

Short Stories

Louis Becke

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Short Stories

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Short Stories

DESCHARD OF ONEAKA

(The native pronunciation of Kuria is like "Courier."—L.B.)

Short Stories

I.

Among the Gilbert Group—that chain of low-lying sandy atolls annexed by the British Government two years ago—there is one island that may be said to be both fertile and beautiful; yet for all this Kuria—for so it is called by the natives of the group generally—has remained almost uninhabited for the past forty years. Together with the lagoon island of Aranuka, from which it is distant about six miles, it belongs to the present King of Apamama,² a large and densely populated atoll situated half a degree to the eastward. Thirty years ago, however, the grandfather of the lad who is now the ruler of Apamama had cause to quarrel with the Kurians, and settled the dispute by invading their island and utterly destroying them, root and branch. To-day it is tenanted only by the young king's slaves.

Of all the many groups and archipelagoes that stud the North and South Pacific from the rocky, jungle-covered Bonins to Juan Fernandez,⁴ the islands of the Gilbert Group are—save for this Kuria—the most uninviting and monotonous in appearance. They are for the most part but narrow strips of sandy soil, densely clothed, it is true, with countless thousands of stately cocoanut palms varied with groves of pandanus and occasional patches of stunted scrub, but flat and unpleasing to the eye. Seldom exceeding two miles in width—although, as is the case at Drummond's Island, or Taputeouea, they sometimes reach forty in the length of their sweeping curve—but few present a continuous and unbroken stretch of land, for the greater number consist of perhaps two or three score of small islands, divided only by narrow and shallow channels, through which at high water the tide sweeps in from the ocean to the calm waters of the lagoons with amazing velocity. These strips of land, whether broken or continuous, form the eastern or windward boundaries of the lagoons; on the western or lee side lie barrier reefs, between whose jagged coral walls there are, at intervals widely apart, passages sufficiently deep for a thousand-ton ship to pass through in safety, and anchor in the transparent depths of the lagoon within its protecting arms.

* * * * *

Years ago, in the days when the whaleships from Nantucket, and Salem, and Martha's Vineyard, and New Bedford cruised northward towards the cold seas of Japan and Tchantar Bay, and the smoky glare of their tryworks lit up the ocean at night, the Gilberts were a wild place, and many a murderous scene was enacted on white beach and shady palm grove. Time after time some whaler, lying to in fancied security outside the passage of a lagoon, with half her crew ashore intoxicated with sour toddy,⁸ and the other half on board unsuspecting of danger, would be attacked by the ferocious brown people. Swimming off at night-time, with knives held between their teeth, a desperate attempt would be made to cut off the ship. Sometimes the attempt succeeded; and then canoe after canoe would put out from the shore, and the wild people, swarming up the ship's side, would tramp about her ensanguined decks and into the cabins seeking for plunder and fiery New England rum. Then, after she had been gutted of everything of value to her captors, as the last canoe pushed off, smoke and then flames would arise, and the burning ship would drift away with the westerly current, and the tragedy of her fate, save to the natives of the island, and perhaps some renegade white man who had stirred them to the deed, would never be known.

* * * * *

In those days—long ere the advent of the first missionary to the isolated equatorial atolls of Polynesia and Melanesia—there were many white men scattered throughout the various islands of the Ellice,¹⁰ Gilbert, and Marshall groups. Men, these, with a past that they cared not to speak of to the few strangers that they might chance to meet in their savage retreats. Many were escaped convicts from Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales, living, not in dread of their wild native associates, but in secret terror of recapture by a man-of-war and a return to the horrors of that dreadful past. Casting away the garb of civilisation and tying around their loins the airiri or grass girdle of the Gilbert Islanders, they soon became in appearance, manners, language, and thoughts pure natives. For them the outside world meant a life of degradation, possibly a shameful death. And as the years went by and the bitter memories of the black days of old, resonant with the clank of fetters and the warder's harsh cry, became dulled and faint, so died away that once for-ever-haunting fear of discovery and recapture. In Teaké, the bronzed, half-naked savage chief of Maiana, or Mési, the desperate leader of the natives that cut off the

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barque Addie Passmore at Marakei, the identity of such men as "Nuggety" Jack West and Macy O'Shea, once of Van Diemen's Land or Norfolk Island, was lost forever.

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II.

On Kuria, the one beautiful island of the Gilberts, there lived four such white men as those I speak of. Whence they came they alone knew. Two of them—a Portuguese deserter from a whaler and a man named Corton—had been some years on the island when they were joined by two others who came over from Apamama in a boat. One was called Tamu (Tom) by the natives, and from the ease with which he spoke the Gilbert Island dialect and his familiarity with native customs, he had plainly lived many years among the natives; the other was a tall, dark-skinned, and morose-looking man of nearly fifty. He was known as Hari to the natives—once, in that outer world from which some crime had dis severed him forever, he was Henry Deschard.

Although not familiar with either the language or the customs of the ferocious inhabitants of the Gilbert Group, it was soon seen by the ease with which he acquired both that Hari had spent long years roaming about the islands of the Pacific. In colour he was darker than the Kurians themselves; in his love of the bloodshed and slaughter that so often ran riot in native quarrels he surpassed even the fiercest native; and as he eagerly espoused the cause of any Kurian chief who sought his aid he rapidly became a man of note on the island, and dreaded by the natives elsewhere in the group.

There were then over a thousand people living on Kuria—or rather, on Kuria and Oneaka, for the island is divided by one of those narrow channels before mentioned; and at Oneaka Tamu and Deschard lived, while the Portuguese and the man Corton had long held sway with the native chief of Kuria.

During the time the four renegades had lived on the island two vessels that had touched there had had narrow escapes from seizure by the natives. The first of these, a small Hawaiian whaling brig, was attacked when she was lying becalmed between Kuria and Aranuka. A breeze springing up, she escaped after the loss of a boat's crew, who were entrapped on the latter island. In this affair Deschard and Tamu had taken part; in the next—an attempt to capture a sandalwooding barque bound to China—he was leader, with Corton as his associate. The sandalwooder, however, carried a large and well-armed crew, and the treacherous surprise so elaborately planned came to ignominious failure. Deschard accused his fellow-beachcomber of cowardice at a critical moment. The two men became bitter enemies, and for years never spoke to each other.

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III.

But one afternoon a sail was sighted standing in for the island, and in their hateful bond of villainy the two men became reconciled, and agreed with Pedro and Tamu and some hundreds of natives to try to decoy the vessel to an anchor and cut her off. The beachcombers, who were tired of living on Kuria, were anxious to get away; the natives desired the plunder to be obtained from the prize. A compact was then made that the ship, after the natives had done with her, was not to be burnt, but was to be handed over to the white men, who were to lead the enterprise.

* * * * *

Sailing slowly along till she came within a mile of the reef, the vessel hove to and lowered a boat. She was a large brigantine,¹⁸ and the murderous beings who watched her from the shore saw with cruel pleasure that she did not appear to carry a large crew.

It had been agreed upon that Corton, who had special aptitude for such work, should meet the boat and endeavor to lure the crew into the interior, under the promise of giving them a quantity of fresh-water fish from the artificial ponds belonging to the chief, while Deschard and the other two, with their body of native allies, should remain at the village on Oneaka, and at the proper moment attack the ship.

