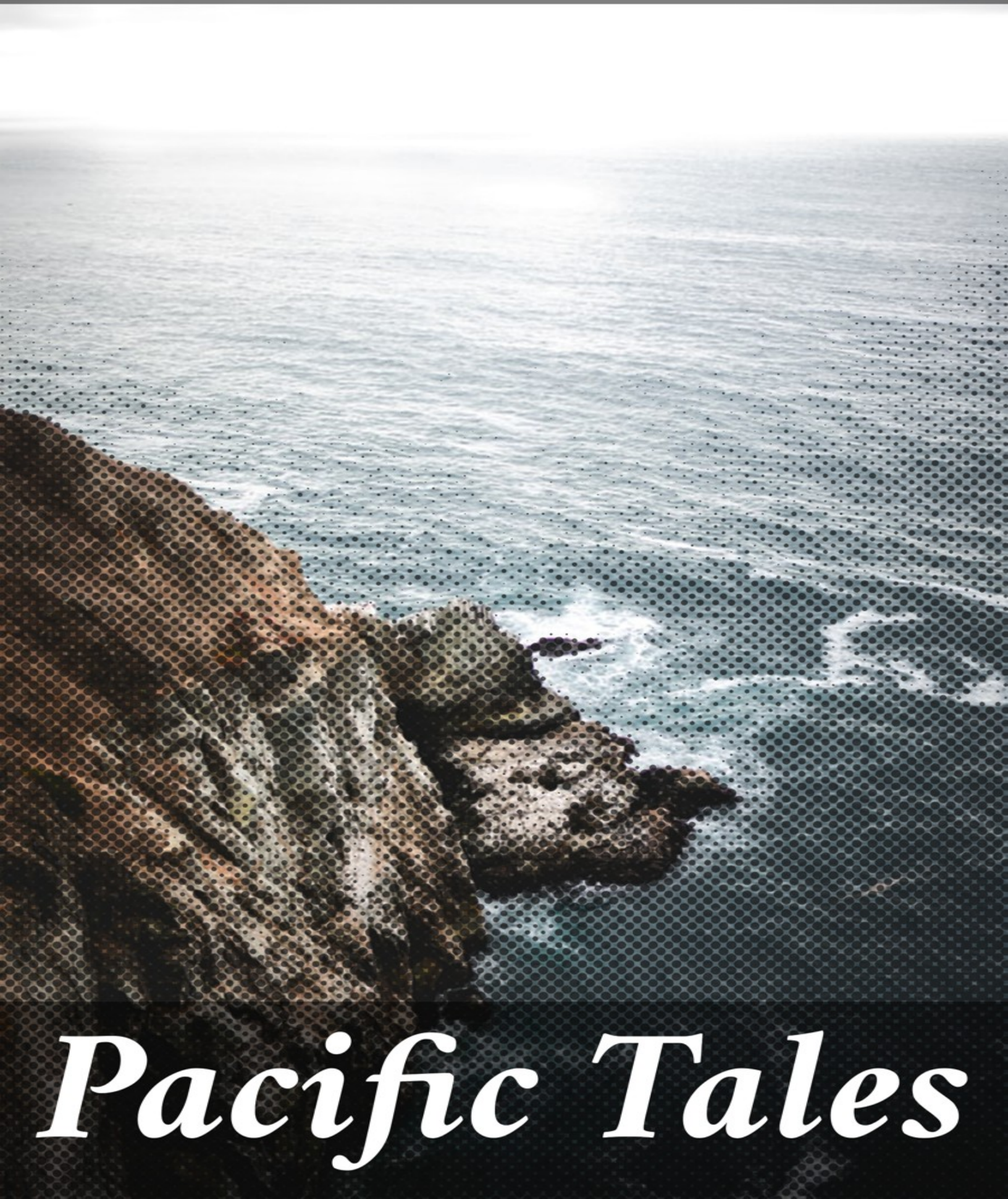
Louis Becke



Pacific Tales

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An Island Memory: English Bob

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There was once a South Sea Island supercargo named Denison who had a Kanaka father and mother. This was when Denison was a young man. His father's name was Kusis; his mother's Tulpé. Also, he had several brown-skinned, lithe-limbed, and big-eyed brothers and sisters, who made much of their new white brother, and petted and caressed and wept over him as if he were an ailing child of six instead of a tough young fellow of two-and-twenty who had nothing wrong with him but a stove-in rib and a heart that ached for home, which made him cross and fretful.

