



CAPTAIN CUT-THROAT

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

**Thirteen brigands in a sleek-black bark! Greedy sea-wolves
scenting ripe pearl plunder in Typhoon Bradley's bailiwick.**

TYphoon Bradley broke one of the written laws of the islands when he interfered. It was at Funafuti, toward the close of the pearlizing sea-

son. A score of ships were anchored in the lagoon. Half a hundred canoes and whaleboats dotted the surface of the limpid water. On the beach was a small city of

tents, shacks, huts and lean-tos, such as always sprang up when a lagoon was being worked. Native women and children were scattered along the sand. White men sprawled here and there on the hastily built verandas. Pearl buyers from all the world rested in the shade and sipped their drinks. Typhoon Bradley was sitting with Chang, the Chinese pearl buyer, when it began.

First of all a slender native, or rather a half-caste from the look of him, came hurtling out of the bar door. He fell heavily on the sand and the next moment there was standing over him a burly, tall man with a ragged black beard and thick hairy arms.

"I'll teach you, you nigger swine!" he roared, and the whip rose and fell. The half-caste writhed, tried to crawl away, was kicked back and at last resigned himself to whimpering and crying out, his head buried in his arms.

A small crowd gathered. No one said anything. A man had a right to punish his own natives. The Islands were not being tamed by prayers and good wishes. The South was raw and a man's crew might at any time turn and rip him to shreds if they thought him soft enough.

Typhoon Bradley drew on his cheroot and frowned a little.

"Who is he?" he asked quietly. Chang shrugged.

"The bearded one? A Captain Tench, Came in two days ago with that rakish bark over there. No one seems to know much about him. The thin, pock-marked man standing by him is his mate, I believe."

The whip rose and fell, the bearded man swore viciously. The half-caste's back was cut and raw, beginning to bleed. Soon his writhing and screaming ceased. He had fainted. Still no one said anything and no one moved. But the whip lifted and fell with sickening soft sounds and blood spattered the crowd.

TYPHOON BRADLEY got up, shook off Chang's detaining arm and tossed away his cheroot.

"Don't you think that's enough?" he asked mildly. Captain Tench paused for a moment and glared at him.

"You mind your own damned business!" he grated. "The damned swine stole a belt out of my cargo!"

Bradley looked and saw the unconscious half-caste was still clutching a chcap, patent leather belt such as was used for trade in the outer islands, a thing worth, perhaps, two cents.

"Stealing's bad when it gets started in a crew," Bradley agreed, "but you don't need to kill the man."

"Shut up!" snarled the other and brought the whip down again with a vicious swish upon the unconscious man's back. Typhoon's gray eyes hardened and his six feet of lean muscle tightened a little.

"I said that's enough!" he snapped. He caught the arm that held the whip, wrenched the weapon away and flung the owner aside. There was a silence that could almost be felt. Men stared. Captain Tench choked with wrath. The veins corded in his bull neck and the blood ran red in his face.

"You! . . . damn you!" he choked. Someone caught his arm.

"Careful there. That's Typhoon Bradley!"

Captain Tench hurled the cautioning hand aside.

"I don't give a damn who he is! He can't tell me what to do!"

"Listen . . ."

"Get out of my blasted way!" roared Tench, and he charged, his great fists flailing and his head lowered. Someone laughed. Typhoon Bradley was reputed to be the strongest man in the South and no one but a stranger would have been as big a fool as Tench.

There was a hard smacking noise and the bearded captain went sidewise and to the sand, sprawling a good six feet before he lighted. Typhoon Bradley rubbed his knuckles and waited.

Tench got up, shaking his head, undoubtedly surprised and sobered. He whipped 'round, cooler now, his eyes slits.

"Tough, eh?" he sneered and came in with the weaving gait of a practiced fighter. Bradley was no boxing man but he knew the rough-and-ready fighting of the outlands as few other men did. Even first-rate boxers are not always good fighters outside the ring, and champions

have been known to be knocked out in a rough-house by men they could cut to pieces in a squared circle and under rules. But Tench was good. There could be no mistake about that.

He ducked Typhoon's right hook and landed with a stinging left jab that would have sent most men to their knees. Typhoon took half a step back and smack! Tench staggered, almost fell and covered up by instinct. He made the mistake then of going into a clinch and Bradley got him under the heart with a right hook that nearly broke Tench's ribs.

Tench was game. He came back, landed a right jab, crossed with a hard left and left himself open. Typhoon laughed and put his body behind his blow. Tench's feet left the sand and he was hurled twice his own length before crashing into the crowd and falling. He was out before his body hit the sand and his left ear was all but torn off.

“WELL,” someone drawled, “he's pretty good. He hit Typhoon three times. That's one above the record.”

Someone else laughed. Typhoon stared at his inert foe for a moment and thoughtfully rubbed his knuckles.

“You ain't heard the last of this,” a voice said beside him and he turned sharply to see the thin, pock-marked man who was Tench's mate. The man was snarling and obviously savage and his right hand kept clawing at his gun butt, as if he had a hard time to control himself. But you can't shoot another man on Funafuti beach without giving him an even draw, and Typhoon's gumbelt hung over the back of his chair near Chang.

“Are you proposing to fight too?” inquired Typhoon mildly. The other licked his lips, breathed hard and then shook his head.

“Not now, Bradley. But I'm Tench's mate and I know him. He'll get back at you some way. We've heard of you! Big guy in the Islands, eh? You won't be for long.”

Bradley shrugged.

“You'd better pick up the wreck,” he said indifferently, jerking his head toward Tench who was still unconscious. The other glared at him, cooling off.

“I suppose you don't object if I take

our man along too?” he asked sarcastically. Bradley glanced down at the now groaning half-caste and shook his head.

