

THE PHANTOM SHARK

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY, No. 6

By JOHN BLAINE

CHAPTER I

A Plan for Barby

Rick Brant was aware that events frequently hang on small, obscure incidents, but he had no idea that a mental image of his sister Barby holding an envelope to the light, trying to see what was in it, would eventually lead to one of the most unusual adventures of his young life.

It began in Washington, D.C. Rick, Don Scott, Hart-son Brant, Rick's famous scientist father, Julius Weiss and Hobart Zircon, two of the Spindrift scientists, were preparing to return to Spindrift, the island laboratory and home of the Brants off the New Jersey coast.

The Whispering Box Mystery had been solved, to the entire satisfaction of the scientists, the boys, and the United States government. The Spindrifters were tired. For weeks they had raced against time to create a counterweapon for the Whispering Box.

While they waited for final word that the case was closed, Rick read them a letter from Barby, his pretty blond sister. Among other things, Barby had written that Rick and Scotty had a letter from Chahda, their Hindu friend who was in Hawaii, and that there was a second letter from Hawaii that was not from

Chahda. It had no return address. She had held it to the light, trying to find out who it might be from, but with no success.

Hartson Brant knew, however. At first, because the famous electronic scientist was very tired, he hadn't remembered all the details. Later, as they took a taxi to the railroad station, he recalled, "Paul Warren asked me about you two when we were in Honolulu. He was planning an expedition to the Southern Pacific and wanted you to join him."

Rick was sitting on the folding seat in the rear of the taxi. He turned around so fast he almost fell off. "Honest, Dad? What kind of expedition?"

"Fishing," big Hobart Zircon boomed. "Scientific fishing. Wasn't that it, Hartson?"

Mr. Brant nodded. "I believe so. The combined Pacific Research Societies have been commissioned by the United Nations to explore new fishing grounds that may supply all of Southeast Asia. Warren was getting his staff together."

Scotty, a husky boy with black hair and brown eyes, asked quickly, "Does he want us to work for the expedition?"

"Not this time," Hartson Brant smiled. "He evidently doesn't know what he's letting himself in for, inviting you two and Chahda to go along. He merely thought

you would enjoy the trip. He and Mrs. Warren like to have young people around."

Rick looked at the scientist anxiously. "Can we go, Dad?"

Little Julius Weiss, the mathematics genius of the Spindrift group, leaned forward. "Confidentially, I overheard your father telling your mother that he'd be glad to give his permission."

Rick let out a whoop. "When do we start?"

Hartson Brant smiled. "That depends. How are your finances?"

There was a rule in the Brant household. When Rick, Scotty, or Barby wanted to take trips or make purchases that did not involve the entire family, they had to pay their own way. It was Hartson Brant's method of teaching them financial responsibility, and of making them self-sufficient against the day when they would be on their own.

"How much money would we need?" Scotty asked.

"Plane fare both ways," Hartson Brant replied, and that will be expensive. As I recall, the *Tarpon* was scheduled to leave Hawaii on the eleventh. This is the eighteenth. That means you must meet the expedition in New Caledonia -if you want to go."

Rick had checked into plane fares before, when he, Scotty, and Hartson Brant had flown to Hawaii for the expedition to Kwangara Island. He estimated the fare quickly, then allowed ten per cent discount for a round-trip ticket.

"I can make it," he said. "How about you, Scotty?"

“Okay. I can do it.”

The taxi pulled up in front of the station and the party unloaded their baggage. As they walked to the ticket office, Hobart Zircon said, “I’ve been thinking about the salary I received from the government for this last job.”

The officials for whom they had worked had insisted on placing the scientists and the boys on the government pay roll for the duration of their assignment. Rick had been surprised to receive a check. It wasn’t much, because he and Scotty had been classed as clerks, at a very low wage scale. But Zircon, Weiss, and Hart-son Brant had been paid top salaries.

“Julius and I were locked up in that old house for most of the period for which we were paid,” Zircon said. “I think that it would be only proper if we turned our checks over to you boys. What do you say, Julius?”

“I agree,” Weiss answered promptly.

“We couldn’t take your pay checks,” Scotty protested.

“I insist,” Zircon said flatly.

“So do I.” Weiss was equally firm.

Rick was silent. He had a swift vision of Barby, holding the letter from Hawaii against an electric light globe, trying to penetrate its mystery. Barby’s intuition was swift and sure. He remembered the promise she had tricked him into making that if there ever was another chance to take a trip during the summer vacation he would “use his influence,” as she put it flatteringly.

He could imagine her face when they told her, her suspicions were true: that he and Scotty would be off again to the Pacific. She would make him miserable until he made an effort to keep his promise.

“Dad, this trip is strictly a vacation for us?” he asked.

“Yes, Rick. Warren said nothing about assignments for you.”

“Is Mrs. Warren going?”

“She had planned to.”

Rick blurted impulsively, “Professor Zircon, I’ll accept that salary, if we can use it to buy plane tickets for Barby!”

Scotty looked astonished, then grinned and winked.

Hartson Brant reacted with a resounding, “No!”

Rick talked fast and earnestly. He almost succeeded in convincing himself. “Listen, Dad, Barby has never been on an expedition, and she hates always being left behind. This one is different. We won’t be doing anything dangerous, and you know the *Tarpon* is safe!”

“No, Rick.” The scientist shook his head. “If Mother were going, it would be fine. But there would be

no one to take care of Barby.”

Scotty took a hand. “Don’t you think Rick and I could take care of her, sir?”

The scientist was firm. “I’m sorry, boys. Of course you could take care of her. But, after all, she wasn’t invited.”

“And that, I think,” Julius Weiss declared, “is simply because Paul Warren had no idea you might let her go.”

“Exactly,” Zircon boomed. “Hartson, you know that Helen Warren is very fond of Barby.”

Rick was very much like his father, both in appearance and in the way his mind worked. He knew that the scientist was weakening. “I’ll send a cable,” he said quickly. “Right now. The *Tarpon* has radio equipment. We can have an answer waiting when we get home to Spindrift.”

Hartson Brant patted his son on the shoulder. “All right, Rick. I think it’s fine that you should want to include Barby. However, this sudden rush of brotherly devotion has its suspicious side.” He added a warning. “I can’t speak for your mother. You’ll have to persuade her.”

“Leave it to us,” Scotty said. “Rick, let’s get that cable on the way!”

“Get going,” Zircon urged. “I’ll get your tickets.”

The boys ran for the telegraph desk.

“What a guy,” Scotty exulted. “She’ll have the time of her life! But all of this doesn’t sound like the Rick I knew!”

At the telegraph desk, he composed swiftly. “To the motor vessel *Tarpon*, at sea, Western Pacific. Your invitation just received. Accept with pleasure. Where do we meet you? Would there be room for Barby as Mrs. Warren’s personal maid or as baby sitter? Reply to Spindrift.” He signed it “Scotty-Rick.”

The message filed, Rick sighed with relief. Well, he had kept his promise to his sister. Scotty was witness. Rick, not being the owner of a crystal ball, could not know that he had started a chain of events that would lead the Spindrift trio of youthful explorers into situations both strange and mysterious. Nor could he know that Barby, at that very moment, was engrossed in a pamphlet she had just received in exchange for twenty-five cents and the top off a box of soap powder. The pamphlet, too, would have much to do with coming events. It was titled *Daughter of the Moon*.

Spindrift Island, famous location of the Spindrift Scientific Foundation Laboratories and home of the Brants, was located off the coast of New Jersey, near the mainland town of Whiteside.

On the south seaward corner of the island were the long, gray laboratory buildings. On the north seaward side of the island was the big Brant house where the family and the scientists lived. Scotty was considered a member of the family, and had been since the day when, still in Marine uniform, he had rescued Rick from the gang that was attempting to wreck the famed moon-rocket experiment.

The returning Spindrifters were met at the White-side dock by Barby in one of the two island motor-boats. She ran to meet them as the bus from the railroad station dropped them at the wharf. Beside her raced a shaggy little dog.

Rick watched his sister, grinning to himself. She was slim and pretty in tennis shorts and one of his white shirts. Obviously, she was excited. He had to laugh when he saw what she carried in her hand. It was a letter-and he would have bet anything that it bore the postmark of Hawaii .

She kissed her father, embraced the professors and Rick, then shook hands sedately with Scotty. Her blue eyes danced with excitement. "Can we open the letter right now?"

"No hurry," Rick said. "Let's wait until we get home."

Barby's eyes opened wide. "But how can you wait? No, let's open it!"

Rick yawned elaborately. He took the letter and tucked it into his pocket. "Too tired to read."

"I'll read it," Barby offered eagerly.

"It might be private," Rick said. "No, I think we'd better wait."

Dismal, the shaggy little dog, was on his back, all four legs in the air, playing dead to attract his young master's attention. Rick scratched the pup's ribs to his complete satisfaction, then picked him up bodily and carried him to the motorboat.

As they made themselves comfortable on the leather seats, Hartson Brant asked, "Any wires or cables?"

Barby looked at him curiously. "No, Dad. Were you expecting one?"

Hartson Brant laughed. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Barby's pert face lengthened. "No one ever tells me anything!" She slid in behind the wheel of the fast motorboat, and, as Scotty cast off, she started the motor, slid the craft into gear, backed expertly out of the slip, turned, and headed for Spindrift.

Rick was proud of his sister. In situations where most girls would be a burden, she could more than hold her own. She could hike all day without complaint, and she was like a water sprite when it came to swimming. At tennis, although Rick had a much stronger drive, she gave him plenty of competition. And at badminton or ping-pong, where strength didn't count, she could run him ragged. She was a swell trail companion and her sense of adventure was as strong as his own. Barby was a good sport, he reflected. But he resented her placing him in the position in which he found himself- of pleading to take her along on an adventure. Gosh-

Gloomily he stroked Dismal, as the speedy craft bounced on the swells, and wondered about the cable. There was a chance that the shore station had been unable to reach the *Tarpon* because of poor atmospheric conditions. But the ship's call would be repeated over and over until an answer was finally received. No, he might as well face it. Barby had the upper hand this time. She was going on this trip. He might as well admit defeat gracefully.

It was nine o'clock that night before the reply came. The Brants, Scotty, and the professors were on the big screened porch that looked out toward the Atlantic. They had eaten one of Mrs. Brant's excellent dinners and were discussing their recent adventures in Washington, minimizing, as always, the elements of danger.

Barby was seated with her legs curled under her in an overstuffed chair. Now and then her eyes went to Rick, and he knew she hadn't forgotten the letter from Hawaii, even though she hadn't mentioned it again. He and Scotty had opened it in privacy. As Hartson Brant had predicted, it was an invitation to join the Warrens on a trip to the Southern Pacific.

A second letter, from Chahda, urged their acceptance. The Hindu boy had stayed with the Warrens after the Kwangara expedition, to attend school in Honolulu.

In the midst of Professor Weiss's description of his capture by the Whispering Box gang, the telephone rang. There was instant silence. Mrs. Brant looked around curiously. "Are any of you expecting a call? You all look so strange"

Rick tried to be casual. "Why don't you answer it, Mom? It may be Mrs. Webster or someone."

Barby was sitting bolt upright. She had sensed the instant tension. Her eyes went from Rick to Scotty. "Something is up," she said. "What is it?"

"I'd better go find out," Mrs. Brant said. She rose and went to the library extension. Rick followed, and saw that Barby was going to follow, too. He gave Scotty a meaning look.

"Barby, just a minute--"

In the library, Mrs. Brant picked up the phone. "Yes? Just a moment please, until I get a pencil and paper."

Rick, his heart beating fast, handed them to her.

"All right. Go ahead." She wrote rapidly as the telegraph station at Whiteside dictated.

Rick watched her face anxiously and saw surprise, then a frown.

She hung up the phone and reread what she had written, then she handed the paper to Rick.

It was addressed simply to Spindrift Island, and it said:

"You're wonderful. How did you know Paul and I wanted to ask Barby? Hesitated for fear you might not want to part with her. Please send her with boys. Repeat, please. Meet them Noumea about first of month. Much love. Helen and Paul."

Rick looked up from the message. Well, that settled it!

Mrs. Brant gave him a quizzical look. "What is all this, Rick?"

He explained quickly, then said, "She's dying to go, Mom. She'll be all right, and she'll love it."

"But she's so young to travel so far," Mrs. Brant said. "Rick, I don't know . . ."

"She's only a year younger than I am," Rick pointed out none too happily. "Besides, you can write a good stiff letter to Mrs. Warren saying she's kinda willful and likes to read, but that she will stay put if she's handled firmly and all."

Rick got a certain amount of satisfaction out of these suggestions.

Mrs. Brant sighed. "I suppose I must resign myself to having you both grow up. I don't like to have her go so far away, but Helen Warren will love having her, and I really shouldn't object, especially since your father evidently has given his permission."

"Then it's settled?"

"All right. I'll write the letter right away. You can hand it to Mrs. Warren."

Rick nodded. "Don't say anything yet, Mom. Let me break it to her in my own way."

"Don't tease her too much," his mother admonished.

As they rejoined the others, Rick went to Scotty, winked at him, then solemnly shook his hand. "Hello, fellow traveler. Got your bags packed?"

"They haven't been unpacked yet." Scotty's grin stretched from ear to ear.

Barby jumped to her feet. "I knew it," she wailed. "They're going on another trip! I knew it the minute I picked up that letter!"

Rick ignored her. "It's all settled, Dad. When can we leave?"

Hartson Brant took the telegram and read it. "Let's see. It's one day to the coast and another day to Hawaii, then about two days to Noumea."

"Where is Noumea?" Barby demanded.

"On the island of New Caledonia," Scotty replied. "Start a line at New Guinea, draw it down through the Solomons and the New Hebrides, and you come to New Caledonia. It's a French colony."

Hartson Brant continued, "Allowing for overnight stops and bad weather, you had better plan a minimum of a week's travel time. Plan to leave here in three or four days. Better make your plane reservations right away."

"I'll do it right now," Rick said. "By phone. Come on, Scotty. Want to come, Barby?"

She looked at him wrathfully. "Look here, Rick Brant," she blazed, "you aren't going to get away with this! You promised me when I got you out—"

"Hold everything, kid," interrupted Rick hurriedly. "Keep your shirt on. I never wench on promises. But this time we're just going fishing," Rick explained as they walked into the library. "Scientific fishing, to open up new commercial fishing grounds. We'll probably stop at the New Hebrides and the Solomons as well as New Caledonia. Maybe we'll even get to Australia."

"It sounds fine," Barby said gamely but unhappily.

"Call the airport at New York for us," Rick requested. "We want to go by Pan American, from Hawaii, anyway."

Barby sat down at Hartson Brant's big desk and picked up the telephone. In a steady voice she asked for long-distance, then for the New York airport. In a moment she said, "Just a minute, please."

She looked at Rick. "What shall I ask for?"

"Three reservations for Noumea via Honolulu, leaving New York in about three days," Rick said.

"Three res ... three! Who else is going?"

"You are," Rick said.

Barby's nose went into the air. She handed Rick the phone. "Get your own reservations. I don't think you're very funny."

Rick grinned. He suddenly felt good. He took the phone and spoke into it. "Hello? I'd like three reservations for Noumea, New Caledonia, please. We'd like to leave in about three days." He didn't look at Barby. "Yes, by Pan American. Fine. Tuesday will be perfect. Names? Miss Barbara Brant, Richard Brant, and Donald Scott. Right. We'll send you a check and pick up the tickets Monday night. Thank you."

He hung up. Barby was staring at him, wide-eyed. "You really meant it," she said, her voice hushed. "You really did! Honest, Rick, can I go?" She turned to Scotty, her eyes beseeching. "You wouldn't fool me, Scotty. Is it true?"

Scotty nodded, smiling.

She sat down suddenly in the desk chair, then just as suddenly she jumped up again. "Rick! You did it, didn't you? You arranged the whole thing!"

She didn't wait for an answer. She threw her arms around him and hugged him, then she ran for the door.

"Where you going?" Scotty called.

"To pack!"

Rick laughed. "But we're not leaving yet!"

"I don't care." Barby was positively radiant with excitement and joy. "I'm going to pack, and then I'm going to hide somewhere until it's time to go, just in case anyone changes his mind!"

CHAPTER II

Noumea

Barby was in a seventh heaven of delight. It made Rick and Scotty feel good just to see how much she

was enjoying the trip.

Even the long plane ride hadn't been boring for her. She promptly made friends with the crew and the passengers, and, since people were getting off the plane and new ones getting on at every stop, she always had someone different to talk to. She had heard the life stories of a strange assortment of travelers ranging from a Fiji Islander returning home after studying in the States to a missionary en route to a remote island near the Solomons .

No sooner did the plane let them off at New Caledonia , than Barby found another friend. He was a Kanaka taxi driver, over six feet tall and muscled like a blacksmith, with sooty skin and hair turned yellow from many applications of lime, a standard native treatment for lice. He chewed betel incessantly, which Barby thought was fascinating, since it turned his tongue and lips the color of a ripe tomato. His name, he said in wonderfully bad English, was Henri. He pronounced it "On- ree."

Henri's taxi was a relic, an ancient touring car with doors that flew open every time he rounded a corner, which he always did on two wheels. As Rick whispered to Scotty, he drove as though he had a grudge against the old jalopy. The boys sat in back. Barby sat up front with Henri and talked with him in high school French almost as bad as his English.

New Caledonia was a beautiful island, and a big one. The mountains were rugged, as though a part of the Rockies had been transplanted to the South Seas . The seacoast, however, was tropical, with palms and huge banana plants shading occasional native villages with houses of whitewashed boards. Now and then the car passed people who weren't at all like the stalwart, friendly Kanakas. They were more like Chinese.

"Tonkinese," Scotty explained. "From Indo-China. They're imported as laborers to work in the mines."

"What kind of mines?"

"Nickel."

The touring car reached the outskirts of Noumea now, and Rick looked around him with astonishment. It was a real city, and obviously French. It reminded him of the French Quarter in New Orleans . The architecture was the same. All the street signs were in French. There was an air of quiet drowsiness about it. Henri wheeled the car around a corner with a scream of tires and jerked to a stop in front of a two-story frame house.

"Otel," he announced.

Rick and Scotty got out as Henri ran around and gallantly held the door for Barby. She smiled her thanks, like a queen nodding to a faithful subject.

"Isn't he cute?" she whispered to Rick. "He promised to bring his children around so I can see them. He has seven."

Henri stacked their suitcases one on top of the other. All together, they weighed close to two hundred pounds, but he handled them as though they were filled with air.

In the lobby, nothing stirred. The only sign of life was a tan dog of uncertain ancestry that slumbered on a straw mat. Scotty banged the bell on the counter.

The dog looked up, growled a mild protest, and went back to sleep. Somewhere upstairs a door slammed and a sleepy voice called, “Un moment, s’il vous plait!”

A round little man appeared at the top of the stairs, slipper-clad and tucking his shirt into his trousers. Then, still blurred with sleep, but presentable, he slipped down the stairs and beamed at them. “Ah! Messieurs Brant and Scott, and Mademoiselle Brant? A pleasure! Your cable was received. Your rooms are ready. Also, I have a cable for you.” He ran to the counter and found it.

Rick tore it open. Scotty and Barby read it over his shoulder.

“Arriving Noumea thirtyoneabout ten AM . Warren .”

“On the thirty-first,” Rick said. “That’s tomorrow.

We really timed it right. Well, let’s get cleaned up and change clothes, then we can go see the town and get some lunch. I’m hungry.”

Scotty changed a few dollars into French francs, then paid Henri. Rick ran upstairs with the proprietor to examine Barby’s room. He had slept in small hotels in far places before, and, although he didn’t particularly mind discomfort for himself, he wanted to be sure it was all right for Barbara. There was a bare minimum of furniture and a grass mat on the floor, but it was clean and airy and the windows were screened.

His and Scotty’s room was next door. It looked about the same. He went downstairs to help with the bags, but a drowsy Javanese boy already had the situation in hand. He glanced at his watch.

“Thirty minutes from now we start looking for chow. Time enough, sis?”

“I’ll be ready in half that time,” she said.

Henri approached them as they left the hotel and asked hopefully, “You want car?”

“Not now,” Rick answered. “We’d rather walk. Let’s go, sis.”

The center of the town was lovely. There were many trees, and an even greater number of flowering shrubs. In the very center of the city was a large park.

“That’s the Place des Cocotiers,” Barby explained. “The proprietor told me. There’s a restaurant on the other side called Le Bagnard .

They entered the park and walked along a shaded path. Barby stopped at every other shrub to admire a new species of flower. As they rounded a corner of the path, they heard what could only have been an American voice, raised in anger.

“I told you no, you old bum! Keep out of my way or I’ll have you locked up!”

A big man in a crumpled white sharkskin suit faced an oldster who might have stepped right out of the pages of a story about castaways. The old man was stooped with the weight of more than eighty years. His great mane of hair was snow white, and he was clad only in a torn shirt and a pair of trousers cut off just below the knees. His feet were bare.

Before Rick and Scotty knew what was happening, Barby was facing the big man like a small fury.

“How dare you speak to an old man like that!” she fumed.

The man stared at her in astonishment. He was taller even than Scotty, and inclined to stoutness. His face was beef-red from the sun. But there was a look about him that spoke of plenty of money. Even his suit, crumpled as it was, looked expensive.

He said, “Well, miss! You’re an American, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” Barby said. “And you ought to be ashamed of yourself, using such language to an old man!”

The big man laughed heartily. “Perhaps I should,” he admitted. “But every time I walk through here he stops me to beg for money. I get a little tired of it. Why should I support him?”

“You don’t have to,” Barby said coldly. “But you could at least be polite.”

“I admit my guilt,” the man said jovially. He looked at the old man. “Sorry, grandpop . And my apologies *to* you, miss.” He nodded and walked away.

Rick and Scotty watched him go, then looked at each other. Rick knew what Scotty was thinking. A good thing the man had been amused at Barby’s interference. Otherwise, they might have had a battle on their hands. Rick decided that he would have to lecture her on minding her own business while in foreign lands. The old man bowed. “Thank you, ma’m selle .” Barby looked at him critically. “You’re hungry, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I do not like to beg, but how can such an old one as I work? What is there for me to do? I spoke only to that man because I knew he was very rich. I thought he would not miss a few centimes.”

Barby beckoned to Scotty. “Let me have some francs, Scotty, please.”

Scotty handed her a few bills and she tucked them into the old man’s hand.

“I give my thanks and my blessing,” he said with dignity. “I ask your name, so I may know in whose debt I will forever be. I am called Barthelemi.”

“My name is Barbara Brant, and this is my brother Richard and my friend Scotty.”

Old Barthelemi bowed. “You will be here for long?”

“Only until our ship comes,” Rick said. “The *Tarpon*. She’s due in tomorrow.”

Barthelemi sucked in his breath. “No! You must not go aboard that ship!”

“Why not?” Scotty asked quickly.

“It was in the newspaper/” the old man said shakily. “I picked it up on a bench where someone had left it, and I read of this ship. She goes to Indispensable Reef and Nanatiki Atoll. Messieurs, believe me, I implore you! You must not take this lovely girl-child into those waters! If you do not think of your own safety, I implore you to think of hers!”

“But why?” Rick said, bewildered. “I don’t understand.”

The old man looked up and down the path, as though to make sure they were alone. He bent close, and Rick read fear in his eyes.

“For the best of reasons. Between Nanatiki Atoll and the Indispensable Reef—that is the lair of the one we call *Le Requin Fantome* !”

The Phantom Shark!

CHAPTER III

The Dutchman and the Aussie

Babthelemi would say no more. He wouldn’t even stay to talk. He hurried off down the pathway while the three young people watched in astonishment.

“He’s cracked,” Scotty muttered.

“He is not!” Barby said indignantly.

Bick didn’t think so, either. “The Phantom Shark,” he mused. “Sounds interesting. Wonder if it’s supposed to be a real shark or a ghost?”

“Well ask someone else,” Scotty said. “Come on, no point in standing here. I’m hungry.”

As they resumed walking, Bick squeezed Barby’s arm. “Listen, girl-child, I want a word with you.”

“I only seem like a child to him because he’s so old,” Barby said gravely. “I understand him perfectly.”

Bick smothered a grin. “All right. Only don’t jump to the defense of strangers like that without thinking. If that man had misunderstood, we might have had a fight on our hands.”

Barby’s nose went into the air.

As they came out of the park, the sign *Le Bagnard* was visible across the street. The restaurant was in an old stone building almost completely covered with vines.

“It’s pretty,” Barby exclaimed.

“Hope the food is edible,” Rick said. “Let’s go see.”

It was dim after the bright sunlight. They stood in the doorway for a moment and let their eyes adjust. Then Barby said, “Oh! There’s Mr. Van der Klaffens!”

Van der Klaffens was a rotund, jolly little Dutchman with whom Barby had struck up a conversation on

the plane. He had gotten aboard at Suva, in the Fiji Islands, and by the time the plane landed at New Caledonia, Barby had his biography well in hand. He was originally from Batavia. He was an independent copra buyer. Van der Klaffens visited every port in the islands regularly, traveling as far north as Manila, as far east as Honolulu, and as far west as Penang. He had an interest in a Noumea firm.

He saw the trio almost at the same moment they saw him, and he rose and hurried toward them.

“Ah! Miss Barbara! And Mr. Brant and Mr. Scott. You care for lunch? Fine. You must join me.” He had only a trace of accent. He seated them at his table and beckoned to a Chinese waiter. “For lunch today is an excellent soup and an omelet you will enjoy. Sorry, there is no choice. Now, tell me. How do you like Noumea?”

“Beautiful,” Barby said enthusiastically. Rick and Scotty agreed.

Van der Klaffens nodded. “It is without doubt the best port in the South.”

“We met a couple of inhabitants,” Rick said. “A big American and an old man by the name of Barthelemi.”

“An American? And big? I suppose he had a ... how do you say it ... a florid face?”

“That’s the man,” Scotty said. “Do you know him?”

“I know who he is. He is the representative of an American industrial firm. Even, I think, he is a vice president or something equally important. At least, people tell me he spends francs as though they were centimes. His name is, let me see ... yes, I am sure. It is Walter Jerrold.”

“What is he doing out here?” Rick asked.

“I am told he is making arrangements for raw materials for his industries in America. In New Caledonia, he negotiates for nickel shipments. Also chromite. In the Philippines he buys silver. In Nauru and Ocean Islands he bargains for phosphates. I am told also he is a big buyer of copra, quite out of my class.”

“He sounds dull,” Barby remarked. “I’d rather hear about old Barthelemi.”

Van der Klaffens smiled. “He is picturesque. You realize that he is one of the last of a vanishing group? He came to Noumea as a convict more than half a century ago. It was a French prison colony in those days. The prison itself was called Le Bagne, and was located on that big island in the bay. You will see it. It is called He Nous. The custom was that certain prisoners, as a reward for good behavior, were set free and permitted to farm. They were called liberes, or bag-nards. This restaurant was started by one.”

“But Barthelemi couldn’t have been a convict,” Barby objected.

“I’m afraid he was. No one is sure about his crime. But I assure you that only dangerous criminals, or political ones, were sent here. Barthelemi was not a political prisoner. All of them returned to France long ago. The prison no longer exists, of course.”

The Dutchman stopped as the light from the doorway was blotted out. Rick turned to see a long, loose-jointed man enter. He was clad in white shirt and trousers, and he wore a seaman’s cap.

Van der Klaffens hailed him. "Well!Kenwood!"

Kenwood walked to the table and smiled at them. He reminded Rick of rangy Texans he had met, but when he spoke, his voice was pure Australian.

"Cheer-o, Van.How's the stinkin ' copra business?Your pardon, miss."

Van der Klaffens introduced the newcomer and in- vitedhim to draw up a chair. Evidently the two were old friends.

"I've been running into this old pirate up and down the islands for twenty years," Van der Klaffens said. "He's a scavenger.Deals in such oddments as crocodile hides, sharkskins , lumber, shell, and trepang ."

Rick could see that Barby was enthralled. A copra dealer, and now a beachcomber!

"Have you been combing beaches for long, Mr. Kenwood?" Barby asked.

The two men burst into laughter.

"Lordstone the crows!" Kenwood exclaimed. "Lass, I'm no beachcomber. I'm a respectable bloke, I am. I get my Oscar Ashe strictly yakka , and that's the dinkum oil."

Barby stared. "Do you?" she said hesitantly.

Rick and Scotty, who had heard Australian slang before from Digger Sears, one-time mate of the *Tarpon*, broke into chuckles.

"I'd better translate," Scotty said. " 'Lord stone the crows' is just an expression. Oscar Ashe is hard cash. Yakka is hard work. And dinkum oil is gospel truth."

"Well stonker me!" Kenwood exclaimed. "Here's a lad who's been to Aussie!" He shook hands again with Scotty.

Barby sighed. "Will someone translate that?"

"Never mind," Kenwood said. "We'll stick to murderin ' theking's English without Aussie talk."

"Do you trade up and down the islands by ship?" Rick asked.

