



THE PEARL OF TORRES

by Louis Esson

WHEN Ted Jarrett, of New York City, drifted into the picturesque pearling village by Torres Straits, the monotony of life had just been relieved by a little shooting affair. The chief actor was Leon Rod, a jewel-buyer, who traveled between Thursday Island and the scattered villages on the coast, engaging divers, arranging outfits and occasionally buying pearls. He had engaged two Malays, Muda and Tuah, as divers for one of the big fleet owners; but when they had signed the contract, and each received ten pounds in advance, they formed the plan to slip away to the Aroe Islands, in Dutch waters, that had not been fished so much as Torres Strait.

This simple scheme miscarried, because one night the Malays got so gloriously drunk and talkative, that they let out their secret. "Big" Bailey; the police constable, arrested the culprits, and locked them up in the ramshackle jail. The Malays promptly escaped, and went to interview Rod, who was smoking a cigar on the hotel veranda. In the midst of their vociferous explanations, Rod suddenly drew a revolver and fired. Tuah fell, shot through the heart, and Muda, with a scream, dashed down the street

and disappeared. When a crowd gathered 'round the dead body of the Malay, Rod was quietly smoking a cigar.

"It was his own fault," he said indifferently.

Ted Jarrett entered the little shanty, a wooden building, with a galvanized iron roof, known by the grandiloquent title of the Cape York Hotel, just in time to pick up the tag end of the story. Rod, who was angry at losing his commission, declared that the Malays had run amok. Muda had not been seen since. He might have been in hiding, meditating revenge, or perhaps he had slipped away to the Aroe Islands after all.

The American ordered drinks for the crowd. The girl serving behind the bar was a French girl from San Francisco, and Ted wondered how she came to be there in such strange surroundings, for there is no more cosmopolitan crowd on earth than the pearl-ers of Torres Straits.

A smiling Chinese handed 'round the drinks.

"Good luck!" cried the pearl-ers, draining their glasses.

"Good luck!" said Jarrett.

In the bar-room were many races of white men, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, Russians, and different varieties of Southern Europeans; while in the streets could be found Chinese, Japanese, Indian Mohammedans, Singhalese, Malays, Kanakas, Filipinos, Australian blacks, and various nondescripts, white, brown, black, yellow, and every shade between.

Pearling is a fascinating pursuit, and draws adventurers from the ends of the earth.

It had drawn Ted Jarrett from a lawyer's office in New York City, and cast him into the Outer Spaces. Ted was twenty-five years old, and already had been twice 'round the world; but each time, on his return, his father gave him good sensible advice, and sent him back to the heavy law books which he detested. Ted knew he would never cut much of a figure in the legal profession, so on his father's death, three years before, he abandoned office work, and spent most of the little fortune he had inherited in a trade enterprise in Mexico. But his heart was not in the business, and he sold out at a loss.

Ted was a big strong, athletic young man, well educated and full of energy; but too good-natured to be a lawyer, and too easy going to make a successful merchant. So far he had failed in everything; and Evelyn Ward, a young society beauty with whom he thought he was in love, told him, one Summer's evening, after dinner at a stylish Broadway restaurant, that, unless he turned over a new leaf, and made a success of something, his attentions would be no longer welcome.

Ted's face took on a sterner outline.

"I suppose you think I'm a failure?" he said.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"What else can I think? One can't live on romantic dreams."

"I was foolish enough to think that we could," Ted replied, with a dry laugh.

When they finally parted that night, Ted had already made his plans, though Evelyn had

given him no definite promise. She would never marry a poor man, for it needed money, and plenty of money, to give her the only life she cared about, the gay and brilliant life of New York society. If he failed there was no more to be said; and if he succeeded, well, he might take his chance with the rest of her admirers.

Next day Ted put his affairs in order, and with a steamer ticket and a few thousand dollars in his pocket, caught the train for Frisco, where he meant to set out to seek his fortune in the islands of the South.

For some months he knocked 'round the islands, making little more money than he spent, but enjoying life in his usual light-hearted way; but one night at Suva, in the club, he met a man who told him of the pearling at Torres Straits, and his imagination was so kindled that he caught the next boat for Sydney, and from there went north, past the Great Barrier Reef, to Thursday Island. A few days later he went over to the mainland, determined to fit out a lugger and reap a rich harvest of pearls.

