

Some Pearls and a Swine

BY CARL CLAUSEN



MAINA LO, the shell-diver's daughter, took from the shelf above the hearth a heart-shaped pearl shell and a small leather sack. Placing the shell upon a low stool in the middle of the floor, she shook into it twelve small, gray seed-pearls from the sack and poured over them half a cup of coconut-oil from an earthen vessel. On her knees, her elbows resting on the edge of the stool, she pursed her lips and blew softly upon the surface of the oil.

Her father watched her intently from his mat, peering over her shoulder with his watery, brine-blinded eyes, a broken stump of a clay pipe between his toothless gums. Old and decrepit was Aoku, the shell-diver. The icy clutch of twenty fathoms had squeezed the warm blood from his veins and left him a paralytic, helpless wreck, dependent upon the charity of the inhabitants and upon the bounty of the occasional traders whose schooners tarried in the lagoon for a few hours between the tides.

"What see you in the shell, daughter?" he croaked, raising himself on palsied knees.

Without answering, Maina lo continued blowing, until the funnel-shaped opening made in the oil by her breath touched the bottom of the shell and caused eleven of the twelve small pearls to arrange themselves in a circle about the base. The twelfth and largest stayed in the center of the circle and no amount of blowing could dislodge it.

"A strange ship will enter the straits." she answered, gazing into the shell with her face between her hands. "We shall have food,

much food, my father. I see a very white *sahib* with hair like the sun and eyes the color of mother of pearl."

"It is time," Aoku mumbled. "Perhaps it is Perrot, the trader. He is free with his purse and he favors you."

"Perrot, the Frenchman, is a swine," she cried. "Sooner would I starve than eat from his hand. Have you forgotten his perfidy with other maidens? Aileta who leaped from the cliff and others?"

Aoku shook his head and gazed at the floor.

"I am an old man," he whined. "Soon I shall be gone. Have I not labored for you these many years? It is time you took a man. Among our own people not one finds favor with you. Then why spurn you this white trader who has much gold and fine houses?"

"The Frenchman is a swine," Maina lo repeated. "Think you he would take me to dwell as his wife? Not he! I am still a maid, and a maid I remain until— until—" she paused and patted her father's wrinkled cheek—"until my heart calls me."

"We shall starve," Aoku whimpered. "I am an old man—"

"Rest easy, my father, I am young and strong. I can dive. Tomorrow I begin. Who knows but some day I may bring up a great pearl?"

"But you are a woman," he remonstrated, "and good to look upon. The men will laugh you to scorn."

"Yes," she said, slowly, "I am a woman—and good to look upon."

She rose to her feet, poured the oil from the shell and replaced the twelve small pearls in the sack.

A quiet serious-minded girl was Maina lo, with rather heavy, sensuous lips and somber eyes that somehow suggested slumbering passions. She had the respect of traders and natives alike, for she was a good girl. Also, she was beautiful, a rare

combination along the Straits of Malaita, where beauty and virtue rarely go hand in hand.

From her crown of glossy black hair to her finely-arched bare feet she was good to look upon. Proud of bearing she was, high-breasted as Venus, with the aristocratic blood of her race flowing undiluted in her veins.

She was proud of this blood. Upon the free and easy unions between maidens of her race and the white masters she looked with scorn. Her mind, primitive, and untutored though it was, grasped the significance of such unions and their effect upon the destiny of her race.

In a vague sort of a way she understood that she and her people were inferior to the white man who seemed to possess everything in the world worth possessing. She wondered why. It seemed unjust. Did she not love, hate, eat and drink as they? Did not the sun smile on white and brown alike, and the soft-trade winds, did not they kiss the graves of both races, impartially?

The brown man toiled no longer at his ancestral pursuits. Rum had left in him no desire for the old, simple life. Upon his women a new and sinister value had been placed, and he had sunk low enough to take advantage of it.

Maina lo pondered much upon these signs and hot hatred grew in her heart against the white man and her debased brethren. Had she lived in New York instead of upon Danrhyn atoll, she would have been an ardent suffragette.