As the boat drew near, the officer who was in charge saw that although there were numbers of natives clustered together on the beach, the greater portion were women and children. He had with him five men, all armed with muskets and cutlasses, and although extremely anxious to avoid a collision, he was not at all alarmed. The natives meanwhile preserved a passive attitude, and when the men in the boat, at a word from the officer, stopped rowing, backed her in stern first, and then lay on their oars, they nearly all sat down on the sand and waited for him to speak.

Standing up in the boat, the officer hailed—

"Hallo there, ashore! Any white men living here?"

For a minute or so there was no answer, and the eyes of the natives turned in the direction of one of their number who kept well in the background.

Again the seaman hailed, and then a man, seemingly a native, stout and muscular, with hair falling down in thick masses upon his reddish-brown shoulders, walked slowly out from the others, and folding his brawny arms across his naked chest, he answered—

"Yes; there's some white men here."

The officer, who was the mate of the brigantine, then spoke for a few minutes to a young man who pulled bow oar, and who from his dress was not one of the crew, and said finally, "Well, let us make sure that there is no danger first, Maurice."

The young man nodded, and then the mate addressed the seeming native again:

"There's a young fellow here wants to come ashore; he wants to see one of the white men here. Can he come ashore?"

"Of course he can. D'ye think we're a lot o' cannibals here? I'm a white man myself," and he laughed coarsely; then added quickly, "Who does he want to see?"

The man who pulled the bow oar sprang to his feet.

"I want to see Henry Deschard!"

"Do you?" was the sneering response. "Well, I don't know as you can. This isn't his day at home, like; besides that, he's a good long way from here just now."

"I've got good news for him," urged the man called Maurice.

The beachcomber meditated a few seconds; then he walked down to the boat.

"Look here," he said, "I'm telling the exac' truth. Deschard's place is a long way from here, in the bush too, so you can't go there in the boat; but look here, why can't you chaps come along with me? I'll show you the way, and you'll have a good look at the island. There's nothin' to be afraid of, I can tell you. Why, these natives is scared of all them guns there that you won't see 'em for dust when you come with me; an' the chief says as you chaps can drag one of his fish-ponds."

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The mate was tempted; but his orders were to allow only the man Maurice to land, and to make haste back as soon as his mission was accomplished. Shaking his head to the renegade's wily suggestion, he, however, told Maurice that he could go and endeavor to communicate with Deschard. In the meantime he would return to the ship, and tell the captain—"and the other" (these last words with a look full of meaning at the young man) that everything was going on all right.

Foiled in his plan of inducing all the men to come ashore, Corton assumed a careless manner, and told Maurice that he was still willing to conduct him to Deschard, but that he would not be able to return to the ship that night, as the distance was too great.

The mate was agreeable to this, and bidding the beachcomber and his victim good-day, he returned to the ship.

Holding the young man's hand in his, the burly renegade passed through the crowd of silent natives, and spoke to them in their own tongue.

"Hide well thy spears and clubs, my children; 'tis not yet time to act."

Still clasping the hand of his companion, he led the way through the native town, and then into the narrow bush track that led to Oneaka, and in another five minutes they were alone, or apparently so, for nought could be heard in the fast gathering darkness but their own footsteps as they trod the leafy path, and the sound of the breaching surf long miles away.

Suddenly the beachcomber stopped, and in a harsh voice said—

"What is the good news for Deschard?"

"That I cannot tell you," answered the stripling, firmly, though the grim visage, tattooed body, and now threatening aspect of his questioner might well have intimidated even a bolder man, and instinctively he thrust his hand into the bosom of his shirt and grasped a letter he carried there.

"Then neither shall Deschard know it," said the man savagely, and throwing himself upon the young man he bore him to the ground, while shadowy, naked figures glided out from the blackness of the forest and bound and gagged him without a sound. The carrying him away from the path the natives placed him, without roughness, under the shelter of an empty house, and then left him.

The agony of mind endured by the helpless prisoner may be imagined when, unable to speak or move, he saw the beachcomber and his savage followers vanish into the darkness; for the letter which he carried had been written only a few hours before by the wife of the man Deschard, telling him of her loving quest, and of her and her children's presence on board the brigantine.

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IV.

At daylight next morning some native women, passing by the deserted house on their way to work in the puraka plantations of Oneaka, saw the figure of the messenger lying dead. One of the women, named Niapó, in placing her hand upon his bosom to feel if he yet breathed, found the letter which had cost him his life. For nearly twenty years she kept possession of it, doubtless from some superstitious motive, and then it was bought from her by a white trader from Apamama, named Randall,²⁰ by whom it was sent to the Rev. Mr. Damon,²¹ the "Sailor's Friend," a well-known missionary in Honolulu. This was the letter:—

MY DEAR HUSBAND,—It is nearly three years since I got your letter, but I dared no risk writing to you, even if I had know of a ship leaving for the South Seas or the whale fishery. None of the sandalwooding people in Sydney seemed even to know the name of this island (Courier?). My dear husband, I have enough money now, thank God, to end all our troubles. Your letter was brought to me at Parramatta by a sailor—an American, I think. He gave it first to Maurice. I would have rewarded him, but before I could speak to him he had gone. For ten years I have waited and prayed to God to bring us together again. We came to Sydney in the same ship as Major D—, of the 77th. He has always been so good to us, and so has his wife. Nell is sixteen now, Laura eighteen. God grant that I will see you in a few hours. The captain says that he will land us all at one of the places in the Dutch East Indies.²³ I have paid him £100, and am to pay him £100 when you are safely on board. I have been so miserable for the past year, as Major D— had heard that a man-of-war was searching the islands, and I was in such terrible fear that we would never meet again. Come quickly and God bless you, my dear husband. Maurice insisted and begged to be allowed to take this to you. He is nineteen years old now, but will not live long—has been a faithful and good lad. Laura is eighteen and Nell nearly sixteen now. We are now close to Courier, and should see you ere long.—Your loving and now joyful wife,—ANNA DESCHARD.

* * * * *

In the big maniapa, or council house, on Oneaka, two hundred armed and naked savages were sitting awaiting the arrival of Corton and his warriors from Kuria. A little apart from the muttering, excited natives, and seated together, were the man Deschard and the two other beachcombers, Pedro and Tamu.

As Corton and his men filed across the gravelled pathway that led to the maniapa, Deschard, followed by the two other white men, at once came out, and the former with a fierce curse, demanded of Corton what had kept him.

"Couldn't manage to get them ashore," answered the other, sulkily. The he proceeded to impart the information he had gained as to the ship, her crew, and armament.

"Nine men and one native boy!" said Deschard, contemptuously. He was a tall, lean-looking, black-bearded man, with even a more terrifying and savage appearance than any of his ruffianly partners in crime, tattooed as he was from the back of his neck to his heels in broad, perpendicular lines. As he fixed his keen eyes upon the countenance of Corton his white teeth showed in a cruel smile through his tangled, unkempt moustache.

Calling out the leading chiefs of the cutting-out party, the four desperadoes consulted with them upon their plan of action for the attack upon the brigantine, and then arranged for each man's work and share of the plunder. The white men were to have the ship, but everything that was of value to the natives and not necessary to the working of the ship was to be given to the natives. The muskets, powder, and ball were to be evenly divided between the whites and their allies.

