Chapter Five--A LITTLE ACCOUNT WITH SWITHIN HALL

I

With a last long scrutiny at the unbroken circle of the sea, David Grief swung out of the cross-trees and slowly and dejectedly descended the ratlines to the deck.

"Leu-Leu Atoll is sunk, Mr. Snow," he said to the anxious-faced young mate. "If there is anything in navigation, the atoll is surely under the sea, for we've sailed clear over it twice--or the spot where it ought to be. It's either that or the chronometer's gone wrong, or I've forgotten my navigation."

"It must be the chronometer, sir," the mate reassured his owner. "You know I made separate sights and worked them up, and that they agreed with yours."

"Yes," Grief muttered, nodding glumly, "and where your Summer lines crossed, and mine, too, was the dead centre of Leu-Leu Atoll. It must be the chronometer--slipped a cog or something."

He made a short pace to the rail and back, and cast a troubled eye at

the Uncle Toby's wake. The schooner, with a fairly strong breeze on her quarter, was logging nine or ten knots.

"Better bring her up on the wind, Mr. Snow. Put her under easy sail and let her work to windward on two-hour legs. It's thickening up, and I don't imagine we can get a star observation to-night; so we'll just hold our weather position, get a latitude sight to-morrow, and run Leu-Leu down on her own latitude. That's the way all the old navigators did."

Broad of beam, heavily sparred, with high freeboard and bluff, Dutchy bow, the Uncle Toby was the slowest, tubbiest, safest, and most fool-proof schooner David Grief possessed. Her run was in the Banks and Santa Cruz groups and to the northwest among the several isolated atolls where his native traders collected copra, hawksbill turtle, and an occasional ton of pearl shell. Finding the skipper down with a particularly bad stroke of fever, Grief had relieved him and taken the Uncle Toby on her semiannual run to the atolls. He had elected to make his first call at Leu-Leu, which lay farthest, and now found himself lost at sea with a chronometer that played tricks.

II

No stars showed that night, nor was the sun visible next day. A stuffy, sticky calm obtained, broken by big wind-squalls and heavy downpours. From fear of working too far to windward, the Uncle Toby was hove to, and four days and nights of cloud-hidden sky followed. Never did the sun appear, and on the several occasions that stars broke through they were too dim and fleeting for identification. By this time it was patent to the veriest tyro that the elements were preparing to break loose. Grief, coming on deck from consulting the barometer, which steadfastly remained at 29.90, encountered Jackie-Jackie, whose face was as brooding and troublous as the sky and air. Jackie-Jackie, a Tongan sailor of experience, served as a sort of bosun and semi-second mate over the mixed Kanaka crew.

"Big weather he come, I think," he said. "I see him just the same before maybe five, six times."

Grief nodded. "Hurricane weather, all right, Jackie-Jackie. Pretty soon barometer go down--bottom fall out."

"Sure," the Tongan concurred. "He goin' to blow like hell."

Ten minutes later Snow came on deck.

"She's started," he said; "29.85, going down and pumping at the same

time. It's stinking hot--don't you notice it?" He brushed his forehead with his hands. "It's sickening. I could lose my breakfast without trying."

Jackie-Jackie grinned. "Just the same me. Everything inside walk about. Always this way before big blow. But Uncle Toby all right. He go through anything."

"Better rig that storm-trysail on the main, and a storm-jib," Grief said to the mate. "And put all the reefs into the working canvas before you furl down. No telling what we may need. Put on double gaskets while you're about it."

In another hour, the sultry oppressiveness steadily increasing and the stark calm still continuing, the barometer had fallen to 29.70. The mate, being young, lacked the patience of waiting for the portentous. He ceased his restless pacing, and waved his arms.

"If she's going to come let her come!" he cried. "There's no use shilly-shallying this way! Whatever the worst is, let us know it and have it! A pretty pickle--lost with a crazy chronometer and a hurricane that won't blow!"