But Denison hasn't got much to do with this story, so all I need say of him is that he had been the supercargo of a brig called the *Leonora;* and the *Leonora* had been wrecked on Strong's Island in the North Pacific; and Denison had quarrelled with the captain, whose name was "Bully" Hayes; and so one day he said goodbye to the roystering Bully and the rest of his shipmates, and travelled across the lagoon till he came to a sweet little village named Leassé, and asked for Kusis, who was the head man thereof.

"Give me, O Kusis, to eat and drink, and a mat whereon to sleep; for I have broken apart from the rest of the white men who were cast away with me in the ship, and there is no more friendship between us. And I desire to live here in peace."

Then Kusis, who was but a stalwart savage, nude to his loins, and tattooed from the crown of his head to the sole of

his foot, lifted Denison up in his brawny arms, and carried him into his house, and set him down on a fine mat; and Tulpé, his wife, and Kinia, his daughter, put food before him on platters of twisted cane, and bade him eat.

Then, when the white man slept, Kusis called around him the people of Leassé and told them that that very day a messenger had come to him from the King and said that the white man who was coming to Leassé was to be as a son to him, “for,” said the King, “my stomach is filled with friendship for this man, because when he was rich and a supercargo he had a generous hand to us of Strong’s Island. But now he is poor, and hath been sick for many months, so thou, Kusis, must be father to him and give him all that he may want.”

So that is how Denison came to stay at Leassé, and lived on the fat of the land in the quiet little village nestling under the shadows of Mont Buáche, while up at Utwe Harbour on the south side of the island, Bully Hayes and his crew of swarthy ruffians drank and robbed and fought and cut each others’ throats, and stole women from the villages round about, and turned an island paradise into a hell of base and wicked passions. But though Leassé was but ten miles from Utwe, none of the shipwrecked sailors ever came there, partly because Captain Hayes had promised Denison that his men should not interfere with Leassé, and partly because the men themselves all liked Denison, and did *not* like the Winchester rifle he owned.

And as he grew stronger and joined the villagers in their huntings and fishings, they made more and more of him, but yet watched his movements with a jealous eye, lest he

should grow tired of them and go back to the other white men.

Leassé, as I have said, was but a little village—not quite thirty houses—and stood on gently undulating ground at the foot of a mountain, whose sides were clothed with verdure and whose summit at dawn and eve was always veiled in misty clouds. And so dense was the foliage of the mountain forest of “tamanu” and “masa’oi” that only here and there could the bright sunlight pierce through the leafy canopy and streak with lines of gold the thick brown carpet of leaves covering the warm red soil beneath. Sometimes, when the trade wind had died away and the swish and rustle of the tree-tops overhead had ceased, one might hear the faint murmur of voices in the village far below, or the sharp screaming note of the mountain cock calling to his mate, and now and then the muffled roar of the surf beating upon its coral barrier miles and miles away.

But down from the gloomy silence of the mountain there led a narrow path that followed the winding course of a little stream, which in places leapt from shelves of hard black rock into deep pools perhaps fifty feet below, and then swirled and danced over its pebbly bed till it sprang out joyously from its darkened course above into the bright light and life of the shining beach and the tumbling surf and sunlit, cloudless sky of blue that ever lay before and above the dwellers in Leassé village.

Right in front of the village ran a sweeping curve of yellow beach, with here and there a clump of rocks, whose black, jagged outlines were covered with mantles of creepers and vines green and yellow, in which at night-time

the snow-white tropic birds came to roost with clamorous note. Back from the beach stood groves of pandanus and breadfruit and coconuts, whose branches sang merrily all day long to the sweep of the whistling trade wind, but drooped languidly at sunset when it died away.

Straight before the door of Denison's house of thatch there lay a wide expanse of placid, reef-bound sea, pale-greenish in its shallower portions near the shore, but deepening into blue as it increased in depth toward the line of foaming surf that ever roared and thundered upon the jagged coral wall which flung the sweeping billows back in clouds of misty spume. Half a mile away, and shining like emeralds in the bright rays of the tropic sun, lay two tiny islets of palms that seemed to float and quiver on the glassy surface in the glory of their surpassing green.

