ДЖЕК ЛОНДОН

A SON OF THE SUN

Джек Лондон
A Son Of The Sun

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25291726
A Son Of The Sun:

Содержание

Chapter One – A SON OF THE SUN 4
Chapter Two – THE PROUD GOAT OF ALOYSIUS PANKBURN 32
Chapter Three – THE DEVILS OF FUATINO 59
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 60

Jack London
A Son Of The Sun

Chapter One – A SON OF THE SUN

I

The *Willi-Waw* lay in the passage between the shore-reef and the outer-reef. From the latter came the low murmur of a lazy surf, but the sheltered stretch of water, not more than a hundred yards across to the white beach of pounded coral sand, was of glass-like smoothness. Narrow as was the passage, and anchored as she was in the shoalest place that gave room to swing, the *Willi-Waw's* chain rode up-and-down a clean hundred feet. Its course could be traced over the bottom of living coral. Like some monstrous snake, the rusty chain's slack wandered over the ocean floor, crossing and recrossing itself several times and fetching up finally at the idle anchor. Big rock-cod, dun and mottled, played warily in and out of the coral. Other fish, grotesque of form and colour, were brazenly indifferent, even when a big fish-shark drifted sluggishly along and sent the rock-cod scuttling for their favourite crevices.

On deck, for'ard, a dozen blacks pottered clumsily at scraping

the teak rail. They were as inexpert at their work as so many monkeys. In fact they looked very much like monkeys of some enlarged and prehistoric type. Their eyes had in them the querulous plaintiveness of the monkey, their faces were even less symmetrical than the monkey's, and, hairless of body, they were far more ungarmented than any monkey, for clothes they had none. Decorated they were as no monkey ever was. In holes in their ears they carried short clay pipes, rings of turtle shell, huge plugs of wood, rusty wire nails, and empty rifle cartridges. The calibre of a Winchester rifle was the smallest hole an ear bore; some of the largest holes were inches in diameter, and any single ear averaged from three to half a dozen holes. Spikes and bodkins of polished bone or petrified shell were thrust through their noses. On the chest of one hung a white doorknob, on the chest of another the handle of a china cup, on the chest of a third the brass cogwheel of an alarm clock. They chattered in queer, falsetto voices, and, combined, did no more work than a single white sailor.

Aft, under an awning, were two white men. Each was clad in a six-penny undershirt and wrapped about the loins with a strip of cloth. Belted about the middle of each was a revolver and tobacco pouch. The sweat stood out on their skin in myriads of globules. Here and there the globules coalesced in tiny streams that dripped to the heated deck and almost immediately evaporated. The lean, dark-eyed man wiped his fingers wet with a stinging stream from his forehead and flung it from him with a weary

curse. Wearily, and without hope, he gazed seaward across the outer-reef, and at the tops of the palms along the beach.

"Eight o'clock, an' hell don't get hot till noon," he complained. "Wisht to God for a breeze. Ain't we never goin' to get away?"

The other man, a slender German of five and twenty, with the massive forehead of a scholar and the tumble-home chin of a degenerate, did not trouble to reply. He was busy emptying powdered quinine into a cigarette paper. Rolling what was approximately fifty grains of the drug into a tight wad, he tossed it into his mouth and gulped it down without the aid of water.

"Wisht I had some whiskey," the first man panted, after a fifteen-minute interval of silence.

Another equal period elapsed ere the German enounced, relevant of nothing:

"I'm rotten with fever. I'm going to quit you, Griffiths, when we get to Sydney. No more tropics for me. I ought to known better when I signed on with you."

"You ain't been much of a mate," Griffiths replied, too hot himself to speak heatedly. "When the beach at Guvutu heard I'd shipped you, they all laughed. 'What? Jacobsen?' they said. 'You can't hide a square face of trade gin or sulphuric acid that he won't smell out!' You've certainly lived up to your reputation. I ain't had a drink for a fortnight, what of your snoopin' my supply."

"If the fever was as rotten in you as me, you'd understand," the mate whimpered.

"I ain't kickin'," Griffiths answered. "I only wisht God'd send me a drink, or a breeze of wind, or something. I'm ripe for my next chill to-morrow."

The mate proffered him the quinine. Rolling a fifty-grain dose, he popped the wad into his mouth and swallowed it dry.

"God! God!" he moaned. "I dream of a land somewheres where they ain't no quinine. Damned stuff of hell! I've scoffed tons of it in my time."

Again he quested seaward for signs of wind. The usual trade-wind clouds were absent, and the sun, still low in its climb to meridian, turned all the sky to heated brass. One seemed to see as well as feel this heat, and Griffiths sought vain relief by gazing shoreward. The white beach was a searing ache to his eyeballs. The palm trees, absolutely still, outlined flatly against the unrefreshing green of the packed jungle, seemed so much cardboard scenery. The little black boys, playing naked in the dazzle of sand and sun, were an affront and a hurt to the sun-sick man. He felt a sort of relief when one, running, tripped and fell on all-fours in the tepid sea-water.

An exclamation from the blacks for'ard sent both men glancing seaward. Around the near point of land, a quarter of a mile away and skirting the reef, a long black canoe paddled into sight.

"Gooma boys from the next bight," was the mate's verdict.

One of the blacks came aft, treading the hot deck with the unconcern of one whose bare feet felt no heat. This, too, was a

hurt to Griffiths, and he closed his eyes. But the next moment they were open wide.

"White fella marster stop along Gooma boy," the black said.

Both men were on their feet and gazing at the canoe. Aft could be seen the unmistakable sombrero of a white man. Quick alarm showed itself on the face of the mate.

"It's Grief," he said.

Griffiths satisfied himself by a long look, then ripped out a wrathful oath.

"What's he doing up here?" he demanded of the mate, of the aching sea and sky, of the merciless blaze of sun, and of the whole superheated and implacable universe with which his fate was entangled.

The mate began to chuckle.

"I told you you couldn't get away with it," he said.

But Griffiths was not listening.

"With all his money, coming around like a rent collector," he chanted his outrage, almost in an ecstasy of anger. "He's loaded with money, he's stuffed with money, he's busting with money. I know for a fact he sold his Yringa plantations for three hundred thousand pounds. Bell told me so himself last time we were drunk at Guvutu. Worth millions and millions, and Shylocking me for what he wouldn't light his pipe with." He whirled on the mate. "Of course you told me so. Go on and say it, and keep on saying it. Now just what was it you did tell me so?"

"I told you you didn't know him, if you thought you could clear

the Solomons without paying him. That man Grief is a devil, but he's straight. I know. I told you he'd throw a thousand quid away for the fun of it, and for sixpence fight like a shark for a rusty tin, I tell you I know. Didn't he give his *Balakula* to the Queensland Mission when they lost their *Evening Star* on San Cristobal? – and the *Balakula* worth three thousand pounds if she was worth a penny? And didn't he beat up Strothers till he lay abed a fortnight, all because of a difference of two pound ten in the account, and because Strothers got fresh and tried to make the gouge go through?"

"God strike me blind!" Griffiths cried in im-potency of rage.

The mate went on with his exposition.

"I tell you only a straight man can buck a straight man like him, and the man's never hit the Solomons that could do it. Men like you and me can't buck him. We're too rotten, too rotten all the way through. You've got plenty more than twelve hundred quid below. Pay him, and get it over with."

But Griffiths gritted his teeth and drew his thin lips tightly across them.

"I'll buck him," he muttered – more to himself and the brazen ball of sun than to the mate. He turned and half started to go below, then turned back again. "Look here, Jacob-sen. He won't be here for quarter of an hour. Are you with me? Will you stand by me?"

"Of course I'll stand by you. I've drunk all your whiskey, haven't I? What are you going to do?"

"I'm not going to kill him if I can help it. But I'm not going to pay. Take that flat."

Jacobsen shrugged his shoulders in calm acquiescence to fate, and Griffiths stepped to the companionway and went below.

II

Jacobsen watched the canoe across the low reef as it came abreast and passed on to the entrance of the passage. Griffiths, with ink-marks on right thumb and forefinger, returned on deck Fifteen minutes later the canoe came alongside. The man with the sombrero stood up.

"Hello, Griffiths!" he said. "Hello, Jacobsen!" With his hand on the rail he turned to his dusky crew. "You fella boy stop along canoe altogether."