Six of the native chiefs then swore by the names of their deified ancestors to faithfully observe the murderous compact. After the ship was taken they were to help the white men if the ship had anchored to get her under way again.

It was the intention of Deschard and his mates to make for the East Indies, where they would have no trouble in selling the ship to one of the native potentates of that archipelago.

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At daylight the brigantine, which had been kept under easy sail during the night, was seen to be about four miles from the land, and standing in. Shortly after, two or three canoes, with only a few men in each, put off from the beach at Oneaka and paddled out leisurely towards the ship. When about a mile or so from the shore they

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ceased paddling, and the captain of the brigantine saw by his glass that they were engaged in fishing.

This was merely a device to inspire confidence in those on board the ship.

In another hour the brigantine passed close to one of the canoes, and a native, well tutored by past masters in the art of treachery in the part he had to play, stood up in the canoe and held up a large fish, and in broken English said it was a present for the captain.

Pleased at such a friendly overture, the captain put the helm down for the canoe to come alongside. Handing the fish up over the side, the giver clambered up himself. The three other natives in the canoe then paddled quietly away as if under no alarm for the safety of their comrade, and resumed their fishing.

As the ship drew into the land the mate called the captain's attention to some eight or ten more natives who were swimming off to the ship.

"No danger from these people, sir," he remarked; "they are more frightened of us than we of them, I believe; and then look at the women and girls fishing on the reef. When the women come out like that, fearless and open-like, there isn't much to be afraid of."

One by one the natives who were swimming reached the ship, and apparently encouraged by the presence of the man who had boarded the ship from the fishing canoe, they eagerly clambered up on deck, and were soon on the most friendly terms with the crew, especially with one of their own colour, a half-caste native boy from the island of Ambrym,²⁵ in the New Hebrides,²⁶ named Maru.

This Maru was the sole survivor of the tragedy that followed, and appeared to be well acquainted with the captain's object in calling at Kuria—to pick up the man named Deschard. More than twenty years afterwards, when speaking of the events here narrated, his eyes filled with tears when he told of the "white lady and her two daughters" who were passengers, and who had sat on the poop the previous day awaiting the return of the mate's boat, and for tidings of him whom they had come so far to find.

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The timid and respectful manner of the islanders had now so impressed the master of the brigantine that in a fatal moment he decided to anchor. Telling the mate to range the cable and clear all ready, he descended to the cabin and tapped at the door of a state-room.

"I am going to anchor, Mrs. Deschard, but as there are a lot of rather curious-looking natives on board, you and the young ladies had better keep to your cabin."

The door opened, and a girl of seventeen or eighteen appeared, and, taking the captain's hand, she whispered—"She is asleep, captain. She kept awake till daylight, hoping that my father would come in the night. Do you think that anything has happened either to him or Maurice?"

Maru, the Ambrym cabin-boy, said that the captain "patted the girl's hand and told her to have no fear"—that her father was on the island "sure enough," and that Maurice would return with him by breakfast time.

The brigantine anchored close in to the shore, between Kuria and Oneaka, and in a few minutes the long boat was lowered to proceed on shore and bring off Maurice and Deschard. Four hands got into her and then the mate. Just as he was about to cast off, the English-speaking native begged the captain to allow him and the rest of his countrymen to go ashore in the boat. Unsuspicious of treachery from unarmed natives, the captain consented, and they immediately slipped over the side into the boat.

There were thus but four white men left on board—the captain, second mate, two A.B.'s—and the half-caste boy Maru. Arms and ammunition, sufficient for treble the crew the brigantine carried, were on board. In those days the humblest merchant brig voyaging to the East Indies and China coast carried, in addition to small arms, either two or four guns (generally 6-pounders) in case of an attack by pirates. The brigantine was armed with two 6-pounders, and these, so the Ambrym half-caste said, were still loaded with "bags of bullets" when she came to an anchor. Both of the guns were on the main deck amidships.

* * * * *

Contrary to the wishes of the mate, who appeared to have the most unbounded confidence in the peaceableness of the natives, the captain had insisted upon his boat's crew taking their arms with them.

No sooner had the boat left the vessel than the English-speaking native desired the mate to pull round to the east side of Oneaka, where, he said, the principal village was situated, and whither Maurice had gone to seek Deschard. It must be remembered that this native and those with him were all members of Corton's clientèle at Kuria, and were therefore well aware of his treachery in seizing the messenger to Deschard, and that Maurice had been seized and bound the previous night.

In half an hour, when the boat was hidden from the view of those on board the brigantine, the natives, who outnumbered the whites two to one, at a signal from their leader suddenly threw themselves upon the unsuspecting seamen who were rowing and threw every one of them overboard. The mate, a small, active man, managed to draw a heavy horse pistol from his belt, but ere he could pull the trigger he was dealt a crushing blow with a musket stock. As he fell a native thrust him through and through with one of the seamen's cutlasses. As for the unfortunate seamen, they were killed one by one as they struggled in the water. That part of the fell work accomplished, the natives pulled the boat in towards Oneaka, where some ten or fifteen large native double-ended boats and canoes, all filled with savages lusting for blood and rapine, awaited them.

Deschard, a man of the most savage courage, was in command of some twenty or thirty of the most noted of the Oneaka warriors; and on learning from Tebarian (the native who spoke English and who was Corton's brown familiar) that the two guns were in the waist of the ship, he instructed his white comrades to follow in the wake of his boat, and, once they got alongside, board the ship wherever their fancy dictated.

There was a muttered E rairai! (Good!) of approval from the listening natives, and then in intuitive silence and perfect discipline the paddles struck the water, and the boat and canoes, with their naked, savage crews, sped away on their mission of death.

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But, long before they imagined, they had been discovered, and their purpose divined from the ship. Maru, the keen-eyed half-caste, who was the first to notice their approach, knew from the manner in which the canoes kept together that something unusual was about to occur, and instantly called the captain. Glass in hand, the latter ascended the main rigging for a dozen ratlins or so and looked at the advancing flotilla. A very brief glance told him that the boy had good cause for alarm—the natives intended to cut off the ship, and the captain, whom Maru described as "an old man with a white head," at once set about to make such a defence as the critical state of affairs rendered possible.

Calling his men to him and giving them muskets, he posted two of them on top of the deckhouse, and with the remainder of his poor force stationed himself upon the poop.³⁰ With a faint hope that they might yet be intimidated from attacking, he fired a musket shot in the direction of the leading boat. No notice was taken; so, descending to the main deck with his men, he ran out one of the 6-pounders and fired it. The roar of the heavily-charged gun was answered by a shrill yell of defiance from two hundred throats.

"Then," said Maru, "the captain go below and say good-bye to women and girls, and shut and lock cabin door."

Returning to the deck, the brave old man and his second mate and two men picked up their muskets and began to fire at the black mass of boats and men that were now well within range. As they fired, the boy Maru loaded spare muskets for them as fast as his trembling hands would permit.

Once only, as the brigantine swung to the current, the captain brought the gun on the port side to bear on them again, and fired; and again there came back the same appalling yell of defiance, for the shower of bullets only made a wide slat of foam a hundred yards short of the leading boat.

