

SHORT STORY AMERICA

THE DEVILS OF FUATINO

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I

Of his many schooners, ketches and cutters that nosed about among the coral isles of the South Seas, David Grief loved most the *Rattler*—a yacht-like schooner of ninety tons with so swift a pair of heels that she had made herself famous, in the old days, opium-smuggling from San Diego to Puget Sound, raiding the seal-rookeries of Bering Sea, and running arms in the Far East. A stench and an abomination to government officials, she had been the joy of all sailormen, and the pride of the shipwrights who built her. Even now, after forty years of driving, she was still the same old *Rattler*, fore-reaching in the same marvellous manner that compelled sailors to see in order to believe and that punctuated many an angry discussion with words and blows on the beaches of all the ports from Valparaiso to Manila Bay.

On this night, close-hauled, her big mainsail preposterously flattened down, her luffs pulsing emptily on the lift of each smooth swell, she was sliding an easy four knots through the water on the veriest whisper of a breeze. For an hour David Grief had been leaning on the rail at the lee fore-rigging, gazing overside at the steady phosphorescence of her gait. The faint back-draught from the headsails fanned his cheek and chest with a wine of coolness, and he was in an ecstasy of appreciation of the schooner's qualities.

"Eh!—She's a beauty, Taute, a beauty," he said to the Kanaka lookout, at the same time

stroking the teak of the rail with an affectionate hand.

"Ay, skipper," the Kanaka answered in the rich, big-chested tones of Polynesia. "Thirty years I know ships, but never like this. On Raiatea we call her *Fanauao*."

"The Dayborn," Grief translated the love-phrase. "Who named her so?"

About to answer, Taute peered ahead with sudden intensity. Grief joined him in the gaze.

"Land," said Taute.

"Yes; Fuatino," Grief agreed, his eyes still fixed on the spot where the star-luminous horizon was gouged by a blot of blackness. "It's all right. I'll tell the captain."

The *Rattler* slid along until the loom of the island could be seen as well as sensed, until the sleepy roar of breakers and the blatting of goats could be heard, until the wind, off the land, was flower-drenched with perfume.

"If it wasn't a crevice, she could run the passage a night like this," Captain Glass remarked regretfully, as he watched the wheel lashed hard down by the steersman.

The *Rattler*, run off shore a mile, had been hove to to wait until daylight ere she attempted the perilous entrance to Fuatino. It was a perfect tropic night, with no hint of rain or squall. For'ard, wherever their tasks left them, the Raiatea sailors sank down to sleep on deck. Aft, the captain and mate and Grief spread their beds with similar languid unconcern. They lay on their blankets, smoking and murmuring sleepy conjectures about Mataara, the Queen of Fuatino, and about the love affair between her daughter, Naumoo, and Motuaro.

"They're certainly a romantic lot," Brown, the mate, said. "As romantic as we whites."

"As romantic as Pilsach," Grief laughed, "and that is going some. How long ago was it, Captain, that he jumped you?"

"Eleven years," Captain Glass grunted resentfully.

"Tell me about it," Brown pleaded. "They say he's never left Fuatino since. Is that right?"

"Right O," the captain rumbled. "He's in love with his wife—the little hussy! Stole him from me, and as good a sailorman as the trade has ever seen—if he is a Dutchman."

"German," Grief corrected.

"It's all the same," was the retort. "The sea was robbed of a good man that night he went ashore and Notutu took one look at him. I reckon they looked good to each other. Before you could say skat, she'd put a wreath of some kind of white flowers on his head, and in five minutes they were off down the beach, like a couple of kids, holding hands and laughing. I hope he's blown that big coral patch out of the channel. I always start a sheet or two of copper warping past."

"Go on with the story," Brown urged.,

"That's all. He was finished right there. Got married that night. Never came on board again. I looked him up next day. Found him in a straw house in the bush, barelegged, a white savage, all mixed up with flowers and things and playing a guitar. Looked like a bally ass. Told me to send his things ashore. I told him I'd see him damned first. And that's all. You'll see her to-morrow. They've got three kiddies now—wonderful little rascals. I've a phonograph down below for him, and about a million records."

"And then you made him trader?" the mate inquired of Grief.

"What else could I do? Fuatino is a love island, and Pilsach is a lover. He knows the native, too—one of the best traders I've got, or ever had. He's responsible. You'll see him to-morrow."

