

A man with short, dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark jacket and dark pants, stands on a dark, pebbly beach. He is looking out towards the ocean under a grey, overcast sky. To his right is a large, dark, textured structure that appears to be part of a building or a large sculpture, with a rough, weathered surface. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

Gordon Young

*Seibert
of the Island*

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CHAPTER I

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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 Pulotu. 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 Pulotu 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 fingertips.

"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 Pulotu. 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 Pulotu, 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 Pulotu 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 Pulotu 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 Pulotu 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 Pulotu 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 Puluotu. 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 cocoanuts.

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