By the time the gun was reloaded the brigantine had swung round head to shore again; and then, as the despairing but courageous seamen were trying to drag it forward again, Deschard and his savages in the leading boat had gained the ship, and the wild figure of the all but naked beachcomber sprang on deck, followed by his own crew and nearly two hundred other fiends well nigh as bloodthirsty and cruel as himself. Some two or three of them had been killed by the musketry fire from the ship, and their fellows needed no incentive from their white leaders to slay and spare not.

Abandoning the gun, the captain and his three men and the boy Maru succeeded in fighting their way through Deschard's savages and reaching one of the cabin doors, which, situated under the break of the high poop, opened to the main deck. Ere they could all gain the shelter of the cabin and secure the door the second mate and one of the seamen were cut down and ruthlessly slaughtered, and of the three that did, one—the remaining seaman—was mortally wounded and dying fast.

Even at such a moment as this, hardened and merciless as were their natures and blood-stained their past, it cannot be thought that had Deschard and his co-pirates known that white women were on board the brigantine they would have permitted their last dreadful deed. In his recital of the final scene in the cabin Maru spoke of the white woman and the two girls coming out of their state-room and kneeling down and praying with their arms clasped around each other's waists. surely the sound of their dying prayers could never have been heard by Deschard when, in the native tongue, he called out for one of the guns to be run aft.

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"By and by," said Maru, "woman and girl come to captain and sailor-man Charlie and me and cry and say good-bye, and then captain he pray too. Then he get up and take cutlass, and sailor-man Charlie he take cutlass too, but he too weak and fall down; so captain say, 'Never mind, Charlie, you and me die now like men.'"

Then, cutlass in hand, the white-haired old skipper stood over the kneeling figures of the three women and waited for the end. And now the silence was broken by a rumbling sound, and then came a rush of naked feet along the deck.

"It is the gun," said Maru to the captain, and in a agony of terror he lifted up the hatch of the lazarette under the cabin table and jumped below. And then Deschard's voice was heard.

"Ta mai te ae" (Give me the fire).

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A blinding flash, a deafening roar, and splintering and crashing of timber followed, and as the heavy pall of smoke lifted, Deschard and the others looked at their bloody work, shuddered, and turned away.

Pedro, the Portuguese, his dark features turned to a ghastly pallor, was the only one of the four men who had courage enough to assist some of the natives in removing from the cabin the bodies of the three poor creatures who, but a short time before, were full of happiness and hope. Deschard and the three others, after that one shuddering glance, had kept away from the vicinity of the shot-torn cabin.

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The conditions of the cutting off of the brigantine were faithfully observed by the contracting parties, and long ere night fell the last boatload of plunder had been taken ashore. Tebarau, chief of Oneaka, had with his warriors helped to heave up anchor, and the vessel, under short canvas, was already a mile or two away from the land, and in his hiding-place in the gloomy lazarette the half-caste boy heard Corton and Deschard laying plans for the future.

Only these two were present in the cabin; Pedro was at the wheel, and Tamu somewhere on deck. Presently Corton brought out the dead captain's despatch box,³² which they had claimed from the natives, and the two began to examine the contents. There was a considerable amount of money in gold and silver, as well as the usual ship's papers, Corton, who could scarcely read, passed these over to his companion, and then ran his fingers gloatingly through the heap of money before him.

With a hoarse, choking cry and horror-stricken eyes Deschard sprang to his feet, and with shaking hand held out a paper to Corton.

"My God! my God!" exclaimed the unhappy wretch, and sinking down again he buried his face in his hands.

Slowly and laboriously his fellow ex-convict read the document through to the end. It was an agreement to pay the captain of the brigantine the sum of one hundred pounds sterling provided that Henry Deschard was taken on board the brigantine at Woodle's Island (the name Kuria was known by to whaleships and others), the said sum to be increased to two hundred pounds "provided that Henry Deschard, myself, and my two daughters are landed at Batavia or any other East India port within sixty days from leaving the said island," and was signed ANNA DESCHARD.

Staggering to his feet, the man sought in the ruined and plundered state-room for further evidence. Almost the first objects that he saw were two hanging pockets made of duck—evidently the work of some seaman—bearing upon them the names of "Helen" and "Laura."

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Peering up from his hiding-place in the lazarette, where he had lain hidden under a heap of old jute bagging and other debris, Maru saw Deschard return to the cabin and take up a loaded musket. Sitting in the captain's chair, and leaning back, he placed the muzzle to his throat, and touched the trigger with his naked foot. As the loud report rang out, and the cabin filled with smoke, the boy crawled from his dark retreat, and, stepping over the prostrate figure of Deschard, he reached the deck and sprang overboard.

For hours the boy swam through the darkness towards the land, guided by the lights of the fires that in the Gilbert and other equatorial islands are kindled at night-time on every beach. He was picked up by a fishing party, and probably on account of his youth and exhausted condition his life was spared.

That night as he lay sleeping under a mat in the big maniapa on Kuria he was awakened by loud cries, and looking seaward he saw a bright glare away to the westward.

It was the brigantine on fire.

Launching their canoes, the natives went out to her, and were soon close enough to see that she was burning fiercely from for'ard to amidships, and that her three boats were all on board—two hanging to the davits and one on the deckhouse. But of the four beachcombers there was no sign.

Knowing well that no other ship had been near the island, and that therefore the white men could not have escaped by that means without being seen from the shore, the natives, surmising that they were in a drunken sleep, called loudly to them to awake; but only the roaring of the flames broke the silence of the ocean. Not daring to go nearer, the natives remained in the vicinity till the brigantine was nothing but a mastless, glowing mass of fire.

Towards midnight she sank; and the last of the beachcombers of Kuria sank with her.

SAUNDERSON AND THE DYNAMITE

Saunderson was one of those men who firmly believed that he knew everything, and exasperated people by telling them how to do things; and Denison, the super-cargo of the Palestine, hated him most fervently for the continual trouble he was giving to everyone, and also because he had brought a harmonium on board, and played dismal tunes on it every night and all day on Sundays. But, as Saunderson was one of the partners in the firm who owned the Palestine, Denison, and Pakenham the skipper, had to suffer him in silence, and trust that something might happen to him before long. What irritated Denison more than anything else was that Saunderson frequently expressed the opinion that super-cargoes were superfluous luxuries to owners, and that such work as they tried to do could well be done by the captains, provided the latter were intelligent men!

"Never mind, Tom," said Pakenham hopefully, one day, "he's a big eater, and is bound to get the fever if we give him a fair show in the Solomons. Then we can dump him ashore at some missionary's—he and his infernal groan-box—and go back to Sydney without the beast."

When the Palestine arrived at Leone Bay, in Tutuila, Saunderson dressed himself beautifully and went ashore to the mission-house, and in the evening Mrs. O— (the missionary's wife) wrote Denison a note and asked if he could spare a cheese from the ship's stores, and added a P.S., "What a terrible bore he is!" This made the captain and himself feel better.

The next morning Saunderson came on board. Denison was in the cabin, showing a trader named Rigby some samples of dynamite; the trader wanted a case or two of the dangerous compound to blow a boat passage through the reef opposite his house, and Denison was telling him how to use it. Of course Saunderson must interfere, and said he would show Rigby what to do. He had never fired a charge of dynamite in his life, nor even seen one fired or a cartridge prepared, but had listened carefully to Denison. Then he sarcastically told Denison that the cheese he had sent Mrs. O— might have passed for dynamite, it was so dry and tasteless.