As he swung over the rail and stepped on deck a hint of catlike litheness showed in the apparently heavy body. Like the other two, he was scantily clad. The cheap undershirt and white loin-cloth did not serve to hide the well put up body. Heavy muscled he was, but he was not lumped and hummocked by muscles. They were softly rounded, and, when they did move, slid softly and silkily under the smooth, tanned skin. Ardent suns had likewise tanned his face till it was swarthy as a Spaniard's. The yellow mustache appeared incongruous in the midst of such swarthiness, while the clear blue of the eyes produced a feeling of shock on the beholder. It was difficult to realize that the skin of this man

had once been fair.

"Where did you blow in from?" Griffiths asked, as they shook hands. "I thought you were over in the Santa Cruz."

"I was," the newcomer answered. "But we made a quick passage. The *Wonder's* just around in the bight at Gooma, waiting for wind. Some of the bushmen reported a ketch here, and I just dropped around to see. Well, how goes it?"

"Nothing much. Copra sheds mostly empty, and not half a dozen tons of ivory nuts. The women all got rotten with fever and quit, and the men can't chase them back into the swamps. They're a sick crowd. I'd ask you to have a drink, but the mate finished off my last bottle. I wisht to God for a breeze of wind."

Grief, glancing with keen carelessness from one to the other, laughed.

"I'm glad the calm held," he said. "It enabled me to get around to see you. My supercargo dug up that little note of yours, and I brought it along."

The mate edged politely away, leaving his skipper to face his trouble.

"I'm sorry, Grief, damned sorry," Griffiths said, "but I ain't got it. You'll have to give me a little more time."

Grief leaned up against the companionway, surprise and pain depicted on his face.

"It does beat hell," he communed, "how men learn to lie in the Solomons. The truth's not in them. Now take Captain Jensen. I'd sworn by his truthfulness. Why, he told me only five days ago –

do you want to know what he told me?"

Griffiths licked his lips.

"Go on."

"Why, he told me that you'd sold out – sold out everything, cleaned up, and was pulling out for the New Hebrides."

"He's a damned liar!" Griffiths cried hotly.

Grief nodded.

"I should say so. He even had the nerve to tell me that he'd bought two of your stations from you – Mauri and Kahula. Said he paid you seventeen hundred gold sovereigns, lock, stock and barrel, good will, trade-goods, credit, and copra."

Griffiths's eyes narrowed and glinted. The action was involuntary, and Grief noted it with a lazy sweep of his eyes.

"And Parsons, your trader at Hickimavi, told me that the Fulcrum Company had bought that station from you. Now what did he want to lie for?"

Griffiths, overwrought by sun and sickness, exploded. All his bitterness of spirit rose up in his face and twisted his mouth into a snarl.

"Look here, Grief, what's the good of playing with me that way? You know, and I know you know. Let it go at that. I *have* sold out, and I *am* getting away. And what are you going to do about it?"

Grief shrugged his shoulders, and no hint of resolve shadowed itself in his own face. His expression was as of one in a quandary.

"There's no law here," Griffiths pressed home his advantage.

"Tulagi is a hundred and fifty miles away. I've got my clearance papers, and I'm on my own boat. There's nothing to stop me from sailing. You've got no right to stop me just because I owe you a little money. And by God! you can't stop me. Put that in your pipe."

The look of pained surprise on Grief's face deepened.

"You mean you're going to cheat me out of that twelve hundred, Griffiths?"

"That's just about the size of it, old man. And calling hard names won't help any. There's the wind coming. You'd better get overside before I pull out, or I'll tow your canoe under."

"Really, Griffiths, you sound almost right. I can't stop you." Grief fumbled in the pouch that hung on his revolver-belt and pulled out a crumpled official-looking paper. "But maybe this will stop you. And it's something for *your* pipe. Smoke up."

"What is it?"

"An admiralty warrant. Running to the New Hebrides won't save you. It can be served anywhere."

Griffiths hesitated and swallowed, when he had finished glancing at the document. With knit brows he pondered this new phase of the situation. Then, abruptly, as he looked up, his face relaxed into all frankness.

"You were cleverer than I thought, old man," he said. "You've got me hip and thigh. I ought to have known better than to try and beat you. Jacobsen told me I couldn't, and I wouldn't listen to him. But he was right, and so are you. I've got the money below.

Come on down and we'll settle."

He started to go down, then stepped aside to let his visitor precede him, at the same time glancing seaward to where the dark flaw of wind was quickening the water.

"Heave short," he told the mate. "Get up sail and stand ready to break out."

As Grief sat down on the edge of the mate's bunk, close against and facing the tiny table, he noticed the butt of a revolver just projecting from under the pillow. On the table, which hung on hinges from the for'ard bulkhead, were pen and ink, also a battered log-book.

"Oh, I don't mind being caught in a dirty trick," Griffiths was saying defiantly. "I've been in the tropics too long. I'm a sick man, a damn sick man. And the whiskey, and the sun, and the fever have made me sick in morals, too. Nothing's too mean and low for me now, and I can understand why the niggers eat each other, and take heads, and such things. I could do it myself. So I call trying to do you out of that small account a pretty mild trick. Wisht I could offer you a drink."

Grief made no reply, and the other busied himself in attempting to unlock a large and much-dented cash-box. From on deck came falsetto cries and the creak and rattle of blocks as the black crew swung up mainsail and driver. Grief watched a large cockroach crawling over the greasy paintwork. Griffiths, with an oath of irritation, carried the cash-box to the companion-steps for better light. Here, on his feet, and bending over the box,

his back to his visitor, his hands shot out to the rifle that stood beside the steps, and at the same moment he whirled about.

"Now don't you move a muscle," he commanded.

Grief smiled, elevated his eyebrows quizzically, and obeyed. His left hand rested on the bunk beside him; his right hand lay on the table.

His revolver hung on his right hip in plain sight. But in his mind was recollection of the other revolver under the pillow.

"Huh!" Griffiths sneered. "You've got everybody in the Solomons hypnotized, but let me tell you you ain't got me. Now I'm going to throw you off my vessel, along with your admiralty warrant, but first you've got to do something. Lift up that log-book."

The other glanced curiously at the log-book, but did not move.

"I tell you I'm a sick man, Grief; and I'd as soon shoot you as smash a cockroach. Lift up that log-book, I say."

Sick he did look, his lean face working nervously with the rage that possessed him. Grief lifted the book and set it aside. Beneath lay a written sheet of tablet paper.

"Read it," Griffiths commanded. "Read it aloud."

Grief obeyed; but while he read, the fingers of his left hand began an infinitely slow and patient crawl toward the butt of the weapon under the pillow.

"On board the ketch Willi-Waw, Bombi Bight, Island of Anna, Solomon Islands," he read. "Know all men by these presents that I do hereby sign off and release in full, for due

value received, all debts whatsoever owing to me by Harrison J. Griffiths, who has this day paid to me twelve hundred pounds sterling."

"With that receipt in my hands," Griffiths grinned, "your admiralty warrant's not worth the paper it's written on. Sign it."

"It won't do any good, Griffiths," Grief said. "A document signed under compulsion won't hold before the law."

"In that case, what objection have you to signing it then?"

"Oh, none at all, only that I might save you heaps of trouble by not signing it."

Grief's fingers had gained the revolver, and, while he talked, with his right hand he played with the pen and with his left began slowly and imperceptibly drawing the weapon to his side. As his hand finally closed upon it, second finger on trigger and forefinger laid past the cylinder and along the barrel, he wondered what luck he would have at left-handed snap-shooting.

"Don't consider me," Griffiths gibed. "And just remember Jacobsen will testify that he saw me pay the money over. Now sign, sign in full, at the bottom, David Grief, and date it."

From on deck came the jar of sheet-blocks and the rat-tat-tat of the reef-points against the canvas. In the cabin they could feel the *Willi-Waw* heel, swing into the wind, and right. David Grief still hesitated. From for'ard came the jerking rattle of headsail halyards through the sheaves. The little vessel heeled, and through the cabin walls came the gurgle and wash of water.

"Get a move on!" Griffiths cried. "The anchor's out."

The muzzle of the rifle, four feet away, was bearing directly on him, when Grief resolved to act. The rifle wavered as Griffiths kept his balance in the uncertain puffs of the first of the wind. Grief took advantage of the wavering, made as if to sign the paper, and at the same instant, like a cat, exploded into swift and intricate action. As he ducked low and leaped forward with his body, his left hand flashed from under the screen of the table, and so accurately-timed was the single stiff pull on the self-cocking trigger that the cartridge discharged as the muzzle came forward. Not a whit behind was Griffiths. The muzzle of his weapon dropped to meet the ducking body, and, shot at snap direction, rifle and revolver went off simultaneously.