The cloud-mussed sky turned to a vague copper colour, and seemed to glow as the inside of a huge heated caldron. Nobody remained below. The native sailors formed in anxious groups amidships and for'ard, where

they talked in low voices and gazed apprehensively at the ominous sky and the equally ominous sea that breathed in long, low, oily undulations.

"Looks like petroleum mixed with castor oil," the mate grumbled, as he spat his disgust overside. "My mother used to dose me with messes like that when I was a kid. Lord, she's getting black!"

The lurid coppery glow had vanished, and the sky thickened and lowered until the darkness was as that of a late twilight. David Grief, who well knew the hurricane rules, nevertheless reread the "Laws of Storms," screwing his eyes in the faint light in order to see the print. There was nothing to be done save wait for the wind, so that he might know how he lay in relation to the fast-flying and deadly centre that from somewhere was approaching out of the gloom.

It was three in the afternoon, and the glass had sunk to 29:45, when the wind came. They could see it on the water, darkening the face of the sea, crisping tiny whitecaps as it rushed along. It was merely a stiff breeze, and the Uncle Toby, filling away under her storm canvas till the wind was abeam, sloshed along at a four-knot gait.

"No weight to that," Snow sneered. "And after such grand preparation!"

"Pickaninny wind," Jackie-Jackie agreed. "He grow big man pretty quick, you see."

Grief ordered the foresail put on, retaining the reefs, and the Uncle Toby mended her pace in the rising breeze. The wind quickly grew to man's size, but did not stop there. It merely blew hard, and harder, and kept on blowing harder, advertising each increase by lulls followed by fierce, freshening gusts. Ever it grew, until the Uncle Toby's rail was more often pressed under than not, while her waist boiled with foaming water which the scuppers could not carry off. Grief studied the barometer, still steadily falling.

"The centre is to the southward," he told Snow, "and we're running across its path and into it. Now we'll turn about and run the other way. That ought to bring the glass up. Take in the foresail--it's more than she can carry already--and stand by to wear her around."

The maneuver was accomplished, and through the gloom that was almost that of the first darkness of evening the Uncle Toby turned and raced madly north across the face of the storm.

"It's nip and tuck," Grief confided to the mate a couple of hours later. "The storm's swinging a big curve--there's no calculating that curve--and we may win across or the centre may catch us. Thank the Lord, the glass is holding its own. It all depends on how big the curve is. The sea's too big for us to keep on. Heave her to! She'll keep working along out anyway."

"I thought I knew what wind was," Snow shouted in his owner's ear next morning. "This isn't wind. It's something unthinkable. It's impossible. It must reach ninety or a hundred miles an hour in the gusts. That don't mean anything. How could I ever tell it to anybody? I couldn't. And look at that sea! I've run my Easting down, but I never saw anything like that."

Day had come, and the sun should have been up an hour, yet the best it could produce was a sombre semi-twilight. The ocean was a stately procession of moving mountains. A third of a mile across yawned the valleys between the great waves. Their long slopes, shielded somewhat from the full fury of the wind, were broken by systems of smaller whitecapping waves, but from the high crests of the big waves themselves the wind tore the whitecaps in the forming. This spume drove masthead high, and higher, horizontally, above the surface of the sea.

"We're through the worst," was Grief's judgment. "The glass is coming along all the time. The sea will get bigger as the wind eases down. I'm going to turn in. Watch for shifts in the wind. They'll be sure to come. Call me at eight bells."

By mid-afternoon, in a huge sea, with the wind after its last shift no more than a stiff breeze, the Tongan bosun sighted a schooner bottom up. The Uncle Toby's drift took them across the bow and they could not make out the name; but before night they picked up with a small, round-bottom, double-ender boat, swamped but with white lettering

visible on its bow. Through the binoculars, Gray made out: Emily L No. 3.

"A sealing schooner," Grief said. "But what a sealer's doing in these waters is beyond me."