At dusk, when the shadows of the great mountain fell upon the yellow curve of beach, and the coming night enwrapped the silent aisles of the forest, the men of Leassé would sit outside their houses and smoke and talk, whilst the women and girls would sing the songs of the old bygone days when they were a strong people with spear and club in hand, and the mountain-sides and now deserted bays of Strong's Island were thick with the houses of their forefathers.

* * * * *

One evening, as Kusis, with Tulpé, his wife, and Kinia, his daughter, sat with Denison on a wide mat outspread before the doorway of their house, listening to the beat of the distant surf upon the reef, and watching the return of a fleet of fishing canoes, they were joined by a half-caste boy and

girl who lived in a village some few miles further along the coast. The boy was about twelve years of age, the girl two or three years older. Denison had one day met them, and they had taken him with them to their mother's house. She was a woman of not much past thirty, and the moment the white man entered had greeted him warmly, and pointing to some muskets, cutlasses, and many other articles of European manufacture that hung from the beams overhead, said: "See, those were my husband's guns and swords."

"Ahé, and was he a white man?"

"Aye," the woman answered proudly, as she brought Denison a mat to sit upon, "a white man, and, like thee, an Englishman. But it is two years now since he died under the spears of the men of Yap, when he led other white men to the attack on the great fort in the bay there. Ah, he was a brave man! And then I, who saw him die, came back here with my children to Leassé to live, for here in this very house was I born, and this land that encompasseth it is mine by inheritance."

From that day Denison and the two half-caste children became sworn friends, and twice or thrice a week the boy and girl would walk over to see him, and stay the night so as to accompany him fishing or shooting on the following day. The boy was a sturdy, well-built youngster, with a skin that, from constant exposure to the sun, was almost as dark as that of a full-blooded native; but the girl was very light in complexion, with those strangely deep, lustrous eyes common to women of the Micronesian and Polynesian people—eyes in whose liquid depths one may read the coming fate of all their race, doomed to utter extinction

before the inroads of civilisation with all its deadly terrors of insidious and unknown disease. Unlike her brother, who either could not or pretended he could not, understand English, Tasia both understood and spoke it with some fluency, for, with her mother and brother, she had always accompanied her father in his wanderings about the Pacific, and had mixed much with white men of a certain class—traders, pearl-shellers, and deserters from whaleships and men-of-war.

For some minutes Kusis and his white friend smoked their pipes in silence, whilst Tulpé and the two girls sat a little apart from them, talking in the soft, almost whispered tones peculiar to the Malayan-blooded women of the Caroline Islands, and looking at some boys who were boxing with the half-caste lad near by.

“Ha!” said Tasia to the two men, with a laugh, “see those foolish boys trying to fight like English people.”

“What know you of how English people fight, Tasia?” asked Denison.

The girl arched her pretty black brows. “Much. I have seen my father fight—and he was the greatest fighter in the world.”

“Truly?”

“Truly. Is it not so, Kusis?”

“Aye,” said Kusis, turning to Denison, “he was a great fighter with his hands as well as with musket and sword. Tell him, Tasia, of how thy father fought at Ebon.”

* * * * *

“When I was but ten years old there came to Lela Harbour on this island a great English fighting ship, and my

father, who had run away from just such another ship long years before in a country called Kali-fo-nia, became troubled in his mind, and hid himself in the forest till she had gone. When he returned to his house, he said—pointing to many letters and tattoo marks on his breast and arms—‘Only because of these names written on my skin have I lived like a wild boar in the woods for three days; for see, this name across my breast, were it seen by the people of the man-of-war, would bring me to chains and a prison, and I should see thee no more.’ And so, because he feared that another man-of-war might come here, he had the whole of his breast, back, and arms tattooed very deeply, after the fashion of Strong’s Island, so that the old marks were quite hidden. Yet even then he was still moody, and at last he took us away with him in a whaleship to an island called Ebon, ten days’ sail from here. And here for a year we lived, although the people were strange to us, and their language and customs very different to ours. As time went on, the Ebon people began to think much of my father, because of his great bodily strength and courage in battle, for they were at war among themselves, and he was ever foremost in fighting for Labayan, the chief under whose protection we lived.

“One day a great American warship came into the lagoon of Ebon, and many of the sailors came ashore and got drunk, and as they staggered about the village, frightening the women and children, one of them, hearing that my father was a white man, came to him as he sat quietly in his house, gave him foul words, and then said—

“‘Come out and fight, thou tattooed beast, who calleth thyself a white man.’