Grief felt the sting and sear of a bullet across the skin of his shoulder, and knew that his own shot had missed. His forward rush carried him to Griffiths before another shot could be fired, both of whose arms, still holding the rifle, he locked with a low tackle about the body. He shoved the revolver muzzle, still in his left hand, deep into the other's abdomen. Under the press of his anger and the sting of his abraded skin, Grief's finger was lifting the hammer, when the wave of anger passed and he recollected himself. Down the companion-way came indignant cries from the Gooma boys in his canoe.

Everything was happening in seconds. There was apparently no pause in his actions as he gathered Griffiths in his arms and carried him up the steep steps in a sweeping rush. Out into the blinding glare of sunshine he came. A black stood grinning at

the wheel, and the *Willi-Waw*, heeled over from the wind, was foaming along. Rapidly dropping astern was his Gooma canoe. Grief turned his head. From amidships, revolver in hand, the mate was springing toward him. With two jumps, still holding the helpless Griffiths, Grief leaped to the rail and overboard.

Both men were grappled together as they went down; but Grief, with a quick updraw of his knees to the other's chest, broke the grip and forced him down. With both feet on Griffiths's shoulder, he forced him still deeper, at the same time driving himself to the surface. Scarcely had his head broken into the sunshine when two splashes of water, in quick succession and within a foot of his face, advertised that Jacobsen knew how to handle a revolver. There was a chance for no third shot, for Grief, filling his lungs with air, sank down. Under water he struck out, nor did he come up till he saw the canoe and the bubbling paddles overhead. As he climbed aboard, the *Wlli-Waw* went into the wind to come about.

"Washee-washee!" Grief cried to his boys. "You fella make-um beach quick fella time!"

In all shamelessness, he turned his back on the battle and ran for cover. The *Willi-Waw*, compelled to deaden way in order to pick up its captain, gave Grief his chance for a lead. The canoe struck the beach full-tilt, with every paddle driving, and they leaped out and ran across the sand for the trees. But before they gained the shelter, three times the sand kicked into puffs ahead of them. Then they dove into the green safety of the jungle.

Grief watched the *Willi-Waw* haul up close, go out the passage, then slack its sheets as it headed south with the wind abeam. As it went out of sight past the point he could see the topsail being broken out. One of the Gooma boys, a black, nearly fifty years of age, hideously marred and scarred by skin diseases and old wounds, looked up into his face and grinned.

"My word," the boy commented, "that fella skipper too much cross along you."

Grief laughed, and led the way back across the sand to the canoe.

III

How many millions David Grief was worth no man in the Solomons knew, for his holdings and ventures were everywhere in the great South Pacific. From Samoa to New Guinea and even to the north of the Line his plantations were scattered. He possessed pearling concessions in the Paumotus. Though his name did not appear, he was in truth the German company that traded in the French Marquesas. His trading stations were in strings in all the groups, and his vessels that operated them were many. He owned atolls so remote and tiny that his smallest schooners and ketches visited the solitary agents but once a year.

In Sydney, on Castlereagh Street, his offices occupied three floors. But he was rarely in those offices. He preferred always to be on the go amongst the islands, nosing out new investments,

inspecting and shaking up old ones, and rubbing shoulders with fun and adventure in a thousand strange guises. He bought the wreck of the great steamship *Gavonne* for a song, and in salving it achieved the impossible and cleaned up a quarter of a million. In the Louisiades he planted the first commercial rubber, and in Bora-Bora he ripped out the South Sea cotton and put the jolly islanders at the work of planting cacao. It was he who took the deserted island of Lallu-Ka, colonized it with Polynesians from the Ontong-Java Atoll, and planted four thousand acres to cocoanuts. And it was he who reconciled the warring chief-stocks of Tahiti and swung the great deal of the phosphate island of Hikihu.

His own vessels recruited his contract labour. They brought Santa Cruz boys to the New Hebrides, New Hebrides boys to the Banks, and the head-hunting cannibals of Malaita to the plantations of New Georgia. From Tonga to the Gilberts and on to the far Louisiades his recruiters combed the islands for labour. His keels plowed all ocean stretches. He owned three steamers on regular island runs, though he rarely elected to travel in them, preferring the wilder and more primitive way of wind and sail.

At least forty years of age, he looked no more than thirty. Yet beachcombers remembered his advent among the islands a score of years before, at which time the yellow mustache was already budding silkily on his lip. Unlike other white men in the tropics, he was there because he liked it. His protective skin pigmentation was excellent. He had been born to the sun. One he

was in ten thousand in the matter of sun-resistance. The invisible and high-velocity light waves failed to bore into him. Other white men were pervious. The sun drove through their skins, ripping and smashing tissues and nerves, till they became sick in mind and body, tossed most of the Decalogue overboard, descended to beastliness, drank themselves into quick graves, or survived so savagely that war vessels were sometimes sent to curb their license.

But David Grief was a true son of the sun, and he flourished in all its ways. He merely became browner with the passing of the years, though in the brown was the hint of golden tint that glows in the skin of the Polynesian. Yet his blue eyes retained their blue, his mustache its yellow, and the lines of his face were those which had persisted through the centuries in his English race. English he was in blood, yet those that thought they knew contended he was at least American born. Unlike them, he had not come out to the South Seas seeking hearth and saddle of his own. In fact, he had brought hearth and saddle with him. His advent had been in the Paumotus. He arrived on board a tiny schooner yacht, master and owner, a youth questing romance and adventure along the sun-washed path of the tropics. He also arrived in a hurricane, the giant waves of which deposited him and yacht and all in the thick of a cocoanut grove three hundred yards beyond the surf. Six months later he was rescued by a pearling cutter. But the sun had got into his blood. At Tahiti, instead of taking a steamer home, he bought a schooner, outfitted her with trade-goods and

divers, and went for a cruise through the Dangerous Archipelago.

As the golden tint burned into his face it poured molten out of the ends of his fingers. His was the golden touch, but he played the game, not for the gold, but for the game's sake. It was a man's game, the rough contacts and fierce give and take of the adventurers of his own blood and of half the bloods of Europe and the rest of the world, and it was a good game; but over and beyond was his love of all the other things that go to make up a South Seas rover's life – the smell of the reef; the infinite exquisiteness of the shoals of living coral in the mirror-surfaced lagoons; the crashing sunrises of raw colours spread with lawless cunning; the palm-tufted islets set in turquoise deeps; the tonic wine of the trade-winds; the heave and send of the orderly, crested seas; the moving deck beneath his feet, the straining canvas overhead; the flower-garlanded, golden-glowing men and maids of Polynesia, half-children and half-gods; and even the howling savages of Melanesia, head-hunters and man-eaters, half-devil and all beast.

And so, favoured child of the sun, out of munificence of energy and sheer joy of living, he, the man of many millions, forbore on his far way to play the game with Harrison J. Griffiths for a paltry sum. It was his whim, his desire, his expression of self and of the sun-warmth that poured through him. It was fun, a joke, a problem, a bit of play on which life was lightly hazarded for the joy of the playing.

IV

The early morning found the *Wonder* laying close-hauled along the coast of Guadalcanal She moved lazily through the water under the dying breath of the land breeze. To the east, heavy masses of clouds promised a renewal of the southeast trades, accompanied by sharp puffs and rain squalls. Ahead, laying along the coast on the same course as the *Wonder*, and being slowly overtaken, was a small ketch. It was not the *Willi-Waw*, however, and Captain Ward, on the *Wonder*, putting down his glasses, named it the *Kauri*.

Grief, just on deck from below, sighed regretfully.

"If it had only been the *Willi-Waw*" he said.

"You do hate to be beaten," Denby, the supercargo, remarked sympathetically.

"I certainly do." Grief paused and laughed with genuine mirth. "It's my firm conviction that Griffiths is a rogue, and that he treated me quite scurvily yesterday. 'Sign,' he says, 'sign in full, at the bottom, and date it,' And Jacobsen, the little rat, stood in with him. It was rank piracy, the days of Bully Hayes all over again."

"If you weren't my employer, Mr. Grief, I'd like to give you a piece of my mind," Captain Ward broke in.

"Go on and spit it out," Grief encouraged.

"Well, then – " The captain hesitated and cleared his throat. "With all the money you've got, only a fool would take the risk

you did with those two curs. What do you do it for?"

"Honestly, I don't know, Captain. I just want to, I suppose. And can you give any better reason for anything you do?"

"You'll get your bally head shot off some fine day," Captain Ward growled in answer, as he stepped to the binnacle and took the bearing of a peak which had just thrust its head through the clouds that covered Guadalcanar.