"Treasure-hunters, maybe?" Snow speculated. "The Sophie Sutherland and the Herman were sealers, you remember, chartered out of San Francisco by the chaps with the maps who can always go right to the spot until they get there and don't."

III

After a giddy night of grand and lofty tumbling, in which, over a big and dying sea, without a breath of wind to steady her, the Uncle Toby rolled every person on board sick of soul, a light breeze sprang up and the reefs were shaken out. By midday, on a smooth ocean floor, the clouds thinned and cleared and sights of the sun were obtained. Two degrees and fifteen minutes south, the observation gave them. With a broken chronometer longitude was out of the question.

"We're anywhere within five hundred and a thousand miles along that latitude line," Grief remarked, as he and the mate bent over the chart.

"Leu-Leu is to the south'ard somewhere, and this section of ocean is all blank. There is neither an island nor a reef by which we can regulate the chronometer. The only thing to do--"

"Land ho, skipper!" the Tongan called down the companionway.

Grief took a quick glance at the empty blank of the chart, whistled his surprise, and sank back feebly in a chair.

"It gets me," he said. "There can't be land around here. We never drifted or ran like that. The whole voyage has been crazy. Will you kindly go up, Mr. Snow, and see what's ailing Jackie."

"It's land all right," the mate called down a minute afterward. "You can see it from the deck--tops of cocoanuts--an atoll of some sort. Maybe it's Leu-Leu after all."

Grief shook his head positively as he gazed at the fringe of palms, only the tops visible, apparently rising out of the sea.

"Haul up on the wind, Mr. Snow, close-and-by, and we'll take a look. We can just reach past to the south, and if it spreads off in that direction we'll hit the southwest corner."

Very near must palms be to be seen from the low deck of a schooner, and, slowly as the Uncle Toby sailed, she quickly raised the low land above the sea, while more palms increased the definition of the atoll circle.

"She's a beauty," the mate remarked. "A perfect circle.... Looks as if it might be eight or nine miles across.... Wonder if there's an entrance to the lagoon.... Who knows? Maybe it's a brand new find."

They coasted up the west side of the atoll, making short tacks in to the surf-pounded coral rock and out again. From the masthead, across the palm-fringe, a Kanaka announced the lagoon and a small island in the middle.

"I know what you're thinking," Grief said to his mate.

Snow, who had been muttering and shaking his head, looked up with quick and challenging incredulity.

"You're thinking the entrance will be on the northwest." Grief went on, as if reciting.

"Two cable lengths wide, marked on the north by three separated cocoanuts, and on the south by pandanus trees. Eight miles in diameter, a perfect circle, with an island in the dead centre."

"I was thinking that," Snow acknowledged.

"And there's the entrance opening up just where it ought to be----"

"And the three palms," Snow almost whispered, "and the pandanus trees. If there's a windmill on the island, it's it--Swithin Hall's island. But it can't be. Everybody's been looking for it for the last ten years."

"Hall played you a dirty trick once, didn't he?" Grief queried.

Snow nodded. "That's why I'm working for you. He broke me flat. It was downright robbery. I bought the wreck of the Cascade, down in Sydney, out of a first instalment of a legacy from home."

"She went on Christmas Island, didn't she?"

"Yes, full tilt, high and dry, in the night. They saved the passengers and mails. Then I bought a little island schooner, which took the rest of my money, and I had to wait the final payment by the executors to fit her out. What did Swithin Hall do--he was at Honolulu at the time--but make a straightaway run for Christmas Island. Neither right nor title did he have. When I got there, the hull and engines were all that was left of the Cascade. She had had a fair shipment of silk on board, too. And it wasn't even damaged. I got it afterward pretty straight from his supercargo. He cleared something like sixty thousand dollars."

Snow shrugged his shoulders and gazed bleakly at the smooth surface of the lagoon, where tiny wavelets danced in the afternoon sun.