“If he's your man he's yours. But I wouldn't beat him up any more.”

“No?”

“That's what I said.”

“And what would you do, big guy? Board our packet?”

“I don't know just what I'd do but it wouldn't be pleasant.”

“*You're* not the damned magistrate here!”

Someone snickered and Typhoon smiled grimly.

“That happens to be exactly what I am. Appointed for the duration of the season.”

THE other's jaw dropped. He mumming bled something, backed off, then, calling sharply to several of his crew he saw standing about, he had the half-caste and Captain Tench carried down to the water's edge and taken on board the bark.

The crowd broke up, some few men congratulating Typhoon. He merely shrugged and returned to his seat beside Chang. It had been the first time that season he had ever had to interfere as a magistrate and then he had handled the matter outside of officialdom. When Typhoon Bradley held authority no one cared to cause trouble.

“He's bad, that Captain Tench,” said Chang quietly. Typhoon nodded.

“Damned bad. I wonder what his game is?”

“I have been wondering too,” said Chang dryly. “I heard a short while ago that he has Gentleman Harry on board.”

“What?” Bradley ripped out, turning to stare at the Chinaman. “Gentleman Harry?”

For a moment he was tense and motionless. If there was one name that could jar the habitual calm of the man it was that of his old enemy Gentleman Harry of Singapore. They had clashed a dozen times. They had wounded and all but killed each other. It had been a blow of Typhoon's fist one night on Balata Beach that had ruined the Gentleman's then handsome features. He had, before that night, been called Gentleman as a term of admiration for his looks as well as his immaculate clothing. But after that night

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the term of Gentleman was used as a jest, and for that Gentleman Harry hated Typhoon Bradley with an intenseness that at times sent him almost insane. If Gentleman Harry was at Funafuti that meant trouble.

"I'll look into this," promised Typhoon grimly. "I'm responsible for the beach this season and no one's going to pull anything if I can help it. . . . Come on in and let's feed."

They both got up and went into Boston Charlie's for a drink and some food. Outside the night fell swiftly over the vast expanse of the great lagoon and the lights began to twinkle out on the ships. Bonfires flickered on the beach. The Kanakas shouted and boasted and strutted up and down telling of their day's diving. A tinny piano began to play in Boston Charlie's, and native women slipped quietly in and out while the rattle of dice and the harsh voices of the game dealers cut across the smoke-filled air.

II

IT must have been two or three hours after sunset when Typhoon finally left the poker game he had been sitting in, and after a few words to Chang went outside into the cool night air. He paused for a moment to stare up and down the line of shacks and then hitching up his cartridge belt he pushed his way through the throng and made for the water's edge.

He was frankly puzzled at learning that Gentleman Harry was at Funafuti, and more than puzzled that though the man had been there two days he had made no attempt to come ashore. That meant he wanted to keep under cover. No one else in the lagoon seemed to know the Gentleman was present, and how Chang had found out Typhoon couldn't guess. The Chinaman, however, usually knew a good many things others didn't. When Typhoon had bluntly asked him how he was aware of the Gentleman's presence on Tench's ship, Chang had merely shrugged, smiled inscrutably and said:

"It is my business to know everything. That is why I buy pearls for Cartier's and Tiffany. That is why I have been in the Islands twenty years and am still alive."

Bradley shook his head. He knew

Chang too well to doubt that his information was correct. Then what did the Gentleman plan on doing? The season was closing in two days. Most of the pearls had been bought or were contracted for; so had the shell.

Tench hadn't brought any supplies to sell. . . . Typhoon had ascertained that. Nor had he claimed to be in need of supplies or water. He appeared to be some sea bully from northern waters who offered neither explanations nor courtesy. Typhoon suspected something was going to break and it had worried him so much he had not been able to attend to his poker. He was magistrate for the season and he intended it should close with a clean slate for him.

He picked out a dinghy when he reached the water's edge—as magistrate he could commandeer any boat he felt like, though for that matter no one would have argued with him—and getting in he pushed off and rowed himself out to Tench's bark, the *Wanderer*. There seemed to him to be a curious air of tension hanging over the night, a sense of something going to happen. He swore to himself and put his weight on the oars. He must be getting old to let such feelings bother him.

He reached the *Wanderer* at last and was surprised by several things. In the first place he could see in the starlight that she was riding to a short cable, almost up and down in fact, which was a curious thing for a vessel at anchor in a lagoon twenty miles long and with plenty of room to swing in. Second, her sails, which he would have sworn that afternoon were harbor stowed, were now loosened. Thirdly, there seemed to be an unusual number of men on board. . . . and she carried a white crew Chang had said.

At night at Funafuti most if not all of the shipping save the anchor watches went ashore for a brawl. Typhoon hesitated. The *Wanderer* had all the earmarks of a ship set for a quick getaway. Should he go back and gather a crowd to help him investigate or shouldn't he? But investigate what? Nothing had happened so far. And apart from that he, Typhoon, had a reputation to consider. He wasn't accustomed to going back for help. The strongest man in the South and the best shot in the Islands . . . excepting only Stinger

Seave . . . did not rely on other men. Bradley cursed and forced the dinghy alongside, catching hold of the pilot ladder and making fast.

SOMEONE leaned over the bulwarks. "Who the hell's that?"

"We'll talk about that later," Bradley said irritably. "Is Captain Tench on board?"

"Maybe. But he ain't receiving visitors. Come back tomorrow."

Typhoon was already halfway up the ladder.

"You ain't boarding us tonight!" warned the speaker above.

