against one of the blue posts of the veranda. He gave no sign and said nothing, being at the time more or less preoccupied because, but a moment before, he had seen a small, pretty, dark face peer round the edge of a window curtain, gaze intently for an instant, and vanish timidly.

He, somehow, without being excluded, had not been included in the invitation to go to the stables; perhaps because at the table he had said that he knew as little of horses as of women, and was easily frightened by either. Seibert had laughed boisterously at this, leaning far back in his chair and striking the edge of the table with his palm.

Then they had got up from the table, and Seibert had brought from a locked cupboard his glass jar of big cigars, passing them with an awkward, free-handed insistence, urging Paullen, who did not smoke, to try one, forcing McGuire to take two.

As he relocked the cupboard he had said, "These house girls steal them for those stable boys. A native has no business with a good cigar. He likes a bad one better."

Then he had laughed, shaking his great body. In a sort of clumsy companionableness he had seemed at ease with them, glad to have them about; but this heartiness had been, and still was, unconvincing to Paullen, who dreaded what might be going on behind that mask-like expression.

And now, at being urged to go to the stables, a perturbing thought had come into Paullen's uneasy mind. Bismarck's deadliness was known. Everybody on the plantation, excepting Seibert, was afraid of him. He was saddled or unsaddled only when Seibert was standing by. And what if, when they had gone into the stables, with nobody near but themselves, Seibert should suddenly discard his mask-like expression and fling him under the stallion's heels, to be kicked to death? He needed only to say afterwards that Paullen had incautiously stepped too near!

Indeed, Paullen's sense of guilt was beginning to unsettle his courage; and he glanced with anxious scrutiny at the big, round face, now again momentarily blank with vague detachment, as if whatever it was that constantly clutched at his thoughts had again fastened on his attention. But a minute later, when Seibert grinned at him and said, "We will go now, heh?" Paullen squared his shoulders stiffly and walked off with him, keeping step with his stride.

## 5

McGuire, about to throw away the excellent tobacco, regretfully eyed its bare inch of ash and puffed deeply two or three times, taking the last taste of enjoyment in gulps; then he dropped the cigar out of sight behind a hydrangea bush and walked soft-footed to a screened door, curtained its full length by blue cloth that hung in folds.

He opened the door slightly, peered within, then quietly stepped through and let the door close softly on a hand held out behind him.

The room was coolly blue in colour, with a kind of rigid arrangement in the furnishings, as if every object had been carefully placed, and set at a certain and unalterable angle. A couch with rumpled bedding, scattered and tossed about by a restless sleeper, was the only thing in the least out of order.

There were many queer, ornamental objects about. A large shepherd boy, with rosy and preposterously clean face, in a pale blue shirt and deep blue trousers, with pink bows at the knees, stood at the centre of the table that was in the middle of the room. He leaned dreamily against his crook and faced the door. Anyone would have known that he would not dare move an inch even if life should come to him. At each side of the mirror was a plump German girl with plaited yellow hair, red cheeks, and blue eyes; both statuettes wore tight blue bodices, and stood in beribboned and ruffled skirts which swelled out stiffly, and were shortened just in time to avoid concealing the tiny red slippers—slippers that would have been small for a fairy's feet.

Near the feet of one of them lay a large, thick watch, obviously Seibert's.

These little Gretchens were on a dark, heavy chest from which (carved there) two gnome faces looked out of the wood and considerably extended their tongues for use as drawer-knobs.

A cuckoo clock hung in a corner.

On one of the walls hung a coloured picture of German scenery; in the midst of this scenery a man with a feather in his green cap, staff in hand, gazed upward from the winding trail toward a great eagle that hovered above the mountain-top. The picture was framed in black wood. A German word in gilt letters appeared at the bottom of the frame.

Oreena stood by a window. Her dainty hands touched apart the curtains, and she peeped between them at the two men who were disappearing round a curve of the gravel path on their way to the stables. She wore a blue kimono sort of gown, much too large for her small body, and it lay in silken folds about her feet. The unbrushed, curly hair, dark and fine, looked as if a wind had left it tousled.

She dropped her hands; the curtains closed with faint trembling, and then were motionless. Oreena turned slightly, and, gathering the gown out of the way of her bare feet, started to leave the room through an inner door. McGuire quietly spoke.

She whirled swiftly and stood rigid, slightly drawn back. Her pretty little face, for a moment alarmed, stared out from the tangled hair; then a determined frown gathered on her forehead, and the dark eyes became narrowed and severe.

McGuire crossed his hands behind him, and, sagging as if a shoulder was broken, smiled mistily, then said with easy slowness, "I'm Dan McGuire."

"I know that."

She straightened a little and shook the kimono into loose folds, effacing the outline of waist and thigh, and regarded him coldly. There was nothing handsome or attractive in his appearance, and he had a bad name. She stared with unapproachable aloofness, and a slight air of one about to be indignantly amazed.

McGuire, with deliberate composure, returned a drowsy gaze, as if sleepily amused. The smile on his wide, crooked mouth deepened, and with listless steadiness he examined her face, exasperating her by being at ease, amused, and even critical of that beauty in her which she knew that he saw.

She spoke angrily. "What is it you want?"

"Well, for one thing, I wanted to ask how Nada is this morning?"

"Oh, she is all right; you know she is all right." Oreena spoke quickly, as if there was nothing about Nada to warrant inquiry; then, flashing her eyes and throwing the words stormily: "How dare you come into my room this way! I shall tell Mr. Seibert. I surely shall. This is—is——"

"Outrage," McGuire supplied.

"That you came into my bedroom when I——"

"Oh, is this your bedroom?" He looked about with mild interest. "Perhaps I didn't know that. I am not very familiar yet with the arrangement of your house. But you see, Mrs. Seibert, I had to come to the first place where I could find you alone, because—well, I wanted to tell you to make Paullen go away from here and stay away. Tell him to go to Pulu and get any boat he can catch, and go on it. And you will please do it at once, or——"

McGuire broke off with a wide, crooked smile and shrug of his shoulder.

Oreena was now really astonished and highly angered. She felt McGuire's intense dislike for her, something that she had never felt under any man's eyes; and he had spoken with a kind of bantering mockery.

She began twice to reply. Being not only angered but frightened, she checked herself; and as she paused her thoughts went spinning from fear to fear, so that when she did speak it was with a humbleness that McGuire knew was not in the least to be trusted. "Why, oh, why would you tell Mr. Seibert *that*!"

"What?" he asked, with malicious dullness.

"That I—you know that—Nada has told you! I *do* love John Paullen, but"—she was pleading now—"but you surely wouldn't tell Mr. Seibert *that*?"

"You are right. I surely wouldn't!" said McGuire hastily, with an enigmatic twist to his crooked mouth.

"Oh, you—you wouldn't?"

"Hardly. I don't want my neck broke."

She frowned, puzzled, not quite understanding.

McGuire told her, "It isn't Mr. Seibert we're concerned with just yet. It's John Paullen."

"Nada told you that! She loves him herself. I know it. I've known it from the first. And you—you are doing it for her. Oh, I see through you, both of you!"

"Shh-hh-h!" McGuire impertinently wagged a finger. "I didn't say you were to hand him over to anybody. I said send him away—off the island—over the rim of the earth—anywhere. I don't care where."

"Oh!" Oreena gasped. Her dark eyes gazed blankly for an instant, then she shot a bare arm out through the big loose sleeve, as if aiming for his head, and cried, "It's just to cheat me! I knew Nada loved him, and you know it too. You are doing it for her!"

Her jealousy, like an impalpable creature with a thousand wavering tentacles floating in air, seized on anything. She was alive with doubts and fears, fretfully uncertain, filled with an unappeasable selfishness; a fragile, artificial, pretty little thing, in a way as breakable and blameless as the red-cheeked Gretchens beside her mirror; but now intensely and jealously angered.

Her dark hair floated in a cloudy tangle; one hand clutched the gown around her; the other aimed a finger, rigid as if she wished to use it as a dagger, at McGuire; and she, so dark and hotly stirred, stood in the midst of the cool blue silk.

"It is Nada, always Nada! It always has been Nada! You too! And even John Paullen—it was for her that he broke away and rode that dreadful horse last night. And Mr. Seibert, too, last night, for Nada! Even my husband loves Nada!"

"All my life it has been Nada that people loved—old Waller, and Brundage, and Dr. Lemaitre! Even my father, all the time I was at home alone, babbled about Nada. And why did I have to leave her in San Francisco to have parties and lovers and be made over, while I came back to this wretched island? I was tricked and cheated to be gotten rid of! Kate Collins introduced me to a rich young planter who was coming out to Samoa, and I took passage on the same ship because she told me that he was mad over me. The first day out I discovered that he was married. Kate Collins didn't want *me* with her—I know it now. But she kept Nada and gave her a wonderful time. Everywhere, always, it has been Nada. Even that Hurricane Williams, the woman-hater—he brought Nada home so she could be with John Paullen. He is mine, I tell you! He does love me. I've taken him away from her, and I will keep him! She is jealous, and hates me for it. She pretends to be sick to get his sympathy. She has everybody else—you, too—even my husband is in love with her! It is Nada, Nada, Nada! Oh, I—I—I could kill her!"

McGuire lazily scratched the tip of his long nose and asked indifferently, "All done?"

She may not have finished with all she would have liked to say, but she was left speechless, partly by being out of breath, and largely because his impudence baffled her. At that moment, if he had been under her small, soft feet she would gladly have trampled him to death, but she had nothing to strike with, not even words. So she stood with her eyes blazing and waited.

McGuire began carelessly, "I've never heard Nada say she cared that"—he swept his hand with a discarding movement out to one side, snapping finger and thumb—"for Paullen. But *I, I* like the boy, and if he stays around here he is sure to get hurt. You are the only one that can make him go away; that is, unless he quits loving you, and so hasn't any reason for staying around longer. I don't suppose you would want that to happen, would you? To wherever he went—ends of the earth or a little beyond—you'd like to have him still think well of you, wouldn't you? In a way, that is? Surely. Of course.

"Now this boy Paullen may love you—you know more about that than I do—but he's a gentleman, first, last, all the time. It's in his blood, and he can't help it any more than there are some things that you can't help—having dark eyes, for instance, and a darker temper!"

"There are times when, as a matter of honour, a gentleman like Paullen will instantly cease being the lover of any woman. And if he stopped loving you, then—now that you mention it, and seeing that you and Nada *do* look alike—something alike—he might—well, you wouldn't want him to do that, I know.

"Shh-sh-hh-h!" he uttered, carelessly wagging a hand back and forth as she started to speak. "I waited until you had finished. It's my turn now. And let's clear the deck—understand each other—for you and I, Oreena—I may call you Oreena?—well, you and I, Oreena, are enemies. Don't think because I am being pleasant that there can be peace between us. There can't any more than there could ever be peace, or love, between you and John Paullen if he knew why you told Seibert that I was Dan McGuire, and that he could make me take him to where Williams had gone pearling!"

Whatever she may have expected, it was not that. Her softly dark, delicate hands, clutching the gown as if for something

to grip and hold to, shook, and she could not keep them still. Their motion set the silk's sheen a-quiver with iridescence in the morning sunlight.

McGuire faced her inscrutably. He had expected surprise, anger, indignation at Seibert, or hasty denials, and if not denials at least a rushing justification, with perhaps a threat or two for himself; but this scene between them was something he had determined on, for he felt that otherwise the love between her and Paullen must bring tragedy upon them; and he knew that he could influence her to send Paullen away. It would have been risky to try to make him see her as deceitful and unlovely, since Paullen was not the sort of boy to believe evil hearsay from anybody of a woman he loved.

As McGuire began to speak again she turned away, and, dropping her eyes, seemed relieved, perhaps helped to a feeling of concealment by the way her tangle of silken hair floated beside her lowered face; and she stood motionless, in spiral folds of the shimmering silk that coiled fold on fold to her breast.

McGuire had settled lazily against the table in the middle of the room, and, resting his leg across a corner, propped his forearm between chin and knee. Now, pendulously swinging the loose foot, he set about finishing the scene with her. His eyes, deceptively shadowed by the drooping lids, looked drowsily in her direction, but not at her. He was watching in the mirror, since her back was toward him.

He began, not wholly truthfully, with, "Besides, you see, Williams is a great hero to Paullen. Great hero, in a way. And he's like a son to Williams.

"You see, Oreena, they're something alike, those two. Have that sense of honour you and I don't care much about. Rather silly thing at times, honour. Doesn't let you do what you want to do, then drives you to do strange, mad sort o' things nobody can understand.

"Imagine yourself doing that to you—or to me! I mean, to anybody. Like you had an overseer inside of you—something like one of Seibert's sunburned Germans! Honour!

"But it's a good thing to pretend to have sometimes. Impresses other people—the ones that really do have it. Now, for instance, if you said to Paullen that you have grown to feel that it is terribly wicked of you to love him, and that, after all, your husband is your husband, and that you would rather do what is really right than be happy—though, of course (you must say), that you can't be happy when doing something wrong—and that you love him—Paullen, that is—and always will love him, still you can't endure any longer the terrible ache of feeling wicked—why, Paullen will understand, being a gentleman. He has a lot of honour. Right now he feels a good deal that way about himself. And he would give in to you; that is, if you insisted. It would be a fearfully sad parting, of course, but wherever he went, as long as he lived, he would retain a wonderful respect for you, and probably keep empty that place in his life which no other woman could seem worthy to fill.

"It might be"—now McGuire was overlaying a false hope with high colouring—"that Paullen would stay in the South Seas—at a distance, you know—waiting, waiting, perhaps feeling that he was somewhere within voice-call in case you ever need him. On some other island, of course, but near enough to hear how things go with you.

"Seibert's past fifty—in the middle fifties, isn't he? You aren't twenty. Paullen's almost as young. A few years—who knows?"

McGuire himself knew that a few years would be ruinous to Oreena. Hers was purely a tropic bloom. There was no warmth of feeling, no sweetness, aglow within her to soften the scratchings and pinchings of the years which, with a kind of sentient, cruel eagerness, would be after her prettiness.

"Yes, you are a young girl. Paullen's a mere boy. Seibert's an old man; and in spite of all that great show of heartiness, if the jungle doesn't kill him outright, the deceitfulness of coffee trees and cotton fields will.

"But at any sort of parting I wouldn't mention that to Paullen. Hardly! He isn't the sort of boy, with all that honour in him, you know, to get pleasure from the idea of having somebody die so that he could——"

At that moment Oreena slightly lifted her head, as if she started from a hot twinge. McGuire caught the reflection in the mirror. His dangling foot became motionless, stiffly held out; his hand dropped from his chin, and he straightened slightly, staring at her, seeing her face, but himself unseen.

Then he stood up, fascinated, holding his breath through many pulse-beats as an ugly idea rapidly took shape in his mind. An incredible, frightened, guilty look had come into her dark eyes, that were now furtive and full of suffering.



She must have sensed the intentness of his gaze as it glanced from the mirror into her face, for her eyes moved directly into the reflected stare, paused for a moment with uneasy intentness, then, with a panicky flicker, fell. She knew now that he had guessed; and she snatched at the gown, burying her face. One hand pulled at her hair, clawing it down, bunching it, too, about her face, trying to hide herself.

"So that's it! You hoped Williams would kill him! It wasn't merely to get Seibert off the island."

A pause, then McGuire laughed quietly. The laugh was not very pleasant, but he was at least a little amused.

He moved a few steps nearer to Oreena, then stopped, and with hands crossed behind him raised up a few times on his toes, looking down at her. "Well, well, well!" He said it with exasperating composure, almost gentleness. "What a blind little fool you are, Oreena." McGuire's smile was wide and crooked. "Don't you know—you ought to; you have heard about Williams all your life—that he has respect for people who are openly and frankly his enemies?"

"Besides, remember what I have just been saying about honour? He feels that he did Seibert an injury years ago, he and Brundage. Why, you mad little idiot, Seibert is one of the few men that Williams, under no circumstances, would hurt!"

McGuire stopped and looked about. He hardly knew what more to say, but it must be something definite, final, something that would end this scene and leave her ready for the one with Paullen.

He was not shocked; a little surprised—much surprised—but at that only surprised as one is by something preposterous. Yet a brain must have a certain grotesque shape before it will even hold ideas of that kind; and she, like a wicked little checker player, had looked two jumps ahead, and saw how Seibert could be placed in a way to be struck from the board. But the idea itself frightened her, because it was her own, and she had tried to use it.

McGuire became aware that she was faintly crying; this brought him back to the need of having the scene over with.

"Some time to-day you tell Paullen whatever you wish. Better keep those tears; they'll help convince him. And if he's here to-morrow—well, I'll talk to him. I'll tell him everything. Some things even you don't know about—why Williams is pearly now, and Seibert, the kind of man that Seibert really is!"

He walked quickly from the room, again letting the door close against his palm behind him, while he looked watchfully about; for it had just occurred to him that he had, after all, been in Oreena's bedroom.

## 6

After coming out on the veranda McGuire rumbled his red cow-lick thoughtfully. He had it in mind to find a secluded spot and do some tall thinking about what might happen if Oreena failed to be convincing; but he was pretty sure that she would not fail. She would not dare fail. There would, after all, be no real sense of finality in sending him off, and she would have comfort in the splendid sadness of parting with Paullen.

McGuire said to himself, "Poor little wretch, her poses have been nothing but costumes in which she has dressed up. It's all she's had—just poses. She *has* been unlucky and can't help herself. She wasn't born with a sweet, generous nature; and, damn it! when she was a baby Nada waited on her, did for her, petted her into selfishness, and all through childhood, too. She just grew and grew as she was trained. Now, who's to blame for it? Nada or Oreena?"

But before he found the secluded spot and began his tall thinking—in fact, just as he was placing a match to the second excellent cigar—he saw the fleeting, shadow-like movement of something at a great distance through the trees. This would have seemed a trick of fancy had not the movement continued; and presently he made out that two or three horsemen were coming along the drive toward the house. Soon, in great surprise, he perceived that one of the men was Penwenn; with increasing puzzlement he saw that another closely resembled Dr. Lemaitre, who was supposed to be far down the coast among sick natives; the third person was unmistakably an Englishman, and rode slightly ahead, as if to be the spokesman. McGuire readily guessed that he was Mortimer, the English consul, and at the time also acting as American consul.

## 7

There were usually three consuls at Pulotu, each of whom was expected by his Government to do far more than routine consular work, as the occasion seemed to require—but to make *no* mistakes.

The German consul was now absent in Samoa. The French consul, an elderly person, somewhat deaf, had never been considered important, even when in the best of health. For days he had been in bed. Because of his condition, growing worse, Dr. Lemaitre had been summoned from down the coast.

Mortimer, the Englishman, was said to have been discarded at home by a woman; as a result he appeared to have given way to lotus-fever; and because of his heart Dr. Lemaitre had repeatedly told him he should return to England, stop using strong coffee and stronger tobacco.

That was the consular situation that Penwenn had found the day before, when he arrived. His name was known in the South Seas, as for three generations it had been associated with Pacific trading and shipping.

He had made his complaint to Mortimer, who then explained that under the circumstances Penwenn might call for volunteers among the residents to accompany him; or, since he wished to do so, he might go with his own sailors, identify and bring in such as had been implicated in the theft of the *Flying Gull*.

A Yankee gunboat, recently at Apia, was known to be coming in a few days to Puluotu; and Mortimer said that he then, as acting American consul, would arrange with the naval captain for the disposal of the prisoners and their custody while being returned to the United States.

Mortimer had a good deal of diplomatic shyness, as well as a gentlemanly reluctance, about apprehending Nada Combe, who, so Penwenn had at the time angrily insisted, was, under the law, as much a pirate as anybody.

After Penwenn had returned from the Combe plantation there was much excitement at the Puluotu Club. Men stood about drinking, listening, and discussing.

The flesh of Penwenn's lean face had glowed as he talked, repeatedly turning to the rather unexcitable Mortimer, who sat smoking thoughtfully in a long cane chair and listening to demands that something punitive be done.

The situation was a difficult one for Mortimer. He might be criticised for whatever he did, or for doing nothing, by his own Government (British prestige and interests were all he greatly cared about); and he had increasing reluctance to exert himself, because he suspected that something more than ship-stealing was involved in Penwenn's attitude toward Nada.

No man could turn Mortimer aside from what he believed was his duty; but he was not easily agitated, and he had been too long in the South Seas to be exercised by the renewed talk about Combe being an escaped convict, of which Penwenn tried to make quite a point.

On all sides, there in the club, Penwenn had found listeners and sympathisers, who discussed the affair with brutal phrasing, as if the more harsh expressions showed the greater zeal for justice rather than an excessive taste for warm champagne laced with rum.

Seibert had never been popular at Puluotu. Many people all along had thought him a blasted hypocrite, with that stiff grin and the hearty cheerfulness that wasn't cheerful.

A certain Captain Rudsell—"Blackie" Rudsell, well known by evil reputation—whose schooner had arrived just about sundown, talked more loudly than anyone else. He had wedged himself to a place beside Penwenn, as if symbolically, as well as in fact, putting himself shoulder to shoulder with Penwenn.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Captain Blackie cried, holding high as a signal for silence the rum bottle from which he had been pouring.

Whether he was first called "Blackie" because of his complexion, swart as a Moor's, or because he dealt with pronounced vigour in the labour trade, snaring and enticing blacks, or because of certain suspicions about his character, would be difficult to say, as he had then for some ten or fifteen years been known by that name. He had often been searched for when complaints against him were fresh, but he seemed to have an uncanny gift of sensing danger from afar.

"Gentlemen!"

Voices dropped to a buzz, then hushed.

Rudsell had short, thick black hair, a short, bristling black beard, a short, flat, broken nose with noticeable nostrils, like a pig's snout. His black eyes roved commandingly about the silenced room.

"Gentlemen"—the rum bottle was waving overhead at arm's length—"you know, I know, we all know, about that blasted

Dutchman, and how he has pretended to hate that blankety-blank Williams. Why, that Dutchman and old Tom Combe have made out that they were enemies just over that blankety-blank Williams."

He paused and sucked noisily at his glass.

"It was a deep game they played us! That's the game they played us! An' we might've known! We might've known when old Tom give that Dutchman his daughter. But to-night, to-night our friend here"—his hand rested on Penwenn's shoulder—"made that blasted Dutchman show his hand!"

The rum bottle, after an overhead wave in gestural emphasis of Penwenn's accomplishment, had come down spirally and tipped its mouth in Captain Blackie's glass.

Two or three wild heads were eager over Captain Blackie's suggestion about everybody getting together and going out forcibly to bring the "pirates, woman and all," and Seibert with them, into Pulotu to await the coming of the Yankee *Panther*.

Mortimer looked around, with the end of his cigar scarcely beyond the fringe of his moustache, and said quietly, "Yes, Rudsell. The *Panther* will be pleased to take charge of *all* trouble-makers." His serious eyes had paused a moment on Captain Blackie's face, then turned away. Somehow it seemed that he had made a threat.

Mortimer had a long, straight nose and deep-set, impassive eyes—very serious eyes, with little bags under them; an untrimmed moustache stuck out and drooped over his mouth, as if to conceal a hare-lip or bad teeth. One could not imagine why he let the moustache fringe his lip untidily when it was seen that he had no defect to be obscured, and that the line of his mouth was shapely. He was middle-aged, rather tired in appearance, even sickly; but he seemed unaware that he wasn't in the best of health, though there were days when he hardly moved from the long cane chair that he used at the club. It was generally thought that he took his meagre duties too seriously, possibly because he never took them lightly, though they were attended to with a half-bored, weary air, but they were attended to thoroughly.

His manner, when he had spoken, after raising a hand for silence in the midst of a wordy confusion, was that of final decision.

"Very grave situation, possibly. To-morrow morning, first thing, I shall ride over and see Seibert. Have a talk with him. Mr. Penwenn here will accompany me. We two shall take the matter up with him, and then——"

He had gestured slightly, reluctantly, as if he knew perfectly well what he would then do.

The hot-heads continued to mumble, growl, and mutter about what ought to be done; but there was a Yankee gunboat in the background, and Mortimer was not one who would hesitate to make trouble if they tried impudent lawlessness.

During the night still another report about Seibert had drifted into the talk on the beach, mingling with the gurgle of gin, and then had got into the club, where warm champagne plopped and fizzed.

This was concerning a runaway black that he had caught, and was going to burn at the stake, or something.

## 8

In the meantime Dr. Lemaitre had been urgently sent for by the French consul.

He arrived about three on that morning in an outrigger canoe, driven by a dozen rowers and a sail. They had been ten hours on the way.

The natives at once drew their canoe high on the beach and lay beside it, sleeping as they fell. Their black forms, in the twisted and awkward attitudes of tired men, on the white sand and under the star-filled sky, were like the bodies of men who had fallen under a fusillade.

Dr. Lemaitre was as wet with spray as if he had passed through a squall; his clothing stuck to his flesh with clammy pressure, and the chill that dampness has in the tropic night-time, very like the shivery part of the fever it often presages, worked in toward his bones.

As he hurried on alone, walking heavily in the loose sand that gave off the *scrunch*, and had the colour, of snow, making toward the tall, shadowy fringe of palms, their fronded tops reaching out and swaying like enormous spiders, he saw lights burning at the club.

"Card players," he thought, and tramped on.

He advanced through thick shadows from the broken gate to the door of Consul Balte-Brun's house, opened the door without knocking, and, removing his hat, entered an unlighted room. No one was about. He pushed on to where a thread of light lay under the door, and entered.

A fat native woman was asleep in a chair. She sat upright, or nearly so. Her long, straight hair fell about her head, so that except for the position of her body it would have been difficult to say which way she faced.

A large lamp burned dimly on the table by the bed; about the base of the lamp were a few small bottles, a half-emptied phial of laudanum, a spoon or two, a little round pill-box, some crumpled papers.

The shrivelled body of the old consul lay with one arm curved above his head; the other loosely hung over the side of the bed. His thin face, which pain had marked ascetically, wore a long greyed moustache and goatee, and was now turned toward the wall. In life he had been pathetic and doddering. Men joked about his militant imperial. Death, with a kindly stroke, had given him the dignity of a sleeping marshal.

The native woman awakened, stood up with a start, and began to sob. Dr. Lemaitre knew that much of the violence in her sobbing was due to a belated fright at having been alone with a dead, instead of with merely a sick, man. The body was rigid. He pulled a sheet over the form, paused to wipe his spectacles, and stamped the sand from his feet. Then, taking up the lamp, he went into the kitchen for a drop or two of wine.

The woman threw back her hair and followed. She would not have remained alone in the dark of that room for all the printed calico in the shops of Pulu; and her sobbing diminished into long sighs. She was barefoot, and moved with heavy slowness, trying to tell this or that the consul had said, what he had been given to eat, and when; all the petty chatter of the dead, which in the last hours take on the importance of finality.

Dr. Lemaitre knew that the old consul had found at last some relief; relaxation showed on his chilled features.

Dr. Lemaitre was not interested in last words and last feedings. He had left men and women crawling about like sick flies to come to one man, because this man was of his race, of his blood; to feed medicine to a poor old disappointed man who was miserable in life and unafraid to die. If he had been called to help summon the deep sleep, ah, that would have been understandable. But, no. He, the atheist, brooded for a moment on mortal follies. He sipped at his wine thoughtfully; his fancies were far away.

The woman, with a flat-footed heaviness and an inconsolable air of suffering, moved about opening a can of salmon. She began to eat from the can with her fingers. The lamp was between them, and both were standing.

Suddenly, with an almost predatory gleam in her dark eyes, she stared at him. It had just occurred to her that he couldn't possibly know of the excitement that had been going on up and down the beach. So, over a can of oily salmon that she ate to the last red crumb, she told him of Seibert, and a score of things about the evening's incident that weren't true.

Dr. Lemaitre, unmindful of his wet clothes, tramped straight over to the club; and from the two or three men that were reasonably sober, or at least still awake, he learned more facts.

Later in the morning, about the time that breakfast-fires were sending out wisps of smoke that vanished among the foliage as if absorbed, Dr. Lemaitre appeared on horseback before Mortimer's door.

"Come in, come in for a bit of toast and coffee," Mortimer invited from the veranda, where he appeared in conventional whites, with blouse unbuttoned, fingering an unlighted cigar.

"Ah, yes, certainly. Yes," Mortimer then replied, when Dr. Lemaitre expressed his intention of riding over to Seibert's. "But it were best that we go together. Seibert may be in an ugly mood. Queer fellow, always wrong-headed. I can't imagine what he was up to. Wish his own consul was here.

"But I was thinking of poor Balte-Brun when you rode up. Poor old man. I've already done that." He pointed with the cigar between his fingers; and Dr. Lemaitre's eyes, following the gesture, saw the French flag at half-mast on the flag-staff at the edge of the sand.

"It seemed about all that could be done now. I went over this morning, went into the house—not a soul about—and got out the flag. The lamp was still burning. Not a person in the house, as if he had died of leprosy instead of—ulcers, wasn't it? In the stomach. I trust the *Panther* is here in time to give him a salute. Poor old Balte-Brun, he attached importance to that sort of thing.

"That's right. Come in. You look pretty fagged yourself. Many deaths down the coast?"

After breakfast Penwenn came to Mortimer's house; and, when they were introduced, Penwenn eyed Dr. Lemaitre questioningly and in return received a hard, peering scrutiny through the iron-rimmed spectacles.

Hardly a word was spoken between the three of them during the hour's ride; and, as they approached Seibert's house, Dr. Lemaitre, who had for years—five or six, in any case—not been in the grounds, looked about at the flowers and terraces, the spreading clumps of strange trees, the winding paths and borders of trimmed hedge, as if sure that he was being taken into the wrong place.

## 9

McGuire, with his best air of laziness, had seated himself on the rail; his legs were extended, and he propped his back against a pillar of the blue and white veranda, waiting with impertinent composure as they approached.

At a distance Penwenn fixed his eyes angrily on him. Their cold blue stare did not waver, even after his horse had stopped a few feet from the veranda.

Evidently Penwenn had not changed his clothes during the night; the starched clothes had a rumpled, soiled, slept-in appearance, though the lean, bony face seemed badly bitten by sleeplessness. A black stubble, that wanted a razor passed over it, showed on the Scotch jaw; the stubble was perhaps the Spanish peeping through; and showing, too, how intensely worked-up the coolly fastidious Penwenn must be so to neglect his polish.

Mortimer stopped his horse, and, removing his cigar, half burned and now unlighted, touched his protruding moustache, as if lightly wiping his mouth first on one side then the other, eyed McGuire impassively for a moment, and said, "You are McGuire."

McGuire smiled, and made a gesture faintly like a salute of acknowledgment, as insolent as a quiet manner and good nature could make it.

"Is Seibert about?"

"Yes. Yes. Oh, yes. He's here. Did you think he might have run off when he heard your horses thundering down the highway?"

Mortimer regarded him soberly, though without a change of expression, and said, "This is hardly a time for jesting, McGuire. I am here to speak with Seibert."

McGuire looked away. Before he thought of an answer he saw Paullen hurrying toward them; and it was soon apparent that he came with a message. He stopped, and, after looking indecisively from one to another, addressed Dr. Lemaitre, saying, "Mr. Seibert will be here at once. One of the men saw you enter the grounds and told him. He asked me to tell you he was coming."