In the Cape York Hotel there was much talk of sudden strokes of fortune, good and evil, of thieving divers, of the fatuity of politicians, and of the sin, sweat, and sorrow of that particular torrid township.

The conversation like the crowd, was mixed; but Jarrett soon got his bearings. He learned that, on an average, the shell was as profitable as the pearls; but every man who went out in a lugger clung to the hope that some unusually fine pearls would fall to his lot. It was always the pearl that might be, not the shell that was, that attracted adventurous fleet-owners.

A Dutchman, from Java, and an Italian had a heated argument about the respective merits of the Aroe Islands and Torres Straits. A good case was made for both sides; but an old Queensland pearler maintained that the Torres shell was the best

in the world.

“That will do for me, then,” said Jarrett.

“But it’s harder to find,” remarked the jewel-buyer.

“All the more fun,” replied the young American.

Li, the stolid Chinese “boy” kept carrying ’round the drinks.

The girl behind the bar, who was called Suzette, seemed to Ted much too delicate a picture for such a rough-set frame. She had an expressive face, a clear skin tinted a delicate olive by the sun, eyes soft and brown, but with a merry laugh in them, and a great mass of blue-black hair. Her figure was slight and graceful; and Ted could not help noticing the good taste of her dress, a simple frock of some dark, semi-transparent material, suitable for the tropics, but with a touch of coquetry in its scarlet belt that matched the red flower in her hair.

Leon Rod, a handsome middle-aged man of unknown nationality—he might have been anything, for he had traveled the world, and spoke several languages fluently—sat at a little table sipping a liqueur. He raised his glass to Suzette.

“A tes beaux yeux!”

Suzette wrinkled her dainty little nose.

Rod walked over to the bar, caught her wrist, and whispered something in French. Suzette’s cheeks blazed with shame and indignation. Rod laughed, and bent over to kiss her, when Ted Jarrett grabbed him by the shoulders, wheeled him ’round, and then pushed him violently to the door. Rod was a heavy and powerful man, but he was taken by surprise by the American’s quickness and dexterity.

The crowd laughed at the little incident; but as Leon Rod stumbled out of the door on to the veranda, a revolver shot passed just over his shoulder and buried itself in the wall. There was a rush to the door.

“It was Muda,” cried Big Bailey, the

constable, “having a crack at Rod.”

There was a scene of disorder. Suzette was forgotten. The pearlers ran in different directions, but there was no sign of the Malay. Muda had escaped again.

THE lugger was drifting across the glittering Straits.

Ted Jarrett was now a full-blown pearler. It was a day of perfect beauty, and the thrill of the tropics fired his blood. Pearling, he thought, was a splendid game. His money had gone, but what of that? A good haul of shell would pay all expenses, and the pearls he found would be clear profit.

He had leased the foreshore from a more or less paternal Government, and used the site for his own shack, a shell shed, and a place for overhauling his boats.

Ted felt rather pleased with himself. But what would Evelyn think, he wondered, if she saw him in such a place, and in such a costume. It would be difficult to turn him into a society man again. He loved adventure, untamed lands, tropic seas, strange people, and the big, vague dreams of the wanderer. Had he the soul of a beach-comber, after all?

This, he had to admit, was the life that suited him, and though his financial position was not exactly rosy, he was in excellent health and spirits. His lugger was not yet fully paid up, and he was depending on a haul to clear himself; but he was a born adventurer, undaunted by circumstances, and buoyed up by the hopes of youth.

Ted reveled in the pearling. His lugger, fitted up with a dingey, pump, and diving-gear, had a small but resourceful crew. He was proud of Utimaro, a little Jap, who was one of the most daring divers of Torres Straits. Though slightly built, Utimaro was strong and sinewy, and there was no question of his skill and courage. He

was absolutely cold-blooded, and if the prospects were good, there was no risk he would refuse to take. He was a silent little man, more respected than loved by the rest of the crew. Why he had offered him his services at a moderate wage was a mystery to Jarrett.