"Schooner," Kenwood explained. "My own, a ruddy beaut . She's at the dock now. Come on down and take a look. If I do say it, she's a witch for sailing, and so easy to handle even a couple ofCollins Street squatters could sail ' er."

"And what areCollins Street squatters?" Barby wanted to know.

"Australian equivalent of drugstore cowboys," Scotty explained- "But what is trepang ?"

"Sea cucumbers, also known as beche-de-mer , " Van der Klaffens replied. "The natives get them on the sea bottom. They're boiled, then dried and smoked. The Chinese prize them for making soup. Good soup, too, I might add."

Kenwood smiled at the three youngsters. "Now it's my turn to rack up a little info. What brings you to Noumea?"

"We're joining the *Tarpon* here," Rick said. "She's a survey ship. A converted trawler. We're going somewhere to look for new fishing grounds."

"Shouldn't be much trouble. Plenty o' fish in these waters. Any idea where you're sailing?"

"We just heard," Barby put in. "It was in the paper. We're going to places with wonderful names. Nana-something Atoll and Indispensable Reef."

"Nanatiki Atoll," Rick added. "Do you know where they are?"

"Only by the chart. I've never been there. Nanatiki is due west of Esperito Santo in the New Hebrides, and about five hundred miles northwest of here. Indispensable is about a hundred and fifty miles north of Nanatiki."

"Ever hear of the Phantom Shark?" Scotty inquired,

The two men looked at each other, each waiting for the other to answer.

"Can't say I have," Kenwood said. "You, Van?"

"Not I," Van der Klaffens replied. "Is this Phantom Shark a real one?"

"We don't know," Rick said. He remembered old Bartholemi's frightened eyes as he warned them, and he refrained from mentioning the old man's name.

"It's just a name we heard," Scotty explained. "Mr. Kenwood, I should think trading around the islands would be a lot of fun."

The Australian grinned. "Used to be. When I was a youngster, I thought it was real derring-do to sail the islands. The abos were still takin' heads then. But it's old stuff to me now. And sometimes it's a fair cow."

Scotty saw Barby's bewildered look. "Abo is Australian for aborigine," he told her. "It's what they call the natives. Fair cow is Aussie slang for pretty punk." To Kenwood, he said, "I suppose it takes a few weeks to make the round trip."

"Yes. I usually leave here, go right up through the Hebrides and the Solomons as far as Rabaul. That's on the tip of New Britain. Then, if business hasn't been too good, I sometimes go as far up as the Admiralties. About twice a year I go across to Brisbane to pick up trade goods and drop off some of the choice stuff I've picked up. Too bad you can't make the trip with me. I'm leaving at dawn tomorrow."

"When did you get in?" Van der Klaffens asked. "You weren't here when I went up to Suva."

"Got in four days ago. I don't stay long. Just offload my cargo, pick up new goods, and start back again."

Lunch over, the group separated. Rick, Barby, and Scotty returned to the hotel. Van der Klaffens and Kenwood went their own ways.

At the hotel, Rick wondered aloud, “Any good swimming beaches near here?”

“But yes!” the proprietor said. “Out at Anse Vata, only a short way from here, is one of the best beaches in the Pacific. You enjoy the swim? Henri can take you. I will send for him.”

“It’s a little soon after lunch, but I guess we can loaf on the beach for a while,” Scotty said.

“Good. I will bring you fresh towels to take to the beach with you.”

As they went upstairs, the proprietor bustled off. He rapped on the door while Rick and Scotty were undressing.

Rick opened the door. “Come in. Thanks very much for the towels.”

“You undress here?”

“Putting on our suits under our clothes,” Rick explained.

“Ah. American system, I think.”

“Strictly American,” Scotty said, smiling. “Incidentally, have you ever heard of anything called the Phantom Shark?”

The man’s reaction was astonishing. He turned white, crossed himself, then cast a quick look at the door as though afraid someone might be listening. “Monsieur,” he whispered, “have the favor not to mention that name in my establishment. Ma foil Have you no fear?”

Rick’s eyes widened. “Fear? Of what?”

“Of ... of what you said. Name of a dog! If you have no consideration for your own hides, think of mine. I have a family, monsieur!”

“But what are you afraid of?” Scotty demanded. “Is it a man?”

The proprietor bowed. “If you need anything else, please call me. Henri is waiting downstairs.” He hurried away.

Rick and Scotty finished dressing and went downstairs, very thoughtful. By unspoken agreement, they said nothing to Barby of the proprietor’s reaction to the name. Then, in the sheer joy of swimming in the clear water, they forgot the whole affair. They alternately swam and toasted on the beach, collected sea shells, and explored outcroppings of coral.

After the long afternoon in the sun and salt air, they were glad to eat a light dinner at a near-by restaurant and turn in. Barby went up to her room. Scotty and Rick delayed in the lobby long enough to ask the proprietor to wake them early, because the *Tarpon* was expected in and they wanted to be at the dock to meet her.

The man nodded. He seemed to have overcome his fears. “I will send up breakfast from my own kitchen.”

As they thanked him and started up the stairs, Kenwood came into the hotel.

“Halloo,” he greeted them. “You staying here? So’m I.” He walked up the stairs with them. Then, at their door, he scratched his head thoughtfully. “Invite me in and I’ll tell you something.”

“Sure,” Rick agreed. “Come on in.”

The lanky Australian trader took a seat on one of the twin beds. “About this noon. Remember you asked about the Phantom Shark?”

Scotty stopped in the act of stripping off his shirt. “You mean you know something?”

“Not much, but enough to know it’s no folk tale. Before the war, when Rabaul was the pearl center for this part of the world, the Chinese pearl buyers used to whisper about a bloke who would appear, always in the dead of night, with the best pearls they had ever seen. No one ever saw his face. He used to identify himself with a shark’s tooth, mixed in with the pearls. And when the Chinese buyers saw that, they knew that they had better pay up and at top price, even if it meant no profit.”

“Suppose they didn’t?” Rick asked.

“Some didn’t, at first. They were found with their throats cut. With a knife made of shark’s teeth. Ever see one? Ruddy awful. Can’t miss the marks it leaves.”

“Where did the pearls come from?” Scotty inquired.

“That’s another thing. Down through the islands there were wild yarns about a huge silver shark. He would park on the bottom until some poor Kanaka boy found a good one, then up he’d come and upset the canoe. If the boy was lucky, he got away with his life. But not his pearl. If he wasn’t lucky, they’d find his body later, with the mark of the Phantom Shark on it.”

“Do you believe any of it?” Rick asked curiously.

Kenwood shrugged. “I don’t know. I’ve had no evidence, and the idea of a shark lying in wait until someone finds a pearl sounds like a fairy tale. But in my time I’ve found that ‘neath all the smoke may be a bit of fire.” He rose and walked to the door. “Didn’t want to mention it in front of Van. For all his years in the islands, he’s no believer in tales. I didn’t want to be laughed at.”

Rick and Scotty walked to the door with him.

“Thanks for the story, Mr. Kenwood,” Rick said. “You said you heard all this before the war. Nothing since?”

“Nothing since.”

Scotty rubbed his chin. “But if this Phantom Shark does exist, why should he hang out near Nanatiki and Indispensable Reef?”

Kenwood looked up and down the hall. “I thought *you* knew that.” He lowered his voice. “I thought you knew that between Nanatiki and Indispensable lie some of the richest deep-water pearl beds in the world”

CHAPTER IV

The Jerrold Pearls

It seemed to Rick as though he had hardly drifted off to sleep before he was awakened by a knock on the door. He opened his eyes and realized that it was morning. It wasn't late, though, because the shadows were still long in the room and the air was cool.

Scotty sat up in the next bed and called, "Who is it?"

"You open up? Gottomchow."

"Breakfast in bed!" Rick exclaimed. "That's for me." He opened the door for the Javanese houseboy, who brought in a tray of coffee, rolls, and fresh mangoes, compliments of the proprietor.

"Did you take some to the young lady next door?" Scotty asked.

"Missy gottom."

It took only a few moments to shower, brush their teeth, and get into clean slacks and shirts. Then they sat down to enjoy breakfast.

"We're early," Scotty said. "It's only seven o'clock."

"Guess the proprietor took us at our word," Rick agreed. "Never mind, we can do some shopping before the ship gets in. I imagine Barby will want to buy some souvenirs to send home."

They were finishing the last of the fruit when Barby knocked. "Come on, you sleepyheads," she called.

Rick opened the door. "We've been up for hours. Waiting for you."

"I know," Barby jeered. "I could hear you snoring."*

"I never snore," Scotty said with dignity.

Barby's eyebrows went up. "No? Then two buzz saws must have been having a duet under my window. Come on. I want to see some more of Noumea."

They walked past the Place des Cocotiers and into a side street, searching for shops. Later, laden with baskets, mats, and an assortment of carvings, they started back toward the hotel. They were in the market section of town, so they walked slowly, taking in the colorful scene. Dark Kanaka women bartered with dainty Javanese, and with Tonkinese women whose teeth were black from betel. The air was redolent with the smell of foodstuffs, fish, fruit, and people.

A little Javanese man stepped in front of them and bowed ingratiatingly. "Missy like pearl? Number one water, good color."

Barby's blue eyes opened wide. "A real pearl? Oh, let me see it."

The little man unfolded a dirty bit of cloth, exposing a tiny white globe no larger than a match head.

A voice spoke from behind them. "Don't waste your time or money."

They turned to meet the American whom Barby had reprimanded the day before.

"You won't find good pearls in the market place," he said, smiling. "Take my advice. You'll end up buying a piece of junk for an exorbitant price."

"You know pearls?" Rick asked politely.

"I think I do. They're a hobby, if you want to call it that. Incidentally, my name is Jerrold. Young lady, am I forgiven for yesterday's episode?"

"Of course." Barby was very gracious about it. She introduced herself and the boys.

"Delighted to meet you," Jerrold said. "It's always a pleasure to meet fellow Americans in a foreign land. Perhaps you could have chocolate with me?"

Rick and Scotty hesitated, but Barby accepted. "If you'll tell me something about choosing pearls."

"I'll be glad to. My hotel is right around the corner."

They walked with him to the town's leading hotel, a place no more elaborate than the one where they were staying. But, unlike theirs, his had a dining room. Rick checked their purchases at the desk.

"I never thought much about pearls," Barby explained over a steaming cup of rich chocolate, "until I got a pamphlet called *Daughter of the Moon*. Did you know that's what pearls are called? It was full of wonderful information. Until then, I liked emeralds. Now I think I'd rather have pearls."

"Good choice," Jerrold approved. "Pearls seem alive. They have warmth and richness." His eyes gleamed as he warmed to his subject. "Unlike other jewels, they grow to maturity, and they seem to have life inside of them."

Rick realized they had hit on the big man's favorite topic. "You sound like a collector, sir," Rick remarked. "Have you bought many pearls?"

Jerrold lowered his voice. "A fortune's worth. For the past five years, ever since I came into the Pacific, I have been trying to match a perfect string. You realize the difficulties? To put together a flawless set requires much searching and judgment. Every pearl must be of exactly the same shade. There is considerable variation in color, you know. Then, they must be graduated in size so that each is only a trifle smaller or larger than the one beside it."

"It sounds wonderful," Barby breathed. "I'd love to see some real pearls."

"Finish your chocolate," Jerrold commanded. He excused himself, rose, and walked to the hotel desk. Rick saw him speak to the desk clerk who vanished into an inner room, reappearing in a moment with a heavy strongbox.

Jerrold brought the box back to the table. "You'll have to come to my room. I want to show you my beauties, but I don't want to open this box in public."

Rick's eyes asked Scotty's a question. Scotty shrugged, then nodded.

"I'd like to see them myself," Rick said. He offered to help Jerrold carry the heavy box, but the big man refused.

His room was one flight up, and it had a sitting room as well as a bedroom. Rick guessed the suite was the best the town had to offer.

Jerrold put the strongbox on a table and unlocked two heavy padlocks that held it closed. Then he moved so that the boys couldn't see what he was doing, and turned the combination. Finally, he lifted the cover, and, deliberately blocking their view, lifted out a flat black case, then slammed the lid shut again.

He placed the case next to the strongbox and opened the lid.

Barby gasped.

Inside, against black velvet, were row after row of pearls. The largest was almost the size of a regulation clay marble. The smallest was no larger than a buckshot. In between the extremes were rows of perfectly round pearls. Here and there were a number of blank spaces, evidently awaiting pearls of the proper size.

Barby was speechless. She put out her hand toward the case, then swiftly drew it back.

"Pick them up, if you like," Jerrold said. "But be careful not to drop them. They're devilish hard to find when they roll under furniture."

Rick couldn't get excited over the display. They were pretty enough, but he couldn't understand Jerrold's high enthusiasm or Barby's rapture. Scotty stared at the box and didn't say anything.

Barby and Jerrold discussed them enthusiastically. They talked of weight and color. They counted the vacant spaces that must be filled before the string was complete. Then, reluctantly, Barby helped rearrange the pearls and stood aside as the case was snapped shut.

Again, Jerrold lifted the lid of the strongbox, interposing his big body between the box and the three young people. But this time, Scotty moved quickly on silent feet and looked over Jerrold's shoulder. When the big American turned around, Scotty was looking disinterestedly through the window.

"Thank you very much," Barby said, and the boys echoed her.

Jerrold smiled. "Perhaps it wasn't fair to show you so much all at once. But I'll tell you what, if you'd like one pearl, or perhaps two, I'll act as your agent. I expect to see . . . that is, I'll be in contact with a man who has some fine pearls tomorrow, probably tomorrow night. If you'll tell me what you'd like and how much you want to spend . . ."

"It's no use," Barby sighed. "I do thank you, Mr. Jerrold, but we'll be gone by tomorrow night. Besides, all the money we have wouldn't buy even one pearl like those."

Jerrold walked with them to the door of the hotel, then waved as they walked toward the Noumea docks. It was almost nine-thirty. The *Tarpon* would arrive any time now.

Scotty let Barby get a few steps ahead, then motioned to Rick. "Got something to tell you," he whispered.

Rick considered. Barby was with them; she was a full partner in this expedition. He decided that, although they would definitely keep out of trouble, they would have no secrets from her.

"Listen, sis," he said, and he told her of their visit from Kenwood last night.

Barby listened gravely. "So the Phantom Shark is a man," she said when he had finished. "And a pearl pirate and a murderer! But I don't see why we should be afraid. We haven't any pearls, and I'm afraid we won't ever get any."

"That's right," Rick agreed. "Scotty, what's on your mind?"

Scotty waited until they had passed a group of Frenchmen. "Didn't anything strike you as funny about that collection of Jerrold's?"

"Funny? It was beautiful!" Barby exclaimed. "It was worth a tremendous amount of money."

"That's just the point."

They had reached the beginning of the piers. Rick suddenly caught a glimpse of a familiar silhouette, far out in the bay. He could make out the characteristic lines of a trawler, and this one was painted white, as no commercial fishing boat was likely to be in this part of the world.

"There's the *Tarpon*!" he exclaimed.

Barby and Scotty looked to where he pointed. For long moments they watched the slow progress of the ship.

"It won't be here for quite a while," Barby said. "Finish what you were going to say, Scotty."

"All right. I knew there was something wrong about that collection, but it didn't ring a bell right away. Now I know what it was. It was too complete."

"But Jerrold has plenty of money," Rick objected. "Why shouldn't it be complete?"

"He told us how hard it was to match pearls, didn't he? And listen, I've heard stories about pearlers. They don't live on the pearls they find, you know. Their big income is from the pearl shell. They sell it for making buttons and things like that. When they find a pearl, it's a bonus, sort of. Well, if pearls are that rare, and they really are, imagine how difficult it is to collect a lot of them. I guess even the biggest dealers have trouble matching strings. You know, one pearl may be worth only a couple of hundred, but if you find one exactly like it, their combined value is multiplied. I don't know exactly how much, but as a guess, if each pearl is worth two hundred, put them together and they're worth maybe six or seven hundred. That's because they're hard to match. A matched string like Jerrold's is priceless."

"I begin to see what you mean," Rick said slowly.

“I don’t,” Barby said impatiently.

“Well, if pearls are rare and matching them is so hard, even for a big pearl dealer, how can Jerrold have put together a string like that? How many pearls would you say he had in the collection?”

“I didn’t count them. But there were at least three hundred. Wouldn’t you say so, Rick?”

“At least.”

“Then to match them up,” Scotty continued, “he must have examined about three thousand pearls, at a conservative estimate, because I don’t think one out of ten would match up. Now-do you mean to tell me he matched them by casually meeting pearl salesmen with perhaps ten or twenty pearls to choose from? But the clincher came when I peeked over his shoulder. Do you know what was in the box?”

“More pearls?” Rick guessed.

“There were little boxes,” Scotty said. “They might have contained pearls. There was money, too. A big wad of American dollars. But that wasn’t what interested me. In the bottom of the box there was practically a handful of shark’s teeth.”

Rick whistled. “So that’s how he matched his collection!”

Barby looked from one to the other. “But . . . but if that story Mr. Kenwood told you was right, that means Mr. Jerrold . . .”

“That’s exactly what it means,” Scotty said. “I’ll bet my last franc on it. Jerrold has been dealing with the Phantom Shark!”

CHAPTER V

The Shark Strikes

Out in Noumea harbor, a small launch raced to meet the incoming *Tai pon*. Scotty identified it as the quarantine boat, and pointed out that the trawler was flying the yellow quarantine flag, a matter of routine on entering a strange port.

There was activity on the pier. Two trucks filled with crates arrived and parked near the empty space where the *Tarpon* would dock, then a huge Diesel truck arrived and took up its position.

“Is all this for the *Tarpon*?” Barby asked. “It must be. I don’t see any other ships coming in.”

A clerk who had come with the trucks overheard. He bowed. “Oui, ma’m selle. It ees for ze *Tarpon*.”

Rick guessed from the color of the clerk’s skin and his wiry hair that he was probably a half-caste. “How was it ordered?” he asked.

“By post, m’sieu .FromHonolulu.”

The three turned at a hail from down the pier and saw Van der Klaffens coming toward them. The rotund little Dutchman was perspiring and mopping his face with a large handkerchief.

“My young friends,” he greeted them. “Yonder is your boat, I think.”

“That’s the *Tarpon*, ” Scotty agreed. “What brings you to the dock, sir?”

“Business.”The Dutchman winked. “We Nether- landersare a nation of businessmen, and it happens that my business is with your ship. I returned fromSuva to find that a local firm in which I have an interest has been engaged to supply your craft with foodstuffs and Diesel oil.”

“Is that interesting Mr. Kenwood still here?” Barby asked.

“No, Miss Barbara.At least I do not see his schooner. Did he not say he was sailing with the dawn tide? As you say, he is very interesting. But, also, I am afraid he is a skeptic. I have learned in my years in the Pacific that strange tales must be given some credence. But my Australian friend-he believes nothing. That is why I had no answer yesterday to your question of the Phantom Shark.”

Rick and Scotty exchanged glances, remembering that Kenwood had said much the same thing about Van der Klaffens.

“Do you mean you know something about the Phantom Shark?” Barby asked eagerly.

Van der Klaffens shrugged. “Not much. A few whispers.”

“Please tell us,” Barby pleaded.

“Very well, but as I say, I do not guarantee the truth of what I have heard.However. I first heard of this creature atBatavia . You knowBatavia is the center of much pearl traffic? Ja , it is. In my youth, I dealt in pearls to some extent.” He smiled. “I am afraid I was a smuggler, of sorts. I thought it most romantic and daring to get pearls past the customs men. And it was from the men with whom I dealt that I heard of your Phantom Shark.Nothing definite.Whispers only. They feared to speak the name above a whisper. I have heard tales of pearls worth a rajah’s ransom, and I have heard tales of dead men.”

“Ever hear what the Phantom Shark looks like?” Rick asked.

“Never.I doubt that anyone knows. Always at night he comes, his face hidden. Only his pearls speak for him-his pearls and one other thing, a shark’s tooth held in the palm of his hand. From what I have heard, only men of wealth meet the Phantom Shark in safety. He sells them pearls. The poor-well, there are tales. Even inNoumea the poor know of this man. He is not a pleasant fellow. Men known to be expert pearl divers have been found floating in the bay, the mark of the shark on them.”

Rick looked out to where the *Tarpon* was dropping a pilot ladder for the quarantine men and immigration officers. “Did you ever hear any reason why the Phantom Shark hangs out at Nanatiki and Indispensable?”

Van der Klaffens looked at Barby and shrugged. “I have no wish to frighten you with my old wives’ tales.”

“I’m not frightened,” Barby said stoutly. “Please go on.”

“Well, it is a thing I do not like to repeat, because who knows if it is true? But I have heard of no less than three pearlmen sunk in those waters. It is said that divers have been recovered, dead, still in their diving suits. And always, there was the mark of the shark.”

“But couldn’t real sharks have gotten the divers?” Scotty asked.

“No, I am afraid not. A shark is a coward, do you know that? One probably would not attack a diver in a suit. The diver has only to shoot air bubbles from his cuff at the shark and the beast runs away. So, I believe that the Phantom Shark was the one who left the marks of his teeth in those unfortunate divers.”

Van der Klaffens smiled apologetically. “You will refrain from repeating what I have told you? At least, do not mention my name. Who knows? There may indeed be a Phantom Shark, and I would not like him to resent my tales.”

“We won’t say a word,” Barby promised.

“Your friends are waving,” Van der Klaffens said.

The three turned, to see the *Tarpon* coming closer. The quarantine boat had pulled away. In front of the pilothouse was a group of figures. Puck instantly recognized the small, brown boy, the tall man, and the slender woman. Chahda, Dr. and Mrs. Warren! He waved excitedly, and they waved back.

In a few moments the trawler was swinging smoothly into the dock. Kanaka longshoremen grabbed the lines and made them fast. But before the gangplank was even down, Rick and Scotty had jumped to the deck, held out their hands for Barby, and lifted her aboard.

A small brown tornado descended on them, pounded them unmercifully, then bowed with exquisite grace to Barby.

“Salaam, Memsahib Barbara,” Chahda said. “Is in ‘Merica, 65,607,683 females. So says my Worrold Alm-in-ack. And of all, sister of my friend Rick is most nice.”

Barby shook hands with the Hindu boy, smiling her delight. “I’m glad someone appreciates me,” she said.

Barby blushed and ran to greet Paul and Helen Warren. Dr. Warren was a tall, slender man with a neat brown beard. Mrs. Warren was a slim, attractive woman with graying hair and a keen sense of humor. She kissed Barby and shook hands with Rick and Scotty.

When the customs men had finished inspecting passports, they went ashore. Dr. Warren introduced the three to the other members of the expedition. There were Bill Duncan, the marine biologist, a young, scholarly looking fellow with thick glasses and straw-colored hair bleached almost white by the sun and sea; Carl Ackerman, the elderly chemist, whose principal characteristic was a prominent nose that suffered from the sun; and big Tom Bishop, a hearty, weather-beaten commercial fisherman from Boston who was also master of the *Tarpon*.

The crew was Hawaiian, and they seemed a friendly, happy lot. Rick was relieved. The last crew of the *Tarpon*, under Captain Turk Mallane, had mutinied off Kwangara. The new mate of the vessel was

Jack Pualani, a full-blooded Hawaiian. Although Jack was past middle age, he had the powerful physique of a young man. Rick later learned that he had been a famous Olympic swimmer. He had spent most of his life on American ships, and he had gone to school in the States.

Van der Klaffens came aboard and was introduced all around. After a brief consultation with Tom Bishop, he signaled to the dock. Instantly the ship swarmed with Kanaka longshoremen, each carrying a box of rations. Jack Pualani ran from place to place, trying to be sure the stuff was stowed in the proper holds.

The ship became a bedlam. Rick, trying to talk with Chahda, had difficulty making himself heard.

Dr. Warren joined the two boys. "Rick, I suppose all your baggage is at your hotel?"

"That's right, sir."

"We'll have to get it at once. We've planned to get fuel and supplies aboard and leave right away. Two or three hours should do it."

"Won't you have a chance to see Noumea, sir?"

"We'll all go ashore with you. A brief glimpse will have to do for now, although we hope to put back in before our job is finished."

"I'll round up the others," Rick said.

Rounding up the others wasn't so easy. They were scattered all over the ship. But finally, Rick, Scotty, Barby, Chahda, the Warrens, and the three other members of the expedition made their way through the crowd of longshoremen to the dock. Then Barby and Mrs. Warren had to be helped over the mass of hose that was pumping Diesel oil into the trawler's tanks. Jack Pualani had been left behind to supervise loading. Van der Klaffens remained, too, checking off the supply orders with Jack. Before they left, however, he said, "We should be finished in an hour. And then, I beg of you, be my guests for luncheon? At Le Bagnard."

As they left the pier and walked into the park, Chahda looked around appreciatively. "Nice place, this. Capital of New Caledonia. Big island, has 8,548 square mile, also has 53,245 peoples. Eleven thousand in Noumea. That is what says the Worrold Alm-in-ack."

Rick and Scotty laughed. It was like old times to hear Chahda quoting from *The World Almanac*. A Bombay beggar boy, he had educated himself with only the *Almanac* for his textbook, and he had laboriously memorized everything in it. Because of their deep liking for him, and his loyalty, as proved during the Tibet radar expedition, the Spindrift scientists had taken him to America on their return. He had studied in New England for a time, and had taken part in the Submobile expedition, remaining in Hawaii with the Warrens when the expedition returned to Spindrift. The boys had missed his quick wit.

The party hired Henri's taxi and a less dilapidated second taxi and took a rapid tour of the city. They picked up their baggage and checked out of the hotel, then stopped at Jerrold's hotel to get the purchases they had left. Barby, acting as scribe for the trio, wrote a brief note to Spindrift, while Dr. Warren sent a cable notifying the Brants that the two parties had met on schedule.

Then they repaired to Le Bagnard and found Van der Klaffens waiting, with lunch already ordered. "Your ship is fully stocked and ready to sail," he informed them. "You will want to eat quickly, yes? It is

best if you are out of these waters before dark. There are treacherous reefs.”

By one o’clock , the party was headed back to the ship. The dock was clear now, and the *Tarpons* decks were clean again. Jack Pualani, evidently an efficient mate, had things well under control.

The boys and Barby took their luggage to the proper cabins and deposited it. Rick and Scotty shared their old cabin with Chahda. Barby had a small cabin of her own. Then they hurried out on deck again.

The gangplank was already aboard. Longshoremen were standing by to cast off. In a moment the *Tarpon* would back out and Noumea would be left behind.

Rick and Scotty went to the pilothouse where Tom Bishop and Jack Pualani were standing. Jack went in and took the wheel, while Tom waited on deck to give orders. The ship was shivering a little with the pounding of the big Diesel engines. Up on the bow, a Hawaiian sailor stood by the small winch, ready to reel in the heavy bow hawser.

Van der Klaffens waved from the dock and called, “Bon voyage!”

“Good-by,” Rick called. “And thank you!”

Tom Bishop cupped hands to his mouth. “Slack off”

Rick saw the bow winch turn and hawser run out, giving the longshoremen slack enough to lift the big loop from the dock pilings when the time came.

“Slow astern.”

Jack Pualani repeated the order and rang the engine-room telegraph. The *Tarpon* shuddered and water swirled from under the stern.

“Cast off the stern line.”

The ship was moving now.

“Port your helm!”

“Port helm,” Jack repeated from inside the wheel-house. Suddenly he yelled. “She doesn’t answer!”

Rick jumped to the rail and looked astern. The *Tarpon* had way on now, and was swinging into the dock! As he looked, a steel shore boat slowly drifted under the stern, two natives poling frantically to get out of the way!

Scotty had hurried to the rail with Rick. Now, the fast-thinking ex-Marine made a frantic leap for the bow winch. He jerked the control handle far down, just as the longshoremen on the pier were getting ready to cast off the bowline. The motor whined, the hawser tightened.

There was the groaning of the piles as the full weight of the ship tugged at them, but the *Tarpon* shuddered to a stop. The steel shore boat swung out of the way.

Then Tom Bishop and Jack had control once more. In a moment the stern line was out to the pier again, the engines were dead, and the trawler was being hauled back into the dock. Jack Pualani came out of

the pilothouse, his brown face gray. "I had no rudder control," he said. "I thought we were going to smash!"

Tom Bishop clapped a heavy hand on Scotty's shoulder. "But for this boy, we would have. Son, I never saw anyone move so fast or think so quickly."

If Scotty had not stopped the *Tarpon* by pulling in the bow hawser at high speed, they would have run right over the shore boat, and they would have smashed into the pier, splintering the rudder and probably smashing the bronze screws against the steel boat.

Rick patted his friend on the shoulder. "You always come through in the pinch, Scotty."

"I just happened to be in the right place," Scotty said with a grin.

Tom Bishop and Jack Pualani were already heading down the ladder to the engine room. Rick and Scotty followed.

"This way," Tom said. He led them back through the engine room, past the big Diesels, to where the ship's wheel connected to the rudder.