Mortimer looked at Paullen for a time with penetrating steadiness. Anyone competent to observe anything about character could see that in the boy's straight carriage, his cleanly-formed features, in the modest boldness of his grey eyes, there was the subtle presence of unmistakable manliness.

McGuire, shrewdly watchful, detected Mortimer's curiosity. With gestural flourish he cried, "Consul, behold! Another of the dangerous pirates. This is John Paullen, official scuttler for Hurricane Williams!"

Paullen flushed and moved uneasily. He caught McGuire's insistent signal, and, moving in a wide circle round the horses, went to the veranda.

Mortimer, with finger and thumb at the tip of his moustache, again regarded McGuire with long, impassive staring; and he may have perceived that there was something important going on when McGuire spoke for a time in an earnest, low tone to Paullen, then seemed to overcome the last of the boy's reluctance by a parting shove. Paullen walked off with an air of nervous eagerness and disappeared round a corner of the veranda.

Dr. Lemaitre rode a few steps nearer. He appeared uneasy, as if guilty of something that was in danger of being found out.

"How—how is Nada?" he asked quickly.

"Cured!"

Then McGuire, in Samoan, rapidly and at length, told of what had happened, praising Seibert, and in a way that made Dr. Lemaitre listen doubtfully, incredulous.

Mortimer, completely lacking the physician's and beach-comber's fluency in the native tongue (McGuire spoke many island dialects), looked from one to another with a slightly baffled expression.

McGuire broke off with the English words, "There he comes now!"

## 10

Seibert approached in state, seated on the black stallion, that fretted and stamped, frequently striking the deep gravel with hoof-blows that made it splatter like water. Seibert had not intended to ride Bismarck this day; but when he had heard who was coming into his grounds he had called up the stable boys and had him saddled at once. No other of his horses had the strength and fire of this one; no other appeared so magnificent or was so dangerous.

Seibert sat upright, massive, filling the saddle as if he had been moulded into it. But McGuire's heart gave an uncertain flutter as he saw that Seibert was smiling—broadly, genially; he had expected that Seibert would come with a scowl on his great round face, and, glowering, run off the consul and Penwenn. Otherwise McGuire would have been tempted to go into hiding at the first sight of them, for he knew what they were after.

"Ha, gentlemen!" Seibert cried, and waved a gloved hand—flung up his arm as if throwing the hand away. "I am glad to see you this day. It is my pleasure. I am glad to see you."

He rode nearer, beaming. His great, full, sunburned face was broken into knots and lumps of cheerfulness, and the wide straw hat, far back on his head, disclosed the broad, red, smooth forehead, hairless as an egg. His left hand—he wore gauntlet gloves—was poised rigidly in air a few inches above the horn of the California saddle, holding the broad reins. His other hand rested at the hip, and on the wrist of this the whip, sinisterly slim, dangled.

"Ha, Mortimer! Glad to see you. Dr. Lemaitre, it is my wishes that have brought you. We have a sickness here. Mr.—ah—Penwenn, heh? Is it? I can't be sure. It was by lantern-light we met in the dark!"

This was not the reception they had expected, and they did not know whether it was contemptuous or conciliatory. Almost everything about Seibert had much the same ambiguity, the same doubtfulness as to what could be his intention. He looked massive, formidable, and appeared trying in his hearty, awkward way to be pleasant; though there was something about this broadness of chest, the enormous weight of body, and almost grotesque roundness of his grinning face, that suggested an equally awkward and ponderous effort at irony.

Even the impassive Mortimer was just a little doubtful. Dr. Lemaitre adjusted his spectacles two or three times. Penwenn had, at Seibert's approach, transferred his eyes to him, maintaining the stare that was as motionless as the glint of blue crockery.

"Seibert," Mortimer began, rather friendly, but signifying that he spoke as an official, "it appears that last night you may have been a little high-handed with Mr. Penwenn here. Nada Combe is, of course, a relative. That is understandable—understandable presuming, of course, that you weren't familiar with all the facts. Understandable, but hardly—hardly—I say, Seibert, it was a confoundedly high-handed piece of work.

"And this McGuire—you know, of course, *who* he is? Paullen, too; though unfortunately he is merely a young boy. And are you aware, Seibert, that you have given aid and protection to the right-hand man of Hurricane Williams, for whom you have always professed enmity?"

Had Mortimer come alone, or unattended by Penwenn, Seibert might have entered into more of an explanation. As it was, he laughed.

"I need," he said, "somebody to tell me who is mine enemies, eh? That is fine."

"This is a serious matter, Seibert. Feeling is high against you at Puluotu."

"Oh? That is so? Ah! Feeling it is high against me? *Ach!* ho!"

His round face took on a ludicrous expression of surprise. His sandy eyebrows lifted, and his mouth shaped itself around a hole about large enough to admit his thumb.

"Yes," said Mortimer decisively.

"*Ach!* That I had not thought of. No. Eh?"

Somewhat encouraged, Mortimer continued, "If those people are brought into Puluotu the difficulty will be much simplified. I say, Seibert, it will go much easier with—with you—with everybody."

"Is that so, heh?"

"Yes, Seibert."

"Nada, she is sick. I have been wishing for Dr. Lemaitre. My Hausen, he does for blacks and horses. But there is that McGuire. If him you want, take him. *Ach!* yes. He is no good, that fellow. You just take him right along with you, like I did. Ho, ho, ho!"

"And Paullen, too!" snapped Penwenn, in a high, rasping voice, jerking himself as though he were jointed by wires, all of which were attached to his vocal chords.

"Sure," said Seibert. "He is a fine boy, that Paullen. He rode this horse like I do myself! But the feeling it is high at Puluotu, eh? Among the loafers?"

Mortimer had cast a questioning, sidelong glance at Penwenn, as much as if to inquire with polite firmness as to who was handling this situation; then again looked toward Seibert; but Seibert was beaming cheerfully, and seemed to have nothing more to say. Mortimer then turned in his saddle and stared severely across his shoulder at McGuire, who had not moved except to sit up and throw aside the excellent cigar that had suddenly become tasteless.

Mortimer plucked doubtfully at the ends of his untidy moustache, remarking, "You are going back with us."

McGuire nodded sleepily. He hardly knew how he was to get off, but he did not intend to accompany them.

Seibert had ridden still closer; and then he shouted, "Listen. I tell you gentlemen somethings. I said you take this McGuire just like I took him! Understand that what I say?" He was vehement, but entirely good natured. "I know my business. I keep my business to myself. And I keep McGuire, unless you take him just like I did!"

His arm went up with a flourish; the dangling whip swung out; Bismarck shied sidelong, then leaped forward under the sting of spurs, and was held fast by the reins, drawn like steel ribbons against his mouth. Vapour shot from the stallion's nostrils; the eyes rolled; he pawed, trampling about, threatening to rear; his backing and sidling made Penwenn pull away and Mortimer turn to one side. Seibert apparently took no notice of the horse's restive struggles.

"Seibert, Seibert," Mortimer pronounced warningly, lifting his hand with the half-burned cigar between his fingers, "you are being wrong-headed in this. It may mean trouble—serious trouble. The U. S. *Panther* is coming. Due any time—to-day, to-morrow, any time. Mr. Penwenn is an American. I have charge of the American affairs at present. This is forced upon me. Williams, aided by the three persons now under your—er—protection, stole Mr. Penwenn's ship. It is serious."

Mortimer paused, but with his hand again lifting in a way that asked for continued attention, and earnestly, though with no agitation, he went on: "But there is another matter, Seibert, another matter of even more gravity. I understand that you intend to execute a black here on the plantation, and I warn you that it must not be done! It will be regarded as murder—as cold-blooded murder. Twenty years ago that sort of thing was done sometimes, but now it is barbarous to consider it! I am amazed at you, Seibert. As a friend I advise, and as an official I warn you. It may mean complications that will reach to Europe. And, Seibert—I say this in all friendliness, but, Seibert, if you do it I will do everything in my power to have you held for murder!"

Then instantly Seibert, as he gesticulated with a wandering arm, answered loud: "That Gauro shot at me. He killed my cocoanut trees, damn him! He stirred up my boys to run off. He tried to make an uprising—wipe out everything! If I shoot him in the bush, all well and good. You say, 'Fine, Seibert, fine. He was bad.' If I say to my men, 'Don't you hurt that fellow. You catch him alive, hear me?' And they catch him so I can put him up where all my blacks can see, and I tell everybody why, and right then I go—*bang-bang!*—that will do some good. Make things safe. But you say, 'No!'"

"He should be brought to Puluotu and given a trial. He will be punished if he is guilty."

"If he is guilty!" Seibert shouted. "Guilty of what? Look here!" He pulled off his hat and excitedly swung it out toward Mortimer, while the restive stallion sidled about, struggling helplessly between the yank of bit and the sting of spurs. "A hole there is—you look at it. Guilty! Guilty! Look here. No, he's not guilty! He missed my head—with my own rifle, too—he missed one, two, three inches about. If he don't miss my head, then he been guilty!"

"You fellows would hang him off some place where my blacks don't see. That do me no good. Those blacks don't know what hanging is—not even if they do see. Hanging, that is to them like a rite like when they kill somebody to put blood on a canoe. But *bang!*—right before their eyes—they know what that is, and don't try no funny business for a long time.

"For twenty years—more than twenty years—I plant, plant, plant here, build and make a big place with fine stables, and a big house and these grounds I've got. And this Gauro tried to make all my blacks jump up and destroy everything! But to shoot him would be murder! Bah! to let him live would be more murder! To-day I shoot him—*bang!*—right like that. You stay and I'll show you—*bang!*"

Seibert had shouted, brandishing his arm from which the whip swung about with unregarded flourishes; it was like a drunken arm trying to make off in first one direction then another with Seibert's hat. The terrified stallion had struggled to leap, to wheel, to back, to do anything to get away from the supposed menace of those flourishes, but Seibert's left arm hardly moved; the rigid grip of the one hand seemed as unconscious as the agitation of the other.

His coarsely fibred face, usually appearing almost as immobile as sun-baked clay except for the stiff grins, and these had a mask-like rigidity that was unconvincing, now had worked expressively. His eyes blazed; the thick lips rolled themselves flexuously around words. He had seemed in a fury, or approaching one; then abruptly he stopped, and was smiling. His face continued to glow with the warmth of blood that had been stirred by excitement, but he appeared absolutely good natured.

"You are a madman, Seibert! A madman!" Mortimer exclaimed, reining back and eyeing him sombrely.

Seibert clapped his hat on his head, pushed it up, and then opened his mouth as if about to burst into roars of laughter; but he gave only one or two forced "Ho-ho's."

"Seibert, delay this damnable thing until your own consul returns, then be advised by him. I am trying to warn you. But I will not hesitate to act, even if your consul——"

"Huh!" Seibert grunted. "That German consul, what does he know of my business? Do you fellows tell the doctor here how to cure measles and things? I got worse than measles. Does that fellow feed my labourers or make them work? Does he help me haul fertiliser or worry his damn head when things won't grow? Bah! He sits with you and other loafers at Puluotu and drinks too much schnapps, then growls about the climate that is here. Bah!" He swung his great right arm from far behind his back, smiting his chest with a blow that would have killed a consul, thus illustrating the enormous difference between himself and other men. "I wish for more of that heat that you consul fellows growl about. It kills off loafers and makes things grow!"

"Come," said Mortimer, with a brooding air of finality, to Penwenn, "we can do nothing more." Then, over his shoulder: "Remember, Seibert, it will be murder, and I will do everything in my power to have you punished for it. Law must be upheld."

"Ba-a-a-a-ah!" said Seibert, insultingly and grinning, looking after them until they were almost lost to sight, disappearing behind the lattice-tangle of foliage.

## 11

Seibert dismounted slowly. He was ponderous, but his very awkwardness, when motionless, when striding about, or gesturing with strange detachment of meaning, was suggestive of immense bodily strength. He walked with an unconscious sway, though sometimes, too, with a conscious swaggering stride.

Now, without either roughness or a gentle word, and paying no attention beyond a firm grip of the halter to the stallion's fretful tramping and jerks, he tied the rope through an iron ring bolted into a tree-stump, then he passed behind the stallion's heels, actually brushing aside the sweep of the black tail, and remaining apparently unaware that he could be killed instantly.

When he saw Seibert do that McGuire suddenly had less doubt about the holes in his hat-crown; but the thing that had been the most surprising was Seibert's self-control. It was almost as the Puluotu loafers had declared—positively unnatural for a Dutchman (a South Sea Dutchman being proverbially explosive) not to lose his temper. Under provocation enough to have inflamed anyone he had faced Mortimer, whom he did not like, and Penwenn, whom he disliked, with pleasantry and smiles—grins rather, and forced; but nevertheless grins. He had been contemptuously rude, but good natured. It was almost as if there was a connection between the way he had reined in the stallion and kept



himself, also, manageable.

"Lord help us if he ever lets go!" said McGuire to himself; and the flash of that thought lighted into remembrance the fact that Paullen and Oreena were at a lovers' parting within the house.

At that moment Seibert was calling on him to accompany them to Nada's bedside. "The doctor," said Seibert, grinning in a strange, preoccupied way, and pausing for a moment as if to finish with some passing thought that had intruded before completing the sentence, "the doctor he says just now you have been Nada's nurse. Maybe you are not such a bad fellow like I think." His great hand struck McGuire's shoulder with friendly force.

Then McGuire, with an ear almost twisted out of shape by the strain of listening hopefully for Paullen's returning step, said earnestly, "Mr. Seibert, just plain *bang-banging* isn't going to be half bad enough for that Gauro. Dr. Lemaitre will tell you so, too."

Seibert's face assumed its baked-clay sort of blankness, but suspicion settled in his eyes, and he placed his gloved hands on his hips, while his body bent forward slightly with an air of resistance.

"Besides," McGuire went on, "the main thing's to scare your blacks. I knew a man once that scared a whole tribe of cannibals into ways of virtue by smearing the chief with phosphorus just at twilight. Supposing you lay a curse on Gauro. That'll get around Mortimer, and——"

Mortimer's was an unfortunate name for that moment.

"No," said Seibert, with powerful grunting. "No." His face was massively set.

"But it would be better, it would be better," Dr. Lemaitre added, adjusting his spectacles. The little doctor was not at ease. He did not know what to make of Seibert. He did not like Seibert. He was now impatient to get along to Nada.

Seibert turned doubtfully toward him and hung fire for a moment. "Somebody can tell you what is better to give in medicine, eh?" He stabbed Dr. Lemaitre with an index finger. "Bah!" Then chuckled heavily. "Now let us go to Nada."

## 12

Seibert's house was originally in the plan of a square; but rooms had been added, and to these rooms added again, with no strict geometrical observance, so that the house had acquired the arrangement known as rambling; but, whatever the additions, the encircling veranda was continued.

Seibert could have taken them in either direction, toward the right or toward the left, and arrived at the corner where Nada's bed had been placed; but it was a little nearer to pass Oreena's room; and that way he started.

McGuire supposed that the coming of their feet would be heard by Paullen and Oreena, though he knew something of the stupefying intentness that lovers have when breaking their hearts, and was disquieted a little by the ease with which they could disconcertedly blunder if frightened. Like all subtle intriguers, he had small confidence in other people's ability to dance perfectly unless he pulled the strings. Besides, he had no respect at all for Paullen's adeptness in gallant escapes and no faith in Oreena's inexperience. If they should have to do more than merely be furtively quiet they would (he felt) surely be confused into doing something wrong, and the least slip might mean tragedy.

McGuire would have gone along lazily enough, and have ventured nothing more out of the way than perhaps a warning loudness of tone that would make sure the guilty lovers had their chance to draw to one side, keep quiet and concealed, while Seibert marched with tread of spurred boots past the door; but Seibert now lifted his thick watch from a breast pocket of the blouse and stopped abruptly.

His face was an odd blank. He shook the watch and placed it in the palm of his hand, holding it against his ear; then with curious, almost comic inflection, said: "I bust this damn thing again? *Ach!* I have to keep time on me. What is the hour now?"

Dr. Lemaitre carried no timepiece. Hours meant nothing to him. Dawn, noon, and night divided the day sufficiently for one who was only called for by the sick, and went when called, whatever the hour.

"Well," said Seibert, "I got another. I'll get him."

He dangled the useless watch in a way that showed he had it in mind to get the other immediately.

McGuire's fancy leaped to the watch he had seen lying on the chest top below Oreena's mirror, and with instant desperation he realised that nothing of which he was capable could prevent Seibert's entering that room, where most assuredly those mad children would be caught like frightened rabbits under a wayside bush; or if they tried flight they would make some betraying sound, significant as the voice of an accuser; or if Paullen (who wasn't a fellow to run readily) did get out, Oreena would be left in such agitation as to excite aggressive questioning.

McGuire knew that whatever he could do must be done at once, and that the folly of anything he might attempt would not be greater than that of doing nothing.

When they had taken but few steps more he stopped suddenly, with hand lifted, holding Seibert, and Dr. Lemaitre paused; then, "I thought I heard——"

He broke the sentence with intentional vagueness, and darted off in vanishing swiftness, turned the corner, and in two or three jumps was before the door of Oreena's room, holding it half-opened.

She and Paullen peered in alarm toward him. They stood between the table, with its negligent shepherd boy, and the rumpled couch against which she had been crying when Paullen had come to the door. Now they had been startled from an embrace that was still somewhat represented in the attitude of their bodies, and certainly confessed by irresolute stiffness of their arms, so suddenly withdrawn from around each other.

McGuire had counted desperately on the first few seconds of blank puzzlement that would detain Seibert; and the glance over his shoulder as he went on into the room showed that Seibert, far up the veranda was coming.

The frightened lovers heard the jingling stamp of his boots, and read their further warning in McGuire's face; but their instant's helplessness was prolonged by over-strained nerves into an appreciable length of time.

McGuire signalled fiercely at Paullen, but the instinct of flight was not strong in him, and his face set rigidly. He said, "No, no. I'll face him. He may do what he will to me!"

"Go, go, or he'll kill *her*!" McGuire whispered, pointing at the inner door.

Paullen leaped on tiptoes and disappeared.

Oreena's foolish impulse was also to flee, in which case McGuire could never have explained to Seibert satisfactorily why he had burst into the room. She had gathered her gown away from her feet, and had started to follow Paullen; but McGuire snatched at her arm, jerked her around, tripped her, and, clapping a hand over her mouth, let her to the floor. He was almost forcibly holding her down when he shouted over his shoulder as Seibert reached the door, "She must have fainted. I thought I heard a woman's cry!"

At that he felt Oreena's body relax, and he stood up, relieved. With such a cue she could play out her part, and she lay as if dead.

The screened door to Oreena's room fastened with a catch lock; one slight turn of a knob and it opened. Seibert's gloved hand struck at the knob, and missed just the right releasing movement; but he did not fumble or stop; he simply came through with sharp cracking of wood as he broke the latch, tore the screen, and jerked down the blue curtain. The floor trembled under his rushing tread. His face, coming from sunlight into a shadowed place, appeared darkened, but not enough to have accounted fully for the black, intense look; and for a moment McGuire was afraid.

In the massive way that he had rushed in, Seibert's presence was overwhelming; his expression was of dazed anger, doubtful as to what to fasten on; he had been excited by McGuire's excitement, and was surprisingly ready for any dangerous thing. He saw Oreena on the floor and dully glowered about from corner to corner with a sort of challenging expectancy, but in a few seconds realised that there was nothing to rush upon; then, in a voice strangely lowered, he said, "My *Gott*! what is it has happened?"

"I thought I heard a cry. Maybe one of the blacks—like Gauro—was sneaking about the house!"

Seibert growled hoarsely, and again peered about, looking for the black. Then he dropped to a knee, bending over her, his gloved hands hovering out, as if they feared to settle their rough weight on an object so fragile and pathetically lovely.

"Or'na! Or'na!"

She lay as if dead, her face aside in the curve of a bare arm.

"Is she dead?" he asked, with amazing blankness, his big, round face lifted toward McGuire with an emptiness as if a light had been blown out.

"No, no; don't you see? She's breathing!"

McGuire could not see that she was breathing, but he knew that it was so, though Oreena, with remarkable caution, had checked respiration as much as she could.

Seibert leaned over watchfully, and all were motionless, and everything was quiet but the marching seconds, as with measured *click-tick, click-tick, click-tick*, they filed across the cuckoo clock on their way into the past.

For one instant of wild fancy it was not unlike a tableau—the guardian half-giant, huge and bulky, beside an injured maiden strange with beauty; and, too, with tableau immobility the gnome faces looked out of solid wood from behind their swollen tongues, while the vivid Gretchens stood poised in artless unconcern, as if such scenes were too common for notice in the enchanted Northern forests from which they had come.

Seibert fumbled a little hesitatingly as to how to take hold of the slight child figure, limp as if lifeless, and partly revealed by bared arm, the extended knee, the soft outline of flesh under silk; but then, working his broad hands under her body, he raised her on his palms, with arms extended, and placed her on the couch with the same exaggerated, painful effort at carefulness.

He now at once became more like the Seibert everyone knew.

"Here, here, doctor, here!" he shouted at Dr. Lemaitre, as if the doctor was at a great distance, though he had just come to within a step of Seibert, and, black bag in one hand, finger and thumb of the other touching his spectacles, lifting them slightly, the better to adjust his serious gaze at Oreena. "She has been hurt, has she?" Seibert demanded, as though a doctor should know about that at a glance. Then he cried, "*Ach!* Every damn dog I will kill this day—to let another black get my house into without a bark!"

Seibert smote gloved fist into gloved palm. The contact was like a shot. Oreena gave a start, but Seibert did not see.

The threat about shooting the dogs was literal, and his exasperation at them great. Some days before (so it was believed by Seibert) Gauro had actually entered the house undetected and made off with a rifle. The dogs, trained to distinguish between house servants and field blacks, were supposed to attack any of the latter that entered the grounds unaccompanied by an overseer.

Seibert began trampling about, calling loudly for this servant and that: "Malama! Lalua! Lalua! Tono! Sin Loo! Here, here!" He had gone to the veranda door and shouted. His voice had a thundering reach.

McGuire could hear the stir of voices and movement through the house agitated by Seibert's excitement and by the perturbing uncertainty of what lay behind the great shout of: "Here! All of you, here! Everybody!" There were distant flurries of native words as one servant anxiously inquired of another what was the trouble; the sharp closing of two or three doors; then a bustling rush, a moment of sound like a wind blowing loose leaves over hard, dry ground as the grass-slippered feet scurried along the veranda mats.

Dr. Lemaitre held Oreena's limp wrist against his sensitive thumb, and he was bending until his face was almost against her hair, as if whispering. Without looking up he said testily to McGuire: "Keep them out! Keep them out—out!"

Seibert was at one door, demanding of those who came if they had seen a strange black in the house, and if they hadn't, why? Where were their eyes?

McGuire turned to the other door, and met Nada.

She stood as if hesitating to enter, and was prettily dressed, partly in her sister's garments. Her dark, motionless eyes looked into McGuire's face, and he knew that she understood what had been done, and why.

Nada had determined that she would not play sick and that she would not be timid; but that at the first opportunity she would go to Seibert and thank him gratefully, as he deserved, for the way he had taken her from the Penwenn wagon and attended to her comfort; then she would implore him to forgive and forget her folly that day by the waterfall, when she had begged for his love. She would say—and if truth wings words these would surely reach the best that was in him—that she was unable to retain the least respect for herself as long as she felt that he remembered what she had done in that hour of wildest folly; that the blame was all hers, and the shame of it gave her no rest. She hoped thus to appeal to what was noblest in his pride without disturbing his suspicions.

She had wanted, however, to talk it over with someone, and be not advised so much as confirmed; but, warned by an intuitive reluctance too impalpable to be completely followed, she had at first hesitated to tell Oreena, but after an hour's walk among the flowers had returned to the house to make a confidante of her sister.

She had been on her way to Oreena's room when she heard crying, and, listening, not to spy, but simply held unconscious of what she was doing by her own great interest, she overheard Oreena tell Paullen that he must go from her, and why.

Then, with the abruptness of an assailant, McGuire had rushed into the room, and Paullen came out so suddenly as almost to strike against her. In a quick whisper she had showed him which door next to take so as to be the least observed in leaving the house; then, feeling that she must come on into the room since everyone was called, she now had just stepped through the door.

A doubtful, diffused gleam passed across her eyes as she looked at McGuire; but just as he had started to speak to her she passed him with a rush and reached Oreena, who had just raised up, her face desperate, her arms out imploringly, and cried, "Nada! Oh, Nada!"

Nada, springing on the couch, enfolded her sister.

Oreena was almost frantic. It had been just about all she could do to lie so nearly motionless and death-like, breathing with strained slowness, and trying to appear unconscious. Then Dr. Lemaitre, who for all of his warmth of heart had the physician's quick temper at being imposed on, had said, when she would not answer his gentle questioning: "You are not hurt. There has been no *cannaque* in this house. You did not faint. You are hiding everything that is true. I have a mind to tell Herr Seibert!"

Oreena had given a low cry of terror, then looking up, had seen and cried to Nada, who now with a mothering defensiveness enclosed her.

Dr. Lemaitre, of course, had never an intention of telling Seibert; there was too much of that suppositive priest for him to reveal even unconfided secrets.

But when Seibert, hearing Oreena's cry of terror, turned from the door where he had just scattered the servants, with orders to spread the word that a black was in the grounds, and have a search made, he strode heavily toward her and shouted, "What did he do here, that fellow? Or'na, my *Gott*, why can't you talk a little!"

"No, no, no!" said Dr. Lemaitre, interposing his arm and speaking with surprising firmness. "She must not be talked to so. She has had a fright, and you make her worse!"

Dr. Lemaitre thought that the *cannaque* had been Oreena's explanation of what happened, not McGuire's suggestion.

Seibert had advanced toward the couch in burly excitement, with an air of half-anger and loudness of voice that he used in almost everything that had an element of hurry. Now he stopped abruptly, his face suddenly blank as the palm of his hand, and stared at Dr. Lemaitre.

The doctor felt that Seibert, astounded at being so addressed, was gathering rage; and his own small body seemed fairly to bristle, for among the virtues that Dr. Lemaitre possessed was that of not being afraid of anybody. Behind the iron-rimmed spectacles his eyes kindled. Besides, the dislike of twenty years, with attending suspicions, had not vanished simply because McGuire, from the veranda rail, a half-hour before had said in native speech, "Seibert's more of a fool than Puluotu thinks—and a much finer man!"

McGuire had discovered (or thought that he had) that Seibert's head was nearly incapable of holding two thoughts at the same time; and that the first was seldom displaced gradually, but was bumped out of the way, so that there was a moment between loss of connection with the one and complete possession of the other. This often gave him a stupid look when the subject was changed.

Just now Seibert seemed increasingly puzzled by why Dr. Lemaitre should be angry.

"What the matter with you is?" demanded Seibert harshly, still towering and blankly moon-faced. The blank insolence of tone, the overshadowing bulkiness of body, the sort of detached menace in attitude, set fire to all that was French in Dr. Lemaitre, who was already bristling.

He did not like the aspect of affairs in this house. Nor was there any allaying influence in McGuire's apparent ease of manner about the place, but this rather increased the doctor's exasperation. After all, at best McGuire was only a good-natured wastrel, one that at his worst might be undependable or even very untrustworthy. There were also the twenty odd

years of dislike, suspicion, and evil report of Seibert. On top of this was the confidence in which Nada, from her desire to tell him everything, had told him that her sister was afraid of Seibert; which had even a minor place in the recital of Nada's own fear and dread of him at that time. And still overtopping even this was Dr. Lemaitre's feeling that there had been no black, no *cannaque*, as the French have it; so that he, putting two and two together and arriving at a sad error of addition, believed that Oreena's shivering terror was in some significant way connected with Seibert's brutality, evidence of which seemed now quite apparent in his manner of approach and speech to her. But at the very tiptop of everything, however, was Dr. Lemaitre's suspicion of Seibert's motive in bringing Nada into his house; and the doctor had seen the sad distraction in her eyes as she came from the doorway, rushing to the couch.

"You—you——" said Dr. Lemaitre, shaking both fists vibrantly before him. "I know the kind of man you've been on Puluotu for twenty years!"

Seibert grunted, still in preoccupied puzzlement.

Dr. Lemaitre was full of anger, and of a kind that grows by being expressed. McGuire tried anxiously to stop him, to check him, or at least to soften the vehemence, by cutting in with words, by interposing his hand, and by taking hold of the doctor's arm; but the interruptive words glanced as hail off a slate roof, and the pacifying gestures were knocked aside.

Dr. Lemaitre was greatly worked up; but though he was small, with full, plump cheeks in spite of the nights that might have been sleepless, and though he was stout and spectacled, and did shake his fist under the face of one who overshadowed him, still, not the most perverted sense of comedy could have inspired amusement at him. He spoke with courage, not merely from temper, and sincerity was in every fibre of him.

But out of the very nature of the situation Dr. Lemaitre could not deal with plain words, which might easily increase the peril of Nada and Oreena; for had not Nada implored Seibert to love her? And if Oreena was in terror, was she not a faithless wife? Dr. Lemaitre knew those things, but could not well disclose knowledge of either.

"Some people know more about you, Herr Seibert, and what goes on here than you think! You are a brutal man, Herr Seibert; but don't you think you can do what you like, Herr Seibert, with everybody! There are men on Puluotu, and if the cries of women reach them it will be for you more than whipping runaways or shooting a *cannaque*! Don't you forget that, Herr Seibert! Don't you forget it! I—I—old Dr. Lemaitre will make you remember it if you go hurting anybody just because you are a big man and think you can laugh at people at Puluotu that you call 'loafers'! Don't you make any woman cry, Herr Seibert; and don't you make threats; and don't you touch anybody in anger or if she turns from you! You think people are afraid of you, but I—I, old Dr. Lemaitre, am not afraid of you! I know how you treat people here. I have seen. I have heard things, Herr Seibert. And you be warned by me, you be warned! I tell you to be warned what you do, Herr Seibert! Don't you dare mistreat ever a woman! Good-day to you, Herr Seibert!"

Dr. Lemaitre remained as he stood for a moment, then put an adjusting thumb and finger to his spectacles, and glanced toward the couch where Nada and Oreena, more frightened than ever before in their lives, were huddled together in an embrace with their faces averted.

After that Dr. Lemaitre gave a last sharp look into Seibert's staring eyes, picked his black bag and hat from the floor, and walked with short, quick steps from the room.

Seibert, without any reply, turned slowly clear around in his tracks, following him with perplexed frown and staring gaze; and when Dr. Lemaitre was out of sight, Seibert, after a long pause, then took his eyes off the empty doorway through which the doctor had passed and turned blankly toward McGuire.

"Women? What is that doctor fellow talking about? Is he all gone crazy? It must be his head is all turned around. Women? Never but one woman on this place have I had whipped, and——"

Just then a softly guttural voice spoke, and another form filled the doorway.

"Ah, Hausen, ho!" said Seibert, at once taking a long, heavy stride toward the door, moving with an air of almost forceful unconcern, as when one takes up a familiar sort of affair, however important, with familiar people; and in that air was something of easy masterfulness.

