

Mystery On Dead Man Reef

by George Armin Shaftel

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By **GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL**

DeCoursey could prove John Gregg was innocent, but to prove it meant death

“**W**HAT is your *real* name, lad?” the trader asked. “Just what I’ve told you! John Gregg.”

“Oh.” DeCoursey chuckled. “I was wondering if that was as phony as the rest of your story.”

The young man stiffened. “Look here—”

“Easy, easy! You jump off Lassen’s trading schooner and swim ashore here, and tell me you were a stowaway and had been kicked off. I talk to Lassen by radio and he tells me you *hired* him to bring you to Puna-Puka. So what am I to think?”

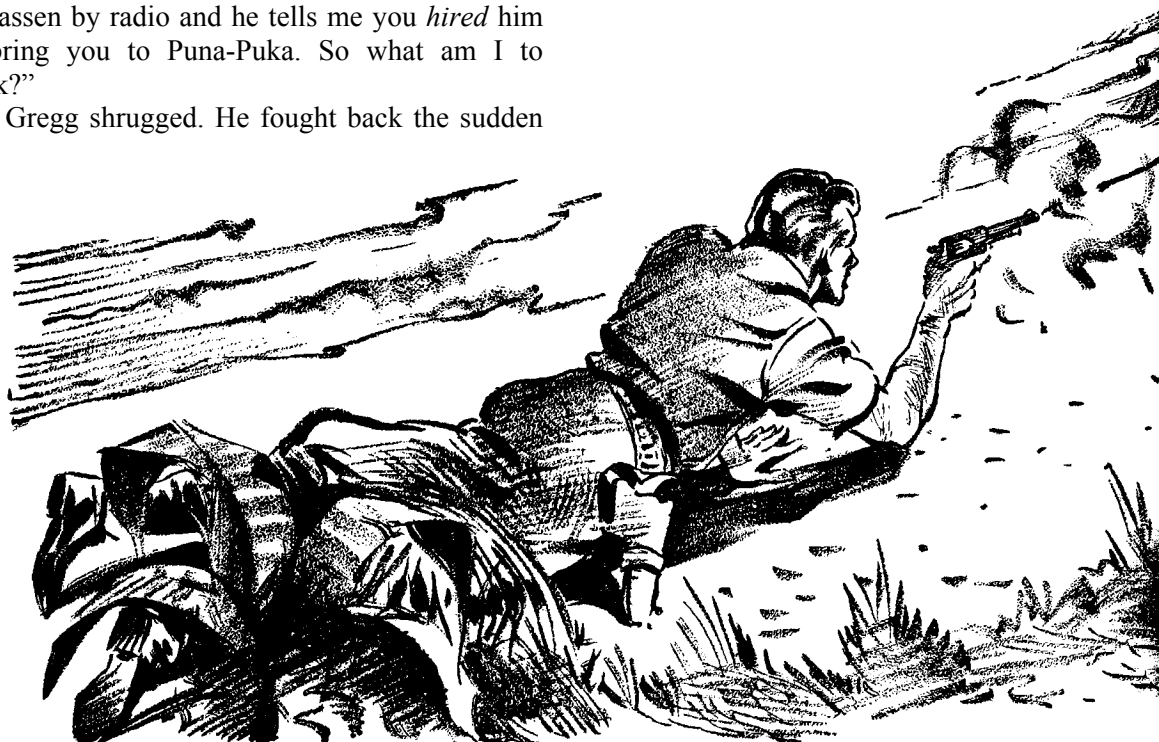
Gregg shrugged. He fought back the sudden

panic tightening his innards, and kept his voice cool as he answered.

“I’m broke. I figured you’d give me a job for a while, and pay my passage away from here.”

The trader chuckled. A small, plump, gray-haired man, DeCoursey had a kindly way about him.

“So you’re broke. Yet you told Lassen to come by here next week to pick you up, and promised him three hundred dollars.”





DeCoursey's tone was amused, not accusing. And he spoke on quickly, as if not liking to embarrass young Gregg.

"I told Lassen not to come back here until his next regular trip. That's six months from now. So I guess you're marooned here, lad."

So guess again, John Gregg thought suddenly, staring out to sea, excitement flaring within him.

Gregg and DeCoursey, who was the one trader and white resident of the island, were sitting on a coral boulder out on the reef a couple hundred yards from the Puna-Puka beach. They were fishing for *malau*, a fat big-eyed red fish of gorgeous flavor. The moon had risen, and the southeasterly trade wind had faded to an amorous sigh.

Along the shore the coconut trees stood stately and mute, gleaming faintly above the white glare of the beach. Behind the palms, a few lights shone in the village beyond the trading station.

Within the reef, the water was smooth. But on the outer edge of the coral barrier, the surf smashed and pounded. Across the reef it swept crabs and lobsters with eyes that shone amazingly in the sun's glare. It followed hollows on the broad expanse of coral—shimmering pools in which spotted sea eels lay coiled.

It was ceaseless as time, that surf, beating up an eerie glow of phosphorescence as it struck, lashing across the barrier with a crackling hiss and choking down them into coral caverns.

Gregg stared out beyond the surf, out to sea. Keener-eyed than the trader, he saw lights out there. A yacht was heading in toward Puna-Puka.

Marooned, was he? Like hell! Tonight, he'd swing into action. Tomorrow, he'd get away....

DeCoursey pulled up a fat red fish.

"Enough," he sighed. "Let's turn in."

Gregg waited an hour, lying on his cot on the screened veranda of the trading station. Then he got up. Walked inside.

Moonlight shone on counters and shelves. With poignant homesickness, Gregg was drawn to thoughts of home. For here were those smells of a country general store—of kerosene, of leather goods and dungarees, of tobacco and candy. At the back of the store was DeCoursey's desk, and iron safe. Between them was his shortwave radio set.

GREGG got busy. His lean, rangy figure bent over DeCoursey's roll-top desk, he searched through ledgers and bills of lading and files of correspondence.

In a pigeonhole, he found photographs. And a medal. On the back of this Croix de Guerre medal he found what he sought: the engraved name, Philip DeCoursey Leroux.

Which meant that DeCoursey *was* Leroux!

"Don't move."

Gregg whirled, and recoiled, blinded by the smack of a flashlight beam into his lean face. He heard a gun being cocked.

"I could shoot you as a thief," DeCoursey said. "I'd be absolutely justified."

Unflinchingly Gregg faced him. He was a serious young fellow, Gregg—a high-tempered youngster who turned defiant and reckless when threatened. His lips tightened with panic, but his gray eyes blazed in anger.

"I'm no thief, Leroux!"

"Please keep on calling me DeCoursey."

"I came here to find you. To take you back to Honolulu!"

The trader swore, his pale forehead knitting in surprise.

"But why?"

"You were the only witness to the DeGroot robbery. You can identify the thief."

"Yes, that's so," the trader admitted.

Gregg's voice was taut. "Am I the man?" he demanded.

"No. He wasn't a tall, good-looking youngster like you. He was burly, putting on lard, and gray at the temples."