Typhoon reached the top of the ladder and a heavily built seaman in worn blue dungarees laid a rough hand against his chest. Bradley swore and pushed and the seaman went staggering. Before he could recover himself Typhoon was on deck. The seaman got up, swearing, and Typhoon saw he was wearing a gun belt, a strange thing for a common seaman.

"You gotta get out!" snarled the man, jerking out his weapon. "Orders is 'no one boards.' . . ."

He gave a yelp of pain as a hard fist smacked him under the jaw. Bradley took his gun from him as he fell and contemptuously tossed it overside. He was immediately surrounded by a half dozen armed men, threatening and surly.

"I'm the magistrate for Funafuti," he said coldly. "Do you all want me to arrest you?"

Someone laughed.

"What a chance!"

Another voice spoke up and a man in a peaked cap, evidently the second mate, pushed forward.

"Never mind the guff, fellers. This is Typhoon Bradley, ain't it?"

"Correct!" said Typhoon stiffly. The other gave a mocking bow.

"An' you want to see Cap'n Tench, eh?"

"I do."

"You're quite sure you wouldn't rather get back into th' dinghy?"

Something warned Bradley but he hitched forward his holsters and set his jaw.

"You heard what I wanted."

The other hesitated.

"You're sticking your nose into some-

thing," he warned. "What you doing out here anyway this time of night?"

Typhoon wasted no further words. He strode forward. A man tried to check him and went reeling from a backhand blow. The second mate sprang forward to receive the flat of Bradley's hand full in the face. There was an ugly under-current of oaths and Typhoon spun around, his gun out and his eyes slits. They were drawing on him, but the second mate's snarling voice checked that.

"Let 'im go, fellers. The Old Man'll be glad t' see 'im anyway after what happened this afternoon."

THEY drew back then and after a pause Typhoon holstered his gun, turned and proceeded aft. He was angry, coldly angry. He was not used to being treated like that.

He strode up to the poop, approached the main cabin scuttle and dropped down the companion, his eyes like ice.

There were four men seated around the table and drinking, three of whom he recognized. One was Captain Tench, his head swathed in bandages. One was the pock-marked mate. The third, Gentleman Harry, calm and smiling and malevolent as usual, in immaculate white, his hair glossy black, a blue silk cummerbund about his slim waist and his terrible scarred face lemon-colored in the lamplight. The fourth man, a nervous, pimply-faced youth, Bradley did not know.

He faced the four, his face grim and his thumbs in his cartridge belt. Tench glared at him. The pock-marked mate swore sibilantly. The pimply-faced youth crouched lower in his chair and looked like a snake about to strike. Only Gentleman Harry seemed unmoved, unless the faint nervous twitching beneath his ears could be called apprehension.

"You see," he said smoothly, waving a well-manicured hand. "You see, Tench. I told you he would probably be along if he heard I was aboard."

He smiled craftily.

The bearded captain struck the table with his clenched fist and ripped out a scalding oath.

"Damn you, Bradley! I never thought you'd have th' nerve to board a ship of mine!"

"I'll board any damned ship in Funafuti I choose," said Bradley coldly. "I'm a magistrate and I've got that right."

Tench got up, choking, and made a move for his gun. The rest got up, excepting the Gentleman. Bradley stared at Tench.

"I wouldn't draw if I were you, unless you can shoot a lot better than you can fight."

The Gentleman smiled.

"For what are we indebted to this little visit, my friend?"

Tench kept his hand on his gun but did not draw. The rest watched. Bradley stared at his old enemy, his face like iron.

"You're the reason, Gentleman," said Bradley coldly. "I don't want you around. This ship will sail at once, with you on board. The wind's fair. The tide'll be right by the time you reach the channel. So get out."

"We are getting out," the Gentleman assured him, smiling. "In fact, we are getting out tonight as you suggest. But we did not expect to have the honor of your company, although I did warn Tench you might take a notion in your head to come along."

"Yeah, you warned me but I never thought he'd be damned fool enough to come here alone. Anyway we'll handle him."

Typhoon glanced swiftly about. He sensed that if he had not actually walked into a trap they were prepared for the eventuality of his coming. The Gentleman knew him and his ways; probably the Gentleman even knew that Typhoon knew of his presence on board the *Wanderer*. If not that, the Gentleman was certainly aware that when Typhoon Bradley was around it was always best to take precautions.

"What's the game?" said Bradley suddenly. The Gentleman smiled.

"A very sweet little game, my friend. But perhaps you had better throw your gun away first. There are four of us here. The second mate on deck had orders that if you should happen to arrive and be alone and insisted upon coming aft, you should. But right now there are two men covering the scuttle up above so you can't get out. And there are two more covering you with Winchesters from the skylight."

BRADLEY did not turn his head to look. It was an old trick to distract attention though he believed the Gentleman was telling the truth.

"Fair enough," he said quietly. "But you ought to know me better, Gentleman. If you want me—come and take me."

He jumped back against the bulkhead, out of line of the skylight fire, and his draw was fast as the strike of a rattler. They had him trapped perhaps, had him cornered, but he never surrendered. He would go down fighting like all the Island pioneers went down, his back to the wall and his gun spouting flame.

It would be a battle to the finish.

The Gentleman dived for the deck and missed death by the sixteenth of an inch. Captain Tench had drawn and was firing. Bradley's gun ranged the cabin and the pimply-faced youth went down with a hole between his eyes. It was nothing but sheer bad luck that Typhoon did not get every man present. But he only had time for three shots and then a bullet from the pock-marked mate's gun, wide of the mark, ricocheted off one of the brass hanging lamps and grazed Bradley across the back of the head, stunning him as neatly as a blackjack could have done.

He pitched forward and lay still and there was a silence in the main cabin save for the hard-drawn breathing of Captain Tench and the harsh whistling noise that his mate made between his teeth.