Dr. Hausen held a battered pith helmet respectfully in one of his hands, and with the other opened the broken screen

door, but he had an almost unctuously humble attitude of not wishing to enter, of not intending to enter; and he smiled in a way that made his loose lips under a skimpy, straw-like moustache appear as if they had been greased. His clothes were of white cotton, the trousers being too long and the square-cut blouse too large on his rather thin frame. These were wrinkled and soiled in spots, that had a dull polish such as comes only from long wear. His bleary, peering, red-rimmed eyes were vaguely distorted behind thick lenses. When reading—and he did studiously read far into the nights—the book was held within a few inches of his face; but this short-sightedness did not seem greatly to affect his vision in observing what went on at ordinary distances, and he was a close observer. His age was somewhat above thirty.

He seemed to have been born with the greasy smile as he had indubitably been born possessed of a bulging nose far too large for his face; and if, as physiognomists say, this feature tends to indicate self-assurance, it had served him well in spite of the unhealthy subservience, the rather smooth eagerness to please, that he always presented to Seibert.

A little more than three years before he had written to the German consul that he wanted to come out to the island, and that he thought his skill as a veterinary might be of value to one of the larger planters. The consul had read this letter to Seibert. He, with a wide sweep of an aimless hand and a moment's grin, had said, "My blacks get sick, not my horses; they are not fools in what they eat. If he comes I can find him work. *Ach Gott!* yes, plenty of work!"

Some months later, when a thin, pale, short-sighted man, with heavy glasses before his eyes, had been introduced by the consul, Seibert gazed down upon him, and with bland heartiness exclaimed, "Ho! So you are a horse-doctor? Well, cannibals are animals."

In three years, with scarcely a change in his condition that one could isolate, and say, "Here was a promotion," Hausen had risen from the nondescript situation of a horse-doctor who gave dope to blacks and had become the nearest to a manager that Seibert, who by untiring tramping and riding supervised all work, could have tolerated.

Dr. Hausen still occupied the small room where he had first been put, with such stuff as comprised the meagre dispensary, in the overseer's house. This stood a hundred yards beyond the stables, and on a slight elevation overlooking the labourers' quarters a half-mile away. He still had his meals with the overseers, and he continued to visit such blacks as were too sick to file past his stool and portable table under the cocoanut trees in front of his quarters; and he remained always eagerly humble in Seibert's presence. He was so ready to carry messages, and to relate in his smooth, softly guttural voice everything he saw and much that he merely suspected, that in the course of time Seibert, who discussed his affairs with no one, had gradually come to trust Hausen's reports and occasionally to approve his suggestions. No one else in Seibert's employ showed anything like a foresighted concern in what went on.

In some ways Hausen was a studious, persistent fellow, and dreamed of a time when he, too, would be a big planter. He really had the greatest contempt imaginable for Seibert, who appeared as only a big, dull man, blindly wasting money and blacks in uprooting more and more jungle when he already had an enormous amount of unproductive acreage; and besides, much of his cultivation was with experiments that would have been less profitable than cocoanuts if successful, and a great deal was thrown away on mere prettiness of grounds and a fanciful arrangement of stables and outbuildings. And for everything that Hausen told to Seibert about the plantation, he told two and three to the German consul who looked after the Pulotu affairs of the great Godeffroy Company.

The overseers—all Germans—did not like Hausen, and they talked of him with vigorous coarseness among themselves. He was a fool; but they were fearful of his humble intimacy with Seibert. They resented the fact that Hausen by his smooth persistency and those bleary, peering eyes, in addition to his close contact with the swarm of labourers as a sort of medical director (if a phrase of dignity may be applied to so pitiful a relationship), had got himself a place of influence.

Those rough, simple, bearded, and rather doggedly brutal fellows, the overseers, said that Hausen was a fool and a swine. Blackbirders, in furnishing labourers to the plantations from Australia northward, recruited women as well as men. Hausen was a great fool. And these strong-stomached countrymen of his made no pretence at delicacy of feeling. On the other hand, though they were afraid of Seibert they liked him.

Now, as Hausen stood at the door talking with Seibert, McGuire, who knew no German, nevertheless attentively watched the fellow, and with interest greatly increased by what Oreena had reported of him on the occasion when, through lack of any other physician, he had been brought into the house to do what he could for her supposed illness.

If this unattractive, slyly obsequious man had really ventured to put his lips against her hand, especially under circumstances so perilous to his bodily welfare, McGuire felt that he must have been either crazy or else with incredible stupidity had believed himself encouraged.

No doubt Oreena, being very much aware that she wasn't in the least ill, had smiled with a quick confidential nervousness, and the fellow had then idiotically presumed that he was favoured.

McGuire knew that few men, and none with greasy lips and sly ease of manner, are ever sufficiently repugnant to women not to have had some success in gallantry, and that often the most graceless are impudently confident, and the most ready to misread any attention as an invitation.

As little as McGuire liked her he realised that Oreena, however mad she may have been for attention, would never have toyed for even the length of an eyelid's flutter with such a person.

McGuire, now having gazed appraisingly at Hausen, and in that glance going farther into the fellow's character than Seibert had gone in three years, was about to turn away and drop soothing, reassuring words into the ears of Nada and Oreena, who had begun an anxious whispering between themselves; but just then, with the sensation of a pretty hard shock, he saw Paullen standing near the foot of the veranda steps, his hands crossed behind him and his attitude of aimless rigidity was like that of one who has failed; but what gave the alert McGuire his shock was not Paullen alone, but Paullen in connection with the bearded overseer that stood just beyond, a heavy gun resting across his forearm.

McGuire, flushed with new alarm, stared at Hausen, who continued in rapid, impenetrably guttural speech, very pleased with what he had to tell. Seibert towered with hands on hips, listening with unusual closeness, his features being set inscrutably.

McGuire glanced about as if at first minded to push by Seibert and squeeze Hausen out of the door; then he went out of the other door on his way through the house, so as to come out on the veranda and discover by a word from Paullen if the situation was what it appeared.

## 14

A half minute later McGuire slipped with a long-reaching, noiseless stride into the room where he had breakfasted with Seibert, and was well into the centre of the room when he became aware of Lalua on the far side of the breakfast-table.

She stood motionless, with only a faint glint of surprise in her long Oriental eyes, as if she had been awaiting him. There was a suggestion of mysterious immobility in her tall, slim body, overhung with loose muslin; and though it was only a squat sugar-bowl being returned to where ants could not find it that she held between her long hands, yet she held it a little way in front of her, and with a delicacy of encircling fingers, as if it were a votive jar filled with incense sacred to the nose of a goddess.

McGuire distrusted her; the shadowed obliqueness of her eyes had from the first hinted to him of unnatural depth to thoughts that touched dangerous desires. Now she had seen him enter with an unmistakable air of stealth.

"Lalua," he whispered in Samoan, "where are those good cigars?"

Slowly, without a smile: "It is not cigars you are seeking."

"No-o? Well, then, Sister to the Moon, what the devil am I after?"

She barely shook her head, without moving her eyes, then in an expressionless tone, somehow more arresting than inflectional stress would have been, and somehow, too, by the very emphasis of the rich voice, by the fixity of the deep eyes, and a subtle, un-outlined intensity of feeling that conveyed a repressed wonderment, she said: "You, too, are her lover."

A hundred needle-footed chills went galloping up and down McGuire's back. He sensed jealousy. It was unintelligible, incredible, without beginning, end, or cause, but impalpably sinister.

He took a slow step backwards, laughing noiselessly. "I—a lover!"

McGuire opened his arms with a downward gesture, thus deprecatingly calling amused attention to his utter unattractiveness.

Lalua answered, "I watched you when you went to her. I saw when you came out."

"You heard, too?"

"I listened, but could not hear. The wall is thick."

She said it with unblushing casualness. Sensations of shame had no place in this tall, deliberate, immobile girl who, like everyone else about Seibert, and Seibert himself, seemed inwardly concerned with impenetrable desires that wore odd masks; and she now exposed her knowledge of dangerous secrets with a composure that increased McGuire's uneasiness. It was such composure as if she knew other things which left this one relatively unimportant.

"I wish you had found a knot-hole," he told her. "You would have heard how little there was of what you think in what I said. 'Twas more like hate!"

Her wide mouth parted slightly, with a faint intake of breath. In her eyes, too, there was a slight change, barely perceptible, as if she had pushed back one of the hundred curtains that hung there. The votive bowl was held nearer to her breast. From outside the sound of Dr. Hausen's voice came to him as a soft rumble of tone.

Lalua did not speak again until McGuire had asked, "And why do you hate her?"

Then, with instant bitterness, but as if the voice she used was far behind her lips, which strangely remained almost motionless: "*Taataa a le ala!*"; literally, "Grass by the wayside"; and this, despite the richness of the simile, is almost the worst thing, and quite bad enough indeed, in that colourful native speech, that one woman can say of another.

McGuire regarded her with new alertness. Jealousy, bitterness, anger, and scorn—all these things she had disclosed toward Oreena. He knew that many a loveless woman speaks reproach out of envy, and that certainly Lalua's curtained eyes glinted with a watchful passion of her own; also by every sign in her that he regarded as trustworthy he knew that she was not to be trusted. Yet there was something more than the jealous bitterness and angry scorn; there was resolution, and the patience that is Oriental. Her immobile slimness, very like dignity, presented the calm contempt of one who is consciously superior.

But in what could she feel herself superior to the flawless Oreena, whom she, with wilful unreason, had termed a wayside woman? McGuire began to imagine that he understood. There was indeed about her the calm posture of one who demanded of him comparison and appraisal, as if her emotions were those of a rival, and not merely censorious; and she seemed to be wishing to say, "Look at me! My flesh is as warm as hers; my pride is great; my eyes are soft. Why should one look twice at that breast-less girl when I am near? My arms would be like the great vines that bind the jungle trees, however large; and hers are wisps of grass that touch and do not hold!"

"What is wrong?" McGuire said, coming nearer, using an attentive eagerness not unlike sympathy. "Tell me. I do not like her. I need to know."

Lalua was visibly tempted by a new thought. The bowl came against her breast, enfolded tightly. It was nothing, that bowl; but the thought she symbolically hugged to her muslin-covered breast was everything; and that was the way her restrained emotion partly expressed itself. Her eyes gleamed with the light of the thought, but she overcast its cunning with a look almost deliberately alluring, as if somehow she had learned that men—any of them—were at their weakest when looked at in just that way. Her wide lips moved with the soft motion of whispered words, and, bending tensely toward him in sensuous intimacy and urgency that was like a false promise, she said, "You will make him know? You will watch and take him to them that his own eyes may see? You will do that?"

McGuire answered quickly, "That is the idea! Why haven't you done it long ago? You have known they were meeting secretly."

A hesitant flutter showed in her eyes; then: "I never had a thought of doing that till now. But you will, won't you? Then he will drive her out!"

Triumph sang like a string at the snapping-point through this last sentence. The intentness of her gaze gave her long, narrow eyes a sudden obliqueness, increasing their Oriental cast. She bent so closely that her warm breath was on his face.

"You will, won't you?"

"You—you, Lalua, have been afraid? Afraid to do it?"

A moment's hesitancy followed, in which she shifted the focus of her close gaze from into one of his eyes to the other, then back again; and she seemed to detect the reply that was required of her if it was to be convincing; and she answered simply, "I have been afraid."

"You have loved him long?"



A startled shiver trembled from her eyes on down the long, slim body, and her backward start set the muslin slip astir, as if it, too, quivered from the chill surprise. The bowl had slipped from between her hands, and, striking dully on the floor, broke open, laying the sugar in a brown splatter at her feet. She did not notice. In the little pause of silence she regarded him with calm doubtfulness, with a bare trace of defiance in her manner, as if the defiance was only peeping out and would not come clearly into view unless needed; then quietly:

"Yes. I have loved him long."

"Well," said McGuire, almost approvingly, at least in a way that reassured, "that's all right."

He, of course, would have no idea of how far it may have been all wrong, though he would not have doubted much of anything of her that he might have heard, or have thought if the thoughts had come; for he knew of a sinister gleam to her character, of inscrutable passions underneath the slim-bodied poise, quite possibly an Oriental malevolence, part fatalism and part cunning, mingling deadliness with the eager, abasement that semi-savage women have when they love. Rather high-flown words with which to appraise a low-caste native servant busy with breakfast ware; but he knew how dramatic could be, and usually were, the loves and hates of the girls that had their feet rooted in the soil, particularly in the jungle earth. Besides, in a way she was especially marked by the long, narrow eyes, very different from the wide, soft, gentle eyes of Samoan women. But McGuire, thinking that this love of hers, if not new, was as yet impassive, and that, now knowing of it, he could be watchful and keep it harmless, repeated, "That's all right. We'll talk this over the first chance. You won't do anything until we've had a talk?"

Lalua moved her head with doubting slowness, though readily promising; her gaze was curiously intent, but as if she was looking out from between curtains that concealed what had already been done.

McGuire was in a hurry to be gone. He made a friendly gesture and left the room.

## 15

Hausen had finished. Seibert had come out on the veranda.

"Ho," he said, his arm making an invitational circle at McGuire, "you come with me. Soon we will go to shoot that Gauro!"

McGuire saw at once that Paullen was not a prisoner, and that he was expected also to join the party.

It had happened that shortly after Paullen got out of the house there began to be shouting and hurrying about all through the grounds. Dogs, released from their kennels near the stables, had come yelping eagerly, running about with muzzles lowered or bounding along, frantic for any movement or glimpse that would start the chase. At first he had thought the hue and cry was for him; then, when he saw that it was not, he knew that it would be inviting suspicion and pursuit to do anything except to keep in plain sight.

Hausen and another German with a gun had come up from the stables at a trot; and Hausen hailed him in the most broken sort of English and asked him what was the trouble, and where was Seibert. Paullen tried to tell him where Seibert was, and, finding that his directions were unintelligible, had thought he might as well attach himself to Hausen as to go wandering about, so he led the way.

Paullen hardly cared, or at least thought that he hardly cared, what happened to him. It appeared that anything else that might come would have to seem less evil than what had already happened. However, as yet he was not content to disappear from the plantation, since the parting was interrupted at a time when Oreena's tears had convinced him only of her suffering, not of his necessity. She had not finished her pleading when McGuire broke in upon them.

There was now no chance for McGuire to talk with him. Seibert had his eye on the boy, and kept him close by, though talking with Hausen as they walked along.

They did not go directly to the hillside where all the labourers were to be gathered and Gauro shot. All was not in readiness there; and Hausen, after some lengthy remarks to which Seibert returned grunts and little else as they walked (much of his attention, in a quiet but direct way, seemed on Paullen), left them at a sloppy trot suggestive of anxiety to hasten the master's work.

The armed overseer had disappeared. His voice, among others, could be heard hoarsely calling to the dogs, urging them here and there. Other voices mingled with the excited yelps, at times almost mistaken for barking. The search for the

fictitious black persisted, though Seibert now showed no excitement, not even interest.

Something appeared to be in his thoughts, and he walked about with an odd air of reflection, pausing frequently with a stolid, heavy expression turned on Paullen, after which he would look away and walk on, now and then cutting at a shrub's tip with his riding-whip. McGuire and Paullen kept at his heels, and there was no escape for them.

Every little while, with a sudden propulsive sentence or two of boasting, he would point out something for them to admire; but while he looked at them the animation would leave his face, and he would walk on as before.

Once, when Paullen purposefully stood out of sight behind a mound of rocks, moss-covered and plumed with ferns, Seibert asked for him peremptorily, without anger and without suspicion, but demanding him. When Paullen then appeared, Seibert, with a flash of cheerfulness, said, "You get yourself lost, heh? Look out or a dog will eat you up and nobody can ever find where you are."

He had a real liking for Paullen; and Seibert's existence had been singularly empty of companionship, largely because he had contempt for all the men that he knew—"loafers with their schnapps"; excepting, of course, officers off his country's warships, and these rarely came, remained never more than a few days, and were seldom heard of again.

The armed overseer and another man, the latter holding a big dog on a leash, came to Seibert, and spoke quickly with gestures of failure, then went away.

Seibert walked on, nearly aimlessly, much of the time blankly preoccupied, stopping now and then and facing McGuire, with longer looks at Paullen. Here and there he paused to snap off a leaf that was curled, and, inspecting the underside with a quick, intelligent glance, would mutter with a sound like that of a grumbled anathema, which, however, was hardly arsenic enough to poison the pests. Occasionally he spoke of this shrub or that tree as they passed; and once they stopped before an orange on which he had successfully grafted three kinds of fruit and was trying a fourth. He seemed actually to pat the tree as he touched it.

Then, presently, Seibert pointed to a rocky terrace, describing how it had been made, and how it was to be extended. He paced out the supposed extension and drove his heel into the ground, as if fastening there a surveyor's stake; then, as if having finished with one thing he was ready to take up another, he said abruptly to Paullen:

"You are a fine boy. My wife, she likes you too." Paullen glanced imploringly at McGuire. "You stay with me and I teach you the plantation work, and give you some ground for yourself. I need a fine fellow to help watch all the lazy loafers I have got. Many men have come to me and said, 'Seibert, let's be partners. Here is some money that I got.' I will not have them. Yet I want somebody that is like you to grow up in my work and learn right. It is settled, eh?"

He clapped a big gloved hand on Paullen's shoulder, jarring his body clear to the hinges of his knees.

"But—but, Mr. Seibert, you know nothing of me!"

It was a weak answer, a stumbling protest; but Paullen was nearly dumbfounded. Had Seibert tried to kill him he would have been less surprised.

"What is it you think of that idea? A fine one, eh?" Seibert demanded of McGuire.

"He's a pirate," said McGuire.

"Pussh! You pirate fellows aren't so bad as you try to be. I know all about him. My wife she has told me. So!"

At the explosive "So!" Paullen started, as if a blow would follow; but Seibert was beaming heartily.

"I can't. I really can't, Mr. Seibert. On my word, I can't. I am not fit—fit or anything. I can't!"

"Who knows more about a fellow that is good for plantation work than I?" Seibert's fist came against his own breast with three or four hard taps. "You will make your fortune, I will help you and you help me. It is settled!"

He looked at his watch. He had forgotten to exchange it. Then he glanced upward at the sun and down at his own shadow.

"It is time to be there. I will introduce you to my men right now as Mr. Paullen, my new—new—*ach! by Gott!* as my new nephew!"

He caught hold of Paullen's arm up under the shoulder and in jovial triumph hustled him along.

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# CHAPTER VI

## 1

A hillside lay between the group of outbuildings, which included the overseers' house, and the quarters given to the labourers, among whom, even at the close of the hardest working day, arose chants that drifted through the night air with notes unlike any sound in nature, or known to the instrument of man, or to the voice of men once they have put cloth upon their backs and shoes upon their feet. These chants were nearly wordless, or, if not, were burdened with meaningless repetition of empty words. The sound floated off with hollow wail, as the cry of man might have done before he knew language when he had a great story of woe for the ears of the unseen shapes of good and evil that lurked in the jungle shadows all about him.

No jungle shadows overcast these quarters, which must have added much to the homesick loneliness of those that dwelt there. The jungle was far back, lurking in the distance like something beaten and baffled. Round about these huts, which were placed in orderly rows and made of shapes unfamiliar to those that used them, were a few towering trees, that had been left for shade, with all their lower branches cut away.

The hillside between these quarters and the buildings above was barren. Not a tree, not a shrub, was left. Anyone who sat at the front of the overseers' house could look straight down to the hive-like huts, where cooking-fires burned of an evening and unresting forms passed to and fro; and the smoke of these fires was like the sacrificial smoke of many altars, about which families gathered in prayer to be delivered out of bondage.

Seibert had no walls, no barricades, no wires, nothing but the barren hillside to mark the bounds of the labourers. These labourers had been recruited from a dozen islands, some as far off as Bouka, and fifty villages, and each island, and almost each village, was hostile to every other; yet they did not war among themselves in this common bondage.

It was very like bondage, though Seibert gave them dry quarters that had to be kept clean, had fresh fish brought from the coast three times a week, supplied taro, rice, and biscuits, with much salted and some tinned meats, sold them tobacco, pipes, cloth, and gewgaws at prices not higher than those in the Puluotu stores; and when their three years' indenture was up gave them a bonus to take on again; but few would remain a day longer than they could help, for if they were cared for like desirable farm animals they were worked like animals, with a steady driving that tormented and embittered. Had they been allowed more laziness, more chattering and loafing, and been tempted to spurts of effort by prizes and praise and a little wine, they might not have got through with so much work, but they would less often have run away into the bush. They did this, perhaps, with less hope of escape than for the sensation of for a time getting nearer home.

Now all the blacks had been gathered on the hillside. They had moved out sluggishly under the direction of their foremen—men selected from among them because of caste, or size, or a willingness to work, and sometimes because of an evil reputation in the villages from which they had come; and the foremen had taken their places in the front row of the semicircle of squatting shapes, for the most part more than half naked, with rags for such clothing as they did have. They were furry-headed, gleaming white-eyed; very like animals. They hardly stirred their broad, flat, prehensile sort of feet, but movement continually rippled through the crowd from swaying and turning of heads; and a low, broken, expressionless murmur, oddly like a low wind in the jungle, rose from among them.

Here and there a savage face was given a diabolically tortured expression by a nose-stick long as the wide, thick mouth, which, when the nostrils were thus closed, hung perpetually half open. Something dangled from almost every ear, for the pierced and stretched Melanesian ear is the nearest thing to a pocket that the savage has. It might be a pipe thrust through the loop, a little bag that was tied there, or, by way of ornament, the tops cut from tin cans. Some pipes were stuck through grass bands on the arms. Rows of beads, strand on strand, circled the necks of the younger men; and the elders had skimpy whiskers drooping from the sides of the chin, like fibre of sennit stuck there by paste; and these elders, too, had the sad, wrinkled, puzzled brows that come with unhappy old age, whatever the race. Some wore plaited eyeshades; some puffed at pipes; some thrust long, slender sticks far into their mouths, turning the betel-nut and lime back under their jaws.

A few, by a certain mildness of gaze and falling breasts, were recognisable as women. Some of these wore slings across their shoulders, and in the slings, peering sleepily or squalling, were babies, with small legs vainly straddling across their mothers' backs. The women wore these burdens to their work in the groves; and it was somehow expressive of the tragedy of sex when a woman leaned against her hoe, shifted the live burden under her arm, and pressed its flaccid,

fumbling little mouth against the drooping, pouch-like dug, while she gazed down with a dull maternal glow. Perhaps even more expressive of that tragedy was the fact that many of these mild-eyed women, unless watched and threatened, killed their young.

This crowd waited impassively and with sombre interest, knowing what to expect, half pleased at the idleness, a little uneasy at being gathered on the open hillside under the eyes of three or four burly bearded men in white suits who sat on camp-stools with guns between their knees. For days these blacks had been in an ugly mood but they were afraid of Seibert.

## 2

McGuire, Paullen, and Seibert, with Seibert pointing and talking loudly, came down past the stables and along the low buildings from which pens extended, wherein fat pigs raised up and grunted lazy interrogations at their approach, as if each pig was asking another if it was worth while to struggle up and go to the fence on the chance of getting something to eat; and as the popular expression seemed to be against this exertion, they settled down in their muddy pool. There were other pens in which cows of a velvet reddish-brown chewed dreamily in the shade; and still another where nervously nimble goats regarded the passers-by with alert suspicion. Chickens strolled all about with an air of indifferent proprietorship, or lay sidewise in dusty places like little boats stranded by an ebb. Here and there a chained dog strained hopefully toward Seibert.

Then they came round the overseers' house, and Paullen stopped with a barely noticeable start at seeing all those squatting, naked blacks spread out in a wide semicircle, sinisterly motionless as if they might rise and rush, enclose the whites, pass over the buildings, on through the grounds, and disappear into the jungle that lay around the plantation like a horizon.

Seibert stopped, too, with an abruptness that was almost violent, and stood arrested for a doubtful moment, but not by the symbolism of the savage semicircle. He drove his spurred heels heavily into the ground, one after the other, as if bracing himself, then slightly squared back his body in a way that seemed to be gathering impetus for the stride forward, which immediately followed.

Dr. Hausen, with his helmet pushed far back, sat on a camp-stool before Gauro, who had an armed man standing some few feet behind him; and Hausen held a bottle of whisky on his knee, one hand around the bottle's neck, and the other hand held up to Gauro a tumbler of the dark, amber liquor that shimmered with a jewel-like radiance in the strong sunlight.

Seibert swore gutturally, and before Hausen could arise, or move, he had with an upward sweep of gloved fist knocked the glass flying. The liquor, swirling from the glass in air, fell splatteringly on the guard behind Gauro; but the fellow grinned, pleased at Hausen's discomfort.

Hausen had almost fallen over backwards. His hat came off, and, landing on the edge of the rim, rolled with wobbly haste for three or four turns, as if trying to make off. He then raised his forearm and whisky bottle before his face to ward off a blow that did not come.

Seibert's big face was flushed. His eyes expanded, and the thick mouth worked rapidly as he demanded of Hausen the meaning of this foolishness.

In humble shrinking, Hausen explained, using many gestures and grinning nervously. The quick, smooth grins rippled across his face, and in the barely perceptible instant between the vanishing of one and the appearance of another his look was painfully anxious.

The facts, which Hausen not wholly unintelligently had reflected upon, were these: since it appeared that another black had got out of bounds, and presumably into Seibert's house, Hausen felt that there was renewed importance in discovering how Gauro himself had, apparently, done the same thing. The rifle he had used in the bush was Seibert's own, and had been stolen from the house. It had occurred to the subtle Hausen that if Gauro was given a little inspiring liquor he might be induced to talk, and so expose this trick of getting past the dogs and into the house. After giving him two glasses he was offering a third, and trying with bare intelligibility to persuade Gauro in his own dialect to tell him how it had been done.

Gauro was a Santa Cruzian from Vanikoro Island, a small, squat, and rather elderly savage with some grey in his wool.

In his own village he had been a professional murderer. For some reason he claimed that his father was a Portuguese; perhaps because he had learned that half-breeds, though they might be held in contempt, were nevertheless given favours and responsibility among the traders and planters. He was a crafty, hideous little fellow, with a forehead no higher than the breadth of his two fingers. His eyes were as small and deep-set as a pig's. His bare chest was knotted and thick. He could talk pidgin-English of the usual beach quality, but no German. Hausen, who, ever since his arrival at Pulotu, had shown a studious, foresighted interest, and something of a knack at picking up native dialects, had laboured rather painfully to talk with him.

Hausen now explained all this, and Seibert listened without a sign on his heavy face to show which way his thoughts inclined; but he listened, heard Hausen out, and did not interrupt.

Then Seibert said that it was a dunder-headed idea, and stupid to give a man who was about to be shot liquor, right out where everybody could see. All the blacks would think that being shot wasn't so bad if it was to be done on a full stomach of whisky.

Then Seibert ordered: "Stand Gauro out, and you tell them the same like this will be done to loafers and runaways. Remember now, Hausen, it's not just because he put a hole in my hat. You tell them that so they know what you mean. It's because he is a damn loafer and trouble-maker and hurt my trees." Then, to one of the overseers, "Bring me your revolver."

The man arose from the camp-stool, and, fumbling with back-handed awkwardness at the holster flap, drew out the revolver, and with unfamiliar handling got hold of the muzzle and presented it to Seibert.

"Is—is," Paullen whispered to McGuire, "is he really going to shoot that little beast right down in *cold* blood?"

"Listen," said McGuire, in a way that was at once confidential and enigmatic. "Listen, and I'll tell you something. A secret. He doesn't do anything in *hot* blood, that fellow."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Seibert."

"But I don't know now what you mean," said Paullen, with brow wrinkled.

"You are blind."

Hausen, after a further exchange of remarks with Seibert, of which McGuire understood no word, turned and began to shout in a loud voice toward the labourers; and of this McGuire understood as much as the savages.

It was a hot morning, approaching noon, and the breath of the sun was like a motionless force on the landscape, where every frond and bough was still in the midst of heat; and in the distance the leafage clustered together in masses with billowy curves, like low, greenish clouds.

Gauro, with monkey-like grinning, watched Hausen's lips.

Paullen was drenched with running sweat, and his face had visibly thinned in the last quarter of an hour or so. Paullen suffered keenly from Seibert's generous offer. In the midst of his distraction he was not incapable of realising what a fine chance it would be for a young fellow like himself to be taken under the wing of the biggest planter on Pulotu and helped along to fortune. It hurt him to see how he had wronged Seibert; and in the past few minutes Paullen had become deeply sensible of what now appeared the good fortune in Oreena's change of attitude, for now he could go away at once, and she would never think ill of him, and Seibert would never know ill of him. His own self-respect might be in rags and tatters as he crept off, but at least the nakedness of shame would be concealed.

Paullen breathed, sighing heavily, with a touch of relief. Sweat was on his face, as if water had been thrown there.

Seibert carelessly tossed the revolver an inch or two up and down on the flat of his gloved palm, watching as if playing a game with himself, waiting for Hausen to finish.

The Germans in getting work done used a sort of bastard lingo, which, with the help of gestures and the square toes of their boots, did very well as a common language between themselves and the labourers; but something more than this was needed now. Hausen, in his first days on the plantation, had seen the importance that must come to anyone about Seibert who could really understand the blacks and be interpreter. He had gradually, and not without much studious work and patience, eased himself into this dignity which increased his position.

Now his speech was pompous, as one to blacks might well be, and full of rhetorical figures, very impressive to cannibal imagination. He repeated himself in three or four dialects.

Then, when he had about finished speaking to the crowd, which listened impassively with staring eyes and motionless heads, he turned to Gauro.

McGuire, in utter and almost confounding amazement, heard him say, "Gauro, now you tell all quick, and your life will be spared. You will then go back to work. Mr. Seibert says so, if you talk quick!"

"What a fool I have been!" McGuire murmured, looking at Seibert, who still toyed indifferently with the large revolver.

Paullen overheard the murmur, and glanced with sharp question from McGuire to Seibert, but he said nothing, for McGuire was strained with listening.

The liquor in Gauro had been at work. He was already half drunk; in a few minutes he would be, if not dead, at least dead drunk. With death almost on top of him, life, now with his belly warm and glowing, seemed desirable; besides, he was silly and reckless.

With much interruptive clucking, he said, "I watch in the bush and see many things. *Techk!* The woman from the house and him there"—his grubby little monkey paw pointed at Paullen—"I see together—mouths together. *Techk!*"

Hausen cast a flushed, meaning, eager look at Paullen, and turned back hungrily to Gauro. Hausen did not dream that anyone other than himself understood a word of what was being said, but McGuire had lived months on Vanikoro and Ndeni, just above it.

"Go!" he said in a low voice, giving Paullen a hard push, the very tenseness of his own muscles communicating warning and excitement. "Run. The game's up for you and Oreena! Gauro has seen you together, and is telling all. Seibert has promised him a pardon, but will shoot him, of course. You two are in for it now. Go! For God's sake, go! Slip around the corner there and *run!*"

Paullen, reading even more than the words told him in McGuire's usually unexcitable features, edged to the corner of the house and disappeared unobserved.