"The wreck was mine. I bought her at public auction. I'd gambled big, and I'd lost. When I got back to Sydney, the crew, and some of the tradesmen who'd extended me credit, libelled the schooner. I pawned my watch and sextant, and shovelled coal one spell, and finally got a billet in the New Hebrides on a screw of eight pounds a month. Then I tried my luck as independent trader, went broke, took a mate's billet on a recruiter down to Tanna and over to Fiji, got a job as overseer on a German plantation back of Apia, and finally settled down on the Uncle Toby."

"Have you ever met Swithin Hall?"

Snow shook his head.

"Well, you're likely to meet him now. There's the windmill."

In the centre of the lagoon, as they emerged from the passage, they opened a small, densely wooded island, among the trees of which a large Dutch windmill showed plainly.

"Nobody at home from the looks of it," Grief said, "or you might have a chance to collect."

The mate's face set vindictively, and his fists clenched.

"Can't touch him legally. He's got too much money now. But I can take sixty thousand dollars' worth out of his hide. I hope he is at home."

"Then I hope he is, too," Grief said, with an appreciative smile. "You got the description of his island from Bau-Oti, I suppose?"

"Yes, as pretty well everybody else has. The trouble is that Bau-Oti can't give latitude or longitude. Says they sailed a long way from the Gilberts--that's all he knows. I wonder what became of him."

"I saw him a year ago on the beach at Tahiti. Said he was thinking about shipping for a cruise through the Paumotus. Well, here we are, getting close in. Heave the lead, Jackie-Jackie. Stand by to let go, Mr. Snow. According to Bau-Oti, anchorage three hundred yards off the west shore

in nine fathoms, coral patches to the southeast. There are the patches. What do you get, Jackie?"

"Nine fadom."

"Let go, Mr. Snow."

The Uncle Toby swung to her chain, head-sails ran down, and the Kanaka crew sprang to fore and main-halyards and sheets.

IV

The whaleboat laid alongside the small, coral-stone landing-pier, and David Grief and his mate stepped ashore.

"You'd think the place deserted," Grief said, as they walked up a sanded path to the bungalow. "But I smell a smell that I've often smelled. Something doing, or my nose is a liar. The lagoon is carpeted with shell. They're rotting the meat out not a thousand miles away. Get that whiff?"

Like no bungalow in the tropics was this bungalow of Swithin Hall. Of mission architecture, when they had entered through the unlatched screen door they found decoration and furniture of the same mission style. The floor of the big living-room was covered with the finest Samoan mats. There were couches, window seats, cozy corners, and a billiard table. A sewing table, and a sewing-basket, spilling over with sheer linen in the French embroidery of which stuck a needle, tokened a woman's presence. By screen and veranda the blinding sunshine was subdued to a cool, dim radiance. The sheen of pearl push-buttons caught Grief's eye.

"Storage batteries, by George, run by the windmill!" he exclaimed as he pressed the buttons. "And concealed lighting!"

Hidden bowls glowed, and the room was filled with diffused golden light. Many shelves of books lined the walls. Grief fell to running over

their titles. A fairly well-read man himself, for a sea-adventurer, he glimpsed a wide-ness of range and catholicity of taste that were beyond him. Old friends he met, and others that he had heard of but never read. There were complete sets of Tolstoy, Turgenieff, and Gorky; of Cooper and Mark Twain; of Hugo, and Zola, and Sue; and of Flaubert, De Maupassant, and Paul de Koch. He glanced curiously at the pages of Metchnikoff, Weininger, and Schopenhauer, and wonderingly at those of Ellis, Lydston, Krafft-Ebbing, and Forel. Woodruff's "Expansion of Races" was in his hands when Snow returned from further exploration of the house.

"Enamelled bath-tub, separate room for a shower, and a sitz-bath!" he exclaimed. "Fitted up for a king! And I reckon some of my money went to pay for it. The place must be occupied. I found fresh-opened butter and milk tins in the pantry, and fresh turtle-meat hanging up. I'm going to see what else I can find."