"Gawd, I never saw a man draw as fast as that afore," said Tench, choking a little. "He's killed the supercargo."

Gentleman Harry got up from the deck and brushed his clothes. He was a little shaken.

"I never thought the fool would fight," he said harshly. "It's bad enough if he gives you an even break but when he jumps you first it's time to duck."

A respectful fear showed in his eyes.

"So I noticed," sneered Tench. The Gentleman's dark eyes glittered.

"Tench!" he said crisply. "There are just three men in the Islands who can draw faster and shoot straighter than I can. Those three men are Larsen of Singapore, Stinger Seave, and Typhoon Bradley. Would you care to dispute the fact?"

Tench stared at him for a moment and

then wilted. He had seen the Gentleman shoot.

"Well, you did duck," he said sullenly. The Gentleman nodded.

"That was common sense with Bradley shooting."

The pock-marked mate swore.

"Aw, what th' hell are you arguing about? We plugged th' lousy swine, didn't we?"

GENTLEMAN HARRY, his own gun drawn now, gingerly approached Typhoon's prostrate body as a man might approach a wounded grizzly bear. He would not even stoop to see if Bradley was dead but made the mate do it. The Gentleman knew Bradley and once before he had shammed dead to advantage.

"Hell," he ain't croaked," said the mate disgustedly after a brief examination. "Just creased, that's all."

"Better finish him anyway," grunted Tench, cocking the hammer of his gun. "Th' swine butted into my business this afternoon and damned near knocked my ear off."

"We won't kill him," said the Gentleman decisively. "At least not yet. He's given me more grief than you'll ever have, Tench, and I'll get rid of him in my own way. Tie his hands and feet and chuck him into a spare room."

The other looked puzzled.

"I don't see why we don't croak him now," swore Tench.

"Because I say not!" rasped the Gentleman. "This is my deal and I'll play it as I see best. The thing you want to worry about is if anyone in th' lagoon has heard the shooting and wants to come over and look-see."

"Another thing," suggested the pock-marked mate sourly. "Th' boats oughta be back."

Gentleman Harry consulted his watch. His head nodded in agreement.

"That's right. We've got to get out of the lagoon before the tide turns. I told that fool Limpy not to wait and clean up if time got too short."

Tench went upon the poop grumbling to himself and ordered two men below to bring up the supercargo's body. The Gentleman saw personally that Bradley's bonds were sound and aided to drag him

into a cabin and lock him in. After that he, too, went on the poop.

III

ASHORE things were happening, also, but so smoothly they passed unnoticed. Perhaps half an hour after Bradley had left him, Chang, still sitting at the poker table, felt a touch on his shoulder. He looked around to discover a hawk-faced man in worn dungarees standing beside him.

"What is it?" he asked calmly.

"Captain Bradley wants to see you," said the man, his voice curt and businesslike. "He's waiting down by the pandanus grove."

"What . . ." Chang began but the man abruptly turned on his heel and vanished in the milling crowd that was arguing, drinking and gambling in Boston Charlie's that night. Chang frowned a little, stared at his cards, absently raised a bet and when the hand was done politely excused himself and went out.

He wondered about the odd request.

The beach was dark save for the starlight, the glows from several bonfires and the shafts of light from the windows and doors of the pearl city. It was a place of dense shadows that shifted and moved as men came and went. Chang strode thoughtfully along until the last of the shacks had been left behind and he met no one save an occasional Kanaka hurrying from the village. Typhoon must have learned something, possibly discovered the reason for Gentleman Harry's presence at Funafuti. But why send for him to come to this out-of-the-way place?

Chang approached the pandanus palms suspiciously, his hand on his gun. He had thirty thousand dollars' worth of pearls in the canvas belt around his waist, and men had been killed for less than thirty dollars on the pearlizing beaches. Funafuti had been singularly free from that sort of thing since Bradley had taken over, otherwise Chang would never have ventured into the shadows without at least half a dozen of his men at his back.

He reached the first palm, peered into the blackness of the grove and called:

"You there, Typhoon?"

He sensed the danger even as it caught

him. Something swished through the air. Chang ducked, drew and fired, the sound of the shot muffled by the wind-noise in the palms and the shouting and laughter back along the beach. A noose settled over the Chinaman's shoulders, jerked tight. He lost his feet, crashed down and several men fell on him. Something crashed on his head and he lost consciousness.

"That's one, Limp," someone grunted. There was a short laugh.

"All right. Drag him back a ways and tie him up."

FIFTEEN minutes later Jack Cummings, buyer for Lascelle's of Paris, busy examining four large pearls in a back room of Lascar Pete's store, was interrupted by a hawk-faced man.

"Chang says he'd like to see you if you can get away," said the hawk-faced man. "He's waiting down by the pandanus grove."

"Chang?" said Cummings, surprised. He swept the pearls into a wash-leather bag and looked at the stalwart native diver who faced him across the table. He finished his business hastily.

"I'll take them, Kinoo. One thousand dollars cash. You're in debt for supplies four hundred. I'll pay the balance in the morning."

"Ai," said Kinoo with a flash of betel-stained teeth. He lifted a hand in a sort of half-salute and went out. Cummings looked around for the hawk-faced man but he had disappeared. He got up, went out into Lascar Pete's main room and beckoned to Peira, buyer for a Papeete syndicate.

"Come along with me, Peira," he said. "Chang wants to see me. Sounds like something's up." They left the place together and walked down the deserted beach to the pandanus grove where sundry things happened to them with amazing swiftness.

"He brought Peira along," chuckled a voice as the unconscious men were examined. "That's a stroke of luck."

Altogether that night seven of the most famous buyers in the South were deftly knocked out and robbed, and in the riotous whirl of the pearl beach their absence passed almost unnoticed.