The land breeze strengthened in a last effort, and the *Wonder*, slipping swiftly through the water, ranged alongside the *Kauri* and began to go by. Greetings flew back and forth, then David Grief called out:

"Seen anything of the *Willi-Waw*?"

The captain, slouch-hatted and barelegged, with a rolling twist hitched the faded blue *lava-lava* tighter around his waist and spat tobacco juice overside.

"Sure," he answered. "Griffiths lay at Savo last night, taking on pigs and yams and filling his water-tanks. Looked like he was going for a long cruise, but he said no. Why? Did you want to see him?"

"Yes; but if you see him first don't tell him you've seen me."

The captain nodded and considered, and walked for'ard on his own deck to keep abreast of the faster vessel.

"Say!" he called. "Jacobsen told me they were coming down this afternoon to Gabera. Said they were going to lay there to-night and take on sweet potatoes."

"Gabera has the only leading lights in the Solomons," Grief

said, when his schooner had drawn well ahead. “Is that right, Captain Ward?”

The captain nodded.

“And the little bight just around the point on this side, it’s a rotten anchorage, isn’t it?”

“No anchorage. All coral patches and shoals, and a bad surf. That’s where the *Molly* went to pieces three years ago.”

Grief stared straight before him with lustreless eyes for a full minute, as if summoning some vision to his inner sight. Then the corners of his eyes wrinkled and the ends of his yellow mustache lifted in a smile.

“We’ll anchor at Gabera,” he said. “And run in close to the little bight this side. I want you to drop me in a whaleboat as you go by. Also, give me six boys, and serve out rifles. I’ll be back on board before morning.”

The captain’s face took on an expression of suspicion, which swiftly slid into one of reproach.

“Oh, just a little fun, skipper,” Grief protested with the apologetic air of a schoolboy caught in mischief by an elder.

Captain Ward grunted, but Denby was all alertness.

“I’d like to go along, Mr. Grief,” he said.

Grief nodded consent.

“Bring some axes and bush-knives,” he said. “And, oh, by the way, a couple of bright lanterns. See they’ve got oil in them.”

V

An hour before sunset the *Wonder* tore by the little bight. The wind had freshened, and a lively sea was beginning to make. The shoals toward the beach were already white with the churn of water, while those farther out as yet showed no more sign than of discoloured water. As the schooner went into the wind and backed her jib and staysail the whaleboat was swung out. Into it leaped six breech-clouted Santa Cruz boys, each armed with a rifle. Denby, carrying the lanterns, dropped into the stern-sheets. Grief, following, paused on the rail.

"Pray for a dark night, skipper," he pleaded.

"You'll get it," Captain Ward answered. "There's no moon anyway, and there won't be any sky. She'll be a bit squally, too."

The forecast sent a radiance into Grief's face, making more pronounced the golden tint of his sunburn. He leaped down beside the supercargo.

"Cast off!" Captain Ward ordered. "Draw the headsails! Put your wheel over! There! Steady! Take that course!"

The *Wonder* filled away and ran on around the point for Gabera, while the whaleboat, pulling six oars and steered by Grief, headed for the beach. With superb boatmanship he threaded the narrow, tortuous channel which no craft larger than a whaleboat could negotiate, until the shoals and patches showed seaward and they grounded on the quiet, rippling beach.

The next hour was filled with work. Moving about among the wild cocoanuts and jungle brush, Grief selected the trees.

"Chop this fella tree; chop that fella tree," he told his blacks. "No chop that other fella," he said, with a shake of head.

In the end, a wedge-shaped segment of jungle was cleared. Near to the beach remained one long palm. At the apex of the wedge stood another. Darkness was falling as the lanterns were lighted, carried up the two trees, and made fast.

"That outer lantern is too high." David Grief studied it critically. "Put it down about ten feet, Denby."

VI

The *Willi-Waw* was tearing through the water with a bone in her teeth, for the breath of the passing squall was still strong. The blacks were swinging up the big mainsail, which had been lowered on the run when the puff was at its height. Jacobsen, superintending the operation, ordered them to throw the halyards down on deck and stand by, then went for'ard on the lee-bow and joined Griffiths. Both men stared with wide-strained eyes at the blank wall of darkness through which they were flying, their ears tense for the sound of surf on the invisible shore. It was by this sound that they were for the moment steering.

The wind fell lighter, the scud of clouds thinned and broke, and in the dim glimmer of starlight loomed the jungle-clad coast. Ahead, and well on the lee-bow, appeared a jagged rock-point.

Both men strained to it.

"Amboy Point," Griffiths announced. "Plenty of water close up. Take the wheel, Jacobsen, till we set a course. Get a move on!"

Running aft, barefooted and barelegged, the rainwater dripping from his scant clothing, the mate displaced the black at the wheel.

"How's she heading?" Griffiths called.

"South-a-half-west!"

"Let her come up south-by-west! Got it?"

"Right on it!"

Griffiths considered the changed relation of Amboy Point to the *Willi-Waw*'s course.

"And a-half-west!" he cried.

"And a-half-west!" came the answer. "Right on it!"

"Steady! That'll do!"

"Steady she is!" Jacobsen turned the wheel over to the savage. "You steer good fella, savve?" he warned. "No good fella, I knock your damn black head off."

Again he went for'ard and joined the other, and again the cloud-scud thickened, the star-glimmer vanished, and the wind rose and screamed in another squall.

"Watch that mainsail!" Griffiths yelled in the mate's ear, at the same time studying the ketch's behaviour.

Over she pressed, and lee-rail under, while he measured the weight of the wind and quested its easement. The tepid sea-water,

with here and there tiny globules of phosphorescence, washed about his ankles and knees. The wind screamed a higher note, and every shroud and stay sharply chorused an answer as the *Willi-Waw* pressed farther over and down.

"Down mainsail!" Griffiths yelled, springing to the peak-halyards, thrusting away the black who held on, and casting off the turn.

Jacobsen, at the throat-halyards, was performing the like office. The big sail rattled down, and the blacks, with shouts and yells, threw themselves on the battling canvas. The mate, finding one skulking in the darkness, flung his bunched knuckles into the creature's face and drove him to his work.

The squall held at its high pitch, and under her small canvas the *Willi-Waw* still foamed along. Again the two men stood for'ard and vainly watched in the horizontal drive of rain.

"We're all right," Griffiths said. "This rain won't last. We can hold this course till we pick up the lights. Anchor in thirteen fathoms. You'd better overhaul forty-five on a night like this. After that get the gaskets on the mainsail. We won't need it."

Half an hour afterward his weary eyes were rewarded by a glimpse of two lights.

"There they are, Jacobsen. I'll take the wheel. Run down the fore-staysail and stand by to let go. Make the niggers jump."

Aft, the spokes of the wheel in his hands, Griffiths held the course till the two lights came in line, when he abruptly altered and headed directly in for them. He heard the tumble and roar

of the surf, but decided it was farther away – as it should be, at Gabera.

He heard the frightened cry of the mate, and was grinding the wheel down with all his might, when the *Willi-Waw* struck. At the same instant her mainmast crashed over the bow. Five wild minutes followed. All hands held on while the hull upheaved and smashed down on the brittle coral and the warm seas swept over them. Grinding and crunching, the *Willi-Waw* worked itself clear over the shoal patch and came solidly to rest in the comparatively smooth and shallow channel beyond.

Griffiths sat down on the edge of the cabin, head bowed on chest, in silent wrath and bitterness. Once he lifted his face to glare at the two white lights, one above the other and perfectly in line.

"There they are," he said. "And this isn't Gabera. Then what the hell is it?"

Though the surf still roared and across the shoal flung its spray and upper wash over them, the wind died down and the stars came out. Shoreward came the sound of oars.

"What have you had? – an earthquake?" Griffiths called out. "The bottom's all changed. I've anchored here a hundred times in thirteen fathoms. Is that you, Wilson?"

A whaleboat came alongside, and a man climbed over the rail. In the faint light Griffiths found an automatic Colt's thrust into his face, and, looking up, saw David Grief.

"No, you never anchored here before," Grief laughed.

“Gabera’s just around the point, where I’ll be as soon as I’ve collected that little sum of twelve hundred pounds. We won’t bother for the receipt. I’ve your note here, and I’ll just return it.”

“You did this!” Griffiths cried, springing to his feet in a sudden gust of rage. “You faked those leading lights! You’ve wrecked me, and by – ”

“Steady! Steady!” Grief’s voice was cool and menacing. “I’ll trouble you for that twelve hundred, please.”