Besides Utimaro there was another Jap, Sato, the "tender," whose job it was to answer the diver's signals, and keep the pipes and ropes free while he was under water. Malays kept the pumps going, and the fifth man, a Levantine Greek, who was no diver, acted as cook and general handy man.

The divers had struck a good patch of shell. Utimaro returned from the bottom of the sea with his bag filled, and sat for a moment enjoying the fresh breeze. One of the Malays then stepped into the diving-dress and was lowered down.

Ted had admired the diving of Utimaro, and his eyes still followed the little man, who went aft to the pile of shells. He noticed the Jap had a piece of wire which he slipped away quickly as Ted crossed over.

"What's that, Utimaro?"

The Jap looked up with a scowl.

"What's the game?"

The Jap did not reply.

Ted looked at the shells, and found that some had been stacked on edge in the sun, so that the oyster would open easily, and allow a big pearl to be fished for with a piece of wire. This was a favorite device with the colored divers, who have a good eye for an oyster likely to contain a pearl.

"That'll do, Utimaro," said Ted, "I'll open the rest myself."

Now he knew why Utimaro had been so willing to work for him. Ted was a new man at the game.

"Utimaro!" called one of the Malays.

It was again the Jap's turn to dive.

Utimaro looked over the ship's side.

"Too deep," he muttered at last, "it is not the law."

There is a law against diving below a certain depth; but Utimaro had never been known to refuse before. His obvious intention was to pay Jarrett back for discovering his tampering with the shells.

"This is your last chance, Utimaro. If you quit now, you'll have to find another job," But the Jap would not dive.

The shell was so good, that Ted Jarrett determined on going down himself. He had full confidence in his crew, and knew the Malays would keep an eye on Utimaro. When he got into the dress, and the heavy helmet was screwed on, he felt far from comfortable. His ears buzzed; then he heard a loud bang, caused by the compressed air striking his ear-drums. But Ted who had no thought of consequences was going to see it through. He stepped down the ladder attached to the side of the boat, and then cast himself off. He went down to the bottom by the plumper which, along with the life-line, was held by the silent Japanese tender.

When he reached the floor of the ocean, Ted was dazzled by the enchantment of the scene, that looked as beautiful and unreal as a fairy palace. He saw the most exquisite shells, of every shape and color, trees made out of coral, delicate fishes flashing among the marine growths, curious flowers and ferns of the sea. But he had no time to indulge his sense of wonder. He kept his eyes fixed on one object only—shell.

Overhead the lugger drifted, dragging him on, and quickly he gathered the large oysters, and dropped them into his bag. Utimaro was right, they had certainly struck a patch. Ted filled his bag, gave the signal to be hauled up, and rose quickly to the surface. Sato unscrewed the helmet; and Ted sat down exhausted, eagerly-filling his lungs with the fresh air. Utimaro did not speak; but the Malays grinned, for the young American's grit had impressed them.

Ted gave the word to return home, lay back exhausted on the deck, and lit his pipe.

The lugger danced over the waves.

It was a day for dreams. In the drowsy tropic afternoon the scene was a picture of delight, with the burning blue of the sea and sky, the red beach at the foot of the cliffs, and the white roofs of the houses peeping: amid the vivid green foliage of the coconut, poinciana, and the palm trees. The air was warm, but a light breeze blew across the sea.

Ted sat up. For some weeks luck had gone against him. There was not a pearl in every shell, Ted soon discovered, nor in every hundred shells. It was a gamble, but the lure was irresistible. Now he had discovered Utimaro's trick, his prospects seemed brighter. At any moment a man might make a fortune.

With a flat, thin-bladed knife, he started on the shells he had just dived for himself. The opening of every oyster was an exciting experiment.

Quickly he opened shell after shell, putting any gems he found into a little tin box. He had suffered many disappointments. At first he thought that every oyster contained a pearl of some kind, and he mistook every bright bubble for one. Often he thought it was real till the knife proved his error—the bubble burst.

The little box was half-filled with pearls, mostly baroques, ill-shaped gems of comparatively small value, yet serving to encourage the hope that the rare pearl, Evelyn's pearl, might yet be found.