"Just the same, the crime's finally been fastened on me!" Gregg said, and the angry resentment of long months of brooding worry was in his voice. "Look, DeCoursey. If you'd come back and testify, you could save me from going to the penitentiary for fifteen to twenty years!"

DeCoursey sighed, his pallid face regretful.

"Sorry, my boy. But I'm fifty-six, and my heart's going back on me. It's a long way to Honolulu—and I've no assurance of getting back here. You haven't the cash to insure that."

"I'll borrow it!" Gregg exclaimed.

"A man suspected of the DeGroot robbery borrow money?"

"I'll get a job and—"

"Maybe." DeCoursey shrugged. "Chances are I'd be stranded in Honolulu, with my little business here going to ruin. No, I won't go."

"But, man alive, you're sentencing me to the penitentiary!" Gregg pleaded.

"Don't think I've got a brass pump for a heart, lad! I'm damned sorry. Look. Suppose I write out my testimony—"

"They'd say I forged it! You've got to appear in person and be identified beyond question."

DeCoursey sighed again. "Then I suggest, Gregg, that you stay here. Puna-Puka is a paradise. When I die, you'll have my business."

"God'l'mighty, I'm young! I've got my whole life ahead of me!"

"And I'm old, with but a year or two ahead of me. I'm spending them right here," DeCoursey said, and his voice was hard. "Go back to bed."

"Go to hell!" Gregg raged.

And he stalked out of the trading station, strode blindly down the beach.

CHAPTER II Dirty Work

NEXT morning, that yacht was anchored out in the roadstead off Puna-Puka. The village buzzed with excitement. Arrival of a vessel was a rare event.* Every native, from older folk in *pareus*, naked children, young men in dungarees and slim, comely girls wearing fern leaf girdles, were down at the beach when a boat put off from the yacht and headed through the break in the reef toward the village.

"That party looks like money," DeCoursey murmured to Gregg as the yacht's boat reached the beach.

There were four men and two women in the group coming ashore.

"I'm Henry Scanlon." The leader of the group introduced himself to DeCoursey and Gregg. He was short, thick-set and powerful, this Henry Scanlon. His hair was utterly white and his mustache was white, and his fleshy face was sunburned to a flaming red, out of which keen

eyes of a Nordic blue stared with a steely directness.

"We're from Globe Picture Syndicate, and we have permission to land to take pictures. Getting background shots for a South Seas epic, you know. My cameraman, Luke Hawes—"

Hawes was lanky, bald and tough. Obviously he was Scanlon's Man Friday. He stood with both hands in his coat pockets, feet spread apart, just like Scanlon stood. He stared hard and unwinkingly at you, like Scanlon did. He was the director's shadow, if you could think of a stocky man throwing a long, lanky shadow.

Gregg didn't like either of them. The third man, Nigel Rorke, was obviously an actor. His was a professional profile with wavy hair and a petulant mouth and an absorbing interest in his fingernails. The fourth man, Nils Rogg, was the yacht's skipper—a chunky, bronzed man with hair so metallically black it screamed *toupé*. He shook hands like a decent guy, Gregg thought to himself.

Gregg looked at the two women—and his pulse leaped.

"My wife," Scanlon was saying, "and Susan Lanphier, who doesn't need introduction even here at this tail end of creation. When better stars are found, Susan will still outshine 'em!"

DeCoursey said, "We haven't any movies here, but never before have I regretted missing them as much as I do now, Miss Lanphier."

She grinned at him engagingly; and as Gregg was introduced, she stepped forward and shook hands in a friendly, comradely way. But her hand clung to his; and as she looked at him, suddenly she wasn't smiling. Something very intent and meaningful was in her glance for just a split-wink instant.

She was a tall, shapely girl with reddish brown hair that seemed to burn in the sun, and eyes of so deep a dusky blue they were almost violet, and her skin was tanned to a buoyant golden hue. She wore a play suit, just linen shorts and a sheer waist.

In the landing through the surf, the party had got doused with spray, and Susan Lanphier's blouse clung revealingly to her body. She moved with grace, lithe loveliness in every line of her slim-hipped figure. Gregg stared at her, his pulse thudding in his ears.

Her hand pressed his meaningfully, and she

* The French administrators at Raratonga seldom give permission for white men to visit the outer islands.—Ed.

turned away.

"We'll want pictures of the village, DeCoursey," Scanlon was saying as the party started toward the trading station.

GREGG stood where he was, staring after them; and to himself he reflected that Scanlon hadn't said, "*May* we take pictures of your village?" No. Scanlon had *announced* what he wanted! A bossy, demanding, snooty buzzard!

Gregg stood where he was, letting the party get ahead of him. For Susan Lanphier had pressed something into his hand.

He looked at it guardedly. It was a strip of newspaper, folded over. He unfolded it. On it, in lipstick, had been hastily scrawled—*I'm in desperate trouble*—No more. As if there hadn't been time for more.

Frowning, Gregg thrust the note into his pocket. What the hell, he had enough troubles of his own!

Susan Lanphier was glancing back at him. For an instant there was pleading in her lovely eyes. The sun shone with a flaming beauty in her hair....

"We're looking," the white-haired director told DeCoursey, "for a scene to be the background for the main sets of our picture. I'll sketch what I want. You can tell me if I'll find it on Puna-Puka."

He scrawled on a sheet of paper. "See? A narrow river valley, with a plateau halfway up one wall. On it maybe there should be ruins of an old stone house. Back of the plateau is a high cliff, with a waterfall. See?"

DeCoursey looked at him in amazement.

"You ever been on Puna-Puka before?"

"You mean, there *is* such a place on the island?" the cameraman blurted, his deadpan face excited.

"Yes." DeCoursey rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Come along. I'll show it to you."

Funny, Gregg thought as he followed the party. The little trader seemed flabbergasted at Scanlon's precise description of a place he had never seen.

"This movie crowd looks damned eager to find the spot," Gregg told himself. "As if they've been looking for it so much that it's just too good to be true that they've actually located it! Wonder

what they expect to find?"

The trader led the party through the village. The Puna-Pukans stared with smiling curiosity at the whites. They were a friendly, courteous people, as hard-working as they were attractive of appearance. Beyond the village, the young men were busy spreading a fertilizer of green *pukatea* leaves on the taro* beds. And on the trail leading inland, the party met young men carrying loads of coconuts, brown ripe drinking nuts; and others bringing in scores upon scores of squawking birds, young boobies, tied together by the feet like bunches of onions.

"Lord, what beauty!" Director Scanlon kept repeating. "Hawes, get that on film!"

And Hawes, his face as expressive as the butt of a log, set to whirring the compact camera he carried.

DeCoursey led the party to the main river of Puna-Puka, and turned inland along its bank.

It was cool on the trail, for overhead arched ancient trees—banyans and mangos and breadfruit. Giant ferns, and clumps of towering bamboo, crowded the path. Tropical flowers, that looked as though they had been carved right out of flaming sunsets, covered the steep walls of the canyon into which DeCoursey led the way.

MILE after mile the party walked. The canyon became a steep-walled gorge. Waterfalls pitched in lacy beauty from the rimrock high overhead, plunging down into wide pools as beautiful as the dreams of sweet repose. And neither snakes nor insects existed here to pester men who passed.