“There were many sailors gathered outside the house, and these, because my father took no heed of the drunken man’s words, but bade him go away, called out that he was but a beach-combing coward and had no white blood in him, else would he take up the challenge.

“Then Bob—for that was my father’s name—put a loaded musket in my mother’s hand, and said: ‘I must fight this man; but stand thou at the door, and if any one of the others seeks to enter the house, fear not to shoot him dead.’ Then he stepped out to the sailors, and said—

“‘Why must I fight this man? What quarrel hath he with me, or I with him? And I shall not fight with a man when he is “tamtrunk” and cannot stand straight on his feet.’

“‘Fight him,’ they answered, ‘else shall we pull thy house down and beat thee for an English cur.’

“And then I heard the sound of blows, and could see that Bob and the man who challenged him were fighting. Presently I heard the sound of a man falling, and the blue-coated sailors gave a great cry, and I saw my father standing alone in the ring. At a little distance lay the American, whose body was supported by two of his friends. His head had sunk forward on his chest, and those about him said to my father, ‘His jaw is broken.’

“My father laughed—‘Whose fault is that? Ye forced me to fight, and I struck him but once. Is there no one man among ye who can do better than he? ’Tis a poor victory for an Englishman to break the jaw of a man who thought he could fight, but could not.’ Then he mocked them, and said they were ‘skitas’ (boasters) like all the ‘Yankeese’; for now he was angry, and his eyes were like glowing coals.

“But they were not all ‘skitas,’ for two or three stepped out and wanted to fight him, but the others stayed them, and said to my father: ‘Nay, no more now; go back to thy wife; but to-morrow night we shall bring a man from the other watch on board the ship whom we will match against thee.’ Then they lifted up the man with the broken jaw, and carried him away.

“In the morning there came to our house two sailors bearing a letter, which my father read. It said that there would come ashore that night the best fighting man of the ship, who would fight him for one hundred dollars in silver money.

“Now thirteen silver dollars was all the money my father had, so he went to Labayan the chief, who had a strong friendship for him, and read him the letter. ‘Lend me,’ said he, ‘seven-and-thirty dollars, and I will fight this man; and if I be beaten and the fifty dollars are lost, then shall I give thee a musket and five fat hogs for the money lent me.’

“Now, Labayan could not refuse my father, so without a word he brought him the money and placed it in his hands, and said: ‘Take it, O Papu the Strong, and if it be that thou art beaten in the fight, then I forgive thee the debt—it is God’s will if this man prove the stronger of the two.’

* * * * *

“At sunset two boats filled with men came ashore. Four score and six were they altogether, for my mother and I counted them as they walked up from the beach to the great open square in front of the chief’s house. All round the sides of the square were placed mats for them to sit upon, and presently baked fish and fowls to eat and young

coconuts to drink were put before them by the people, who were gathered together in great numbers, for the news of the fight had gone to every village on the island, and they all came to see. As darkness came on, hundreds of torches were lit, and held up by the women and boys.

“By and by, when the sailors had finished eating, Labayan and his two wives came out and sat down at one end of the square, and my mother and I sat with them. And then, as fresh torches were lit, so that the great square became as light as day, a man rose up from among the white men and stepped into the centre.

“‘Where is the man?’ he said.

“‘Here,’ answered my father, pushing his way through the swarm of people who stood tightly packed together behind the sitting white men, ‘and here is my money’; and he held out a small bag.

“‘And here is ours,’ said some of the sailors, coming forward, and the money was placed in Labayan’s hands. Then one of them opened a bottle of grog, and my father and the other man each drank some. Then they stripped to their waists. My father was thought to be a very big and strong man; but when Labayan and his people saw the other man take off his jumper and shirt, and beheld his great hairy chest and muscles that stood out like the roots of a tree when they protrude from the ground, they murmured. ‘He will kill Papu,’ they said.

“So Labayan cried, ‘Stop!’ and standing up and speaking very quickly, said: ‘O Papu, there must be no fight! But tell all these white men that the man they have brought to fight thee shall have the money that is in my hands. And tell

them also—so that they shall not be vexed—that the women and girls shall dance for them here in the square till sunrise.’

“My father laughed and shook his head, but told the white men Labayan’s words, and they too laughed.

“‘Nay, Labayan,’ said my father, ‘fight I must, or else be shamed. But have no fear; this will be a long fight, but I am the better of the two. I know this man; he is an Englishman like myself, and a great fighter. But he does not know me now; for it is many years since he saw me last.’ And then he and the sailor shook each other by the hand; and then began the fight.