Rick tried to recall how the ship steered. The wheel in the pilothouse, if he remembered correctly, was connected to a series of shafts by worm gears. Down in the bilge, far aft, the final shaft ended in a crossbar to which heavy steel cables were attached. The cables ran through stuffing boxes out to either side of the rudder.

"Here we are," Tom Bishop said. He lifted an emergency electric torch from its receptacle and shot the beam down. It was the point where the shaft ended in a crossbar. Cables should have been attached to each end of the bar. One was. The other was curled on the deck.

"Broken," Jack Pualani said. "No wonder the helm didn't answer!"

Tom Bishop picked up the end of the cable and rubbed it. "Broken nothing!" he exclaimed. "This has been cut!"

A shiver ran down Rick's back. Sure enough, the cable had every appearance of having been sheared with a heavy instrument, like a cable cutter. There were a few torn strands in the center. Evidently it hadn't been cut completely through. But the first pressure had made it give way.

"Look at the other one," Scotty said. "Maybe that one was cut, too."

Tom Bishop knelt and ran his finger along the cable. It was black with grease. Suddenly the big fisherman let out an exclamation. "Look!"

The boys and Jack bent low over the cable. Like the other one, it had been cut almost through, then the cuts had been filled with grease. If Jack had thrown the helm the other way, this cable would have given as easily as its mate.

Rick caught a glimpse of something white in the quarter inch of bilge water under the cable. He bent and picked it up, and the breath clogged in his throat. He knew now who had cut their cable. The serrated, triangular object in his hand was proof enough.

A shark's tooth!

CHAPTER VI

Barby Asks Some Questions

The members of the expedition held a council of war in the Warrens' cabin.

Except for Barby, Scotty, and Rick, only Jack Pualani had heard of the Phantom Shark.

"I'll tell you about it later," Jack said. "It's only a story, and it won't solve this problem."

Dr. Warren agreed. "I'm not at all certain that finding the tooth means anything. Why should this Phantom Shark, if he exists, want to cripple the ship?"

"To keep us from going to Nanatiki Atoll," Rick guessed.

Tom Bishop brushed the thought aside. "Damage to the ship wouldn't keep us from going there. It would have been only a matter of time before the damage was repaired. The question, it seems to me, is who had an opportunity to cut the cables?"

"And what are we going to do about it?" Scotty asked.

"We'll replace the cables," Bishop said. "Thanks to Scotty's quick action, it isn't serious. We shouldn't be laid up more than two days, provided we can get cable here."

Dr. Warren took over. "All right. Now, all of you think. Who had the opportunity to cut the cables?"

Rick remembered the turmoil on deck. The ship had been crowded with longshoremen. "Any of the stevedores could have slipped below," he pointed out.

Carl Ackerman shook his head. "No Kanaka boy thought up that trick. A Kanaka might have cut the cable, but it probably wouldn't have occurred to him to cut it only to the breaking point and then fill the cuts with grease in case it were inspected."

"Unless he had instructions," Bill Duncan said.

Jack Pualani spoke up. "That Dutchman was here all the time. He didn't leave until the last of the longshoremen got off the ship."

"But he's nice," Barby objected.

Tom Bishop smiled without humor. "Most pleasant and interesting man I ever knew was a burglar. Jack, I think maybe you have something there. Let's call that Dutchman in and ask him to account for himself. He's right outside."

Van der Klaffens had come aboard at once as the *Tarpon* swung back into the dock. Jack left and returned with him. The Dutch trader looked at the circle of serious faces. "The crew is talking," he said. "A shark's tooth was found near the cut steering cables, no?"

"That is correct," Dr. Warren said. "Mr. Van der Klaffens, can you account for your movements all the time you were aboard ship?"

The Dutchman's eyes narrowed. "Ah, so that is the way of the wind!" Suddenly he smiled. "Behold me. I am dressed in a white suit, am I not? And my hands are clean. Is this not the same suit I wore when I met you on the pier, Mr. Brant?"

Rick had to admit that it looked like it.

"You must realize I have had no time to change. Also, your mate should be able to testify that my hands and suit were clean when I went ashore to meet you for lunch."

"That's true," Jack Pualani said.

"Then I rest my defense. Could I have gone into a dirty engine room, cut your greasy cable and filled the cuts with black grease and still show no mark?"

"You've got something there," Tom Bishop admitted. "You couldn't have done it and come out unmarked. Whoever did the job had to work in a tight space. He must have been marked with grease."

"How about the clerk?" Barby remarked.

"What clerk?" Jack Pualani asked. "Mr. Van der Klaffens checked die lists with me."

"Wait!" Van der Klaffens interrupted. "Do you refer to the man with whom you talked as I came down the pier this morning?"

Scotty nodded. "That's the one. He looked like a half-caste."

"He was no clerk of mine," Van der Klaffens said decisively. "I had never seen him before."

"But he came with your trucks," Rick objected.

"That may be true. I will find out." Van der Klaffens walked to the door. "I feel that the honor of my concern is at stake. I will question my drivers and find out about this man." He bowed and left.

"I didn't see any clerk that fits the description. How was he dressed?" Tom Bishop asked.

"Khaki pants and shirt," Scotty remembered.

Dr. Warren rose. "He's probably the one. Tom, will you see about repairs? I think I will consult the Noumea police. The rest of you might as well amuse yourselves. We'll be in port for some time, it appears."

Mrs. Warren and the two scientists elected to remain aboard ship. Jack Pualani also remained aboard, to keep an eye open for further sabotage attempts. The four youngsters decided to go ashore with Tom Bishop, to see about repairs.

As they walked the length of the pier into town, Rick asked a question that had been on his mind. "What do you suppose that steel boat was trying to do? You'd think they would have more sense than to pole out from behind the pier just as we got underway."

Scotty looked at him sharply. "Maybe you've got something. If we'd hit them, the screws would have been dented, or maybe even broken, and we'd be in a much worse mess."

"I doubt that they poled into the way on purpose," Tom Bishop said. "But it's possible."

"Maybe we'd better find that boat and ask the men some questions," Scotty suggested.

"No harm in trying," Tom agreed. "But don't push them too hard or they might resent it with knives. These people are pleasant enough, but touchy."

Scotty nodded. "Coming, Rick?"

Rick hesitated. "How about Barby?"

"I'm going for a walk in the park," Barby said.

"What for?"

"I just want to."

Rick saw by the stubborn set of her chin that she was determined. Knowing Barby as he did, he realized argument would get him nowhere.

"I go with Scotty," Chahda said.

"Okay," Rick said grudgingly. "I'll stick with Barby."

"You don't need to," Barby said.

"I feel like a stroll myself," Rick said grimly. His sister was unpredictable. He sensed some reason behind her sudden yearning for a walk through the park.

At the end of the pier, the party separated. Tom Bishop went to the left, toward a water-front store that looked as though it might be a ship chandler's. Scotty and Chahda turned right, to follow the water front in search of the shore boat. Rick and Barby walked toward the park.

Once out of earshot of the others, Rick said, "Come on, towhead. What's on your mind?"

"Well," Barby said reasonably, "if we want to find out who cut the cables, and why, we have to find the Phantom Shark, don't we?"

Rick grinned. "That's all. Dr. Warren went to the police, remember? And probably the police have been hunting the Shark for years without success. So how do you expect to find him?"

"We women have intuition," Barby said loftily. "I wouldn't expect you to understand. I can't imagine why there aren't more women detectives."

Rick could, but he didn't feel like arguing the point. They reached the park and walked along the shady walks. Now and then they passed people sitting on the benches, but Barby kept going. Rick let her lead the way. She evidently had some destination in mind.

Around a turn in the lane, they found it. A park bench, occupied by old Barthelemi. Barby gave him her best smile, which, as Rick had once said, could charm the flowers off the wallpaper. She sat down beside the old man.

"How are you, Monsieur Barthelemi?"

"I am well, Mademoiselle Barbara," the oldster replied gravely. "Thanks to you, I have dined. Now I enjoy the sunshine. It is warming to my old bones."

Rick sat down on the other side of the old man and contented himself with listening.

"You were kind," Barby said. "You warned us about the Phantom Shark."

Barthelemi stiffened. He looked anxiously up and down the path, then, to make sure they were not overheard, he rose and explored the bougainvillea shrub under which the bench rested. Satisfied, he said in a low voice, "You understand that even the name is dangerous? Mademoiselle, I beg of you, do not even think it!"

"We have to," Barby said. "The Shark cut our rudder cables."

The old man sucked in his breath. "I was afraid," he groaned. "I knew you should not go aboard that ship!"

"How did you know?" Rick asked quickly.

Barthelemi shrugged. "As I told you. I read your destination in the paper."

"But you know more about the Shark than that," Barby said coaxingly. "I know you do. Please, Monsieur Barthelemi, tell us who he is?"

He shook his head. "I do not know. Even if I did, I could not give you such dangerous information."

Barby's blue eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Even if you don't know who he is, you know how he works, don't you? You know that the American who insulted you yesterday buys pearls from him."

Barthelemi trembled violently. "Sacrenom How did you find that out? I could have sworn that only I ..."

Barby sat back, satisfied. "And how did you know?"

He made another quick inspection to be sure no one was listening. "By chance. Only by chance. There is a small hut where I sometimes sleep. It is on the beach, near Anse Vata. You know that place? I was there, asleep. I woke up and I heard this American. He was on the beach itself, and he talked with a person who had come in a small boat. I could see the boat."

"Could you see the other man?" Rick asked eagerly.

“Non. It was not possible. It was very dark. The flashlight carried by the American reflected once on his face, and I saw that he wore a black hood. Also, his clothes were black, and I believe he wore gloves. I was afraid, so I did not move. But I heard the American speak. He said that these were fine, and I believe he spoke of pearls. But also, he said they were not enough. He spoke of great sums of money. Never did I hear the . . . the other speak. He would nod, or he would shake his head. Then the American asked, ‘When can I see you again? When will you have more?’ And the creature in black wrote a number in the sand, which he erased at once. I think that much money changed hands, but I do not know. Then the . . . the other one got in his boat and rowed away, toward He Nous . You know? It is that island in the bay. The American walked to the road and went down it toward Noumea . And that is all, I swear. I do not know any more.”

Barby shivered. “But you actually saw him!”

“What night was that?” Rick asked.

“It was just three nights ago. I will never forget that night, Monsieur.”

Barby gave Rick a meaning look, which he interpreted correctly. He took a few francs from his pocket.

The old man shook his head. “Please. Yesterday I was hungry and you were kind. But I still have your money; I do not need more.”

Rick respected the old man’s pride. He put the francs away. “One more question, please. You didn’t see the number the Shark wrote in the sand?”

“Non. I could not see. I do not even know if it was a number. That is only what I think.”

The two Brants thanked him, then walked in the direction Scotty and Chahda had taken.

“How’s my intuition?” Barby asked pertly. “Pretty good, don’t you think?”

Rick grinned. “Not bad, for a beginner. Do you know, we’ve proved that Van der Klaffens isn’t the Shark?”

“Because he was in Suvathree nights ago. What time was it when we landed there?”

“Around midnight , and he was waiting. He’s in the clear, all right.”

Barby wrinkled her nose thoughtfully. “How about Mr. Kenwood? He was here three nights ago, and I remember Van der Klaffens said he traded in shell. He must have meant pearl shell.”

“How do you know?” Rick looked at her in astonishment.

“My book. *Daughter of the Moon*. It’s all about pearls.”

“I’d better borrow it,” Rick said.

“Not on your life,” Barby replied firmly.

Rick got a glimpse of Scotty and Chahda far down the water front. The boys were walking toward them. Rick and Barby stopped and waited.

“It couldn’t be Kenwood,” Rick said. “He’s gone. He couldn’t have cut the cables, anyway. And don’t forget what Jerrold said.”

“I remember. When he offered to buy some pearls for me, he said he would meet the man who had them tomorrow night. That’s tonight. And wasn’t he careful not to say who the man was!”

“For plenty good reason,” Rick said. He hailed Scotty and Chahda. “What luck?”

They shook their heads. Then, as they came to within conversation distance, Scotty said disgustedly, “We still don’t know. We found the boat and the men, but we didn’t get a thing out of them.”

“But we got some information,” Barby said proudly. She told them of what they had learned from old Barthelemi.

Scotty nodded his approval. “Looks like our little sister has the makings of a detective.”

Barby’s nose went into the air. “Makings, huh?” she said tartly. “Well, I’ve uncovered more information than either of you. So there!”

She took Chahda’s arm and half dragged him away.

Scotty started to follow, but Rick put a hand on his arm.

“Wait a minute. I have a brain storm. Remember what Jerrold said about seeing the man who has the pearls? Well, that’s tonight.”

Scotty nodded. “Got it. We keep an eye on Mr. Jerrold.”

“That’s it. We’ll have to sneak away without Barby knowing, but we can do it. I have a hunch that brother Jerrold will lead us to the Phantom Shark!”

CHAPTER VII

The Watcher on the Beach

Sometimes it seemed to Rick that there was a special angel who looked out for him. He had worried about getting away from the *Tarpon*, knowing that Dr. Warren would certainly object to his tracking Jerrold.

Rick cooked up various schemes with the help of Scotty, but Dr. Warren returned from his visit to the authorities and made them all unnecessary. The police chief, with a shrug of the shoulders, had promised an investigation, but had held out no hope. The police had been concerned with this Phantom Shark for years, but to no avail. Dr. Warren, disgusted with the chief’s defeatist attitude, had demanded to see the governor. The governor had been most polite, and had insisted that they discuss the matter at a formal dinner in honor of the visiting scientists, at his residence.

“That invitation didn’t include us, did it?” Rick asked anxiously.

Dr. Warren smiled his understanding. “Not anxious to dine with the governor, eh, Rick? Well, we’ll interpret his invitation to mean only those of voting age. Unless Scotty, Barby, and Chahda want to go.”

Here Mrs. Warren interrupted. “We’ll take Barbara with us. And, Chahda, you may come along as her escort. I suspect that Rick and Scotty will never miss us.”

Barby glanced suspiciously at the two boys, but their faces were blank. She made a face and then exclaimed, “That will be wonderful, Aunt Helen!”

So, at eight-thirty in the evening, because the sailors had taken the opportunity to go ashore, only Rick and Scotty and Jack Pualani were left aboard ship. The two boys sat on the afterdeck, looking out into the fast-darkening harbor.

“Time to go,” Rick said.

They walked around to the opposite side of the deck where Jack Pualani had a chair pulled up next to the gangplank.

“Going ashore?” he asked.

“For a while,” Rick replied.

The boys hurried along the pier and into the town. It was almost fully dark now, and there were few lights. Only a handful of people were abroad. On the hill above the town, near the great cathedral that was Noumea’s principal landmark, they saw bright lights and guessed that it was the governor’s house.

“They’ll be returning to the ship about half past ten,” Scotty said. “Hope Jerrold doesn’t wait until then.”

“He won’t. This town goes to bed early. Bet he waits only until things have quieted down.”

It was a good guess. They took up stations in an alley, next to the hotel where Jerrold had his suite. There were lights in his sitting room, and once they saw him silhouetted against the light. Then, about a half hour later, the lights went out.

Rick squeezed Scotty’s arm. “Here we go. We’d better separate. Then, if he spots one of us, the other one can keep after him.”

“Good idea. And what do we do when we find this Phantom Shark?”

That stopped Rick. He hadn’t thought that far ahead. “I don’t know. Try to get a look at his face, I suppose. If that isn’t possible, try to follow him.”

“Suppose he’s in a boat again?”

“Keep moving with him, along the shore. He’ll have to put in somewhere, especially if it’s only a rowboat, as old Barthelemi said.”

“Okay. I’ll hike down the street.”

Scotty moved noiselessly away and Rick was left alone. The town was quiet now and lights were winking out in the houses.

Rick flattened against the wall as the big American came out of the hotel, lighting a cigar. For a moment Jerrold stood still, then, the cigar drawing well, he moved off toward the main street. Rick let him get half a block ahead, then slipped after him.

Jerrold was in no hurry. He walked slowly, savoring his cigar and evidently enjoying the night air. Sometimes Rick had to lean against a building or a tree to keep from catching up. Scotty was nowhere to be seen, nor did Rick expect to see him. When it came to tracking, the ex-Marine had few peers.

The way led along a street called Rue de General Gallieni . There were no stores now, and the houses were farther apart. The street was approaching the water front.

As they reached the outskirts of town, Jerrold threw his cigar away. He whirled suddenly and looked back. Rick melted into the shadow of a clump of brush. For long moments Jerrold watched, then he turned and started off again with lengthened stride. Rick realized they were heading toward Anse Vata . It was the way Henri had driven them in his car.

The road was at the water's edge now. It followed the water in a sweeping curve, the other side of the highway varying from flat land to occasional hummocks. Half a mile down was a good-sized hill. Rick remembered that the road ran around the hill, cut away from the water for a short distance, then went straight, paralleling the sea. He tried to recall if he had seen any houses on the road and couldn't remember any. He did recall the shack Barthelemi had mentioned. It was little more than a lean-to. Odds were against the old man being there. He would be too frightened to return, just in case the Phantom Shark frequented the place.

Rick kept to the side of the road, ready to drop behind a convenient bush in case Jerrold should turn suddenly. There was no moon, but the stars were fully out and very bright. He could see the man dimly ahead of him.

A couple of times he looked for Scotty, but there was no sign of his friend. He couldn't be sure whether Scotty was ahead or behind, or even to one side, climbing over the hummocks.

Jerrold turned to watch the road as they rounded the corner of the big hill. Rick saw the man stop and he dropped to his knees, moving sideways into the shelter of a big rock. Presently Jerrold continued on, evidently satisfied.

Jerrold passed the hill and continued along the beach road at a faster clip. Rick surveyed the terrain carefully as he went. Along the rocky beach, the road was straight. On the side away from the water was a flat stretch, then the beginning of a high ridge. A thousand yards beyond the first hill was another, around which the road made a turn. Right behind the second hill was the sandy Anse Vata beach where Barthelemi's hut was located.

As Jerrold reached the second hill, Rick hesitated. Then, instead of following the road, he cut behind the hill. It was hard going, over rocks and thornbush , but he was very quiet. Presently he came out on a knoll overlooking the beach. He could see Jerrold clearly, silhouetted against the white sand and the water. Now to find a good vantage point.

Almost at the edge of the road was a clump of brush, a good big one that would hide him very well. But

he would have to cross an open space to get to it. He estimated his chances. They were good, unless Jerrold turned around. He was facing out to sea, evidently waiting for the Phantom Shark to come by boat.

Rick crawled down the knoll and reached the bottom safely, then, bent very low, he ran, careful to place his feet correctly. He was halfway to the brush when Jerrold turned. Instantly he froze, sinking to the ground. For a long moment Jerrold surveyed the hill behind him, then resumed his gazing out to sea. Rick was in the clump of brush with three long steps. Moving carefully, he wriggled to its very center and a little beyond. Now, by moving a branch, he had an excellent view of the beach.

There was no sign of the expected visitor. Jerrold waited for long minutes, then sat down on the sand. Rick kept a careful watch in all directions, just in case the Phantom Shark decided to come by land. He wondered where Scotty had disappeared to. But then, his friend could have been within yards of him and he wouldn't have known it. He stirred a little. Mosquitoes had found him. They whined around his ears and almost drove him crazy. Now and then he brushed some of them away, but cautiously. He didn't dare slap.

Sand grated a few yards away. Rick froze. Then, with infinite slowness, he picked up a handful of leaf mold and smeared his face and hands. Why hadn't he done it before? He was wearing dark slacks and shirt. Now, with his face and hands darkened, he couldn't be seen. He turned, very carefully, so as not to disturb a single twig. A short distance away, behind a hummock of earth, a figure was just settling to the ground. The figure was indistinct, but he knew it wasn't Scotty.

Where was Scotty?

He faced forward again, not even daring to breathe normally in case the unexpected watcher had good ears. Then he saw Jerrold stand, and beyond him, he saw the dark bulk of a boat.

The Phantom Shark had come!

He kept his eyes on the figure across the road, and on the dark bulk beyond that was the Phantom Shark's boat. Now and then he turned his head, very slowly, to look at the figure next to him. The man, whoever he was, hadn't moved.

The boat grew more distinct as it neared the shore. It was a small, narrow ship's dory, rowed by its single occupant. Again he wondered. Where was Scotty?

He had lost track of time. Surely hours had passed. He wished for a look at his watch, but the luminous dial was hidden by his shirt sleeve and he didn't dare expose it.

There was the sound of wood grating on sand as the rowboat was beached. He strained to see as a figure climbed out and walked to meet Jerrold. Posture, walk, general distribution of bulk—all those things played as great a part in identification as a face. He knew he probably wouldn't see the Phantom Shark's face. But although Jerrold was fairly distinct and recognizable, the newcomer was only a blurred bulk.

Jerrold's voice came to him, low but distinct. "Did you bring them?"

The dark figure nodded.

"All of them?"

The figure shook its head.

Rick wondered why he dared to meet Jerrold in such an open spot, and decided it was about the safest place. The beach was unoccupied and few people came this way at night. His wealthy customer wasn't apt to give him away; that would cut off the supply of pearls needed to match the priceless necklace. Should a car come, which was unlikely, the Shark had only to get into his boat and row away. Jerrold would not need to explain his presence, even to the police.

"Let me see them," Jerrold said. He took a flashlight from his pocket and shot a narrow beam down on what Rick could clearly see were black gloved hands. He caught a glimpse of white in the gloves and guessed they were pearls.

There was disappointment in Jerrold's voice. "Is that all?"

The dark figure shrugged.

"You said you would have enough when I met you last time."

Another shrug.

"When will you have them?"

The figure stopped and wrote something in the sand, then erased it.

"I can't wait that long," Jerrold said irritably. "I must leave here."

The black figure turned and walked to the boat.

"Wait," Jerrold cried. "All right. How much for these?"

The Shark wrote again in the sand.

It was a long minute before Jerrold spoke again. "Here's your money. You're bleeding me, because you know I'll pay to finish the necklace. But don't push me too far. And remember, if these don't match, you get them back."

The figure nodded.

The flashlight clicked off. Then the Phantom Shark turned and jumped into the rowboat. A powerful push with an oar shoved it into the low surf.

Determined not to let the Phantom Shark leave without asking him some questions, Rick was in the middle of the road before he remembered the watcher. He turned in time to see a figure lunging at him, and his action was instinctive. He reached forward and grasped a thick wrist. Then, as the man reached him, he fell backward, his leg pushing upward into his attacker's stomach, throwing the man completely over his head.

But the weight of the man's flying body snapped his head down sharply against the paved road. The strength drained out of him. He sat up dizzily and turned to see his attacker get to his feet again and charge.

Rick wasn't there to meet the charge. He ducked to one side, and his attacker flailed past, reaching for him. The boy shook his head, still groggy from the bang on the pavement. He stepped back as the man rushed again, and his foot met dry, slippery grass. He had stepped off the road. He fell to one knee, and the driving figure smashed into him with stunning force. Locked together, they rolled off the strip of thin grass to the beach.

Rick brought his hands up sharply against the man's throat and broke his hold, then he struggled to his feet and jumped to one side, prepared to meet the next charge. It came with jarring force, and the soft sand betrayed him. He fell forward, his arms around his opponent's waist. He heard the man's heavy breathing, then winced at hammer blows on the back of his head. With a heave he threw the man from him and followed up with a rush that drove his head into the pit of the attacker's stomach.

The man fell back a little, against the bank. One hand flashed to his hip and Rick's breath caught at the gleam of steel.

Rick leaped forward and shot an uppercut that started at his shoe tops. The shock of impact ran up his arm and jarred him.

The assailant's knees buckled. He dropped to the sand on his face.

Rick whirled, wondering about Jerrold. For an instant he didn't see the big man, then he saw two figures struggling on the beach. He ran to them, unsteady in the sand, just as the smaller of the two figures catapulted away from the pile and rolled over.

Scotty!

Rick tensed for a dive at Jerrold, but the big man's voice stopped him cold.

"Don't try it. I've got a gun pointed right at your middle."

He could tell from the tone that the American wasn't fooling.

Jerrold got to his feet as Scotty sat up. "I don't know what this is all about," he muttered, "but keep your distance because I won't hesitate to put a slug through you and call it self-defense. What's the idea, anyway?" He took the light from his pocket and flashed it at Scotty. The boy blinked in the sudden glare. "Why did you jump me?"

"Your man jumped my friend," Scotty said coolly.

"My man?" Jerrold shot the light at Rick's assailant. He walked over to the huddled form and turned him over. It was the half-caste clerk!

"Never saw him before," Jerrold said flatly. "Now, come on. Talk."

"All right," Rick said. "We're here because we knew you were going to meet the Phantom Shark. We want him, because he cut our rudder cables."

Jerrold laughed harshly. "You're lucky he didn't cut your throats. Maybe he will yet. And how did you know I was going to meet him?"

"You told us," Scotty said. "So don't get careless with your gun, because if we got hurt, our friends

would pass the word around that you told us, and it would be your throat the Shark would work on.”

Jerrold chuckled again, and there was merriment in it this time. “All right, kids. We’ll call it a stalemate. I admire your nerve, but take a tip and keep quiet about this. People who stick their noses into my business get hurt.”

He put the gun and the flashlight back into his pocket and walked to the road. He turned, waved jauntily, then hiked rapidly toward town.

“Scotty, are you all right?” Rick asked anxiously.

“Just a lump on my jaw. He’s strong as an ox. I thought he was going to jump you, so I tackled him.”

Just then the unconscious man groaned.

“He’s coming to. Watch him, Scotty. He’s got a knife.”

Scotty’s hands patted the clerk’s clothes and came up with a wicked-looking stiletto. He tossed it into the surf. “What do we do with him?”

Rick knelt beside the clerk. “Ask him some questions.” He shook the man. “What were you doing here?”

No answer.

“He won’t talk,” Scotty said. “I know his type. Better tie him up and leave him here, then we can send the police for him.”

“Good suggestion, but what with?”

Scotty pointed to his belt.

As they began to unbuckle their belts the half-caste made a convulsive movement, rose to his feet and dashed across the road, vanishing into the brush.

“Just what did we get out of this junket?” Scotty remarked sourly.

Rick scratched. “Mosquito bites,” he said ruefully.

CHAPTER VIII

The Mate’s Story

Rick looked at his watch. Amazingly, it was only a little after half past nine ! A lot had certainly happened in a short time. He scratched a mosquito bite furiously and stated, “We’d better get humping. We can still get back aboard ship before the Warrens and the others return.”

Scotty and Rick walked rapidly as they talked, and soon a few scattered lights showed that Noumea was right ahead.

“Almost there,” Rick remarked. “By the way, where were you before the battle started?”

“Buried in the sandbank when that half-caste clerk jumped you. Wonder what was he doing there?”

Rick thought about it for a few moments. Finally he said, “I think he was there as a guard. Otherwise, why would he have jumped me like that? We know the Phantom Shark is pretty cautious. Scotty, you were closer than I. What did he look like?”

“Search me,” Scotty replied. “He not only covers his face but his body. No chance of recognition. I think you’re right about the clerk being a guard. I’m not proud of the way we let him get away. I wouldn’t be surprised to see him turn up with some more mischief like cutting the *Tarpons* steering cables.”

“No proof,” Rick objected. “We surmise he is a confederate of the Phantom Shark, but how could we prove it?”

“Maybe we can,” Scotty answered. “Jerrold and the Phantom Shark are going to meet again on the fifteenth of the month. Jerrold turned on his flashlight and I saw the Shark write the date in the sand.”

“Did you see how much Jerrold paid for the pearls?” Rick asked.

Scotty shook his head. “I tried, but he stepped in front of what the Shark wrote.”

Rick turned the information over in his mind. “Listen. Jerrold expected to get enough pearls to fill his string. The Shark didn’t have them. But he’ll have some more on the fifteenth. Where is he going to get them?”

“Probably rob some poor Kanaka boy,” Scotty guessed.

“Not according to your way of figuring. He couldn’t get that many pearls from a hundred Kanaka boys—not and have them match.”

“Well, however he gets them, we’ll be a good many miles away from here by the fifteenth,” Scotty said resignedly.

They had reached the city. In a few moments they were walking up the pier to greet Jack Pualani.

The big Hawaiian tilted back in his deck chair and looked them over. “A pretty sad-looking pair.”

Rick saw that Jack had a twinkle in his eye. He was curious as to what had happened. The boy decided to take a chance. “We’ll tell you the whole story,” he offered, “if you’ll keep it quiet until I have a chance to see Dr. Warren alone.”

Jack grinned. “I’ve been guilty of a lot of things in my time. But talking too much was never one of them. Shoot.”

Rick did. He started at the moment he and Scotty had left the ship, with Scotty adding his own

comments.

Jack Pualani listened closely, and his eyes showed his admiration for the venturesome pair.

“Miracle you didn’t get hurt,” he said. “But I guess you can take care of yourselves. Too bad that cable cutter got away. Well, what’s the next step?”