Seibert, growing impatient, had interrupted Hausen, and Hausen replied with evident triumph and satisfaction; then turned to Gauro, who was rapidly showing further effects of two tumblers of whiskey poured down as no native ever pours down water.

"*Techk!* Like two monkeys in a tree-top, they were lovers. One day, two day, three day—so many I see them. By the waterfall. *Techk!* By and by I see another woman watch 'em. I jump at her, for I am hungry and *techk!* She talk like my people! She say that is the master's wife, and the fellow there——" Gauro waved the monkey paw toward where Paullen had been standing, but this time Hausen did not look around. He was too intent on hearing more, and urged Gauro on.

"That fellow her lover. *Techk!* This woman say the other woman ought to be killed for a bad wife. 'You do it,' she say to me. 'You bring me a gun,' I say to her. 'You do it?' Then I say I do it. The next day she bring a gun, but I see master first and shoot at him. *Techk! Techk! Techk!*"

He reeled as he stood, foolishly grinning and clucking.

Hausen could not listen longer. He turned in almost fluttering haste, with knees partly bent and head thrust forward as he rushed across to Seibert and began talking in eager humbleness. Delight showed through the greasy sheen on his face, though he tried to appear as troubled of countenance as a friend should when he blackens a wife's name with shameful reports.

Seibert stopped toying with the gun, and regarded him for some moments with utter puzzlement; then his broad face seemed to swell with blackness. He glanced about with a sort of dazed uncertainty, evidently looking for Paullen, though he seemed hardly conscious of doing so.

Hausen was standing quite on his tiptoes and bending toward Seibert, into whose ears the words with guttural smoothness flowed on and on with an effect poisonous as the juice of cursed hebenon.

"Where's Paullen?" Seibert shouted, his arm sweeping out with a kind of aimless groping, as if unconsciously, and with an odd air of striking at a shrilly persistent insect, he was trying to push Hausen, and all that Hausen had said, away from him.

"Paullen?" McGuire asked, and answered instantly, pointing toward the overseers' house by which they stood. "He said he didn't feel well—heat and all made him queasy. Was going in the house to lie down."

If half-minutes would be of any help to Paullen, McGuire meant to give him all that he could.

Seibert's gesture and tone indicated that he was telling two of his men to go into the house and find Paullen.

Hausen, right at Seibert's side, went on talking, making the pretence of keeping close so as not to be overheard, though the excited eagerness of his buzzing gave it a tone that carried far.

Seibert strode to Gauro, who had turned and was making grimaces and gestures toward the crowd of blacks; and some grinned back at him understandingly. Seibert, towering over the little old monkey-like creature, jerked him around by hand to shoulder, then with blundering groping in the bastard lingo of fields and groves (a mixture of bad English mostly) demanded to know if what he had said was true. Gauro would have as readily denied as confirmed; but whisky had perhaps blurred his animal shrewdness, so that he did not detect which answer it was that Seibert wanted.

Gauro grinned, nodded, and *techked*.

Then Seibert raised the gun, holding it less than a hand's breadth from the black breast; but Gauro, who had been promised his life, grinned drunkenly at the joke.

Seibert hesitated, his face black but otherwise rigid, almost without expression; then he turned with quick heaviness and walked with long, heel-driven strides for at least twenty paces, with Hausen trotting nimbly right behind and talking. When he had gone so many paces, Seibert turned and instantly shot, twice.

It was as though he felt that what would have been murder at point blank became an execution at twenty paces. The revolver's report seemed curiously thin and empty in the open space and great stillness of noontime heat.

Gauro from drunkenness was ready to drop; he was lifeless before he fell, and sprawled on the black earth as if only drunken.

A movement like that of a light wind's breath touching a clump of grass and passing went through the black semicircle; but there was no sound, and the savages waited on, staring white-eyed and sullen. Many were smoking. Even the sickly little child that had been squalling was silenced, as if its little animal nerves sensed the hush, more oppressive than a mother's slap and warning.

Seibert tossed the revolver to a camp-stool and turned away with face downcast, drawing his whip between his hands, jerking it as if to test a cord that he was about to break. A glance toward the overseers' house told for what he was waiting.

Hausen remained by him and talked, talked, talked, smoothly, with smiles working up into his face. Seibert turned round, trampling from side to side without taking a step, as if unconsciously trying to get away from that voice. It was evident that he was not listening, that Hausen's voice reached him as sound and not as words.

Suddenly a suspicion groped its way into McGuire's head. Already he was angry to the point of recklessness. He came close to Seibert, and demanded abruptly, "What's that dog telling you?"

Seibert came out of his preoccupied staring with a start, and gazed at McGuire for an instant as if he had never seen him before. He thought the opprobrious "dog" referred to Gauro, and answered with heavy directness: "My wife gave him that rifle—for to shoot me! Oreena, my wife!"

"Hausen told you that? He's a liar! The Santa Cruz islands used to be Williams' hiding-place. I've lived there months, and know the language better than Hausen ever will. Hausen made Gauro talk by promising that you wouldn't shoot him. You tell him to promise that? I know now you didn't. Gauro was full of whisky and Hausen full of lies! The blacks out there all think you've broken your word. Gauro signalled and told them he wasn't to be shot. Tell that dog Hausen what I have said, and you judge between us!"

Seibert turned explosively on Hausen, who staggered in alarm back from under the shock of words; and his eyes glanced with malignant fear toward McGuire; then, a moment later, with very rapid speech he was replying, and by his gestures toward McGuire quite plainly saying what he could to make Seibert permanently distrust him.

But Hausen far under-estimated McGuire's resourcefulness and audacity; and now, with a boldness not usually disclosed by him, McGuire forcibly put himself between Seibert and Hausen and addressed the latter fluently, first in the disputed dialect, to prove his knowledge of it, then in the more expressive Samoan tongue, better understood by Hausen, too.



"Let's understand each other, Hausen. You are lying to Seibert, and I'm going to lie to him to protect her. She didn't give Gauro the rifle, and you know it, but you whittled on the facts to fit them to your revenge. And you did tell Gauro that he wouldn't be shot. And if you don't admit that you have lied, I'll see to it that you get your neck snapped.

"Most of your hate for Oreena is because she slapped your face, which gives you delight to accuse her. But will he believe you or will he believe *her* when I tell him that you—you who accuse her of having a lover—you yourself tried to make love to her that night when you were brought into the house because she seemed sick? She will tell him that it is true! Then what about that scrawny neck of yours? You are in a bad fix, Hausen, with your damn meddling. And the only thing you can do is to admit to Seibert, just as fast as your tongue can travel—and you have a rapid tongue, Hausen—that you have lied. Now talk!"

Hausen did talk, but not rapidly. His manner was deprecatingly humble, and his hands played in nervous gestures. His whole body seemed shrinking down toward the ground, and his knees were bending. He saw, as people who are cunning always see readily when circumstances are against them, that his whole story would be demolished if Oreena accused him. And she would, of course. She would have to. Hausen was cunning and oily, nothing of a fighter; and, being trapped, he whined.

Seibert glared down upon him, and the whip between his big gloved hands was jerked harder, as if he was about to snap it in two.

"What is he saying?" McGuire asked, a little uneasy at Hausen's prolonged speech.

"He says that you know Gauro's tongue better than he—that he may have been mistaken, but he thought he was telling the truth. He says for you to explain it, then, about Paullen and my wife and the rifle. That I am to ask Paullen, too. *Gott!* Why was that Tower of Babel ever built!"

"He's a liar," McGuire shouted uncompromisingly. "Ask him if he thought he was telling the truth when he told Gauro you had promised not to shoot. Every black boy out there knows that!"

Seibert's not being the sort of brain that could keep two things in mind, he had not until then realized the enormity of this false promise, and he could not quite believe it true that Hausen would do a thing of the kind; but the idea that Hausen had meddled with his authority, and compromised his word among the work-people, made Seibert's anger rise. He turned on Hausen and roared at him, demanding to know if it was so.

Hausen shrank back, really shivering under the menace of Seibert's widened eyes; but such is the majesty of truth that it will come up, willy-nilly, as the only thing in a terror-stricken body that dares to meet the accuser, though a lie may struggle ever so hard to get out; and now, against his will, the shrinking Hausen nodded.

Instantly Seibert's whip rose and fell, again and again and again. It came down on Hausen's head, on his shoulders, on his back as he sank, groping at Seibert's legs, huddling against them, begging for mercy. When the wretched fellow lay on the ground, writhing and clasping his hand to his hurts, Seibert raised the lash for a final blow, but checked his arm, so that, with no force, it fell to his side and the whip dangled listlessly.

"From my place you go *now!* You hear me, swine-dog! And never you come near again," Seibert said to the prostrate body, and turned from it.

Presently Hausen slunk off, disappearing into the privacy of his dispensary. Dark, moist spots showed through on the shoulder of his blouse, begrimed and covered with the dirt he had been in.

The men had come out of the house, and were standing by to say that they could not find Paullen; and when, accompanying his words with a look of strong inquiry, this was translated to McGuire, he answered at once, "Oh, of course, he must have meant the house up there. The idea of somebody being shot upset him. Miserably hot morning. Upset anybody."

Seibert had ceased to listen before McGuire had finished, and when the sound of his voice stopped, an abstract sort of grunt was the nearest thing to a reply forthcoming.

Seibert stood for a time pondering, and in an attitude as if all alone he looked across the heads of the crowd of blacks and far into the distance, where the shaggy heads of the cocoanuts rushed together like a tightly-woven mesh of fronds; and far back, back beyond all this, lay the jungle, untamed and untamable. He who knew so much of the bursting and boundless energy that lies behind vegetation, forcing it out and on and up, must at times have realized that the jungle would close in again, some time, on all that he had cleared.

One of the Germans thrust a short-stemmed pipe into his beard and lighted the pipe, leaning the muzzle of the gun against his stomach as he did so. Seibert noticed this and swore at him, telling him to put the gun down or against a tree—anywhere but against his stomach.

Then Seibert's thoughts were brought back to the more immediate needs of the plantation work, for weeds grow and seedlings wilt, bugs breed and ditches clog with silt, and fruits as they ripen must be picked and cocoanuts split, though friends be disloyal and wives faithless. He now gave orders about what was to be done in the afternoon.

One of the bushy-faced men—he was unarmed—who was far too short for his trousers, which bagged and bulged over the tops of his boots, stepped toward the crowd of blacks, and by a few shouts and scattering gestures, flourishing his arms as if broadcasting grain from both hands at once, gave them dismissal.

There was a babel of jabbering; they turned and trooped off, some running down the hillside, scampering; some hurrying with dignified tread; but all moved with an eagerness to be gone.

"Now," said Seibert to McGuire, "we will go to the house, you with me. And as we go you tell me just what that Gauro did say."

"A drunken cannibal!"

"But he said somethings!"

"But, Mr. Seibert, I've lived among them. There's no trusting anything that a Santa Cruzian says. And he was drunk, and he did muddle his words."

"You mean maybe Hausen didn't understand him straight?"

"Look here, I'm not going to vouch for what Hausen did or didn't understand. The fellow's a deliberate liar. There was no misunderstanding about his promising Gauro that you wouldn't hurt him, so why have faith in anything he did say?"

"Yes, yes. That is so, maybe. But why did Paullen go off like that?"

"For one thing, he's not used to heat, like you and I who have been fried and stewed in the sun and steam of these lands. And I guess it did make his stomach a little queasy to see a man shot."

"I like that boy fine," said Seibert aloud, but to himself.

They were walking together on the broad path that led along past the buildings. A green cloud of bougainvillæa lay over the pigs' shed; great clumps of hibiscus bloomed beside the pens where the cows lay; plumed grasses were clustered in designs that showed planning; and between these outbuildings and the stables rows of acacias which, when blooming, sifted dust of gold over their silvered, fern-like leaves. It was amazingly incongruous, the beauty that this coarse man had forced in among this most utilitarian part of his grounds.

In the few minutes' silence as they now walked together, McGuire found his thoughts quarrelling with his impulses. His impulses were intensely sympathetic toward Seibert, and it did but little good to remind himself that Seibert was not a friend, but really an enemy. He felt almost shame to be forcing deception upon Seibert to protect the guiltiness of Paullen, for whom McGuire had a deep affection, and for Oreena, who was unworthy of any sort of protection, yet exacted it by her dainty fragility and the danger that lay about her.

Yet McGuire reflected that it would be doing everybody a favour, Seibert not least, if the truth could be concealed. Gauro was dead. Hausen was dismissed. Paullen would depart. Oreena, wiser and sadder, would feel it a happiness to be relieved from her fears. Lalua would not dare try to disclose anything. All that remained was to smother Seibert's suspicions, and this would not be difficult, largely because he really did not want to believe any evil thing of Paullen; and, like most dominant persons, he could hardly comprehend how those on whom he had bestowed kindnesses could be so dissatisfied, so insensible of the honour, as to do underhandedly anything to his injury.

"But," said Seibert, after a long silence in which he had obviously been turning ideas over and over in his head, "if that Hausen wanted to lie, why didn't he just lie without promising Gauro anything? Something like that I do not understand."

McGuire snapped a thumb and forefinger, illustrating the ease with which this could be explained away, and said, "Why did he give Gauro whisky? Simple enough. He hoped that he might really learn something; and, don't you see, if Hausen *had* got what he wanted out of Gauro—why, don't you see, Hausen should have done his best to keep you from shooting the fellow. Not because of the promise; but Gauro was his only witness. He would have wanted Gauro kept alive, don't you think, until by other interpreters you were entirely convinced? As a matter of fact, Hausen wanted him shot so that

Gauro couldn't contradict the lies he had made up. That's the truth. I'm sure of it."

Seibert's stride slowed down thoughtfully, then he stopped, and, fixing his eyes on McGuire's face, asked, "But that rifle? How did he get that?"

"Well, how did that other black get into the house this morning?"

"That is so."

"And," McGuire went on, "you know that your wife couldn't have talked with Gauro any more than she could have talked with a monkey. They wouldn't have had an intelligible word between them. Not one. Oh, Hausen was a great liar!"

"That *is* so! *Ach!* that is *so*. Ah-ho, I am glad to think of that." He breathed heavily, seemingly relieved; yet a moment later he added, "I believe nothing, but I know something has been wrong. I do not believe it. No. But, *mein Gott!* if there was truth in it!"

McGuire laughed, quietly, as if at a great absurdity.

"But Paullen, he is your friend, McGuire. And you, why should I trust you?"

A pertinent question that; but McGuire answered with ready frankness, "No reason why you should, except this: I told you Hausen lied, and Hausen admitted it. So far as it goes you have found me trustworthy. Wait till you find me a liar, Mr. Seibert. And surely Paullen is my friend; but I never offered him a part of my plantation, or liked him well enough to call him 'nephew.'"

"*Ach!* that is so."

They walked on again.

McGuire, the shrewd and far-sighted, the cunning weaver of plans, reasoned thus: "Paullen has undoubtedly left the plantation by this time. Perhaps not; but the chances are that he has; and his going away will be awkward to explain; but I can get a word to Nada or Oreena, make one of them appear desperately ill, and have her say that Paullen has been sent in haste after Dr. Lemaitre. Thereupon I'll get hold of somebody, or even go myself, and carry a message that will bring Paullen back for a day or two until Seibert's suspicions are gone. He will probably watch them pretty closely for a few days; anybody would. But a word in the ears of each of them will make it come out all right."

McGuire now felt a glow of satisfaction warming up his breast, and pulled at his long nose to conceal a smile.

### 3

Seibert's stables were low buildings, heavily thatched, with overhanging eaves. A great deal of labour and much planning had been used in their construction. They were not merely places where horses were kept, and sheds where grain and hay were stored, with the usual rickety fences setting bounds for spiritless horses.

He was proud of his stables. When he approached them of a morning, coming down the broad, gravelled drive that wound among the shrubbery like a boulevard through a park, he often stopped some distance away and stood for a time examining the buildings and their arrangement with critical pride. The driveway, without narrowing an inch, led into the broad doorway of the central building. On one side of the interior were light wagons, all fresh with paint, with shafts, or tongues, held up by plaited loops suspended from the heavy bamboo rafters; on the other side were a dozen wide stalls, each with a capacious manger. The partitions between the stalls were of bamboo, laid horizontally to a height of about five feet.

The driveway passed through this building and led into the great circular yard, where the work wagons were placed in a circle under an open shed; and the tongue of each wagon was lifted off the ground by the use of the yoke as a prop.

On each side of the main building were smaller buildings, or wings, and in some of these were stalls, with chain harness on pegs; in others were stored various implements—ploughs, cultivators, extra wagon parts, harness that was oiled and covered with oiled canvas. At the end of one wing was the blacksmith's shop, with large bellows forge and a pair of anvils, with tools like instruments of torture hanging about.

Behind the stables, but a part of the stable group, were great sheds for storing copra, grain, and seeds; all of which were built with a spaciousness showing that the ultimate productiveness of the plantation had been considered in their construction.

Out behind the stables were corrals, each with a broad shed to protect the horses from the sun and rain. The fences, standing on foundations of coral rocks, were of split bamboo running horizontally.

Seibert had twice as many horses as he needed, and room for twice as many as he had. He liked the spaciousness of his stables. It gave him satisfaction to see the buildings, the wagons, though many of these were seldom used; he liked the orderly arrangement and well-kept appearance; also it afforded him pleasure when he looked on at the hustle and bustle when teams were going afield, and tramped with chain harness clinking, or pulled at wagons that rolled with a soft crunching over the roadway leading out from the wagon yard in the opposite direction from the house.

He had erected and planned everything with an eye to the future, and built with a care for permanency that was exceedingly unusual in tropic planters. He had immense satisfaction in seeing so much already accomplished for taking care of even a larger and more productive plantation; and where other planters made use of sheet-iron and whitewash, he had used bamboo and coral rock and thatch, which, by those who knew, or thought they did, was said to be unwise, being expensive in labour and no protection against fire.

#### 4

Now, as McGuire and Seibert approached the stables, coming around one of the copra sheds, and for the time walking in silence, the one with a long, slow, thoughtful stride, with gloved hands locked behind his back, and the other watchfully examining the big, solid, expressionless face, they both stopped as by one impulse. Something was happening in one of the far corrals. The sounds were unmistakably those of horses fighting.

"What fool's been up to something now!" Seibert cried, and the next moment, with a lunging rush, he had gone through the doorway of the nearest shed and disappeared on his way through the labyrinth of sheds and yards to the corral whence came the thuds and shrill squeals.

At almost the same moment McGuire, feeling that if ever luck was with him it had come this instant, started forward on the run for the house. He was sure that if he could have sixty seconds or less before Seibert came that he could prepare the women for their parts, and Paullen, too; or if Paullen had already concluded a last parting with Oreena, his disappearance could be covered with at least a temporary excuse which would give opportunity for arranging a permanent explanation. Seibert seemed peculiarly susceptible to any explanation that involved sickness. Dr. Lemaitre's anger in departing but a few hours previously would sufficiently account for his not returning, though seemingly sent for. Seibert might be greatly troubled in mind by the coincidence of Paullen's disappearance—or, rather, second disappearance, as he left the hillside at a most significant time—but upon Paullen's reappearance most of the props would be automatically knocked from under the suspicions.

McGuire ran in the heavy, flat-footed way that seamen have of running, especially those who dislike running as much as he disliked it; and the fall of his feet on the slippery gravel sounded to him very loud in the hot noonday stillness.

Then, as he passed before the great wide portal through which the driveway entered the central barn, his attention was attracted by a sound within, and, without intending to pause, he swung his head to one side.

In a glance at the shadowed space within he saw the silhouette of a slim, restive horse shying from a small man who stood on a box and struggled under a saddle.

McGuire stopped abruptly, then turned and dashed into the building with a muffled shout that was very like an oath.

"What are you up to?" he demanded angrily of the little Tono, who had slipped his bandage high on his forehead that he might have the use of both his small, sly eyes. McGuire knew what Tono was doing, and swore at him.

Tono had looked around, startled.

The horse shied off, jerking at the halter, which had been tied to one of the posts, and so Tono was left apart on the box that he had used to increase his height so that he might swing the saddle with greater ease. It was a woman's saddle. Oreena would use no other.

"Get that saddle out of sight and the horse back in the corral!"

Tono answered excitedly in protest.

"Do as I tell you!" McGuire shouted menacingly, swinging up over his shoulder.

Tono, clinging to the saddle and still on his box, protested frantically. McGuire had spoken to him in English, and he replied:

"Misi fafine say bring horse queek! Misi fafine and Misi Paullum go queek or old Seibel catch 'um! *Bang-bang*, like that they hear him. Damn horse no good stand still. Pilisi help—old Seibel catch 'um!"

"Idiots!" said McGuire, seeing how their flight would disarrange his schemes; and with that he jerked on the saddle, to which Tono held desperately. Tono was worthless, and stupid, and insolent, but he had loyalty to Oreena; which was queer, considering that she always treated him better than he deserved.

McGuire kicked the box from under him and jerked the saddle away as Tono was falling; then, with a hasty glance all about for the place where it would most likely remain out of sight, he threw it into one of the deep mangers.

"What corral's this horse out of?" McGuire demanded, already untying the halter.

Oreena was supposed to be ill; at least to be suffering from a terrible shock; and if Seibert caught sight of either her horse or saddle he might do more than merely wonder, in that stupid, blank-faced way of his, as when a thing seemed pretty much of a puzzle. He might ask questions in his direct, towering, harsh way, and be difficult to satisfy.

"What corral, pig-born?"

Tono pointed vaguely. His voice was almost a sob as he said, even more vaguely than he pointed, "Out there."

"Here, then, take him back. Quick! Hear me, you lizard egg! Why, you—what's the matter with you?"

Tono had edged off warily as the halter end was held out to him, then, getting between McGuire and the doorway, he turned and ran as if for his life.

McGuire stood for a moment in wondering anger looking at the small form dashing down the drive; then he turned to the horse, still nervous from the unwonted excitement that Tono had shown, and now also sensitively shy of having a stranger hold the halter.

McGuire's first impulse had been simply to stop Oreena from the madness of a galloping flight, which would have been an irremediable confession; but then he had realised that Seibert was almost certain to come out through this building. The whole arrangement of buildings and corrals had been made with this one for the central entrance and egress, and also it would be directly on his way to the house.

Seibert would be persistently inquisitive and difficult to put off about a horse—any horse, particularly Oreena's—being where it did not belong. The best that McGuire could think of was to lead the horse into the first corral and turn it loose. It would then be far enough from the stable that, whatever else might be thought, Seibert could not very well imagine that anybody had been about to go for a ride.

The sensitive animal did not like being led by a stranger, whom even a dull and stupid horse could have told instantly was no horseman; and it held back stubbornly, pulling against McGuire's arms, just as if aware of its mistress's needs and wanting to serve her faithfully.

The day was hot, with no wind to make a draught through the air that had been baked under the thatch; this, and McGuire's nervousness, brought out the sweat, and it trickled down the sides of his face. The heat distilled the pungent stable odours, so that they seemed simmering together, the warm animal smells mingling with those of leather and wood and hay; and through it all—subtle, distinct, even heavy, and oftentimes sickening, as if slightly poisonous, as it was also nearly irresistibly alluring—jungle smell. It was there, in the stable, though Seibert might point to the far fringe of bush as the nearest approach that the jungle had to his grounds.

The horse, with slow, hesitant step and neck out-thrust reluctantly against the halter's pull, then followed him, but moved with timidity, as if being taken through this building for the first time.

McGuire took a deeper breath as he and the horse left the stable and entered the wagon yard. Off to the right he saw a bamboo gate, locked by a cross bar, and pulling the horse along between two wagons he came to the gate and peered through. The pen was small and empty. It would do.

He opened the gate and led the horse in, then unsnapped the rope from the halter ring while the horse held its head high, as if afraid of his hands; but when the rope was off the animal turned quietly away, as if with disdain.

McGuire hurried out and slammed the gate shut, throwing the bar into place. He bolted between the wagons and turned

toward the stable.

"Ho-ho! McGuire!"

Seibert called to him through a gate that he had just begun to open at a far side of the wagon yard. His voice was angry. McGuire had the sensation of having been detected in something shameful, and the thought came to him to keep on running; but that would have been stupid; so he stopped and faced about.

Seibert came through the gate and strode up rapidly, swaying the whip with the mere motion of his arms as they swung in the energy of his stride. His face was flushed, and the look in his eyes was severe, yet somehow abstract.

"A fool dog left a gate open and a stallion got in among work horses! Or'na mare that I had there is gone. If my hand is not on these dogs' necks they do everything wrong."

The whip whistled significantly as it swung up and was brought down, sharply striking the leather of his boots. He grunted heavily, then:

"If it had been Bismarck I would have had two dead horses maybe. That damn Tono, I bet. If he took Or'na mare to ride I'll make him tie more rags on himself, where my boot hits!"

He kicked illustratively, with a swinging blow that would have dislodged Tono's soul from his small body.

"Oh-ho! There she is!"

His eyes, sharp as a ferret's at anything connected with the stables and work, had detected the mare through the interstices of the bamboo fence back of the wagons.

McGuire, looking in the same direction, could hardly see the horse, and he wondered if Seibert, after all, had not seen him put her there; or if Seibert really could, with so meagre a glimpse, distinguish the animal's identity. But McGuire was no horseman. As a sailor, however, he could have made out the rig of a vessel so far distant that Seibert would have seen but a dot of shimmering white.

Seibert went to the gate and opened it. He called almost good-naturedly, "Ho, Magga! What you do in here, you bad girl?"

The horse came up to him, putting forward her slender ears, and with neck outstretched the moist nostrils quivered inquisitively at the extended gloved hand.

At that instant McGuire thought that he heard the far-off pounding of hoofs; and he listened; but then he could hear nothing. He glanced toward Seibert, but he had heard nothing, and, stroking Magga's velvet nose, looked her over, first on one side and then the other. Seeing that she was all right, he gave her cheek a parting slap, turned, and left the corral. Magga followed him to the gate and nuzzled peeringly through.

"Funny something I don't understand," he said, more to himself than to McGuire. "Magga can't jump in there." He shook his head in puzzlement.

Then to McGuire: "You got lost, heh? Try to find me over there? I like so many gates and pens. Some day they will be all full. Yes."

An arm went out, circling vaguely, wheeling round and round after what he had said seemed to have left his mind. Then they resumed their walk toward the house.

## 5

Not an insect peeped or bird moved. Their feet crunched on the gravel; and there was no other sound but this, and the faint gurgle of running water in the tiny rivulet that Seibert had brought down from the springs on the side of the hill back of his house, and wound around and down through the grounds over mossy boulders and through fern beds; and even this was like the wordless babble of an idiot child.

As they came round the foliage and in sight of the house McGuire felt that something—and he could not instantly think what—was missing. He took several steps behind Seibert's suddenly lengthened and hurried strides before he realised what had now and silently agitated him. Bismarck was gone!

On the veranda Lalua awaited their coming.

McGuire hastily rehearsed the parts he had intended should be played. After all, what more natural than that Paullen, when the physician was needed at once, should have taken the first horse at hand? Much depended, of course, on the severity of the illness. He would see to it that one of those girls was near to death.

He noticed—and was touched by a little apprehension—that Seibert, who usually gave aloud some statement or fragment of his thought at anything out of the ordinary, was now wordless, with an air of almost dogged silence. With remarkable ease for one of his size and weight, he walked rapidly, driving his heels into the ground so that there was hardly a tinkling scrape of the spurs on the gravel.

They cut across the smooth lawn, straight for the veranda steps; and as they approached Lalua raised a long, slim, bare arm and pointed, her eyes following her hand, along the driveway that led out to the road. Her arm remained extended, then her eyes fell on Seibert's face, and she did not speak as she had intended, but remained silent and motionless. Her hair was loose on her shoulders. Like an impassive dark oracle maiden, gowned in white muslin, she stood amid the blue pillars, pointing a message that she did not dare put into words.

McGuire, anxiously beginning his rôle, shouted at her, "Who is sick?"

Lalua slowly dropped her arm, and, moving her steady eyes toward him, answered quietly, "Many are near death!"

Then he, rapidly in Samoan, told her to say that it was Oreena, and that Paullen had been sent for the doctor.

She replied calmly, "Too late. Too late."

Again lifting her arm, she pointed with tragic immobility along the drive that led to the road that went to Pulotu; and when she had said two or three words more, McGuire knew that it was so, and that he had come too late for any of his petty, artful scheming. The tragedy had been lifted, as if by a destiny impatient at his interference with stop-gap artifices and twistings and concealment, and placed beyond the reach of meddling fingers and tongue. In the midst of the heat and his sweating, McGuire turned cold.

Seibert, striding on in dogged preoccupation, had not been touched into attentiveness by Lalua's pose or words or tone. The psychic whisperings that tragedy oftentimes gives at the threshold of its scene may have reached him, so that he had not time to pause for what a servant might say; besides, Bismarck was gone.

His spurs were clanking down the veranda before McGuire reached it. Lalua put out a hand to McGuire to have him pause, but he pushed her hand aside and followed Seibert.

Seibert went around the house and entered through the screen door he had broken that morning. He stepped from the hot sunlight into the shaded room, and was for a moment unable to see anything distinctly.

"Or'na! Or'na, where are you? Or'na, here, I want you!"

Something very like a woman's sob came from within the still house. There was a hesitant stirring of the curtains of the inner doorway, then Nada came in.

McGuire, peering through the screen with both hands cupped at the side of his face to shut out the light behind him, could see that her dark eyes were anxiously observant of Seibert, regarding him doubtfully and steadily; and her features were drawn and tense and tired, like the countenance of one who is greatly troubled by a fear that she must not show.

Seibert stood in the middle of the room. He demanded, "Where is Or'na?"

"Oh! Then Lalua did not tell you! I—I asked her to."

"Where is Or'na?"

Nada spoke with feverish haste. "Oh, don't follow them! Let them go! You said—you said that you would love me! You said that you did love me! Let them go! I am here. I will remain! They are gone—and you—you do love me, don't you?"

"Oreena gone?"

He stood with his face turned toward the inner doorway, as if believing that she must come. The tone of his voice, the expectant manner of his standing, his whole aspect, had such an air of hopefulness, and was so entirely devoid of rage, that Nada slowly drew away from him with hands uplifted to her cheeks, her eyes growing wider and wider. She cried, half breathless: "Why, why, you—you love her!" Then Nada seemed to answer herself with a long-drawn "Oh-o!"

"Yes. Yes!" Seibert shouted, misunderstanding the pain in her cry. He spoke with gusty roughness, while he waved his

hands. "You—I was sorry for you. You told me you were all lonesome and felt like dying. Should I say, 'No, you—I hate you!' No. But I love my wife, my little wife. Of course I love my wife. She is my wife. What kind of man you think I am not to love my wife? I was sorry. For you I was sorry. It was just that. All this"—a gloved hand swept in a circle—"I get for Or'na. You think I get all this if I don't love her?" From the couch he lifted the discarded blue gown. "This—ah! never this will be worn again!"

He crumpled it between his hands and jerked them apart. It snapped in two like tissue paper. He tossed the pieces to the couch indifferently.