To Griffiths, a vast impotence seemed to descend upon him. He was overwhelmed by a profound disgust – disgust for the sunlands and the sun-sickness, for the futility of all his endeavour, for this blue-eyed, golden-tinted, superior man who defeated him on all his ways.

“Jacobsen,” he said, “will you open the cash-box and pay this – this bloodsucker – twelve hundred pounds?”

Chapter Two – THE PROUD GOAT OF ALOYSIUS PANKBURN

I

Quick eye that he had for the promise of adventure, prepared always for the unexpected to leap out at him from behind the nearest cocoanut tree, nevertheless David Grief received no warning when he laid eyes on Aloysius Pankburn. It was on the little steamer *Berthe*. Leaving his schooner to follow, Grief had taken passage for the short run across from Raiatea to Papeete. When he first saw Aloysius Pankburn, that somewhat fuddled gentleman was drinking a lonely cocktail at the tiny bar between decks next to the barber shop. And when Grief left the barber's hands half an hour later Aloysius Pankburn was still hanging over the bar still drinking by himself.

Now it is not good for man to drink alone, and Grief threw sharp scrutiny into his pass-ing glance. He saw a well-built young man of thirty, well-featured, well-dressed, and evidently, in the world's catalogue, a gentleman. But in the faint hint of slovenliness, in the shaking, eager hand that spilled the liquor, and in the nervous, vacillating eyes, Grief read the unmistakable marks of the chronic alcoholic.

After dinner he chanced upon Pankburn again. This time it was on deck, and the young man, clinging to the rail and peering into the distance at the dim forms of a man and woman in two steamer chairs drawn closely together, was crying, drunkenly. Grief noted that the man's arm was around the woman's waist. Aloysius Pankburn looked on and cried.

"Nothing to weep about," Grief said genially.

Pankburn looked at him, and gushed tears of profound self-pity.

"It's hard," he sobbed. "Hard. Hard. That man's my business manager. I employ him. I pay him a good screw. And that's how he earns it."

"In that case, why don't you put a stop to it?" Grief advised.

"I can't. She'd shut off my whiskey. She's my trained nurse."

"Fire *her*, then, and drink your head off."

"I can't. He's got all my money. If I did, he wouldn't give me sixpence to buy a drink with."

This woful possibility brought a fresh wash of tears. Grief was interested. Of all unique situations he could never have imagined such a one as this.

"They were engaged to take care of me," Pankburn was blubbering, "to keep me away from the drink. And that's the way they do it, lollygagging all about the ship and letting me drink myself to death. It isn't right, I tell you. It isn't right. They were sent along with me for the express purpose of not letting me drink, and they let me drink to swinishness as long as I leave

them alone. If I complain they threaten not to let me have another drop. What can a poor devil do? My death will be on their heads, that's all. Come on down and join me."

He released his clutch on the rail, and would have fallen had Grief not caught his arm. He seemed to undergo a transformation, to stiffen physically, to thrust his chin forward aggressively, and to glint harshly in his eyes.

"I won't let them kill me. And they'll be sorry. I've offered them fifty thousand – later on, of course. They laughed. They don't know. But I know." He fumbled in his coat pocket and drew forth an object that flashed in the faint light. "They don't know the meaning of that. But I do." He looked at Grief with abrupt suspicion. "What do you make out of it, eh? What do you make out of it?"

David Grief caught a swift vision of an alcoholic degenerate putting a very loving young couple to death with a copper spike, for a copper spike was what he held in his hand, an evident old-fashioned ship-fastening.

"My mother thinks I'm up here to get cured of the booze habit. She doesn't know. I bribed the doctor to prescribe a voyage. When we get to Papeete my manager is going to charter a schooner and away we'll sail. But they don't dream. They think it's the booze. I know. I only know. Good night, sir. I'm going to bed – unless – er – you'll join me in a night cap. One last drink, you know."

II

In the week that followed at Papeete Grief caught numerous and bizarre glimpses of Aloysius Pankburn. So did everybody else in the little island capital; for neither the beach nor Lavina's boarding house had been so scandalized in years. In midday, bareheaded, clad only in swimming trunks, Aloysius Pankburn ran down the main street from Lavina's to the water front. He put on the gloves with a fireman from the *Berthe* in a scheduled four-round bout at the *Folies Bergères*, and was knocked out in the second round. He tried insanely to drown himself in a two-foot pool of water, dived drunkenly and splendidly from fifty feet up in the rigging of the *Mariposa* lying at the wharf, and chartered the cutter *Toerau* at more than her purchase price and was only saved by his manager's refusal financially to ratify the agreement. He bought out the old blind leper at the market, and sold breadfruit, plantains, and sweet potatoes at such cut-rates that the gendarmes were called out to break the rush of bargain-hunting natives. For that matter, three times the gendarmes arrested him for riotous behaviour, and three times his manager ceased from love-making long enough to pay the fines imposed by a needy colonial administration.

Then the *Mariposa* sailed for San Francisco, and in the bridal suite were the manager and the trained nurse, fresh-married. Before departing, the manager had thoughtfully bestowed eight

five-pound banknotes on Aloysius, with the foreseen result that Aloysius awoke several days later to find himself broke and perilously near to delirium tremens. Lavina, famed for her good heart even among the driftage of South Pacific rogues and scamps, nursed him around and never let it filter into his returning intelligence that there was neither manager nor money to pay his board.

It was several evenings after this that David Grief, lounging under the after deck awning of the *Kittiwake* and idly scanning the meagre columns of the Papeete *Avant-Coureur*, sat suddenly up and almost rubbed his eyes. It was unbelievable, but there it was. The old South Seas Romance was not dead. He read:

> WANTED – To exchange a half interest in buried treasure,
> worth five million francs, for transportation for one to an unknown island in the Pacific and facilities for carrying away the loot. Ask for FOLLY, at Lavina's.

Grief looked at his watch. It was early yet, only eight o'clock.

"Mr. Carlsen," he called in the direction of a glowing pipe. "Get the crew for the whale-boat. I'm going ashore."

The husky voice of the Norwegian mate was raised for'ard, and half a dozen strapping Rapa Islanders ceased their singing and manned the boat.

"I came to see Folly, Mr. Folly, I imagine," David Grief told Lavina.

He noted the quick interest in her eyes as she turned her head

and flung a command in native across two open rooms to the outstanding kitchen. A few minutes later a barefooted native girl padded in and shook her head.

Lavina's disappointment was evident.

"You're stopping aboard the *Kittiwake*, aren't you?" she said. "I'll tell him you called."

"Then it is a *he?*" Grief queried.

Lavina nodded.

"I hope you can do something for him, Captain Grief. I'm only a good-natured woman. I don't know. But he's a likable man, and he may be telling the truth; I don't know. You'll know. You're not a soft-hearted fool like me. Can't I mix you a cocktail?"

III

Back on board his schooner and dozing in a deck chair under a three-months-old magazine, David Grief was aroused by a sobbing, slubbering noise from overside. He opened his eyes. From the Chilian cruiser, a quarter of a mile away, came the stroke of eight bells. It was midnight. From overside came a splash and another slubbering noise. To him it seemed half amphibian, half the sounds of a man crying to himself and querulously chanting his sorrows to the general universe.

A jump took David Grief to the low rail. Beneath, centred about the slubbering noise, was an area of agitated phosphorescence. Leaning over, he locked his hand under the

armpit of a man, and, with pull and heave and quick-changing grips, he drew on deck the naked form of Aloysius Pankburn.

"I didn't have a sou-markee," he complained. "I had to swim it, and I couldn't find your gangway. It was very miserable. Pardon me. If you have a towel to put about my middle, and a good stiff drink, I'll be more myself. I'm Mr. Folly, and you're the Captain Grief, I presume, who called on me when I was out. No, I'm not drunk. Nor am I cold. This isn't shivering. Lavina allowed me only two drinks to-day. I'm on the edge of the horrors, that's all, and I was beginning to see things when I couldn't find the gangway. If you'll take me below I'll be very grateful. You are the only one that answered my advertisement."

He was shaking pitiably in the warm night, and down in the cabin, before he got his towel, Grief saw to it that a half-tumbler of whiskey was in his hand.

"Now fire ahead," Grief said, when he had got his guest into a shirt and a pair of duck trousers. "What's this advertisement of yours? I'm listening."

Pankburn looked at the whiskey bottle, but Grief shook his head.