"Well, dynamite is made from cheese, you know," said the supercargo deferentially, "just cheese slightly impregnated with picric acid, gastrito-nepenthe, and cubes of oxalicogene."

Saunderson said he knew that, and after telling Rigby that he would walk over to his station before dinner, and show him where to begin operations on the reef, went on shore again.

About twelve o'clock Denison and Rigby went on shore to test the dynamite, fuse, and caps—first in the water, and then on the reef. Just abreast of the mission-house they saw a big school of grey mullet swimming close in to the beach, and Denison quickly picked up a stone, tied it with some string round a cartridge, cut the fuse very short, lit it, and threw it in. There was a short fizz, then a dull, heavy thud, and up came hundreds of the beautiful fish stunned or dead. Saunderson came out of the mission-house and watched the natives collecting them. Denison had half-a-dozen cartridges in his hand; each one was tightly enveloped in many thicknesses of paper, seized round with twine, and had about six inches of fuse, with the ends carefully frayed out so as to light easily.

"Give me some of those," said Saunderson.

The supercargo reluctantly handed him two, and Saunderson remarked that they were very clumsily covered, but he would fix some more himself "properly" another time. Denison sulkily observed that he had no time to waste in making dynamite cartridges look pretty. Then, as Saunderson walked off, he called out and told him that if he was going to shoot fish he would want to put a good heavy stone on the cartridges. Saunderson said when he wanted advice from any one he would ask for it. Then he sent word by a native to Mrs. O— that he would send her along some fish in a few minutes.

Now within a few hundred yards of the mission-house there was a jetty, and at the end of the jetty was Her Majesty's gunboat Badger, a small schooner-rigged wooden vessel commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Muddle, one of the most irascible men that ever breathed, and who had sat on more Consuls than any one else in the service.

Saunderson went on the jetty followed by a crowd of natives, and looked over into the water. There were swarms of fish, just waiting to be dynamited. He told a native to bring him a stone, and one was brought—a nice

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round, heavy stone as smooth as a billiard ball just the very wrong kind of stone. He tied it on the cartridge at last, after it had fallen off four or five times; then, as he did not smoke, and carried no matches, he lit it from a native woman's cigarette, and let it drop into the water. The stone promptly fell off, but the cartridge floated gaily, and drifted along fizzing in a contented sort of way. Saunderson put his hands on his hips, and watched it nonchalantly, oblivious of the fact that all the natives had bolted back to the shore to be out of danger, and watch things.

There was a bit of a current, and the cartridge was carried along till it brought up gently against the Badger—just in a nice cosy place between the rudder bearding and the stern-post. Then it went off with a bang that shook the universe, and ripped off forty-two sheets of copper from the Badger; and Saunderson fell off the jetty into the water; and the bluejackets who were below came tumbling up on deck; and the gunner, seeing Lieutenant-Commander Muddle rush up from his cabin in his shirt-sleeves with a razor in his hand, thought that he had gone queer again in his head, and had tried to blow up the ship, and was going to cut his throat, and so he rushed at him, and knocked him down and took his razor away, and begged him to be quiet; and Muddle, thinking it was a mutiny, nearly went into a fit, and struggled so desperately, and made such awful choking noises that two more men sat on him; and the navigating midshipman, thinking it was a fire, told the bugler to sound quarters, and then, seeing the captain being held down by three men, rushed to his assistance, but tripped over something or somebody and fell down and nearly broke his nose; and all the time Saunderson, who was clinging to one of the jetty piles, was yelling pitifully for help, being horribly afraid of sharks.

At last he was fished out by Rigby and some natives and carried up to the mission-house and then, when he was able to talk coherently, he sent for Denison, who told him that Commander Muddle was coming for him presently with a lot of armed men and a boatswain with a green bag in which was a "cat", and that he (Saunderson) would first be flogged and then hanged at the Badger's yard-arm, and otherwise treated severely, for an attempt to blow up one of Her Majesty's ships; and then Saunderson shivered all over, and staggered out of the mission-house in a suit of Mr. O—'s pyjamas, much too large for him, and met Commander Muddle on the jetty and tried to explain how it occurred, and Muddle called him an infernal, drivelling idiot, and knocked him clean off the jetty into the water again, and used awful language, and told Denison that his chronometers were ruined, and the ship's timbers started, and that he had had a narrow escape from cutting his own throat when the dynamite went off, as he had just begun to shave.

Saunderson was very ill after that, and was in such mortal terror that Muddle and every one else on board the gunboat meant to kill, wound, or seriously damage him, that he kept inside the mission-house, and said he felt he was dying, and that Mr. O— would prepare him for the end. So Denison and Pakenham, who were now quite cheerful again, sent his traps and his harmonium ashore, and sailed without him, a great peace in their bosoms.

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THE SHADOWS OF THE DEAD

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I

"It is bad to speak of the ghosts of the dead when their shadows may be near," said Tulpé, the professed Christian, but pure, unsophisticated heathen at heart; "no one but a fool—or a careless white man such as thee, Tenisoni—would do that."

Denison laughed, but Kuis, the stalwart husband of black-browed Tulpé, looked at him with grave reproof, and said in English, as he struck his paddle into the water—

"Tulpé speak true, Mr. Denison. This place is a bad place at night-time, suppose you no make fire before you sleep. Plenty men—white men—been die here, and now us native people only come here when plenty of us come together. Then we not feel much afraid. Oh, yes, these two little island very bad places; long time ago many white men die here in the night. And sometimes, if any man come here and sleep by himself, he hear the dead white men walk about and cry out."

* * * * *

They—Denison, the supercargo of the *Leonora*, Kuis, the head man of the village near by and Tulpé, his wife, and little Kinia, their daughter—had been out fishing on the reef, but had met with but scant success; for in the deep coral pools that lay between the inner and outer reefs of the main island were hundreds of huge blue and gold striped leatherjackets, which broke their hooks and bit their lines. So they had ceased awhile, that they might rest till nightfall upon one of two little islets of palms, that like floating gardens raised their verdured heights from the deep waters of the slumbering lagoon.

Slowly they paddled over the glassy surface, and as the little craft cut her way noiselessly through the water, the dying sun turned the slopes of vivid green on Mont Buache to changing shades on gold and purple light, and the dark blue of the water of the reef-bound lagoon paled and shallowed and turned to bright transparent green with a bottom of shining snow-white sand—over which swift black shadows swept as startled fish fled seaward in affright beneath the slender hull of the light canoe. Then as the last booming notes of the great grey-plumaged mountain-pigeons echoed through the forest aisles, the sun touched the western sea-rim in a flood of misty golden haze, and plunging their paddles together in a last stroke they grounded upon the beach of a lovely little bay, scarce a hundred feet in curve from point to point; and whilst Kuis and Tulpé lit a fire to cook some fish for the white man, Denison clambered to the summit of the island and looked shoreward upon the purpling outline of the mainland a league away.