Then he gave a start, pricked by a new hope. "It is not so! Or'na has not gone. Or'na! Or'na! She is hiding here. She is afraid. Or'na! Little Or'na, do not be afraid. Oreena, come!"

"No," said Nada, greatly pitying. "No, Mr. Seibert. She has gone."

"But her horse Magga is at the stable! How can she be gone?"

"On Bismarck!"

"*Gott!* She on—— That brute he will kill her! Quick, I must have a horse and——"

"No, no, no!" Nada screamed desperately, fearing his pursuit. "Not alone. They went on him together. Paullen, too!"

Seibert paused with an air of stupid helplessness, his thick face remaining almost expressionless while the incredible fact seeped into the tissues of his brain.

Then, excitably, he shouted, "They will be killed! That brute, his mouth is iron! Bismarck, he is a devil! They ride him that way—he will know what they are doing and kill them! Ah, my Oreena to do that thing! My little Oreena!"

"No, Mr. Seibert. She thought that you loved me!" said Nada, pleading desperately for her sister.

"That is a lie!" he shouted, turning on her as if with menace. "She knew it was not so. I told her how I took you in my arms like a little child that is lonesome. I told her you should have a fine boy like that John Paullen to love you, and I would keep him here for you. Oh, it is hard to think now!"

"You told her—*that!*" Nada cried, beginning to feel the harrowing effects of disillusionment in a sister that she had sacrificed for and loved too well. She now saw how unspeakably treacherous Oreena had been, not only to Seibert, but to Nada herself; and to Paullen, in creating the false fear of her husband. To Nada the world now seemed turning with sickening wobble, and, putting one hand to her eyes, she groped dizzily with the other for something to support her. Coming against the wall, she leaned there as if stricken with blindness; but in a last weak, protesting defence of her sister, Nada cried:

"But she did not know you loved her. She did not understand your—your—love."

"Ah, so she did not know I love," he repeated heavily, his feet wide apart, his big arms folded across his breast. "Why would I marry her? She brought me no money, no land, nothing but one horse. It made her father gabble-gabble about me every place. He said I stole her from him. Why would I steal her when she had nothing, if I don't love her, heh? She is no fool. She knows that. Why I have all these things from my Germany to make her happy? You tell me that. I buy everything that she can want. I think her more beautiful than a little flower. I never hurt her. I would not hurt her now. But that John Paullen——"

Without the least motion of temper or haste in the movement, Seibert reached over, and, deliberately picking up the statuette of the dreamy shepherd boy, snapped off the head and tossed it carelessly to the floor. Then he broke the torso in two and dropped the pieces.

He seemed hardly aware of what he was doing, as if his hands moved through the pantomime of tragedy while his thought was elsewhere; but, now that the powerful hands had felt the joy of breaking one fragile object, they were like hungry things, and groped destructively.

He walked to the mirror, picked up one of the colourful little Gretchens, snapped her head and feet, and dropped the fragments as one drops the peel of an orange. He did the same with the other. His wandering glance fell downward to the gnome faces. He raised a spurred heel and kicked off the bulbous tongues, one after the other; and the rowel made deep scratches on the polished wood.

There was no blind anger about it, no ferment of temper, no appearance of temper at all, but a methodical impassivity.



Not as if he was relieving his feelings or expressing passion, but it was as if he was deliberately destroying what was no longer of value, and which, if it remained as it was, would be in the way.

With the same air of calm destructiveness he drew back a gloved fist and smote the mirror. Many cracks instantly converged on the silver surface, as if a small bomb had burst before the glass and the image of the explosion remained.

"Oh, no, don't! You mustn't!" Nada protested, seeing what he meant to do.

"Why should I not throw away things that are no more wanted?"

"Oh, don't! She may come back to you!"

"To me? No, never. When it is done here, the flowers, the shrubs, the very trees that were hers will I chop down!"

As he spoke he reached for the cuckoo clock, and, putting a finger through the small door of the little bird-house, drew out the bird, tore it loose, and cast it indifferently to the floor; then he crushed the clock between his hands and threw the wreckage aside.

"When I am done nothing will be left in this room," he said, his voice oddly quiet; and he put out his hands to the window curtains.

## 6

The afternoon was almost gone, but the heat remained, and with a myriad little mouths seemed sucking at everything. The begonia vines had closed their flowers, folding the edges tightly inward like the tight crumpling of a baby's fist; the banana palms drooped, as if with sadness; unwatered patches of lawn were baked into a lifeless brown.

Now shadows had begun to cast themselves far east-ward across the ground, and a faintly purplish transparency hung about the hills. In another hour it would be night.

Nada and McGuire for a long time had been standing in the gloomy, hot shade of a banyan. They were not hiding, yet with some suggestion of furtiveness they were obscured among the sunless, distorted branches, though here, too, the sun's heat had been wilting.

Nada now reached out, nervously touching McGuire's arm, reassuring herself of his companionship, as she had done unconsciously before while they watched, peering from amid the twisted, misshapen trunks, like many crutches and props upholding the sprawling growth of the great tree.

"I am so sorry for him," she said. "Oreena really did not know there was love like his here for her!"

"I doubt if he knew it himself."

"But why, oh, why is he doing that! I understand perfectly why he destroyed all those little personal things of hers; but here—how he must suffer in doing all this now. He loves all this so!"

"He has to do the thing that hurts him most. Pain stops in one place if you make a bigger pain somewhere else."

"But he is so calm about it!" she said.

"Men that are knocked half dead are always calm."

"But how can he do it, Dan? How can he?"

"He's trying to cure one ache with another, I told you. Besides, it's the pride that's gone out of him. The woman preferred another man. Seibert was full of pride. No man is proud after his wife runs away."

"Did you have any idea he really loved Oreena so?"

McGuire nodded.

"How could you know?"

"I saw him when he lifted her off the floor this morning—like a casket that held all his treasures."

"Don't be ironical, please. Not at a time like this. Oh-o-o!"

As she looked a party of naked blacks, glistening with sweat and oil, some ten or twelve of them, with big long cane

knives in their hands, went with a rush at a clump of banana-palms. They struck rapidly, like eunuchs massacring a faithless harem, then passed on, trampling over the prostrate foliage. Seibert marched behind, directing them.

The grounds looked as though wind, locusts, and lightning had passed. Seibert, as dispassionately as if clearing off herbage that was in the way of his plans, was chopping, uprooting, trampling, destroying everything that had any particular association in his mind with the woman that had gone away. She had stood by him when the banana suckers were planted, so down came the clump; he had seen her reaching up to pluck the grape-like purple clusters of wistaria, so the vine was felled; a favourite idling-place of Oreena's had been under the lacy foliage of a great iron-wood beside the little rivulet, so this tree of valued beauty had been cut down. It fell with a wide-branched crash across shrubs and palms and ferns. Whole beds of flowers were uprooted, and thrown, wilting, in piles, to be carried off and mixed with compost heaps, as fertiliser.

Nada read the signs of the waning day, and felt that she should have gone long before. "Dan, I *must* go home. Will you ask for a horse, or shall I?"

"I'll ask. He'll give you Magga—if he doesn't shoot her."

"Don't say that. He wouldn't do that."

"Are you sure that you want to go home? Penwenn's still on earth. The world's been turning so fast you forget you are only twenty hours from last night's wild scene."

"Would you have me stay here?" she asked, knowing very well that he wouldn't.

"There's no telling what Oreena's been saying. You had better hurry along and contradict her. Whatever she has told, you may know it isn't true."

"I can't believe that she has meant to do wrong. I really can't."

"You know that you can and do believe it."

"Really, I try not to. That would make her awfully wicked; and she isn't awfully wicked."

"You'll never again find anybody that's half the trouble-maker she is."

"Life, just being alive, begins to seem a terrible thing, Dan. Look how many people are unhappy right here among our lives on the island—and no one is happy, not a person we know of. It isn't fair. When anyone cries, someone near by should be laughing!"

They had waited until no one was in sight, and they were now walking toward the house. By their path were pulled plants and fallen shrubs, that lay wilted like things that had died in agony; as perhaps they had. One orange tree, the finest of the two or three that it stood with, was down and dead; its leaves already crisp, as the penalty of having furnished blossoms for Oreena's hair on her wedding-night. It was the tree that Seibert had pointed out to McGuire and Paullen as a special pride.

"How cruel! Oh, how cruel!"

"Yes; but it's all self-torture," said McGuire.

They had not gone far when they saw Seibert coming toward them, alone. They could not turn aside, retreat, or go on, without being seen; and though there was no reason for not being seen, yet they did not want it to appear that they had been watching. They stood still, expecting that he would avoid them.

He walked slowly, with his hands behind him and his head up; but he looked down from side to side at the wreckage he had made. A little while before he had dismissed the blacks, sending them to their final and routine chores about the stables and pens. When he saw Nada and McGuire he quickened his step and came directly to them.

"Ah, my friends"—an arm wandered about in crippled gesticulation—"the way to forget is to begin all over with it. I would not be a man"—the fist of his wandering arm came against his chest—"if I could not tear her out as I tear all this out." A hand roamed vaguely in the direction of uprooted bulb flowers. "I put those there for her. I throw 'em away—huoof!" He tossed his hands.

There was no heartiness in the words or gesture. He was boasting, making the best of what was not only a loss, but a disgrace; yet his face wore an air of heaviness, the countenance was inflexible and mask-like, but in this case transparent as glass.

He was trying to be the same Seibert, to show himself unbeaten and unbeatable; the whole passion and pride of his life was in that, and his affected heartiness, cheerfulness, his intrusive air of success and insistent boastings, were not so much to deceive others as to keep himself in the rôle. There must be no weakening, no letting down for a minute though coffee trees refused to bear, though tobacco was too bitter, though rain spoiled the cane and mildew the grain, though the blacks took to the bush, and Oreena ran away with a boy he had befriended.

"No matter what happens"—as his old and often mocked boast went—"no matter what happens, nothing can happen enough to beat me!"

Seibert showed that he wanted their company, though perhaps it was not their own so much as company; and he continued talking with a kind of false energy, pointing here and there, saying what he would do with this terrace, and why this rock wall was to be brought farther along. He appeared the same, yet seemed changed. There were all the Seibert mannerisms, smoothed a little by what might have been mistaken for physical weariness; and this was about all that externally could be detected. A more sensitive perception would have realised that something important was wrong.

He had suddenly lost his point of contact with the only intimate relationship in his life, and he felt bare and solitary. He was lonely; the very way he talked showed that he was trying to engage their attention, to hold their presence; he did not want them to go. When McGuire spoke of a horse for Nada, he said, "Of course. Ah, surely. She must go home."

But both Nada and McGuire disliked to go and leave him alone. He had not uttered a word of self-pity nor a word of blame for anybody; and the nearest he had come to a threat was when, at the mention of Paullen's name, he had broken the shepherd boy. McGuire knew that when they were gone Seibert would have no one to talk with—scarcely even a servant. McGuire had seen the two Chinamen shuffling down the road, casting wary glances across their shoulders, and with bundles on their backs, like refugees making off. Nada had overheard the house-girls saying that they would go just as soon as they could get away unperceived.

With Seibert walking slightly ahead, with that unconscious air of weariness talking and pointing, they returned to the house together. No one was in sight. Seibert did not know that the house had been deserted by those who fly from the shadow of disaster; for heathens and such believe that it bodes ill to remain near an unlucky man.

Seibert the unlucky tramped heavily on the veranda, and dropped heavily, too, on a porch couch, put aside his hat, puffed, and with cheerless cheerfulness said, "Such a day! Such a day it has been! It began last night with that Penwenn fellow. But when everything gets so bad it can't be worse, then things begin over again, getting better. You knew Paullen. You both knew that Paullen. What you think made him do a thing like that?"

He looked from Nada to McGuire, his gaze intently questioning. He had asked as he might have asked if Paullen had stolen a horse, a sum of money, something that of itself had been incapable of encouraging him in the theft.

Nada gave a sharp, sidelong glance at McGuire, then looked down and turned her head aside. McGuire, after a hesitant second or two, really deciding whether or not to do it, then said, "Probably because she encouraged him!"

Instantly Seibert was on his feet, shouting, "That is a lie! You know that is a lie!" For a moment it looked as though he might seize McGuire and crush him, break him, as he had broken the statuette. "I will not have it that you talk of my wife so!" He glowered steadily.

McGuire was unafraid; not so much from courage as because he knew that Seibert held in his temper with the same mastery that he handled horses. There was no danger.

And the outburst ended weakly with Seibert saying in a sudden drop of tone, "She is my wife."

"But you said you wouldn't have her back," McGuire remarked quietly.

"I won't, sure I won't. But I won't have her talked about like that. No!"

He drove his fist to palm and stared aggressively at McGuire, then sat down again, and for a time was motionless.

Presently he looked up, vaguely attentive, listening; then McGuire, too, became aware of a sound that he had been hearing for some time without noticing. The canaries with long, sharp, insistent cries were complaining. They now hopped from pole to pole across their cage, at every jump calling out in querulous protest.

"*Ach!* they are in troubles, too."

He got up slowly and walked to them; then, pulling the cage down on its spring so that the floor of it was on a line with his eyes, looked in. They had been given no water, seed, or greens this day.

He went to the door and called, then stood expectantly waiting for an answer. Always, promptly, his voice had been answered in his own house. Now no one answered. He called again and was not answered. The canaries continued their plaint.

Shadows still lurked stealthily out in the grounds, like great crouching bats waiting to take flight in the darkness; but shadows and gloom had filled the house. Night was at hand.

Seibert returned to the cage, lowered it from the spring and hook, and was again going to the door when Nada darted forward and pulled it from his hands.

"I'll attend to them," she said, and disappeared with the cage. From within the darkness of the room, as she passed through, there came back the thin, shrill, long-drawn, half-frightened and half-indignant cry of the birds, still hopping restlessly from pole to pole.

Seibert came back to where McGuire sat on the rail and stopped. His hat was off, showing the bald forehead and closely-cropped head, increasing the roundness of his face. But in the dusk his features took on a bronze-like appearance; he stood in the faint obscurity of twilight, massive and unshakable, like something moulded. Opening a broad blue handkerchief, he wiped away the sweat, then, as he wadded the handkerchief into his hand, he demanded abruptly, "You tell me the truth now. She did give Gauro that rifle. I see now how it was. Look here"—he reached the hat from the couch and thrust it almost into McGuire's face—"how close it did come. One inch and I would not be here. But Paullen he would be here! Hausen, he told me the truth, but I am glad I whipped him hard just the same."

"Hausen lied from first to last."

"But them together, Gauro saw that. That was the truth. Hausen, he told me that."

"Do you think Gauro would know your wife by sight from Nada? Not a bit of it! He didn't know who Paullen was with. Hausen guessed, and, as it happened, he guessed right."

"But that rifle——"

"Gauro said a servant, from your own house, brought it to him. It was not Oreena. He did not say it was Oreena. He said it was not Oreena. Hausen is a liar."

"Who?" Seibert stood in an attitude of dazed staring. "Who would do that?"

"He did not say. You shot him before he said. Hausen wanted him shot so there would be no chance of having his own lies contradicted."

"One of my servants want me killed?" he said vaguely. He appeared deeply hurt, though his face remained almost expressionless.

Before either could say anything more a white presence emerged with shadow-like gliding through the gloom.

Lalua said, "You called, master?"

Her unexpected appearance, the barefoot quietness with which she approached, the strange feeling in her simple words, together with the darkness from which she emerged and the misty gloom in which she stood, a tall, slender figure in flowing white, caused Seibert to gaze at her blankly; and also he was wondering which of the household girls could have wished for his death.

"The canaries, they had nothing to eat this day," he said.

"Malama, whose care they were, is gone."

"Gone? Why's Malama gone? She got no money. I owe her money. She has run away. Ah-ho! Malama she hated me? Is that it? It was Malama!"

"All have gone but I."

"All gone—where?" he asked dully, unable to comprehend.

"Away from here, master."

"Tulla?"

"Gone, sir."

"Sin Loo?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lu Lung, too?"

"Yes, master."

"That damn Tono?"

"He, too, is gone."

"Then why have you stayed? What are you doing here if everybody must run off?"

"To cook your supper this night. Your breakfast and dinner and supper to-morrow. And the day that follows. And all the days that follow."

"You stay here to cook?" He was deeply puzzled.

"I was in the kitchen when you called. The kitchen is far away."

Seibert regarded her uncomprehendingly. He did not at all recognise, and would not have understood had he recognised, the truly Oriental self-abasement in her devotional passion. All that he knew was that for some obscure reason all the servants had made off, but for some more obscure reason this one had remained—to cook. In the dusk she looked more like a priestess than ever. Seibert stared at her for a few moments, then looked away, but with her image still in his thoughts.

Lalua retreated two or three steps, then turned and departed as noiselessly as she had come.

"*Ach!* at least she did not do it," he said hoarsely.

McGuire watched her go. The form lost outline almost at once, then the white of her dress merged into the darkness with a kind of slow, ghostly vanishment.

Earlier in the afternoon he had learned from Lalua that she had been the child-wife of a Santa Cruz trader, and that her mother's father had been a Chinaman.

"Then it was not my Or'na?" he asked hopefully, making assurance doubly sure.

"It was not. Gauro was drunk and muddled. Much he said was not clear, but that much was."

"I will believe that," Seibert pronounced heavily. He then sat down, placing his elbows on his knees, and gazed wearily into the darkness.

## 7

Seibert was struck with amazement when he went into the dining-room. The room was ablaze with light. There were two lamps on the table. One of brass swung from the ceiling, and this had been polished until it glittered like the noon sun's ray on still water. Two or three other lamps had been placed about the room. Fresh, crisp linen, fragrant with the odour of sandalwood, had been spread on the table. Sparkling silver from the chest, that was seldom opened except when naval officers were guests, glittered in the lamplight, and the glass ware shone. The room was filled with flowers.

"Why, like a celebration it looks!" Seibert exclaimed blankly.

McGuire smiled cryptically, and looked away to avoid the steady gaze of Lalua, who stood quietly by the wall, waiting.

"You do all this yourself? Why, Lalua?"

She answered slowly, looking directly into his face, "With the wish to please you, my master."

Seibert made a heavy, inarticulate sound, very like a grunt, and looked about a little uncertainly. He did not know what she meant.

He sat in his big arm-chair at the head of the table, dropping himself into it with an air of collapse, and leaned forward across an elbow, looking from one thing to another. When she had gone he addressed McGuire, and vaguely explained, "She did it all herself. She thought I wouldn't feel so bad with all these lights and this——" He wagged a hand over the silver. "She is a good girl, Lalua is. But she can't know this all is worse than just steel knives and bare board. *Ach!* those

pretty lily flowers! I pulled up the whole bed. Or'na liked them for her hair. Poor Or'na. It is like she was dead." Suddenly, with a groping gesture about the room: "And all this is like somebody was glad she was dead."

He ate everything that was put before him, eating with a steady, untasting, preoccupied movement of the jaws, casting his eyes about from one object to another like a stranger in an odd place. There had been no dinner; he was now not particularly aware of hunger, but the emptiness of his big body allowed him to eat on and on; and anything that dissolved with chewing was about the same as any other.

Nada had gone into the kitchen and stayed there, helping. She felt that Lalua, being merely an ordinary low-caste native, hadn't realised how as if for a feast she had adorned the room; but it had been fine of her to make the effort to relieve Seibert's gloomy evening.

In the house the air heated during the day had not been stirred at all by the evening breeze which crossed the island shortly after sunset like the breath of life, issuing forth to vitalise a stricken world. More than that, there were five lamps in the room, throwing out warmth enough to have taken the edge off a frosty morning. The flowers drooped even before the dinner they were there to enhance was finished; it was as if they were dispirited by being so inappropriately festive, and bent their blooms in shame.

Seibert perspired, but did not notice the heat. There was something prodigious about him, something of the grossness and size and capacity legend attributes to the old Teutons, massive in build, inordinate in thirst, boastful in peace, masterful in war. He ate with his elbows spread out on the table and made masticatory sounds. He never drank a single glass of water, but always two or three, and these often, pouring them down absent-mindedly.

He was coarse-grained, but he was sentimental, at times preposterously so, almost grotesque; but, in spite of it all, he did have an air of dignity, often disconcerting in its unexpected forcefulness.

Once that he had begun to talk he continued without effort, and apparently with no desire to say anything in particular. It often happens that under a shock memory opens; and people who have been touched by tragedy, like those who have reached old age, look backwards.

Seibert and McGuire were alone. Out of a long silence Seibert said, "Once, when I was a little boy, I was walking on the road to market. I saw a woman under the willow trees by a little stream, and she was crying. Because I was such a little boy she seemed an old woman. I asked her what was the matter. She said her husband had gone with a woman and now she had nothing to eat. I had some pennies, and I put them in her hand. She threw all my pennies away in the grass. She said, 'Go away and leave me! I want to starve. I want to die wretched. Then maybe he will be sorry.'

"When I went home I told the old gardener, my master, and he said, 'That is love, Adolph. It is a very bad thing, that love. Having it is almost as bad as not having it, which is the worst thing in the world.'"

Seibert spoke of his childhood, and of how he had been pulled off a straw bed every morning at four o'clock and put to work. Once he fell asleep in the greenhouse, and lay right across a box of fine begonias he was in the act of transplanting. He crushed and broke all of the brittle plants. He was slapped and kicked into wakefulness before he had any kind of a nap. He was fined, too, for destructiveness.

Seibert laughed a little in relating this, and said that he had been treated right. Hadn't hurt him, had it? No. Helped to make him a man. Then in the old, familiar way he straightened his shoulders, putting forward his chest.

"Hard work it is hard to do, but what good is a loafer to himself? Weak plants in the seed-box, we don't nurse them. That's not what a nursery is for. We throw 'em out, like weeds. It's the fellows that stand the heat and the drought and grow that we save and give fertiliser to. Those other things——"

He made a gesture above the table, as if throwing away great handfuls of weeds and weaklings.

The lamplight beat on his big, red, round face, giving it the sheen of copper. A thick elbow and arm lay on the snow-white cloth. His voice rumbled on and on. This was perhaps the first time in his life that he had revisited scenes of childhood and called up incidents in detail. For him there had been no father and no mother that he remembered. He did not appear to feel that this had been a loss. Quite unconsciously he had the attitude that everything that had been hard had been good for him—the harder the better. When very young he decided that he would be a big planter in the tropics, and for years he had worked in botanical gardens, studying tropical agriculture; and studying English, because he had heard that English was the traders' tongue of the South Seas. He had come, and he had done everything as he had planned. Work was what counted. To give in, to quit, to be beaten—that was the crime. But patience must be had, and the long look

ahead.

McGuire sat back drowsily, watching rather than listening.

Presently he became aware of a sound coming along the veranda; it seemed a cautious shuffle, not quite furtive, a little doubtful, but drawing nearer and nearer with two scraping steps and a pause, two steps and a pause.

Seibert was engrossed in talking, and he heard nothing until the uneven footsteps were right at his door; he then stopped in the middle of a sentence and gazed at the doorway.

It was dark outside, very bright within, and the screen of the door kept the light from casting itself through. They knew that someone was standing close by, but could make out only the merest shadow of a form.

"What is it you want?" Seibert demanded gruffly, with a strong suggestion of menace.

*Scrape-scrape*, and old Tom Combe appeared against the screen, pressing his face almost against it. He seemed more like an apparition than a person, both because of the glow filtering through the screen and because of his dull eyes and saddened face, the droop and sag of shoulders and body.

Seibert gave a vague exclamation, something between a cough and a "Ho!" and said, "Come in, Combe."

Combe cleared his throat a time or two, pulled the screen door open for an inch—scarcely more—as if making sure that it really would open; then he came in. He scraped his feet, and one lean, thin hand nervously twitched at his beard. His blue eyes were dull as a corpse's and as steady, which was unusual, for his gaze generally shifted and wandered about when he talked with anyone. He wore a long black, rusty coat, with uneven perforations on the breast where the moths had eaten. The sleeves were too long. He seldom wore a coat of any kind; and this gave him an odd appearance, as if he had tried to dress up. Something was wrong. Everyone knew that Combe's head was not just right, and that at times it appeared to be growing more and more unsettled.

"What it is you want?" Seibert asked harshly, as he might have asked of a stranger.

Combe worked his jaw and lips with a sort of masticating movement, as if loosening up the muscles of his mouth before trying to speak; then: "I come to see you about what you've done to my girls!"

The voice was high, thin, angry.

"What's wrong, Tom?" McGuire shouted; but his voice seemed to have no access to Combe's consciousness. He stared at Seibert, as if he was afraid that if his eyes wandered or dropped they would not again be able to find him. There was a queer desperation about his helplessness, and his addled head was filled with what Oreena had told him.

## 8

Bismarck had not killed the runaway lovers. He had carried them at a gallop up the long grades and down hill, across the ravine, and on the level he pounded the gravel from the road as water flies at the splash of falling rocks; but when they reached Combe's house, and Paullen had tried to pull him up, the tireless brute began to circle about, to back and to rear.

Oreena became frightened, and tried to throw herself off. Paullen, thinking that she was falling, tried to hold her, and was himself dragged off. Bismarck sprang aside, and galloped away with flying stirrups pounding on his ribs.

Both Mr. Grinnell and Combe happened to be within voice-call, and Paullen was picked up unconscious and carried into the house. He appeared dead.

Oreena was unhurt except for scratches about her face. Her little fingers anxiously felt along her cheek, trying to discover how badly it was marred, while her father, beside himself with excitement, held to her and would not take his hands away.

"What's happened? What's happened? Or'na, what's happened?" he cried shrilly, his old, broken voice squeaking and cracking.

Paullen had been placed on a couch in the room, and he did not move. His face was pale and lifeless, but Mr. Grinnell said the boy was only unconscious, he thought, then had hurried off to send a messenger to Puluotu for Dr. Lemaitre.

"Let me go, father! Let me go! I must see a mirror! Oh, it has been terrible. I'll tell you then. Let me go. You know what an awful man Seibert is. He tried to kill me!"

"He tried to kill ye!" shrieked old Combe. "Why? Why, Or'na, why? Was it over him—him there?"

Combe waved a trembling arm toward Paullen, who had not stirred.

Oreena cast a hasty glance toward the motionless form.

"Father, no!" she cried. "Not what you think. I am innocent of that! But—but, oh, father, that Dan McGuire told him that I—I—was"—another furtively cautious glance toward the couch—"that I was meeting John Paullen alone. And it wasn't so! Father, it wasn't so! I *never* met him alone!"

Combe gasped two or three times as if choking, then: "But Where's Nada? What's Nada doin' there?"

"Nada? *She* loves Seibert! She has tried to—father, she actually tried to get him away from me! Oh, Seibert loves her, too! Let me go, please! I must go, father!"

Combe held her more tightly. His trembling arms shook until it seemed that he was shaking her, and his wrinkled old face was distorted in the effort of trying to speak rapidly. He could hardly speak at all.

"Nada? What d'ye mean? Nada? Tell me! Tell me! What's he done to Nada?"

Oreena, with another reassuring side-glance toward Paullen, said, "Oh, I hate to tell you, but Nada was jealous of me, the fine house and everything! And Seibert—father, he boasted to me that Nada loved *him*. She and that old McGuire, they worked together to——"

"Dan? What's Dan done? Tell me, Or'na! Dan's our friend. Him an' Williams——"

She laughed with shrill bitterness. "Williams! McGuire has promised to take Seibert where he can find Williams and catch him! Oh, father, it has been terrible for me!"

"Or'na! It ain't so! I—I——"

"It is so!" she cried fiercely. "It is! They are all against me! And you, you always liked her best, too!"

She dropped her head, struggling to get away from him, and cried. He clutched her, shook her, shouted shrilly at her:

"Or'na! Or'na, you talk to me. I got to know. Or'na!"

"Please let me go. I'm hurt. Oh, I'm hurt!"

"No, you ain't hurt. I got to know. I got to know. I'm your father. I'll go—go to Seibert myself!"

"No, no, don't! He's a terrible man! He'll kill you."

"But Nada—what's he done to Nada?"

"You always loved her best! Now all you think about is Nada—Nada—Nada! Let me go! Let me go! You don't believe me! Oh, you don't believe me!"

Old Combe was ready enough to believe any evil thing of Seibert, but not of Nada—not of either of his daughters. They could do no wrong. Now he moaned pathetically:

"Or'na, Or'na, why did you ever marry that Seibert feller? Why'd you ever leave your poor old daddy an' marry that feller?"

Oreena was frantic, distracted, scarcely knowing what she said, wildly defending herself with the first words that suggested themselves, not because her father would have been a harsh judge, or in the least unforgiving; but she wanted to appear blameless; more than that, she wanted to make out that others had abused her, and that she was greatly wronged.

"At first he was good to me, father. I thought I loved him. And he said he wouldn't trouble *you*, or try to hurt you. I have tried to be a good wife. Nobody knows how hard I have tried! I have never done a *thing* that he could blame me for, and ——"

A low, quiet moan, as from one waking out of a bad dream, came from the couch; but Paullen did not open his eyes or move. The sound startled Oreena. She jumped back from her father with such suddenness and force as to break loose, then ran to the couch, looking down anxiously.

"John! John!" she whispered. "Speak to me! John! Do you hear me?"



There was no responsive movement and no sound. Her hand fluttered out cautiously and touched him; then she ran from the room, up the stairs, and to her mirror.

Old Combe, shambling and mumbling to himself, went from the room; and at once Paullen sat up, his face strained and pained with disillusionment.

He had been unconscious but for a few minutes; and as he lay on the couch, with his senses coming back to him, he had heard Oreena talking. The savagery in her voice, the unfairness of emphasis, the untruthfulness of statement, the attitude and spirit that she showed, her cowardliness in denying her guilty love—all this together was so revealing that Paullen, fallen from the idealisation she had evoked in him but a few hours before at their supposedly final parting, continued to lie motionless, with every word that she said striking like a blow, beating to death his love of her.

For though love, with its queer and insidious windings, had brought crooked impulses into his heart, Paullen was honest, and every fibre in him was straight and generous. He could not forget that Seibert had shown a generous liking for him, and he had now seen that Oreena was miserably deceitful and unlovely. He was one of those unfortunates of the earth who earnestly and actively want to do what is right, and who suffer from the sense of having done something contemptible as from a sharp and perpetual pain.

He presently disappeared, going off by himself where he could not be questioned or urged into talking, and at last settled down gloomily in Mr. Grinnell's little bungalow, which was at quite a distance from the house.

Combe moved about puttering until late in the afternoon. The indecision that he showed about everything was not due to fear, only to a lack of forcefulness in his character. Life had broken him, so that he was helpless, without motive power; but now he was touched at every point of his being by love of his daughters. As his addled old head saw it, both of them had been injured by the same man, and this man was a grievous, treacherous enemy. Just before nightfall he got out an ancient, heavy pistol, greased and loaded it, and then put on an old, long, black coat that would conceal the pistol. He went to the stable alone and put a horse in a light two-wheeled cart; and then, without having said a word to anybody, drove to Seibert's.