“I don’t know,” Rick confessed. He sat down on the deck next to Jack’s chair and rested his back against the wheelhouse. “I’d like to know what reason the Shark had for sabotaging us. If we knew that, we’d be able to figure out the next step.”

“That’s easy,” Jack said.

Rick and Scotty looked at him in surprise.

“Can’t you guess? Only reason he could have would be to keep us away from Nanatiki for a while.”

“But he isn’t in Nanatiki. He’s here,” Rick objected.

Jack shrugged. “Any reason why he can’t leave here? He must be getting his pearls from somewhere, and both the Dutchman and the Australian said he hangs out near Nanatiki.”

It made sense. It made excellent sense, Rick thought.

“Fifteen days,” Scotty mused. “That doesn’t leave much time for him to get his pearls, does it? He has to get there by boat. That must mean he isn’t planning a robbery. If he were, he wouldn’t have set a schedule.”

Jack Pualani stood up and stretched. “Better change your clothes. I’ll go into the galley and make us some chocolate, then, when you get back, I’ll spin you a yarn about the Phantom Shark.”

A few minutes later the boys and Jack Pualani were seated on deck with hot cups of chocolate. But before Jack had a chance to begin his yarn there was a hail from the dock. It was the Warrens and Barby and Chahda returning from the governor’s palace. The Warrens said good night and gave Barbara a very pointed hint about the efficacy of beauty sleep. But when she found out that Jack Pualani was in the midst of a story she and Chahda hung back.

Jack took time out to light a very large and very odorous pipe. “I’d heard about the Phantom Shark for a long while,” he began, “but I always dismissed the yarn as being folklore. We Hawaiians have a lot of folk stories about shark gods, and man-sharks, and things like that.”

“Was this before the war?” Back asked.

“No. It was about two years ago. As I said, I thought the stories were just good yams. But then I found out a friend of mine had actually seen the Phantom Shark.”

They were listening attentively.

“A lot of the stories about the Phantom Shark described the pearls he had. Some even said they were as big as golf balls. Pearls don’t grow that big, of course. I heard tales that he had sold pearls to tourists, and that was a new wrinkle. When a mythical shark god starts being a salesman, I give up. Anyway, the

story my friend told me was about a rich tourist. He had been trying to match up a set of pearls for his daughter's wedding present. He was in a hurry, and he didn't care how much he paid. He could probably have matched the set at a pearl dealer's, except for one thing: The set was made up of black pearls."

Rick had never before heard of black pearls. "That's a funny color to collect," he said.

"They're very rare, and very valuable," Barby said. "What kind of set was it?"

"Earrings, a bracelet, and a pendant. He had bought some in Java, some in the Sulu Sea region, and some in Ceylon. He had about ten, and he needed about five more. Well, he was staying at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. One day he got back from dinner, and there was a typewritten note on his telephone stand. It said that if he wanted enough black pearls to finish the set, he was to row a boat to a point just outside of Kewalo Basin. He was to tell no one. He was to bring a hundred thousand dollars in medium denomination bills, and he had ten days to get the cash. The pearls would be in a can. If he wanted them, he was to take them and leave the money. If not, he could just row back to shore and forget it. He could go by daylight, just before evening, so he could be sure robbery wasn't in the wind." "Was the note signed?" Scotty asked. "No. But wrapped in it was a single shark's tooth." "Go on," Barby pleaded. "What did he do?" "He cabled his bank in New York, and had a courier sent to Hawaii by air with the money. He had the fever, all right. Man starts matching pearls and it gets him. Well, just as instructed, he rowed out past the reef, and found a big tin floating there. It was one of those five-gallon gasoline tins with a screw top. Inside were five black pearls, and they were just exactly what he wanted. There was even an odd-shaped one that was perfect for a pendant. This man took the pearls, put his money in the can, screwed the cover on tight and rowed back to shore. He was perfectly satisfied with the deal. He figured he had kept his part of the bargain, so he decided there was nothing wrong in seeing what happened to the money. He invited a few friends to keep watch with him. They all borrowed powerful glasses, then went up on the roof of the hotel, just about dusk. They could see the can bobbing around the swell. Did I say it was anchored? With a rope tied to a big hunk of coral."

"What a chance," Rick said longingly. "He must have used a small boat. They could have trailed him."

"Not so fast. Listen to the rest. These people watched until it was almost dark, then there was a swirl of water next to the can. They saw it clearly. They also saw a giant silver fin. The can vanished under the water, and so did the fin. And that was all there was to it."

Jack paused. "Sounds incredible, doesn't it? But remember there were reliable witnesses, including my friend, and they all saw the same thing. They got a powerboat and went out to where the can had been. It was only about ten feet deep. My friend went over the side and hunted on the bottom, using the ship's searchlight to see by. He found the rope, and the coral it was tied to. There was no sign of the can. He brought the rope up and they examined it. The upper end had been sheared, as though a knife had been used. A shark could have sheared it in the same way."

For long minutes Rick stared at the starry sky. "It couldn't have been a real shark," he said finally. "I can't swallow that."

Jack nodded. "Same here. But have you any other ideas?"

"Diving suit," Scotty suggested.

"Never saw one with a fin, or one that traveled along the surface and collected tin cans."

Rick sighed. “Nothing about it makes any sense. Let’s sum up what we know. He collects his money while in the form of a shark as well as in the form of a man. He sells pearls to anyone with money enough. He gets them by robbing Kanaka boys. He also gets them from a cache he has at Nanatiki. He doesn’t like ships to go to Nanatiki, so he cuts their rudder cables. Or maybe he swims through pores in the wood into the bilge water and bites the cables in two. His sales area covers the Pacific from Batavia to Rabaul to Noumea to Honolulu . Maybe even to Tahiti . He has an assistant who hides in bushes. He also has a rowboat, probably a ship’s boat off whatever craft he uses to get around in. He gets rid of people he doesn’t like either by biting them or cutting their throats with a knife made of shark’s teeth. Poor people are afraid of him, but rich tourists do business with him.”

Rick rose and looked at his friends. “And I’m sick of him,” he finished. “I’m going to bed. Good night.” He scratched one ankle, and added as an afterthought, “After I get something to put on these bites, that is. Anyway, I suppose I should be glad I got them from mosquitoes and not from the Phantom Shark!”

On his way to his cabin Rick noticed that light still showed under the door of the Warren cabin. This was a good chance to tell the scientist of the events of the evening. He tapped on the door. Dr. Warren, in pajamas and bathrobe, came to the door.

“What’s up, Rick? Anything wrong?” he asked.

As briefly as possible Rick told Dr. Warren what had happened at Anse Vata . His own cabin was dark when he returned to it some fifteen minutes later, and Scotty and Chahda were asleep.

CHAPTER IX

Off for Nanatiki

“THE Shark miscalculated,” Scotty said. “If he wanted to keep us from going to Nanatiki he should have done more than just cut the rudder cables.”

Rick watched the flurry of activity on the repair barge under the *Tarpons* stern and agreed. A French firm had sent its men to repair the damage. Already new cables had been attached to the T bar within the hull. Now they were being passed through the stuffing boxes into the water. By midafternoon the new cables would be attached to the rudder and the ship would be ready to sail. It would take that long because the cables had to be spliced in eye splices through the rudder rings.

“I don’t think he was depending on the cables alone,” he mused. “That was just part of it. Remember the steel boat? I think he planned on us backing into it. We would have stove in the rudder and dented the propellers.”

“Dented the screws,” Scotty corrected. “Ships are driven by screws, not propellers.”

“Technicalities,” Bill Duncan grunted.

Rick smiled at the young biologist. “We’ve been so busy with the Phantom Shark that we haven’t had time for science. How about telling us what we’re supposed to be doing?”

Bill Duncan polished his thick glasses. "I'll sum it up briefly. You know, of course, that about one third of the world population is perpetually hungry? Well, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations hopes to correct that situation. We are one of several expeditions assigned to hunt new fishing grounds. Clear enough?"

"It's clear," Rick agreed, "but how do we go about finding new fishing grounds? Just keep fishing?"

"I wish that were all. Fish are everywhere, but not in commercial quantities. We know that fish gather at certain places because of a combination of circumstances. Water temperature, food supply, currents, geological formation of the land under the sea ... all those things play an important part. We have to find places where the proper combination of factors occur."

"I can understand why Dr. Warren was picked for this job," Rick said. "How about the rest of you?"

"I'm interested in the private life of the fish. Paul will chart bottom conditions, temperature, salinity, currents, and so on. I'll work on food supplies, classify what fish we find, predict fish population, and things like that. Carl Ackerman, the chemist, will help me, and in addition he'll analyze the fish we find for possible commercial uses besides food. Fish oil, for instance, is very important. Tom Bishop knows just about all there is to know of fishing methods. He'll determine the most commercially feasible methods of catching what we find. Mrs. Warren will act as secretary and keep the records up to date."

"Why are we going to Nanatiki?" Rick asked.

"Because it's a central point of the area we plan to survey."

Dr. Warren came out on deck and called to Duncan. The marine biologist left the boys and went to join his chief.

Rick consulted his watch. He was getting hungry. "Isn't it about time Barby and Chahda and the others came back?"

Barby and Chahda had gone ashore with Mrs. Warren and Carl Ackerman to take some Kodachrome shots. They were due back by lunchtime. Tom Bishop and Jack Pualani were supervising the installation of the new cables. Dr. Warren, after an unsatisfactory consultation with the police officials who had come aboard for a brief time, had gone to work on his records. The boys had elected to remain on the ship and had spent the morning doing nothing.

Promptly at noon, the shore party returned, accompanied by the Dutch trader. Van der Klaffens reported to Dr. Warren and the boys. "I inquired about the clerk you mentioned. My truck driver informed me that the man appeared outside the warehouse and begged for a ride to the pier. Once he reached here, he left the truck and my driver didn't see him again."

It was what Rick had expected. He wondered again about the identity of the Phantom Shark. Van der Klaffens was out, because he had been in Suva during a meeting between the Shark and Jerrold. Besides, the Shark had to have a boat to get from island to island.

"Do you own a seagoing boat, Mr. Van der Klaffens?" he asked.

"I did before the war. Since then I have discovered it is less expensive to ship on other people's vessels than to pay for the upkeep of one of my own."

Kenwood owned a boat, Rick remembered. And he dealt in pearl shell. True, he had left Noumea yesterday morning at dawn, but how far had the Australian gone? He might have stayed inside the barrier reef instead of sailing north. If so, he could easily have rowed to last night's rendezvous.

"I wonder if we'll meet Mr. Kenwood," he said. "What is the name of his schooner, sir?"

"The *Kookaburra*. You recognize the word? It is a famous Australian bird. Possibly you will meet Kenwood if you pass close to the New Hebrides. He will be working his way northward, from port to port."

"Where do you suppose he is now?" Scotty inquired.

"Probably he is in Vila today. That is the capital of the New Hebrides, located on the island of Efate. It is not far, perhaps two hundred and fifty miles."

"It would be fun to meet him," Rick said. "Maybe* we could even talk with him by radio."

"I'm afraid not. He has a receiver for weather reports, but I think that is all. However, if you do see him, give him my best."

"We will," Rick promised. "You seem to know him very well."

"Quite well. We came out to this area at about the same time, and I think we have met at almost every port in the islands. He is much more adventurous than I. Where he goes in his own small craft, I fly or go by interisland steamer. I am the businessman. He is a businessman, but he is also something of an explorer. He delights in odd places where few white men ever go. I think profit means little to him. He does not make much money, but he does enjoy life."

After lunch, Van der Klaffens departed, offering his hospitality when they reached Noumea again. The boys and Barby walked with him to the end of the pier and took a last look at the city. By the time they returned, Tom Bishop and Jack had tested the rudder cables and the repair barge was moved away. This time, nothing would go wrong. The lines were cast off and the *Tarpon* backed smoothly from the pier, reversed course, and headed out of the harbor toward the barrier reef.

Rick and Scotty stood together at the rail and watched He Nous slip past. The Phantom Shark had rowed in the direction of the island, but Rick doubted that he had landed.

"Wonder if he rowed out to a ship," he said speculatively. He couldn't get Kenwood out of his mind. Kenwood liked adventure, Van der Klaffens had said. If the Australian's schooner hadn't actually left the vicinity of Noumea, Kenwood might very well be the Phantom Shark. He explained his thoughts to the ex-Marine.

"Why not find out?" Scotty suggested.

"How?"

"Well, if he went to Vila, the port authorities there would know it, wouldn't they?"

"Could be," Rick agreed. "We could radio Vila and ask."

“Let’s do it,” Scotty said.

Jack Pualani, in the *Tarpons* wheelhouse, thought it over for a moment. “I suppose it would be all right, but you don’t want to show too much interest. Tell you what, let’s do it casually.”

“How?” Scotty asked.

“Illshowyou.” Jack walked to the radioman who sat at his control board reading a magazine. “Warm ‘ er up, Duke. Then go on the air and test. Send out a CQ and see if Vila answers. Got their call?”

The radioman consulted his book of calls. “I have, sir.”

The boys watched as the Hawaiian radioman warmed up his equipment and put it on the air.

The radioman tapped his key for a few minutes. Rick translated. “He’s sending the ship’s call, and saying that we’re testing.” Another few moments and the clicks changed, developing a steady rhythm. “Now he’s sending CQ from our call,” Rick explained.

The radioman stopped sending and began to tune his receiver. A variety of tones were located and passed over. Once the radioman stopped tuning and jotted down a call on a pad.

“Calling us,” he said. “But is not Vila. Think it is from Australia .”

“Keep trying,” Jack directed. “Is Vila on the air now? What does your call book say?”

“They on, sir. Should hear us.”

The dial turned, signal giving way to signal. Four times more the radioman stopped to listen, then moved on. None of them were Vila . Finally, as they neared the bottom end of the band, he nodded. “Their call, sir. Should I answer?”

“Yes. Strike up a conversation. Talk about the weather and ask if they have any late information.”

“Yes, sir.”

The key tapped out a reply to Vila ’s call. In a moment the two stations were exchanging bits of information about the weather in their localities. The *Tarpon* radioman reported they were just leaving Noumea Harbor . The Vila operator replied that he’d like to get to Noumea and see a motion picture. Hadn’t seen one in weeks.

Jack Pualani directed, “Ask him if he has seen a friend of yours-the schooner *Kookaburra*, due in Vila this morning.”

The radioman did so, while Rick and the others waited anxiously.

Code crackled in the loud-speaker.

Rick read it aloud. “*Kookaburra* came in at dawn, offloaded and cleared for Espiritu Santo . Want me query Espiritu?”

“Tell him never mind,” Jack said quickly. “Tell him you were just wondering if she arrived on schedule.”

The radioman tapped out the message, then signed off.

“That settles that,” Rick said. “It isn’t Kenwood. Guess it isn’t anyone we know.”

“Might as well forget it,” Jack Pualani agreed. “We’ll be far out at sea by nightfall, out of reach of your friend. If he left Noumea last night, we might overtake him, though, before we get to Nanatiki-or we might see him there.”

CHAPTER X

The Peaceful Voyage

The *Tarpon* rolled gently in the long Coral Sea swells, the ocean miles flowing under her keel at a steady ten knots as she steamed to the northwest. By nightfall, New Caledonia was below the horizon. By noon of the following day, the Huon Islands, a trio of uninhabited rocks, had fallen astern. They would make no more landfalls now until Nanatiki came over the horizon.

Rick had time for his first long chat with Dr. and Mrs. Warren on the subject of the *Tarpon*’s voyage. They sat under a canvas awning on the aft deck and watched Barby, Scotty, and Chahda play a game of shuffleboard with improvised equipment and a court drawn with chalk.

“What are the plans, sir?” Rick asked.

“We use Nanatiki as a base point,” Dr. Warren answered, “then shoot the first leg of our survey due north to Indispensable. We should be able to cover the area in a week. That’s the smallest segment we’ll have to survey. When that is complete, we go due east to the

New Hebrides and make a preliminary survey between the Hebrides and Nanatiki. We plan to return to Noumea for more fuel and supplies in about four weeks. That will leave us with a reserve tank of oil for emergencies. I don’t like to cut things too fine.”

Mrs. Warren added, smiling, “And that is when you get off, Rick.”

Rick nodded. He had known their vacation would not be a long one. “It’s too bad we can’t be aboard until the survey is completed.”

Dr. Warren smiled. “It will take us six months, Rick.”

“We couldn’t be gone that long,” he admitted.

Chahda left the shuffleboard game and joined them. “Too long for me, too,” he said.

Rick looked at his friend in surprise. “Why? Do you have plans?”

Chahda nodded. “Have thought very much. While was in Hawaii, Dr. Warren is paying me good salary,

for nothings, I think . . .”

“Nonsense,” Dr. Warren said emphatically. “I paid you a salary because you were an excellent assistant.” He explained to Rick, “Chahda helped with the cleaning and preparation of the Alta-Yuan specimens. He has a definite talent for delicate work of that kind.”

“Most kind,” Chahda murmured. “But, anyway, I am saving most of my good pay, and now I have plenty moneys for go back toIndia .”

Rick stared. Chahda go back toIndia ? The thought had never even entered his mind.

“Do not be unhappy with me,” Chahda pleaded.

“Remember I tell you once my name means fo’teen , on account of I am fo’teen child my family? Now I am man of world, with plenty knowledge besides what is in my Alm-in-ack . I think better I go home and see all my brother and sister.”

Rick fell silent, thinking over what Chahda had said. It had never occurred to him that the little Hindu boy might want to return toIndia some day.

“I can see why you have to go home,” he said finally. “But we’ll miss you, Chahda.”

“Not for long,” Chahda said cheerily.

The *Tarpon* moved steadily toward the atoll.

Seemingly, everyone had forgotten the Phantom Shark, except Rick and Jack Pualani. Jack had instructed the sailors to keep a sharp watch out for any other craft they might pass. If they did sight another ship, there was a strong likelihood that it would be the pearl pirate, because few legitimate craft had occasion to sail these waters.

Barby and Chahda sat in the bow, their legs dangling over the cutwater while they studied books from the collection the scientists had brought.

Rick found them and sat down beside them. “What you looking for?”

“More information about pearls,” Barby said. “But so far I haven’t found a thing that isn’t in *Daughter of the Moon*.”

“You and that pamphlet,” Rick groaned. “When do I get to see it?”

“On the way home,” Barby said.

“It’s a silly title, anyway,” Rick grumbled. He wasn’t really anxious to see the pamphlet, but he had to let Barby think he was. “Whoever heard of calling pearls anything so romantic?Probably thought up by some soap advertisement copy writer.”

Chahda spoke up. “Not so. I have not seen book, but I can tell you where comes title.”

“Can you?” Barby looked at him in surprise. “The pamphlet only said it was what the ancient people called pearls.”

“That is true, but ancient people was my people. Hindus. Name comes from verse in *Atharva -Veda*, which is a sacred book of my ancestors. Should maybe I quote verse?”

“Please,” Barby said eagerly.

Rick nodded.

Chahda closed his eyes. “Translation something like this:

“ *‘With shell born of the sea we slay the Rashkas and conjure the Atrins . With the shell we conquer disease and poverty; the shell is our remedy for all things. Thou art daughter of the Moon; bones of gods turned into sea-dwelling pearl.’*”

Rick looked at the Hindu boy suspiciously. “Is that really from a sacred Hindu book? I wouldn’t put it past you to make it up as you went along. Is there such a book?”

Chahda grinned. “Would not be past me, but this time is true. That is from *Atharva -Veda*. Look up ‘Veda’ in word book.”

“I think it’s wonderful,” Barby exclaimed. “Write it down for me, Chahda?”

“Will do.”

“I’ll remember that,” Barby promised.

Dr. Warren called from the afterdeck. “Come on, Chahda. Let’s have a few statistics. How big was the biggest shark caught?”

Chahda answered readily, “Biggest shark caught on fishing line was man-eater, weighed 1,919 pounds, was 14 feet, 8 inches long. Caught near Australia. But bigger shark was caught, Worrold Alm-in-ack says *by any method,* weighed 2,176 pounds. Caught South Africa.”

Mrs. Warren shook her head. “What an astonishing memory. Chahda, I hope you put it to good use when you get older.”

“Will do,” he promised.

Rick paced off fifteen feet on the deck. “That big shark must have been about so long,” he said. “A whopper! Even the Phantom Shark couldn’t be any bigger than that.”

“Maybe the Phantom Shark is bigger than that,” Scotty commented. “Remember Jack’s story? How do you account for it?”

Rick stretched out on his back and shaded his eyes with his hands. The others sat down on deck, using the winch housing for a back rest.

He tried to picture the Shark, as Jack had described it. A swirl of water and a silvery fin. Well, why not?

“It wouldn’t be hard to make an underwater craft that would look like a shark.”

Scotty jeered. "No? Remember it took six months and all the Spindrift scientists to turn out the Sub-mobile."

"That was different," Rick said. "The Submobile had to take terrific pressure, and it had a lot of complex equipment. But all you need to go under the water, in shallow depths, is something that's watertight. Shucks, I could put you in an ordinary steam boiler, close the valves and dump you into the drink and you wouldn't even get wet."

"But air would run out," Chahda said.

"If you put in oxygen tanks like the Submobile had it wouldn't," Barby pointed out. "Not for a long time, anyway."

Scotty was still skeptical. "All right. I'm on the bottom in five fathoms, in a sealed washtub. And what good does it do me?"

"None," Rick agreed. "I was just pointing out that men can live under the sea in anything watertight, if they have air. But as for something useful . . . that's different. I can't even imagine what use the Phantom Shark would have for an undersea boat. I can't swallow that yarn about him lying in wait until a diver finds a pearl. He might have to wait for months."

Scotty held up his hand. "Listen a moment."

The tone of the ship's engines had suddenly changed. They were slowing down. The *Tarpon* rolled more heavily in the long swells.

"Better see what's up," Rick exclaimed. He got to his feet and hurried to the wheelhouse, the others right behind him.

Tom Bishop and Jack Pualani were looking at a chart of the area when the young people hurried into the little deckhouse.

"We've slowed down," Rick said. "Anything the matter?"

"Not a thing," Tom Bishop answered. "We're slowing speed so we won't get too close to Nanatiki before morning. This chart's a little too vague for comfort. Might be some reefs that aren't on it."

Rick looked over the men's shoulders. The chart was large scale, and mostly blank. The familiar fathom readings that usually dotted charts were missing. Even the wind arrows were scarce. In the midst of the chart's emptiness a rough oval showed the atoll. Five islands were charted, two of them marked as questionable. A number of reefs were indicated, many of them questionable.

"Strange there isn't a better chart than that," Scotty said.

"Plenty of blanks in the world's charts," Tom Bishop returned. "There will have to be a lot of surveying before all of them are filled in. We'll fill this one in ourselves, before we're through."

Rick estimated the length of the atoll. It was over five miles long and close to three miles wide. The surrounding ring of coral reefs was clearly indicated, the islands spotted on the ring some distance apart.

"The lagoon must be pretty deep," he guessed.

Jack Pualani agreed. "This atoll is a long way from being as far developed as those in the Central Pacific. It's probably a young one, only a few thousand years old."

Barby smiled. "*Just ababy*. How will it look when it gets old?"

Jack indicated the outlined ring. "This reef is building up all the time. Coral does it. Eventually it will reach the surface of the water, as the islands already have. Then broken, dead coral and driftwood and things like that will pile up on it. Eventually it will be land. When enough time has passed for the coral to get in its work, the entire ring will be land and the lagoon will be cut off from the sea. Then, a long time later, the coral will fill in the lagoon and it will become one vast island, maybe ten feet high at the highest point. But not for many thousands of years yet."

"No natives there, are there?" Scotty asked.

"No record of any. There isn't enough land to support a population. We'll find a few sea birds and a lot of land crabs, but that's all."

"Unless we find the Phantom Shark," Rick added.

Jack's hand swept across the chart. "Even if the Shark is in the area, we might not know it. If we were at one end of the atoll and hewere at the other, we probably wouldn't even see him."

Dr. Warren came into the wheelhouse. "Tom, I came in to ask you to tell me when we leave the charted area." To the young people, he explained, "The area in the vicinity of New Caledonia has already been thoroughly charted by the French government. We don't want to duplicate their work, but we do want to overlap our areas sufficiently to insure full coverage."

Tom Bishop answered, "We'll reach the edge of the French charts at about six-thirty in the morning, Paul. I've arranged my watches so enough men will be standing by to help with temperature and salinity readings."

"Good. Rick, if you feel like getting up that early, you can work the fathometer with me."

"I'll be up," Rick promised.

Jack Pualani looked at the ship's chronometer. "0900 hours Greenwich Civil Time. Which means chow time locally. Anyone else interested in food?"

Everyone else was. The sea air created prodigious appetites.

After dinner, Rick joined Barby, Chahda, and Scotty in the bow of the *Tarpon*. The sun was a huge orange ball, supported a few inches above the horizon by a thin layer of pink clouds. They watched it dip from sight and saw the bright blue of the sky give way to a dark bowl of stars.

A few hours ahead lay Nanatiki.

Rick lifted his face to the sky and traced the outline of the constellation Scorpio. Under the curve of the Scorpion's tail the sky was still light, a crescent of soft blue marking the last of the day. For a moment he thought the horizon clouds had moved, ominously, into the shape of a great fin. He smiled to himself. Imagination made him see lots of things that weren't there,

Just then Barby spoke up from beside him, her voice soft and almost inaudible in the warm night wind.

“We’ll see him there. I feel it.”

None of them had to ask whom she meant by “him.”

CHAPTER XI

The Atoll

A hail from the masthead brought Rick out of the cabin where he had been watching the fathometer. The sailor who had taken up a position on the rigging mast called down, “Land. Dead ahead.”

Nanatiki!

Since before dawn, the scientists had been charting the ocean bottom. While Rick watched the automatic fathometer, checking occasionally to be sure the recording drum was operating smoothly, Scotty and Chahda had helped with the water-sample tubes and thermometers that gave valuable data on ocean temperatures and currents.

Letting the automatic recorder take care of itself for the moment, Rick hurried out on deck. Jack Pualani came out of the wheelhouse and called to the sailor on the mast, “Keep a sharp lookout for shoal water.”

Rick joined Barby, Scotty, Chahda, and the others in the bow of the ship. Dead ahead, a blur on the horizon, was a low island. Jack Pualani called, “If our reckoning is right that should be Nanatiki Island. Keep an eye open for Faisol on the starboard.”

The three islands of the atoll that were definitely listed were Nanatiki, Faisol, and Nambi. If others existed, they would find and chart them.

“I want to go ashore and collect some coral and shells,” Barby said excitedly.

Dr. Warren smiled at her enthusiasm. “I hadn’t planned to stop long enough for any shore excursions, Barby.”

“It won’t hurt to delay for an hour or two,” Mrs. Warren said. “Please, Paul. I’d like to gather some shells myself. There must be some beauties here.”

The scientist threw up his hands in mock despair. “I give in.”

Jack grinned at Rick. “Seen any sign of another ship?”

Rick shook his head. “I’ve been inside, at the fathometer. Have you seen anything?”

“Not even a bit of driftwood,” Jack replied. “Either your phantom friend hasn’t arrived or he’s at the

other end of the lagoon.”

Tom Bishop joined the group in the bow. “What do you think, Jack? Do we dare take her inside the lagoon?”

Jack looked doubtful. “It will take a lot of time, because we’ll have to slow down and feel our way. Wouldn’t want to take a chance of ripping out the bottom on a coral head.”

“Better stay outside,” Dr. Warren suggested. “We can look the situation over from one of the motorboats before going inside.”

“That’s safest,” Tom Bishop agreed. “Take her in close ashore and drop the hook, Jack.”

They were nearing the island rapidly now. Rick borrowed the spare binoculars from the wheelhouse and focused them on the low bit of land.

It was a typical atoll island, perhaps five hundred yards long and not more than two hundred yards wide. At its highest point it was only about six feet above high water. A line of coconut palms, like oversize feather dusters, were outlined against the sky. There was no sign of life.

It wasn’t necessary to heave the lead here to keep track of depth. The clarity of the water would permit them to see any reefs or coral outcroppings.

“Plenty bottom,” the lookout called.

They could see the surf breaking against the shore now, and to either side of the island a long, thin line of surf marked the reef. The *Tarpon* reduced speed to a point just sufficient to maintain rudder control and slowly moved toward the island.

They were within two hundred feet of the shore before the coral became dangerous. At a word from Jack, the bow anchor ran out and took hold in five fathoms of crystal-clear water. He surveyed the beach through binoculars, then nodded with satisfaction. “Sand. No trouble landing.” He raised his voice. “Lower the port lifeboat.”

The sailors jumped to obey, and in a few moments the motorboat swung outward on the davits and splashed into the water.

“All ashore that’s going ashore,” Tom Bishop called.

Mrs. Warren and Barby hadn’t wasted the moments during which the *Tarpon* was approaching the shore. They appeared in slacks and shirts, each carrying a sugar sack borrowed from the galley to hold the sea shells they hoped to find.