Half a mile distant he could see the sharp peaks of the grey-thatched houses in Leassé village still standing out plainly in the clear atmosphere, and from every house a slender streak of pale blue smoke rose straight up skywards, for the land-breeze had not yet risen, and the smoky haze of the rollers thundering westward hung like a filmy mantle of white over long, long lines of curving reef. Far inland, the great southern spur of the mountain that the Frenchman Duperrey had named Buache, had cloaked its sides in the shadows of the night, though its summit yet blazed with the last red shafts of gold from the sunken sun. And over the tops of the drooping palms of the little isle, Denison heard the low cries and homeward flight of ocean-roving birds as they sped shoreward to their rookeries among the dense mangrove shrubs behind Leassé. Some pure white, red-footed boatswain birds, whose home was among the foliage of the two islets, muttered softly about as they sank like flakes of falling snow among the branches of the palms and bread-fruit trees around him. All day long had they hovered high in air above the sweeping roll of the wide Pacific, and one by one they were coming back to rest, and Denison could see their white forms settling down on the drooping palm-branches, to rise with flapping wing and sharp, fretful croak as some belated wanderer fluttered noiselessly down and pushed his way to a perch amidst his companions, to nestle together till the bright rays of sunlight lit up the ocean blue once more.

At a little distance from the beach stood a tiny thatched roofed house with sides open to welcome the cooling breath of the land-breeze that, as the myriad stars came out, stole down from the mountains to the islet trees and then rippled the waters of the shining lagoon.

The house had been built by the people of Leassé, who used it as a rest-house when engaged in fishing in the vicinity of the village. Rolled up and placed over the cross-beams were a number of soft mats, and as Denison returned Kuis took these down and placed them upon the ground, which was covered with a thick layer of

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pebbles. Throwing himself down on the mats, Denison filled his pipe and smoked, while Tulpé and the child made an oven of heated stones to cook the fish they had caught. Kuis had already plucked some young drinking coconuts, and Denison heard their heavy fall as he threw them to the ground. And only that Kuis had brave blood in his veins, they had had nothing to drink that night, for no Strong's Islander would ascend a coconut tree there after dark, for devils, fiends, goblins, the ghosts of men long dead, and evil spirits flitted to and fro amid the bosage of the islet once night had fallen. And even Kuis, despite the long years he had spent among white men in his cruises in American whalships in his younger days, chid his wife and child sharply for not hastening to him and carrying the nuts away as they fell.

Then, as Denison and Kuis waited for the oven to be opened, Tulpé and Kinia came inside the hut and sat down beside them, and listened to Kuis telling the white man of a deep, sandy-bottomed pool, near to the islets, which, when the tide came in over the reef at night-time, became filled with big fish, which preyed upon the swarms of minnows that made the pool their home.

"'Tis there, Tenisoni, that we shall go when we have eaten," he said, and he dropped his voice to a whisper, "and there shall we tell thee the story of the dead white men."

So, when the fish was cooked, Tulpé and Kinia hurriedly took it from the oven and carried to the canoe, in which they all sat and ate, and then pushing out into the lagoon again they paddled slowly along in shallow water till Denison saw the white sandy sides of a deep, dark pool glimmering under the starlight of the island night. Softly the girl Kinia lowered the stone anchor down till it touched bottom two fathoms below, on the very edge; and then payed out the kellick line whilst her father backed the canoe out from the quickly shelving sides into the centre, where she lay head-on to the gentle current.

For many hours they fished, and soon the canoe was half-filled with great pink and pearly-hued groper and blue-backed, silver-sided sea salmon, and then Denison, wearying of the sport, stretched himself upon the outrigger and smoked whilst Tulpé told him of the tale of the white men who had once lived and died on the little islets.

"'Twas long before the time that the two French fighting-ships came here and anchored in this harbour of Leassé. Other ships had come to Kusaie, and white men had come ashore at Lêla and spoken with the king and chiefs, and made presents of friendship to them, and been given turtle and hogs in return. This was long before my mother was married, and then this place of Leassé, which is now so poor, and hath but so few people in it, was a great town, the houses of which covered all the flat land between the two points of the bay. She, too, was named I am—Tulpé—and came from a family that lived under the strong arm of the king at Lêla, where they had houses and many plantations. In those days there were three great chiefs on Kusaie, one at Lêla, from where my mother came, one at Utwe, and one here at Leassé. Peace had been between them all for nearly two years, so, when the news came here that there were two ships at anchor in the king's harbour, many of the people of Leassé went thither in their canoes to see the strangers, for these ships were the first the people had seen for, it may have been, twenty years. Among those that went from Leassé was a young man named Kasi-lak—Kasi the big or strong, for he was the tallest and strongest man on this side of the island, and a great wrestler. There were in all nearly two hundred men and women went from Leassé, and when they reached the narrow passage to Lêla, they saw that the harbour was covered with canoes full of the people from the great town there. These clustered about the ships so thickly that those that came from Leassé could not draw near enough to them to look at the white men, so they rested on their paddles and waited awhile. Presently there came out upon a high part of the ship a chief whose name was Malik. He was the king's foster-brother, and a great fighting-man, and was hated by the people of Leassé for having ravaged all the low-lying country from the mountains to the shore ten years before, slaying women and children as well as men, and casting their bodies into the flames of their burning houses.

"But now, because of the peace that was between Leassé and Lêla, he showed his white teeth in a smile of welcome, and, standing upon the high stern part of the ship, he called out, 'Welcome, O friends!' and bade them paddle their canoes to the shore, to the great houses of the king, his brother, where they would be made welcome, and where food would be prepared for them to eat.

"So, much as they desired to go on board the ships, they durst not offend such a man as Malik, and paddled to the shore, where they were met by the king's slaves, who drew their canoes high up on the beach, and covered them with mats to protect them from the sun, and then the king himself came to meet them with fair words and smiles of friendship.

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"'Welcome, O men of Leassé,' he said. 'See, my people have covered thy canoes with mats from the sun, for now that there is no hate between us, ye shall remain here at Lêla with me for many days. And so that there shall be no more blood-letting between my people and thine, shall I give every young man among ye that is yet unmarried a wife from these people of mine. Come, now, and eat and drink.'

"So all the two hundred sat down in one of the king's houses, and while they ate and drank there came boats from the ships, and the white men, whom Malik led ashore, came into the house where they sat, and spoke to them. In those days there were but three or four of the Kusaie men who understood English, and these Malik kept by him, so that he could put words into their mouths when he desired to speak to the white strangers. These white men, so my mother said, wore short, broad-bladed swords in sheaths made of thick black skins, and pistols were thrust through belts of skin around their waists. Their hair, too, was dressed like that of the men of Kusaie—it hung down in a short, thick roll, and was tied at the end.(2)

"Kasi, who was the father of this my husband, Kusi, sat a little apart from the rest of the Leassé people. Beside him was a young girl named Nehi, his cousin. She had never before left her home, and the strange faces of the men of Lêla made her so frightened that she clung to Kasi's arm in fear, and when the white men came into the house she flung her arms around her cousin's neck and laid her face against his naked chest. Presently, as the white men walked to and fro among the people, they stopped in front of Kasi and Nehi, and one of them, who was the captain of the largest of the two ships, desired Kasi to stand up so that he might see his great stature the better. So he stood up, and Nehi the girl, still clinging to his arm, stood up with him.

"'He is a brave-looking man,' said the white officer to Malik. 'Such men as he are few and far between. Only this man here,' and he touched a young white man who stood beside him on the arm, 'is his equal in strength and fine looks.' And with that the young white man, who was an officer of the smaller of the two ships, laughed, and held out his hand to Kasi, and then his eyes, blue, like the deep sea, fell upon the face of Nehi, whose dark ones looked wonderingly into his.