“Ah! it was terrible to look at, and soon I began to tremble, and I hid my face on my mother’s bosom. Once I heard a loud cry from the assembled people, and looking up saw my father stagger backwards and fall. But only for a moment, and as he rose again the white men clapped their hands and shouted loudly; and again I hid my face as the two met again, and the sounds of their blows and their fierce breathing seemed like thunder in my ears.

“Presently they rested awhile, and now the torches blazed up again, and, as the women saw that the face of the big man was reddened with blood which ran down his body, their hearts were filled with pity, a great wailing cry broke from them, and they ran up to Labayan and besought him to bid the fight to cease. But the white men said it must go on.

“As the two men rested, sitting on the knees of two of the sailors, they each drank a little grog—just a mouthful. Then they stood up again, staggering about like drunken men; and my mother and I, with many other women, ran into

Labayan’s house and wept together—for we could no longer look. Suddenly we heard a great cry of triumph from the assembled people, but the white men were silent. Then Labayan called to us to come and see. So we ran out into the square again.

“The big white man lay upon a mat, but he was horrible to look at, and we turned our faces away. My father sat near him, held up by Labayan and one of the white sailors, and lying beside his open hand were the two bags of money. But his eyes were closed, and he breathed heavily.

“As the people—white and brown—thronged around the big man to see if he were dead, we heard the tramp of marching men, and a score of sailors carrying muskets, with swords fastened to their muzzles, came across the square. They were led by two officers, who held drawn swords in their hands.

“‘What is this?’ said he who was leader, sternly, looking first at one and then at another of the white sailors. Then they told him, and said it had been a fair fight.

“‘Back to the boats, every man,’ he said, ‘but first carry this dying man into a house, where he must lie till the doctor comes to him.’ And then, when this was done, the armed men drove the others down to the boats, and the square became dark and deserted.

“My father was but little hurt, and all that night he sat beside the man he had fought, who lay sick for many days in Labayan’s house. Every morning the doctor from the ship came to see him, and other white men came as well. At last he got better, and then he and my father had a long talk together, and shook each other’s hands, and became as

brothers. Then the boat came for him, and the beaten man bid us all farewell and went away.

“That night my father told us that this man, who was named Harry, had once been a friend of his, and they had served the Queen of England together in the same man-of-war, and, like him, had run away from the ship. And as soon as my father met him face to face in the square he knew him, ‘and,’ said he, ‘it came hard to me to fight a man who was once my friend, and was still my countryman, but yet it had to be done to shame those boasting “Yankeese,” who are but “skitas.”’”

* * * * *

And now, as I think of Tasia’s story, there springs upon my memory the tale of the fight told of in “The Man from Snowy River,” where an Australian station manager, fresh from England, fought a terrible fight with an intruding drover. So, only changing four words of “Saltbush Bill,” and with all apologies—

Now the sailor fought for a money prize with a scowl on his bearded face,
But the trader fought for his honour’s sake and the pride of the English race.

In the Old, Beachcombing Days

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A white, misty rain-squall swept down the mountain pass at the head of Lêla Harbour, plashed noisily across the deep waters of the land-locked bay and whirled away seaward.

Standing upon jutting ledges of the inner or harbour reef, a number of brown-skinned women and children were fishing. The tide was low and the water smooth, and as the fishers shook the raindrops from off their black tresses and shining skins of bronze they laughed and sang and called out to one another across the deep reef-pools.

"*Ai-e-eh!*" cried a tall, slender girl, naked to her hips, around which she wore, like her older and younger companions, a broad, woven sash of gaily-coloured banana fibre—"*ai-e-eh!* 'tis a cold rain, but now will the fish bite fast, and I shall take me home a heavier basket than any of ye here;" and then she deftly swung her long bamboo rod over the pool on whose rugged brink she stood.

"*Tah!* Listen to her!" called out a round-faced, merry-eyed little woman who fished on the other aide. "Listen to Niya the Wisehead! She hath not yet caught a fish, and now boasteth of the great basketful she will take home! Get thee home for thy father's seine net, for thou canst not catch anything with thy rod;" and the speaker, with a good-humoured laugh, took a small fish out of the basket that hung at her side and threw it at the girl.