They were the first down the ladder and into the boat, but the boys weren’t far behind. Then Dr. Warren and Jack Pualani came down the ladder, followed by Carl Ackerman and Bill Duncan.

The seaman in the stern started the motor and Jack cast off. In a moment they were on their way, the boat throwing up white spray in the low surf. At a word from Jack, the coxswain cut the motor and the boat came to a smooth stop on the sandy beach.

Almost at once the party scattered in all directions. Rick surveyed the low island and found he could see

almost all of it from where he stood.

Chahda joined him. "Good beach. Fine for swim or for picnic."

"Bet it's never been used," Rick said. He shied a pebble at a sand crab that scuttled toward the water. "This is about as lonesome a place as you can find in the Pacific, not counting Pitcairn or Easter Island and some of those."

"Even more lonesome," Chahda corrected. "Those has people. This bit of empty real estate. For sale cheap."

Chahda stopped suddenly. "Say! Maybe someone else been here. Look!" He pointed at a bit of white paper on the beach ahead.

Rick ran forward and picked it up. "You're right." It was an empty cigarette package, native cigarettes with a French brand name. He examined it carefully. "It hasn't been wet."

Chahda touched the paper, then looked at Rick, his eyes wide. "Good as new."

Rick thought quickly. They were on the beach, about six yards from the belt of palm trees and below high-water mark, if the line of twigs and other flotsam was any indication. He looked back the way they had come and saw Jack Pualani walking toward them.

"Jack!" He beckoned to the Hawaiian mate.

The mate lengthened his stride and caught up with them. "What's up?"

Rick handed him the empty package and pointed to the exact place where they had found it. "Jack, is the tide in or out?"

Jack looked around, his eyes narrowed. "Coming in." He marked a line with his foot. "This will be about the high point, if I guess correctly."

The spot he had marked was higher on the beach than the location of the cigarette package.

Rick took a deep breath. "Then this package was dropped sometime today, after the tide had gone out."

"Looks like it."

"Then man is still here," Chahda suggested.

Rick shook his head. "I doubt it. There's no place for him to hide. My guess is that he was parked under one of these palms, keeping an eye toward the southeast. The Phantom Shark wouldn't dare take any chances. And this would be the best place to have a lookout."

"I'll buy that," Jack agreed. "It means the Phantom Shark was in the lagoon. If he took his man off, it must have been from the lagoon side. Otherwise, our lookout would have seen him."

"Why couldn't he see him, anyway?" Rick asked. "A ship could be seen through these palms."

“Not necessarily. It was probably anchored offshore on the lagoon side. Let’s hike to the other side of the island and take a look.”

The other side was only a moment’s hike away. The three came out on the beach and stared into the lagoon. Far away, almost on the horizon, a line of surf creamed, marking the opposite reef. To their right, on the very rim of the horizon, was another island, apparently much like the one they were on. There was no sign of life in the open water. But on the beach were two lines of footprints where one person, barefoot, had come ashore and then left again.

“He could be sitting behind that other island,” Jack said. “We’d never see him. And he would have had plenty of time to reach it.”

Rick winced at Chahda’s sudden strong grip on his arm. The Hindu boy was staring out at the lagoon. Rick followed his gaze, then he saw *it!*

“Look, Jack!” Rick’s voice was tense. With his free hand he pointed.

Far out in the lagoon, the sunshine cast a sparkling reflection from something that twinkled briefly and then vanished in a swirl of foam.

Rick blinked. Had he imagined it, or had he seen, for just an instant, a giant silver fin?

Chahda muttered something in Hindustani.

“I never thought I’d see it,” Jack said, awed. “Did you see the size of it? There never was a shark that big!”

“I don’t know what it was, but it wasn’t a shark,” Rick said flatly.

“Had big fin,” Chahda pointed out.

“Yes, but it wasn’t a fin made of flesh. There’s only one thing would reflect the sun like that-polished metal!”

Barby and Scotty hailed them. Rick turned, to see the two coming through the palms.

Scotty waved as he came up. “Why so intent over here? You been seeing seagoing pixies?”

“I wish it were something as innocent as that,” Rick said grimly. “We just saw the Phantom Shark!”

CHAPTER XII

The Mystery Ship

Rick and the others kept a close watch on the lagoon, but the giant fin failed to reappear.

Rick spoke his thoughts aloud. "Why not some kind of diving outfit? It wouldn't have to be the regular kind. That would account for some of the tales about a big silver shark, wouldn't it?"

"It might be," Jack admitted. "That would mean a self-contained diving unit with its own air supply and some means of propulsion. If it were motor driven, it might account for the fin. Submarines don't have fins, but they do have stabilizers."

Chahda looked at Rick. "You scientist. You ever hear of machine like that?"

Rick shook his head. "Closest thing to it I've ever heard about were the midget subs the Japs used during the war. This thing isn't that big, and I didn't see any conning tower or periscope."

"It doesn't matter much," Jack pointed out. "It's a man-made gadget of some kind. The thing that puzzles me is what is it doing out in the lagoon?"

"Maybe harvest pearls on bottom," Chahda suggested.

Jack grinned mirthlessly. "If that's so, the Shark has found the most wonderful pearl beds in history. Believe me, kids, pearl divers don't just sweep the bottom. They work hard for what they get-and they don't get much."

"Then what are they-or it-after?" Rick asked practically.

"I don't know," Jack said. "But I'd certainly like to take a look."

Mrs. Warren had filled her sugar sack with shells. She and Dr. Warren walked toward them. Bill Duncan and Carl Ackerman were arguing over the species of something they had found on the beach.

"About ready to return to the ship?" Dr. Warren asked.

"Yes, sir," Rick said. He told the scientist about the strange fin and pointed to the place where they had seen it.

Dr. Warren's brows furrowed. "Assuming that what you saw was man-made, I must admit I don't like it. However, I'd like a bit more information. If this device isn't really a sea creature of some sort, where is the ship it operates from?"

"Behind the island. Anyway, that's my guess," Jack Pualani pointed to the island on the horizon.

"Very well. And what is this ship supposed to be doing behind the island when its little undersea craft is in the lagoon?"

"Probably hiding from us," Rick said.

"In that case, I propose we let it hide successfully."

Tom Bishop had been sitting in comfort in the boat, waiting for them to return. "Anything exciting?" he asked. "From what I could see, this is just like ten thousand other atoll islands. I decided not to roam around."

“Nothing exciting on the island,” Rick said. “But in the lagoon . . . well, I don’t know what we saw, but it certainly wasn’t a herring.”

Tom grinned. “Still looking for sea monsters? Perhaps we’d better break out a trawl and give the lagoon the once over. We’d come up with enough fish for supper and maybe the Phantom Shark besides.”

“A practical suggestion,” Dr. Warren said, “but I don’t think we’d better follow it. Suppose we did catch this strange creature? What would we do with it? I’m certain from the description that it isn’t edible.”

Rick looked at Dr. Warren and saw the twinkle in his eyes. He had an idea that the dignified scientist was as curious as any of them. But, since the survey was his responsibility, he had no intention of hunting trouble.

As the *Tarpon* moved into deep water, the group gathered on the aft deck. The trawler moved to the north, paralleling the atoll reef. Rick didn’t fail to keep an eye on the island behind which the Phantom Shark was presumably hiding. It was too far away to see clearly, but Tom Bishop brought binoculars. During the fifteen minutes it took them to come abreast of the island, he studied it through the glasses but saw nothing.

“Let me look,” Rick begged. He had no hope of seeing very much, but he took the powerful glasses and held them to his eyes. There was nothing to see but palms. Then suddenly there was a bright line behind the palms, like sunshine striking metal. “There’s something there!” he exclaimed. He readjusted the focus and strained to see, but he couldn’t make out what it was.

“Let’s have them,” Dr. Warren asked. He took the binoculars and studied the island. “A line of light,” he said. “It looks like a reflection from a metal bar or something of the kind.”

Carl Ackerman was the next to try. He held the glasses steady for a long moment, then said, “I believe I see something sticking up. Tom, take another look. Are those masts?”

They were slightly past the island now, and at a point where the palms thinned out. Tom Bishop took a long look, then passed the glasses to Jack.

“Masts, right enough. Jack, can you make out the rigging?”

The mate studied the spot. Then, as the *Tarpon* moved into better position, he gave a sudden exclamation. “I see it! It’s a schooner . . . no, it’s a ketch. It’s . . . hang it. It’s gone behind the palms again.” The Hawaiian lowered the glasses. “I got a brief look. It’s a sailing craft, ketch rigged. At least the mizzen was shorter than the mainmast. I couldn’t get a good look at the hull.”

“The type of boat doesn’t matter,” Dr. Warren said. “At least we’re sure now that we have company at Nanatiki.”

“What on earth would a boat be doing here?” Mrs. Warren asked.

“Getting pearls,” Barby said.

It was one answer, but Rick couldn’t fully accept it. Surely the Phantom Shark didn’t depend on diving to get pearls for sale. It would take years and more than one lagoon to supply a necklace like Jerrold’s.

“I wish we had time for a long look around,” he said.

Dr. Warren smiled. “Curious, Rick? I am, too. But if that vessel is the Phantom Shark’s, and I don’t know whose else it would be, we can’t risk staying around.” He glanced at Tom Bishop. “We’d better put a few miles between us and Nanatiki, Tom, just in case our friend doesn’t like visitors.”

The fisherman nodded. “I don’t think he’ll worry much about us, unless we try to get close to see who he is. But perhaps you’re right. A little sea distance won’t hurt anything.”

“It’s useless to speculate,” the scientist said. “We won’t know what he is doing here until we’ve had a chance to explore the islands and the lagoon.”

“But we’re leaving, and we won’t have a chance,” Barby objected.

Rick watched as Dr. Warren took the glasses and swept the lagoon. “We’ll come back here, won’t we?” he asked.

“Yes,” Dr. Warren said. “We’ll be back. By that time our friend will be gone and we’ll have Nanatiki to Ourselves.”

CHAPTER XIII

The “Tarpon” Returns

The *Tarpon* steamed steadily southward while all hands occupied themselves with various tasks. During the ten days in which they had explored the waters between Nanatiki and Indispensable Reef, enough material and information had been accumulated to keep them going at top speed.

Chahda and Carl were below decks most of the time, working on specimens brought up by the nets. Bill Duncan worked over a large-scale chart of the area, recording the fathometer readings and analyzing them. Dr. Warren, with Rick helping him, made constant checks on water temperatures and filled water samples for Carl to analyze.

The equipment for taking temperature and samples was simple but ingenious. It was lowered on a long, metal shaft connected to a steel cable. Along the shaft were bottles with hinged tops, and three thermometers. The *Tarpon* always hove to when samples were being taken. Rick would reel out the line until Dr. Warren signaled that the proper depth had been reached. Then a metal object called a messenger would be released, to slide rapidly down the steel cable. When it came in contact with the equipment, the hinged tops of the sample bottles would snap shut and the thermometers would be reversed, breaking the thin silver line of mercury in such a way that the temperature could be easily determined when the equipment was hauled in again.

Scotty was kept busy helping Tom Bishop. Several times, the booms had been rigged and the big otter trawl put over the stern. Once or twice it had come up with only a few astonished ocean travelers. More often, it had flopped back on deck with a slippery, leaping, squirming mass of fish, some of them incredibly colored and of nightmare shape. Then, one or two of each variety would be chosen and

packed in the refrigerator for inspection and classification by Bill and Carl. The rest were dumped back into the sea.

To the boys, it seemed that the quantity of fish was more than enough to warrant commercial fishing, but the scientists were not satisfied.

Barby had discovered a new talent. Mrs. Warren, in addition to keeping the records, made color charts of each fish, sketching in the outline of the fish and then indicating the coloring with water colors. Barby tried her hand at it and found that she could sketch rapidly and with considerable accuracy. Consequently, she spent most of her time sketching specimens and trying to perfect her technique under Mrs. Warren's guidance.

She was entranced, too, by Bill Duncan's microscope and what it showed her when the silken plankton nets were brought to the surface. Sometimes the nets brought up only a greenish, thick scum which didn't look like much to the naked eye but resolved itself into myriad weird little sea creatures under the lens. Barby used up pads of sketch paper drawing the odd little creatures.

Dr. Warren shook his head as he checked over a batch of her sketches. "I don't know what we'll do when you young folks leave us. This was supposed to be only a vacation, but you've made yourselves so useful we'll miss your help as well as your company."

They were so occupied with their self-appointed tasks that the Phantom Shark faded far into the background. They were even a little disappointed to find that the *Tarpon* had headed back toward Nanatiki. The Indispensable Reef region had been fascinating, and there was no assurance that the area between Nanatiki and the New Hebrides would be nearly as interesting.

They arrived at Nanatiki on the following morning.

Jack Pualani took the wheel himself, while Tom Bishop stood in the bow to watch for shoal water, and a seaman stood by with lead in hand, ready to take soundings.

The *Tarpon* made a complete circle of the atoll, moving at only five knots in case coral heads should suddenly thrust up in the ship's path. Rick and Dr. Warren sketched in reefs and small islands on the atoll chart as Bill Duncan took sightings and called off the data. Barby, Mrs. Warren, Carl Ackerman, and Chahda contented themselves with being spectators, sometimes rushing to the rail as the *Tarpon* passed close by a coral outcropping.

It was afternoon before the circuit of the atoll was completed. Then Jack took the ship toward a break in the reef that promised clear passage into the lagoon.

"No sign of any other ship," Rick said to Scotty. "Guess our Phantom buddy got back to Noumea on schedule."

"Taking a raft of pearls with him," Scotty nodded. "And the question is, where did he get them? Were they hidden somewhere?"

Rick shrugged. He had puzzled over that until his head ached, but no answer or even a remote theory had been forthcoming. As a hiding place, Nanatiki was good, but too remote. Pearls weren't bulky, and it wouldn't take much room to hide them right in Noumea. He couldn't believe the Phantom Shark had come to fish for pearls. There just weren't that many pearls in any lagoon, according to people who should know, like Dr. Warren and Bill Duncan.

“Maybe we’ll find out when we look around a little,” he said. “But I’m not too hopeful. By the way, what’s the date?”

Scotty figured rapidly. “It’s the fifteenth.”

Their eyes met. Tonight, in Noumea, Jerrold and the Phantom Shark would be meeting again.

“That does it,” Rick said. “By the time we get back the Phantom Shark will be peddling his pearls in Singapore or somewhere, and Jerrold will be far away. I guess we can call this case closed.”

“Looks like it,” Scotty agreed.

Tom Bishop’s voice was raised from the bow. “All hands come up here and help keep a lookout.”

The *Tarpon* had turned and was heading for the break in the reef. Rick and Scotty rushed to the bow with the others and joined Tom.

“We’ll have clearance on both sides,” the skipper said. “And we’ll go slow and heave the lead to be sure there’s plenty of bottom. But all of you keep your eyes open for obstructions ahead. Watch for the water to change color, and watch for coral heads. You’ll see them if they’re near the surface.”

The trawler pushed through the water with just enough speed to maintain rudder control. The leadsman sang out the depths as he worked.

“No bottom at fifteen.” He swung the fourteen-pound lead again and found bottom. “By the deep twelve!”

Surf beat against the reef on either side as the *Tarpon* slipped through. Rick saw the sharp coral teeth of the reef ten feet from the hull and shuddered at what would happen to the trawler if she should hit such a spot.

Then they were inside the lagoon, swinging to the north toward the island where they had seen the Phantom Shark’s ketch. It took a long time, because they had to feel their way, lacking an accurate chart of the lagoon.

“Plenty of water, looks like,” Tom Bishop finally said.

“We’ve yet to see any dangerous heads.” He called to Jack. “Clear ahead. Steady as she goes.”

“Steady as she goes,” the big Hawaiian repeated.

A few moments later the anchor chain rattled out and they came to rest a hundred yards off the small island of Faisol behind which the sailing craft had hidden.

“Are we going ashore?” Rick asked eagerly.

“We certainly are,” Dr. Warren agreed. “And let’s not waste any time about it. I’m as anxious as you are to see if our mysterious pearl pirate left any signs of his visit.”

Jack called an order and the starboard lifeboat was lowered into the water. The group began getting into

the boat as soon as a ladder was lowered. Rick took a seat next to Barby and grinned at her look of eager expectancy. "What do you think we'll find?"

"I don't know," she said. "But don't you think we'll find something?"

"We soon know," Chahda replied.

It took only a few seconds for the boat to make the short run. Rick jumped to the sand and held out his hand to Mrs. Warren, then to Barby. When they were safely ashore, he turned to survey the island.

It was like the one they had first visited but smaller. It had the same palms, the same sandy beaches, and nothing else.

"We want to cover every inch of it," Scotty said. "How do we go about it?"

"Suppose we walk to the southern tip, then spread out in a line across the island and walk the length of it?" Dr. Warren suggested.

"Good idea," Rick said. The island was only a couple of hundred feet wide. "Let's get started."

He, Barby, and Chahda led the way, with Barby stopping now and then to pick up an attractive shell. At the tip of the island they turned and waited for the others. When they were all assembled, Dr. Warren directed, "Barby, you take the extreme right and go up the beach. Rick, next to Barby. Then Scotty, Chahda, Bill, Tom, Jack, Carl, and I, with Helen on the extreme left. Keep steady intervals and be sure the area between you is covered thoroughly. I haven't the vaguest idea what we're looking for, but we may find something of interest."

Mrs. Warren smiled at Barby. "They're letting us comb the beaches. Do you suppose our interest in shells has anything to do with it?"

"It's because you have on sandals," Scotty volunteered. "The sand will run right out again. But we would get our shoes full."

Mrs. Warren nodded soberly. "I see. Chivalry gives way to practicality."

Scotty didn't know what to say to that.

They spread out in a line that extended across the island and started at a slow walk toward the other end. Rick scanned every inch of ground in his area and saw that the others were being equally thorough. There were coconut crabs, big fellows with massive claws that sidled out of the way. There were fallen coconuts and dried, broken palm fronds. There was pigweed, and one lonesome pandanus tree, but nothing else.

At the northern tip of the island the group reassembled.

"Anyone find anything?" Dr. Warren asked.

No one had.

"Not even a footprint," Barby said.

Jack Pualani spoke up. "I don't think whoever was on the ketch even came ashore. Why should they? There's obviously nothing on the island." He pointed out into the lagoon. "That was where we saw the fin, remember? And that's where we'll find the answer to the riddle- if there is an answer."

Rick thought that the mate was probably right. But the lagoon was long and wide. How could they hope to cover all of it? He put the question aloud.

"We can't cover all of it," Tom Bishop agreed. "Best we can do is go out to the place where you saw the fin, or at least the approximate area, and take a look at the bottom." He glanced at the sun. "There's time enough for a few runs across the area before it gets dark. We can get an idea of the bottom, and then lay up for the night."

"Tomorrow," Jack Pualani said, "I'll go down and see what the Shark was doing. Unless someone has a better idea."

No one had.

CHAPTER XIV

Under the Lagoon

"Twenty-one fathoms," Tom Bishop said. "Average depth. Pretty deep, Jack."

The big Hawaiian shrugged.

Rick stared into the depths under the bow. He saw the anchor chain go down and down, until it was lost in the green water. As the sun rose higher, they would be able to see farther into the water, but he didn't know that it would help much.

After running the lagoon a few times with the fathometer, they had spent the night at anchor off the small island of Faisol, where the Phantom Shark had lain. Here and there were coral outcroppings, but the average depth in the area where they had seen the fin was twenty-two fathoms.

"What can we do?" Barby asked. "There isn't a diving suit aboard."

"Jack wants to dive," Rick said.

Her eyes opened wide. "But that's too deep, Rick."

"I think so, too," Rick agreed. "But he says he has gone deeper than that."

"Let's talk it over," Tom Bishop said. "Where are Dr. Warren and the others?"

"Still eating breakfast," Barby told him.

"All right. Let's go see what they have to say."

The rest of the group was aft, having breakfast under the canvas awning.

Dr. Warren looked up as Tom approached. “Any ideas, Tom?”

The skipper motioned to Jack. “He wants to dive.”*

“He’s crazy,” Bill Duncan exploded.

“I not think so,” Chahda declared. “Is diversinIndia go that deep. Jack has dive before, maybe he can.”

The mate smiled. “Thanks for the moral support, Chahda. As a matter of fact, I’ve gone deeper than that myself. I hit twenty-three fathoms once, offHilo , and stayed down for a minute and a half.”

Mrs. Warren asked quietly, “How old were you, Jack?”

“I’ll admit I was a lot younger.” The mate grinned. “But I’m not exactly an old man now.”

Scotty finished his coffee and stood up. “Suppose you do go down, Jack? What will it prove?”

It was a sensible question, Rick thought.

“Maybe nothing. But the Phantom Shark wasn’t playing tag with the angelfish for fun. There must be something on the bottom.”

Dr. Warren nodded. “There undoubtedly is. The question, it seems to me, is this: Is it worth the risk? I have an idea all you’ll find is shell.”

“Shell with pearls,” Jack said. “I have a hunch there are pearls in this lagoon. I’d like to see.”

Rick put in his penny’s worth. “Maybe there are, but would that explain what the Shark was after? There can’t be enough pearls so that he could just scoop them off the bottom.”

“How about the danger, Jack?” Carl Ackerman asked. “There are ordinary sharks in the lagoon, even if the Phantom Shark has gone. And, if you get into a grotto down on the bottom, you may run into a squid or octopus.”

Jack smiled. “There’s always a possibility, but dangers from sharks, squid, and octopus are pretty overrated. The big danger is from moray eels. Or I might step on a poisonous sea star. I never have, though, and I’ve been diving most of my life.”

“Not alone,” Dr. Warren said.

“No, not alone. But I’m willing to take the chance. The odds are all on my side.”

Dr. Warren hesitated.

“Tell you what, I’ll try it once. If it’s too much, I’ll quit. Fair enough?”

Rick could see that Jack was eager to make the dive and said, “Scotty and I can stand by. We won’t be much help, but maybe we’ll be able to haul you out” “I won’t need hauling,” Jack said decisively. “You

can stand by, though, in case I come up winded. Come on, let's get into our trunks." He spoke to Tom. "Got a heavy weight with a line? Give me about fifty pounds if you can."

"The lifeboat anchor should do it," Tom said. "I'll have extra line put on it."

Rick and Scotty hurried with Jack down the companionway into the cabins. They stripped off their clothes and got into swimming trunks. When they returned to the deck, they found the lifeboat in the water. Two seamen shipped the long oars and took their places.

Tom Bishop stepped into the boat with a coil of half-inch rope and untied the kedge-type anchor with which the lifeboat was equipped. He removed its rope and tied in the one he carried, then tied the loose end securely to a cleat.

Jack Pualani came out on deck in his swimming trunks. He had underwater glasses, and a pair of gloves. A heavy knife was at his belt.

Rick looked at the mate critically. Jack was no longer a young man, but no one could guess it by looking at him. His bronzed body was powerfully muscled, and he had an unusual depth of chest, the result, Rick thought, of his years of diving.

Tom Bishop had gone to the other lifeboat and was bringing back its anchor. He addressed Rick and Scotty. "We'll leave this second anchor in the lifeboat with you. Be sure the line is clear at all times. Watch Jack through the waterglass. If he gets into trouble, both of you take a grip on the anchor and go after him. It will pull both of you down, if you kick to help out. Got knives?"

They had forgotten them. Chahda hurried below and returned with a pair of keen fish knives with sheaths from the supply chest. The boys put them on the cloth belts of their trunks.

"Let's go," Jack said, and led the way into the lifeboat.

Fifty feet away from the trawler, the mate instructed the seamen. "Hold her right here. When you see me coming to the top, lift your oars so I won't bash my head against one of them." He took the waterglass, a long box of metal with one end open and the other glassed in. He put it over the side so that the glassed-in end was under the water, then put his face to the open end and examined the bottom for long minutes. Finally he looked up at the boys.

"Can't see much, but the bottom looks pretty clean. Don't get excited if any sharks come around. Chances are they won't bother me."

Rick wished he had Jack's confidence.

The big Hawaiian stood up, handing Scotty the waterglass. For a moment he poised on the seat, his brown skin gleaming in the sun, then he stepped into the water. There was a gasp from the watchers on the trawler. But Jack didn't dive just yet. He took hold of the gunwale and filled his lungs. Rick saw his massive chest expand, then he exhaled with a whoosh and repeated the process.

"Pass over the anchor," Jack directed. "See that the line runs free. Don't let go until I signal."

Rick lifted the heavy anchor and put it over the side, while Scotty took the line and held it. The anchor dangled just under the surface. Jack inhaled, exhaled, inhaled, exhaled, then inhaled again with an explosive sound. He gripped the anchor and let himself sink. Then, as he nodded, Scotty let go the rope.

Rick grabbed for the waterglass and put it over the side as Jack vanished from sight. The rope whistled by his ear as he bent over the gunwale. The glass helped a lot. He saw the path of bubbles that marked Jack's rapid descent, then, as the bubbles cleared, he saw Jack himself plummeting toward the bottom.

The rope went slack. While the seaman held the boat in position with slow movements of the oars, Scotty began hauling up the anchor.

Rick strained to see through the waterglass. Jack was a dim shape on the bottom, moving with slow strokes. He stopped and Rick saw his arms move. Then he swam a few feet and stopped again.

The seconds were ticking by. Rick could almost time them by the pulse in his temple. Was Jack going to stay down forever?

"One minute!" Dr. Warren shouted.

Was that all? Rick called without taking his eyes from the dim shape on the bottom, "He's all right."

Jack continued to move, stopping now and then. Rick couldn't see what he was doing. He moved the glass and scanned the water near by. Directly under him, a tiny fish moved, but there was no other sign of water life.

"Two minutes," the scientist called.

Rick watched Jack. Surely he must be coming up soon! But the mate was working at something, his arms a pale blur. Then Rick saw him swing upright. A heartbeat later he was flashing to the surface.

"Lift oars," Rick shouted.

Bubbles broke from Jack's lips and raced ahead of him to the surface, then the mate himself broke water, lifting almost three feet into the air. His breath expelled with an explosive whistle and he gulped in clean air. A moment later he had a grip on the gunwale with one hand and was grinning at them, his chest heaving-

"Look what I found," he said. He took a shell from his belt, then another, and another. He reached behind him and found a fourth. "Gold lips," he said. "The bottom is covered with them! I think we've really found something."

"You should have a basket," Scotty said.

The mate shook his head. "No need. I haven't enough time to get more than I can tuck into my belt."

"Any sign of octopus or anything down there?" Rick asked.

"None that I saw. A little moray got inquisitive and I took a poke at him with my knife. He ducked back into his hole. Any sharks in sight?"

"I didn't see any," Rick answered.

"We probably won't. I'm trying not to raise too much fuss down below. Sharks are curious, even when they're not hungry."

Jack hooked his elbow over the gunwale and examined one wrist. "Rubbed it a little on a chunk of coral. I was afraid for a minute that I'd scratched it."

"Sea water is a good disinfectant," Scotty said.

"That's not it. Blood brings the sharks."

Rick held up the shells so the group aboard the trawler could see. "Four," he called.

"Is he going down again?" Dr. Warren called back.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him not to overdo it."

"I won't," Jack said. "Once or twice more and I'll call it quits. Pressure is terrific. Okay, get the anchor over."

Rick took the anchor and put it over the side, then took the rope from Scotty.

Scotty picked up the waterglass, first checking to see that the rope was clear.

Jack began his deep breathing, and this time he did it more slowly, gulping in the air, holding it in his lungs for a moment and then expelling it. Then, as he dropped below the surface, Rick let go the rope.

After the bubbles cleared and the anchor was hauled in, he found he could watch, even without the glass, although he couldn't see nearly as well. He held his hands out to shade the patch of water directly under his eyes from the sun.

"One minute," Dr. Warren called. There was no other sound.

Far below, Jack was collecting shell, breaking the big oysters from the coral rock with his knife. Rick could see the shadowy outline of his body, but that was all.

"He's shaking his head," Scotty said worriedly. "What does that mean?"

"I don't know," Rick said. "Is he still moving?"

"Yes."

The scientist called, "Two minutes."

Rick waited anxiously for Jack to start his swift rise to the surface, but the mate still moved around below.

"He keeps shaking his head," Scotty said. "I'm afraid something is wrong."

The seconds ticked away.

"Two and a half," Dr. Warren cried. "Why doesn't he come up?"

Rick half rose. "Scotty, we'd . . ."

Barby screamed. "Shark!"

Rick caught a glimpse of fin fifty feet away, then he saw the rush of a sleek body through the water. And Jack flew toward the surface, arms flailing with driving strokes and his feet kicking frantically.

"Get ready to grab him," Scotty said hoarsely.

"Lift oars," Rick shouted.

The mate broke water within reach, and before he had a chance to fall back in after his plunge into the air, four strong hands had him by the arms. With a mighty heave the boys pulled him into the boat-and as his feet left the water, chisel teeth clashed futilely on air.