AOKU'S boat, the *Moonbeam*, was the fastest and best equipped of the fleet. Crippled and reduced though Aoku had become, he had ever refused to part with it at any price. Originally the lifeboat of a merchantman, the old diver had bought her for five pounds sterling from the captain of the ship, who was anxious to use the deck-room which it

displaced for stowing cargo. Aoku had dragged the boat upon the beach, overhauled her from stem to stern, decked her over with a deck of inch and a half baltic-pine and rigged her with a long slender mast, mainsail, topsail and two jibs. Outside the South Pacific Trading Company's lugger at Duralong—an ex-yacht—no faster boat existed in the straits.

Before daybreak Maina lo hoisted mainsail and jib and stood across the bar with a five-knot breeze long before the rest of the fleet had begun to stir. She headed for Little Akaroa, a cove on the lee side of Duralong, where diving was good on the slack tide. Once clear of land, she set the tops'l, slacked out the main sheet and squared away before the wind.

The *Moonbeam* leaped in response to the increased pressure of sail and buried her nose in the turbulent greenness under her bow. Maina lo hung upon the tiller and through the flying spray watched the white-caps chase one another in the wake astern, and her heart leaped in exultation with the *Moonbeam*.

Here she was at home. A sister to the north wind, she, racing down her ancestral domain. Her long black hair lay coiled in two heavy braids about her head. She had fastened the braids securely with shell-pins and raffia in preparation for the diving. A snug-fitting sleeveless tunic of woven raffia encased her slender body from the armpits to the knees, giving her absolute freedom of movement, a very necessary thing in twenty fathoms of water.

When the sun rose warm and dripping from the eastern sea, she cast aside her covering blanket. The warm wind raced through the loosely woven tunic and drove the blood dancing through her veins. Her cheeks were aflush with excitement for her new undertaking.

Although it was no uncommon thing for women of her race to engage in pearl-diving, Maina lo had never descended more than a few fathoms among the shallows of the

coral reefs, while her father worked the great depths between the barrier reef and the mainland.

Aoku had playfully taught his young daughter the tricks of the trade, never dreaming that some day he should become dependent upon her for food and shelter. There had been in his mind visions of their triumphant return to their native Marquesas with much gold, for the pearl-beds of the great barrier reef were rich in the early days of the industry, but years had passed from plenty to scanty, from scanty to poverty, his body becoming more useless and withered from month to month.

Maina lo grew into young womanhood among the fleet, capable and earnest, always learning, always inquiring, the ablest and most skillful sailor on the lagoon. The pilot at Duralong never ceased to relate how he watched her from the lighthouse drive the *Moonbeam* across the bar in a black northeaster at low tide with a double-reefed mains'l.

With decks awash and the mainboom dragging in the trough of the seas, Maina lo rounded Point Miguel and nosed her way, close-hauled, along the barrier reef, looking for a safe passage. The wind threw the boat on her beam-ends under the heavy sail-pressure and she was forced to furl the tops'l and outer jib.

So busy was she, dodging submerged reefs and taking in her high canvas, that she did not notice a bank of dark clouds rising with incredible swiftness out of the northern sea. The first intimation she had of the approaching hurricane was, when looking across the straits, she saw an incoming bark furl her canvas down to lower tops'ls and square away to sea.

Through her glasses she made out the bark to be the *Pappillon*, the French prison-ship that for the past two years engaged in transferring prisoners from the penal colony of

New Caledonia to Cayenne.

ANXIOUSLY watching the oncoming cloud-bank, she ran the boat into the wind, double-reefed the mains'1 and set the storm-jib. There was but one thing to do; follow the *Pappillon* out to sea. To look for shelter along the reef was worse than useless. Swift as she worked, she had hardly tied the last knot in the reef when the hurricane burst upon her.

So sudden and furious was the onslaught that the boat was thrown on her beam-ends with the storm-jib pounding in the teeth of the gale, threatening momentarily to dismast her. Maina lo leaped for the tiller and threw all her weight against it, but with her deck buried amidships in storm-whipped water, the *Moonbeam* lost all steerageway and pounded head on into the seas. One after another the reef-lashed waves raked the frail craft from stem to stern. With her knees braced against the lee bulwarks, in water to the waist, Maina lo hung on to the tiller in grim desperation, expecting momentarily to be dashed to pieces upon a reef.