DeCoursey stopped, and pointed ahead.

"There it is, Mr. Scanlon! See, where the river forms a wide, shaded pool? Above there, on the east side, the mountain wall cuts back in a flat space. And at the back of the flat, a waterfall drops from the cliff. Like a bridal veil. Right?"

"Right!" Scanlon snapped, his bushy white brows knitted over his steely eyes as he peered ahead. "Isn't it, Hawes?"

"Sure as hell looks like it," Hawes breathed.

"But are there ruins of an old stone house up there?" Susan Lanphier put in.

"Well," DeCoursey admitted, scratching his

* A South Sea plant whose root-stalks are eaten as food.—Ed.

chin, "used to be a lot of natives living along the river. Every flat you'll find practi'ly has the stone platform for a house on it."

"Then, look," Susan said, pointing farther upstream, "there's another flat above a river pool—and a waterfall pouring over a cliff behind the flat. Maybe *that's* the spot?"

Scanlon muttered an oath. And Hawes grunted,

"Damnation, Chief, we don't want to make any mistakes."

Scanlon's face mottled with crimson, as if he had a furious, explosive temper that couldn't brook hindrance.

"We'll come back tomorrow," he rapped, "after we've gone over our specifications again."

The party turned back to the village.

By the time they neared the beach, it was dusk. The people of Puna-Puka were strolling down to the lagoon for their evening bathing. Gregg knew what to expect. Though the scene made his pulse quicken, it didn't make his jaw drop and his eyes pop. But it did for the movie people.

Nude bathing in the evening was an ancient custom of the Puna-Pukans. An active people, untouched by want or hardship or disease, they were a handsome and attractive race. The men were muscular, smiling; and the young women, with their smooth, tawny skins and shining hair and great dark eyes and slender, shapely figures, were breathtakingly lovely.

The whole village, grandparents and tiny toddlers as well as young adults, were on their way to the lagoon, laughing and chattering as they walked.*

"Say!" Scanlon gasped. "Hawes, get that! Don't stand there like your camera was a satchelful of cough medicine. Shoot this! Get it all on film. Talk about Bali and Goona-Goona—Lord, what beauty!"

* R. D. Frisbie, the South Seas authority, has written: ". . . the native wore clothes before the coming of the whites; they were a part of the ritual of the primitive . . . life. They were given to him when he reached maturity, but were forbidden before that time. The age of maturity was decided by a council of the village fathers. When a youngster became of age . . . clothes were decreed and nakedness forbidden except when bathing in the lagoon or turtle hunting at sea."

"Got fast film in here, but dunno if it's fast enough," Hawes murmured, lifting his chunky camera.

"DeCoursey," Scanlon rapped, "would they do some of their dances for us? Ask 'em, man!"

The little trader looked doubtful; and Gregg thought,

"He doesn't like to see the natives exploited that way any more than I do. He's a good egg, DeCoursey."

THE trader talked to an elderly native. A couple of big bonfires were started on the white sand of the beach. And some of the pretty young women started dancing the native dances of love. In silence the movie people watched.

After a while, Susan Lanphier ran out among the dancers.

She started dancing with them, her light skin and vivid red hair in heart-stirring contrast to the tawny, dark-haired beauty of the island girls. In their swaying and supple gestures was a beauty distilled from nature around them—the pliant bending of palm fronds moving in a sea breeze, the rhythm of the surf, the lightness and vivacity of tropic birds and flowers.

They danced with an easy and natural pleasure, the Puna-Puka maidens. In Susan Lanphier's dancing was a difference. In it was schooled artistry. In it was knowledge and sophistication. The girl's good, Gregg reflected. Lord, she's got fire!

Abruptly Susan Lanphier straightened out of her dancing, whirled, flung herself in an arrowing dive into the dark waters of the lagoon, utterly vanishing from sight.

Scanlon yelled, and sprang forward. Hawes flung down his camera, and whipped an automatic from his belt. Flame spurted from its muzzle and the flaring *whack! whack!* of .38 reports thundered across the beach.

Gregg jumped. His fist smacked to the side of Hawes' head and knocked him sprawling on the sand, and Gregg kicked the .38 from his fist. Hawes scrambled up, fists doubled.

"Lay off, you dumb fool!" Scanlon yelled at him, and Hawes subsided. Together, they ran to the lagoon. Nigel Rorke and Skipper Rogg followed close behind.

"Susan!" Scanlon bellowed, hands cupped to

his mouth. "Don't be foolish. Come back here!"

But the girl had vanished. Gregg figured that she must have swum under water, and pulled out into some brush, up the beach a way, hidden by the darkness.

"Mr. Scanlon," DeCoursey snapped, "your cameraman shot at the girl. I think you'd better explain that."

"It's none of your business, Mister. I'm fully responsible. Ask your people to find the girl!"

"I will not, since she seems to be in danger of getting shot," the little trader retorted. "I suggest you take your party back aboard ship."

Scanlon crimsoned. His steely gray eyes glinted as he surveyed DeCoursey.

"Forget it, Chief," Nigel Rorke put in hastily. "The girl can't go nowheres. She'll keep."

Scanlon shrugged. Turned, and said mildly,

"Hawes, you damn fool, likely you ruined your film, dropping your camera that way."

Hawes muttered something, and whirled back to pick up the camera. It had come open, and he hastily clicked it shut. But not so hastily that Gregg didn't get a look inside.

Gregg stood rooted in staring surprise. For the glimpse he'd got of the inside of that camera filled his brain with startled suspicions.

There was no film in Hawes' camera!

CHAPTER III A Meeting of Lips

THE movie people went back aboard their yacht.

"Lend me a flashlight," Gregg said to the trader. "I'll see if I can find the Lanphier girl. She's in trouble."

"I'll go with you, lad."

For two hours they hunted along the beach. Fruitlessly.

"I could send the villagers to hunt her," DeCoursey said, "but maybe she'll be safer if she stays hid. Wonder what it's all about?"

Gregg shrugged. He had enough troubles of his own without taking on somebody else's grief. Only, he would like to take a good swift poke at that fake cameraman, Hawes. Wasn't often he saw a human pan he'd like so much to sink a fist into.

Returning to the trading station, they started

inside.

"Funny," DeCoursey said. "Veranda lamp's blown out."

Crossing the porch, the trader walked into the store, flashlight on.

"Who's there?" he called suddenly.

And then the flashlight was dashed to the floor, smashing. Something went *cr-a-ack!* like the sharp impact of a savage hook to the jaw, and the little trader collapsed onto the matting. Gregg lunged forward, and sprang at a shadowy figure—and crashed headlong over a table shoved at him in the darkness. Instantly he was scrambling erect again. But the shadowy figure had fled out of the door, and off the veranda into the darkness.

Gregg followed. He realized he might get a slug triggered into him from ambush, but a reckless, obstinate anger sent him running wildly toward the beach in the hope of tangling with DeCoursey's attacker.