Jack rolled over, gasping for breath, and then Rick saw what was wrong. Blood was running from his nose, and his eyes, when he opened them, were ruby red.

"The ship," Rick cried. "Get us there, quick!"

Oars dipped and the seamen bent their backs. The lifeboat flew through the water.

Jack tried to sit up and grinned weakly. "I was bleeding, wasn't I? I thought so when I saw that shark. Good thing they're timid. If he'd struck without looking the situation over, I'd be a gone duck."

"What happened?" Rick said, his throat tight.

"Pressure got me. Guess I'm getting old."

The lifeboat slid into place near the ladder and the boys lifted Jack to his feet. "Take it easy, grandpa," Scotty said with joking tenderness.

Willing hands helped Jack up the ladder. He sat down in a chair Chahda placed for him, then drew four more shells from his belt.

"That's all for today," he said. He wiped blood from his nose.

"And for every other day," Dr. Warren said flatly.

Mrs. Warren had hurried below at the first sight of Jack. She returned now with cubes of ice in a bowl of water and some soft linen napkins.

The boys and the scientists stood back and let the two feminine members take over. While Mrs. Warren wiped Jack's face, Barby wrapped ice cubes in a napkin. His nose was still bleeding a little. Barby applied ice, tears in her blue eyes.

"I saw the shark, Jack," she said shakily.

"So did I," the mate said. "He wasn't a very handsome shark. He had buck teeth. I saw them when he gnashed them at me."

“Don’t joke,” Barby reprimanded. “You might have been killed!”

“But I wasn’t,” Jack said, grinning. “So a joke is in order.” He looked at Rick and Scotty. “And thanks to you, my fast thinking friends. If you hadn’t grabbed me, old brer shark would have.”

Rick swallowed as he remembered those clicking razor teeth. “Aw, he would have let go right away,” he said. “You’re too old and tough. Guess you’d better confine your diving to only twenty fathoms instead of twenty-two from now on.”

“He’ll confine his diving to a glass of water,” Tom Bishop said firmly. “I’m taking no more chances on losing the best mate I ever had. If he got killed, I’d have to run the ship myself, and likely I’d pile it on a reef first thing.”

The deep color of Jack’s eyes was receding, but they were still bloodshot. The bleeding had stopped under the application of ice. He sat up straight. “I’m all right now, thanks. What say we see what the oysters look like?”

The seamen had brought the four from the lifeboat. Dr. Warren had been examining them. They were almost ten inches in diameter.

“What do you think, Bill?”

The biologist answered, “*Margaritifera Maxima* Jameson. Known as ‘gold lips.’ The best of the pearl oysters. Open one, Jack.”

“Here goes,” the mate said. He took the first oyster and opened it expertly with his knife, exposing the beautiful, iridescent mother-of-pearl interior, then probed in the soft flesh. He let out a yell of triumph. “Got one!”

His strong fingers tore the oyster loose, then unrolled the flesh from around a spherical object the size of a small pea. He held it up. It gleamed in the sunshine, pink, round, perfect.

The watching group stared in awe. Barby had been holding her breath. She sighed audibly. “It really is! Oh, Jack! It’s . . . it’s wonderful!”

He handed it to her, and she cradled it in her two hands while the others looked.

“Incredible luck,” Dr. Warren said in awe. “The very first try!”

“Let’s open the others,” Rick said quickly. He handed one to Jack.

The mate opened it and probed. “No luck,” he said. He flipped the meat over the side and dropped the shell on deck. “Let’s have another.”

Chahda handed him one. “Maybe this one.”

The Hindu boy was right! In a moment a second pearl, white and round, slightly smaller than the first, was in Barby’s hand.

Dr. Warren scratched his head. “This is too much! Jack, have you ever seen anything like this before?”

Two pearls in three oysters! It's incredible!"

"Open the rest," Bill Duncan said. "Maybe you hit the jackpot."

The rest were quickly opened as the group watched in silence. When Jack had finished, eight open shells lay on the deck. And there were five pearls in Barby's hands, three of them perfect, two irregular in shape but valuable as baroque or novelty pearls.

They were stunned. To find one pearl in eight shells would have been superlative luck, but five-it passed belief.

Barby stared at the lovely things, her smooth forehead puckered in disbelief.

"I've read a lot about pearls," Bill Duncan said. "But I've never heard of anything like this. There must be some unusual condition in this lagoon. No wonder the Phantom Shark didn't want us around!"

Jack Pualani reached out and touched the pearls. "I don't know what the conditions are," he said, "but I'll tell you this. When we get to Noumea, I'm buying a helmet-or a whole suit if I can get one. There's a fortune right in Barby's hand. There must be a whole mint in this lagoon!"

"Better get some rest, Jack," Tom Bishop said. "We'll talk about it later after you've had a nap. Well, Dr. Warren, what now?"

The scientist looked at the pearls. "I suppose a mere fish survey seems rather anticlimactic after this, but I suggest we up anchor and head east. The sooner we get the second leg of the survey completed, the sooner we can return to Noumea. I'd like to talk with an expert about these. It's . . . well, it's incredible."

Incredible or not, Rick thought, they had finally found the answer to the Phantom Shark's presence in the lagoon. In spite of statistics, in spite of the rarity of pearls, the Phantom Shark had found an apparently inexhaustible source.

He looked at Barby. Her bright head was bent over the pearls she cupped in her hands, but where he should have found a look of sheer rapture on her face, there was bewilderment. She felt his glance and looked up.

Chahda said, "Daughter of the moon, Barby. Bones of gods turned into sea-dwelling pearl. Remember?"

Then Barby said a strange thing. "I remember," she said thoughtfully. "But, Chahda, I don't think the sacred Hindu book was talking about anything like this!"

CHAPTER XV

Barthelemi Has News

Barby had a secret. She hadn't said anything, but the boys knew. And Chahda had suggested that Dr. Warren shared it with her. The two of them had been seen with heads together down in Carl Ackerman's laboratory.

"I won't ask them what it's all about," Rick said. "They'll tell us when they get ready."

"Maybe," Chahda said. "Barby likes secrets. Especially pearl secrets."

Scotty leaned against the rail and stared out into the blue water. "It must have something to do with the pearls and the lagoon. I don't know what else it would be. Incidentally, have either of you seen the pearls since we left the lagoon?"

"Not I," Rick said.

Chahda shook his head.

Rick watched the horizon. New Caledonia should be coming in sight almost any moment now. Jack had estimated that they would make a landfall at about nine in the morning and it was half past eight. He was both glad and sorry that the big island was so close, glad because in Noumea they might find another clue to help in solving the riddle of the Phantom Shark, and sorry because it was almost time to leave the *Tarpon*.

Scotty spoke up. "Do you know, this is the first time we've had a mystery and haven't been able to follow it through? I can't forget how we sat there in the lagoon with the Phantom Shark right under our noses, and we didn't do a thing."

"Couldn't," Chahda said reasonably. "What we supposed to do? Dr. Paul had right idea. Let Phantom hide. If we try to stir him up, maybe means plenty trouble."

"We've never ducked trouble."

Rick smiled at Barby as she joined them at the rail. "Hey, towhead, how about giving us some low-down on pearls? If you won't let us read your book, you'll have to give it to us in easy doses."

"That's right," Scotty agreed. "We want to know what we're talking about when we get to Noumea. Otherwise, who'll believe our yarn about a lagoon carpeted with pearls?"

Barby's eyes opened wide. "You're not going to tell anyone!"

"Not if we can help it," Rick said. "We'd start a rush to Nanatiki that would make the Klondike gold strike look like a school picnic. Come on, let's have the first lesson."

"There's only one," Barby said. "It's very simple. First of all, there has to be an oyster."

"How simple!" Chahda exclaimed. "Even a child could understand!"

Barby froze him with a look. "Then there has to be something that irritates the oyster."

"Prickly heat?" Scotty asked.

"If you're going to be silly," Barby said coldly, "I'll stop."

The boys put on their most serious faces.

“It can be a grain of sand, or a tiny worm, or almost anything. First the oyster tries to get rid of it. Then, if he can’t, he covers it up with a layer of stuff called nacre. That’s what his shell is lined with. The book says he secretes it. Anyway, that is how a pearl starts. The oyster keeps adding layers of nacre, so if you peel a pearl it’s something like an onion. And the book says it doesn’t matter how big the oyster is, or how healthy or anything. The only thing that’s important is how much nacre he can make. Dr. Warren says that’s why the gold lip oysters have such wonderful pearls. They can produce lots of nacre.”

“Did he say why Nanatiki has so many oysters with pearls in them?” Rick queried.

“We talked about it. He thought maybe Nanatiki has some kind of little parasite that gets into oyster shells and starts a pearl. But that’s only a theory, because there is nothing in any of the books aboard about parasites like that.”

Barby switched subjects suddenly. “Is that New Caledonia?”

The boys looked ahead to the horizon. There were clouds that might have been mountains, but they couldn’t be sure.

“Plenty of time,” Rick said. “Tell us some more.”

But Barby had finished the day’s lecture. “Can’t,” she said blithely. “Have to go finish some sketches I want to take home with me. ‘Bye.’”

Rick watched her go down the deck toward the cabins. “She has something on her mind,” he said decisively. “I know her! She hasn’t been acting like herself for two weeks.”

“Let her scheme,” Scotty said lazily. “She’ll tell us, when the time comes. A woman can keep a secret for only so long, then she has to spill it.”

Rick had been watching the horizon. He could see now that below the cloud bank was the blue bulk of mountainous land. “There’s the island,” he said. “Not much time left.”

Scotty nodded. “Anyway, we’ve made ourselves useful.”

The *Tarpon* moved slowly toward the pier while the inevitable immigration officials inspected passports and seamen’s cards. Rick watched the pilot boat race away toward the official dock, then surveyed the scene before him.

Noumea rose in a gradual climb to the hills behind the city. It was pretty in the late morning sun. The harbor itself was filled with shipping. At the main pier, two small interisland cargo ships were tied up, longshoremen crowding on the dock, working the cargo nets. At a smaller pier near by, a beautiful white schooner was tied up. As the trawler moved closer, Rick read the name on her stern.

KOOKABURRA, BRISBANE.

Kenwood had returned from his swing around the islands, then. Rick wondered if Van der Klaffens were also in town. It was possible.

In a short while they swung into the pier and tied up, and the immigration officers went ashore. Rick joined the rest of the group on the aft deck.

“Better check on plane reservations,” Dr. Warren said. “You may have to wait for a few days.”

“We can get a plane going north at midnight tomorrow,” Rick told him. “I checked the schedule before we left Honolulu. But I don’t know about Chahda. How are you going to get back to India?”

“Also checked,” Chahda said. “Go from here to Sydney by plane, then take Dutch air line to Singapore. From Singapore is Indian line goes to Bombay. But don’t know when planes leave here for Australia.”

“You can find out easily enough,” Dr. Warren said. “Would anyone like to have lunch ashore, just for a change in cooking? I would.”

The others agreed. “We’ll go ashore right away,” Barby suggested, “and meet you at Le Bagnard at noon.”

“Go ahead,” Mrs. Warren said. “The rest of us will follow later. I want to write some letters to mail when I go ashore.”

The four left the ship and made their way through the congestion of people and goods on the pier, and presently came out at the edge of the park.

“Barby, isn’t this where old man who is your friend has park bench?” Chahda asked. “Maybe we should visit him.”

“Maybe we should,” Barby said thoughtfully. “But let’s not all go. I want to ask him if he has heard anything new about the Phantom Shark, and he doesn’t like to talk if too many people are around.”

“I can take a hint,” Scotty remarked. “Chahda and I will walk around and meet you on the other side. You and Rick go quiz the old man.”

“Okay,” Rick agreed. He was anxious, too, to see if Bartholemi had any new information.

The group split and Rick and Barby walked into the park. It was getting close to noon, so they knew it was likely Bartholemi was in his usual spot. It was the coolest public place in the city when the sun got high and hot.

They found him on the same park bench. The scene hadn’t changed at all since their departure. He might even have been in the same relaxed position for all they could tell.

The old convict’s eyes opened wide at the sight of them, and he rose to his feet. “So! You have returned safe! You did not go near Nanatiki?”

Barby sat down and invited him to sit beside her. “We did,” she said. “And do you know what? We saw Tiim!”

“You live to tell me this?” The old man was incredulous. “When did you see him? I must know!”

Rick counted back. “It was on the fourth day after we left, I think.”

Barthelemi counted on his fingers.

“Are you figuring something out?” Barby asked.

“Yes, Ma’mselle Barbara. You see, the Phantom Shark was here, in Noumea .”

“When?” Rick asked eagerly.

“Twice that I know of. Once it was on the night of the fifteenth. Ah, how can I tell you how foolish I was? I saw him meet the American again.” He shrugged. “I would not have gone, but I had to know if he was here, or in Nanatiki.”

“You were worried about us,” Barby said gently. “That was nice, Mr. Barthelemi.”

The old man smiled. “What are friends for, if not to worry about? Yes, I saw the American leave his hotel, and I hurried ahead of him to Anse Vata , and I hid on top of the hill behind the beach, far away so I would not be found, but in a good place so I could see if he met the Phantom Shark. He did. Just as before.”

Rick nodded. “It’s a good place for them to meet. The Shark can make a quick getaway into the water. There’s not even much chance of a patrol boat catching him there, because the reef is closed outside of Anse Vata . Only a small boat can get in.”

“When was the second time?” Barby asked.

Barthelemi seemed reluctant to talk. “No one knows of this, except for one other. It was when the American left. I heard talk from a friend who works in the hotel kitchen that he had planned to leave soon after the night when he met ‘him.’ But a cable came. My friend said it ordered the American to buy more chromite , and it took almost two weeks to make the arrangements, and then he had to wait a few more days for the airplane to Australia . The plane was to leave in the hour after dawn, from the field at Tontouta . You know? It is perhaps fifty kilometers from here, in the mountains. The American left the hotel before dawn. I did not see him go. But as he rode to the field, the car ran into a mass of brush that had been placed across the road. It was a lonely spot, above Paita . The car stopped, and the Phantom Shark appeared.”

Barthelemi took another look up and down the path. “The American did not reach the airfield. He has not been seen since that time.”

Rick’s eyes met Barby’s.

Jerrold, in the hands of the Phantom Shark! But why? What would the criminal want with the American? He had sold him pearls enough for his necklace; surely he wouldn’t try to get the necklace back! If the stories were true, it was men like Jerrold upon whom the Phantom depended. He would know that to rob a customer would mean that other rich men would fear to do business with him. It didn’t make sense.

“How do you know all this if you didn’t see him leave the hotel?” Rick asked.

“It was Henri,” Barthelemi said. “He was the driver.

He saw the Phantom Shark, but only for a moment, and then he was struck on the head. When he awoke, both the American and the Phantom Shark had gone. He got into his taxi and he drove back, and

he told me because we are friends. We have been afraid to tell anyone else, because who knows if we might not tell the Phantom Shark himself and never know until his knife found our throats?"

"We'll have to tell the police," Barby said. She looked frightened.

"You must not tell the police," Barthelemi said in swift fear. "If they know, the whole world knows. You would have to tell them everything, and then Henri would surely die. I beg of you, do not tell the police. You must promise!"

Rick and Barby hesitated.

"Promise!" the old man commanded. "If you do not, you will violate the confidence I have placed in you as friends."

There didn't seem to be much choice. Rick and Barby said, "We promise."

Rick added, "If we can tell the boys who are with us, we may be able to do something without endangering Henri or you."

"That will be all right," Barthelemi said. "If you promise not to say my name, or that of Henri."

"We won't," Rick said.

The two joined Chahda and Scotty on the opposite side of the park.

"Take long time," Chahda said. "Old man got news?"

"Plenty," Rick said grimly. "The Phantom Shark got Jerrold."

"Killed him?" Scotty asked quickly.

"I don't know." Rick repeated Barthelemi's story, extracting the promise of silence.

As they walked to the air-line office to check on a plane for Chahda, Rick thought hard. The Phantom Shark had really killed the goose that laid the golden eggs this time. It wasn't in keeping with the way he operated. He wondered if Henri were sure that he had seen the Phantom Shark and decided that he must be. He had probably seen the disguised figure in dark hood and gloves, and possibly the sign of the Shark had been left. There was always a possibility that someone who knew Jerrold had the pearls, plus a large amount of ready cash, had pretended to be the Shark, but Rick didn't think it likely. With the reputation of the Shark, no one would dare impersonate him.

"Wonder how come the air line didn't know Jerrold hadn't left?" he asked.

The answer to that was apparent a few minutes after they had walked into the air-line office. It was occupied by a Javanese clerk who didn't appear to know much of anything. He was office manager, clerk, janitor, flight dispatcher, and general factotum. They gathered that the line was an irregular carrier that operated on a catch-as-catch-can basis. Planes came into New Caledonia twice a week-sometimes. Sometimes they didn't come at all. Evidently it depended on how much pay load the plane could pick up in Australia.

Rick thought the plane crew had probably assumed Jerrold had canceled his trip or had simply missed

the plane, and that he would cash in his ticket or save it until next trip. Likely they hadn't even inquired for the missing passenger on the next run into the island.

Chahda gathered that a flight was due two days hence, but there was no assurance that it would arrive. He shrugged. A day or two didn't mean much.

His reservation accepted by the indifferent clerk, the four went a few doors away to the Panair office. It took only a few minutes to make a reservation on the northbound plane; they already had return tickets.

As they neared Le Bagnard, Scotty asked abruptly, "Well, what are we going to do about it?"

"What can we do? Rick said. "Barthelemi tied our hands."

"Yes," Barby said firmly. "We must do something. He's an American, even if I don't like him much."

"Well have a fine time trying to do anything without telling the others what we're up to," Rick observed.

"We have to," Barby said. "If we left here knowing that Jerrold was in the hands of the Phantom Shark we'd never be able to look ourselves in the face again."

"Too true," agreed Chahda.

Rick sighed. "Well," he said, "here we go again!"

CHAPTER XVI

Rick Tells a Tale

Le Bagnard was deserted except for the Javanese waiter because it was past the morning chocolate hour and too early for lunch. Rick chose a table in the corner, far enough away from the kitchen door so that low conversation could not be overheard. He told the Javanese they would wait until friends arrived before ordering, then plunged into the practicalities of the case.

"All right. Jerrold has disappeared. I don't see how we can even guess where he might have been taken. The Phantom has a sailboat. He might have taken Jerrold to sea, or dropped him on one of the thousand little islands around here, or he might have taken him into the hills."

Chahda made absent-minded designs on the tablecloth with his spoon. "Can't tell. Before we can guess where Jerrold is, we must know what Phantom Shark wanted him for."

"The Almanac Kid has something there," Scotty conceded. "Got any ideas?"

Rick had none. Since there could be no reason for the kidnaping of Jerrold in the face of the known facts there must be some facts they didn't possess. The kidnaping had to be for profit. The Phantom Shark was a businessman. He wouldn't risk his neck for amusement.

“What does the Phantom Shark gain?” he asked.

“Ransom,” Barby said promptly.

Scotty shook his head and signaled for glasses of water. “It doesn’t figure. Kidnaping an American citizen would mean action by the American Consul here. The police would have no choice but to stir up a regular whing-ding that would cause the Shark plenty of grief. He’d be stupid to risk it.”

“Jerrold finished necklace,” Chahda speculated. “Maybe it was more valuable than even Phantom Shark had thought. So he took it back.”

Rick motioned for silence as the waiter brought glasses of ice water. Chahda’s idea might account for the theft of the necklace, although he doubted even that. It wouldn’t account for Jerrold’s kidnaping .

“We have to start somewhere,” he said when the Javanese had left. “Suppose we start by getting the exact dope from Henri?”

“Will he talk?” Scotty asked doubtfully.

“He’ll tell me,” Barby said with complete confidence. “He’s my friend.”

Rick had to grin. Barby had faith in the power of friendship. He agreed that Henri would probably tell her his story, even though he probably wouldn’t tell anyone else. He glanced at his watch and saw that it lacked a half hour tonoon .

“There’s time enough right now. Henri’s probably in front of the hotel. Why not go talk with him?”

“I’d better go alone,” Barby said. “He might not want to tell too many people.”

Rick thought that was probably true, but he wouldn’t permit Barby to go anywhere alone. He was on the verge of saying so when Scotty saved him the trouble.

“You can go alone, but I’ll be right behind you. You get a bodyguard whether you like it or not.”

Barby favored Scotty with a smile. “But I like it!” She pushed her chair back and directed, “I’ll go first. You can come along a few seconds later. Just don’t be obvious about it.”

Before Scotty’s jaw could even drop, she was on her way out of the restaurant.

Chahda started to call after the ex-Marine, then suddenly closed his mouth. He was looking at the door. Rick turned in time to see Van der Klaffens enter. So the Dutch trader was in town!

Rick greeted him cordially. At his invitation, Van der Klaffens pulled up a chair. He drew out a handkerchief and mopped his round face, then signaled for water.

“You had a good trip, yes? How was Nanatiki?”

“Fine,” Rick said. The vague outline of a plan began to take place in his mind. “We’ll tell you about it some other time. Right now we have a problem.”

“Yes?Of what kind?”

“Well, it’s about Jerrold. You remember him?”

Chahda’s eyes opened wide.

“The American? Yes, I remember. What about him? He has been gone for days.”

“That’s just it,” Rick said. “We met him before we left, and, since we were fellow Americans, he asked us to help him out. He was afraid of something, but he didn’t tell us what it was. He just asked us to check up when we got back.”

“Check up? In what manner?”

Rick’s brown eyes took on a faraway look. “He wanted us to check up on his leaving. He told us he was afraid that he wouldn’t be able to leave Noumea alive. We were to go to the air line and be sure that he had gotten away all right.”

The Dutchman’s round face broke into a smile. “Is that all? He did get away all right. The hotel clerk mentioned it to me the morning after he left.”

“Oh, he left the hotel,” Rick agreed. “But he never got on the plane.”

For the briefest second the Dutchman’s expression froze, then he smiled again. “But he must have, because he is no longer here.”

“He started out,” Rick said patiently. “But he didn’t reach the airport.”

“And how do you know this?”

“We talked to his driver. According to the driver, they had reached a point above Paita when Jerrold suddenly ordered the taxi to stop. He had a gun. He forced the driver to get out, then he went on by himself. The driver couldn’t understand what was wrong, but he knew he wasn’t going to let Jerrold get away with it, so he hiked along after the taxi. Two miles up the road he found the taxi, but no Jerrold. There was sign of a fight in the dirt alongside the road, and there was also this.”

Rick reached into his pocket and pulled out the object he had carried as a souvenir pocket piece since the cutting of the rudder cables. He dropped it on the table in front of Van der Klaffens.

The Dutchman’s eyes opened wide. “A tooth of a shark!” He touched it, then drew his hand away. “Have you told the police?”

“No,” Rick said. He shrugged eloquently. “What happened when we told them about our rudder cables? Nothing.”

Van der Klaffens nodded slowly. “They are helpless against such a criminal as this. Well, I join you in lamenting for your countryman. If I can be of service, you must call on me.” He rose. “I must go. I did not intend to stop by, but I glanced in and saw you, so I took the opportunity to say hello. I will see you later in the day, perhaps. By the way, Kenwood is here. Doubtless he will lunch here, as usual. You might tell him your story. He is a man with much strange knowledge. Possibly he can help you.”

The Dutchman bowed and left.

“Wow!Such yarns!” Chahda exclaimed. “What was big idea?”

“I don’t know.” Rick grinned. “I had an idea we might try a half-true yarn on a few people to see how they would react. Van der Klaffens reacted, all right. Did you see him freeze up for a second? And he did intend to come in here, probably to meet Kenwood. It’s bright outside and dark in here. He couldn’t have seen us by just glancing in.Right?”

“Is true,” Chahda agreed. “Now what?”

“Now you follow him,” Rick directed. “I’d have trouble, because he knows me too well and I stand out on the streets, especially where there are a lot of natives.”

“Leave it to me,” Chahda said. “Remember how I track Parsee inBombay ?Cinch. I meet you here or back at ship.”

In a moment Rick was left alone. Chahda would stick to the Dutchman with no trouble, he was sure. The Hindu boy had a knack for being inconspicuous when he wanted to be. He could remove his tie, rumple his hair, change his style of walk and blend right in with a crowd of brown folk like these.

The impulse to tell Van der Klaffens a partially true version of Jerrold’s kidnaping had sprung into being full-blown. When he tried to analyze his reasons, he realized that he had always been unsure of the Dutchman. True, he had been inSuva the night Barthelemi had seen Jerrold meet the Phantom Shark. But his quick defense when he thought they suspected him of cutting the cable had been too pat, almost as though he had been prepared. Then, there was the odd way in which he and Kenwood had told them about the Phantom Shark. Both had known it; neither had admitted it in the other’s presence.

There was one danger the impulse had led him into. Once the story was out, it would be easy to check on Henri. Then Henri would be in danger, even though he had kept his word to Barthelemi by not mentioning the driver’s name or divulging the actual story. The answer to that problem, he decided, was to hire Henri for the duration of their stay-or until Jerrold was found.

Rick left a franc tip for the waiter and started out of the cafe to find Barby and the driver. Then he stopped short. Kenwood was walking across the street from the Place des Cocotiers . The lanky Australian waved a hand and shouted a greeting.

As he came close, Kenwood asked, “Well, Yank, how was the trip? Bump into any Phantom Sharks?”

Rick shook his hand. The Aussie had a firm, warm grip. “Not a single phantom. But I know someone who did.”

Kenwood’s brows lifted.“Aye? Come into Ptomaine Willie’s and tell me about it.”

There was nothing else Rick could do. He went into the restaurant with Kenwood and accepted a cup of chocolate, then he repeated his wild yarn substantially as he had told it to Van der Klaffens.

“Lordstone the crows!” Kenwood muttered softly. “So the Shark has been inNoumea , hey? I’ve been kicking around the islands-just got in day before yesterday. I haven’t heard a thing. What did you say the taxi driver’s name was?”

“I didn’t say,” Rick corrected. “Rather not. He might get in trouble for not reporting it to the police.”

“Aye, thathe might. Well, I don’t know’s there’s any advice I have that might be helpful, except this. Wait a couple of days and see if Jerrold shows up. If he doesn’t, better go to your American Consul and tell him what you know.”

“Good idea,” Rick said.

Kenwood finished his chocolate and stood up. “See you later? Got a bit of business to attend to, then I’m having chow with Van der Klaffens. Remember him? He’s at a boardinghouse near by where the food is good-he says. But maybe we’ll see you here for supper?”

“Could be,” Rick agreed. “Anyway, come aboard the *Tarpon* and pay us a call.”

“That I will. See you later, Yank.”

Rick got busy as soon as the Australian left. He found a menu on the table. It was blank on one side. He tore it in half, borrowed a pencil from the waiter, and quickly wrote two notes.

One, to Barby and Scotty, said: “Hire Henri for as long as we’re in town. I may have stuck his neck out. If I have a chance, I’ll phone you here.”

The second note he addressed to Dr. Warren. “Chahda and I had a chance to do a little sight-seeing. Knew you wouldn’t mind. Will be back early.” He signed his name and handed the chits to the waiter, first folding them and turning down the corners.

“You know girl and boy here with us? This one is for them. Second one is for tall American with little beard. You savvy?”

The Javanese nodded. “Much savvy.”

Rick tipped him and hurried out. Kenwood’s words and actions didn’t jibe with those of Van der Klaffens. The Dutchman had mentioned no date with the Aussie. On the contrary, he had suggested that Kenwood would probably eat at Le Bagnard. And Kenwood had tried that old gag about ‘what name did he mention.’

The story had stirred up something, all right, although it was too soon to tell what. Rick felt like a man who dives into a clear pool and deliberately stirs up the muddy bottom. But, he hoped, out of the murky cloud he had created would come something concrete. With Chahda on Van der Klaffens’ trail and himself sticking with Kenwood, something was bound to turn up.

Barby and Scotty walked into Le Bagnard less than ten minutes after Rick’s departure. The waiter pondered over two notes, then finally handed them one. Barby noted that they looked like two halves of a menu.

She read the note, then gave it to Scotty. As he glanced through it she went to the waiter. “Let me have the other one, too.”

He shook his head. “Is for tall American with beard.”

“My guardian,” Barby said. “Illgiveit to him.”

The waiter looked dubious. Barby found an American twenty-five-cent piece in her handbag and gave it to him. It brought results. She unfolded it and read Rick's scrawl.

"Leave it to Rick to stir up trouble! Well, what now?" Scotty said. "Do we just sit here and wait, or shall we go hire Henri and then come back?"

Barby gave him a direct look. "What would you do if you were alone, Scotty?"

Scotty shrugged. "Probably go hotfooting after him and get us both in a jam. Always provided I could find out which way he went."

"You could," Barby said. "Suppose you get started? I'll write a note to the Warrens and then go get Henri, and we'll swing around the park and pick you up."