"Look here, young man," Captain Glass rumbled threateningly at his mate. "Are you romantic? Because if you are, on board you stay. Fuatino's the island of romantic insanity. Everybody's in love with somebody. They live on love. It's in the milk of the cocoanuts, or the air, or the sea. The history of the island for the last ten thousand years is nothing but love affairs. I know. I've talked with the old men. And if I catch you starting down the beach hand in hand—

His sudden cessation caused both the other men to look at him. They followed his gaze, which passed across them to the main rigging, and saw what he saw, a brown hand and arm, muscular and wet, being joined from overside by a second brown hand and arm. A head followed, thatched with long elfin locks, and then a face, with roguish black eyes, lined with the marks of wildwood's laughter.

"My God!" Brown breathed. "It's a faun—a sea-faun."

"It's the Goat Man," said Glass.

"It is Mauriri," said Grief. "He is my own blood brother by sacred plight of native custom. His name is mine, and mine is his."

Broad brown shoulders and a magnificent chest rose above the rail, and, with what seemed effortless ease, the whole grand body followed over the rail and noiselessly trod the deck. Brown, who might have been other things than the mate of an island schooner, was enchanted. All that he had ever gleaned from the books proclaimed indubitably the faun- likeness of this visitant of the deep. "But a sad faun," was the young man's judgment, as the golden-brown woods god strode forward to where David Grief sat up with outstretched hand.

"David," said David Grief.

"Mauriri, Big Brother," said Mauriri.

And thereafter, in the custom of men who have pledged blood brotherhood, each called the other, not by the other's name, but by his own. Also, they talked in the Polynesian tongue of Fuatino, and Brown could only sit and guess.

"A long swim to say *talofa*," Grief said, as the other sat and streamed water on the deck.

"Many days and nights have I watched for your coming, Big Brother," Mauriri replied. "I have sat on the Big Rock, where the dynamite is kept, of which I have been made keeper. I saw you come up to the entrance and run back into darkness. I knew you waited till morning, and I followed. Great trouble has come upon us. Mataara has cried these many days for your coming. She is an old woman, and Motauri is dead, and she is

sad."

"Did he marry Naumoo?" Grief asked, after he had shaken his head and sighed by the custom.

"Yes. In the end they ran to live with the goats, till Mataara forgave, when they returned to live with her in the Big House. But he is now dead, and Naumoo soon will die. Great is our trouble, Big Brother. Tori is dead, and Tati-Tori, and Petoo, and Nari, and Pilsach, and others."

"Pilsach, too!" Grief exclaimed. "Has there been a sickness?"

"There has been much killing. Listen, Big Brother. Three weeks ago a strange schooner came. From the Big Rock I saw her topsails above the sea. She towed in with her boats, but they did not warp by the big patch, and she pounded many times. She is now on the beach, where they are strengthening the broken timbers. There are eight white men on board. They have women from some island far to the east. The women talk a language in many ways like ours, only different. But we can understand. They say they were stolen by the men on the schooner. We do not know, but they sing and dance and are happy."

"And the men?" Grief interrupted.

"They talk French. I know, for there was a mate on your schooner who talked French long ago. There are two chief men, and they do not look like the others. They have blue eyes like you, and they are devils. One is a bigger devil than the other. The other six are also devils. They do not pay us for our yams, and taro, and breadfruit. They take everything from us, and if we complain they kill us. Thus was killed Tori, and Tati-Tori, and Petoo, and others. We cannot fight, for we have no guns—only two or three old guns.

"They ill-treat our women. Thus was killed Motuaro, who made defence of Naumoo, whom they have now taken on board their schooner. It was because of this that Pilsach was killed. Him the chief of the two chief men, the Big Devil, shot once in his whaleboat, and twice when he tried to crawl up the sand of the beach. Pilsach was a brave man, and Notutu now sits in the house and cries without end. Many of the people

are afraid, and have run to live with the goats. But there is not food for all in the high mountains. And the men will not go out and fish, and they work no more in the gardens because of the devils who take all they have. And we are ready to fight.

"Big Brother, we need guns, and much ammunition. I sent word before I swam out to you, and the men are waiting. The strange white men do not know you are come. Give me a boat, and the guns, and I will go back before the sun. And when you come tomorrow we will be ready for the word from you to kill the strange white men. They must be killed. Big Brother, you have ever been of the blood with us, and the men and women have prayed to many gods for your coming. And you are come."

"I will go in the boat with you," Grief said.

"No, Big Brother," was Mauriri's reply. "You must be with the schooner. The strange white men will fear the schooner, not us. We will have the guns, and they will not know. It is only when they see your schooner come that they will be alarmed. Send the young man there with the boat."

So it was that Brown, thrilling with all the romance and adventure he had read and guessed and never lived, took his place in the sternsheets of a whaleboat, loaded with rifles and cartridges, rowed by four Raiatea sailors, steered by a golden-brown, sea-swimming faun, and directed through the warm tropic darkness toward the half-mythical love island of Fuatino, which had been invaded by twentieth century pirates.