## 9

And now, as old Combe declared his wrongs, his voice rose to a thin scream, cracked, broke, recovered. It was useless for him to try to arrange his sentences, to make a carefully-planned statement. Seibert had demanded what he wanted, and Combe, after saying that he had come about his daughters, half gasped, half stuttered, groping for words, then with rising frenzy cried, "You try to kill—to kill my Or'na because you want Nada now for a wife!"

Then there was a silence, as during the first few moments that follow an explosion. Seibert glowered, staring blankly. He seemed visibly swelling with anger, but his face had an unfocused expression, like that of one whose thoughts are tumbling end over end.

An idea lodged in the uppermost part of his mind, and he stood up suddenly. He simply arose from his chair, but in doing so he pushed the heavy teak table from him. This unconsidered movement set the dishes rattling as if they had been stirred by an earthquake, and the forcible shifting of the table almost overturned McGuire, chair and all, at the other side.

Seibert flourished his fist, but shouted, "Where is my hat? You wait till I get my hat! I show you then what she has done!"

But when he had said that he seemed left without an idea, and he did not look for his hat, but looked at Combe, and Combe looked at him. There was silence between them for several moments, and the moments seemed of great length.

Then Combe spoke again, with a sort of toothless snarl:

"Where is my Nada?"

McGuire had got up. Combe had always shown an intimate liking for him; and now McGuire put a reassuring hand on the old fellow's shoulder, and said, "Listen, Tom. Nada is all right. She is here, and——"

Combe impatiently pulled away, with a shambling, sidewise step, at the same time flapping his hand, as if beating McGuire off; and, making an inarticulate noise of disgust as he screwed his old bearded face into unspeakable detestation, said, "You—you——" his voice broke, but went on squeakily: "You are worse 'an him!" It seemed as if he could get no farther; it was as if the words would choke him. His anger, his forceless agitation, the almost strangulating aversion he showed for McGuire, almost made him speechless.

At last, with stuttering and squeaking, it came out: McGuire had made a compact to lead Seibert to where Williams could be found. McGuire had gone over to the enemy. Why, he had even tried to persuade Dr. Lemaitre (who had come to Combe's that day) that Seibert was a fine man! But that agreement to catch Williams!

His trembling arm went around the room, pointing.

"An' ye fellers celebrate together o'er it!"

"Nonsense," said McGuire, who knew the old fellow's head was not just right. "Oreena's told you a mess of lies. It isn't true."

Seibert's fist smote the table. The dishes jumped, as if startled. "It is true!" he cried. "Or'na did not lie. It is true! You just dare say again, you McGuire, that Or'na lies like that!"

McGuire was nearly bowled over. He had forgotten that it was apparently true. Seibert stood towering and massive; he glared challengingly at McGuire, who was lanky and loosely hung.

The three of them were standing, and made no sound. Combe was dumbfounded.

One of the lamps had begun to smoke. The black threads streamed upwards, wavering slightly before the heat of the flame. Specks of soot drifted through the still air and settled with exquisite lightness on the white linen.

The first sound that came out was that of laughter—not pleasant, but amused, impudently ironical; and as he laughed McGuire looked from Combe, who blinked and twitched his jaw while his hands fumbled behind him, to Seibert, glowering, puzzled, and who demanded: "It is something funny you laugh at maybe?"

"It is," said McGuire, and he stopped laughing. "You already know, Seibert. And if it isn't a joke there never was one in the world. Williams is after pearls to pay you, Seibert—a debt that is owed by you, Combe, since you fell heir to Waller's debts as well as to his other things! Williams would surely make you pay, Tom, if you had anything to pay with—but you haven't the money."

"Ye're lyin', Dan McGuire!"

"That I don't believe a word of," said Seibert.

"It ain't so! I know it ain't so!"

"What would he be doing something like that for when nobody makes him?"

"Ye're lyin', McGuire. By your face I c'n tell it. Ye're smilin' at us that way!"

"You think we are fools?" demanded Seibert.

"Don't b'lieve him!" Combe cried. "It ain't so!"

"Crazy foolishness!"

McGuire leaned easily against the table, and began with detail to tell how Brundage had found the trader Waller had helped, and how the trader laughed and confirmed the story; and of how Williams, hoping to get his shell into a good market, had gone to Penwenn; but, finding Penwenn treacherous, had brought Nada home, and gone on to the pearling to do the best he could.

But before his story was finished McGuire stopped, for outside of the house it was growing light, as if from a premature and lurid dawn, or the sudden bursting into flame of a volcano.

"Ho, now what is the trouble!" Seibert shouted, facing about with a flat-footed heaviness, and standing solidly, as if to meet a physical pressure; then, having waited that extra second or two that marks the slow perception from the rapid, he tramped from the room with long, hurried steps. Combe followed with a sort of bustling, shambling patter; and McGuire, who went behind, paused with the screen door open to look back as Lalua and Nada came running into the room; and they followed him.

Fire that reached from the earth to the heavens filled the night. The flames swayed in the breeze, and bits of burning wood streamed aloft and fell like sparks. Familiar objects near at hand leaped into view, half shimmering light and half

dense shadow; and underneath the foliage of the grounds shadows darted about, running forward and springing back, restless, frantic, like strange nocturnal shapes surprised by light and unable to find their hiding-places.

The interwoven boughs and leaves and clusters of fronds, with detail of twig and swaying curve, and all the interstices marked by light, stood against the sky like traceries of ink on iridescent vellum.

In the open places about the grounds it was lighter than day. The veranda was lighted by a glare that fell from the high flames; and their roaring, which was like a great soft mouth puffing and sucking as it ground small, brittle bones, filled the night, repressing, diminishing, at times almost obliterating the shouts and cries that floated up from a distance, where the blacks had fired their quarters.

There could have been nothing but intention and concerted application of brands in such complete engulfing suddenness of flame. Dogs barked and howled. Then from time to time, nearer at hand, came the piercing, thrilling, screaming neigh of frightened horses.

The faces of the persons on the veranda shone in the light, and for a few moments they were unmoving as statues, and looked out with something of that breathless awe that mankind has perhaps retained from prehistoric nights for uncontrollable fire.

Then Seibert, realising that the native quarters had been fired deliberately, smote fist in palm. It was not the loss that struck him first. It was, How dare those dogs do such a thing! The fabric and structure of his authority was injured. This was more than money loss. It was rebellion. It was incredible, too, and almost as if the very horses, cows, pigs, chickens, goats, had conspired together and destroyed their pens and sheds. Those blacks were afraid of his anger, yet they dared do this! It was unintelligible, baffling, incomprehensible, as if some one of nature's laws had gone askew. This, too, right on the very day when Gauro had been shot before their eyes for a lesser crime.

The flying embers, tossed up by the rushing heat, swayed aloft, shifting and whirling in the wind and dropping afar off. The thatched buildings burned like dry leaves sprinkled with gunpowder. The flames could not last much longer than a bonfire of paper.

A moment's slight change of wind and the ash and embers began to sift down into the grounds; and then a new rim of flame suddenly appeared. The stables were on fire. Whether these had been deliberately lighted, or had caught from the falling sparks, could not be known; but here, too, the fire leaped in many places simultaneously, but perhaps from a shower of coals.

With a great shout of, "The horses—the horses, they will burn!" Seibert jumped the veranda and went tearing through the flowers and vines planted beyond. Horses had been brought up and stabled for early work on the morrow.

McGuire, without thinking of what he did, perhaps more from the instinct that makes one run to a fire than for any other reason, followed.

Everything was burning. The stables, the grain rooms, the copra sheds, the hay-stacks, all were on fire. Even the fences of the corrals had caught fire in places. Nothing but a cloudburst could have checked the flames, and the night was bright with stars, like little sky-flowers strewn in the pathway of the moon that was soon to rise.

Horses, with a peculiarly human scream, gave sound to their terror.

Between himself and the fire McGuire saw excited, shirtless, bearded men without hats, and some with guns; and he heard their loud babble, of which he understood nothing, though the fire roared amid its snapping and crackling. He could see Seibert pointing, and hear his deep-chested shouts, and saw also that the overseers edged backwards, refusing to do what they were told. It was a drama of silhouettes against a background of fire. They were armed men, but he saw Seibert advance on them with fist upraised, and all excepting one fellow drew back, but this one presented his gun, muzzle on, and Seibert struck him down, as if only by the weight of his falling fist.

Seibert then turned and disappeared on the run through the wide entrance of the burning stables. One moment his big body had been lighted with the beating glare of fire, and a giant shadow sprawled behind him on the ground; and the next moment he had vanished into blackness, all the more deep and impenetrable for the crest of flame that streamed along the thatched roofs.

Amid the sounds of thumping and bumping, frantic horses, one at a time, began to dash out, mad from fright. They rushed off wildly down through the grounds, tearing across the shrubbery with a sound like that of windstorm. Soon no more horses came out, but Seibert did not return.

The stables, burning from the thatch down, did not go up with quite the powdery rush of the other buildings; but these, too, were soon nothing but flames.

McGuire retreated as the heat and glare increased; but he waited. The overseers had withdrawn, grumbling hoarsely and evidently cursing, too. McGuire was alone, and he waited, fascinated by the havoc and obsessed by the wonder if Seibert would come back. It was not easy to believe that anybody could return from the far side of those flames.

When the flames began to die down they died rapidly as if all that was combustible had been suddenly exhausted; but there remained the glow and white film of ash on the red and black ruins, over which played innumerable small serpent tongues of flame, flickering and vanishing. Here and there a strong post stayed upright, with creeping threads of fire weaving up and down its surface, like little sparkling worms writhing about. The wooden bodies of the wagons retained their shapes, charred and smouldering, but not consumed. Everything else was utterly ruined; more than ruined—destroyed, obliterated.

Seibert's form, visible a long way off as something in motion rather than an object with outline, came along the path that circled the stables. A solitary figure against a background of ruins that glowed in spots and flickered, he came on with slow, heavy strides, head up, and looking at the ruins. What was left was hardly so much as ruins. There was nothing but ash.

The moon had begun to rise. Strange, thin calls and wailing chants drifted up from below the hillside.

McGuire stepped into view.

"Ho, McGuire, it is you?"

"Yes."

"McGuire, you tell me. Why would this thing happen to me?" A big arm swung out. "That you tell me. I don't know for myself." The arm continued to waver about.

McGuire replied quietly, with a tone of condolence, "Bad luck. No man can beat it."

"Bad luck is for loafers an excuse! Not for me. Always before, when something goes wrong I could take a look behind me and see what the matter was. But my wife leaves me. My young friend that I like steals her. Now all my stables and my sheds burn up. I lose the copra that would bring money I must have. But now there is nothing worse that can happen, so that is something. All over I will begin to-morrow."

He lapsed into an absent-minded sort of silence, and in the moonlight looked about without seeming to notice anything in particular, as when one's thoughts are so completely inward that the world is lost to view.

Then, with no noticeable change of expression, with merely a kind of puzzled blankness, though he looked directly at McGuire: "Who was that fellow in the Bible that had such a time like this? *Ach!* Job—that was his name. I am no Bible fellow. I just work hard, and pay what I owe and do what I promise, and try to make things grow. Why should this happen, then? That is something that I do not understand."

## 11

When they returned to the house, Combe and Nada had gone, and Lalua was nowhere to be seen.

The dining-room was still ablaze with light, and the smoking lamp burned more smokily. Reddish darts of flame mingled with the upstreaming smoke. The ceiling was spotted with a ring of soot, and particles floated about the room, and covered the wilted flowers, the dishes and white cloth. McGuire turned down the lamp and blew it out.

Outside of the house black ash was sifting down like mist, covering everything—trees, flowers, all the veranda furnishings, the very ground, with a filmy network of ashes. The moonlight was grey as dawn, and floating through this light appeared swarm on swarm of the falling ash, like a horde of small locusts, and it settled like a blight, like a plague of aphids, pervading everything, overspreading everything.

Seibert tramped up and down the veranda, walking with heavy steps and long, slow stride. In his walk he passed before a window of the dining-room, his big form almost blotting it out as he stepped from shadow into light, passing at once into shadow again. He would tramp up and down for a time, then address a question to McGuire; and these questions were like little arrows on a chart that mark the flow and windings of a current.

"What did he mean, that old Tom, that I tried to hurt Or'na?"

"Nothing. His brain rattles about like a dried nut in its shell."

"Yes, he is crazy. He is crazy," Seibert repeated, as if satisfied, and strode away.

Then: "McGuire, what did you mean that way you said Or'na lied? She did not lie. You have promised to take me to where that Williams is."

"She made it appear that I *wanted* to take you, was glad to do it. At least, Combe got that impression."

He gave a meditative grunt, stood for a moment evidently pondering that distinction, then walked off.

There was nothing of a crushed, broken attitude about him; he accepted his misfortune as he accepted the rain and wind and drought. He walked back and forth, back and forth, tramping heavily, as if marching; occasionally he muttered a word or two; now and then he stopped and said something more to McGuire, but it was rather because McGuire was a self-effacing object with ears, propped attentively in the shadow of a pillar, rather than because of companionship between them.

Presently McGuire saw, coming at a distance among the mooncast shadows of the trees, what he would have believed was a ghost if he had believed in ghosts; but after a moment's alert peering he recognised by the gliding, stately walk and the flowing white dress that it was Lalua. As she came closer he saw that she was walking rapidly, and that she was barefooted; also that her white muslin gown was smeared and streaked with the marks of brushing against leaves and sprays on which the floating ash had settled. She came gliding rapidly along the veranda and placed herself before Seibert; then quickly, with a strong quality of excitement, she said:

"I have been among the blacks. They were told to burn their houses by that man Hausen!"

Seibert stared at her with dull intensity. It was some moments before the statement could firmly take hold on him. His brain was not flexible, and this was an astounding thing.

"Hausen!" he pronounced, with his deep voice on a rising inflection that seemed to contain the promise of lifting the very scalp from Hausen's head.

"He ran away," she said, all in a breath. "He has gone to Pulotu. He was afraid."

"Hausen!" he repeated. Then, "Ah!" as if something had suddenly been made clear, adding: "He could do that thing. Yes, he can talk like they jabber. Ah!"

Seibert turned from her and stared vaguely out into the moonlight, preoccupied, perhaps troubled, but soberly expressionless, as if his thoughts had no connection with the play of facial muscles.

McGuire, unnoticed by her, continued to lean in the shadow of the pillar, and he looked at Lalua with feelings of increased respect, though he had no liking at all for her; but there could not help be some respect for a woman who had gone at night, alone, down among as wild a lot of brutes as an inhuman recruiter ever herded together, and had questioned some of them. McGuire knew that she was full of incalculable impulses, some audacious, some sinister, some inexplicably generous; and she was the only person in the world that had the least affection for Seibert, and she was merely a low-caste half-breed. And though Lalua was capable of sinister and deadly things that the little Oreena, in her wildest passions, had never dreamed of, she was also capable of a sacrificing and humble love, equally remote from the dreams of Oreena.

Now Lalua stood quietly waiting. She had the strange air of impassive, imperturbable assurance, as if waiting for something that must eventually come.

Then Seibert, staring at her as if she was someone he had never before seen, asked why she had gone among those blacks. Didn't she know it had been dangerous? What could have taken her down there at such a time?

She answered, in a voice warmly submissive and eager: "That you, my master, might know who put evilness into their hearts!"

"But no man would have done that thing! It was foolishness for——"

Her cry was almost exultant. "I am a woman, and, my master, I love you!"

Then, as if ashamed by her boldness, she dropped her head forward, submissively awaiting his pleasure—anger or

forgiveness, or whatever he might accord. Her flowing dark hair fell on each side of her face like soft, fibrous curtains, hiding cheeks that, though certainly not blushing, may have been hot with daring. She had at last achieved, and with dignity, her confession.

But Seibert regarded her only with dull astonishment. He had heard what she said, but what she really meant—all the passion, the blind devotion, her intensive humbleness to his will—were facts about her that could never get into the recesses of his brain and be understood. He did not understand at all. It seemed unreasonable, preposterous. He took a step or two back, not so much as if withdrawing from her as if merely withdrawing from something strange and uncertain that it were best not to be too near.

"That is foolishness," he said brusquely, waving an arm, though what the gesture had to do with the statement was not clear; perhaps it was driving the idea away.

But Lalua seemed to feel that he meant to drive her away. Without a word, and not lifting her head, she turned and quietly glided off. Seibert stared after her until she was out of sight, then at first slowly, but gradually with increased stride, began to walk up and down.

Soon he sat down, dropping heavily into a chair, and leaned his head against his hands; then he rubbed his head as if it was filled with aches, and, after shifting his position two or three times, groaned slightly and got up. The shock was wearing off and he had begun to feel the pain.

## 12

He was still walking up and down when a half-dozen horsemen trotted up the driveway through the moonlight; and as they approached the house some rode over the lawn and came up to the veranda rail, remaining in their saddles. Two or three dismounted; and of these McGuire, who had seated himself in the swinging couch, recognised Mortimer as their leader.

Seibert came to the rail, placed his hands on it, looked down, and said nothing.

"It has been a beastly day for you, Seibert," Mortimer began, not unkindly, and jerking his hand toward the stables. "Lost about everything, haven't you?"

"What is it you want?" Seibert demanded roughly, as if resenting the sympathy in Mortimer's voice, as perhaps he did.

"Seibert, you know us, all of us here. You know who we are." Mortimer indicated the men with him, traders and planters, men of the first importance in Puluotu, Seibert's peers; but he had received them with a hostile lack of greeting.

"And, Seibert," Mortimer went on, his tone hardening, "we feel that it is necessary to take you into custody. This is for your own good as much as because we cannot, and will not, tolerate on this island such high-handed barbarities as you have perpetrated!"

There was a sudden crack of wood breaking. Seibert, in the start of surprise and anger, had seized and jerked on the veranda rail, pulling it loose.

"Go 'way! All you, go away!" he shouted. "Go 'way off my place!"

Mortimer pulled at one end then the other of his moustache, and, tossing aside a burned-out cigar, said firmly, "Seibert, we are out here this time of night because there is talk on the beach of coming here and treating you roughly. Some drunken ruffians are stirring up feeling. They don't care anything about Gauro or"—he was about to mention the supposed abuse of Oreana, but thought better of it—"anything else you have done; they are simply trouble-makers. I would have preferred to wait for the return of your consul. But you did shoot that man, and I warned you! I warned you what I would do!"

"You warned me, heh? All my buildings and grain and stores, they are burned up. My copra, too. What will you consul fellows do about that? Nothing. You come to arrest me because I protect my property."

"You killed a man, Seibert."

"Bah! You ask Dr. Lemaitre. He will tell you the missionaries kill hundreds of men. The measles—missionaries did it with their trousers and things. Why you do nothing with them?"

"I am not here to argue, Seibert. If a missionary murdered a man I would take him in charge; and that is why I am here

now. I here and now, in the Queen's name, place you under arrest!"

"You arrest me!" cried Seibert, a fist beating a tattoo on his breast. "Me!" A hand flourished wildly. "This is no Britisher island. You arrest me!"

"I know. I know all that," said Mortimer a little wearily. "But I'm the only Government official of any kind on Pulotu at present. Besides, Seibert, you forget that I am doing this largely for your own protection."

"Bah!" said Seibert. "When I want protection I give it to myself." Then, looking toward one of the men on horseback on the lawn, "You, Jorgensen, you come to help arrest me too, eh? The last time you come it was to borrow some horses, and the time before that it was to have some of my grain seed.

"And you, Wilmot, you say every time I come to buy stores in your place, you say, 'Seibert, I tell you honest, there is not a man on the island so much deserves success as you!'

"There I see Fernald and Schwartz, too. Both you fellows been good friends when something I had you wanted. Now you come——"

A heavy voice spoke up. "We are still your friends. This is for your own good, Seibert. Black Rudsell is getting all the ruffians on the beach——"

Another voice threw in, "It's over your rescuing those Williams pirates!"

Then another, more shrill, more insistent, as if giving a truth that the others ignored: "It's the way you treated your wife!"

For many moments no one moved or spoke. The tinkling of the bridles as the horses bent their heads to crop or pull at shrub leaves, the faint creaking of saddles, the far-away shouts of blacks holding their revel, were the only sounds until Seibert, who had looked from face to face, asked dully, "The way—I treat—my wife?"

He had no more comprehension of what was meant than if he had been accused of some unknown and unimaginable depravity; but his dullness of tone, the blankness of his puzzled countenance, the awkward immobility with which he stared about him, were considered by all as signs of apprehension that his mistreatment was known.

"We will see to it," said Mortimer, "that someone is placed in charge here during your absence, so that the plantation will be looked after. But you must go with us now."

Seibert turned toward McGuire and asked, rather dazed: "Where is my hat? I must go with these fellows."

"And you, too, McGuire," said Mortimer, faintly ironical. "We must have your company."

Mortimer drew a fresh cigar and lighted it; and the sparkle of the sulphur match lighted up his long, lined, almost tragical face. No expression of triumph showed, but rather the weariness of one who has had to do a difficult and unpleasant thing.

Seibert walked off the veranda, coming heavily down the steps, his full weight on each step, then he stopped, and, turning slowly in all directions, stared about him, as if trying to recall something. Without looking toward anyone he then spoke loudly, though somewhat as if to himself, as if summing up his thoughts:

"Friends—*ach!* they are fine things to have when you don't need them."

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## CHAPTER VII

### 1

The nearest thing to a jail in Pulotu was a vermin-ridden, thatched shack with a few filthy mats strewn about in the corners and a doorway that had no door. Occasionally a drunken beachcomber was dragged there and dropped in a corner. Any prisoner that could walk was considered fit to be discharged from such custody as the jail afforded; and it was most frequently inhabited by some two or three shivering wastrels, too low for even native hospitality, who, having no other place to go for anything so nearly like shelter on wet nights, would huddle together, and perhaps quarrel over the bottle of gin that had been begged or stolen.

Pulotu was far from being such a paradisaical sort of place that offenders needed no worse than an unbarred jail; but the police system was as empty of authority as it would have to be on an island where the natives were nominally independent, and where three European Governments jealously observed the efforts of each other to get control of native affairs.

Though there were many trouble-makers and noisy drinking men that came off ships in Pulotu Bay, they usually returned to the ships by themselves or were dragged on board by a mate and part of the crew that had come after them. But in spite of the rewards that captains offered for deserters and the readiness with which native police turned them up, loafers and idlers and beachcombers had accumulated about bar shanties as flies do around spilled rum; but as these miserable rascals kept pretty well off to themselves at one end of the beach, begging and drinking and fighting to their hearts' content, they were more or less tolerated. Occasionally, however, through a concerted effort on the part of the consuls and the respectable citizens, exceptionally disagreeable characters were made to take passage to another port.

Such were the imprisoning and punitive conditions in Pulotu when Mortimer came down from the uplands with Seibert and McGuire. They had to be taken care of until the *Panther* arrived and disposed of McGuire, and the German consul came and considered Seibert's case. Mortimer was on very friendly terms with the German consul. But in the meantime lodging had to be found for the prisoners.

Houses were scarce in Pulotu. There were, of course, sheds and sheet-iron warehouses, any one of which might have been used as a jail. Any sort of hut would have done for McGuire, but Seibert was no ordinary malefactor. Mortimer did not want to humiliate him, partly, perhaps, for fear of offending the Germans on the island, who might change their friendly attitude toward the British consul if they saw even so unpopular a countryman, whatever the charge against him, being shabbily treated.

That day the French consul had been buried. Such matters are attended to with almost alacrity in the tropics. As he had left no family, the house was unused. Dr. Lemaitre took charge of Balte-Brun's effects; and, though he would have liked to see Seibert put into the darkest, hottest corner of a warehouse, he accepted Mortimer's way of looking at the circumstances.

### 2

All the night following his arrest Seibert sat in a chair with his legs extended, his head dropping forward, his hat on his lap, and an elbow on the table where an oil lamp was burning faintly with a strong smell of an untrimmed wick. Bottles and little boxes of medicine that Balte-Brun had used remained scattered about the base of the lamp.

Seibert was slow to realise that he was a prisoner, subject to other men's beck and call; that he could not go and come; that he must have a stranger's permission to put even his head out of a door. The world had closed in from the jungle-horizon he had made for himself in the hills, and was now four narrow, rickety walls. A man under arms moved about watchfully on the far side of one door, and another man similarly armed guarded the other door. Both of these men were out of sight, but their feet scraped and jarred from time to time. They were strangers, mere sailors off an English boat that was being repaired, and they had the right to shoot him if he tried to go out.

The benumbing part of this experience was that Seibert did not feel that he had done anything to justify such treatment; and he was shaken by his misfortunes, for he had always felt a deep faith in the rewards of work—honest, hard work—and had taken to his work something of that confidence that many people take to their religion.

With the coming of dawn Seibert had hardly changed his position. McGuire, dozing in a cane chair, had left the bed to



Seibert if he should want it; and, having awakened many times, would stare for a while at the heavy, motionless figure lost in the depth of brooding, then return to his uneasy dozing.

At daybreak voices were heard in the rooms on each side of the one in which they were confined. The sailors were changing guard.

McGuire arose, blinked, stretched himself, and with an affectation of good cheer grinned at Seibert, who was staring at him.

"You've been there all night, wide awake as an owl," said McGuire.

"If I could get home, everything would be better. I should not have come with Mortimer. It was a trick. There is work to do. The horses, they are loose. All the blacks are loose and won't work. I should not have come."

"We couldn't very well help ourselves."

"Now I wonder who they will have there to look after things? No man will be much good. Jorgensen may be. No man can look out for you like yourself."

"Right now I'd like the chance, too, of looking out for myself. I hope Penwenn gets a fishbone crosswise in his throat, and that Dr. Lemaitre chokes him trying to get it out. I suppose you have feelings of the same kind for Hausen."

Seibert gave a start, and looked at McGuire as if looking through him; then, slowly closing his enormous hands as he held them before him, he stared fixedly, and said, "Ah, that Hausen! *Ach!* yes! I could choke him!"

McGuire regarded him with a sensation of uneasiness. Seibert was huge and powerful, and he glared at the empty air with an expression of vacant intensity as his hands closed and shook, as if shaking the life out of the detestable Hausen.

An hour or so later the heavily-jawed young fellow on watch at the door between their room and the kitchen let a cook that had been sent to prepare their breakfast come into the kitchen. This cook was a native, dirty and lazy, who floated eggs in grease when he fried them, and boiled coffee as if it were the grounds that people drank, in which case, of course, these needed to be well cooked.

After a long time, during which he puttered about in the kitchen, nosing into everything, more out of curiosity than otherwise, he brought to them a platter of eggs and a pot of coffee. Looking about for a place to put these things, and seeing nothing at hand, he set the coffee-pot on the floor and the platter on the bed, then with insolent unconcern started out. McGuire laughed vaguely, amused; but Seibert, suddenly aware of the fellow's impudence, shouted at him. His voice brought both the sentries to their feet and into the doorways, from where they saw a badly frightened native cringing respectfully under Seibert's angered eyes.

It was strange that he should care at such a time about such a thing; but he did, and the lamp and all the little boxes and bottles from which old Balte-Brun had tried to get relief for his irremediable pains were removed from the table, and a cloth spread. The cook moved quickly, with anxiety to please, and he kept his eyes aslant at Seibert, who had forgotten him at once. All that Seibert had cared about was that a servant should be a servant in his presence; he simply would not have any "foolishness."

The breakfast was placed on the table, spread with a clean cloth, with plates and cups and shining cutlery. The eggs froze rigidly in the grease; the ham, partly burned and half raw, too, lay like chips of charred red wood, and the poisonous coffee grew cold, and remained untasted. Seibert forgot the breakfast, and McGuire was in no mood to eat.

Shortly before noon Mortimer came in. He had been freshly shaved, his whites were spotless, but he looked tired, and the little pouches under his eyes appeared almost purplish. In one hand he held a large, unlighted cigar, and the fingers of the other beat a nervous tattoo against it. He entered in a quiet, weary way that nevertheless did not seem affected; and he stood for a moment pulling at the ragged fringe of his moustache, as if waiting for Seibert to speak first.

Seibert had been pacing slowly to and fro across the room. The floor shook under his heavy steps. He now stopped short, and with his hands crossed behind him waited, looking directly at Mortimer, simply staring at him as if from behind a mask.

"Comfortable here, I hope," said Mortimer, off-hand, not very solicitous, but at least not sarcastic, as he gazed quickly about. He did not appear to expect an answer, and none was made.

He then thrust the end of the cigar into his mouth, bit off the end, and spat out the detached part without removing the cigar.

"Seibert, I am doing all I can to make your position easy. It must be understood that there is nothing personal in my holding you under arrest. I simply had to take the steps that I did. As the representative of a civilised Government I could do nothing else. And it was to avoid more trouble on the island that I took you in custody, instead of waiting for the return of your consul, who will most assuredly approve. There is still some talk down among the bar shanties about mobbing you, for those rascals are beginning to think the *Panther* may not come soon. But they have been given to understand that if they try anything of the kind we will meet them with shotguns, so there is no danger—none whatever.

"And by having your man come to see you this morning before he went out to the plantation to take charge, I have shown you, Seibert—haven't I?—that I am trying to be fair, to treat you justly."

Seibert asked in sullen doubt, "What man you mean went to take charge of my place? No man has been to see me here."

"Why, your man Hausen. I had a talk with him, and he said that he knew more about your plantation and your affairs than \_\_\_\_\_"

Seibert rose on his toes and leaned forward with hands half out, as if to fall on Mortimer, who retreated a step or two. But Seibert held his anger in, lowered his hands, settled back on his heels, slowly, reluctantly. "So that is it! You and that Hausen are in cahoots! You are a fine fellow, to talk about what I have done, when you go in with that Hausen, who burned last night my stables and pens and all my stores. I won't have him on my place! You let me go! I will go and do my own work. You are a scoundrel, you consul-loafer!"

Seibert strode forward. He was hardly looking at Mortimer, who stood in his way; but he strode as if beginning a long march that must be made rapidly. His mind was on his plantation; his eyes, with unfocused staring, were on the door. There was no menace about him except as there would be menace for anyone who was in the road of a big piece of machinery that had been set in motion. Seibert was as impersonal as that. He undoubtedly would have walked right over Mortimer, or struck him casually aside without noticing what he did.

But Mortimer stepped hastily out of the way, and shouted quickly: "Hatborn! Hatborn, don't let this man pass!"

The sailor on watch appeared in the doorway with his gun in readiness. He would not have hesitated. In fact, the prompt Hatborn had the alert firmness of a man who is almost eager to make his duty dramatic, though tragical.

The staring muzzle brought Seibert up short. He looked at it without fear and without resentment, as a person might look at something that had awakened him. He turned toward Mortimer and said, "Get out, you. Go 'way from me. My day is coming. The Godeffroys will hear about all this. They are a big company. You won't be such a proud fellow when they make a report to your Government that will tell how you do things that hurt people they like. Go get away from me, you consul fellow."

Mortimer was much affected, but he replied with a strained quietness, though his hands trembled and his face had changed colour:

"Seibert, Hausen told me that he would come and talk with you before going out. Get your advice. I gave him a pass to see you. I thought that he would be the best man. I'll send out and tell him that you don't want him. I am trying to do what is right by you!"

Seibert growled contemptuously and turned away.