"'Who is this girl? Is she the big man's sister?' he asked of Malik. Then Malik told him, through the mouth of one of the three Kusaie men, who spoke English, that the girl's name was Nehi, and that with many of her people she had come from Leassé to see the fighting-ships.

"By and by the white men with Malik went away to talk and eat, and drank kava in the house of the king, his brother; but presently the younger white man came back with Rijon, a native who spoke English, and sat down beside Kasi and his cousin Nehi, and talked with them for a long time. And this he told them of himself. That he was the second chief of the little ship, that with but two masts; and because of the long months they had spent upon the sea, and of the bad blood between the common sailor men and the captain, he was wearied of the ship, and desired to leave it. Ten others were there on his own ship of a like mind, and more than a score on the larger ship, which had twenty-and-two great cannons on her deck. And then he and Rijon and Kasi talked earnestly together, and Kasi promised to aid him; and so that Rijon should not betray them to Malik or the two captains, the young white man promised to give him that night a musket and a pistol as an earnest of greater gifts, when he and others with him had escaped from the ships, and were under the roofs of the men of Leassé. So then he pressed the hand of Kasi, and again his eyes sought those of Nehi, the girl, as he turned away.

"Then Rijon, who stayed, drew near to Kasi, and said—

"'What shall be mine if I tell thee of a plan that is in the mind of a great man here to put thee and all those of Leassé with thee to death?'

"'Who is the man? Is it Malik?'

"'It is Malik.'

"'Then,' said Kasi, 'help me to escape from this trap, and thou shalt be to me as mine own brother; of all that I possess half shall be thine.'

"And then Rijon, who was a man who hated bloodshed, and thought it hard and cruel that Malik should slay so many unarmed people who came to him in peace-time, swore to help Kasi in his need. And the girl Nehi took his hand and kissed it, and wept.

"By and by, when Rijon had gone, there came into the big house where the people of Leassé were assembled a young girl named Tulpé—she who afterwards became my mother. And coming over to where Kasi and his cousin sat, she told them she brought a message from the king. That night, she said, there was to be a great feast, so that the white men from the ships might see the dancing and wrestling that were to follow; and the king had sent her to

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say that he much desired the people from Leassé to join in the feasting and dancing; and with the message he sent further gifts of baked fish and turtle meat and many baskets of fruit.

"Kasi, though he knew well that the king and Malik, his brother, meant to murder him and all his people, smiled at the girl, and said, 'It is good; we shall come, and I shall wrestle with the best man ye have here.'

"Then he struck the palm of his hand on the mat upon which he sat, and said to the girl Tulpé, 'Sit thou here, and eat with us,' for he was taken with her looks, and wanted speech with her.

"'Nay,' she said, with a smile, though her voice trembled strangely, and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke. 'Why ask me to sit with thee when thou hast so handsome a wife?' And she pointed to Nehi, whose hand lay upon her cousin's arm.

"'Tis but my sister Nehi, my father's brother's child,' he answered. 'No wife have I, and none do I want but thee. What is thy name?'

"'I am Tulpé, the daughter of Malik.'

"Then Kasi was troubled in his mind; for now he hated Malik, but yet was he determined to make Tulpé his wife, first because he desired her for her soft voice and gentle ways, and then because she might be a shield for the people of Leassé against her father's vengeance. So drawing her down beside him, he and Nehi made much of her; and Tulpé's heart went out to him; for he was a man whose deeds as a wrestler were known in every village on the island. But still as she tried to eat and drink and to smile at his words of love, the tears fell one by one, and she became very silent and sad; and presently, putting aside her food, she leant her face on Nehi's shoulder and sobbed.

"'Why dost thou weep, little one?' said Kasi, tenderly.

"She made no answer awhile, but then turned her face to him.

"'Because, O Kasi the Wrestler, of an evil dream which came to me in the night as I lay in my father's house.'

"'Tell me thy dream,' said Kasi.

"First looking around her to see that none but themselves could hear her, she took his hand in hers, and whispered—

"'Aye, Kasi, I will tell thee. This, then, was my dream: I saw the bodies of men and women and children, whose waists were girt about with red and yellow girdles of oap, floating upon a pool of blood. Strange faces were they all to me in my dream, but now two of them are not. And it is for this I weep; for those two faces were thine own and that of this girl by my side.'

"Then Kasi knew that she meant to warn him of her father's cruel plot, for only the people of Leassé wore girdles of the bark of the plant called oap. So then he told her of that which Rijon had spoken, and Tulpé wept again.

"'It is true,' she said, 'and I did but seek to warn thee, for no dream came to me in the night; yet do I know that even now my father is planning with his brother the king how that they may slaughter thee all to-night when ye sleep after the dance. What can I do to help thee?'

"They talked together again, and planned what should be done; and then Tulpé went quietly away lest Malik should grow suspicious of her. And Kasi went quickly about among his people telling them of the treachery of Malik, and bade them do what he should bid them when the time came. And then Rijon went to and fro between Kasi and the big white man, carrying messages and settling what was to be done.

"When darkness came great fires were lit in the dance-house and the town square, and the great feast began. And the king and Malik made much of Kasi and his people, and placed more food before them than even was given to their own people. Then when the feast was finished the two ship captains came on shore, and sat on a mat beside the king, and the women danced and the men wrestled. And Kasi, whose heart was bursting with rage though his lips smiled, was praised by Malik and the king for his great strength and skill, for he overcame all who stood up to wrestle with him.

"When the night was far gone, Kasi told Malik that he and his people were weary, and asked that they might sleep. And Malik, who only waited till they slept, said, 'Go, and sleep in peace.'

"But as soon as Kasi and those with him were away out of sight from the great swarm of people who still danced and wrestled in the open square, they ran quickly to the beach where their canoes were lying, and Kasi lit a torch and waved it thrice in the air towards the black shadows of the two ships. Then he waited.

"Suddenly on the ships there arose a great commotion and loud cries, and in a little time there came the sound

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of boats rowing quickly to the shore. And then came a great flash of light from the side of one of the ships and the thunder of a cannon's voice.

"'Quick,' cried Kasi; 'launch the canoes, lest we be slain here on the beach!' And ere the echoes of the cannon-shot had died away in the mountain caves of Lêla, the men of Leassé had launched their canoes and paddled swiftly out to meet the boats.

"As the boats and canoes drew near, Rijon stood up in the bows of the foremost boat, and the white sailors ceased rowing so that he and Kasi might talk. But there was but little time, for already the sound of the cannon and the cries and struggling on board the ships had brought a great many of the Lêla people to the beach; fires were lit, and conch shells were blown, and Malik and his men began to fire their muskets at the escaping canoes. Presently, too, the white men in the boats began to handle their muskets and fire back in return, when their leader bade them cease, telling them that it was but Malik's men firing at Kasi's people.

"'Now,' said he to Rijon, 'tell this man Kasi to lead the way with his canoes to the passage, and we in the boats shall follow closely, so that if Malik's canoes pursue and overtake us, we white men shall beat them back with our musket-fire.'