Grief, too, departed, through a door that led out of the opposite end of the living-room. He found himself in a self-evident woman's bedroom. Across it, he peered through a wire-mesh door into a screened and darkened sleeping porch. On a couch lay a woman asleep. In the soft light she seemed remarkably beautiful in a dark Spanish way. By her side, opened and face downward, a novel lay on a chair. From the colour in her cheeks, Grief concluded that she had not been long in the tropics. After the one glimpse he stole softly back, in time to see Snow entering the living-room through the other door. By the naked arm he was

clutching an age-wrinkled black who grinned in fear and made signs of dumbness.

"I found him snoozing in a little kennel out back," the mate said. "He's the cook, I suppose. Can't get a word out of him. What did you find?"

"A sleeping princess. S-sh! There's somebody now."

"If it's Hall," Snow muttered, clenching his fist.

Grief shook his head. "No rough-house. There's a woman here. And if it is Hall, before we go I'll maneuver a chance for you to get action."

The door opened, and a large, heavily built man entered. In his belt was a heavy, long-barrelled Colt's. One quick, anxious look he gave them, then his face wreathed in a genial smile and his hand was extended.

"Welcome, strangers. But if you don't mind my asking, how, by all that's sacred, did you ever manage to find my island?"

"Because we were out of our course," Grief answered, shaking hands.

"My name's Hall, Swithin Hall," the other said, turning to shake Snow's hand. "And I don't mind telling you that you're the first visitors I've ever had."

"And this is your secret island that's had all the beaches talking for years?" Grief answered. "Well, I know the formula now for finding it."

"How's that?" Hall asked quickly.

"Smash your chronometer, get mixed up with a hurricane, and then keep your eyes open for cocoanuts rising out of the sea."

"And what is your name?" Hall asked, after he had laughed perfunctorily.

"Anstey--Phil Anstey," Grief answered promptly. "Bound on the Uncle Toby from the Gilberts to New Guinea, and trying to find my longitude. This is my mate, Mr. Gray, a better navigator than I, but who has lost his goat just the same to the chronometer."

Grief did not know his reason for lying, but he had felt the prompting and succumbed to it. He vaguely divined that something was wrong, but could not place his finger on it. Swithin Hall was a fat, round-faced man, with a laughing lip and laughter-wrinkles in the corners of his eyes. But Grief, in his early youth, had learned how deceptive this type could prove, as well as the deceptiveness of blue eyes that screened the surface with fun and hid what went on behind.

"What are you doing with my cook?--lost yours and trying to shanghai him?" Hall was saying. "You'd better let him go, if you're going to have any supper. My wife's here, and she'll be glad to meet you--dinner, she

calls it, and calls me down for misnaming it, but I'm old fashioned. My folks always ate dinner in the middle of the day. Can't get over early training. Don't you want to wash up? I do. Look at me. I've been working like a dog--out with the diving crew--shell, you know. But of course you smelt it."

V

Snow pleaded charge of the schooner, and went on board. In addition to his repugnance at breaking salt with the man who had robbed him, it was necessary for him to impress the in-violableness of Grief's lies on the Kanaka crew. By eleven o'clock Grief came on board, to find his mate waiting up for him.

"There's something doing on Swithin Hall's island," Grief said, shaking his head. "I can't make out what it is, but I get the feel of it. What does Swithin Hall look like?"

Snow shook his head.

"That man ashore there never bought the books on the shelves," Grief declared with conviction. "Nor did he ever go in for concealed lighting. He's got a surface flow of suavity, but he's rough as a hoof-rasp underneath. He's an oily bluff. And the bunch he's got with him--Watson and Gorman their names are; they came in after you left--real sea-dogs, middle-aged, marred and battered, tough as rusty wrought-iron nails and twice as dangerous; real ugly customers, with guns in their belts, who don't strike me as just the right sort to be on such comradely terms with Swithin Hall. And the woman! She's a lady. I mean it. She knows a whole lot of South America, and of China, too. I'm sure she's Spanish, though her English is natural. She's travelled. We talked bull-fights. She's seen them in Guayaquil, in Mexico, in Seville. She knows a lot

about sealskins.