Then gradually the *Moonbeam* paid off, righted herself and tore out to sea before the hurricane in the two-mile wake of the *Pappillon*.

To prevent getting carried overboard, she tied the main halyards around her waist and made the end fast to a ring-bolt in the deck. In less than half an hour she was out of sight of land, racing before the eighty-mile gale with the jib-sheet taut as a violin string and the hurricane howling in the rigging. Through the flying mist ahead she saw the *Pappillon's* lower tops'ls blow out in a shower of shreds, leaving the bark running before the wind with bare poles.

The last of the young sun hung lurid and ghostly behind the black clouds astern. Sky and water seemed to unite in a frenzy of storm-lashed fury. A lone albatross swept down the gale before her and was swallowed

up in the blackness ahead. She was utterly alone in the turbulent expanse of storm-whipped waters, hanging on the tiller with numb, nerveless hands.

Then, the deluge. The heavens seemed to open their flood-gates. Howling, snarling, raging came the icy, spume-laden downpour, whipping the surface of the waters into a veritable caldron of leaping fury. It beat upon her bare arms and legs with the sting of a lash and drove the breath out of her body.

The frail craft shuddered beneath the weight of it and wallowed for minutes at the time, submerged to the bulwarks, only to rise gallantly again, shake herself and leap forward on the crest of the next wave.

Never for a moment did Maina lo's heart fail her. With numb, frozen hands she grasped the tiller in a grip of steel; guiding the *Moonbeam* through the chaos of wind and water. Even momentarily she did not relax her vigilance. She looked upon the white, merciless death about her and smiled. The fear of death was not in her. With blinded eyes she strove to pierce the gloom ahead. So low hung the clouds that it seemed as if by reaching out her hand she might touch them.

Sun nor stars broke the inky pall, and the sea beneath was like a caldron of madly boiling milk, a great expanse of blinding whiteness. The hiss of the rain was drowned in the thundering noise of the waters pouring over the boat.

How long it lasted she could not have told. When the squall passed on, she saw the *Pappillon*, a scant quarter of a mile ahead. Her rigging and white, slender spars stood drawn against the blackness of the sky like a delicate, silver-threaded pattern upon a curtain of black velvet. She was laboring heavily without a stitch of canvas. A storm-torn signal of distress fluttered from the mizzen gaff.

With the cessation of the rain, the waves began to rise. The sea changed in aspect. Great mountains of water lifted the

Moonbeam toward the sky and flung her forward with incredible speed. The little craft plunged on, her head down green, phosphorescent valleys of abysmal depth, climbed up the next wave bravely, only to be tossed as by some giant hand into the sky and go coasting madly again.

With a deafening roar a great sea bore down upon her. Maina lo set her teeth, flung herself face down upon the deck and took a fresh turn about her waist with the halyards. For one breathless moment she waited with the thunder of the oncoming waters in her ears. The *Moonbeam* lay momentarily passive like a hunted stag awaiting the *coup de grace*.

Then with a last brave attempt to meet the onslaught, she staggered into the thundering death. The tiller snapped in Maina lo's hand like a piece of matchwood. With terrific force she was hurled against the mast, the waist-rope almost cutting her in twain by the force of the onrushing waters.

Bereft of the guiding hand, the *Moonbeam* swung broadside to the seas. The jib blew out with the noise of a blast. Topmast and jib-boom went crashing over the side.

Stunned and half-drowned, Maina lo groped her way on hands and knees along the engulfed deck to the companionway and tore the hatchet from the rack. With bleeding hands she chopped the tangled rigging adrift to prevent the dragging topmast from pounding a hole in the side of the boat.

On examination she found the rudder carried away. Only a broken splinter of wood remained, swinging uselessly above the water-line. Cutting one of the oars from its lashings, she chopped a deep notch in the stern, laid the oar in the notch and lashed it securely to the top hinge of the broken rudder. Then rising to her feet, she threw her weight against the oar and righted the boat.