"So then Kasi turned his canoes seaward, and the boats followed; and as they rowed and paddled, all keeping closely together, the great cannons of the two ships flashed and thundered and the shot roared above them in the darkness. But yet was no one hurt, for the night was very dark; and soon they reached the deep waters of the passage, and rose and fell to the ocean swell, and still the iron cannon-shot hummed about them, and now and again struck the water near; and on the left-hand shore ran Malik's men with cries of rage, and firing as they ran, till at last they came to the point and could pursue no farther; and soon their cries grew fainter and fainter as the canoes and boats reached the open ocean. Then it happened that one of the white sailors, vexed that a last bullet had whistled near his head, raised his musket and fired into the dark shore whence it came.

"'Thou fool!' cried his leader, and he struck the man senseless with the boat's tiller, and then told Rijon to call out to Kasi and his people to pull to the left for their lives, for the flash of the musket would be seen from the ships. Ah, he was a clever white man, for scarce had the canoes and boats turned to the left more than fifty fathoms, when there came a burst of flame from all the cannons on the ships, and a great storm of great iron shot and small leaden bullets lashed the black water into white foam just behind them. After that the firing ceased, and Rijon called out that there was no more danger; for the cunning white man had told him that they could not be pursued—he had broken holes in all the boats that remained on the ships.

"When daylight came, the boats and canoes were far down the coast towards Leassé. Then, as the sun rose from the sea, the men in the boats ceased rowing, and the big white man stood up and beckoned to Kasi to bring his canoe alongside. And when the canoe lay beside the boat, the white man laughed and held out his hand to Kasi and asked for Nehi; and as Nehi rose from the bottom of Kasi's canoe, where she had been sleeping, and stood up beside her cousin, so did Tulpé, the daughter of Malik, stand up beside the white man in his boat, and the two girls threw their arms around each other's necks and wept glad tears. Then as the canoes and boats hoisted their sails to the wind of sunrise, the people saw that Tulpé sat beside Kasi in his canoe, and Nehi, his cousin, sat beside the white man in his boat, with her face covered with her hands so that no one should see her eyes.

"As they sailed along the coast Tulpé told Kasi how she and Rijon had gone on board the smaller of the two ships, and seen the tall young white man whispering to some of the sailors. Then, when they saw the flash of Kasi's torch, how these sailors sprang upon the others and bound them hand and foot while a boat was lowered, and muskets and food and water put in. Then she and Rijon and the young white leader and some of the sailors got in, and Rijon stood in the bows and guided them to the shore to where Kasi and his people awaited them on the beach.

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II

"For nearly three months these white men lived at Leassé, and the father of Kasi, who was chief of the town, made much of them, because they had muskets, and bullets, and powder in plenty, and this made him strong against Malik and the people of Lêla. The ships had sailed away soon after the night of the dance, but the two captains had given the king and Malik many muskets and much powder, and a small cannon, and urged him to pursue and kill all the white men who had deserted the ships. "'By and by, I will kill them,' said Malik.

"The young white man took Nehi to wife, and was given a tract of land near Leassé, and Kasi became husband to Tulpé, and there grew a great friendship between the two men. Then came warfare with Lêla again, and of the twenty and two white men ten were killed in a great fight at Utwé with Malik's people, who surprised them as they were building a vessel, for some of them were already weary of Kusaic, and wished to sail away to other lands.

"Soon those that were left began to quarrel among themselves and kill each other, till only seven, beside the husband of Nehi, were left. These, who lived in a village at the south point, seldom came to Leassé, for the big white man would have none of them, and naught but bitter words had passed between them for many months, for he hated their wild, dissolute ways, and their foul manners. Then, too, they had learnt to make grog from coconut toddy, and sometimes, when they were drunken with it, would stagger about from house to house, musket or sword in hand, and frighten the women and children.

"One day it came about that a girl named Luan, who was a blood relation of Nehi, and wife to one of these white men, was walking along a mountain-path, carrying her infant child, when her foot slipped, and she and the infant fell a great distance. When she came to she found that the child had a great wound in its forehead, and was cold and stiff in death. She lifted it up, and when she came to her husband's house she found him lying asleep, drunken with toddy, and when she roused him with her grief he did but curse her.

"Then Luan, with bitter scorn, pointed to the body of the babe and said, 'Oh, thou wicked and drunken father, dost thou not see that thy child is dead?'

"Then in his passion he seized his pistol and struck her on the head, so that she was stunned and fell as if dead.

"That night the people of Leassé saw the seven white men, with their wives and children, paddling over towards the two little islands, carrying all their goods with them, for the people had risen against them by reason of the cruelty of the husband of Luan, and driven them away.

"So there they lived for many weeks, making grog from the coconut trees, and drinking and fighting among themselves all day, and sleeping the sleep of the drunken at night. Their wives toiled for them all day, fishing on the reef, and bringing them taro, yams, and fruit from the mainland. But Luan alone could not work, for she grew weaker and weaker, and one day she died. Then her white husband went to the village from whence they were driven, and seizing the wife of a young man, bore her away to the two islets.

"The next day he whose wife had been stolen came to the husband of Nehi, and said, 'O white man, help me to get back my wife; help me for the sake of Luan, whom this dog slew, and whose blood cries out to thee for vengeance, for was she not a blood relation to Nehi, thy wife?'

"But though the husband of Nehi shook his head and denied the man the musket he asked for, he said naught when at night-time a hundred men, carrying knives and clubs in their hands, gathered together in the council-house, and talked of the evil lives of the seven white men, and agreed that the time had come for them to die.

"So in silence they rose up from the mats in the council-house and walked down to the beach, and launching their canoes, paddled across to the islands under cover of the darkness. It so happened that one woman was awake, but all the rest with the white men and their children slept. This woman belonged to Leassé, and had come to the beach to bathe, for the night was hot and windless. Suddenly the canoes surrounded her, and, fearing danger to her white husband, she sought to escape, but a strong hand caught her by the hair, and a voice bade her be silent.

"Now, the man who held her by the hair was her own sister's husband, and he desired to save her life, so he and two others seized and bound her, and quickly tied a waist-girdle over her mouth so that she could not cry out.

Short Stories

But she was strong, and struggled so that the girdle slipped off, and she gave a loud cry. And then her sister's husband, lest his chief might say he had failed in his duty, and the white men escape, seized her throat in his hands and pressed it so that she all but died.

"Then the avengers of the blood of Luan sprang out upon the beach, and ran through the palm grove to where the white men's house stood. It was a big house, for they all lived together, and in the middle of the floor a lamp of coconut oil burned, and showed where the seven white men lay.

"And there as they slept were they speared and stabbed to death, although their wives threw their arms around the slayers and besought them to spare their husbands' lives. And long before dawn the canoes returned to Leassé with the wives and children of the slain men, and only the big white man, the husband of Nehi, was left alive out of the twenty and two who came from the ships at Lêla. So that is the story of the two islets, and of the evil men who dwelt there."

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Denison rose and stretched himself. "And what of the big white man—the husband of Nehi?" he asked; "doth his spirit, too, wander about at night?"

"Nay," said Tulpé, "why should it? There was no innocent blood upon his hand. Both he and Nehi lived and died among us; and to-morrow it may be that Kinia shalt show thee the place whereon their house stood in the far-back years. And true are the words in the Book of Life—'He that sheddeth blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'"