"Now here's what bothers me. She knows music. I asked her if she played. And he's fixed that place up like a palace. That being so, why hasn't he a piano for her? Another thing: she's quick and lively and he watches her whenever she talks. He's on pins and needles, and continually breaking in and leading the conversation. Say, did you ever hear that Swithin Hall was married?"

"Bless me, I don't know," the mate replied. "Never entered my head to think about it."

"He introduced her as Mrs. Hall. And Watson and Gorman call him Hall. They're a precious pair, those two men. I don't understand it at all."

"What are you going to do about it?" Snow asked.

"Oh, hang around a while. There are some books ashore there I want to read. Suppose you send that topmast down in the morning and generally overhaul. We've been through a hurricane, you know. Set up the rigging while you're about it. Get things pretty well adrift, and take your time."

VI

The next day Grief's suspicions found further food. Ashore early, he strolled across the little island to the barracks occupied by the divers.

They were just boarding the boats when he arrived, and it struck him that for Kanakas they behaved more like chain-gang prisoners. The three white men were there, and Grief noted that each carried a rifle. Hall greeted him jovially enough, but Gorman and Watson scowled as they grunted curt good mornings.

A moment afterward one of the Kanakas, as he bent to place his oar, favoured Grief with a slow, deliberate wink. The man's face was familiar, one of the thousands of native sailors and divers he had encountered drifting about in the island trade.

"Don't tell them who I am," Grief said, in Tahitian. "Did you ever sail for me?"

The man's head nodded and his mouth opened, but before he could speak he was suppressed by a savage "Shut up!" from Watson, who was already in the sternsheets.

"I beg pardon," Grief said. "I ought to have known better."

"That's all right," Hall interposed. "The trouble is they're too much talk and not enough work. Have to be severe with them, or they wouldn't get enough shell to pay their grub."

Grief nodded sympathetically. "I know them. Got a crew of them myself--the lazy swine. Got to drive them like niggers to get a half-day's work out of them."

"What was you sayin' to him?" Gorman blurted in bluntly.

"I was asking how the shell was, and how deep they were diving."

"Thick," Hall took over the answering. "We're working now in about ten fathom. It's right out there, not a hundred yards off. Want to come along?"

Half the day Grief spent with the boats, and had lunch in the bungalow. In the afternoon he loafed, taking a siesta in the big living-room, reading some, and talking for half an hour with Mrs. Hall. After dinner, he played billiards with her husband. It chanced that Grief had never before encountered Swithin Hall, yet the latter's fame as an expert at billiards was the talk of the beaches from Levuka to Honolulu. But the man Grief played with this night proved most indifferent at the game. His wife showed herself far cleverer with the cue.

When he went on board the Uncle Toby Grief routed Jackie-Jackie out of

bed. He described the location of the barracks, and told the Tongan to swim softly around and have talk with the Kanakas. In two hours Jackie-Jackie was back. He shook his head as he stood dripping before Grief.

"Very funny t'ing," he reported. "One white man stop all the time. He has big rifle. He lay in water and watch. Maybe twelve o'clock, other white man come and take rifle. First white man go to bed. Other man stop now with rifle. No good. Me cannot talk with Kanakas. Me come back."

"By George!" Grief said to Snow, after the Tongan had gone back to his bunk. "I smell something more than shell. Those three men are standing watches over their Kanakas. That man's no more Swithin Hall than I am."

Snow whistled from the impact of a new idea.

"I've got it!" he cried.

"And I'll name it," Grief retorted, "It's in your mind that the Emily L. was their schooner?"

"Just that. They're raising and rotting the shell, while she's gone for more divers, or provisions, or both."

"And I agree with you." Grief glanced at the cabin clock and evinced signs of bed-going. "He's a sailor. The three of them are. But they're

not island men. They're new in these waters."