But he found nobody, and no sign of the prowler. Realizing that the trader might have been hurt badly and in need of attention, Gregg finally turned back to the store.

DeCoursey was sitting up and groaning ruefully as Gregg came in. Gregg hastily lit a lamp, and poured a glass of brandy.

"Thanks," DeCoursey said, taking it. "My jaw ain't broken, but it feels like every tooth in my dental plates had a galloping ache!"

"Look around," Gregg said in his earnest, headlong way. "Anything stolen?"

"Why, yes, there is. My shotgun's gone from the wall pegs. So's the pistol I keep on my desk."

"DeCoursey, look! Your radio set. *Smashed!*"

The sending and receiving set, next to the trader's safe, looked as if a typhoon had struck it.

DeCoursey breathed a rueful oath of dismay.

"One of your natives did it, maybe?" Gregg asked.

"No. I don't lock doors. Any time this past year, a native wanting to rob me could've done it."

DeCoursey looked out the window at the yacht anchored beyond the reef, and gestured toward it.

"Looks like friend Scanlon is making sure I won't be able to communicate with the authorities at Raratonga."

“And that you’ll have no guns to defend yourself with!” Gregg added harshly. “What’re they up to, DeCoursey?”

“Don’t know. Have another drink, lad?”

UNABLE to sleep, Gregg lay on his cot on the veranda, staring at the ceiling. His thoughts ached around in worry.

“You’re brooding like a scared woman,” he railed at himself. “Forget it! Go to sleep.”

But he couldn’t forget it. Over and over he asked himself:

“Suppose Scanlon’s party pulled something raw, and a fight started, and DeCoursey was killed. Where would I be then, with DeCoursey dead? Headed for twenty years in the penitentiary, if I ever returned to Honolulu....”

Gregg started violently. Listening hard, straining to see in the dark, he realized he had dozed off and something had wakened him.

A hand grasped his wrist. He reacted like a striking rattler—grappling with the prowler, hooking an elbow about the man’s throat and pulling him flat onto the cot as he groped with his other hand for the man’s throat.

Fragrant, silky hair pressed against Gregg’s cheek; and his arm was clamped about slim shoulders. It was a girl; her breast was soft against his chest. He released her and sat up violently. Snatching the flashlight from under his pillow, he switched it on.

“Please, don’t make a light. You nearly choked me—”

It was Susan Lanphier. She was wet; the thin play suit was molded against her slim, lovely figure and she was shivering with chill.

He wrapped a blanket about her, and demanded, “Where’ve you been, for Pete’s sake!”

“Hiding, up the beach. In the water. Thanks,” she stammered as Gregg poured her a stiff drink of brandy.

“You mind telling me what a movie actress is doing here in the—‘tail end of creation,’ your director called it, dodging around—”

“He’s *not* my director, and I’m *not* a movie actress!”

“—like a fugitive from a reform school,” Gregg finished. He hated being interrupted. “But you *are* a fugitive?”

“Look, Mr. Gregg.” She spoke with a fire

and firmness to match his own temper. “My brother and I started from Honolulu with a party for a vacation trip. That boat out there is his. It’s a small diesel cruiser, and we have four men as crew. Mr. Scanlon and his wife and his so-called cameraman came along as guests.

“But they seized the boat. Captain Rogg and one of the crew were men they had planted on us—and they scared the other two men into joining them. There was a fight, and my brother got hurt. Not badly. They keep Tom locked in a stateroom. They’ve let me be up and about, but they’ve warned me that if I didn’t do what I was told, they’d kill Tom!”

“So why did you bust off the reservation?” Gregg demanded.

“Because, if they find what they’re after here, they’ll be sure to kill me and Tom anyhow!” Susan exclaimed.

“What’re they after?” Gregg swore at himself, as he asked the question.

Damn it, he mustn’t let her involve him in her troubles! As far as he was concerned, Susan might as well be a sourpuss maiden aunt. When his own neck was in a sling, he’d be a sucker to take on her troubles too.

BUT damn it, he had to admit, she *wasn’t* an old maid. Moonlight streaming through the vines over the veranda shone on Susan’s lovely young face. The blanket had slipped back from her shoulders, and the line of her throat was sweet and innocent. Her bosom lifted shakily as she sighed with concern.

“You see, we headed for Puna-Puka because, a long time ago, my family owned property here. It got around Honolulu that we were coming here. That’s why Scanlon’s outfit wished themselves onto us, I guess. We believed what they told us about taking moving pictures. Especially since it looked like we could make a really nice sum of money from them.”

“But they’re not here to take pictures!” Gregg protested.

“No. They have a map. Oh, I guess it sounds simply insane—”

“Yeah, but go on and tell it,” Gregg said grimly.

“You’ve heard of the German raider, the cruiser *Emden*?”

"Yeah, even if I did fight the First World War in the second grade at grammar school."

"Well, besides the *Emden*, there were several other German battle cruisers raiding the steamship lanes. It seems that one of them realized it never would get back to Germany. The commander had a lot of money, a big part of it in gold, taken off merchant ships.

"According to Mr. Scanlon, this German raider was on its way home from Australian waters. The commander decided to cache the money on some little island that nobody ever visited, where it would be safe until after the war."

"So they buried the coin on Puna-Puka!" Gregg's eyes widened.

"Scanlon says so. And he says that the raider was sunk before it got to Germany, and the money's never been recovered!"

"And Scanlon has come to dig it up," Gregg surmised.

"Yes. He has a map he claims was drawn by one of the officers of the German raider."

"Barnum was wrong," Gregg said disgustedly. "There's *two* suckers born every minute." He looked sharply at Susan. "Or do *you* believe the money's here, too?"

"I don't know and I don't care!" she flared. "Good heavens, all I'm interested in is getting my brother away from Scanlon. Won't you help me? Can't you get in touch with the authorities?"

Gregg shook his head. "No."

Susan leaned closer to him. "You probably think I'm just throwing hysterics, but don't you see—if Scanlon finds that money he'll kill Tom, and he'll kill me if he can, to shut our mouths! That's why I'm so—"

Gregg interrupted her harshly.

"Look. If I can get your yacht away from them, will you make a bargain with me? I want to leave Puna-Puka. I want to take—something with me. Will you agree to help me in whatever I want to do?"

"I have to agree," Susan said shortly. "But how can you take the *Leeward* away from Scanlon's men?"

Yeah, how could he? Alone, with no weapons, and no way of radioing for help, how could he do the job?

"You just leave that chore to me!" Gregg

said, banging it out all the more emphatically because he was so uncertain.

SUSAN looked at him a little strangely.

"You're a pretty skeptical, determined sort of person, aren't you?" she said.

Gregg flushed. "What makes you say that?" he demanded.

Her eyes clashed with his, but hers were the first to lower.

"Oh, I don't know," she stammered. "It's just—well, I guess I've always lived a sort of sheltered life. I've never come in contact with men who—"

"Didn't look too clean, or act that way either," Gregg finished for her brutally. "Well, it's about time you learned what makes the wheels go round. Never could stand you pampered society dolls anyway. What good are you? When your type gets in trouble, it has to go whining for help...."