Niya, too, laughed merrily as she ducked her head and twisted her lithe young body sideways, and the fish, flying

past her face, struck a boy who stood near to her in the back.

He swung round, and with mock ferocity hurled the fish back at she who threw it.

“That for thee, fat-faced Tulpé; and would that it had gone into thy big mouth and down thy throat and choked thee! Then would thy husband call me friend, and seek out another wife; for, look thou, Tulpé, thou art getting old and ugly now.”

A loud shriek of laughter from Niya, a merry, mocking echo from those about her, joined in with Tulpé’s own good-natured chuckle, and then, flinging down their rods and baskets, they sprang into the water one after another and played and laughed and gambolled like the children they were all in heart if not in years.

By and by the sun came out, hot and fierce, and the women and children, rods in hand and baskets on backs, made homewards to their village across the broken surface of the reef. Right before them it lay, a cluster of some two or three score of grey-thatched, saddle-backed houses, with slender sharp-pointed gables at either end.

Nearest to the beach and distinguishable from the others by its great size was the dwelling of Togusā, the chief of Lêla Harbour. At a distance of fifty feet or so from its canework sides a low wall of coral slabs surrounded it on four sides, with gateways at back and front. Within, the walled-in space was covered with snow-white pebbles of broken coral, save where a narrow pathway led from the front gateway to the open doorway of the house.

On came the fishers, the older of the women walking first in twos and threes, the young girls and boys following in a noisy, laughing crowd. But as they drew nearer to the low stone wall their babbling laughter died away, and they spoke to each other in lowered tones. For it had ever been the custom of Kusaie (Strong's Island, the eastern outlier of the Caroline Archipelago) to speak in a whisper in the presence of a chief, and Togusā, chief of Lêla, was master of the lives of four thousand of the people. Other chiefs were there on Kusaie who lived at Utwe and Mout and Leassé, and whose people exceeded in numbers those of the chief of Lêla, but none were there whose name was so old and whose fame in battle would compare with his.

So, with softened steps and bodies bent, the women entered through the narrow gateway one by one and knelt down in front of the door in the manner peculiar to the women of the Caroline Islands, bringing their thighs together and turning their feet outward and backward. Apart from them, and clustering together, were the boys, each sitting cross-legged with outspread hands upon the pebbled ground. And then all, women, girls, and boys, bent their eyes to the ground and waited.

Presently there came to the open doorway of the chief's house an old, white-haired woman, who supported her feeble steps with a stick of ebony wood. For a moment or two she looked at the people assembled before her, and then a girl who followed her placed upon the canework verandah of the house a broad, white mat, and spread it out for her to sit upon. Slowly the old woman stooped her time-worn frame and sat, and then the slave-girl crouched behind

her, and, with full, luminous eyes, looked over her mistress's shoulder.

Suddenly the dame raised her stick and tapped it twice on the cane work floor, and then, with a quick, soundless motion, the fishers rose, and with bent heads and stooping bodies crept up near to her and laid their baskets of fish silently at her feet.

But though they spoke not themselves, each one as she or he placed a basket down looked at Sipi, the slave, and made a slight movement of the lips, and Sipi, in a low voice and looking straight before her, murmured the giver's name to the old woman.

"'Tis the gift of Kinio, the wife of Nara, to Seaa, the mother of Togusā the King."

"'Tis the gift of Leja, the daughter of Naril, to Seaa, the mother of the King."

And so, one by one, they laid down their tribute till the offering was finished and they had crept back again to the place where they had first awaited old Seaa's coming, and now they sat and waited for the King's mother to speak.

"Come hither, Niya."

At the sound of the old woman's voice the girl Niya came quickly out from amongst her companions and sat down beside the piled-up baskets of fish.

"Count thee out ten fish for Togusā the King, ten each for his wives, and two for Sipi, the slave."

With deft hands the girl did the old dame's bidding and placed the fish side by side upon narrow leaf platters brought to her by the young slave-girl.

“Good,” said old Seaa, smiling at the girl, for Niya was niece to Sikra, and Sikra was one of the King’s most trusted warriors and nephew to old Seaa.

“Good child. And now, tell the people that Togusā the King is sick, and so comes not out to-day to see their offerings of goodwill to him and his house. So let them away to their homes, taking with them all the fish they have brought save these fifty and two here before me.”

Again the women crept up, and each taking up her basket again walked slowly away through the gateway and disappeared among the various houses. But Niya, at a sign from the King’s mother, remained, and sat down beside Sipi, the slave.