Again Snow whistled.

"And the Emily L. is lost with all hands," he said. "We know that. They're marooned here till Swithin Hall comes. Then he'll catch them with all the shell."

"Or they'll take possession of his schooner."

"Hope they do!" Snow muttered vindictively. "Somebody ought to rob him. Wish I was in their boots. I'd balance off that sixty thousand."

VII

A week passed, during which time the Uncle Toby was ready for sea, while Grief managed to allay any suspicion of him by the shore crowd.

Even Gorman and Watson accepted him at his self-description. Throughout the week Grief begged and badgered them for the longitude of the island.

"You wouldn't have me leave here lost," he finally urged. "I can't get a line on my chronometer without your longitude."

Hall laughingly refused.

"You're too good a navigator, Mr. Anstey, not to fetch New Guinea or some other high land."

"And you're too good a navigator, Mr. Hall," Grief replied, "not to know that I can fetch your island any time by running down its latitude."

On the last evening, ashore, as usual, to dinner, Grief got his first view of the pearls they had collected. Mrs. Hall, waxing enthusiastic, had asked her husband to bring forth the "pretties," and had spent half an hour showing them to Grief. His delight in them was genuine, as well as was his surprise that they had made so rich a haul.

"The lagoon is virgin," Hall explained. "You saw yourself that most

of the shell is large and old. But it's funny that we got most of the valuable pearls in one small patch in the course of a week. It was a little treasure house. Every oyster seemed filled--seed pearls by the quart, of course, but the perfect ones, most of that bunch there, came out of the small patch."

Grief ran his eye over them and knew their value ranged from one hundred to a thousand dollars each, while the several selected large ones went far beyond.

"Oh, the pretties! the pretties!" Mrs. Hall cried, bending forward suddenly and kissing them.

A few minutes later she arose to say good-night.

"It's good-bye," Grief said, as he took her hand. "We sail at daylight."

"So suddenly!" she cried, while Grief could not help seeing the quick light of satisfaction in her husband's eyes.

"Yes," Grief continued. "All the repairs are finished. I can't get the longitude of your island out of your husband, though I'm still in hopes he'll relent."

Hall laughed and shook his head, and, as his wife left the room, proposed a last farewell nightcap. They sat over it, smoking and

talking.

"What do you estimate they're worth?" Grief asked, indicating the spread of pearls on the table. "I mean what the pearl-buyers would give you in open market?"

"Oh, seventy-five or eighty thousand," Hall said carelessly.

"I'm afraid you're underestimating. I know pearls a bit. Take that biggest one. It's perfect. Not a cent less than five thousand dollars. Some multimillionaire will pay double that some day, when the dealers have taken their whack. And never minding the seed pearls, you've got quarts of baroques there. And baroques are coming into fashion. They're picking up and doubling on themselves every year."

Hall gave the trove of pearls a closer and longer scrutiny, estimating the different parcels and adding the sum aloud.

"You're right," he admitted. "They're worth a hundred thousand right now."

"And at what do you figure your working expenses?" Grief went on. "Your time, and your two men's, and the divers'?"

"Five thousand would cover it."

"Then they stand to net you ninety-five thousand?"

"Something like that. But why so curious?"

"Why, I was just trying----" Grief paused and drained his glass. "Just trying to reach some sort of an equitable arrangement. Suppose I should give you and your people a passage to Sydney and the five thousand dollars--or, better, seven thousand five hundred. You've worked hard."

Without commotion or muscular movement the other man became alert and tense. His round-faced geniality went out like the flame of a snuffed candle. No laughter clouded the surface of the eyes, and in their depths showed the hard, dangerous soul of the man. He spoke in a low, deliberate voice.

"Now just what in hell do you mean by that?"

Grief casually relighted his cigar.