She was almost abreast of the *Pappillon*. Fifty yards to starboard the great black hull of the prison-ship towered

monstrously above her, her stern pointing toward the sky. She was foundering by her head. Foc'sle-head and forward deck lay engulfed to the fore-hatch. Crowsnests and rigging were crowded with human forms awaiting the end. The fragments of two splintered lifeboats dragged in the water from the tackle at her davits.

Against the railing of the poop-deck a crowd of prisoners was lined up. Two sailors with hammers and chisels were striking the shackles from the unfortunate men across the iron hawser-bits. As fast as he was freed, each man leaped for the rigging.

The bark was drifting helplessly before the gale. With her forward hold half-full of water she staggered drunkenly to her grave. Curious, incredulous faces stared down at the frail craft with the lone half-nude figure of a girl standing upright in the stern, guiding the boat with only an oar. A sailor in the mizzen truck waved his sou'wester to her.

Above the tumult of the wind came faintly the sound of voices. They were cheering her. From the rigging and yard-arms flashed a message of tribute from a hundred doomed men. Then suddenly the great bark plunged head down in the waves up to the mainmast. Her stern rose in the air with the dripping rudder pointing to the sky. One by one the men in the rigging dropped into the sea. The two sailors abandoned their hammers and chisels and leaped from the railing of the poop.

In the stern stood the solitary figure of a man silhouetted against the sky, with manacled hands raised above his head, the last of the prisoners whom the sailors had abandoned in their efforts to save themselves. A giant of a man he was, with a great shock of yellow curls dancing in the gale. He was signaling to her, pointing astern with his manacled hands.

Maina lo measured the distance with her eyes, cast all her weight upon the oar and

swung the *Moonbeam* under the stern quarter of the bark. Tying a bowline in the main halyards, she threw the rope overboard and signaled her readiness. With a terrific swing the man brought down his manacled wrists across the hawser-bit, breaking the shackle-chain. Then he leaped.

Straining at her oar, Maina lo saw his head rise in the wake of the sinking bark, a few feet astern. The *Moonbeam* staggered momentarily as the man caught the dragging rope and rose half-way out of the water with the sudden strain. The next moment two bloody, mangled arms with the broken shackle-chains dangling from the torn flesh were thrust over the railing. Grasping the man beneath the armpits, Maina lo dragged him to safety and sprang back to her oar, just as the last of the *Pappillon* disappeared beneath the waves.

NIGHT came with the hurricane spent and a chill moon rising out of the sea. Weary and worn, Maina lo left her oar and knelt beside the prostrate form upon the deck. By neither sound nor movement did the man betray sign of life. One mangled wrist lay across a forehead white as death. The broken shackle-chain swung tangled in his hair with the movements of the boat. She looked at the man helplessly. To all appearances he was dead. She had risked her life and boat to no purpose.

When she accidentally touched his forehead with the tips of her fingers, she thought she saw a faint flutter of the eyelids. She placed her ear against his breast and listened breathlessly. Barely perceptible yet unmistakably came the soft beating of his heart. Life was not quite extinct.

For several minutes she sat looking at him perplexedly. Across the moon-flooded waste long, swift lines of ponderously cat-footed rollers moved from horizon to horizon, breaking in menacing white-capped thunder about the boat. Phalanx after phalanx of

storm-torn clouds charged the young ascending moon.

The storm still raged in the higher levels, though but the merest breath of wind fanned her cheek as the boat coasted down the rollers. A blue layer of chill, shroudy mist hung low over the sea with an interminable stretch of clear, sparkling space above. A sinister, brooding peace of fury-gorged elements enwrapped the universe.

Against the deck the face of the unconscious man glowed ghastly beneath his matted, brine-soaked locks that moved Medusa-like in the wash of the deck with the pitching of the boat. A strange freak of circumstances had placed in Maina lo's hands the fate of one of the hated race. Only in the fact that he was a convict and therefore in the estimation of his own people-no better than she, did Maina lo find in her heart a sense of pity for him.

Like herself, he was very young. A downy golden beard covered his vigorous, aggressive jaw. His nose was straight, finely molded, with sensitive blue-veined nostrils. There was a bold, careless quality in the repose of his face. Where his shirt lay open, the skin of his throat glowed soft and velvety beneath its coat of sun-bitten tan. A pathetic boyish look, reminiscent of a brutally disillusioned childhood, hung about the corners of his mouth.