OUT in the lagoon the rakish and fast bark *Wanderer* slipped her cable and began to move, silent as a ghost, away from the rest of the shipping. Two whale-boats, filled with men ahead of her, were towing her. Two miles out the canvas was set and before the urge of a gentle wind she moved toward the channel.

Behind her a stab of red flame suddenly spurted up from Chang's schooner, the *Lotus Bud*, followed almost at once by a similar red flame from Cumming's brig, the *Hyacinth*. On the poop of the *Wanderer* Gentleman Harry chuckled.

"Neat work," he boasted. "That'll keep the whole beach busy for a while saving the ships."

Tench growled something in his beard and felt tenderly of his torn ear. The pock-marked mate hitched at his cartridge belt and swore sourly.

"It'll be a devilish near thing if they get after us in whaleboats," he stated. Gentleman Harry lighted a cherooot and laughed.

"I've got it figured pretty well. All we needed was a fair wind and we've got that. The tide won't bother us yet and we ought to get out before it turns. Once it turns not even the magistrate's launch'll be able to buck it and no ship can clear the channel. By daylight we'll be at sea, with twelve hours' start anyway."

Funafuti Lagoon, which is one of the largest in the Islands, runs twenty miles from the pearlimg beach near the native village to the only channel practical for deep-water vessels, and that channel is only practical at high water. An hour after high water is reached the passage is dangerous; two hours afterwards it is useless even for small boats.

Gentleman Harry had calculated things to a nicety, except he had not planned to make his clean-up until the following night. The presence of Typhoon Bradley and the fact that that night there was a favorable wind had induced him to act sooner than he had expected. At the three or four knot speed the *Wanderer* was making she would be several hours reaching the channel and clearing for the open sea. And she would just have time to scrape through before the tide turned. If pursuit could be delayed for only an hour after that the Gentleman was reasonably safe.

HE rubbed his hands together and walked up and down the poop with Tench. He was highly elated. He had pulled off one of the most spectacular raids in the history of the islands; had made a laughing stock of Typhoon Bradley and was in a position to dispose of his old enemy for good. He could not resist the temptation to tell him so and he and Tench went down to the main cabin.

Bradley was conscious now, his head and one side of his face covered with dried blood and his limbs cramped from his bonds. He blinked in the sudden flood of light when Gentleman Harry opened the door of his prison and with Tench's aid hauled him into the main cabin and sat him in a chair.

"Well," he said coolly, although his head was throbbing as if it would burst. "You seem to have pulled off something."

The Gentleman lighted a cheroot and blew smoke into Bradley's eyes.

"I have," he boasted. "I've cleaned out the beach."

Typhoon stared at the little pile of canvas belts and chamois leather bags that lay on the table. He recognized Chang's belt by the ornate embroidery. He recognized Cummings' chamois sack, and Peira's initials showed he had been cleaned, too. The Gentleman laughed.

"Seven of 'em," he sneered. "Two-thirds of the season's output and the cream of the lot."

"Clever," admitted Typhoon evenly. "How did you manage it? Kill them?"

"Not at all. No need for that. Merely had 'em knocked out and tied up. Limpy Smith knew all the buyers by sight so I brought him along with me to handle the deal."

Bradley nodded. Limpy Smith was a vicious little rat of a man, one of the worst characters of the pearl ground, but one who gained his ends by cunning rather than by force. Bradley had wondered why he hadn't shown up this season but this accounted for it. The Gentleman had got hold of him and used him.

The beach was all but cleaned, no doubt of it, and all the verandas of the Islands would tell the tale how Gentleman Harry had finally bested Typhoon Bradley. Bradley swore under his breath.

"You can't get away with it," he stated

harshly. "There'll be a dozen ships on your track."

The other shrugged. Captain Tench poured a drink and tossed it down with relish.

"We ain't fools," he growled. "We set fire to two packets so the others would be kept busy. And we'll be at sea just ahead of the tide turn. That'll shut 'em in for a while."

IT was true. Bradley thought hard. From the looks of things the Gentleman *would* get away with it. If he wasn't stopped this side of the channel there wouldn't be a chance in a hundred of catching him. He had a big crew also, nearly all white men, and heavily armed. There'd be a bloody fight even if the pearl-ing ships did overtake him by some miracle. Typhoon groaned and the Gentleman laughed.

"I suppose you wonder why I'm keeping you?" he jeered. He leaned forward and with savagery struck Bradley's face with his open hand, struck him again and again, his features convulsed and his eyes burning fire.

"Damn you, Bradley! I've got you now. You've had a long run, over ten years, and you've got in my way too many times. You remember the first time, eh? On Balata Beach. You smashed my face there. You're going to pay for that, savvy?"

Bradley shrugged though he was white and tense.

"Seems like you're talking too much," he said calmly. "Why not get it over?"

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" the Gentleman sneered. "Yes, you'd like a bullet through your damned head, a quick death! But that's too easy. I owe you too much. I'm going to watch you die slowly, see? Dying for days and days."

"When we're at sea I'm going to tie you in a boat and trail you along astern. I'll strip you so the sun can get at you. I'll watch you go mad with thirst and hunger, watch you try to break free to throw yourself overside and drown. I'll enjoy all that. Maybe now and then I'll bring you alongside and dribble a little cold water on your chest, just where you can't reach it. There'll be a good many in the Islands who'll thank me for all that. And maybe some time some skipper'll pick

up a ship's boat with a dried-up mummy in it that was once a man called Typhoon Bradley."

He was insane, working himself into a fury. Even Tench stared at him with some amazement. Tench had no liking at all for their captive but he was rather appalled at the sheer ferocity the Gentleman was exhibiting.