As he opened shell after shell, finding only a bubble or a baroque, he would just curse, and tackle another pile.

"Better luck next time," he would say. As the lugger was nearing the shore, he picked up a big oyster, inserted his knife at the "lip" of the shell, and cut through the strong central muscle that bound the flat and round sides together. His knife touched something that made his heart jump with excitement.

It was a beautiful pearl. It was big,

perfectly round, with a smooth skin and delicate iridescent luster. Ted could hardly believe his eyes, for never before had he seen anything like it. There was no pearl to match it in the gem-shops of Thursday Island. What was the worth of that little sphere of nacre? Ted examined it carefully. Who could say? A fine pearl is like a fine picture, it is something unique, beyond price, it becomes a matter of fancy, of artistic taste. Well, if it were sold for twenty, twenty-five, thirty thousand dollars, Ted thought it would be cheap.

But he had no intention of selling this pearl. He had worked for it, he had crossed the world to find it, he had dived for it himself, and he felt proud of his efforts.

Utimaro stood unobserved behind him.

When Ted looked up the Jap was pointing to the little jetty the lugger was approaching.

"At last," Ted reflected, "I have something to show, a perfect pearl, a queen of gems, worthy to hang as a pendant on the white throat of a New York beauty."

The lugger touched the jetty.

Ted hid the pearl in his belt.

NEXT evening as the moon was rising, Ted Jarrett stepped out of his shack, and ran down the beach for a swim.

He told nobody of the precious pearl he had found, and he thought nobody knew. Before going down to the sea, he looked carefully 'round the shack, and slipped the little leather bag, containing the pearl, into a hole in the wall.

As he was enjoying his swim, Sato, the Japanese tender approached, and, when Ted came out of the water, handed him a note. It came from New York, and he recognized Evelyn's handwriting.

As he hastily dressed he was surprised to find how slightly moved he was.

New York, was very far away, and somehow the lights of Broadway were less alluring than the moonlight on the lonely sea.

He tore open the letter, glanced at it hastily, and was about to return when Sato, who had been waiting patiently, asked him a question about the lugger.

While he was reading the letter from New York, and giving Sato some directions for the next day, a small brown figure which had been hiding behind the low bushes at the foot of the cliff, crept into the shack. It was Utimaro. He went straight to the hole in the wall, opened the bag, and took out the pearl, and then glided off into the bushes like a snake into its hole. He wriggled along the sands till he reached the cliff, scrambled up the jagged rocks and disappeared.

Dismissing Sato, Jarrett, with the letter in his hand, returned slowly and thoughtfully to the shack.

He threw himself into a low chair, and, while the kettle was boiling, he again read Evelyn's brief note. It destroyed his last illusions about her. She took it for granted that he was a failure was usual, and would never make a success of pearling. Shell had fallen a hundred dollars a ton—she had made inquiries. She would be pleased with a pearl from Torres, if it were a fine one; but fine pearls were rare, and fortune was not likely to favor him.

Her light chatter of automobiles, dances and supper parties, and the artificial pleasures that could be bought by wealth, jarred on the young man, who saw clearly that she was more interested in his fortune than in himself. The pearl he had striven for, surely it was never destined for such a cold and calculating woman!

As he sat, dreaming for hours in the tropic night, he realized how strangely satisfied he was with his lot. He liked the life, and the motley, adventurous crowd that gathered o' nights in the little shanty. Suzette, who was treated by the pearl-ers with a rough, but

genuine courtesy, seemed to take no special notice of him. After the incident with Rod, he felt rather shy in her presence, keeping somewhat aloof, with a chivalrous care not to presume on her gratitude.

He often wondered at her refinement; but he learned that she was the daughter of a cultured man, though a ne'er-do-well, a French engineer, who had traveled the world seeking his fortune, and at last come to Thursday Island. Later he crossed to Cape York, and opened the little hotel, though most of his time he spent pearling. One night his lugger went out, but it never returned. That was two years ago. Suzette kept on the shanty, saving her little money, so that she could return to her mother's people in San Francisco.