"All right, Captain, though I tell you on whatever is left of my honour that I am not drunk – not in the least. Also, what I shall tell you is true, and I shall tell it briefly, for it is clear to me that you are a man of affairs and action. Likewise, your chemistry is good. To you alcohol has never been a million maggots gnawing at every cell of you. You've never been to hell. I am there now.

I am scorching. Now listen.

"My mother is alive. She is English. I was born in Australia. I was educated at York and Yale. I am a master of arts, a doctor of philosophy, and I am no good. Furthermore, I am an alcoholic. I have been an athlete. I used to swan-dive a hundred and ten feet in the clear. I hold several amateur records. I am a fish. I learned the crawl-stroke from the first of the Cavilles. I have done thirty miles in a rough sea. I have another record. I have punished more whiskey than any man of my years. I will steal sixpence from you for the price of a drink. Finally, I will tell you the truth.

"My father was an American – an Annapolis man. He was a midshipman in the War of the Rebellion. In '66 he was a lieutenant on the *Suwanee*. Her captain was Paul Shirley. In '66 the Suwanee coaled at an island in the Pacific which I do not care to mention, under a protectorate which did not exist then and which shall be nameless. Ashore, behind the bar of a public house, my father saw three copper spikes – ship's spikes."

David Grief smiled quietly.

"And now I can tell you the name of the coaling station and of the protectorate that came afterward," he said.

"And of the three spikes?" Pankburn asked with equal quietness. "Go ahead, for they are in my possession now."

"Certainly. They were behind German Oscar's bar at Peenoo-Peenee. Johnny Black brought them there from off his schooner the night he died. He was just back from a long cruise to the westward, fishing beche-de-mer and sandalwood trading. All the

beach knows the tale."

Pankburn shook his head.

"Go on," he urged.

"It was before my time, of course," Grief explained. "I only tell what I've heard. Next came the Ecuadoran cruiser, of all directions, in from the westward, and bound home. Her officers recognized the spikes. Johnny Black was dead. They got hold of his mate and logbook. Away to the westward went she. Six months after, again bound home, she dropped in at Peenoo-Peenee. She had failed, and the tale leaked out."

"When the revolutionists were marching on Guayaquil," Pankburn took it up, "the federal officers, believing a defence of the city hopeless, salted down the government treasure chest, something like a million dollars gold, but all in English coinage, and put it on board the American schooner *Flirt*. They were going to run at daylight. The American captain skinned out in the middle of the night. Go on."

"It's an old story," Grief resumed. "There was no other vessel in the harbour. The federal leaders couldn't run. They put their backs to the wall and held the city. Rohjas Salced, making a forced march from Quito, raised the siege. The revolution was broken, and the one ancient steamer that constituted the Ecuadoran navy was sent in pursuit of the *Flirt*. They caught her, between the Banks Group and the New Hebrides, hove to and flying distress signals. The captain had died the day before – blackwater fever."

"And the mate?" Pankburn challenged.

"The mate had been killed a week earlier by the natives on one of the Banks, when they sent a boat in for water. There were no navigators left. The men were put to the torture. It was beyond international law. They wanted to confess, but couldn't. They told of the three spikes in the trees on the beach, but where the island was they did not know. To the westward, far to the westward, was all they knew. The tale now goes two ways. One is that they all died under the torture. The other is that the survivors were swung at the yardarm. At any rate, the Ecuadoran cruiser went home without the treasure. Johnny Black brought the three spikes to Peenoo-Peenee, and left them at German Oscar's, but how and where he found them he never told."

Pankburn looked hard at the whiskey bottle.

"Just two fingers," he whimpered.

Grief considered, and poured a meagre drink. Pankburn's eyes sparkled, and he took new lease of life.

"And this is where I come in with the missing details," he said. "Johnny Black did tell. He told my father. Wrote him from Levuka, before he came on to die at Peenoo-Peenee. My father had saved his life one rough-house night in Valparaiso. A Chink pearler, out of Thursday Island, prospecting for new grounds to the north of New Guinea, traded for the three spikes with a nigger. Johnny Black bought them for copper weight. He didn't dream any more than the Chink, but coming back he stopped for hawksbill turtle at the very beach where you say the mate of

the *Flirt* was killed. Only he wasn't killed. The Banks Islanders held him prisoner, and he was dying of necrosis of the jawbone, caused by an arrow wound in the fight on the beach. Before he died he told the yarn to Johnny Black. Johnny Black wrote my father from Levuka. He was at the end of his rope – cancer. My father, ten years afterward, when captain of the *Perry*, got the spikes from German Oscar. And from my father, last will and testament, you know, came the spikes and the data. I have the island, the latitude and longitude of the beach where the three spikes were nailed in the trees. The spikes are up at Lavina's now. The latitude and longitude are in my head. Now what do you think?"

"Fishy," was Grief's instant judgment. "Why didn't your father go and get it himself?"

"Didn't need it. An uncle died and left him a fortune. He retired from the navy, ran foul of an epidemic of trained nurses in Boston, and my mother got a divorce. Also, she fell heir to an income of something like thirty thousand dollars, and went to live in New Zealand. I was divided between them, half-time New Zealand, half-time United States, until my father's death last year. Now my mother has me altogether. He left me his money – oh, a couple of millions – but my mother has had guardians appointed on account of the drink. I'm worth all kinds of money, but I can't touch a penny save what is doled out to me. But the old man, who had got the tip on my drinking, left me the three spikes and the data thereunto pertaining. Did it through his

lawyers, unknown to my mother; said it beat life insurance, and that if I had the backbone to go and get it I could drink my back teeth awash until I died. Millions in the hands of my guardians, slathers of shekels of my mother's that'll be mine if she beats me to the crematory, another million waiting to be dug up, and in the meantime I'm cadging on Lavina for two drinks a day. It's hell, isn't it? – when you consider my thirst."

"Where's the island?"

"It's a long way from here."

"Name it."

"Not on your life, Captain Grief. You're making an easy half-million out of this. You will sail under my directions, and when we're well to sea and on our way I'll tell you and not before."

Grief shrugged his shoulders, dismissing the subject.

"When I've given you another drink I'll send the boat ashore with you," he said.

Pankburn was taken aback. For at least five minutes he debated with himself, then licked his lips and surrendered.

"If you promise to go, I'll tell you now."

"Of course I'm willing to go. That's why I asked you. Name the island."

Pankburn looked at the bottle.

"I'll take that drink now, Captain."

"No you won't. That drink was for you if you went ashore. If you are going to tell me the island, you must do it in your sober senses."

"Francis Island, if you will have it. Bougainville named it Barbour Island."

"Off there all by its lonely in the Little Coral Sea," Grief said. "I know it. Lies between New Ireland and New Guinea. A rotten hole now, though it was all right when the *Flirt* drove in the spikes and the Chink pearler traded for them. The steamship *Castor*, recruiting labour for the Upolu plantations, was cut off there with all hands two years ago. I knew her captain well. The Germans sent a cruiser, shelled the bush, burned half a dozen villages, killed a couple of niggers and a lot of pigs, and – and that was all. The niggers always were bad there, but they turned really bad forty years ago. That was when they cut off a whaler. Let me see? What was her name?"

He stepped to the bookshelf, drew out the bulky "South Pacific Directory," and ran through its pages.

"Yes. Here it is. Francis, or Barbour," he skimmed. "Natives warlike and treacherous – Melanesian – cannibals. Whaleship *Western* cut off – that was her name. Shoals – points – anchorages – ah, Redscar, Owen Bay, Likikili Bay, that's more like it; deep indentation, mangrove swamps, good holding in nine fathoms when white scar in bluff bears west-southwest." Grief looked up. "That's your beach, Pankburn, I'll swear."

"Will you go?" the other demanded eagerly.

Grief nodded.

"It sounds good to me. Now if the story had been of a hundred millions, or some such crazy sum, I wouldn't look at it for a

moment. We'll sail to-morrow, but under one consideration. You are to be absolutely under my orders."

His visitor nodded emphatically and joyously.

"And that means no drink."

"That's pretty hard," Pankburn whined.

"It's my terms. I'm enough of a doctor to see you don't come to harm. And you are to work – hard work, sailor's work. You'll stand regular watches and everything, though you eat and sleep aft with us."

"It's a go." Pankburn put out his hand to ratify the agreement. "If it doesn't kill me," he added.

David Grief poured a generous three-fingers into the tumbler and extended it.

"Then here's your last drink. Take it."

Pankburn's hand went halfway out. With a sudden spasm of resolution, he hesitated, threw back his shoulders, and straightened up his head.