"I don't know just how to begin," he said. "The situation is--er--is embarrassing for you. You see, I'm trying to be fair. As I say, you've worked hard. I don't want to confiscate the pearls. I want to pay you for your time and trouble, and expense."

Conviction, instantaneous and absolute, froze on the other's face.

"And I thought you were in Europe," he muttered. Hope flickered for a moment. "Look here, you're joking me. How do I know you're Swithin Hall?"

Grief shrugged his shoulders. "Such a joke would be in poor taste, after your hospitality. And it is equally in poor taste to have two Swithin Halls on the island."

"Since you're Swithin Hall, then who the deuce am I? Do you know that, too?"

"No," Grief answered airily. "But I'd like to know."

"Well, it's none of your business."

"I grant it. Your identity is beside the point. Besides, I know your schooner, and I can find out who you are from that."

"What's her name?"

"The Emily L.

"Correct. I'm Captain Raffy, owner and master."

"The seal-poacher? I've heard of you. What under the sun brought you down here on my preserves?"

"Needed the money. The seal herds are about finished."

"And the out-of-the-way places of the world are better policed, eh?"

"Pretty close to it. And now about this present scrape, Mr. Hall. I can put up a nasty fight. What are you going to do about it?"

"What I said. Even better. What's the Emily L. worth?"

"She's seen her day. Not above ten thousand, which would be robbery. Every time she's in a rough sea I'm afraid she'll jump her ballast through her planking."

"She has jumped it, Captain Raffy. I sighted her bottom-up after the blow. Suppose we say she was worth seven thousand five hundred. I'll pay over to you fifteen thousand and give you a passage. Don't move your hands from your lap." Grief stood up, went over to him, and took his revolver. "Just a necessary precaution, Captain. Now you'll go on board with me. I'll break the news to Mrs. Raffy afterward, and fetch her out to join you."

"You're behaving handsomely, Mr. Hall, I must say," Captain Raffy volunteered, as the whaleboat came alongside the Uncle Toby. "But watch out for Gorman and Watson. They're ugly customers. And, by the way, I don't like to mention it, but you've seen my wife. I've given her

four or five pearls. Watson and Gorman were willing."

"Say no more, Captain. Say no more. They shall remain hers. Is that you, Mr. Snow? Here's a friend I want you to take charge of--Captain Raffy. I'm going ashore for his wife."

VIII

David Grief sat writing at the library table in the bungalow living-room. Outside, the first pale of dawn was showing. He had had a busy night. Mrs. Raffy had taken two hysterical hours to pack her and Captain Raffy's possessions. Gorman had been caught asleep, but Watson, standing guard over the divers, had shown fight. Matters did not reach the shooting stage, but it was only after it had been demonstrated to him that the game was up that he consented to join his companions on board. For temporary convenience, he and Gorman were shackled in the mate's room, Mrs. Raffy was confined in Grief's, and Captain Raffy made fast to the cabin table.

Grief finished the document and read over what he had written:

To Swithin Hall,
for pearls taken from his lagoon (estimated) $100,000

To Herbert Snow, paid in full for salvage from
steamship Cascade in pearls (estimated) $60,000

To Captain Raffy, salary and expenses for
collecting pearls 7,500

To Captain Raffy, reimbursement for
schooner Emily L., lost in hurricane 7,500

To Mrs. Raffy, for good will, five fair
pearls (estimated) 1,100

To passage to Syndey, four persons,
at $120. 480

To white lead for painting Swithin
Hall's two whaleboats 9

To Swithin Hall, balance in pearls (estimated)
which are to be found in drawer of library table 23,411

$100,000--$100,000

Grief signed and dated, paused, and added at the bottom:

P. S.--Still owing to Swithin Hall three books, borrowed from library: Hudson's "Law of Psychic Phenomena," Zola's "Paris," and Mahan's "Problem of Asia." These books, or full value, can be collected of said David Griefs Sydney office.

He shut off the electric light, picked up the bundle of books, carefully latched the front door, and went down to the waiting whaleboat.