"Bah!" snapped the Gentleman at last. "Let's pitch him back in the cabin to think it over." He flung a glass of gin and water into Bradley's face, so the shattered fragments cut his cheek and the fiery spirit made his eyes run.

"I'll kill you for that!" he said between his teeth. The Gentleman laughed, recovering his calmness.

"Your killing days are over," he sneered. "Give me a hand with him, Tench."

THEY dragged Typhoon back into the cabin again, flung him inside, kicked him half unconscious and then left him to stare at the round circle of the open port where the stars shone big and flickering. The *Wanderer* slipped along, the wind humming in her rigging, the level water of the great lagoon lap-lapping along her hull, and Typhoon's eyes grew hard as flint in his drawn face.

A fine end it would be all right, a fine end for Typhoon Bradley who had dominated the South for over a decade now. His friends would revenge him, of course. Stinger Seave would scour the seas. Cassidy of Apia would set in motion all his vast interests. Jack Barrett would oil up his guns and lurk around Singapore.

Some time, somehow, Gentleman Harry would drop before hot lead to pay for this night's work. He might, of course, fly to Europe with his winnings, but it was not impossible that death would follow him there.

Yet, for all that comforting thought, Bradley was bitter. To go out lashed in an open boat, to go mad with thirst and hunger while his old enemy watched and laughed and gloated. Bradley swore through tight teeth and struggled furiously with his bonds. In a few hours there would be no hope. Once the *Wanderer* cleared the channel and the tide turned he was done.

A N hour passed and then another. Typhoon gave up struggling with his bonds and lay panting and sweating on the cabin deck. He could hear the shoes of men on the poop above and sometimes caught the sound of their voices and a mutter of laughter as the wind blew into the open port. They were walking on the opposite side of the ship, which was the windward side, and that fact was fortunate for Bradley. Occasionally two of the men would drop below and there would follow the clink of glasses in the main cabin. But Bradley was not disturbed any more.

He was just struggling to his feet with the idea of hoisting himself to the bunk for comfort's sake, when a dark shadow appeared in the open port and there came a sibilant hiss. Bradley grew rigid.

"Who is it?" he said cautiously. The shadow in the port—it was a man's head—spoke rapidly in a combination of bech-de-mer English and Samoan.

"Ai, this is the man who was whipped today. I learned you had fought for me. I learned also you were here and I came as soon as I was able."

Bradley suppressed an exclamation. He remembered the half-caste Tench had flogged over the theft of a cheap belt. He had completely forgotten the man was a member of the *Wanderer's* crew.

"How'd you get out there?" he demanded swiftly. "What are you on board?"

"I am the steward," the other whispered. "Be still. If you turn your back to me I will cut the ropes."

Typhoon heaved himself to the bunk with a tremendous effort, rolled over and inched toward the bulkhead. He felt a hand touch him, searchingly, and then a keen knife sawed through his bonds. His wrists fell apart and he was free. A few moments he spent bringing some life back to his numbed fingers and then seizing the proffered knife he cut his legs clear. That done he took a deep breath and wiped sweat from his forehead.

"I am grateful, my friend," he said simply. "You have given me a chance to die like a man . . . and perhaps to do even more."

The other gave a little grating laugh. "Keep the knife, mister. I will unlock the door, for I have stolen a key. And then you will kill Captain Tench for me."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Bradley grimly and the head vanished. He hefted the keen knife for a moment, grinned and thrust it in his belt. He wasn't a knife man but if no other weapon came to hand this blade would serve.

He thrust his head out of the port and discovered how the half-caste had reached him. Along the hull of the *Wanderer* ran a narrow beading about four feet below the scupper edge. By holding on to the scupper edge and resting the toes on the beading an active man could inch along and go right around the ship if he chose. Had the *Wanderer* been at sea, or heeling much to leeward the feat would have been impossible. As it was, however, she was on an almost level keel and there was little pitch or roll to her.

BRADLEY waited. He heard the Gentleman and Tench come below and take a drink. The Gentleman came to the cabin door and hammered on it, obviously in a jovial mood.

"Think of the open boat, Bradley! It'll be a long, thirsty time before you croak."

He laughed and returned to the bottle. After a few minutes the two men went on deck again. Bradley breathed hard and pressed his ear to the door. He heard a faint foot pad on the companion, and then a key slid into the lock, turned and was withdrawn. The door opened the merest crack.

"I was ordered not to come below while you were prisoner here," muttered the half-caste. "And I am afraid. I go now."

Bradley opened the door swiftly and grasped the man's arm as he was about to make for the companion and get away. He gripped his hand.

"You're not quitting on me now," he said shortly but quietly. "You have been a man tonight."

The half-caste struggled for a moment, fearful that one of those above would come below, and then something about the white man's steady gray eyes and strong jaw gave him courage. He drew himself up.

"I will fight with you," he agreed reluctantly and Typhoon nodded. The man's

spirit was almost broken but some trace of his fighting Samoan ancestors remained in him.

There was the sound of someone at the scuttle above and the half-caste gave a gasp and almost wilted. Bradley gripped him by the shoulder and dragged him back into the cabin. They waited, crouched by the door. It was the pock-marked mate coming down and they could hear him discussing something with another man Bradley presently identified as Limpy Smith, who had evidently engineered the shoreward end of the raid. They had several drinks before going on deck again but made no attempt to approach the cabin.

It was evident those on the poop were taking it in turns to hit the bottle. Limpy Smith and the mate went up at last and the main cabin was still save for the creakings of the hull and muffled water noises. Bradley came out of hiding and listened. Up above they were idly walking the weather deck. Bradley slipped toward the companion and went up, silent as a ghost, the trembling half-caste at his heels.