Mortimer hesitated uncomfortably. He removed his cigar and stared at it, replaced the cigar and glanced sharply at McGuire, then looked severely toward Seibert, whose back was turned.

Mortimer was irritated. He knew that Seibert had done a monstrous thing in murdering that black, and that he had done right in arresting him; but somehow he felt no satisfaction. Something was missing. The very essence of crime was lacking. He did not understand it.

With a long parting glance at Seibert's big back, Mortimer went out.

### 3

Later in the day Mortimer got Jorgensen and Wilmot to ride over to the plantation to see how matters were going and have Hausen return to Puluotu. Mortimer meant to investigate that charge that Hausen had fired the buildings.

They came back without Hausen, but they brought with them the woman Lalua.

Word flies about in a South Seas town as if spread by the buzzing of insects; and, almost before Lalua was brought to the consul's house, people, as if caught in a current, began to move up the street. Men who had been dozing in club chairs came out. Natives hurried along eagerly. A few of the shopkeepers closed their doors. Penwenn and the man with whom he had been drinking Scotch joined the crowd that had collected under the palms and on the grass, from where people stared at Lalua, who sat on a straight-backed chair on the veranda in an attitude of imperturbable patience.

Mortimer had been taking a noonday nap, or trying to, and now, while he dressed, Jorgensen came into the room and told of how he and Wilmot had gone to Seibert's house and had been met on the steps by this woman, who stood there as if she had been waiting for them.

They had asked for Dr. Hausen. First at Jorgensen, then at Wilmot, she gave a long, slow look from those opaque, dark, slanting eyes, and said, "Yes, he is here. I will show you. Come."

She led the way down the veranda and pointed to a door.

"He is there," she said.

It was the door to a small room that Seibert used as an office, where he kept his accounts, money that he had about the house, and business papers.

Jorgensen had been in the room frequently. He now opened the door and stepped in ahead of Wilmot. Coming out of the dazzling sunlight, they were at first unable to see anything, but as he opened the door Jorgensen had said, "Well, Hausen, how goes everything?"

There was no answer; and this was so queer that both of them instantly felt that something was wrong. Then they saw that Hausen lay on the floor, and just beyond his outspread hands papers were scattered, as they had fallen when his groping fingers opened. He lay face down on his chin; the thick glasses were still on his eyes, so that his appearance was grotesquely as if he peered near-sightedly at something on the floor.

Mortimer, after hearing this, came out on his veranda, and, holding a freshly-lighted cigar, sat down behind the table in a mat-covered recess, where he usually sat for anything like official business. He pulled at his moustache and looked with judicial severity at Lalua, who, guided by Jorgensen, had been brought to the table.

She remained standing, like a person being sentenced; but she was merely being asked to tell what she had done, and why. This she told in a quiet, level voice, which did not once use so much as a stressed inflection. Her dark, slightly oblique eyes gazed at Mortimer without wavering, and her hands, crossed in front of her, were not moved until she had finished; then they dropped suddenly, like things stricken dead and hung motionless at her side.

"That man Hausen came this morning, and I said to him, 'Begone. The master is away.'

"He laughed foolish, as if something tickled his feet, and he said to me, 'I am master here now.'

"'You lie,' I told him. 'You will never be master here while I remain.'

"'Then you get out,' he said, and lifted his hand as if he would strike me; but I did not move, and he put his hand down.

"I told him, 'You had the blacks put fire to their dwellings and our stables.'

"'Don't you think I wish now that I hadn't?' he said to me in a loud voice. 'It is my loss now. I am master here.'

"I said to him, 'If you go into my master's house while he is away I will kill you, because I know that you mean to do evil.'

"He said, 'Bah! You are no longer wanted here. Go!'

"Then he went by me and straight into Mr. Seibert's little room. I went to the drawer where I knew Mr. Seibert kept his gun in a leather sack wrapped with oiled cloth. I took it up and looked to see if it had shells. I saw that there were shells. I went to the room where that man Hausen was already among the master's papers.

"I said to him, 'You will not rob and harm my master again.'

"Then I held the gun before me in my two hands and pulled with a finger.

"After that I went away. When these men came and asked for him I took them to where he was, that they might see.

"There is nothing more, and all that I have said is true."

Mortimer blew a cloud of smoke off to one side and looked at no one. It was quiet on the veranda, and not a person made a sound, even among those who were far back in the crowd.

Hausen, eager and voluble, had come to Mortimer with his mouthful of reasons as to why he should go out and take charge. He had gone, and this woman had killed him. It was like madness, or something terribly inhuman, this serenity of hers. It was as though she did not realise what she had done. She seemed so simple, yet inscrutable. Mystery was there somewhere. Mortimer had a feeling of relief that this, plainly enough, was another case for the German consul to worry his own closely-cropped head about.

Hausen was German; weregild was still respected at the world's outposts. As the white man interpreted it on his own behalf throughout the islands, the law of an eye for an eye was mercilessly like an eye for an eyelash, a tooth for a bruised lip.

She stood before Mortimer now, as if awaiting dismissal—tall, slender, composed, almost as if with pride, her hands at her side and her dark hair falling widely spread across her shoulders. She was not pretty, and the faintly slanting eyes, their gaze level as an arrow, suggested shadowy depth. Mystery of some sort was in her.

She seemed to expect that what she had done would be approved. She had shown no hesitation and no doubt in telling of it, and had not defended her act, as if it was not in need of defence.

A frown gathered on Mortimer's forehead as he wondered in exasperation what could be the matter with people on Seibert's plantation that they should take the killing of other people as a thing of no consequence.

He asked her if Seibert was such an excellent man and master that she would so readily commit murder on his behalf.

Lalua answered, "Hausen was an evil man, who meant to do more wrong. Mr. Seibert is an honest man, and kind to all who know him."

Mortimer leaned forward on his elbows, and, making quite a point of his reply, said, "His wife doesn't agree with that. She tells a different sort of story about him."

Lalua answered at once, imperturbably, "His wife's fears are the fears of a wife that has a lover."

She had spoken with an inflexible composure, so like dignity that it gave a subtle convincing quality to what she said.

Everyone wanted to hear more. There was a slight pressing forward, an intent listening. But Mortimer had the kind of gentlemanly sensitiveness that shrank from questioning servants about a household's scandal, that had no bearing on the case, even though that household might be one upon which disaster had fallen.

He asked no further questions. Outside of detaining the woman, the case was not one that concerned him officially. There would have to be, of course, a report to his chief. On everything there must be a report.

When he had made arrangements for the temporary custody of Lalua he retired to an obscure spot within the house, and with pad on his knee, and a fresh cigar in his mouth, he wrote out the notes of Lalua's story. As he reflected from sentence to sentence he became aware of a slight and indefinable sympathy for the woman; this was probably because he personally had always detested Hausen, and because, too, he knew as well as one can possibly know the outcome of a sequence of events, such as an island trial, that the demand for her punishment could not be appeased with anything short of her life. This inevitably would be the reward for her futile devotion.

#### 4

During the remainder of the day Mortimer heard many things that irritated, even disturbed him. The blacks on Seibert's plantation were running loose. The white men—the overseers—had refused to remain. Perhaps they were afraid; but they said all through the town that they could not remain without shooting some of the blacks, and since the British consul would charge them with murder if they did, the only thing for them was to leave the plantation. So they came into Pulo and talked. They said that if Seibert had been on the place everything would have been all right. He could handle the blacks. Now everything was ruined. The blacks were destroying crops and trees, and nobody dared shoot at them.

Mortimer knew that at least some of this talk was malicious; but Jorgensen had reported, after a second visit, that the damage was really severe. He gave it as his opinion that it had been a mistake to take Seibert away.

"He could've kept them from doing damage. Never a man like him," said Jorgensen, "for making blacks dance to his

whistling."

"We did it to protect him," said Mortimer defensively.

"Yes, partly, partly," Jorgensen admitted. "But you talked a lot about 'barbarity,' and that us white men couldn't afford to let a crime like that pass unnoticed. That's why you got us to go out with you."

"All that *is* true, Jorgensen. But I wouldn't have undertaken to arrest him—it is his own consul who should have done that—if it had not been for the talk against him. Rudsell was trying to get up a mob."

"Then why the devil didn't you arrest Black Rudsell? An' no need of protecting"—he stressed the word ironically—"Seibert *now*."

The danger was over, if it had ever really existed. Blackie Rudsell, getting as near sober as he ever did when on shore, had suddenly gone on board his ship about noon and raised anchor without a good-bye to anyone.

"You mean, Jorgensen, that Seibert should be released?"

"Why not? He don't need *protecting* any more. An' he'll not run off the island. He'll be here when the German consul comes back. 'Sides, his plantation is being all shot to hell. I don't know how he's ever goin' to pull out. The blacks went right through his cocoanuts, cutting out the crowns."

"He killed Gauro in cold blood, Jorgensen."

"Well, a lot o' Germans hereabouts are beginning to feel pretty huffy over your arresting him. That was for the German consul to do, they say. Supposing you let him go."

"Never!" said Mortimer, his teeth meeting through his cigar.

However, he regretted having arrested Seibert. Though considerable indignation had helped Mortimer to want to make the arrest, he had really urged it at the time he did to forestall some kind of outrage which the troublesome Rudsell might have taken pleasure in committing. But now that he had arrested Seibert he could not let him go. He might possibly have offered some kind of parole if the Germans had not begun to mutter and mumble; but to let him go now, on any pretence, would appear to be knuckling under; and that, of course, would be to humble the whole British Empire and lose influence in Pulotu affairs. Such are the agonies of diplomacy.

## 5

Late in the afternoon a gunboat came into the bay. Mortimer's heart jumped at the sight of the British ensign. He was alongside and on board as quickly as he could get there.

The ship was the *Bellarius*, one of a few Australian gunboats outfitted to supervise the labour trade and to overhaul lawless blackbirders. She cruised all through the islands, particularly those farther south, and heard all the gossip of all the beaches and ports.

The captain was a profane, energetic young man by the name of John David. The first question that he threw at Mortimer was, "Have you seen Black Rudsell?"

When Mortimer had answered the young captain swore for five minutes with only such slight pauses as were needful for breath; and perhaps his curses had the blasting, obliterating effect of anathema, for Black Rudsell was never seen or heard from again.

That evening Mortimer invited Captain David on shore to dinner; and from behind large, heavy cigars and over coneshaped glasses, warmly glowing with port, they sat and talked. Mortimer, from across the dimly-lighted table, regarded the vigorous young captain with an acidless envy. He was healthy; no need to go slow, as yet, in his smoking, coffee, or other sort of drinking; he was hardly more than a boy, and eager about the world and all that was in it; and buoyantly forceful in his opinions.

"You served that Dutchman blastedly well right!" cried Captain David. "This thing of mistreating natives on plantations has to be stopped. Of course, we really can't say 'Boo!' to the Germans on islands like Pulotu, but we can let them know how we feel about it; and, the other consul chap being away, you had the chance. Good for you!"

"The worst of it," said Mortimer, "is that this native was a poor old half-breed—half-breed Portuguese from Santa Cruz

——"

"Gauro, by God!" cried Captain David, almost bounding from his chair and slapping the palm of one hand on the table. "Why, Mortimer, you can't do anything to anybody for killing that damned murderous, sulphur-skinned ape of a cannibal. He was on the Wateson plantation in Fiji—this fellow's name was Gauro?"

"Gauro? Yes, Gauro," said Mortimer rather reluctantly.

"There's the Governor of Fiji himself who'll be delighted when I get to Levuka with the news! Crafty old beggar, that Gauro. He was wanted for murdering a white on the Wateson plantation. Murder and—and the other thing, you know. Cooked his victim. Ah, being Gauro makes it a different story. You ought to pin a couple of medals on your Dutchman."

"But, captain, are you sure?"

"Sure? We've all been on the look-out for Gauro. He got away somehow, and didn't want to go back to his native village, where he'd surely have been snapped up quick. He knew that. Crafty old devil. Good for your Dutchman, I say!"

"But the principle of the thing?" asked Mortimer a little feebly.

"Principle be damned!" said the vigorous Captain David. "Every blackbirder and recruiter in the South Seas has heard of Gauro. Been on the look-out for him. The Governor put a reward out for him. Why, I'd have shot the blighter myself."

"But Seibert didn't shoot him because he was Gauro!"

"Didn't, eh? You just bet he did! Your Dutchman may not have known of the Fijian mess. Evidently didn't, or he would have turned him over to somebody long ago. But he got rid of Gauro because he *was* Gauro, a villainous, knock-kneed, turtle-headed old reprobate who'd have thrown his own mother into a stew-pot. He was no more Portuguese than you are. He was cannibal, all of him. Why, if anybody undertook to try your Dutchman for killing that miserable old devil, at least two British magistrates and Mr. Wateson himself, and even the Governor, would appear as witnesses for the defence."

"Then I fear that I have blundered," said Mortimer wearily, looking into a cloud of smoke that drifted hazily in the still air.

"Didn't you say something about the Dutchman trying to kill his wife? You could still hold him for that."

"No, no," Mortimer replied slowly. "That would be—er—you know, wrong. If the murder—it was murder—of Gauro is—well, is commendable—then I have made a very humiliating mistake. I am not yet convinced that it was—commendable, I mean. In that case I most certainly would release Seibert; and—er—I don't know how he could take an apology."

"Oh, he'd be so jolly well glad to be free of the thing he wouldn't need an apology. Just a word of explanation. Show him that a Britisher is as quick to let him go as to haul him in. Fairy lapy, you know. That's all that counts. You think him guilty—jerk him in. Something comes up that shows he's not guilty—turn him out. Perfectly straight-forward and simple," said the young captain cheerfully.

He then poured another glass of port for himself, and wondered at Mortimer's long silence over a matter so transparent as this.

But Mortimer was moodily reflecting on the damage done to Seibert's plantation during his imprisonment; and all the Germans would say it was their pressure that caused him to give Seibert release. Enormous injury would be done to British prestige. The German consul might then resent his interference in German affairs (he saw this clearly now), and the Godeffroys, to whom Seibert was heavily in debt, would of course complain to their Foreign Office, and their Foreign Office would complain to the British Colonial Secretary. There would be no end of complications, and all to the disadvantage of British influence. That is, if he did release Seibert.

But the *Bellarius* was going away to-morrow. If he stuck to his guns, insisted that the killing of that old native was murder, and showed the German consul a firm attitude, the consul (Mortimer knew him well) would be impressed, and inclined to take on the colour of Mortimer's indignation. The whole matter might be carried to a conclusion, or at least carried along far enough for Mortimer to emerge from it without loss of prestige, without the question of Gauro's character in far-off Fiji coming up. Seibert hadn't known anything definitely about Gauro in Fiji; so, as far as actual guilt was concerned, it *was* murder. But the honest and honourable thing? Mortimer was to have no sleep that night.

Captain David had also brought a bit of news about the *Panther*, explaining her delay in reaching Pulotu.

"You may not see the *Panther* for some time. We over-hauled the *Cleo* about ten days ago—blackbirder, she is, and a rascal. But her papers and everything were all right this time, and she was loaded to the scuppers with the finest shell you ever saw.

"Where'd you steal this?" I said to the *Cleo* captain.

"Then he told me a rare good joke. Hurricane Williams—queer, isn't it, when you've got his McGuire under lock and key? Well, sir, Williams was fishing shell over in the Tuillias, and had tons on tons of it cleaned and piled on the beach ready to get on board. Then the *Panther* nosed into the bay looking for fresh water. Williams went out to sea like a bat out of hell; and about an hour later, after the *Panther* sailors had got ashore and learned from the natives who it was that went through their fingers, out goes the *Panther* after him. If she caught him, she's headed for San Francisco. If she didn't, she's still looking for him. And you can count on it that Williams won't be back up this way for a long time! Well, then *Cleo* happened along a day or two after that, looking for recruits, and took the shell. What are you going to do with McGuire? Give him to me. I'll run him down to Sydney and introduce him to a magistrate."

Mortimer smiled faintly, and shook his head. "No, though I would like to. But Penwenn has first claim on him. However, I won't turn him over to a private citizen who has a grudge. I'll wait for the *Panther*, but I doubt if Penwenn will. He is growing quite impatient."

## 6

A servant-boy with slippered stealth came into the room. He was a girlish-looking sort of boy, and wore a white jacket with brass buttons that shone dimly, like lumps of gold. Having come to within a few feet of the table, he stood still until Mortimer, looking across his shoulder, asked in a slow, tired voice what was wanted.

"Man come to see you, sir."

"Who is he? What does he want this time of night?"

Mortimer lifted by its chain a heavy watch from his breast pocket. The hour was almost ten.

"He won't say his name. Say he tell you his name, sir."

The boy spoke rapidly, without gestures, but in earnest, thin tones, as if anxious to impress the consul with his zeal. Mortimer knew him for an incorrigible petty thief and harmless liar, but for all of that saw no reason for displacing him with a successor, who would probably have a different set of worse tricks that one would not get on to in weeks.

"Go ask him what he wants, Tasese."

The boy left, gliding smoothly over the mats as if it would be necessary to slip upon the fellow in order to put the consul's question.

Mortimer explained to his guest, "Usually at this time of night my caller is some beachcomber in a state of drunken homesickness—must tell the consul his troubles—have a letter written home to his people. The poor beggars that go on the beaches out here! The unfortunate part of God's world is that most of them have mothers, or somebody, back home. Roving men should be born out of eggs, like turtles. I hear strange wild tales from——"

Mortimer stopped with a sudden look of pain in his eyes, and unobtrusively placed a hand against his left side. After holding his breath for a moment he began to breathe cautiously, then with evident relief took a full breath, that was released like a sigh. He put his half-smoked cigar down and pushed the tray aside with the quiet movement of one reluctantly putting by a pleasure he had been warned against.

Mortimer made no comment, and Captain David pretended not to have noticed. The consul was apparently one of those men who regarded any little physical weakness in themselves with a feeling of shame.

They then heard the native boy's voice, shrill with agitated protest, and for an instant saw his form, back toward them in the doorway; then he was pushed aside, and a young man, very erect, with a kind of rigid bearing, came directly into the room.

Captain David half rose from his chair to interpose himself, but, seeing that the young fellow did not intend violence, sat back with a questioning glance at the servant, who had been thoroughly trained into being silent in the consul's presence unless addressed.

Mortimer leaned forward on the table and looked closely, hardly recognising Paullen, whom he had seen before only for a minute, and whose face now appeared strained and pale even in the soft, dimmed glow of the shaded lamps.

"Well, sir?" said Mortimer gravely, with a strong hint of displeasure.

"Mr. Mortimer, I am sorry to come in on you like this, but that boy of yours said you wouldn't see me to-night, and I felt that you had to see me to-night. I want to be—be arrested and put with McGuire and Mr. Sei-Seibert!"

Mortimer sat back, a hand absently reaching far off and with sentient precision closing on the half-smoked and now fireless cigar; but at the boy he looked steadily, as if his thoughts had scattered themselves in all directions to search out the reason for this strange request.

"I fail to perceive why you would wish that, Paullen."

"I do wish it, sir."

"You want to give yourself up, is that it?"

"I am willing to do that, even that, sir!"

"Um!" said Mortimer slowly. Only that morning Penwenn had practically admitted that he now did not care whether or not Paullen was taken; and he had said in so many words that he would not now swear to a complaint against Nada Combe. A duller perception than Mortimer's would have seen that Penwenn was pretty well sickened of his pirate catching. Besides, Mr. Grinnell had told Mortimer (he and Mr. Grinnell were rather close friends) that Paullen had not known the *Flying Gull* was being stolen until after she was out to sea.

"Um-m! You have perhaps an important communication to make to my prisoners, and think that I am not foresighted enough to detect the ruse?"

"No, sir! That is not so, Mr. Mortimer. But I—I feel that it ought to be done!"

And Mortimer, though he could not begin to imagine what was involved, knew that Paullen did feel it. His strained face had a clear, earnest, intense expression, more suggestive of high, quiet courage than of duplicity; but still the whisperings and gossip that had passed to and fro like the rustling stir of dried leaves in a wind, coming up in flurries, dying down from a lack of breath, had used the name of Paullen as the lover of Seibert's wife.

"Even if I were to place you in custody, Paullen, I still see no reason why you should be put with Seibert and McGuire. In fact, Paullen, I could better understand why you might ask *not* to be placed near Seibert."

Paullen's pale face flushed, but he remained upright, even squaring his shoulders a little. This, and a certain tightening of the mouth, gave Mortimer the impression that Paullen felt as if he was facing a firing-squad and would not flinch.

Then, abruptly, Mortimer said, "Tasese, bring me ink and paper."

The servant, who had been standing in the doorway, made a faint flash of white as he turned quickly, and then reappeared with a broad leather pad on which were paper, an inkstand, and pens.

Mortimer pushed away his glass, and Tasese placed the pad on the table. For a moment the pen scratched in rapid jerks. Mortimer then read what he had written, folded the note, and, handing it to Tasese, gestured that it was to be given to Paullen.

"That, Paullen, is for the man on guard."

"I thank you, sir."

"That is all," said Mortimer.

Paullen hesitated, as if about to say something more, something impulsive; but he remained silent, cast a look from Mortimer to Captain David and back to Mortimer, then with a movement of his arm, as if about to salute before remembering that a salute was out of place, he turned and walked from the room with the air of an orderly bearing a dispatch.

"There," said Mortimer, relighting his stale cigar and puffing deeply to get it going, "there goes a young fellow that I like, though there must be something of the rascal in him, but I don't believe it! I haven't the faintest idea why he wants to be put with McGuire and Seibert, but if I were in his place—that is, in the place reports say he has in Oreena Seibert's affection—I would go anywhere, take all sorts of risks of the kind a fugitive has to take, rather than go into the same



room with that big German!"

In the house of Balte-Brun, McGuire, the lazy and listless, who had always been able to doze almost anywhere at almost any time, had turned sleepless. Even Seibert at last had fallen into a heavy sleep, somewhat repaying for the previous night of wide-eyed brooding, and a day of trampling about, much of the time in gloomy silence.

Earlier in the evening McGuire had got the sailor on watch in the kitchen to give him a bottle of wine. Now, with the last of the bottle in a small glass before him, he leaned forward and eyed the dark liquor as if it was a necromancer's crystal. The shaded lamp cast down a bright circle of light, and moths that had crept in out of the darkness fluttered frantically up under the blue glass shade. He had not found any warmth in the wine.

A sound like a quick, inarticulate protest came from Seibert. McGuire raised up and looked toward the bed, where his huge body lay in ungainly posture crosswise on the bed.

All day Seibert had walked about. Once he had stopped, and abruptly asked, "McGuire, my friend, do you think it could be that Or'na would wish she had not gone away?"

"Mr. Seibert, there're lots of things I don't approve of about the way the Lord runs this earth; but he always does see to it that the people who make perfect fools of themselves live to regret it."

Then that day, shortly after noon, the guards had been changed. Both the relieving sentries were late, because they had been among those who went to the consul's house and heard Lalua's story.

These sailors were hard-handed forecastle men, with no idea of military precision; and since neither McGuire nor Seibert were accused of offences repugnant to a rough, robust manhood, they did not regard them with unfriendliness. And when they came on watch this time, one stood in the doorway that led to the kitchen, the other stood in the doorway across the room, and together, often both speaking at once, or with one correcting the other, they told what had happened, talking eagerly, with the excited importance of men who are the first to bring news to the person it most concerns.

Seibert became for a time agitated, and gesticulated in a kind of awkward distress. He shouted at McGuire. "It was craziness! A fellow like Hausen is not worth shooting. He makes more troubles dead than if he stayed alive. It is nothing to kill somebody. Anybody can kill somebody. She makes herself get arrested, and will never again be let go!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" Seibert shouted. "What is there to do? That's what the matter is! What can I do? You, McGuire, tell me that."

"Have a little gratitude, anyway!"

"Gratitude? Gratitude? Why should I have gratitude when she does something that makes herself all those troubles! What good will that thing gratitude do her!"

"She did it for you."

"You do something for me that I don't want done, then I must have gratitude when it makes you troubles? It was craziness, I tell you. It was mad craziness!"

"Aren't you even satisfied with what happened to Hausen? Served him right!"

"No!" Then again, "No!" A thoughtful pause, broken by an even heavier and louder, "No! Would you be that satisfied if some woman kills a man you don't like? No. No, I tell you!"

Then he had walked away.

"So," McGuire now said to himself as he sat sleepless, a little restless, and reflectively peered at the last glass of dark wine. "So ends the love of Lalua for Seibert the bull-headed."

He reached out, and, raising the glass a few inches from the table, said half aloud, as if addressing someone across from him:

"Well, Lalua, here's to you. The last of a bottle of sour wine, an' I drink you luck! Here's to you, you with the look and poise of an evil priestess. I don't like you. I wouldn't be surprised to know that you shot Hausen without a sound to warn him. But you're happy. You think you have jarred Seibert into an amazed realisation of what a woman's love can be, and

he calls it 'crazy foolishness.' So it is. And so is his love of Oreena, which, like a hydra, grows two heads to eat on his heart for every one that he lops off. You don't know what a hydra is, of course. You are an ignorant mixture of savage and more savage Chinese. But I pledge you in my last glass of wine—sour wine! But it's the most you'll ever get for your love."

He raised the glass and swallowed the wine at a gulp, then dashed the glass to the floor. It broke with a small crash, and as he looked down at the fragments he laughed a little, bitterly.

## 8

McGuire sat up stiffly, listening to the sound of voices in the next room; then the door opened. Paullen came in with rapid, resolute steps. His eyes glanced unseeingly from McGuire, and darted all about the room until they found Seibert.

"What are you doing here?" McGuire cried in a low voice.

"He come by himself with a letter from the consul," said the rugged boatswain, Ben Holt, who was on guard.

McGuire put a hand on Paullen, pressing him toward the door. "Get out. He may wake up. He'll go crazy when he sees you."

Paullen stepped sideways, putting off McGuire's hand.

"Bo'sun, take him out of here!" said McGuire.

"He come with a letter, McGuire; an' the letter says——"

"Let me be, both you!" said John Paullen, with rigid fierceness, taking another step to one side, then standing with a determined air, as if he would fight if touched.

Holt, looking down at his letter, doubtfully backed through the doorway and closed it.

"Why are you here?" McGuire demanded.

"I had to come," Paullen replied, his eyes on Seibert's great sprawling body.

"He'll kill you!"

"I can't help it."

"You are giving yourself up? You are a lunatic. What's the matter, Paullen?"

"I had to come. I *had* to."

"Why?"

"I have done him a terrible injury. I have been everything that is low and contemptible, McGuire."

"And"—McGuire half sneered—"you want to apologise."

"What good would any words I could say be to him?"

"What *are* you going to do, then?" McGuire cried, exasperated.

"Nothing!"

"Nothing?"

"Nothing, McGuire."

"You *have* lost your head! What's the matter with you? Why are you here? He'll kill you, sure!"

"I—I had to come to—to give——"

"Give what? Go on. Tell me."

"McGuire, he loves her. He has loved her all the time. She made me believe she was afraid of him, and she wasn't at all. She just wanted to—to—make a fool of me!"

"How do you know that?"

"She told me!"

"Oh," said McGuire unsympathetically, "you have quarrelled."

"Yes."

"And you believe what an angry woman tells you—in a love quarrel!"

"No. That's why we quarrelled, as you call it. I saw she was deceitful, and—and——"

"And what?"

"I told her so!"

"Good Lord. You told her *that*! Then what did she tell you?"

"She cried first. Then she became angry. Then she told me everything."

"How much was that?"

"Why, you know—*everything*! That she was sorry she ever saw me; that as a man I wasn't worth Seibert's little finger!"

"That opened your eyes and broke your heart. I see. What else?"

"It wasn't that I didn't care what she said that way. It was other things that she told me—and she laughed, too."

"Of course. The laughing is what hurt."

"No, I didn't care about that. She said—I'm telling only what she said—she said that she saw Nada liked me, and she just wanted to see if she couldn't take me away from Nada. She said Nada had always taken lovers away from her. She said that she had been tired of me—that's why she had tried to make me go away by pretending that she felt wicked to love me. She said that she had been terribly frightened when she found that Gauro had seen us, and that when we got to her father's house she had said as mean things as she could about Seibert because she had always made people understand that she was afraid of him, because he was such a big rough man. And she said that of course she was not going to take the blame of being a faithless wife who was in love with me when she had only been playing with me to amuse herself!"

"And you believe all that, Paullen?"

"No, McGuire. But I don't know what to believe. Then we heard from Nada how he had destroyed everything that belonged to his wife; and Nada said it was because he was so deeply hurt. But before that, McGuire, long before, I had discovered that Oreena was a deceitful, unworthy woman, and I told her so. That was how she answered me, making out that I had been merely a plaything for her. And I was. That much I do believe."

Both then looked at Seibert, who had shifted with a movement of writhing and muttered heavily. For a moment he seemed about to awaken, perhaps disturbed by the sound of talking; but he threw an arm at full length along the bed, turned his head to one side, and continued asleep.

"But why are you *here*?" McGuire asked, in an insistent undertone.

"I had to come. Can't you see? Don't you understand? He liked me, and I wronged him in the way that any miserable dog of a man might have done. And I know it. I feel it, McGuire. I don't know what he will do to me, but whatever it is I'll—I'll—don't you see I couldn't go sneaking off and always be ashamed of myself for a coward? As well as—as—what I was, a cur that stole a man's wife when the man had tried to be his friend. Don't you see the only way I could get back any little bit of self-respect was to come right to him, and say, 'Mr. Seibert, here I am. Do whatever you think right!'"

"No," said McGuire, glancing hastily from the slight boyish form to the great, powerful body on the bed. "No, I don't see. I don't see why you should feel that you owe anything like that to Seibert."

"I don't owe it to Seibert," Paullen said earnestly. "I owe it to myself. It's the only thing I can do and have any respect for myself left. I have got to have something that I am not ashamed to remember. Don't you understand, McGuire?"

"No. No, I don't."

"Nada understood. She tried to keep me from coming. But she understood."

"You told her?"

"Yes."

"Ah," said McGuire.

"Why do you say, 'Ah'?"

"Well, Paullen, you have come. You have shown yourself no coward. You have done all that. Now go; the old boatswain will let you out. Don't be a fool. If the fates chose to have him asleep when you came, consider it as a sign from the gods that you don't need to have your neck broken—and go!"

"No. I shall wait," said Paullen, perceptibly stiffening.

He stood at one side of the room, near the wall, but he did not lean against it. He folded his arms and looked away from McGuire.

McGuire eyed him with long, thoughtful scrutiny, not quite sure whether he admired Paullen for a strange sort of courage or pitied him for a stranger sort of folly.

The lamp cast a brilliant ring of light around itself on the table; elsewhere the room was dim, but objects anywhere in it were visible if the eyes gazed for a moment or two at them.

Seibert's deep stertorous breathing held their attention when they had ceased talking. He slept unrestfully; in every few breaths there would be one that was long-drawn, like a ponderous sigh, and frequently his voice spoke brokenly, without words, as if his troubled breath of itself swept the vocal chords into inarticulate sound.