That was as far as he got. Not too many generations back in her ancestry, Susan Lamphier's people had been hard-bitten Yankees who sailed the seas and worked and fought, if need be, for what they got. Susan retained their strength of character in her blood.

More, she had their temper. At Gregg's words she lit into the tall, cynical youngster like a little wildcat. Her small feet kicked at his shins. Her nails scratched at his face. And her elbows pounded angrily at his chest.

Startled, Gregg gave way. Then his gray eyes flashed. He wouldn't take it from a man; he wouldn't take it from a girl, either.

He reached out and slapped Susan in the face, a stinging little blow that left the imprint of his fingers on her soft tanned cheek,

Susan stopped fighting. She looked at Gregg, suddenly very much hurt. And then she began to cry. Not loud and harshly, but in soft little sobs, like a small girl who has been punished for something she didn't do.

Gregg got suddenly very red in the face. He began to feel like a heel.

You dope, he thought, *taking your anger out on an innocent girl. You ought to be slugged in the jaw and have the stuffing kicked out of you.*

The blanket had slipped from Susan's sobbing shoulders. Gregg picked it up and

wrapped it around the girl.

"There, there," he soothed. "I—I guess we must have lost our tempers. I should have known better—"

Susan shook the tears out of her eyes.

"You're—you're just a big bully," she said, her spirit coming back. "You don't care anything about a girl's feelings. You—"

"But I'm not!" Gregg protested heatedly. "You're no lily of the valley yourself!"

He shook her shoulders for emphasis. And suddenly Susan began to smile.

"There you go again," she said. "I suppose you'll be hitting me next."

Gregg glared at her. "Dammit," he swore, "I'm going to teach you a lesson! For once and for all, it's about time somebody taught you a thing or two!"

And he folded her suddenly in his arms, hard. Susan fought him. Gregg laughed recklessly, tilted her firm little chin up to his own. He kissed her then. Kissed her with youthful abandon; then a little less harshly...then tenderly. Her soft young body relaxed slowly against his own, and slowly, slowly her lips responded....

He thrust her from him then.

"I'm sorry," he said hoarsely. "I should have known better. I—I..."

He turned abruptly on his heel and stalked off, motioning with his head for the girl to follow him. She did; and there was an amused light in her eyes. And a little tenderness, too.

CHAPTER IV Payoff in Blood

GREGG took Susan to a hut back of the trading station, told her to sleep and keep hidden until he came for her. Then he returned to his cot on the veranda. And racked his brain until dawn, groping for some plan of action that would have one chance in ten at least of working....

After sunup, a boat put out from the *Leeward*.

Stocky, white-haired Scanlon, Skipper Rogg, the cameraman Hawes, Nigel Rorke and two members of the crew landed on the beach. A seaman rowed the dinghy back to the yacht. Scanlon's party came on to the trading station,

and Gregg saw that they carried shovels and crowbars.

The trader noticed the shovels, and frowned.

"Scanlon, you have to have a French permit to dig up relics."

"Oh, we're just going to do a little clearing away of brush and rock on that flat, for picture taking. Come along, and see for yourself."

Gregg's heart skipped a beat. If Scanlon did find that buried coin, he would shut DeCoursey's mouth with a bullet. Frowning, Gregg watched the party head inland along the river.

He waited a full hour. Through binoculars, he studied the *Leeward*, anchored beyond the reef.

"Two men, stretching out on deck. Each with a pistol in his belt. How," he mused, "should I tackle 'em?"

He walked up the beach, around a headland. Then he walked out into the surf. Swimming low in the water, lifting his face out only for gulps of air, he headed for the yacht, on the side opposite to the men lying on deck.

Reaching the *Leeward's* dinghy, he pulled himself hand over hand up its painter to the yacht rail, and drew himself aboard. Carefully, then, he started forward.

Opening a stateroom door, he looked inside, saw it was empty. He moved to the next stateroom, opened the door—and looked straight into the eyes of a young fellow lying on a bunk, his left arm swathed in bandages.

"Lanphier?" Gregg whispered. "I'm here to help you."

"Susan sent you?" the youngster whispered back eagerly.

"Yeah. Hold still, while I untie those ropes."

Young Lanphier looked like his sister, except that his hair was sandy and his features stronger. He was hog-tied into the bunk.

Gregg asked, "How many people on board?"

"Two seamen. And Mrs. Scanlon, in the cabin behind this."

"When you want something, they told you to sing out for it?"

"Yeah."

"All right, call out," Gregg snapped—and flattened himself against the wall beside the door.

"Hey, Swede!" Lanphier yelled. "Bring me a drink!"

He yelled again, and a third time.

"All right, all right. Pipe down, damn it!"

Lazy footsteps sounded on deck. A tall, husky seaman carrying a tray came to the stateroom door, kicked it open and started inside. Gregg stepped into his way, swinging. Fist met jaw with a hard, sharp *cra-ack!* The seaman staggered back out the doorway and collapsed to the deck, his tray clattering down beside him. Gregg stooped swiftly to snatch the pistol from the man's belt.

BUT even as he lunged, he saw a shadow on the deck. And Gregg flung himself forward as he snatched at the fallen sailor's gun. A hot flash of pain seared along his ribs as a .38 roared flat and heavy in the warm air. Then the gun in Gregg's hand kicked as it spurted fire—and the other seaman, beyond Gregg, doubled up, clutching at his chest, the gun falling from his fist as he pitched headlong to the deck.

Gregg jumped up, pistol leveled. But the man was dead.

Startled footsteps rounded the bow. Looking up, Gregg saw Mrs. Scanlon coming—and the woman stopped short, both hands to her face, and screamed. Gregg strode toward her.

"You won't be hurt, Mrs. Scanlon. Go back to your stateroom."

He locked her in there. Returning, he tied up the sailor he had knocked senseless and took the dead man's pistol.

"Any more ammunition on board?" Gregg asked Lanphier as he untied him.

"Yes. In my cabin."

"Look, could you and I run this boat?"

"Why, yes, if necessary," the youngster nodded.

"Fine! I'm going ashore. If I come back at all, it'll be with another man and your sister. Have this tub ready to sail back to Honolulu!"

"How about Scanlon and his outfit?"

"If they come back, I *won't!*" Gregg said grimly....

Rowing ashore in the dinghy, he realized it would be wisest to send Susan back to the yacht now, where she'd be safe. Beaching the boat, he hurried to the trading station.

"Susan!" he called.

"She not here," DeCourcey's native houseboy told him. "That man Hawes come for

picks and flashlights. He see girl, and make her go with him." The Puna-Pukan pointed to the trail inland.

Gregg bit off an oath of utter dismay. This was something he hadn't counted on. It was a staggering, crippling blow. All too clearly he foresaw complications.

"This makes a setup too tough for one man to handle!" he warned himself. "Unless I can catch up with Hawes and the girl!"

Turning on his heel, he headed for the trail inland.