The poop was in darkness, and as the scuttle faced for'ard it was no task for Typhoon to crawl to the lee rail and then aft along the scupper. The main cabin scuttle, the skylights and a long locker that reached almost to the binnacle shielded him from possible discovery by those across the deck. The half-caste came fearfully with him, his teeth chattering but by now more afraid to go back than to go on.

BRADLEY hesitated when he could see the loom of the helmsman against the stars and the glow of the binnacle against the man's white shirt.

He braced himself and waited. Gentleman Harry and Tench came to view, the tips of their cheroots glowing cherry red in the dark. They were laughing at something as they paused together near the binnacle to look at the compass.

"We'll have to alter the course in twenty minutes," said the Gentleman. Tench agreed.

"It's not two miles to the channel. There's an ugly shoal to the sou'west. We'd better make a big swing to clear it."

"I guess west b' north ought to do it," observed the Gentleman. "We'll wait until Becke's Point before swinging."

They turned and paced for'ard. Bradley heard them halt to speak with the pock-marked mate and Limpy Smith.

"We're going below for a snort," Tench growled. "Give us a shout when you're abreast of Becke's Point."

"Aye, aye," said the mate gruffly.

The Gentleman and Tench went below. Limpy Smith and the mate came slowly aft. Bradley waited. They turned and went for'ard again and then Bradley leaped, silent as a panther making its kill. His iron fist took the astonished helmsman on the jaw and the man fell on the wheel with a grunt. Bradley lowered him to the deck, searched him and cursed. While steering the man had evidently laid his cartridge belt aside, for he was unarmed. The sails began to shiver and Bradley caught the wheel as it started to run. He checked the ship, then reached down to haul the shaking half-caste to him.

"Can you steer?" he whispered fiercely. The man nodded dumbly. Bradley thrust the spokes into his hands.

"Keep her as she goes!" he ordered. "And stop rattling your teeth!"

THE mate and Limpy Smith had turned and were coming aft again. They reached the end of the skylight and then the mate, glancing at the wheel, halted with an astonished oath. The half-caste steward's sweat-dewed face was plain in the binnacle glow, convulsed with utter terror.

"What in hell . . ." began the mate, and then something hit him and he went over and rolled into the scuppers. Limpy Smith, wizened, vicious and rat-like, gave a sudden snarl and went into action with surprising suddenness. That is, he dived instinctively for Typhoon's legs. Bradley was a little off balance after swinging at the mate and he went down with a jar. Limpy Smith clawed for his gun and then he thought he had wandered into the middle of a cyclone. Steel fingers choked back his breath. His right wrist snapped and then he was flung the length of the poop to bring up against the for'ard taffrail with sufficient force to topple him over it. Most men would have been killed but Limpy Smith had all the uncanny vitality of a cat. He landed on his feet, reeled, choked for air and then let out a yell.

Typhoon stooped over the pock-marked mate, secured his gun, hefted it with a little laugh and waited. He had teeth now and he was not known as one of the best shots in the Islands for nothing. There was a pounding of shoes on the main cabin companion. Limpy Smith was screaming and shouting for the crew to gather. Gentleman Harry and Tench burst on the poop, bewildered at the noise and confusion. Tench leaned over the for'ard taffrail.

"What th' hell's wrong, you fool?" he roared. "What's happened?"

"Aft there!" screeched Limpy Smith, holding his broken wrist and hopping with pain and viciousness. "Aft there. Typhoon Bradley!"

"He got loose?" choked the Gentleman incredulously and he whipped round to face aft, his gun leaping to his hand.

"Stay where you are!" snapped Typhoon crisply. "I . . ."

The Gentleman sent a stream of lead into the shadows by the wheel and then ducked behind the scuttle. Tench opened up. Men came running from for'ard and the night grew vivid with orange splashes. The half-caste slipped a bowline over the wheel and dropped to the deck, quaking with awful fear. Typhoon shot three times, wounding two men, and then held his fire. The noise died away as Gentleman Harry shouted:

"Get overside, Bradley. We'll let you swim clear!"

But Typhoon laughed. He knew what was in Gentleman's mind. The *Wanderer* was abeam of Becke's Point and it was time to change the course.

He crawled cautiously to the unconscious mate and relieved him of his cartridge belt and then reloaded his gun. The Gentleman was swearing thickly. Tench was cursing in his beard. The stars were beginning to pale and the dawn would soon be upon them. The *Wanderer* had to get through the channel right away. If she were delayed she would be trapped for another tide and pursuit would catch her. Bradley set his jaw as he heard the Gentleman's voice grow calmer. Orders rapped out. Men moved swiftly.

"I'll give you just thirty seconds to clear out, Bradley," said the Gentleman from behind the cover of the scuttle. Bradley's only answer was to take a snapshot at the

loom of a head. He missed and the next instant the firing was general.

NEVER before nor after was Typhoon Bradley in exactly the bad jam he was in then. The helmsman he had stunned was reviving and sitting up. The pock-marked mate was beginning to move. The night was fast disappearing and he had only his one gun to stand off a heavily armed crew of some two dozen men. They were already climbing up into the rigging to get shots at him. A veritable hail of lead swept the poop waist high so he could not rise. He only grinned. He was fighting and he was glad. The old wolf was at bay.

The *Wanderer* was yawing badly but under the urge of the wind still going forward. Becke's Point was well past the beam. Ahead there was the roaring of breakers, muffled and dim as yet. To port were ugly shoals and the channel twisted between them.