Scotty considered. He didn't like the idea of Rick and Chahda going off without him. Not that he resented being left out, but he knew that there was strength in their sticking together.

"Okay," he said finally. "But be careful!"

"Don't worry," Barby said. "I'll be right behind you. She took another menu, found a pencil in her bag, then stopped as an idea struck her. She beckoned to the waiter. "Was anyone in here with my brother?"

"Yes, missy. Was two men. Was Tuan Vandklaff and Tuan Kenwood."

She might have known those two would be in it somewhere, although her idea had been simply that Rick and Chahda must have met someone in the restaurant. She hadn't guessed whom.

She wrote rapidly on the back of the menu. "We are taking the old touring car for a short trip. Plane passage all arranged. Will be back early. Love, Barby."

"This is for the tall American with the beard," Barby said, and handed her note to the waiter, then she ran out of doors and looked for some sign of Scotty. He was in conversation with a Kanaka on the edge of the park. She turned up the street and walked rapidly to where Henri was parked in front of Jerrold's former hotel.

The big Kanaka driver gave her a wide smile. "No more tell, missy. All gone."

"I know you told me all that happened," Barby said. "We won't talk about it any more, Henri. I want to hire your taxi."

He bowed her into the back seat, then ran around to the front, his bare feet making a splatting noise on the hot pavement. The old touring car groaned into life. Barby pointed down the street toward where she had seen Scotty. Henri moved away from the curb with a great grinding of gears.

Scotty was waiting at the curb.

"Rick went up the hill toward the cathedral.

"Let's go."

"Did that man see him?"

“Yes. I told him my friend and I had gotten separated in the market.”

At Scotty’s direction, Henri took the main street leading to the cathedral. But there were other streets, some that hugged the hillside and others that wound around through the houses. Although Scotty asked several people if they had seen a young American, they could not pick up the trail. He knew it was no use to ask for Chahda. The Hindu boy with his brown skin would not be noticed.

“What can we do, Scotty?” Barby asked, worried.

“Go back to the restaurant, I guess.”

“We can’t do that. I left a note for the Warrens that we were going for a ride into the country. They’ll be there by this time, or in just a few minutes. It’s almost noon.”

Scotty thought for a moment, his quick glance taking in the surrounding area. His eyes stopped on the cathedral tower.

“Then there’s only one thing we can do. You’ll have to pretend to be a tourist in search of a view, and charm the caretaker into letting you go up into the tower. I’ll take a stand down the street and Henri can park around the corner. Between us, we’ll have a view of this entire area. If Rick or Chahda or either of the two men come out into the street, we’ll see them.”

“Suppose they don’t come out?” Barby objected.

“If they don’t . . .” Scotty didn’t finish the thought. It would mean that by disobeying Rick’s orders to wait in the restaurant, they had cut themselves off from communication with him. It would mean that Rick and Chahda, if they got into a dangerous spot, would have no one to call on for help!

CHAPTER XVII

Three Twisted Trails

Kenwood’s long legs took him swiftly across the Place des Cocotiers and into a side street. Rick followed at a discreet distance.

With Van der Klaffens, Rick thought, the reaction had been surprise. Why? The Dutchman had a right to be surprised, of course, but why should his surprise have led him to lie?

Kenwood had concealed his reaction better. Only the fact that his story didn’t jibe with the Dutchman’s gave grounds for suspicion. What did the two know about Jerrold?

Rick crossed the street to take advantage of the cover offered by a line of trucks discharging produce, but his caution wasn’t really necessary. Kenwood was hiking at a pace that made Rick hurry to keep up, and the Australian wasn’t taking time out to look behind him.

They passed from the business district into a residential part of town where old houses with balconies overhanging the street clustered together. Kenwood strode past the row of houses, then turned into a narrow street. Rick sprinted to catch up and looked around the corner in time to see the Australian go into a door.

The house into which the Australian had gone was set slightly apart from its neighbors. Rick cast about and saw that it was separated from the neighboring house by an alley about three feet wide, overgrown with weeds. Rick looked down the narrow alley and saw that there were windows in both houses, but that they were well above ground. If he crouched low, he wouldn't be seen.

He took a quick look around and saw no one on the street or in the windows of any of the surrounding houses. He scooted into the alley. The weeds were almost to his waist. He kept low and picked his way cautiously.

The last window was open. Rick took shelter under a stoop at the rear of the house and waited. He thought he could hear voices. But were they coming from the rear of the house, or from the window he had just passed? He decided to try the window. He crept from his shelter.

Kenwood was in the room. Rick kept his head below window level. He didn't dare look in, but he heard the Australian's voice, raised in an irritable question.

The voice that answered spoke almost unintelligible English. "Tuan Van, he asks. Not know. Soon he goes."

"Where did he go?" Kenwood demanded.

"Not know. Took car."

"Think! When did you last see Nondo?"

"Nondo come yesty . Soon go."

"Where did he go?"

"Not know, Tuan."

"Did he go to Laguerre?"

"Not know, Tuan."

"All right! Blast it, I'll have to find out some other way. Call Gelima, and tell him to bring out my car."

"Yes, Tuan."

A door slammed inside the house. Rick moved away, sure that he had heard the last of the conversation. Kenwood was angry at the ignorance of his houseboy. But Rick had gained a little information. Van der Klaffens had come, and he had gone in a car. What had Chahda done then? Kenwood was also about to go somewhere in a car.

Rick moved swiftly from the little alley and took up a post on a corner diagonally across from Kenwood's house. He was in time to see a Tonkinese boy hurry out of the front door and down the

street. That would be Kenwood's houseboy, hurrying to find Gelima, whoever he might be.

Rick pondered what he had heard. Kenwood had been anxious to find out about someone called Nondo. He had never heard the name before. He wondered if Nondo might be the Phantom Shark. One thing was becoming clear: Van der Klaffens and Kenwood knew a great deal more about the Phantom Shark than they had let on.

What was the next step? If Kenwood left by car, Rick would be stranded. He thought about Barby and Scotty waiting at Le Bagnard with Henri. If he could contact them, it might be possible to follow the Australian.

He had to chance getting to a telephone. He left his hiding place and ran back the way he had come, trying to recall where he had seen a store that might have a telephone. He had almost reached the corner of the street when a small car of French make rolled by. The Tonkinese houseboy was in the front seat next to the driver, a Kanaka. Rick stepped into a doorway and waited. The car pulled up in front of Kenwood's house. The Tonkinese houseboy got out, and at the same time Kenwood came from the house and jumped into the car.

Rick watched unhappily. It was too late now. He had lost Kenwood. The car flashed away from the curb, turned rapidly around in the narrow street, and roared toward Rick. He flattened himself in the doorway.

The car sped by. Kenwood, looking straight ahead, didn't see Rick.

He waited until the car rounded the next corner, then ran for the business district, in the opposite direction from that which Kenwood had taken. He reached the corner of the residential street and hesitated. There were a number of stores. He turned right and started downhill to a group that looked more prosperous and were more likely to have phones.

Had Rick crossed the street, he would have been within sight of the cathedral steeple and Barby would have seen him. Had he continued straight ahead, he would have walked right into Scotty. But by turning right, he kept buildings between him and the others.

In an office supply store he found a telephone. The proprietor cheerfully gave his permission to use it. Rick thumbed through the thin phone book and found the number of Le Bagnard. The operator got the connection and a voice with an accent answered.

"I want the American girl or the American boy," Rick said. "Are they there?"

"They gone."

"Where did they go?"

"Not know. See them go in car."

"How long ago?"

"Not so long."

Rick thanked him and hung up, then stared thoughtfully through the store window. Barby and Scotty had gone in a car, probably Henri's. But where had they gone, and why? He shook his head. He couldn't

chase all over the city looking for them now. Kenwood was on his way somewhere, probably following the same route Van der Klaffens had taken. And where was Chahda?

There was only one clue to follow. Kenwood had mentioned a name that sounded like Laguerre. Who, or where was Laguerre?

“Have you a map?” he asked the proprietor.

“Certainly, monsieur. Of Noumea?”

“I’m looking for something called Laguerre,” Rick explained. “Have you ever heard the name?”

“But yes. It is a small village, not far from here. You wish to locate it on a map?”

“It you please.”

The man selected a map from a counter case and unfolded it. It was a large-scale map of New Caledonia, with a smaller insert showing the area around Noumea Harbor. He pointed to a point on the coast above Noumea. “Port Laguerre. There is a village, a small place of no consequence.”

Rick looked at the map scale, then estimated the distance. It was seven or eight miles from Noumea, allowing for the irregular coast line.

“How can I get there?” he asked.

“By car, although it is a rough trip. Also, if you are lucky, you may find a railroad coach.”

“Railroad?” Rick looked his surprise.

“Of a sort. It is not a good railroad. Mostly it is used to transport workmen to and from the mines. But cars go all the time, and if you are lucky, you may find one.”

Rick thanked him, paid for the map, and tucked it into his pocket. He hadn’t suspected the presence of a railroad on New Caledonia, but it was clearly marked on the map, and the terminal wasn’t far away. He hurried across town.

Laguerre, from its location on the map, would be a good hide-out for the Phantom Shark. It was close to Noumea, but isolated. Furthermore, the Shark could have reached Anse Vata beach by water from Laguerre.

The railroad station was not for commercial use, it seemed. At least he could find no one to sell him a ticket. He went to the rear of the station and found a group of men working on a tiny Diesel-operated locomotive. The tracks on which it sat seemed scarcely more than a yard wide. It was a railroad in miniature, with tiny freight cars, the only island railroad in the South Pacific.

Rick walked over to a man who stood on the outskirts of the repair gang. “How can I find about getting a ride to Laguerre?” he asked.

“Rein?”

“Laguerre,” Rick said. Evidently the man didn’t understand English.

The man called to one of the group, and spoke rapidly in French. Another Frenchman walked toward Rick. "You go to Laguerre?"

"Yes. Is there a train?"

"We go ten minutes. You can come."

"How much will it be?"

"Much? Oh, nozzing . Eesfor workmen. You just get on."

"Thanks very much," Rick said, delighted with his luck.

Chahda was getting anxious. Over fifteen minutes had passed since Van der Klaffens sped from sight in his car, and not another bit of transportation had passed. He walked to the police box by the side of the road and struck up a conversation with the Kanaka policeman.

"Not many cars? When bus comes?"

"Sometimes many cars, sometimes not. Bus comes twice day. In morning. Also comes night."

Then there was no hope of getting a bus. "Maybe car comes, you help me get ride? Most important I get ride."

The policeman shrugged. "Car comes, you get ride. I stop car and ask."

Chahda nodded his thanks. He had removed his necktie and put it in his pocket, and he had rumped his hair in a good imitation of the local hair-do. He could easily pass for a light-colored native boy. Van der Klaffens hadn't noticed him, even when he looked back once. But by getting a car, the Dutchman had effectively left him behind. Chahda had managed to reach the outskirts of town by jumping on the back of a passing truck. Then the truck had turned up a side street and he had been forced to jump off, in time to see the rear of the Dutchman's car vanish down the road.

"Car come," the Kanaka policeman said. He stepped into the road and held up his hand.

Chahda saw that it was a small car of French make. A Kanaka drove while a white man sat in back.

In a moment everything was arranged. The man in the back seat looked disgruntled and impatient, but he raised no serious objection. Chahda thanked the officer and climbed into the front seat.

"All right, Gelima," the man in back said. "Get going."

He had a British or Australian accent. Chahda wondered. The man wore a seaman's white cap, too, and even though he was sitting down it could be seen that he was taller than average.

The Hindu boy swiveled around and faced the man.

"Your pardon, monsieur. You need number one cabin boy?"

"Cabin boy? For what?"

“For pretty big schooner with funny name.” The man smiled. “*Kookaburra*. That’s the name of an Australian bird. But I don’t need a cabin boy.” “Too bad,” Chahda said. “Maybe next time.” He turned and faced front again, his heart hammering. By the sheerest luck, he had gotten a lift from Kenwood, Van der Klaffens’s Australian friend!

Barby was tired of waiting, and besides, the man who had let her go up into the steeple would be getting suspicious. She had seen nothing of Rick, Chahda, Van der Klaffens, or Kenwood. Of course one or all of them might have been in a car that had gone through the area, but she couldn’t be expected to see them through a steel top.

She made her way down, thanked the caretaker, and went out into the street. A block away she found Scotty.

“We can’t just wait around,” she said impatiently. “Think of something, Scotty.”

“There’s only one thing we can do. Canvass the area and ask everyone we see. But that’s a big job.”

“I don’t care,” Barby said firmly. “We have to find them. You take one side of the street and I’ll take the other.”

“Let’s get started,” he agreed.

They separated and began a slow canvass of the neighborhood. Every person who spoke anything resembling English was asked about an American boy who had passed a short while ago. All answers were negative. Then, as they moved to a busy business street, Barby found their first clue. A Kanaka peddler had seen what he believed was an American. At least he had been young, and he had walked very rapidly, which no New Caledonian in his right mind would do in the heat of the day. He had come by after a tall man who also walked rapidly. Then, some time later, the young man had come back again.

Barby hurried to Scotty. “We’re on the right track! Rick came this way following Kenwood, then he came back down the street again.”

“Good,” Scotty exclaimed. “Keep going.”

They hadn’t asked about Chahda, realizing that he would not be noticed particularly in a city where brown skins predominated.

Barby continued on her way, asking each store proprietor, each truck driver and each street vendor. Then, as they neared the place where the street joined a main thoroughfare, Scotty came out of a store and hailed her.

“Come on,” he called. “I know where Back went!”

CHAPTER XVIII

Nondo

the flatcar swayed, groaned, and rattled at incredible speed over flat countryside while Rick tried to hold on with one hand and scan his map with the other. He had a clear picture now of the location of Laguerre in relation to Noumea . One large peninsula and two smaller ones separated Laguerre from Noumea Bay . And, what was most interesting, the railroad went in as straight a line as possible across country while the road took a great curve away from the sea to a town called Dumbea . Then it ran toward the sea again until it reached the town of Paita , near which Jerrold had been captured by the Phantom Shark.

The railroad was the shortest leg of a triangle, with the other legs formed by the curve in the road. At the speed they were making, and with the shorter distance to cover, Rick thought he might very likely reach Laguerre ahead of Kenwood. The Australian would have to proceed at a moderate speed because the road was not very good.

The trainman came back, balancing himself like a sailor in heavy weather. "Laguerre two- t' reeminute."

Rick wondered if it would be wise to go right into town. "Can I get off this side of Laguerre?" he asked.

"You want to get off, better go now. Laguerre soon." The trainman turned and yelled something in French. The engineer stuck his head out of the cab and waved. The train slowed, swaying perilously.

Rick folded the map and got to his feet, holding on to the brake wheel for support. Ahead, near the sea, he saw a group of huts, evidently made of grass. To his left the sea was cut off by heavy jungle. Between him and the jungle was a wide field of cogon grass.

The train slowed, the rasp of steel brakes on steel wheels sending a quiver down Rick's spine. Then the trainman gestured. It was time to jump. They evidently weren't going to stop completely. Rick yelled his thanks, picked his spot, and jumped. He landed running, fighting to keep his balance. Then he slowed to a stop and waved as the train forged ahead.

He started through the field of cogon to the edge of the jungle, thinking that the woods would hide him. Then, halfway across the field, he came to a road. It wasn't much of a road—two wheel tracks through the tall grass. He hesitated as he noticed a tiny patch of black against the yellow-green grass. He touched it and sniffed. Oil, and so fresh it hadn't had time to absorb into the thirsty earth. A car had passed, very recently.

That decided him. The road must branch off the one that led into town. He followed it and saw that it turned into the jungle.

The woods were dense, overgrown with creepers. The road was little more than a trail, just wide enough for a car to pass—if the driver didn't mind rubbing the sides against the foliage. He moved rapidly but with caution. He didn't know when he might enter a clearing.

A perfect hide-out for someone like the Phantom Shark, he thought. Close to Noumea , but well hidden, and handy to the sea. It was close to Paita , too, according to the map. His pulse began to pound. There was every possibility that Jerrold ... his thought broke off as he sensed a presence behind him. He whirled, but too late. Something thudded home behind his ear. The strength flowed out of his legs and sense fled from him.

Just below Paita , the car in which Chahda rode slowed to a stop. The Hindu boy saw that a narrow dirt

road led away from the macadam.

“Far as we go,” Kenwood announced. “Out with you, mlad .”

Chahda had no choice but to obey. “Thank you,” he said. “You see me again, maybe, when I come for job as cabin boy.”

The Australian grinned. “I don’t figure on hiring any cabin boys. Go ahead, Gelima.”

Chahda stood aside as the car swung into the narrow road. He waited until it was out of sight, then he followed at a dogtrot. The dirt road curved through brush-land that soon gave way to a rolling field of high grass.

Far ahead, Chahda saw the roofs of a town. He counted eight houses, all with thatch roofs. But before he reached them, a few yards on the other side of an incredibly narrow railroad track, the road branched. A little-used road cut through the swale and across the grassy field. Chahda bent and studied the ground. There was only one set of fresh tire marks in the dust of the road surface, and they turned off on the new road. That satisfied him. He turned off, too, and continued at his best and most enduring pace, a fast walk that was not quite a run.

Henri drove like a madman, but Scotty didn’t object. He was glad that he had insisted that Barby return to Le Bagnard . There was no telling what danger he might run into in Laguerre. Also, he felt that Dr. Warren should be informed of the recent developments.

They sped past tiny villages of Kanaka folk, and the people stopped to gape at the speed of their passing. Chickens squawked their way to safety, and now and then a pig caused Henri to swerve. It was lovely country, dotted with banana plants, palms, and spreading mango trees, but they were going too fast to enjoy it.

“ Paitacome!” Henri called back.

They went through the village without slowing. An oxcart pulled to the side as Henri’s horn wailed, but so slowly they missed it only by the width of a coat of paint. A few minutes later they reached the village of Laguerre .

“Stop,” Scotty ordered.

There were less than a dozen huts, all made of the split bamboo material called suwali . All were occupied by Kanakas, big, friendly folk who clustered around the car.

Scotty said, “Henri, ask if they’ve seen another car.”

Henri spoke in the queer pidgin French of the island. The villagers shook their heads and answered volubly.

“What did they say?” Scotty asked.

“Say no car come two, free days.”

“Ask if there are any other houses around,” Scotty said.

Henri put the question. It was answered with a great deal of pointing.

“They say house there.” Henri gestured to the left.

“In the jungle?”

“They say yes. Road back small way. I find.”

Scotty considered. If there were a house in the jungle that ran along the coast, it wouldn't do to tip their hand by driving right up to it.

“Henri, wait here in the village for me.”

Henri nodded.

Scotty got out and walked down the road until he came to a turnoff leading into the jungle. For perhaps twenty minutes he picked his way through the tangled growth, then he saw something that made him stop short.

The jungle skirted the bay, stopping at the edge of a low bluff that dropped vertically to the beach. Scotty had followed the rim of the bluff because it was easier going. Now, a few yards ahead, he saw a flight of stairs leading down toward the water. He inched forward and saw that they led to what was evidently a boathouse, built out over the bay and concealed by two fingers of jungle scrub that thrust out on either side.

A mouse with thorns on its feet was running around inside Rick's skull, trying hard to get out. He wished it would succeed. He tried to sit up, but his head was too heavy. Then he realized someone was helping him. He sat up with a Herculean effort and looked dizzily into a familiar brown face.

“Rick! You not dead?”

“Not yet,” Rick said. He tried to lift a hand to rub his sore head but his hand wouldn't move.

“You tied,” Chahda explained. “Minute.” He knelt and fumbled at Rick's wrists. In a moment he held up a belt. “With this.”

Rick put one hand to his head and felt a lump behind his ear. He winced at the touch. “Someone really got me good, and I didn't even see who it was.”

“We find out now,” Chahda said. “Can you walk all right?”

“I can walk,” Rick said, and proved it by standing up and taking a few hesitant steps. “I don't know how well.”

Chahda's forehead creased. “Maybe better you stay here. I go see what is up. House close by, and two cars. Van der Klaffens and Kenwood here.”

“I'm going with you,” Rick said. He wished the top of his head would blow off and be done with it.

Chahda motioned for quiet and stepped out to the road. Rick followed, one hand nursing the lump behind his ear.

For perhaps two hundred feet they moved through jungle that would have been almost impassable except for the narrow road. Then, as the road curved around a giant banyan tree, they saw the house.

It was of wooden construction with a painted tin roof. In a clearing between them and the house were two cars. One, Rick recognized as Kenwood's. Where was Gelima, Kenwood's driver? The boys faded into the woods and examined the place from a safer distance. Gelima wasn't in sight, nor was anyone else.

"Let's try to get closer," Rick said softly.

They circled to the left, still keeping in the woods. There was no one to be seen, but a side door was open, and from within came the sound of angry voices.

The boys looked at each other. They had to get in on this!

"We can make it," Rick said. "Looks like everyone is inside. It will be a cinch. Keep low, and keep the cars between us and the house, then go around the cars, keeping way down, and we'll be under the window."

"Easy," Chahda said. "You all right?"

"Fine. Let's get going."

Rick led the way. He moved until the cars were between him and the house, then crouched low and went fast, coming to a stop behind the French car. Chahda moved in and stopped next to him.

"So far so good," Rick muttered. He dropped to hands and knees, to be sure he was below the sight of anyone facing the window, then went scuttling across the open space, not stopping until he was against the wall of the house. Chahda was right beside him.

Rick moved until he was directly under a window. There was no glass in any of the windows, and the sills were only a few feet above ground level. He raised himself up until he could hear the voices clearly.

"I could cut you down and the police would never hold me for it," a voice grated. "Come on, now. One of you is the Phantom, and I want to know which one."

Rick froze. The voice was unmistakably American. It could only be Jerrold!

This was a new turn. The American was threatening, therefore he was not a captive. What went on, anyway? If only they could get a look inside!

Van der Klaffens' voice answered, calm and patient. "I tell you that neither of us held you up. We can prove it. I was asleep in my hotel, as the houseboy can bear witness, and Kenwood wasn't even in Noumea. If anyone held you up it was Nondo."

"They lie!" an unfamiliar voice said.

Rick chafed with impatience. If only they could get a look inside! He crawled along the wall, hoping for a crack or something through which he might see. He rounded the corner and saw a door stoop with two stairs leading to the door. If only he dared look around the corner! He inched forward, and felt Chahda

close behind him.

From inside, Kenwood drawled, "Van's right. What reason would we have for holding you up?"

Jerrold laughed harshly. "Don't you call ten thousand dollars reason enough?"

The door was open. Rick put his hands on the stoop and lifted himself with infinite caution. He leaned forward, ready to draw back instantly, and peered through the open door.

He looked right into Jerrold's eyes!

The big man had a gun in his hand. It steadied on Rick's head. "Keep coming," Jerrold said flatly. He moved with surprising speed for one so big. "Back against the wall, all of you. Brant, keep coming."

Rick had no choice.

"You couldn't have untied yourself," Jerrold said. "Tell your pal to come in, too. I'll shoot if you make me."

There was nothing else to do. Rick and Chahda rose and walked into the room.

Lined up against the wall, hands high, were Van der Klaffens, Kenwood, and the half-caste clerk who had been at the pier, and with whom Rick had fought at Anse Vata. He was Nondo. He had to be. No one else was in the room.

Jerrold's face was covered with a thick stubble of beard, and his eyes were cold under swollen lids. "Line up with them." He gestured with his gun.

Rick and Chahda did so.

"We came because we heard you were kidnaped,"

Rick said. "We couldn't leave a fellow American in a jam."

Jerrold stared at him keenly. "I believe you, kid," he said finally. "I didn't know what you were doing, so I couldn't take a chance. That's why I slugged you."

"You?" It was Rick's turn to stare. "Then you weren't kidnaped?"

"No. I was knocked out by the Phantom Shark, and my strongbox was taken. I came to before the driver did, and I started out for town, hoping to find out where the Phantom Shark had gone." His mouth thinned. "No one robs Walt Jerrold and gets away with it."

He gestured toward Nondo. "I spotted him walking through the streets of Paita at dawn that morning, and I followed him. He led me here. I've been in the jungle ever since, waiting for his boss to show up. I knew he wasn't the Phantom, because of that night on the beach. But I figured he belonged to the Phantom, and I wanted that dirty crook bad enough to lie in the jungle and live on wild mangoes and palm cabbage until he showed up. Now we've got two of them, and one of them has to be the Phantom Shark."

The change in events had caught Rick by surprise. He looked at Van der Klaffens and Kenwood and a

sudden idea struck him. Why did the Phantom Shark have to be one man? Why not two? It would make a wonderful cover up. If they took turns being the Phantom Shark, no one would ever suspect. Hadn't he decided it could be neither of them? But that was without taking into consideration that they might work together.

There was only one thing wrong. He couldn't imagine either of the two being thieves or murderers. It didn't fit. They were tough men; they had to be to exist in the island trade. But he thought they were basically decent.

"It wasn't either of them," he said flatly. "Nondo is your boy. He figured on getting away with your money and pearls and casting the blame on the Phantom Shark. Why not? No one has ever seen the Shark."

Jerrold grinned mirthlessly. "The Shark kills to get pearls. Why shouldn't he take them away from his customers?"

"Bad business," Rick explained. "The only market he has is rich men who aren't too particular whether or not they buy stolen goods, or maybe small pearl buyers he can force into buying. If word ever got around that he robs his customers, rich people would be afraid to deal with him."

Jerrold frowned. "Keep talking, kid. You're making sense."

"Other thing," Chahda put in. "When these men hear you are missing, they get excited and rush right out here. I sure they know nothing before we tell them."

"Chahda's right. I thought it was crazy when I first heard you were missing," Rick went on. "It didn't sound like the Phantom Shark. It never occurred to me that you might have hidden yourself. But now it makes sense. Nondo was the one who held you up. He was double-crossing the Phantom Shark. He tried it once before, at Anse Vata. He was figuring on slugging you and taking away what pearls you had just bought. I'll bet on it!"

Van der Klaffens started. He turned on the half-caste. "Were you at Anse Vata? You dirty scum!" He lifted his arm, as though to strike Nondo, but the man moved like a streak. His shoulder caught the Dutchman in the armpit and sent him hurtling directly into Jerrold. The big man staggered, and in that moment Nondo was on him, wrenching the gun from his hand.

Rick, Kenwood, and Chahda started forward, but Nondo was quicker. With one bound he went headlong through the window, rolled like an acrobat, and was on his feet, running.

Scotty moved slowly through the jungle, careful not to let a sound betray his presence. Suddenly he froze. A few yards ahead, leaning against a tree and smoking a cigarette was a Kanaka. Scotty had never seen the man before; he couldn't know it was Gelima, Kenwood's driver.

The boy sank back into the brush and considered his next move. He could go around the Kanaka, or he could sneak up and put him temporarily out of the picture with a judo punch.

He never had the chance to decide. From somewhere ahead, Rick let out a yell. "He's getting away!"

The Kanaka whirled, dropped his cigarette, and started off at a run. Scotty moved cautiously behind him. In a moment he saw a man sprinting down the path. The Kanaka said something in pidgin French and the newcomer answered, slowing to a walk. Only then did Scotty see the pistol in his hand.

The newcomer walked up to the Kanaka, and Scotty saw his face. It was the half-caste clerk! He came close to the Kanaka, smiled, then with the speed of a striking rattler he brought the barrel of his pistol sharply against the Kanaka's temple. The man crumpled without a sound.

Someone shouted, "He went toward the boathouse!"

Scotty didn't know the score, but he knew that somehow the clerk was running away from Rick. He waited until the man was almost abreast of him, then launched himself in a vicious tackle. His shoulder smashed into the man's thighs and he went down with a crash, but as he dropped, he swung the gun in his hand. The barrel raked across Scotty's head, sending a wave of agony through him. For an instant he relaxed his grip, then the gun descended again across the muscles of his right arm, completely paralyzing it.

The half-caste jerked away and ran.

Scotty watched helplessly as Nondo paused at the edge of the clearing and dug frantically in the earth. There were now several voices besides Rick's shouting. He fought against losing consciousness. Now the half-caste clerk was lifting a metal box out of its shallow hiding place. Tucking it under one arm, and whirling to fire a shot in the direction of his nearest pursuer, he ran with desperate strides in the direction of the boat-house.

And now he was conscious that Rick and Chahda were bending over him and were lifting him to his feet. Van der Klaffens bent over the huddled form of the driver. Kenwood and Jerrold started to go past.

"Which way did Nondo go?" bellowed Jerrold.

"The boathouse," replied Scotty weakly.

"He's gone to get the Shark!" Kenwood exclaimed. He ran to the edge of the forest and looked down into the water.

Rick followed, not knowing what the Aussie had meant. Jerrold and the others crowded around.

An instant later the doors of the boathouse swung open. A huge, silver thing almost twenty feet long flashed out. Rick gasped. It was a shark! A shark of metal! It sped along the surface of the water, then it dived smoothly with a swirl of foam and disappeared.