"I guess I won't," he began, then, feebly surrendering to the gnaw of desire, he reached hastily for the glass, as if in fear that it would be withdrawn.

IV

It is a long traverse from Papeete in the Societies to the Little Coral Sea – from 100 west longitude to 150 east longitude – as the crow flies the equivalent to a voyage across the Atlantic. But

the *Kittiwake* did not go as the crow flies. David Grief's numerous interests diverted her course many times. He stopped to take a look-in at uninhabited Rose Island with an eye to colonizing and planting cocoa-nuts. Next, he paid his respects to Tui Manua, of Eastern Samoa, and opened an intrigue for a share of the trade monopoly of that dying king's three islands. From Apia he carried several relief agents and a load of trade goods to the Gilberts. He peeped in at Ontong-Java Atoll, inspected his plantations on Ysabel, and purchased lands from the salt-water chiefs of northwestern Malaita. And all along this devious way he made a man of Aloysius Pankburn.

That thirster, though he lived aft, was compelled to do the work of a common sailor. And not only did he take his wheel and lookout, and heave on sheets and tackles, but the dirtiest and most arduous tasks were appointed him. Swung aloft in a bosun's chair, he scraped the masts and slushed down. Holystoning the deck or scrubbing it with fresh limes made his back ache and developed the wasted, flabby muscles. When the *Kittiwake* lay at anchor and her copper bottom was scrubbed with cocoa-nut husks by the native crew, who dived and did it under water, Pankburn was sent down on his shift and as many times as any on the shift.

"Look at yourself," Grief said. "You are twice the man you were when you came on board. You haven't had one drink, you didn't die, and the poison is pretty well worked out of you. It's the work. It beats trained nurses and business managers. Here, if

you're thirsty. Clap your lips to this."

With several deft strokes of his heavy-backed sheath-knife, Grief clipped a triangular piece of shell from the end of a husked drinking-cocoa-nut. The thin, cool liquid, slightly milky and effervescent, bubbled to the brim. With a bow, Pankburn took the natural cup, threw his head back, and held it back till the shell was empty. He drank many of these nuts each day. The black steward, a New Hebrides boy sixty years of age, and his assistant, a Lark Islander of eleven, saw to it that he was continually supplied.

Pankburn did not object to the hard work. He devoured work, never shirking and always beating the native sailors in jumping to obey a command. But his sufferings during the period of driving the alcohol out of his system were truly heroic. Even when the last shred of the poison was exuded, the desire, as an obsession, remained in his head. So it was, when, on his honour, he went ashore at Apia, that he attempted to put the public houses out of business by drinking up their stocks in trade. And so it was, at two in the morning, that David Grief found him in front of the Tivoli, out of which he had been disorderly thrown by Charley Roberts. Aloysius, as of old, was chanting his sorrows to the stars. Also, and more concretely, he was punctuating the rhythm with cobbles of coral stone, which he flung with amazing accuracy through Charley Roberts's windows.

David Grief took him away, but not till next morning did he take him in hand. It was on the deck of the *Kittiwake*, and there

was nothing kindergarten about it. Grief struck him, with bare knuckles, punched him and punished him – gave him the worst thrashing he had ever received.

"For the good of your soul, Pankburn," was the way he emphasized his blows. "For the good of your mother. For the progeny that will come after. For the good of the world, and the universe, and the whole race of man yet to be. And now, to hammer the lesson home, we'll do it all over again. That, for the good of your soul; and that, for your mother's sake; and that, for the little children, undreamed of and unborn, whose mother you'll love for their sakes, and for love's sake, in the lease of manhood that will be yours when I am done with you. Come on and take your medicine. I'm not done with you yet. I've only begun. There are many other reasons which I shall now proceed to expound." The brown sailors and the black stewards and cook looked on and grinned. Far from them was the questioning of any of the mysterious and incomprehensible ways of white men. As for Carlsen, the mate, he was grimly in accord with the treatment his employer was administering; while Albright, the supercargo, merely played with his mustache and smiled. They were men of the sea. They lived life in the rough. And alcohol, in themselves as well as in other men, was a problem they had learned to handle in ways not taught in doctors' schools.

"Boy! A bucket of fresh water and a towel," Grief ordered, when he had finished. "Two buckets and two towels," he added, as he surveyed his own hands.

"You're a pretty one," he said to Pankburn. "You've spoiled everything. I had the poison completely out of you. And now you are fairly reeking with it. We've got to begin all over again. Mr. Albright! You know that pile of old chain on the beach at the boat-landing. Find the owner, buy it, and fetch it on board. There must be a hundred and fifty fathoms of it. Pankburn! To-morrow morning you start in pounding the rust off of it. When you've done that, you'll sandpaper it. Then you'll paint it. And nothing else will you do till that chain is as smooth as new."

Aloysius Pankburn shook his head.

"I quit. Francis Island can go to hell for all of me. I'm done with your slave-driving. Kindly put me ashore at once. I'm a white man. You can't treat me this way."

"Mr. Carlsen, you will see that Mr. Pankburn remains on board."

"I'll have you broken for this!" Aloysius screamed. "You can't stop me."

"I can give you another licking," Grief answered. "And let me tell you one thing, you besotted whelp, I'll keep on licking you as long as my knuckles hold out or until you yearn to hammer chain rust. I've taken you in hand, and I'm going to make a man out of you if I have to kill you to do it. Now go below and change your clothes. Be ready to turn to with a hammer this afternoon. Mr. Albright, get that chain aboard pronto. Mr. Carlsen, send the boats ashore after it. Also, keep your eye on Pankburn. If he shows signs of keeling over or going into the shakes, give him a

nip – a small one. He may need it after last night."

V

For the rest of the time the *Kittiwake* lay in Apia Aloysius Pankburn pounded chain rust. Ten hours a day he pounded. And on the long stretch across to the Gilberts he still pounded.

Then came the sandpapering. One hundred and fifty fathoms is nine hundred feet, and every link of all that length was smoothed and polished as no link ever was before. And when the last link had received its second coat of black paint, he declared himself.

"Come on with more dirty work," he told Grief. "I'll overhaul the other chains if you say so. And you needn't worry about me any more. I'm not going to take another drop. I'm going to train up. You got my proud goat when you beat me, but let me tell you, you only got it temporarily. Train! I'm going to train till I'm as hard all the way through, and clean all the way through, as that chain is. And some day, Mister David Grief, somewhere, somehow, I'm going to be in such shape that I'll lick you as you licked me. I'm going to pulp your face till your own niggers won't know you."

Grief was jubilant.

"Now you're talking like a man," he cried. "The only way you'll ever lick me is to become a man. And then, maybe – "

He paused in the hope that the other would catch the

suggestion. Aloysius groped for it, and, abruptly, something akin to illumination shone in his eyes.

"And then I won't want to, you mean?"

Grief nodded.

"And that's the curse of it," Aloysius lamented. "I really believe I won't want to. I see the point. But I'm going to go right on and shape myself up just the same."

The warm, sunburn glow in Grief's face seemed to grow warmer. His hand went out.

"Pankburn, I love you right now for that."

Aloysius grasped the hand, and shook his head in sad sincerity.

"Grief," he mourned, "you've got my goat, you've got my proud goat, and you've got it permanently, I'm afraid."

VI

On a sultry tropic day, when the last flicker of the far southeast trade was fading out and the seasonal change for the northwest monsoon was coming on, the *Kittiwake* lifted above the sea-rim the jungle-clad coast of Francis Island.

Grief, with compass bearings and binoculars, identified the volcano that marked Redscar, ran past Owen Bay, and lost the last of the breeze at the entrance to Likikili Bay. With the two whaleboats out and towing, and with Carl-sen heaving the lead, the *Kittiwake* sluggishly entered a deep and narrow indentation. There were no beaches. The mangroves began at the water's

edge, and behind them rose steep jungle, broken here and there by jagged peaks of rock. At the end of a mile, when the white scar on the bluff bore west-southwest, the lead vindicated the "Directory," and the anchor rumbled down in nine fathoms.

For the rest of that day and until the afternoon of the day following they remained on the *Kittiwake* and waited. No canoes appeared. There were no signs of human life. Save for the occasional splash of a fish or the screaming of cockatoos, there seemed no other life. Once, however, a huge butterfly, twelve inches from tip to tip, fluttered high over their mastheads and drifted across to the opposing jungle.

"There's no use in sending a boat in to be cut up," Grief said.

Pankburn was incredulous, and volunteered to go in alone, to swim it if he couldn't borrow the dingey.