By and by, with much stamping of feet and singing a loud chorus, came a party of men, tall, stalwart fellows, stripped to their waists, with their long black hair tied up in a knob at the back of their heads. As they reached the gate their song ceased, and each man placed the basket of taro or yams he carried at the feet of the old dame. From each basket the girl Niya, at old Seaa’s command, took one taro and a small yam for the King’s household; then the men, picking up the baskets again, followed the women into the village.

So for another hour came parties of men and women and children, brown, healthy, strong and vigorous, carrying their daily offerings to the King of fish and fowl and wild pigeons, and baked pigs and young coconuts, and bananas and other fruits of the rich and fertile Kusaie.

Then, when the last of them had come and gone, the slave-girl Sipi put a small conch shell to her lips and blew a note, and men and women—slaves like herself—appeared

from the rear of the house and carried the baskets away to the King’s cook-houses.

* * * * *

This was the daily life of Lêla. At the very break of dawn, when the trees and grass were heavy with the dews of the night, and the flocks of mountain parrots screamed shrilly at the rising sun and the wild boar scurried away to his forest lair, the people were up and at work among their plantations or out upon the blue expanse of Lêla Harbour in their canoes. For though there was no need for them to do but the merest semblance of toil, yet it was and always had been the custom of the land for each family to bring a daily gift of food to the King. Sometimes if a whaleship lay outside the harbour the King would take all they brought, to sell to the ship in exchange for guns and powder, and bright Turkey red cloth; but beyond this he took but little of all that they gave him day after day. They were a happy, contented race, and their land was a land of wondrous fertility and smiling plenty.

* * * * *

Sometimes, even in those far-off days, a whale-ship cruising north-westwards to the Moluccas, or the coast of Japan, would sail close in, back her mainyard and send her boats ashore and wait till they returned laden to the gunwales with turtle, yams and fruit. Dearly would the crew —as they gazed upon the bright beaches and the thickly-clustered groves of palms amid which nestled the gray roofs of thatch—have liked the ship to have sailed in, and heard the cable rattle through the hawse-pipes as her anchor plunged through the glassy depths of Lêla Harbour. But Lêla

was seldom entered by a ship of any size. Her boats might come in if the captain so choose, and the rough, reckless seamen might wander to and fro among the handsome, brown-skinned people and make sailors' love to the laughing Kusaie maidens till the ship fired a gun for them to return; but the ship herself dared not enter. Not that there was danger of treachery from the people, but because of the narrow, tortuous passage and the fierce, swift current that ever eddied and swirled through its reef-bound sides. Once, indeed, in those olden days the captain of an English whaleship, that lay-to outside, had seen a small schooner lying snugly moored abreast of the King's house, and had boldly sailed his own ship in and anchored beside the little trading vessel. In a week a dozen of his crew had deserted, lured away from the toils of a sailor's life by the smiles of the Kusaie girls. Then he tried to get away before he lost any more men. Three times he tried to tow his ship out with her five boats, and thrice, to the secret joy of the Kusaie people and his crew, had he to return and anchor again; at the fourth attempt the ship struck and went to pieces on the reef.

In those wild days, and for long years afterwards, there were some five or six white men living on Kusaie. They were of that class of wanderers who are to be met with even now among the little known Caroline and Pelew Groups and on some of the isolated islands of the North Pacific. Of those that lived on Kusaie, however, our story has to do with but one, an old and almost decrepid sailor named Charles Westall, who then lived at Lêla under the protection of Togusā, as he had lived under the protection of that chief's

father thirty years before. With those white men who lived in the three other districts of the island he had had no communication for nearly ten years, although he was separated from them but half a day's journey by boat or canoe; not that he did not desire to see them, but simply because the intense jealousy that prevailed between the various native chiefs who ruled over these districts made visiting a matter of danger and possible bloodshed. Each chief was extremely jealous of his white protégé, who, although he was exceedingly well treated and lived on the fat of the land, was yet kept under a friendly but rigid surveillance lest he should be tempted to leave his own district and settle in another.