THE sun beat hot on Gregg's shoulders, until the trail reached the canyon where huge ferns and bamboo arched over the river banks to make cool shade. Gregg started running through dense groves of island ebony, of mango and rosewood trees, and jungle-thick growths of crimson hibiscus and the gardenia-like *pua*. Startled parakeets screamed as he passed, and darted like winged bomb-bursts into tall *hutu* trees that luxuriated in gorgeous crimson blooms.

But Gregg didn't sight Hawes and the girl. They had too long a start on him. Doggedly he ran on, laboring for breath as the trail climbed the steepening canyon side. Far below, the river formed deep, shaded pools in which fish jumped.

Ahead of him, finally, Gregg saw the terrace overhanging the river on which Scanlon's men were working. He slackened pace, and approached cautiously. Surprise would have to be a big part of his ammunition. Keeping under cover of the brush, he approached Scanlon's party on the plateau gouged out of the side of the canyon wall.

FROM the cliff above, a waterfall poured down in a shower of silvery spray, and flowed in a broad stream across the flat, to arch down again into the river below. Along the edge of the plateau, Gregg saw with surprise that a line of elm trees was growing—huge, magnificent old giants of the kind he'd often seen in New England towns.

He could see now only the stocky, white-haired figure of Scanlon, Susan and DeCourcey. The other men were inside a tunnel they had dug into the back wall of the terrace. Scanlon held a gun in his hand.

Coming closer, Gregg saw Scanlon peer into

that tunnel, heard him yell,

"Find anything?"

Hawes came out of the tunnel, carrying an old-fashioned Chinese chest of carved wood and leather.

"Just clothes," he said disgustedly, setting the chest down and flipping the lid back. "Scanlon, there's a *house* in there! Funniest damn' thing. Furniture and a bed that looks a hundred years old. How do you figure it?"

DeCoursey said, "The natives tell me that there was a stone house built here, but an avalanche came down and covered it up. But that was so long ago that nobody now living on the island ever saw the house."

"That's *your* story," Scanlon retorted, his fleshy face mottled with anger.

He looked toward the tunnel then, for Skipper Rogg and a sailor came out, lugging an old sea chest with a big lock.

"That looks more like it!" Scanlon said. "Quick, get that thing open!"

Hawes broke the lock off with a pick. The men crowded close to look inside as he lifted the top.

"Uniforms!"

"What the hell is this, a costume shop?"

"Dueling pistols, by God! What's this, Skipper?"

"A sextant—and a damn' old one."

"To hell with this trash!" Scanlon burst out. "Go on back inside, everybody! Look sharp. Don't bring out any more junk, damn you!"

"But there's nothing else in there," Nigel Rorke insisted. "Just furniture and books and rugs and pictures."

"We've gone through the place like a cop friskin' a tramp," Skipper Rogg offered weakly.

"The chart says that money is here!" Scanlon raged.

"Maybe the chart is a fake," DeCoursey said mildly.

Scanlon looked at him, eyes narrowed, for a long, thoughtful moment, and the mottled red of his fleshy face deepened. Abruptly he took a step toward the little trader, reached out and grabbed his shirt front in a big fist.

"DeCoursey, you've already looted this hideaway. Haven't you?"

The mild little trader blinked with surprise.

"Me? Good Lord, no!"

Scanlon smashed his fist into DeCoursey's face, knocked him sprawling to the ground. Reaching down, Scanlon hauled him onto his feet.

"What did you do with it?" he roared.

"With wh-what? I tell you—"

"Gold and silver bullion!" Scanlon rasped. "Is it in your trading station?"

"So help me, Scanlon, I've never—"

AGAIN Scanlon knocked him down. And as the gray-haired trader got up, blood streaming across his jaw, Scanlon ordered,

"Hawes—and you, Rorke—make him talk!"

They grabbed DeCoursey. Stripped off his shoes. Hawes struck a match. Touched the flame to the bare sole of DeCoursey's foot—

And Gregg, watching from the brush, sprang into action. The gun blazed from his hand, and Hawes plunged flat on his face to the ground, a bullet in his brain. Gregg burst out of cover then, charged the surprise-stunned group.

They broke and ran for shelter—all except Scanlon, who jerked the muzzle of his gun toward the fighting youngster. But Susan grabbed Scanlon's arm, and the bullet went wild. He pulled violently away from her; struck her across the temple with the gun barrel, knocking her to the ground.

Gregg triggered a slug at him that slashed his thick arm from wrist to elbow. The gun dropped from Scanlon's grasp, but he snatched at it with his left hand, caught it and darted into the tunnel opening.

DeCoursey had scrambled to his feet. He bent now, picked up the senseless girl, and ran unsteadily to meet Gregg.

Scanlon shot at them from the tunnel. Gregg whipped a slug at him that knocked rock fragments into Scanlon's face, and the man dodged back. His men had taken shelter behind the elms at the far end of the terrace, and now they started shooting.

"Here, I'll take the girl, DeCoursey!" Gregg said.

He thrust one of his two guns into DeCoursey's hands, took Susan in his own arms, and started back down the trail to the beach at a lurching run.

A bullet knifed through leaves over Gregg's

head, and another hissed past his ear. Behind Gregg, the trader shot back at Scanlon's men, his gun going *wham! wham!*

And then Gregg heard DeCoursey gasp, heard the thud of a heavy fall. Gregg halted, look back and saw the trader sprawled face down on the path.

"DeCoursey! You hurt?"

"No, I—"

DeCoursey tried to get up, but his right leg buckled under him and he fell. Blood streamed from his thigh. Gregg looked wildly around. A few paces on down the trail was a pile of boulders that had avalanched from the rimrock.

He ran to the midst of the rock fall and put the senseless girl on the ground. Running back to the trail, he helped DeCoursey to his feet, helped him hop into the shelter of the rock barricade. A bullet creased Gregg's hip as they ran, and another slug scattered rock splinters into the side of his face and ricocheted screaming to one side.

Gregg triggered a shot in answer at the four men coming down the trail, and they scattered into the brush for protection.

DECOURSEY bent over Susan Lanphier. A stain of crimson showed at the roots of her shining bronze-red hair.

"Lad, you think that fat swine fractured her skull?"

"Don't know. I'd like to fracture his!"

"Look, Gregg. You take the girl on down to the beach. I'll stay and keep shooting to hold these crooks back."

"Like hell I will! You'll get killed. Damn it, you're forgetting I got to take you to Honolulu to swear me out of twenty years in prison!"

"But I'm hurt. We can't all get away, boy."

"Listen—soon as it's dark, we'll sneak off. I got a boat on the beach. We'll row out to the yacht. The girl's brother has got control of it by now. We'll get to hell-and-gone away from Puna-Puka!"

Gregg spoke confidently—but his words ended with a choked oath of consternation, for he saw something that staggered him with dismay.

Scanlon and his three men were climbing down the wall of the canyon, descending to the river.

"They'll swim across the river," Gregg

realized. "They'll get past us here, and go on down to the beach. They'll find the dinghy, and row out to the yacht. They'll take over the *Leeward* again—and once they've done that, I'm sunk!"

His serious young face wild with panic, he turned to DeCoursey.

"Come on! We got to beat that gang to the beach!"

"You go, lad. Take the girl—"

"No! Man alive, I've told you I've got to take you to Honolulu. Come on!"