Taking his head in her lap, she began to rub his face and chest briskly and rolled him back and forth to induce circulation in his frozen arteries. After several minutes of unceasing labor she was rewarded by feeling the play of his reviving muscles under her touch. When she placed the water-soaked blanket under his head, he opened his eyes for a fraction of a minute and gazed up at her unseeingly.

Letting her hand fall upon his shoulder, she leaned over him breathlessly, searching his eyes by the faint light of the

moon. Deep blue, the color of mother of pearl, they gazed beyond her into nothingness. When he had closed them again, she sat lost in thought, studying the blank repose of his face.

Then, rising to her feet, with a look of determination upon her face, she found the hatchet and knocked the cover off the hatchway. Below decks everything was snug and tight. Groping about in the dark she found matches and lighted the lantern which swung from the beam above the bunk. She extended her stiff, frozen hands over the flame and looked about with a sigh of relief. Not a drop of water had the staunch little craft shipped.

Returning on deck, she dragged the unconscious man below, dropped him in the bunk and began to strip him of his wet garments. When she pulled his coarse prison-shirt over his head, she gave a gasp of horror. From the neck to the waist his back was a mass of horrible, bloody bruises.

She knew too well the mark of a cat-o'-nine-tails to be mistaken. Cords of beaten flesh lay in livid lines from armpit to armpit. He had been brutally whipped. With a sob of mingled rage and compassion she worked away feverishly and flung the last of his water-soaked garments on deck. Tender-handed and pitying, she anointed his body with healing oil from her locker and bound up his mangled hands with strips torn from the blankets.

She forgot race-hatred and prejudice in administering aid and comfort to the helpless, white-skinned stranger who had come to her out of the sea, bruised and bleeding. She rolled herself into the blankets against his icy body that the warmth of her youth might kindle into flame the flickering spark of life. With maiden shyness she drew his face to her breast and closed her eyes. An indescribable feeling of peace and contentment came to her. She slept.

WHEN she awoke, she was alone. The cabin

was flooded with warm noontide sunshine. The boat swung lazily upon a calm, sunlit sea. She heard him move about on deck. Wondering, she sat up and looked about. Before leaving, he had tucked the blankets around her.

She crawled on deck and found him curled up, prison-garbed, on the mainsail with his back against the mast. She dared not lift her eyes for fear of encountering his. He held out his hand and took hers between his two bandaged ones and raised it to his lips, drinking in the beauty of her with his clear, boyish eyes.

Gently withdrawing the hand, she knelt beside him and pressed the spot his lips had touched shyly to her breast. No word passed from her lips. He also was silent, but in his eyes she saw enshrined something which she dared not believe true.

The youth of him, for he was but an overgrown, bearded boy, spoke to her own in youth's breathless language, tremulous with awe and exquisite delight at their mutual discovery. Fiercely her spirit assailed the barrier of blood and found his amid the wreckage.

It was no mere mortal love which shone from the splendor of her face. The fire in her eyes was love's refining flame, the beacon that has guided frail humanity through the ages in its wingless pursuit of happiness.

The sea moved inevitably from horizon to horizon. Near by a flock of albatrosses fought over a drifting morsel of food. She remembered then that she had not eaten since the morning before.

When she placed food and drink from her locker before him he followed her with his eyes, eating ravenously the while. Knowing the scanty supply, she ate and drank sparingly herself, heaping his lap with fruit and sun-cured fish. When he had eaten his fill, he drew the sail about him with a grateful smile and closed his eyes.

While he slept, she tiptoed about, repairing the damage done by the storm. Every little while she paused in her task to watch him in silent exultation. Bending low over him, she touched his cheeks shyly with her lips and ran her finger-tips lightly through the gold of his hair.

In the afternoon a strange sail appeared, bearing down upon them with a strong breeze from the east. With a sudden fear in her heart, Maina lo recognized the *L'Aiglon*, the swift brigantine of Perrot, the trader.

Arousing the fugitive, she pointed to the ship.

"It is Perrot, the French trader," she whispered. "Go below and hide. Even, now he may have seen you through his glasses."