She was quite unlike the selfish, superficial Evelyn. She had known suffering; that was part of her charm. The diamond is struck from the hard inanimate rock, but the pearl is born of pain—that was the difference between them. The New York girl was hard, cold, brilliant, a society beauty—a diamond; Suzette was soft and subtle, one who had known suffering, but with a depth of color, a delicate enchantment—a pearl.

"Yes, a pearl," he reflected, "the pearl of Torres."

IT WAS a quiet time in the Cape York Hotel. Suzette was sitting in a rocking-chair, pensively knitting, when Leon Rod came in. He seemed greatly excited.

"Wine, Suzette," he cried, "I must drink."

Suzette rose, and brought a small bottle of champagne. The wine sparkled gaily in the glass. As he lifted it to his lips, he gazed boldly at Suzette, who flushed and walked away.

Leon Rod laughed, drained his glass, and called for more wine.

"I have good news," he said, "good news *chérie*."

When Suzette brought another bottle he leaned across the table and spoke eagerly.

"Listen! At last fortune has been kind to me. I am going to leave this infernal country. I have seen enough, too much. What have we here—fever, heat, flies, dirt—and as for the people, they're the very scum of the earth. Bah! It's a terrible life. But I'm through with it, do you hear, Suzette? I have my fortune, and now I go."

Suzette watched him closely.

"You have been buying pearls?" she asked.

"*Mais oui*, I have bought pearls."

"Where have they come from? The American has found very few."

Leon Rod lit a cigaret.

"He has found very few," he laughed. "That is so."

"You are much cleverer," said Suzette, moving away.

"I am not a shell-hunter, I am a connoisseur."

The jewel expert brought out a little case from his pocket. He opened it, and Suzette saw it was filled with a choice collection of gems.

"I am an expert," he said, "These pearls are small, but very fine. Would they not make a pretty necklace, Suzette?"

Rod was in an eager, amorous mood, and Suzette became curious as to his designs.

"What are you going to do with the pearls?" the girl asked.

"I will sell them at the right time."

"Here?"

"No! In the best market, London, Paris, New York. I have done with Torres. How I have suffered in this hell-hole! And you must have suffered too, Suzette. But tomorrow I sail away. Singapore, Colombo, Port Said, Marseilles, and then Paris, Paris—the boulevards, the theaters, the cafes—Paris; think

of that, think what Paris means to a man of wealth! That will be my life. Will you come with me?"

The girl's eyes flashed.

"The wine has gone to your head, *m'sieu*."

"It is not the wine, it is you, *ma belle*, Do you know Utimaro?"

"*Oui, m'sieu*."

"He, too, is one of my agents. I have fooled the American."

Suzette trembled.

"Come, let us have a glass together!" said Rod.

Suzette hesitated a moment. Since the night Ted Jarrett had defended her, she had thought only of him; but her love was hidden deep in her heart like a pearl in the sea. She felt that it was hopeless; yet now he was being cheated, she would risk anything to find out Rod's schemes.

Setting her teeth tight she brought a large bottle of champagne, and a glass for herself. She sat down at the little table opposite Leon Rod, who filled both glasses with the sparkling wine. Suzette touched the glass with her lips.

"Tell me about it," she said. "It must be amusing. You are not drinking."

Rod raised his glass.

"Gem-buying is an art," he replied, jocosely. "It is much better than fitting out a lugger. I have the choice of the spoil from many luggers, and I buy very cheap, not always from the fleet owners, you may be sure. It is a dangerous game, now Big Bailey is on the lookout, but I have a little arrangement with the best of the colored divers."

"Ah, that is how you manage," said Suzette, with a little jerky laugh, as she refilled his glass.

"*Mais oui*, I love you, Suzette." Leon Rod leaned over the table trying to grasp the girl's hand. "Tonight I am going to buy one

more pearl, the finest of all.”

“Who found it?” she asked.

Leon Rod winked knowingly.

“Utimaro. He stole it from the American.” Rod, who was now flushed with wine, whispered confidentially, “I shall meet Utimaro on the beach, when I get the word from Sato.”

“Is it a very fine pearl?” the girl inquired innocently.

“It is perfect. I saw it only for a moment, for the Jap would not hand it over till he got the money.”

“Will you have to pay him a great deal?”