"But the girl needs to be taken care of—"

"She's got to take her chances!" Gregg blurted in desperation. "All I know is I'll rot in prison if I don't get you down to the beach in a hurry. Damn it, *come on!*"

He reached out, to put an arm about DeCoursey's shoulders so as to support him—and DeCoursey, standing on one leg, struck him across the temple with the side of his pistol.

Gregg staggered, stumbled back over a rock and fell. And DeCoursey hopped across the trail, and started down the steep canyon wall toward Scanlon's party descending to the river. Scanlon saw him. Pointed.

"Get him! Get the little ape!" Scanlon ordered his men.

They started shooting, their pistols lancing fire. DeCoursey doubled over and rolled headlong down the slope. He clutched with his hands in a frantic effort to grab rocks or shrubs to ease his sliding fall. But on down he slid and skidded, in a miniature avalanche of dust and rocks, toward Scanlon's men.

Gregg, jumping to the rim of the trail, looked down and saw Scanlon's killers shooting at the little trader as he came hurtling down the slope almost directly toward them. Gregg saw gouts of dust spurt from the trader's coat, as if bullets had thudded into him like slugs striking a dusty pillow.

"The crazy little fool!" Gregg choked—and launched himself down the slope in a reckless, sliding jump.

DeCoursey slammed to the canyon floor and brought up against a pile of driftwood at the river's edge, sprawled out on his face. Slumped and inert he lay. Their guns ready, Scanlon and his three men lunged toward him.

ABRUPTLY DeCoursey raised up on one elbow. The .38 spat flame from his hand. Instantly the other men shot back at him, and the canyon rocked to the echoing *wham-bang!* of gun shots. Nigel Rorke stiffened convulsively and dropped, dead before he hit. Skipper Rogg doubled over and keeled head-first into the river.

Then DeCoursey himself was slumping face down into the dust again, his body jouncing to the smash of bullets into his back.

Scanlon and the remaining sailor laughed harshly. They didn't see Gregg, didn't hear him until he was almost on top of them.

Then Scanlon jerked his head around, saw Gregg, and triggered a bullet that seared along Gregg's throat like the slash of a jagged knife. Gregg hit the bottom of the slope and fell on hands and knees. Scanlon's second bullet whipped over his head.

Gregg shot, pointblank. And Scanlon staggered back from the smash of the slug into his chest. His arms dropped, and he swayed. With a terrific effort, he steadied himself, raised his gun—buckled at the knees, and collapsed.

Gregg's gun had barked again as he whirled toward the sailor, but the bullet missed. The fellow flung up his hands.

"Don't shoot! I quit, I give up!" the man yelled—and flung his own weapon to the ground in surrender....

Gregg bent over DeCoursey. Turned the little trader over on his back. DeCoursey groaned, and opened his eyes.

Thank the Lord he's not dead! Gregg thought. And aloud, he said shakily,

"It's all over, pal. Look, I'll carry you to—"

"No, lad. I'm all shot up," the trader whispered. "Listen. I—you look in my safe. I wrote that—that letter for you. You know. My testimony. About the robbery. The DeGroot theft—you wanted it—"

"Don't worry about that! I'll carry you to the beach. We'll—"

But DeCoursey wasn't hearing, wasn't caring. The little trader was slipping beyond reach of voice or aid.

CHAPTER V The Last Act

SUSAN'S scalp wound proved minor. Next day, Gregg and Susan and her brother Tom returned to the treasure cache on the flat above the river. With a flashlight, Gregg led the way through the tunnel Scanlon's men had dug into the old stone house which had been covered, for so many years, by a fall of rock.

Part of the structure had fallen in, but some of the rooms were intact. And as Gregg looked around, he had the eerie feeling of stepping through a door of time into the distant past. He played the flashlight beam on furniture that was a century old, on bookcases, on pictures on the walls, on rugs and mirrors.

"Susan," young Tom Lanphier blurted excitedly. "This must be the house that Captain Lanphier built on Puna-Puka! Gregg, we have a Yankee ancestor who came into the South Seas in 1813 on a United States man-o'-war under Admiral Porter."

"Susan told me that."

"Captain Lanphier liked it so well that he returned some years later with a wife, and settled down for keeps."

"And you two," Gregg asked, "are his legal heirs?"

"Why, yes—if there's anything to inherit."

Gregg flashed his light beam around again, and in his voice was an edge of excitement as he said,

"This place has been hermetically sealed for about three generations, I guess. This Captain Lanphier—was he a cultured man who liked books and pictures and had the money to satisfy his whims?"

"Yes, he was," Susan said, with a sudden catch of expectancy in her voice, for she was quick of intuition.

Gregg turned his flashlight on a table.

"Look at that. Isn't it a beauty? And at least a hundred years old! I don't know the great furniture makers, but these pieces were likely brought from New England—where they had come from England! Chippendale? I bet it is. I bet every one of these pieces is worth a house and lot!

"And look on the wall. Those are engravings by Hogarth. And that portrait over the mantel, of a

British naval officer—Come here. So help me, it's a Joshua Reynolds! And look at the books."

"He likely got books off every sailing vessel that put in at Puna-Puka," Tom said, his voice hollow with awe.

"Look at these!" Gregg blurted. "Copies of Chaucer and Beaumont and Fletcher and Goldsmith that were likely old before Captain Lanphier got them.

"And here—a first edition of 'Confessions of An Opium-Eater,' and of Dr. Samuel Johnson's 'Rasselas'. And, as I live and breathe, a first of Keats' 'Lamia'!"

Gregg looked at Susan and her brother, his eyes shining.

"You realize that this house has been a sort of vault, keeping these things safe for you for over a century?"

"They're really valuable?" Susan breathed.

"When Captain Lanphier got 'em, most of them were valuable, but they weren't heirlooms, they weren't museum pieces. But now they *are!** I'm telling you, you've got a fortune here!" Gregg laughed shakily. "That rat Scanlon came here to find gold, didn't find any—and walked out on a fortune right under his nose! These things are worth a damn' sight more than a satchelful of pirate coin!"

SUSAN slipped her arm through his.

"John, we'll take these things to Honolulu and sell them. Whatever they bring, you'll share equally with us."

Gregg pulled away, his lean face tightening.

"Forget it. I'm not going to Honolulu."

"You're not—You mean, you're staying here?" Susan asked, dismayed. "On the island?"

"You got it," he said harshly. "I'm staying right here."

LATE that afternoon, the villagers buried DeCourcey on a rise near the beach.

* Sir Joshua Reynolds was England's great portrait painter, Hogarth a great English satirical painter and engraver. The literary works described represent some of the finest flowerings of English culture. The value of such a collection of paintings and books would be incalculable, the paintings because they are originals and the literary masterpieces because in all probability they are first editions.—Ed.

Afterward, Gregg and Susan and her brother went to the trading station. Depressed, Gregg puttered around. This trading station was going to be his and he might as well get used to it.

Tom Lanphier walked out after a bit. Susan sat in a chair and watched Gregg. In the morning, the *Leeward* was sailing away, and leave-taking now was hard.