The boy's face turned white beneath his tan.

"He shall not take me alive. Sooner death than the living hell of Cayenne."

The girl took his face between her hands.

"Fear not, *temasere*" she said softly. "He shall not take you at all, dead or living. But you must hide swiftly."

Hastily rigging a jury jib-boom with the second oar, she hoisted the remaining jib and the mainsail and bore away to the south. Storm-beaten and damaged though she was, the little *Moonbeam* staggered bravely on. With anxious eyes Maina lo watched the brigantine grow larger and larger. Through his glasses Perrot, the trader, had recognized her and was driving the *L'Aiglon* off her course in an effort to overhaul the *Moonbeam*. Maina lo set her teeth and prayed for night.

At dark the brigantine was a league astern, gaining rapidly. Through the gloom of the tropic night her red and green beam-lights followed the wake of the *Moonbeam* like the two evil eyes of a demon. Crouching at her oar, the girl resorted to every known trick of seacraft in futile efforts to outmaneuver the

Frenchman. A stone's throw to starboard, the great white hull of the brigantine rose out of the phosphorescent sea, a ghostly avenger, following every, movement of the *Moonbeam*.

With a sob of rage and despair Maina lo saw her mainsail flap idly in the breeze that began to die with the approach of dawn. At daylight the *Moonbeam* and the *L'Aiglon* lay a cable-length apart upon the calm, rose-tinged lap of the sea. From the forward davits of the brigantine a boat was being launched.

"WELL?"

Maina lo drew from her bosom the leather sack containing the twelve seed-pearls and threw them upon the cabin table. She glanced through the open port-hole at the *Moonbeam* towing in the sluggish wake of the *L'Aiglon* and bit her lip. Perrot, the trader, laughed loudly. It was a cold, sinister laugh that seemed to emanate from his flaring hair-studded nostrils.

"A piker's bet, *mademoiselle*," he snarled. "Twelve seed-pearls, value thirty francs, for your pasty-faced lover. *Sacre-bleu, enfant*, the Government of France will pay me one thousand francs for him, dead or alive."

The girl choked back a sob.

"It is all I have," she murmured faintly. "*M'sieu* will have mercy. I will sign a contract. Half my earnings for one—nay two years to come shall be yours. I have found a new bed where the shell is heavy and pink-edged, and there are pearls of fine luster."

Perrot leaned back in his chair and leered lewdly upon her. His bleary pig-eyes lingered with bestial contemplation upon her slender, lightly garbed form.

"The thirteenth pearl *mademoiselle*," he said, smacking his damp lips with an insinuating leer, "the finest in the world, and I trade. Take it or leave it. A house in Suva, fine silks and nothing to do till tomorrow, as the Yankees say."

"*M'sieu* is jesting," she whispered. "I

am still a maid, and poor. There are others more beautiful than I. Have mercy!"

He rose from his chair and took a step toward her. With a look of inexorable loathing, Maina lo drew away and turned her back upon him. A hundred feet astern swung the *Moonbeam* at the end of the *L'Aiglon's* hawser. Perrot's eyes followed hers through the porthole. Upon the deck two sailors sat Turk-fashion, guarding the hatchway, smoking their pipes. The girl was hardly aware of the trader's presence. She stood looking out to sea with her arms folded upon her breast.

A rose-tipped ridge of fleecy clouds framed the young dawn. Her face grew radiant. Carved indelibly upon her soul stood the runes of love's sacrificial message. Her sacrifice would atone for the mere carnal sin! Fragrant and virginal his white rose should ever rest upon her heart.

"*Eh bien, mademoiselle*, time is precious. I am waiting," Perrot growled.

"I accept," the girl answered in a barely audible voice.

"Ah!"

The trader drew a breath of surprize and gratification and placed his hand upon her arm. Her flesh cringed beneath the foul moisture of his palm.

"One moment, *m'sieu*—the terms of our contract. Food and water for thirty days. A suit of clothing to replace his prison-garb, a compass, a chart and medical supplies. You are to repair the damage done by the storm and send the ship's blacksmith to strike his fetters."

The trader waved his hand airily.