“No. How else can he sell it? The Chinese store-keepers would know it was stolen, and give him little, and nobody else dares to buy from the colored divers. They all have to come to Leon Rod. I am the friend of the poor.”

Suzette was shivering with excitement, but she kept filling Rod’s glass.

“You will come with me,” he cried, “you will voyage as my wife. We will lead the gay life, ah, Paris, Paris!”

At this moment Sato came in, handed Rod a slip of paper, and then silently went out. Rod’s eyes gleamed.

“Let me see!” cried Suzette.

Rod laughingly showed her the note, which was in code.

Some of the pearlers were now entering, and Suzette put away the champagne glasses. The men called for drinks and cards.

Leon Rod looked at his watch, and pulled himself together with a start. He rose, crumpling the note in his hand, and bowed to Suzette.

“*A demain,*” he said significantly, as he left the room.

At once Suzette called Li, the Chinese “boy,” told him to look after the place, and then without pausing to slip a shawl over her head, she left the shanty, and walked quickly to

the beach.

“THE PEARL of Torres,” murmured Ted softly.

His long reverie was interrupted by a cry from Suzette. With loosened hair, and sparkling eyes, she told her story, rapidly but clearly, her pale hands flashing to and fro in pretty and expressive gestures.

Jarrett listened intently.

“But I have the pearl!” he cried.

Suzette looked surprised.

“Here it is,” he said, taking the bag from its hiding-place. He opened it and started. “The pearl was gone.”

“It is stolen!” cried Suzette.

The young American smiled grimly. So Utimaro had been spying on him! But he would recover that stolen pearl, for it meant something to him—now. He looked at the little French girl in admiration.

“Why have you done all this for me?”

Suzette seemed agitated.

“I must go, *m’sieu.*”

As they were speaking they caught sight of a small figure, gliding along the beach. Jarrett made a sudden move.

“Be careful,” whispered Suzette.

“I’ll see who it is,” said Ted, “I want that pearl.”

“Keep to the cliff,” said Suzette, as she hurried away, “*adieu.*”

Ted Jarrett was too excited to notice how she slipped off. Fixing his eyes on the small brown figure whose movements were so suspicious, he kept to the cliff, walking behind the bushes. The man, who was creeping along the beach below, by a familiar gesture revealed himself to Jarrett as the diver, Utimaro.

It was before a cave in the rocks that Utimaro stopped, and looked ’round. In a few minutes he was joined by another man, sauntering leisurely along, and smoking a

fragrant cigar. It was Leon Rod.

From his vantage ground on the cliff Ted Jarrett could see them distinctly! Carefully he approached nearer, hiding behind some rocks and bushes, till he hung straight over the precipice. The men had entered the cave, and were sitting on a boulder.

For some time they looked closely at each other, but at last Utimaro displayed the jewel, and handed it over to the illicit buyer. Rod talked volubly, offering a price; but the face of the Jap was set and stern.

“It will not do,” he said.

“But let me explain, Utimaro——”

“No explanation.”

Rod held up the pearl.

“It is big, and has a good skin, that I admit— but it is not perfect. I am an expert.”

“I, too,” said the Jap, with a scowl. “My best price is one hundred pounds.”

“Five,” snapped the Jap.

“Impossible, my friend, impossible.”

Utimaro remained silent. Then he held out his hand.

“Give me the pearl. I do not sell.”

Rod put it in his pocket,

“Listen, Utimaro,” he said, holding out a bank note, “take your money.”

“No! I will have the pearl. It is mine.”

“Listen!”

The Jap rose quietly.

“We talk no more,” he said.

Jarrett waited for him to rise, but Rod did not move. His eyes were shut, and Jarrett thought it was a knock-out blow. As he bent over and took the jewel from Rod’s pocket, suddenly a knife flashed in his face, gashing his forehead. It was a treacherous blow, but the ruse succeeded. Rod cautiously raised himself, and picked up the fatal pearl.

Jarrett lay helpless on the sands, and then lost consciousness.

BACK IN the shanty Suzette became

Rod knocked the ash from his cigar.

“The pearl!” cried Utimaro, making a spring; but Rod was too quick for him, his hand was on his automatic and he fired.