The lamplight shone with golden sparkles in her bronze-red hair. Gregg was conscious of it, and was conscious of the way she looked at him, concern in her blue eyes. But he made himself turn his back on her. No use storing up any more heartache for himself than he had to.

Looking in the safe, he saw a letter there with his name on it. He remembered, then. DeCourcey had written out his testimony in regard to the DeGroot murder.

"Damned little good it'll do me," Gregg muttered to himself. Only by DeCourcey's appearing in Honolulu in person, being identified and sworn in, could his word that Gregg was innocent of the DeGroot robbery have stood up. Now DeCourcey was dead.

Idly Gregg opened the envelope and unfolded the letter. He read:

Dear Gregg,

I've felt awfully bad about refusing to go to Honolulu to testify in court that you're not the man who robbed DeGroot and to identify the man who did do the thievery. I just couldn't do it. You'll understand why when I tell you that I, myself, am the thief who robbed DeGroot.

I was a watchmaker for the firm, remember. The robbery was an "inside job," and my testimony that a thief broke in and chloroformed me after a struggle was just a cover-up.... I chloroformed myself.

I'm writing this letter now, so that if anything happens to me, you'll have a way of proving your innocence of the theft.

In the "H" Street Branch of the National Trust Bank, in Honolulu, I have a safe deposit box, under my full name of Philip DeCourcey Leroux. The court can order the box opened. The jewels are there. And the bank people know that nobody but myself ever had access to that box.

I think that will clear you once and for all of any suspicion. DECOURCEY.

Thunderstruck with surprise, Gregg read the

letter a second time, to make sure—and let out a wild whoop of joy.

WHEREUPON Susan jumped up, startled. He grabbed her by the elbows, waltzed her around the room, and kissed her resoundingly on the lips.

“J-John!” she gasped happily. “Why this sudden outburst?”

“I’m free! I’m an honest man and I can prove it! I don’t have to hide, I’ve got my life ahead of me and a future Susan! Can I still go to Honolulu with you and Tom?”

“Well, maybe,” she said, laughter in her blue eyes. “Do you think you could kiss me like that again?”

Gregg grinned hugely. “Honey,” he said, “you ain’t seen nothin’ yet!”

MODEL THE AUTHOR

GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL Author of
MYSTERY ON DEAD MAN REEF

“I’M the Census Taker,” said the lean man.

“Come right in! Sit down! Have a smoke! What’s on your mind?” I said, all in one breath. My wife says I can talk the arm off a guy.

“Name?” asked the Census Taker, hereinafter known as C. T.

“George Armin Shaftel.”

“Occupation?”

“Writer.”

“Oh!” he said, looking at me kind of awed.

“Then you’ve been a soldier of fortune, and—”

“No! And I’ve never crossed the Pacific in a 16-foot ketch, flown with the old Lafayette Escadrille, or shot lions with bows’n arrows, and I’ve never worked for the old *New York World*, stowed away on a freighter, been a Chinatown guide or advertising copy writer, or rode with Pancho Villa or starved in a garret.”

The C. T. gawked at me, real suspicious.

“You *sure* you’re a writer?”

“Listen, brother. When I get a story accepted, I’m a helluva good writer. When I get a rejection, I wonder why in blazes I didn’t finish Engineering School.”

“Oh, then you’ve been to college?” he asked, doubtfully.

“A.B. and M.A., pal. Taught literature and rope spinning at my alma mater. Rounded it off with tramping the Sierras, and gasoline-bumming from Tia Juana to Seattle.”

“Born?” he asked. “No cracks, please!”

“In St. Louis, Missouri.”

“Married?”

“And working at it.”

“What do you write?”

“Fiction, for a living. Plays, for fun. Books, for speculation.”

“Did you ever sell to the *Satevepost*?”

“Sure!”

“When did you start writing?”

“While still in college. I wrote a play. Entered it in the annual college contest. Thirty-two plays were considered, and were returned numbered in the order of merit. Thirty-two plays—and mine was *not* numbered 32 when it came back. No, it was numbered 33. I ask you—Was that literary criticism? I got mad. Next year, I won *first and third prizes* in that contest.”

“When did you start writing professionally?” the C. T. finally blurted, getting a word in edgewise.

“Sorry!” I apologized.

“My wife says I can talk an arm off a wooden Indian. When she saw that armless statue of the Venus de Milo, she said Venus must’a been married to a guy like me. Why, I started writing soon’s I left college, under the guidance of my friend William Byron



Mowery, who has probably given aid and comfort to more young writers than any topflight fictioneer I know of. The sixth story I wrote I sold to Harold Hersey, then Clayton's chief editor. Hersey asked for more, and wrote that he was *desperately* in need of more such stories. Yeah, he underlined the *desperately*. Happy days! . . . The third story he bought, he jumped my pay rate from 1c a word to 2c. Oh boy oh boy! And a little later, Clayton offered a number of us writers a better proposition still: he'd keep us at 2c a word for a year. Then, with each succeeding story he bought, he'd raise our rate 1/10 of a cent until 3c was reached—and pay us that for a year. Then, ditto, to 4c, to stay there for a year; then ditto to 5c.”

“In real dough?” gasped the C. T.

“No bushwah. Real folding money. And what's more—”

“How do you work?”

“Both ways “

“*Both* ways!”

“Yeah. Lots of writers plan a story in full detail before starting to write. Used to be, I'd have more wordage jotted down in notes *about* a story than the yarn would amount to when finished. I'd work out maps of the action scenes—”

“Do you own this house, or rent it?” asked the C.T.

“—and time tables for events. But lots of writers don't jot down a single note. Once they get a title and a first line, they start writing, visualizing the story as they go. I used to think this way of working was pure insanity. But now I'm just as crazy as the next guy. Sometimes I plan a story in detail, sometimes I start writing

and build it as I go, and I'm sure—”

“Okay, *okay!* How many people live in this house?”

“—that most editors agree that one method is as good as the other. And while we're on the subject, I *do* think that writers should spend part of each year in New York City. Why, when I lived in New York, I'd take a story to a certain editor at 11 o'clock of a Friday morning, then go to a Fiction Guild luncheon. I'd get home at three o'clock in the afternoon—and I'd find a phone message saying that the editor liked the story and a check would be coming for it next week! Nice huh? Topping that, though—”

“I said,” yelled the C. T., “*who else lives in this house?*”

“—is the case of a friend of mine who was so trusted by an editor that he would bring in a story and lay it on the editor's desk, and the editor would just ask how long is it?—and sign a voucher; and my friend would pick up his check on the way out! You asked have I ever sold to the POST—”

“No! I asked *how many luckless devils got to live in the same house with you?*”

“—and I *have* sold to the POST! But my name didn't appear on the piece and I don't even know what the item was, for it was one of a bunch of jokes I sent to *Post Scripts*, and I don't know which joke it was. But I got a POST check for it—for \$5. Hey! Wait! Hold on!” I yelled.

For the guy had jumped up. Fled. I shouted, I bawled for him to wait—for on the rug was lying his left arm....

—George Armin Shaftel.