"They haven't forgotten the German cruiser," Grief explained. "And I'll wager that bush is alive with men right now. What do you think, Mr. Carlsen?"

That veteran adventurer of the islands was emphatic in his agreement.

In the late afternoon of the second day Grief ordered a whaleboat into the water. He took his place in the bow, a live cigarette in his mouth and a short-fused stick of dynamite in his hand, for he was bent on shooting a mess of fish. Along the thwarts half a dozen Winchesters were placed. Albright, who took the steering-sweep, had a Mauser within reach of hand. They pulled in and along the green wall of vegetation. At times

they rested on the oars in the midst of a profound silence.

"Two to one the bush is swarming with them – in quids," Albright whispered.

Pankburn listened a moment longer and took the bet. Five minutes later they sighted a school of mullet. The brown rowers held their oars. Grief touched the short fuse to his cigarette and threw the stick. So short was the fuse that the stick exploded in the instant after it struck the water. And in that same instant the bush exploded into life. There were wild yells of defiance, and black and naked bodies leaped forward like apes through the mangroves.

In the whaleboat every rifle was lifted. Then came the wait. A hundred blacks, some few armed with ancient Sniders, but the greater portion armed with tomahawks, fire-hardened spears, and bone-tipped arrows, clustered on the roots that rose out of the bay. No word was spoken. Each party watched the other across twenty feet of water. An old, one-eyed black, with a bristly face, rested a Snider on his hip, the muzzle directed at Albright, who, in turn, covered him back with the Mauser. A couple of minutes of this tableau endured. The stricken fish rose to the surface or struggled half-stunned in the clear depths.

"It's all right, boys," Grief said quietly. "Put down your guns and over the side with you. Mr. Albright, toss the tobacco to that one-eyed brute."

While the Rapa men dived for the fish, Albright threw a bundle of trade tobacco ashore. The one-eyed man nodded

his head and writhed his features in an attempt at amiability. Weapons were lowered, bows unbent, and arrows put back in their quivers.

"They know tobacco," Grief announced, as they rowed back aboard. "We'll have visitors. You'll break out a case of tobacco, Mr. Albright, and a few trade-knives. There's a canoe now."

Old One-Eye, as befitted a chief and leader, paddled out alone, facing peril for the rest of the tribe. As Carlsen leaned over the rail to help the visitor up, he turned his head and remarked casually:

"They've dug up the money, Mr. Grief. The old beggar's loaded with it."

One-Eye floundered down on deck, grinning appeasingly and failing to hide the fear he had overcome but which still possessed him. He was lame of one leg, and this was accounted for by a terrible scar, inches deep, which ran down the thigh from hip to knee. No clothes he wore whatever, not even a string, but his nose, perforated in a dozen places and each perforation the setting for a carved spine of bone, bristled like a porcupine. Around his neck and hanging down on his dirty chest was a string of gold sovereigns. His ears were hung with silver half-crowns, and from the cartilage separating his nostrils depended a big English penny, tarnished and green, but unmistakable.

"Hold on, Grief," Pankburn said, with perfectly assumed carelessness. "You say they know only beads and tobacco. Very well. You follow my lead. They've found the treasure, and we've

got to trade them out of it. Get the whole crew aside and lecture them that they are to be interested only in the pennies. Savve? Gold coins must be beneath contempt, and silver coins merely tolerated. Pennies are to be the only desirable things."

Pankburn took charge of the trading. For the penny in One-Eye's nose he gave ten sticks of tobacco. Since each stick cost David Grief a cent, the bargain was manifestly unfair. But for the half-crowns Pankburn gave only one stick each. The string of sovereigns he refused to consider. The more he refused, the more One-Eye insisted on a trade. At last, with an appearance of irritation and anger, and as a palpable concession, Pankburn gave two sticks for the string, which was composed of ten sovereigns.

"I take my hat off to you," Grief said to Pankburn that night at dinner. "The situation is patent. You've reversed the scale of value. They'll figure the pennies as priceless possessions and the sovereigns as beneath price. Result: they'll hang on to the pennies and force us to trade for sovereigns. Pankburn, I drink your health! Boy! – another cup of tea for Mr. Pankburn."

VII

Followed a golden week. From dawn till dark a row of canoes rested on their paddles two hundred feet away. This was the deadline. Rapa sailors, armed with rifles, maintained it. But one canoe at a time was permitted alongside, and but one black at a time was permitted to come over the rail. Here, under the

awning, relieving one another in hourly shifts, the four white men carried on the trade. The rate of exchange was that established by Pankburn with One-Eye. Five sovereigns fetched a stick of tobacco; a hundred sovereigns, twenty sticks. Thus, a crafty-eyed cannibal would deposit on the table a thousand dollars in gold, and go back over the rail, hugely-satisfied, with forty cents' worth of tobacco in his hand.

"Hope we've got enough tobacco to hold out," Carlsen muttered dubiously, as another case was sawed in half.

Albright laughed.

"We've got fifty cases below," he said, "and as I figure it, three cases buy a hundred thousand dollars. There was only a million dollars buried, so thirty cases ought to get it. Though, of course, we've got to allow a margin for the silver and the pennies. That Ecuadoran bunch must have salted down all the coin in sight."

Very few pennies and shillings appeared, though Pankburn continually and anxiously inquired for them. Pennies were the one thing he seemed to desire, and he made his eyes flash covetously whenever one was produced. True to his theory, the savages concluded that the gold, being of slight value, must be disposed of first. A penny, worth fifty times as much as a sovereign, was something to retain and treasure. Doubtless, in their jungle-lairs, the wise old gray-beards put their heads together and agreed to raise the price on pennies when the worthless gold was all worked off. Who could tell? Mayhap the strange white men could be made to give even twenty sticks for

a priceless copper.

By the end of the week the trade went slack. There was only the slightest dribble of gold. An occasional penny was reluctantly disposed of for ten sticks, while several thousand dollars in silver came in.

On the morning of the eighth day no trading was done. The gray-beards had matured their plan and were demanding twenty sticks for a penny, One-Eye delivered the new rate of exchange. The white men appeared to take it with great seriousness, for they stood together debating in low voices. Had One-Eye understood English he would have been enlightened.

"We've got just a little over eight hundred thousand, not counting the silver," Grief said. "And that's about all there is. The bush tribes behind have most probably got the other two hundred thousand. Return in three months, and the salt-water crowd will have traded back for it; also they will be out of tobacco by that time."

"It would be a sin to buy pennies," Albright grinned. "It goes against the thrifty grain of my trader's soul."

"There's a whiff of land-breeze stirring," Grief said, looking at Pankburn. "What do you say?"

Pankburn nodded.

"Very well." Grief measured the faintness and irregularity of the wind against his cheek.

"Mr. Carlsen, heave short, and get off the gaskets. And stand by with the whaleboats to tow. This breeze is not dependable."

He picked up a part case of tobacco, containing six or seven hundred sticks, put it in One-Eye's hands, and helped that bewildered savage over the rail. As the foresail went up the mast, a wail of consternation arose from the canoes lying along the dead-line. And as the anchor broke out and the *Kittiwake's* head paid off in the light breeze, old One-Eye, daring the rifles levelled on him, paddled alongside and made frantic signs of his tribe's willingness to trade pennies for ten sticks.

"Boy! – a drinking nut," Pankburn called.

"It's Sydney Heads for you," Grief said. "And then what?"

"I'm coming back with you for that two hundred thousand," Pankburn answered. "In the meantime I'm going to build an island schooner. Also, I'm going to call those guardians of mine before the court to show cause why my father's money should not be turned over to me. Show cause? I'll show them cause why it should."

He swelled his biceps proudly under the thin sleeve, reached for the two black stewards, and put them above his head like a pair of dumbbells.

"Come on! Swing out on that fore-boom-tackle!" Carlsen shouted from aft, where the mainsail was being winged out.

Pankburn dropped the stewards and raced for it, beating a Rapa sailor by two jumps to the hauling part.

Chapter Three – THE DEVILS OF FUATINO

I

Of his many schooners, ketches and cutters that nosed about among the coral isles of the South Seas, David Grief loved most the *Rattler*– a yacht-like schooner of ninety tons with so swift a pair of heels that she had made herself famous, in the old days, opium-smuggling from San Diego to Puget Sound, raiding the seal-rookeries of Bering Sea, and running arms in the Far East. A stench and an abomination to government officials, she had been the joy of all sailormen, and the pride of the shipwrights who built her. Even now, after forty years of driving, she was still the same old *Rattler*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.