Suddenly Seibert seemed growling; it was an animal sort of sound, intermittent, and growing deeper. His body strained as if bound by chains; sweat appeared on the high red forehead; his arms twitched, and the fingers of both hands set rigidly. The markings of agony appeared on his coarse, thick features. The sight of his straining and the sounds he made were at once pathetic and alarming, and he struggled like a man in a strait-jacket and under the knees of warders.

"Get out! For God's sake, go!" McGuire shouted at Paullen, who stood with a kind of bewildered dread, his eyes fixed on Seibert.

At the sound of McGuire's voice Seibert abruptly relaxed, sighed heavily, and sat up with a start; then, after a second's daze, he began wiping the sweat from his face with the palm of his hand.

"Whew! I had such a dream! It was that I had hold of——"

He stopped. An expression like perplexed idiocy appeared on his face; and, still sitting, he drew himself up, staring fixedly, stupidly amazed, incredulous. Coming up out of a dream, not yet fully awake, or at least not quite sure that he was awake, he had no rational reason for believing his eyes, for believing that the impalpable body he had struggled to close on and crush in the darkness of a dream had been projected into reality, and stood there in the half-shadows of the room, between himself and the wall. His breath came slowly, cautiously, with the restraint of one intent on not disturbing something that might disappear like wind-blown vapour. He stood up, crouching a little, hunching himself over; he was hardly yet out of his nightmare, and all his senses were still confused by the frustrated violence he had strained to use in the dream.

"There he is now!" Seibert said hoarsely, reassuring himself; and, thus assured of the permanency of Paullen's presence, his breath came fast and heavily, and the dazed expression of his face changed to a glower.

He seized Paullen, grasping him at neck and waist, jerking the boy to him, for a moment holding him as if not yet quite sure that it was not a dream. Seibert's face appeared swollen, and the dark red of his sunburned countenance was stained to a more vivid colour by the rush of hot blood.

McGuire cried at him, "Don't! Seibert! No!" But his voice had no influence; and McGuire caught a glimpse of Paullen's face, white as paper, in the air.

Seibert, breathing hoarsely, in a kind of powerful frenzy, had lifted him from the floor, raised him overhead, held him up at arm's length to dash him down; then Seibert's great body appeared suddenly turned to stone, while the living burden was in his upraised hands. With Paullen over his head Seibert fought within himself; and the long years of harsh self-mastery, of uncompromising self-control, now gave him strength over his rage.

He lowered Paullen, set him on his feet, and gave him a push that sent the boy staggering.

Sweat dripped from all over Seibert's face, and his breathing was like that of a man who has done some terrible labour in the sun. His thick arm shook as he extended it, pointing at Paullen, and shouted, "Why dare you come near me? Go off!"

I don't want that I should see you—I—I——Go! Go!"

Ben Holt, attracted by the shouting, threw open the door and stood aside as Paullen unsteadily passed out, head down, bending slightly forward, as if his straight body had been broken.

9

The remainder of the night Seibert walked about in a preoccupied mood, almost a daze, sometimes trampling and stamping the broken glass from which McGuire, with ironical soliloquy, had drunk his toast to Lalua. The crunching and brittle rasp of the glass seemed to have something in it unconsciously pleasing to him, or perhaps there was a dim gratification in grinding it underfoot, in feeling it break and shatter. At times he sat down, only to rise immediately; and occasionally he made queer, throaty sounds, and clenched his hands. McGuire remained quiet and eyed him warily.

It was near dawn before Seibert, who followed an idea with the persistence of a traveller on a road that has no by-paths, stopped before McGuire and demanded, "Why did they put that fellow here in with me, like that? With me?"

"He came of himself, Seibert. He felt guilty, and wanted to take his punishment."

Seibert glared, uncomprehending.

"It's all over between them," said McGuire. "She told him that she was sorry she ever saw him. She said—Oreena said that he wasn't worth one of your little fingers as a man. She told him so. And more. She is——"

Seibert stepped closer, and commanded quickly, "Again, McGuire! Say that again!"

Then McGuire offered the spurious truth by repeating the bitter things that Oreena, in defensive anger, had said to Paullen when she was desperately trying to save her own appearance of self-respect. McGuire felt that Seibert, amid the ruins of everything that he valued, was entitled to that much satisfaction.

"It is true, McGuire? It is true like you say?"

Seibert towered, awkwardly eager.

"Paullen told it to me."

"Ah!" Seibert was doubtful.

"Their folly soured on them quicker than I thought it would."

Seibert looked down steadily for a moment. "She said that, McGuire? You think Or'na now feels that way?"

"Paullen may do other things, but he doesn't lie."

"Poor little Or'na. Sometimes she is just like a child, McGuire."

"Is she?" he asked, with an air of innocence.

"*Ach!* yes! Just a child. Yes. A little child. McGuire?"

"Yes?"

"You tell me honest. My head is full of tangles, like a jungle. You tell me all that you think about it. Is it right that I should ask her to come back to my house?"

McGuire, on the impulse, nearly cried, "Lord, no!" but he paused a moment thoughtfully.

McGuire had no moral eagerness to see people suffer because they may have happened to deserve suffering. Oreena soon would likely be glad to return to the comforts she had abandoned; these, compared to what she would have in her father's house, would be luxurious, and her pretty little body needed ease and softness as a bird needs a warm nest. It would at least greatly please her vanity to be forgiven, and she would never again be so ready for folly. And Seibert loved her. He wanted her. His unhappiness would be perpetual without her. Just as soon as Oreena fully realised that Paullen was utterly lost to her she would, even though a little reluctantly, be willing to return to Seibert. And Seibert was the sort of man who could forgive; which is something requiring greater strength and self-mastery than not forgiving.

"Tell me, McGuire?" Seibert repeated.

"You know best what you want. I would do that—whatever it is," said the subtle McGuire.

Seibert turned away with an ambiguous, "Ah—uh" to ponder that answer. He walked to the bed and sat down on it, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and staring at the floor.

Boatswain Ben Holt came again on watch at noon. He opened the door and looked in. Seibert sat in the cane chair with his back to the door, and, having glanced at Holt, turned his head away and went on with his own thoughts.

Holt and his mates had been engaged by the consul as the most available men in port to stand watches and keep Seibert and McGuire from leaving the house; and though some of the men, particularly one Hatborn, were inclined to be regular watchdogs, Holt's ideas of wardenship did not extend much beyond the literal observance of instructions.

## 10

Presently Mortimer entered. He appeared very tired. The dark puffs were more prominent under his eyes, and the eyes were weary. He held a freshly-lighted cigar, and a cloud of dark smoke was soon drifting over his head. After a glance at McGuire he looked at Seibert, who continued sitting with feet wide apart, and with a sullen stare looked across his shoulder at the consul.

Mortimer said wearily, slowly, and with effort:

"Seibert, you may go to your plantation, or wherever you like. I am not yet sure that you ought to be released. I am still doubtful, but you can have the benefit of the doubt. Captain David of the *Bellarius*—you know of her—came yesterday and sailed this morning. He knew of Gauro, the man you killed. It appears that the native's life was forfeit in Fiji for a crime on a plantation there—the Wateson. I did not know that when I accused you of murder. Captain David said that you should not be held accountable. I have discussed the matter this morning with many people, and they are all of the opinion, Seibert, that you should benefit by—er—by the fact that Gauro deserved what you did. And as for your interference with Penwenn—well, Penwenn has changed his mind about wanting Nada Combe and young Paullen. Besides, Seibert, there is a great deal of sympathy toward you on Pulotu since your fire, and—er—the blacks have been loose. You may go. When the German consul returns he may—perhaps he may—no, nobody will trouble you more over that, Seibert. And I, Seibert, I am damned sorry!"

Seibert got up slowly. His eyes were glowing; his face grew darker and darker. "You do this thing," he shouted wrathfully, "for something that fellow Gauro did on a plantation in Fiji! When you see my place all burned, you come and you say, 'Seibert, I'm sorry. Everybody thinks you did right to kill a fellow that was bad in Fiji!'"

"I did not shoot him for what he done in Fiji! I shoot him for what he did on Pulotu. You just remember that, Mr. Consul Mortimer! My blacks ruin everything they can while I am here, and you try to get out of the blame for what you have done to me by talking about Fiji! Don't tell lies to me!"

Mortimer's face flushed as he pulled with nervous jerks at his moustache; but after a moment's painful effort he said, though appearing about to choke, "You are wrong, Seibert. You know that you are wrong!"

Then he turned and walked rapidly out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Seibert continued for a time to glare at the door, his body remaining rigid and threatening; and when he had looked away, changed his position, and put down his temper, he even appeared to forget that he was no longer in custody.

McGuire, approaching him, said, "Well, Seibert, I wish that I were going out with you."

He stared at McGuire, for an instant not remembering that he was at liberty; then, bitterly: "For something that fellow did in Fiji! *Ach Gott!* McGuire, and I now go out to my place that is all burned. Ho, well, McGuire, twenty years ago it was worse than that; and I"—his hand swung up to his chest, patting it—"I will make it all right over again."

Then his face became blank; his thoughts were far off, perhaps puzzling among the heavy expenses, the need of money, the baffling lack of labour, the eternal and unresting encroachments of the beaten jungle, and the stubbornness of the soil.

He came to himself with a heavy start, looked about, then walked slowly across to his hat. He put it on and stood still, gazing about as if trying to recall something. Then: "I think maybe you are a good fellow, McGuire. But I am no more going to like anybody. That Hausen, I liked him. That Paullen—I thought there was a fine fellow. My little Oreena——"

He did not try to say more. After a moment or two he vacantly flourished a hand at McGuire with much the same sort of gesture that would have been used to someone a quarter of a mile off, and started out; but at the door he stopped and turned. "Good-bye, you, McGuire. At my house you will always have a place to come and stay, for you are a good

fellow, I think. It is hard to tell about you fellows. It is hard to tell about everybody. Sometimes I don't know even about myself."

He gave another sweep of the big arm, then with his great, round, coarse face gravely set, went out, tramping heavily.

## 11

At this time on Puluotu the weather was hot and sticky; the un-iced food was particularly tasteless and unsatisfying, while insects night and day swarmed about with the persistence of an Egyptian plague.

Penwenn was ready to return to San Francisco. He could not afford to idle about indefinitely for the profitless satisfaction of seeing a vessel bear McGuire off, when the vessel would as readily take charge of him though Penwenn was not present. He wanted to get away. He realised fully that he had made a mistake in following Nada; sympathy everywhere was with her, even among his own sailors.

Mortimer had said, "You must understand, Mr. Penwenn, that as the British consul I might involve myself in difficulties if I turned McGuire over to you, a private citizen. But an American naval vessel carries a kind of unquestionable authority for me since I am acting American consul. No one could ever wonder why or complain if the *Panther* took McGuire, though there are some British claims against him, and Williams——"

No one chose to stir much in the heat, so Penwenn came on shore in the evening, having previously sent word that he would call for a final visit with the consul.

He was received by Mortimer on the coolest part of the veranda, where, after rising to greet Penwenn, he reclined again in the long chair and told Tasese to bring brandy and soda.

Mortimer appeared more weary than usual; the puffs under his eyes were darker, as if they had been newly stained, and his breathing was shallow. Both men seemed tired, dispirited, and the very weariness of manner between them was like a sort of friendliness.

"I have to be returning to San Francisco."

Mortimer nodded sympathetically.

The boy came with the brandy and soda, and a box of long black, thick cigars. He placed the tray on a stand between the two men.

"Barometer's falling," Penwenn remarked, pouring freely of the brandy. "Storm to-night. If it's clear to-morrow, I'll leave."

"We need it. Clear out this blasted sultriness," Mortimer returned, studying the symmetrical row of cigars as if for subtle markings that distinguished some as better than others.

"Miserable climate," said Penwenn.

"Beastly."

"How do you men stand it?"

"We don't—we don't," Mortimer replied quickly. "This time of the year. The only two men this climate never appears to affect are old Tom Combe and Seibert."

"Ah, Seibert," Penwenn said sullenly. "You have let him loose?"

Mortimer lighted a cigar. His hand was unsteady. The climate, this time of year, always unnerved him; at least, he said it was the climate.

"You know why, too," he replied, with a long glance.

Penwenn nodded, as if satisfied, sipped at his glass, sucked at his cigar.

"He's ruined himself, I fear. Completely ruined himself," said Mortimer reflectively.

"Among the residents, you mean? Ah!" Penwenn showed a slight hopefulness.

"Financially. Heavily involved with the Godeffroys. They loaned heavily. Foolishly. They have always admired him.

They *could* pull him out, but they won't. Queer fellow, Penwenn, that Seibert. You saw the parked grounds. He has thrown away thousands, just wasted it in that fashion. Some say he did it for his wife—wanted to make her happy. But, of course, he was doing it before he married. No business head at all, and will be advised by no one. He could have made a fortune, but coffee trees—flowers—cotton—horses—equipment—labourers—and stubbornness!"

A blast of wind came out of the stillness, rushing overhead, rattling the palms, setting the house a-tremble, stirring the air until the lamp's flame quivered; then passed, and all was quiet again.

Mortimer got up slowly, and, taking one of the lamps, said:

"Let's see what the barometer is doing now."

Penwenn arose, tapped the ash of his cigar into the tray, and followed.

"Still falling," said Mortimer, in a tired, uninterested voice.

Another blast of wind passed over the tree-tops. The air cooled suddenly. From a great distance the rolling of thunder reached them.

"I had better be returning on board. I'll be caught in the rain," said Penwenn.

"Yes, it will rain. Rain hard."

"I am going out in the morning, if the sun is shining. Storm will be over, don't you think, by morning?"

"Yes, oh, yes. By morning. Most likely."

"Good-bye, consul. Any time, anything Penwenn-Penwenn & Company can do, let me know. Consider it a favour, I shall. You'll send that rogue McGuire along to San Francisco?"

"Yes, yes, certainly. When the *Panther* comes. I appreciate what you say. I trust you understand my position."

"Assuredly. Good-bye, consul."

"Good-bye, Mr. Penwenn."

Mortimer returned to his chair. He felt chilled. The tropics had debilitated his body, which was not strong, until a slight fall in the temperature made him cold. He let his cigar go out.

After a long time he wondered what the barometer was doing, and, taking his lamp again, went to see.

As he looked at the barometer he shuddered; and then thunder broke overhead. Rain began to fall with the sound of hail striking, the first gust of the rain was that heavy. The dazzling shimmer of lightning played through the house for a moment, and wind went by, galloping like cavalry. The mats fastened up to screen the veranda quivered and flapped.

Then Mortimer raised the lamp high above his head, so that its glow would be cast farther, and he said quickly: "Ho, there! Who are you?"

"It's me, sir," answered a hoarse, excited voice, and Ben Holt stamped from out the shadows. "McGuire's gone!"

"What's this, Holt? What are you saying?"

"McGuire's gone, sir. I come to go on watch an' found Nat Hatborn dead drunk in the kitchen! I've shook an' shook 'im, but he wouldn't speak. I kicked him, an' he only cussed. McGuire's gone, an' a night like this the devil his-self couldn't find nobody."

"Gone!"

Mortimer was angered. He knew how people would laugh at him.

"Yes'r, he's sure gone."

"But how, Holt? How did he get Hatborn intoxicated?"

"Well, sir, I dunno. There's only one bottle on the floor, an' Hatborn could've drunk six without wobblin' much."

Mortimer walked a few feet away from the barometer and placed the lamp on a table. He tore a strip of paper from a magazine, twisted it into a quill, then held it over the lamp, and when it caught fire he relighted his cigar; but at once the cigar fell from his mouth. An expression of intense, pained surprise came over his face, and he put both hands to his



breast, as if to snatch and pull away something that was hurting him. With two or three unsteady, backward steps he moved toward a chair, but before he got to the chair, or before the bewildered Holt could reach him, he toppled over.

Holt shouted, as if arousing the watch below, "He's dead! The consul's dead!"

The dapper Tasese came running lightly. His soft, womanish face glowed with fright, and he began howling.

Mortimer swore weakly and raised himself on an elbow. He took a cautious breath, and sank back again, as if he had been stabbed.

"Get me into bed," he said, with strange composure. Then testily to the bellowing boy: "Stop that blasted racket, can't you?"

Mortimer felt that he was done for; in any case, he could not remain longer in the tropics. Dr. Lemaitre had warned him repeatedly against coffee, particularly against strong tobacco.

Holt's clothes were soggy from the rain he had come through, and the water dripped from him as he raised Mortimer, who tried to help himself, moving cautiously, warily, expecting another stab, and feeling a growing numbness all through his body.

Tasese and Holt got him to his bed, laid him on it. He began to shiver. They pulled the covering about him. He lay exhausted, with eyes partly glazed and both hands on his left breast, as if feebly shielding his heart.

"This, this," he said quietly, "means that McGuire gets away. I can do nothing now. Other people on Pulotu will be glad of it. And he knows the island like a native—like a native."

## 12

McGuire's escape had been easily made. Among the boxes of medicine and little phials left in the room of Balte-Brun was one that McGuire, by inquisitively sniffing, had recognised as laudanum before he made out Dr. Lemaitre's scrawl.

McGuire knew the sort of disagreeable fellow that Hatborn was, and, having watched and talked with him on guard, knew just about what to expect.

McGuire had got one of the men to give him a bottle of wine, and, drinking about half of it, poured the laudanum into what was left; then, that evening, waiting his chance, he pretended to be trying to get a drink from the bottle without letting Hatborn see, and of course Hatborn did see.

"Here! Here!" he called. "Give me that bottle."

"Go to hell," said McGuire. "You'll not drink this!"

"Give that up! Hear me?" Hatborn demanded severely.

McGuire appeared cowed, and reluctantly surrendered his bottle.

"I won't, eh?" Hatborn sneered, and, tipping the bottle, drank it in rapid gulps, in the manner of one accustomed to hard liquors. He was used to queer flavours in what he found to drink at bar shanties and on water-fronts. He swallowed it down before McGuire's face, just to show who was the guard and who was the prisoner.

Hatborn had then returned to the kitchen and closed the door, which McGuire gently opened and peered through. He saw a silly, mystified expression come over Hatborn's face. The fellow rubbed his eyes, grimaced in a vague effort to keep off sleepiness, then, sitting down, fell heavily across his arms on the table.

McGuire was almost to Combe's plantation before the storm broke. He wanted to pass that way and leave word of his whereabouts before he took to the hills and went in hiding with a native family that he knew.

When it began to rain he was within a mile or less of the house, and pushed on rapidly. As he entered the grounds he saw several lights in the distance. At first he did not realise that these were lanterns, jerking and flickering, and that their light was crossed and recrossed by the dark forms of persons moving about in the storm.

He knew that something alarming must have stirred the household; so he hurried forward on the run, and came to the house just as he saw a form with a lantern pass along the veranda and enter a lighted room. It was Mr. Grinnell.

A moment later McGuire was at the door, and paused as he opened it, then entered slowly, listening. Three or four

persons—all his friends—were in the room, but at first they hardly noticed him. Paullen and Nada were standing together, and she smiled, but did not seem to wonder how he came to be there.

Paullen was sopping wet, and Nada wore a rubber coat that was too large, from which water dripped. She had removed her soaked straw hat, but held the shapeless thing in a hand that hung wearily at her side.

Combe sat with legs extended and head forward, his vague eyes fastened on the floor. He twisted and untwisted his fingers together. He had been out in the storm without a hat, and his thin grey hair appeared to be splattered over his head, and the wet had caused his beard to cling together and become sharply peaked, so that, except for the writhing of his fingers, he would have been like a drowned man loosely propped in the chair.

Mr. Grinnell, in wet black rubbers, that glistened and shimmered, placed his lantern on the floor, and said with an air of dejection:

"We have looked everywhere, Combe—everywhere."

"But you ain't found her? You ain't found her?"

"I've turned out every man, black and white, Combe. They are still wandering about, looking."

"You don't think Seibert's done something?" Combe asked, looking up.

At the mention of Seibert's name Paullen walked to a far side of the room and stood looking out of a window, through which he could see nothing except when the lightning flashed.

No one answered Combe, though his faded eyes turned hopefully from face to face, as if wanting to hear evil words of Seibert. Then he dropped his eyes again, and went on twisting his fingers like one in pain.

Mr. Grinnell absently moved a little closer to Nada, and said, "That fellow I sent to Seibert's should be back—bad roads or not." Dropping his voice so Combe would not overhear: "You still think she may have gone to him?"

Nada glanced a little uneasily at her father, and nodded quickly.

"When did she disappear?" asked McGuire.

Mr. Grinnell then noticed him for the first time. McGuire, too, was covered with mud, and soaked through. "How did you get here?" asked Mr. Grinnell, with brightening interest.

"A fellow went to sleep and I walked out. I can't stay long, but what of Oreena? She is gone?"

Nada again glanced cautiously at her father; then she took McGuire's arm and led him aside.

"To-night Oreena would not eat supper, and told me that she was going to bed. She has been terribly unhappy. After a time I went up to her room to see if she was asleep, and she was not there. I looked all through the house. I went to Mr. Grinnell's house—John Paullen is stopping there, and I thought she might have gone there. I could not find her, and I told father. Everybody has been searching everywhere. We can't find even a sign of where she has been."

"You think she may have gone——" McGuire gestured.

"We heard to-day that he had been released. Oreena said that she wished that she dared to go back to him. She was terribly affected by the way Mr. Seibert destroyed everything that had belonged to her. One minute she said that it meant he loved her, and the next that she knew it showed that he was glad she was gone."

"And he?" McGuire nodded toward Paullen.

"She never loved him," said Nada quickly.

"Or Seibert either."

"No, perhaps not, Dan. But she wanted love. That is all she did want from almost anybody. She knows now that Mr. Seibert really loved her. And suffering makes so much difference in what you think of things. She was really awfully sorry for Mr. Seibert after his fire, and the way the consul treated him. Dan, she said one terrible thing to-day. She said that she wished that *she* had killed that Dr. Hausen. Then, she said, Mr. Seibert would have forgiven her everything."

Oreena had said another thing that day which had deeply touched Nada, though she did not then speak of it: "Oh, it was wicked of me to try to steal John Paullen from you! But the first time you mentioned his name I knew that you loved him. And I had never taken a lover from anybody; and I so wanted to! I wanted the thrill of it, and I tried to steal him. Oh, I

was so miserable and I am so wicked. Please don't forgive me! Nobody should ever forgive me!"

A broad sheet of lightning passed through the grounds, and Paullen turned from the window as if a little dazed, saying:

"Seibert has come. I saw him on horseback there."

"Who? Seibert?" said Mr. Grinnell. Then he picked up his lantern and went out.

Paullen started to leave the room in the opposite direction, but McGuire caught at his shoulder.

"Don't, McGuire! He is coming in. I can't stay. You know I can't."

"Yes, I know. But don't go far. I am making for the hills as soon as we find out about Oreena. You are going with me, and stay with me. Understand? You will do it?"

"I want to. That's what I want to do. I'll wait somewhere outside."

Then he left the room rapidly.

As McGuire faced about, Nada was looking steadily at him. She had overheard; and she then was aware that McGuire, too, conspired against her love of Paullen, and was taking him away; but since it was a love that she could not declare, and would not admit, she must stand mute, without protest, and without complaint, and watch him go from her in a way that meant he was never to return.

"Ah, Dan," she said a little reproachfully, and was silent.

### 13

Then Seibert came in with Mr. Grinnell, carrying the lantern behind him. Seibert was covered in a rubber coat that fell loosely about him. He wore his leather boots, and the big spurs struck with a scraping rasp as he walked. The large rubber hat was like a black helmet. He did not have gloves, but the supple whip swung at his wrist.

This was the first time that he had entered Combe's house in many years, but he was thinking of one thing only, and showed no sign of remembering now the enmity that he had always ignored. He did not make a gesture of any kind, except to push up his hat. His large face was not in the least flexible, and looked now dull and troubled, as if by a secret pain that he did not understand. His long coat of shining wet rubber rustled and swished at every movement, and seemed to cloak much of his awkwardness. He walked directly to Combe and said, "I come here to take my wife home when we find her. Why is she gone?"

Combe sat perfectly motionless. His fingers had ceased their writhing, and a queer glint appeared in the washed-out eyes. There was something about him that was strange, and though he sat dripping wet and loosely, as if the water had softened his bones, he suddenly cried in a shrill voice, "She won't go home with ye! I won't let 'er! She's my daughter, an'—an' you've been mean to her!"

Everyone glanced anxiously at Seibert, but he, merely staring as if dully perplexed, looked down at Combe and said nothing.

"An' you're ruined!" Combe squawked, a flash of grotesque glee appearing on his wrinkled face. "You're ruined—like Waller said you'd be! You're ruined! Hee-hee-hee-hee!"

Combe laughed, toothless and mirthless:

"Hee-hee-hee!"

Seibert stiffened; his great body seemed to grow larger and larger.

"I? Ruined?" he asked, in slow dazed depth of voice, then struck his breast powerfully. "Never! No matter what happens, nothing can happen enough to ruin me!"

Far off heavy thunder rolled on and on, as if all the battlements of heaven were being toppled down.

"Hee-hee-hee!"

"Father!" Nada cried, suddenly realising what had happened, and, running to him, pressed her hands against him.

"Ruined! Hee-hee!" old Combe muttered happily, sinking back, relaxed, smiling foolishly, his twisted brain now

flickering with madness. "She's hid from him. He can't get Or'na. Hee-hee! An' he's ruined!"

## 14

It was Lily's white husband, a tall, lazy beachcomber type of man, a sort of foreman over the blacks, who came running out of the rain to say that Oreena had been found.

"Tono found her—found her hat up there first. He knew she used to go up there an' just sit and sit, lonesome-like. Then he came back and got me an' some boys to go look there at the bottom o' the cliff. They're bringin' her now. I came on ahead to tell you, an'——"

Seibert's face remained dully blank, stolid, mask-like; it was as coarsely featured as if cast of rough, dark-red metal, and his eyes, which seemed peering through the mask, had an unseeing, glazed expression. He was like a man encased in armour, who could show nothing of what he felt. With quick, heavy steps he walked toward the door.

The foreman, at first thinking that Seibert meant to speak with him, was directly in the way, and barely shifted aside, brushed by the rubber coat.

Mr. Grinnell followed with his lantern; then McGuire and the foreman. "What's the matter with that fellow?" the foreman asked in a puzzled grumble.

Rain fell as it falls only in the tropics, with hours of torrential downpouring. It streamed from the palms, ran in sheets from the veranda thatch, falling to the ground with continuous muffled splashing, like the sobbing of many voices.

Lightning from a harmless distance repeatedly dipped its broad flame into the darkness, and the dull jars of thunder trembled across the heavens like the rolling of mighty wheels on a bridge that spanned the sky.

Far off down the grove faint lights seemed struggling among the tree-trunks, gleaming and vanishing; and the foreman pointed, saying, "There, they're coming."

Seibert, with Mr. Grinnell hurrying in silence at his side and keeping the lantern before them, strode on with hard, heavy steps. Occasionally the spurs clicked; and there was a perpetual *swish-swish* of rubber coats that glistened and shimmered darkly under the rain in the light.

As they drew near they heard the sound of one voice wailing, with shrill rise and whimpering fall of tone.

"That's Tono," said the foreman. "She was good to him."

Oreena was borne on the bare shoulder of a black. Many black, squatty, naked shapes pressed closely about the lanterns, with which they had searched at the foot of the cliff where Oreena, desperately unloved, had thrown herself.

Seibert pushed among them, his hands out, as if pushing aside tall grass. He lifted her from the black's shoulder, and, bending forward, held her small, bedraggled, broken body under the lantern which Mr. Grinnell raised.

The white glare of the lantern fell on, and rain streaked through the light and beat on the cold little face, as if cruelly to wash away the last trace and suggestion of its beauty. She lay on his arms as if drowned. Her tangle of soft, bushy hair hung and clung about her like tarred strings. Her dark eyes were half opened, with a listless stare, as if vaguely watching.

Seibert opened his rubber coat and drew it, black as a pall, over her body, sheltering her, holding her tightly.

## 15

Seibert carried her into the house, up the stairs, and placed her weary and broken little body on a big bed in the room where she had lived before she came to him; in the same bed where, in gloomy loneliness, she had once lain awake in the night-time, scheming how to get into his affection. The fever of loneliness and lovelessness was now gone from her for ever, as if at last put away by the gentleness with which she was borne.

The little gilded lamp burned with a small flame on the table before the mirror where she had so often watched herself, playing with smiles and tossing her head in the make-believe of triumph over imaginary lovers; and the mirror now darkly took up the scene within the room, as if to show, in the same depths where her vanity had preened itself, how futile had been her youth and beauty. She had been only a foolish girl, with no one to show her that selfishness was

unlovely, that her proud little artificial airs made herself unhappy, that the schemings of her inexperienced child's head were at best but a flimsy net.

Nada threw herself half on the bed, enfolding the cold, wet little body as if to warm it back into life; her tears ran from her cheek to Oreena's, and her low crying was the only sound within the room.

Mr. Grinnell, with his head uncovered, stood in the pool of his lantern's light. Beside him, old Combe, now blessed with a harmless madness, smiled secretively as he held up a heavy glass lamp that burned a dirty, smoking wick; and with an idiot air of furtiveness he peered at Seibert.

Seibert groped vaguely toward his hat, but when his hand touched the stiff rubber brim he unconsciously pulled it tighter on his head. He stood a long time without moving, a great figure shrouded in wet, glistening black. Even now he showed none of the flexibility of grief. His face expressed nothing but a dull heaviness, though the rain that was still on his cheeks gave a strange impression, as if a mask could weep.

"Ah, she was just a little child," he said with low hoarseness, and for a moment seemed trying to say something more, but said nothing.

Then he turned, at first a little dazed, as if hardly aware of what he was doing, and in leaving the room he walked toward a doorless wall.

McGuire picked up the lantern and swung it toward the door; then Seibert, after an instant's pause, went toward the lantern, which McGuire now carried on ahead to light him down through the dark barracks of a house. His spurs scraped and clicked. At times the floor shook under his great weight and heavy steps.

They came out on the veranda, and while walking along it toward the steps, lightning winked rapidly, then flashed steadily for a second or two, making the night brighter than any day. This disclosed Paullen, solitary as a lost soul in the midst of its punishment, and his pale, staring face appeared as much in pain as if he were.

Seibert stopped, his breathing instantly hoarse and quick. The lightning vanished; a deeper darkness closed over the veranda, and nothing beyond the circular glow of the lantern could be seen. No one spoke; McGuire hurried on; and Seibert, after a doubtful moment as to whether he had seen a ghost or a man, followed. His first step made a sound of stumbling, then his stride became firm and heavy, his spurs clicked, his coat rasped and rustled from the swing of his arms.

He tramped down the steps and to the dripping palm-shelter where his horse was tied. McGuire held up the lantern to the rope's knot, and Seibert drew it loose, then faced about slowly. The light was between them, on both their faces.

"Ah, McGuire, what a fool that I—I, Adolph Seibert— should try to graft a little flower bud to a big old man like me."

With a quick, powerful swing of fist he smote his chest and the blow was like a blow of punishment.

He swung himself into the saddle, reined the horse back, turning northward; then rode at a gallop into the darkness.

THE END

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[The end of *Seibert of the Island* by Gordon Young]