Westall, therefore, as his years and infirmities increased, resigned himself to the knowledge that except when a ship might call at Lêla, he would not be likely to ever converse again in his mother tongue with men of his own colour. He was, although an uneducated man, one of singular energy and discernment, and had during his forty years' residence on the island acquired a considerable influence over the chief Togusā and the leading native families. He was by trade a ship's carpenter, and, attracted by the intelligence of the natives and the professions of friendship made to him by Togusā's father, had deserted from his ship to live among them. Unlike many of his class, he was neither a drunkard nor a ruffian; and eventually marrying a daughter of one of the minor chiefs of Lêla, he had settled down on the island for a lifelong residence. As the years went by and his family increased, so did his status and influence with the natives, and at the time of our story he lived in semi-European style

in Lêla village, about a stone's throw from the house of Togusā. He had now some twenty or thirty children by his five wives—for in accordance with native custom he had to increase the number of his wives as his wealth and influence grew—and these had mostly intermarried with natives of pure blood, so that in course of years the old English sailor's household resembled that of some Scriptural patriarch who was honoured in the land.

Early in the morning on the day following the scene described at the King's house, old Westall was sitting outside his boatshed smoking his pipe and watching some of his white-brown grand-children at play, when a young native girl came quickly along the groves of breadfruit and coconut and called out that she had news for him—a ship, she said, was in sight.

"Come thou inside, little one," said the old sailor, kindly, speaking in the Kusaie tongue. (Indeed he had but seldom occasion to speak English.)

The girl was Niya, the niece of Sikra, and was betrothed to Ted, one of old Westall's younger sons. She was about fifteen or so, and was possessed of that graceful carriage and those faultlessly straight features common to women of the Micronesian Islands.

Seating herself on the ground beside the old man, and, in accordance with native fashion, not deigning to notice her lover, who was that moment at work in his father's boatshed, the girl told Westall that she and some other girls had seen a small white-painted ship about four miles off, making towards Lêla.

The old sailor’s face instantly became troubled and he called to his son to come to him.

“Ted,” said the old man, speaking in English, “that mission ship has come at last, and now there’s goin’ to be a bit of trouble. You see if there won’t.”

Edward Westall, a short, thick-set youth of twenty, with a darker complexion than that of the girl who sat at his father’s feet, leant upon the adze he carried and said in his curious broken English: “How you know she’s mission’ry? Has you ever seen mission’ry ship?”

“No,” replied the old man, shortly; “an’ I don’t want to see one. But I know it’s a mission’ry ship. She’s painted white, an’ I heard from Captain Deaver of the *Hattie K. Deaver* that there was a mission ship at Honolulu two years ago, an’ she was painted white, an’ was comin’ here right through this group, blarst her!”

“Well, an’ what you goin’ to do? You think Togusā goin’ to let a mission’ry come ashore an’ live?”

“That’s just what I don’t know, boy. Togusā likes the white men, an’ maybe he may take to these Yankee psalm-singers. An’ if he does, it just means that you an’ me an’ all the rest of us will have to clear out of here and seek for a livin’ elsewheres. They is hungry beggars, these mission’ries, and drives every other white man away from wherever they settles down. An’ I’m gettin’ too old now to be badgered about by people like them.”

“W’y don’ you go and tell Togusā to keep ’em from comin’ ashore?”

The old man shook his head. “No good, boy. I managed to block one mission’ry from landing here—that feller that

came here in the *Shawnee* whaler when you was a babby—an’ I’ve always been telling Togusā that it will be a bad day for him when he lets one of them come here, but,” and he shook his head again, “he’s a weak man, and just like a child. His father was another sort, an’ had a head chock full o’ sense.”

For a moment the old seaman seemed sunk in thought, and then suddenly aroused himself.

“Ted,” he said, “just you go along with Niya to her uncle Sikra and tell him an’ Jorani an’ the other big chiefs to come here an’ have a talk with me. Togusā is sick, an’ so I can’t get in to see him.”

Throwing down his adze, the young half-caste beckoned to the girl to rise and come with him. With that passive obedience common among women of her race when spoken to by a man, the girl instantly rose and followed her betrothed husband, who, from the broad blue stripes of tattooing that covered his naked arms and thighs, would never have been taken for anything else but a pure-blooded native.

Then old Westall, still wearing a troubled look upon his brown and wrinkled face, walked slowly back to his thatched dwelling and sat down to wait for the native chiefs to talk with them over the danger that—from his point of view—menaced them all.

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Four miles away the mission brig—for such indeed was the strange ship—was sailing slowly along the precipitous northern coast of the island. On the poop deck were four clerical gentlemen clothed in heavy black, and each bore in