Utimaro fell against the boulder, blood spurting from his throat.

When Rod saw that Utimaro was dead, he left the body where it fell, and stepped quickly out of the cave. He threw the incriminating weapon far into the sea, and set out along the sand.

Jarrett followed, and as the beach made a sudden curve about a quarter of a mile from the cave, he swung himself over the edge of the cliff, and dropped lightly on to the sand. Rod started as Jarrett met him face to face.

“What do you want?” he cried angrily.

“My pearl,” said Jarrett.

Rod, who though slower in movement was the heavier man, closed with him, and together they swayed backward and forward, each trying in vain for a successful throw. At last Jarrett broke away, and met his opponent’s rush with a straight left. Some blows were exchanged; and then Jarrett making a feint, tempted Rod to smash in a heavy right; but the blow fell short, and Jarrett, making the most of his chance, landed a well-timed hook on the point of the jaw. The big man staggered and fell heavily. impatient. The American had not returned. She confided her fears to Big Bailey, the police officer, who immediately made ready for action.

“I’ve had my eye on Rod for some time,” he said. “This illicit pearl buying is turning too many good divers into thieves, and ruining the industry.”

“I’ll go with you,” said Suzette.

“Come along, then,” he growled, in a bluff, good-natured way.

They left the pearlers drinking and playing cards, slipped out quietly, and made

for the beach.

As they reached the cliffs they were startled by the splendor of the tropic moonlight that bathed the lonely sea and shore in brilliant light. The night was soft, but as clear as day, and every object could be plainly distinguished. Suzette uttered a little cry, her heart beating fast. On the sands two figures had been struggling. She recognized Ted Jarrett, the young American, and Leon Rod, kneeling beside the body.

Rod picked up the pearl, and then rose and walked quickly along the beach. But he did not go far. A little boat touched the shore. A dark figure rushed out, came behind Rod, and plunged a kris between his shoulder blades. Rod fell forward on the sand and stirred no more.

It was a weird scene.

“Quick!” cried Suzette.

As they stood on the cliff, the dark figure made for the sea. It was Muda, the Malay. He seemed to know what he was doing. He got into his little boat, and pushed off across the glassy sea.

Bailey helped Suzette down the cliff-side. The girl ran along the wet sand in her thin little shoes. She bent over the body of Jarrett, who opened his eyes and smiled.

“*Bon Dieu.*” exclaimed Suzette, with a sigh of relief.

Jarrett staggered to his feet. He looked ghastly in the moonlight with his white face, and his hair clotted with blood; yet his wound was not so deadly as it appeared to Suzette. The knife had struck the bone; but it had not penetrated. It was an ugly gash, but it would soon heal.

Big Bailey was examining the body of Rod, when Ted Jarrett, leaning on Suzette’s arm, managed to stumble across the sands.

“I sure knocked him out,” he said, bewildered at the sight, “but don’t say I killed him.”

“He’s dead all right,” replied Bailey, “but don’t you worry. We saw the finish.”

Suzette pointed over the sea, where the Malay was far out in his little boat.

“Muda took a hand,” said Bailey, “a Malay is a man of one idea, and he has a long memory. Muda waited for his chance.”

Jarrett picked up the pearl. It was a beauty as it gleamed in the moonlight.

“How lovely!” exclaimed Suzette.

“It is for you,” said Jarrett.

“*Non, non, m’sieu,*”

“*Mais oui.*” Jarrett persisted; but his small stock of inferior French soon gave out, so he whispered something in her ear, in his own language.

Big Bailey, a diplomat in his way, had turned his back on the pair and was looking across the sea.

The girl shook her head.

“You must keep this pearl of Torres,” she said. “You have fought for it, and won it.”

“You are the pearl of Torres,” he said softly. “You are the only pearl I want.”

Suzette blushed.

“Well,” cried the American desperately, “if you won’t take the pearl, will you take me?”

Suzette did not reply; but the light in her eyes told him what he wanted to know.

Big Bailey half turned ’round, remarking casually:

“He’s making for one of the islands. Guess I’ll let him go.”

The night was calm, the sea a mirror of silver. The Malay’s boat was now a speck in the distance. Muda had had his revenge.