Bradley turned his head and saw that the half-caste was entirely useless, gray from fear and crouched, whimpering, to the deck. Typhoon picked another man out of the rigging and then wriggled to the wheel. The stars were all but gone. The sky was a vast dome of opal white, steadily growing clearer. Bradley glanced at the sails, glanced to windward and chuckled. He threw clear the bowline from the wheel, let it spin, checked it, let it spin again, all while he was lying almost flat beneath the leaden hail, protected only by the low poop houses. Tench's harsh voice roared out an oath.

And in the midst of all this the *Wanderer* struck. Under the full press of her canvas she rammed into the soft, sandy shoal Bradley had aimed her at, jarred once or twice and then slowly heeled to port and was still, the main topmast going by the board with a crash of rigging and spars.

On the poop Gentleman Harry had taken hold of himself with a tremendous effort.

"Lower the boats," he said harshly. "We'll have to chance it. Water and provisions."

"Jump to it!" Tench roared, because now the full day had come they could see, far down the lagoon, the white topsails of a dozen racing ships.

The men were milling in a panic. Their losses had been fearful. Tench, the Gentleman and the pock-marked mate plunged into the midst of them and hammered and kicked some sense into them. They slopped one boat in the water and the three leaders piled in, together with four men. The rest fought and quarreled among themselves to get the other boat lowered and panic swept them again. It was every man for himself.

Typhoon sensed what was going on and hesitated. He was sick and weak but there was still something to be done. The poop was deserted save for the dead. The survivors of the crew were laboring midships, striking each other and cursing. The Gentleman's boat was half a cable's length away, pulling for the channel, and Bradley swore. Then he acted.

He swept against those left on board like the typhoon for which he was named. He knocked down two men with the barrels of his guns, shot another who drew on him and drove the rest to the boat falls in some semblance of order. They made no more resistance. Covered with blood, his eyes like ice and his tight-lipped mouth roaring at them, they were quelled.

He drove them into the boat when it was overside, jumped into the stern sheets, shipped the tiller and jammed it over with one knee while he glared at the frightened men. Few of them had weapons now. They had discarded their Winchesters and what revolvers they had were empty from the fierce fighting on the poop. As in a mad daze they found themselves pulling at the oars. The mast was stepped and the sail hoisted. Heeling stiffly, the boat with a madman at her tiller, roared along after Gentleman Harry.

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TENCH looked around and swore. "He's gaining on us. He's a devil. He ought to be dead and he's chasing us instead, in our own boat with our own men pulling for him."

Typhoon balanced himself and fired. The range was long and the lunging of the boat made aim difficult but Typhoon could shoot. His first bullet whickered by the Gentleman's head. His second splashed the water alongside. His third

nicked the shaft of an oar but his fourth, fired as the boat steadied for a moment, blew in the back of the mate's head.

The mate moaned through dead lips.

He fell forward, letting go the tiller, and the boat yawed wide, came up into the wind. Tench cursed hysterically and jumped for the stern sheets. The oars brought the boat to the wind again but they had lost too much distance.

"We can't make the channel now!" snarled the Gentleman. "Head for the beach. There's fifty miles of brush and palms to hide in and anything can happen."

Both boats turned for the beach, two miles distant, but with the changed slant of the wind the more lightly loaded craft was hard to manage under sail while Typhoon's packet lay down to it and surged steadily forward. He gained, inch by inch, and he withheld his fire when he saw this.

DRIVING with wind and oars, the Gentleman's boat rammed into the shelving sand of the beach so hard it ploughed half ashore before stopping. The mast snapped off and fell, stunning one of the seamen. Tench and the Gentleman and the other two stumbled over the gunnels and started for the fringe of the palms fifty yards away, where they might temporarily at least find breathing space and shelter.

Scarce half a minute behind them, Typhoon's boat beached with a jarring crash and Typhoon himself, with a flying leap, was in the shallows and ploughing for the sand. None of the men he had cowed attempted to follow him. They remained in the boat, looking stupidly at each other, as in a dream, and watching the racing pearl fleet coming down the lagoon. They felt as if they had tangled with a buzz-saw and they had had enough.

A bullet runs faster than a man and Typhoon fired as he ran. He dropped one of the seamen with a bullet in the left leg. Tench stumbled and fell over a fragment

of coral rock and the others left him. The bearded captain turned, snarling, to face Typhoon, his eyes wide with terror and desperation. Bradley killed him as he passed, ignoring Tench's shot in his thigh.

The race was nearly done then. The last seaman, winded, abandoned himself to fate, threw his gun away and cowered on his knees. Typhoon struck down at him with a gun barrel and went on. He spun the Gentleman half around with a bullet through the left shoulder blade, and the Gentleman almost fell. He turned, his face convulsed with fury and pain, and he flung something almost at Bradley's feet before he turned and ran again, wobbling badly.

Typhoon checked. A large bag lay on the sand. He picked it up, hefted it and laughed. The Gentleman had flung him the pearl loot in an effort to stop him. And it had stopped him.

Typhoon thrust the heavy bag into his shirt, tried to start running again and found his legs were trembling so much he dared not attempt a step. He lifted his gun at the fleeing Gentleman's back but his eyes were misty and he could not see. He had gone through too much. He had used up all he had. He cursed, pressed the trigger, but the bullet went into the sand not twenty feet ahead of him.

He heard the Gentleman's final bitter curse as that worthy vanished into the shelter of the palms and then, staggering, Typhoon turned to see the pearl fleet swinging up one by one and dropping anchor off the beach while the whaleboats were flung overside and raced toward him.

"All right, fellers," he said wearily. "It's all right. Nothing missing, I guess. I may be a hell of a magistrate but I figure the slate's clean!"

They could not hear him, of course, and when they came running up the sand toward him they found him lying unconscious on his face, his guns still gripped in his hands, and the loot of Funafuti Lagoon safe inside his shirt.



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