"It shall be done—everything. In one hour your convict shall be as free as the wind."

He raised his swarthy, grinning face to hers.

"One kiss, *mademoiselle*—just one leedle kiss to seal the bargain."

"*M'sieu*, have a care!" she panted, turning upon him with the fury of outraged chastity.

Perrot shrank back, a cunning look in his bloodshot eyes.

"*Tres bien, ma cherie*, business before pleasure, eh, what?"

Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he mounted the stairs and locked the companionway door from the outside. She heard him descend the poop-ladder and order the crew to haul the *Moonbeam* under the stern quarters.

Through the porthole she watched the ship's carpenter fit a new jib-boom in place of the broken one. The two sailors fell to work upon the tangled rigging, while others-lowered the supplies over the side. Perrot himself descended the rope-ladder and threw an old suit of clothes upon the deck.

"*Mademoiselle* sends her best regards," he said maliciously.

The boy steadied himself against the mast and looked at the bundle blankly.

"*Monsieur* had better go below and change," Perrot continued. "The authorities of Tahiti might ask embarrassing questions of one landing there in the garb of a thief."

"The authorities at Tahiti?" the boy repeated weakly. "You mean—"

"That you are free," the trader interposed.

"Free?" the boy ejaculated. "I don't understand."

The trader shrugged his shoulders.

"*Monsieur's* obtuseness is alarming," he sneered. "I said free. A price has been paid. *Mademoiselle* begs me to wish you a bon voyage."

THE two men measured each other across the open hatchway. The blue eyes of the convict grew hard with the glint of steel. His hands moved convulsively at his side. He was about to leap at Perrot's throat, when a sound above

his head caused him to look up.

Maina lo, with her finger upon her lips cautioned him from the open porthole unobserved by the trader or the sailors. Turning his back upon Perrot, the boy picked up the bundle of clothes and threw it down the hatchway.

While the blacksmith worked at his shackles, the boy kept his eye on the porthole. Presently a brown hand grasping a slender, fine-toothed saw was thrust cautiously through the opening. Fascinated, he watched the saw move back and forth across the rudder-stock, six inches above the top pintle. While the blacksmith perspired over the shackles, oblivious to everything save his task, the saw ate its way into the oaken rudder-stock, slowly, relentlessly. Minute flour-like particles of sawdust floated over the heads of the two men on the rising breeze and were lost in the swirling wake of the *L'Aiglon*.

Perrot and the sailors had clambered aboard the brigantine, their task finished. Only the blacksmith remained. The boy prayed for time. In a dozen ingenious ways he delayed the work of the man.

Slowly the gleaming saw-blade sank into the wood. Outwardly calm, he watched its progress with his heart pounding madly against his ribs. Only an inch of the wood now remained. His task completed, the blacksmith rose, tossed the sundered shackles into the sea, picked up his tools and clambered aboard the *L'Aiglon*.

“Son of a thief, let go the hawser,” Perrot bawled from the waist of the ship. As the boy bent over the forward hawser-bit to cast off, a sudden lurch of the brigantine swung the *Moonbeam* close under the stern, less than four feet from the porthole. He could almost have touched the girl’s face, so close was he. The saw was withdrawn. Only the fraction of an inch of the wood remained.

“Set the mainsail and stand by to windward,” she whispered, as his head swept past and the released *Moonbeam* drifted astern. He heard the faint snap of the parting rudder-stock as he leaped to the halyards and ran up the mainsail and jib, and hove to.

Crouched under the belly of the sail, every nerve alert, he saw a brown figure drop from the porthole of the *L'Aiglon* and come plowing hand over hand through the water toward him. The next moment Maina lo, dripping with brine, swung herself on deck. From the helpless brigantine came cries of rage. The helmsman spun the useless wheel in his hands. Slowly the disabled craft swung into the wind, sails aback. On the bridge, beside himself with rage, stood Perrot, the trader. The girl waved her hand to him.

“*Bon voyage, m’sieu,*” she sang out. “Twelve seed-pearls you will find in the sack upon the cabin table. The thirteenth—” she turned her wet, radiant face to the boy’s—“the thirteenth, *m’sieu* is my wedding dower. *Au revoir!*”