CHAPTER XIX

The Phantom Shark

Kenwood took instant command. "Van," he barked. "The south entrance! Quick! Where's Gelima?"

The driver appeared, holding one hand to his bleeding temple.

“Gelima, get to the village.”

Gelima looked dazed.

Kenwood switched to pidgin French. Gelima’s face cleared and he started off at a dead run, in the direction from which Scotty had come.

“He can’t get far,” Kenwood said crisply. “The reef has only two openings. Van can pick up some Kanaka boys and block the south entrance with a couple of logs. It’s only eight feet wide. The people in the village can block the north entrance by sinking their canoes in it. He’ll be trapped. Jerrold, take Van’s car. It’s faster. Get to Paita. There’s a phone in the food store. Call Noumea and get the American Consul. Ask him to hurry down to the dock and deputize the skipper of the *Tarpon*. Tell him it’s a matter of life and death. Say they’re to come to the north entrance of Port Laguerre. It’s on their charts. Tell them to break out a trawl. We’ll get that ruddy bloke and we’ll get him good!”

“Call Le Bagnard first,” Rick said quickly. “Ask for the American with the beard. That’s Dr. Warren.”

“I go with him,” Chahda said. He ran for the car, the big American following.

Rick stared out to where the craft had vanished. Beyond, a quarter mile away, he could see the foam where breakers shattered on the reef.

“I knew he was a bad ‘un,” Kenwood said. “I should have wrung his neck long ago.”

“That’s your craft, isn’t it?” Rick asked.

“Right.”

Rick nodded. “You and Van der Klaffens together. You’re the Phantom Shark. And you’ve been pulling a fast one on people for years.”

He was remembering a lot of things. The tales of horror about the Phantom Shark had come from Kenwood and Van der Klaffens themselves. It was all a deliberate myth which they had spread.

“That was your schooner we saw at Nanatiki, wasn’t it?” Rick went on. “You were collecting pearls. But how did you make it look like a ketch? Jack, the mate of the *Tarpon*, isn’t easy to fool.”

Kenwood grinned. “It might be possible for a man to run up a spare gaff and lash it to one mast so the rigging wouldn’t look the same, especially if he expected visitors.”

“He might expect visitors,” Scotty said, “if he thought his plan to damage the *Tarpon* might fail. The cables were cut, all right, but the trawler didn’t back over the steel shore boat.”

Kenwood changed the subject. “Let’s hike up to the village. I want to be sure the Kanakas have the reef passage blocked so he can’t slip through.”

“How long can the thing stay down?” Rick asked.

“Several hours. There’s air-refreshing chemical inside, and a bottle of oxygen. I’m betting Nondo plans to lay on the bottom until dark. Then he could surface, open the hatch, and swim away. He’s like a fish in the water.”

“Mr. Kenwood, you admitted that metal shark is yours,” Rick said. “How about telling us how it works? We saw it once at Nanatiki.”

“I know it,” Kenwood said, grinning. “I was in it. I surfaced to take a look, and there you were, lined up on the beach. So down I went again. Anyway, I’m kind of proud of the Shark. It’s my own, from stem to stern. Made with my own hands.”

The Australian had been inland on Guadalcanal in the Solomons, trading with the natives when he had come across the wreckage of an airplane. It was an old P-40, its nose painted to resemble a shark with open mouth. He examined it and found that the fuselage was intact. Evidently the engine and wings had been removed, possibly because of a ground loop or some other operational accident.

The idea sprung into being as he examined the wreck. Near Henderson Field, he found a dump, full of the wreckage of planes. It was overgrown with weeds, a forgotten part of the war for Guadalcanal. Planes shot down in dogfights over the field, other planes shot to pieces on the ground, and still others lost in accidents had contributed to the pile. He chose the best and biggest pieces of aluminum and had them hauled, with the P-40 fuselage, out to his ship.

A letter to a friend in Australia had brought the parts and the tools he needed. The first step was to seal the fuselage, first by riveting aluminum sheets over all openings, and then by the liberal use of caulking materials and plastic paint. He built a deck of aluminum inside the fuselage and made it watertight, then he added a hatch, sealed with a rubber gasket, and a nose of molded plastic.

The compartment under the deck was left open, and the portion near the tail drilled with holes. Thus, above the deck, the craft was watertight. Underneath, the sea was free to run in and out. He had contrived claws operated from the watertight compartment, and so set that they could rake material into the open bottom part.

He put a junk rudder on top as a stabilizer. He added horizontal stabilizers that worked like a plane’s ailerons, from inside the ship. Finally, he used an English-made electric motor that ran from an ordinary automobile battery and geared it to a small ship’s propeller. The addition of a simple rudder, and the craft was ready- except for one thing. It floated on top of the water.

By experiment, he found the amount of lead needed to balance its buoyancy, and arranged it so that it would just float. A push would send it under the water.

And that push was given by the propeller. When the screw turned over and the horizontal stabilizers were properly set, the craft went to the bottom without trouble. It handled easily, and it could turn with amazing speed and grace. Shut off the motor and the craft would rise to the surface very easily when the bottom compartment was empty, very slowly and sluggishly when loaded with shell.

Down to thirty fathoms it worked like a charm. Below that the pressure was too great and the craft leaked dangerously. The device was carried in the *Kookaburra*’s hold, except when in ports where strangers were apt to go aboard. In such places, like Noumea, the Shark was dropped over while outside the harbor and taken to a hiding place.

Rick was enthralled. It was clever, and practical. To collect pearl shell, the craft could crawl along the bottom, even holding itself down with the claws, its motor shut off. While one claw held, the other could break pearl oysters loose from their rocks and push them back into the open mouth of the bottom compartment. The aircraft construction could withstand pressure, and it wouldn’t bother the man inside.

They reached the village and found it deserted. Everyone was at the water front. As they walked down to the water they could see the villagers in canoes, clustered around one spot. At the sight of them, a canoe broke away and paddled to shore. Gelima was in it, with two Kanakas.

Gelima reported in the dialect. Kenwood translated.

“They have sunk four canoes and loaded them with rocks, and they have spread all the fishing nets in the village. He can’t get through here, and Van wouldn’t let him through the other end.”

“Do these people know about the Phantom Shark?” Rick asked curiously.

Kenwood smiled. “They know me, which is even better.”

The sound of a racing motor made them turn. Van der Klaffens’ car was speeding toward them, a cloud of dust marking its passing. It roared into the village and skidded to a stop near them. Jerrold and Chahda got out.

“They coming,” Chahda said excitedly. “Anything happen?”

“Not a thing,” said Scotty.

Jerrold explained, “We caught them at the restaurant just as they were ready to leave. The United States Consul already was there. Dr. Warren is anxious to cooperate. They’re coming at top speed. Any idea how long it will take them?”

“That craft should do about fourteen knots wide open,” Kenwood said. “And it’s about eight miles by water. Say forty minutes at the outside.”

Rick looked at his watch. An incredible number of things had happened since they first stepped ashore. Hours should have passed. But his watch told him it was only a few minutes after half past two ! At first he shook the watch to see if it were running, but Scotty’s and Jerrold’s said the same thing. Then, as he figured back, he realized that it hadn’t been noon when they left Le Bagnard .

Just to have something to talk about, Rick asked, “Were all your pearls and money in the box?”

Jerrold scowled. “I thought he had my strongbox in the house. I don’t know when he had time to bury it. That’s why I’ve been watching the house for his boss to show up. I wasn’t going to let the Shark get away with it.”

“Don’t blame you,” Kenwood said. “When Van turned on Nondo, the rat must have figured the jig was up for fair. He knew that with Van and me on his trail, he didn’t have a chance.”

Jerrold looked keenly at the Australian. “You and Van, eh?”

Kenwood shrugged.

A concerted shout from the reef brought all of them to the edge of the water. The *Tarpon*, running outside the reef, was pushing toward them at top speed.

“Let’s get a canoe,” Rick said excitedly. “We want to go out to meet them.”

Kenwood let out a piercing whistle. In a moment a big canoe broke away and came in to shore. Rick, Scotty, Kenwood, Chahda, and Jerrold got in.

Paddles dipped. The canoe moved out to the reef to meet the incoming *Tarpon*. Kenwood gave instructions to the stern paddler, then translated for the boys' benefit. "Told him to have his men clear the channel just long enough for Warren's trawler to enter, then to close it again."

As they passed the break in the reef, Rick looked down. Loaded canoes on the bottom anchored an impenetrable mass of nets. There must be more than a dozen nets all spread together, he thought. "How deep is it?" he asked.

"About twenty feet," Kenwood answered. "The trawler will make it without scraping the canoes."

The canoe passed over the channel and went to meet the *Tarpon* as it throttled down. As the group climbed aboard, the entire crew of scientists and sailors met them, all asking questions at once.

Rick introduced Jerrold to Dr. Warren and to Skipper Tom Bishop. The boyish-looking United States Consul shook hands with the florid-faced businessman. "What kind of a scrape are you in this time, Mr. Jerrold?"

"A matter of robbery," growled Jerrold.

"I think Mr. Kenwood had better assume charge," Dr. Warren said. "He evidently knows these waters."

Kenwood nodded. "First, let's get through the reef. Got a trawl rigged? If I guess right, he'll be lying on the bottom, probably holding down with the claws. Chances are you'll tear the net some, but I don't think he can hold against the drag."

"Right. We won't worry about the net. What first?"

"First we have to locate him. The lagoon isn't wide. Go up the middle of it and we'll keep an eye peeled. Greatest depth is only about six fathoms. It's clear, so we should be able to see him."

"Right." Tom Bishop took command. Jack Pualani went into the wheelhouse.

The native chieftain signaled that the passage was clear and the *Tarpon* drifted through it. Instantly the nets were swung into position again.

All hands, except those needed in the ship's operation, lined the rails. Jack steered a course straight down the center of the reef-locked water.

Rick strained to see, but there was no sign of a metal shark. If there had been, he would have seen it, because the bottom was clearly visible in the limpid water. Once they passed a real shark, a fish about six feet long.

Then they were at the other end and Van der Klaf-fens hailed them. "No sign of him! Try the outer side, near the reef!"

"Good idea," Kenwood agreed. "Turn her and let's go back, skipper."

Tom Bishop shouted an order. The *Tarpon* heeled over and reversed course. Rick ran to the reef side of the ship. They steamed down its length, about a hundred feet off. Out beyond the reef he saw a tiny strip of island, like the atoll at Nanatiki. Then, as they neared the halfway mark, Scotty let out a piercing yell from the bow.

“There it is!”

In a moment Rick saw it, too. The silver shark was lying on the bottom, nestling against the reef.

Tom Bishop scratched his head. “It’s bigger than I thought. But the net will hold it all right. If we can get the net under it.”

Jack Pualani tossed over a small package of marker dye. Instantly a yellow stain spread on the water, right over the silver shark.

The *Tarpon* reversed course again, on Kenwood’s advice. “Easier to pick her up from the stern,” he said. “The tail is high enough so the net can get under.”

Seamen stood by an otter trawl, a big V-shaped net with a mouth spread of over sixty feet, designed to stay on the bottom. Off the New England coast, such nets were used to catch flounders and other bottom feeders. But Rick doubted if any otter trawl had ever been put to a use like this.

When the *Tarpon* was in position to come up behind the shark, Tom Bishop shouted, “Full ahead!” The trawler leaped ahead. “Over with the net!” The trawl splashed into the water.

The wake of the ship caught the big net. The door boards spread it wide. It dipped toward the bottom and the heavy tow ropes tightened. Then he saw Scotty step from the cabin, and in his hand was a harpoon, brought along for a possible catch of swordfish. The boy walked to the side and looked over.

“Coming up on it!” Tom Bishop yelled. “Stand by the net!”

Yellow dye was around them now. The net caught and the *Tarpon* shuddered. The tow lines strummed taut. Scotty gave a triumphant yell. “In the net!”

“Haul!” Tom Bishop shouted.

Rick ran to the stern, Chahda, Barby, Dr. and Mrs. Warren, and the others beside him. The winch roared and the ropes creaked with the strain. But the net was coming in.

“Full ahead!” Tom Bishop bellowed.

The *Tarpon* had to keep moving, to keep the net from being tangled in the screws. Slowly the big net came up, and in it gleamed the aluminum shark.

It broke water, and in that instant a hatch on its top opened. The half-caste thrust the upper part of his body through, and the pistol in his hand covered the group on deck.

Scotty’s arm rocked back and flashed forward, and as he threw the harpoon, he gave it a slight twist. It flashed through the air, slanting sideways. The heavy shaft smashed into Nondo’s shoulder and dropped into the water.

Scotty started to climb over the rail. Tom Bishop yelled, “Stop the engines!” Rick stepped back, took a running jump and flashed over the rail in a perfect dive.

He knifed into the water right next to the net. A few strokes brought him into it. Scotty climbed to the rail and jumped after him. Then Jack, Kenwood, Jer-rolld , and Carl Ackerman were in the water, too.

Rick reached Nondo first. He brushed off a powerful swing as though it were a mosquito. He took the half-caste by the throat and gave a mighty heave. Nondo came out of the Shark, his feet dangling.

Scotty struggled to reach them through the tangling mass of the net. He edged through the net to Rick’s side.

Rick turned and grinned, but he didn’t let go of Nondo. “I’m just educating this bird a little.”

Nondo’s head dropped limply on his shoulders. “Better wait until he comes to,” Scotty said. “He’s in no condition to learn anything.”

“Hang on,” Jack Pualani called.

The two ropes tightened, lifting the net almost out of the water. Carl Ackerman and Kenwood took Nondo and passed him to the deck. Jack pushed to Scotty’s side and they joined Rick. They all were consumed with curiosity to have a look at the Shark resting quietly and innocently in the trawler’s net.

CHAPTER XX

The Secret of the Lagoon

Scotty accepted another helping of rosette saute from the governor’s houseboy. The Warrens, Barby, Rick, Scotty, Chahda, Van der Klaffens, Jerrold, the governor, the scientists, and the American Consul were dining in state at the governor’s palace in the cool of the evening. Everyone was in a relaxed mood after the events of a strenuous day. Two of the guests bore slight evidence of physical damage that had been inflicted during the course of the day, but they seemed none the worse for wear. Barby was the only one who seemed inclined to be a bit resentful over the passive part she had played in the day’s exciting events. But her frequent reproachful glances in her brother’s direction could not conceal a certain look of smugness that she wore.

Rick had been waiting for the conversation to get back to the subject of the Phantom Shark. He turned to the governor.

“Now that Nondo is in jail for robbery, is anything going to be done about his charges that Mr. Kenwood and Mr. Van der Klaffens are the Phantom Shark and that he was working for them? After all-“

Jerrold interrupted quickly. “Is that any of our business, young man? The governor,” he nodded to the Frenchman sitting at the head of the table, “seems to feel that the so-called Phantom Shark has committed no crime. I have my pearls back safe and sound, and-“

“Yes, you have your pearls back-such as they are,” Barby broke in. Everybody looked at the American girl questioningly. Then Scotty remarked:

“There are some explanations due, it seems to me, from the men who operated as the Phantom Shark. Isn’t anyone curious besides me?”

“Burning like firecracker with much curiosity,” Chahda said.

“So am I,” Jack Pualani agreed. “I want to know about that incident in Honolulu.”

Big Tom Bishop added, “And I want to know why all this running around in dark clothes and masks and stuff? With a lagoon full of pearls, you could sell in the open market.”

Rick looked at Kenwood. The lanky Australian frowned. Even though the identity of the Phantom Shark was known, he evidently didn’t want to divulge too much concerning his activities. There was still a mystery here, he thought.

Barby gave Rick an elaborate wink. He stared at her. She had a pleased, little-girl look that indicated plainly that she, Barbara Brant, had a secret. Then he remembered how mysterious she had been aboard ship.

“Rick,” she suggested, “you’ve guessed a lot about the Phantom Shark’s activities. Tell Mr. Kenwood and Mr. Van der Klaffens how much you’ve guessed. They don’t have to admit anything, of course.”

Rick took a sip of water, stalling for a moment to sum up in his mind just how much he did know-or thought he knew.

“Well,” he said finally, “putting together all the pieces, it seemed to me we had never heard any specific details of the Phantom Shark’s crimes except from two people. Mr. Kenwood and Mr. Van der Klaffens.”

“But Barthelme had a lot to say,” Scotty objected, “and when we asked the hotel proprietor, he was scared stiff.”

“I know. I think Mr. Kenwood and Mr. Van der Klaffens started all the talk, deliberately building up a legend of a terrible, mysterious criminal. You know how stories like that spread.”

“Amazing deduction,” Kenwood said. “Go on.”

“Am I right so far?” When Kenwood and Van der Klaffens only smiled, Rick went on, “Anyway, with a legend like that built up, word was sure to get around, particularly to tourists, about the man who sold wonderful pearls at a low price. Men like Jerrold would be a sucker for a sale. They’d rather get a bargain by buying stolen goods than to pay a slightly higher legal price. Only I still don’t know why, with a lagoon like Nanatiki, the pearls couldn’t be sold in a legitimate market.”

“I do,” Barby said.

Dr. Warren nodded. “She does. And so do I. But I must admit it was Barby’s quick mind that grasped the possibilities, and she was the one with courage enough to risk losing us a lot of money.”

Rick, Scotty, Chahda, and the others looked at Barby. She blushed with pleasure. Then she reached into her handbag and brought out a pillbox. She opened it and turned it over on the tablecloth. One half of a pearl fell out!

“So you really do know,” Kenwood exclaimed. “Well, that does it.”

Rick still didn’t know. “What does half a pearl mean?” he asked. “And why was it cut in half?”

“There were too many pearls in the lagoon,” Dr. Warren said. “But that’s Barby’s story. I’d better let her tell it.”

Bill Duncan suddenly laughed. “I get it now!”

Rick didn’t.

“So do I!” Carl Ackerman exclaimed. “Why didn’t I think of it? They’re cultivated pearls! They’re not real at all!”

Mrs. Warren gasped. “Not real? Why of course they are!”

Jerrold jumped to his feet. “What do you mean the Phantom Shark’s pearls aren’t real?” he roared.

Van der Klaffens sighed. “There goes our secret.”

“So it seems.” The Aussie grinned. “Just our luck to run up against a gang of smart Yanks.” He turned to Jerrold. “Your money will be refunded,” he said coldly.

“But what I want to know is, how did you ever figure out they were cultivated?”

That was Barby’s story. “It was my book, *Daughter of the Moon*. It’s all about pearls, and it said they were so valuable because they were rare as well as beautiful.

Then it went on to say that the value of pearls has gone ‘way down, because a Japanese named Mikimoto, or something like that, discovered how to grow pearls. It said he harvested enough pearls every year to break the market completely and make them cheaper than sand, if he sold all of them.”

“Very true,” Carl Ackerman said. “Natural pearls are an accident. But pearls can be cultivated.”

“But the cultivated ones are not as good!” Mrs. Warren objected.

“A popular belief without much basis in truth,” Van der Klaffens corrected. “Had it been true, the Phantom Shark would scarcely have made a living. The fact is, a pearl is a pearl. It is nothing more than layers of nacre. Whether the layers of nacre form around a grain of sand that got into the shell by chance, or around a tiny button of mother-of-pearl placed there deliberately, is quite immaterial.”

“Correct,” Kenwood said. “If the pearl is removed too soon, the little ball of shell, or mother-of-pearl, may be close enough to the surface to spoil the luster. But let the pearl grow, with layer after layer of nacre, and even an expert who does not know the origin of the pearl cannot tell whether it is natural or cultivated.”

Rick had read of cultivated pearls. The oyster was taken from the water when very young and small.

They were called “sprats” at that stage. Then the shell was opened, and a tiny grain of material inserted, after which the oyster was put back in the water to grow to maturity-and perhaps to grow a pearl around the artificial irritant.

“Must be someone able to tell if pearl is real,” Chahda said.

“Not real-natural,” Van der Klaffens corrected. “All pearls, if they come from oysters, are real. They may be either natural or cultivated. However, there is one man who can tell, and only one. That is the man who drills the pearl so it can be threaded in a necklace.”

“Why can he tell?” Scotty asked.

“Because in a natural pearl, the irritant is so tiny it can hardly be seen. It is like a wisp of dust in one’s eye. Small, but most irritating. Where our eye would water, the oyster produces nacre which hardens into the material of pearl. Thus, when the driller goes into the center of a real pearl, he usually finds nothing. When he goes into the center of a cultivated one, he finds the artificial irritant. If he says nothing-and what driller would, since it is not his business to question-no one else will ever know.”

And that, Rick thought, was the Phantom Shark’s greatest secret. The Dutchman and the Aussie had been selling cultivated pearls as real ones, and, because they had built up the myth that the Phantom Shark was a real pearl pirate, getting the high price of real pearls for them! There was a moment of silence. Jerrold was examining Barby’s half pearl through a pocket magnifying glass. There was a dazed look in his eyes.

“How did you dare to cut a pearl?” Van der Klaffens asked. “Suppose you had been wrong, my dear? You would have destroyed a small fortune!”

“We thought about it,” Barby told him. “I was really frightened. But I was sure, too, sort of. So Dr. Warren and I made a pact not to tell anyone, and we put the pearl in a vise and filed it down. And we found a little piece of shell in the middle.”

“And I was thinking I had found the best pearl bed in the world,” Jack Pualani groaned.

“You’re right,” Kenwood said. “It is. The Japanese beds are fairly shallow, and they use a different kind of oyster. Ours are as close to nature as you can get them, and we haven’t been greedy. Van and I seeded the bed several years ago, and we’ve hardly touched it.”

Mrs. Warren shook her head. “Even though you haven’t murdered people, or robbed divers, it seems to me you are guilty just the same. You’ve been selling cultivated pearls for real ones, and that is most certainly larceny of some sort.”

Van der Klaffens answered her. “You are right, Mrs. Warren. We have only one excuse. We have sold our pearls to unscrupulous men who were more than willing to buy what they thought were stolen goods. Take our friend Jerrold, here, as an example. He bought our pearls, and from the stories he heard, stories which we spread with the help of our Kanaka employees and the natives of Laguerre, he surely believed he was buying real pearls stained with the blood of murdered divers. Yet he bought them. The legend we built up was merely to convince such men that our pearls were real.”

Kenwood broke in. “You Americans have a word for it. You call such a bloke a ‘man with larceny in his soul.’ At first we planned a legitimate cultivated pearl business. We were both divers in our younger days, and we went down in the lagoon in suits and planted our bed. Then, a rich Australian approached

me and asked did I know where he could get pearls, and he hinted he wouldn't mind getting some illegal ones at a lower price. I turned him down, but the idea stuck. Then, after the war, I got the idea for the Shark, simply as a means of harvesting the bed more easily than a suit diver could do it. And one thing led to another, you might say."

"Who cut our cables?" Tom Bishop asked abruptly.

"Nondo," Kenwood replied. "At our suggestion, to be sure. Jerrold was hot after enough pearls to finish his necklace, and it meant a fortune for us. But we had to delay you a bit, because I couldn't afford to have you buzzing around Nanatiki while I was collecting pearls. Van told Nondo to slip below and steal your engine injectors, knowing you probably wouldn't have more than a single spare. We planned to have the injectors found later, by accident. But Nondo got a real bright idea and cut the cables with a cutter out of your own tool chest. Then he fixed it with two of his pals to be in the way when you backed out."

"But those men might have been killed!" exclaimed Rick.

Kenwood shrugged.

"He was too smart for his own good," Van der Klaffens said. "And for ours. But for him, the Phantom Shark would still be the mythical terror of the South Seas."

"Why did he jump me that night at Anse Vata?" Rick asked.

The Dutchman shrugged. "I think your guess was right about him planning to rob Jerrold. And I also think, from what you have told me, that he thought you had seen his face. He knew you and I were friendly, and possibly he feared you would mention it to me, as you had told me of his presence on the dock-which I knew about, of course. So, in a moment of panic, he attacked you."

"My guess, too," Kenwood agreed. "Nondo is mighty smart, but he gets flustered easily."

Jack Pualani spoke up. "Mind telling me about the Honolulu affair?"

"Nothing much to it," Kenwood said. "I got in touch with the man by bribing a servant at the hotel to leave the note. Then, on the morning of the day he was supposed to trade his money for the pearls, I went out in the Shark and anchored the can. I had fixed it in the claws so all I had to do was drop it. The can floated and the lump of coral I used for an anchor sank. Then I watched from the *Kookaburra* until I saw him make the trade, and afterward I got in the Shark, went out and surfaced just long enough to scoop up the can. The rope sheared easily in the claws." He grinned. "I didn't mind him watching me through the glasses. It was good advertising."

Now that the partners had opened up, there were other questions.

Kenwood explained about the trip to Nanatiki. He had put into Vila to drop a passenger, then he had run directly to the atoll in his fast schooner with the Shark aboard, arriving only a few hours before the *Tarpon* showed up. He had harvested pearls for four days, then had sailed to Espiritu Santo and handed the crop to an interisland plane pilot who delivered them to Van der Klaffens.

The Dutchman admitted their fright when Rick told them of Jerrold's disappearance. Van der Klaffens hadn't even waited for Kenwood. He had gone to the house, then, not finding him there, he had jumped into his car and driven to the Laguerre hide-out where Nondo usually stayed. Both men had suspected

Nondo at once. They had long ago suspected he might be overly ambitious.

“What you do now?” Chahda inquired.

At this point Jerrold slowly got to his feet. His face had a beaten look, the look of a child who learns for the first time that there is no Santa Claus. “I’ll tell you what they’re going to do,” he said. “First of all, they are going to give back every cent I paid ‘em for their ten-cent-store trash. Then I’m going to hound these two slimy crooks from the South Seas if it takes me the rest of my life to do it.” The man’s face was getting redder and redder, as his anger mounted. “I can’t expect to get any co-operation from these two-for-a-nickel French-ies.” He pointed with a trembling forefinger at the governor. “But there’s no room out here for thieves. I’m an American citizen and I know my rights-“

Here Barby interrupted. “I wouldn’t boast of it, Mr. Jerrold,” she said. “It seems to me you encouraged these men in what they did, and that you deserved what you got.” She sat down, blushing furiously.

“That will do, Barbara,” said Dr. Warren gently as he got to his feet. “I’m sorry, gentlemen, but we shall have to be going aboard the *Tarpon*. I realize that the code of morals varies in various parts of the world. Personally, I think my wife is right in her belief that selling cultivated pearls for natural ones is common thievery and ought to be punished. I agree, too, with Rick that Mr. Van der Klaffens’ attempt to damage seriously the ship that is in our charge was a desperate and criminal thing to do. However, if Mr. Kenwood and Mr. Van der Klaffens are willing to assume the cost of the new cables and the slight damage to our nets, I am not inclined to press charges against them. I am willing to leave them to the tender mercies of Mr. Jerrold. I regret that what started out to be a pleasant occasion, gentlemen, has ended on an unhappy note.”

The *Tarpon* party arose to depart.

As Rick said good-bye to the two partners, Kenwood grinned. “So long, cobber. You’re not a bad bloke-for a Yank. That was quick thinking, this afternoon. Jerrold was about to get nasty when you popped in.”

“Well always owe you something for that.” Van der Klaffens shook hands. “Good trip home, all of you.”

Rick thought of the Dutchman’s final words as they walked through the darkened streets toward the ship. Chahda was leaving, too, but he wasn’t going in the same direction. He reminded the Hindu boy of that.

Chahda chuckled in the darkness. “Won’t stay away long. Where goes Rick and Scotty, there goes much excitement. Excitement is habit, like breathing. I liking it. Pretty soon stay at home gets dull, and I be back.”

“Excitement is wonderful,” Barby agreed.

“You should know,” Scotty said dryly.

Jack Pualani spoke up. “I’m sorry to see you kids leave. The old ship won’t be the same.”

“Not same for us either,” Chahda agreed. “Big excitements is over. Terrible Phantom Shark turns out to be two business peoples with most strange kind of advertising.”

“It was real adventure,” Barby said dreamily. “The kind I’ve always dreamed about. Even the dinner

was better than any I've ever eaten. What was that meat, anyway? It tasted something like chicken, but it wasn't. What did Mr. Van der Klaffens call it?"

"Rosette saute ," Scotty remembered.

"What means that?" Chahda asked.

Jack Pualani stifled a laugh. "Flying fox."

Barby stopped short. "Do you mean we actually ate a fox?"

"Not exactly," Jack said. "It's the local name for a very large type of fruit bat."

"Bat!" Barby choked.

Rick laughed. "You don't mind a little thing like eating bat, do you? That's adventure, towhead. Real adventure!"

Rick grinned as Barby broke away from them and walked away toward the ship, a slim, proud figure with her pert nose in the air.

Eating flying fox definitely had curbed Barby's desire for adventure. And now that they were going home, far away from adventurous lands, he and Scotty would have to be contented with a more placid mode of living.

Not being a very good prophet, Rick couldn't know that events already shaping up, not far from Spindrift Island , would involve them in the strange adventure of SMUGGLERS' REEF!

THE END

THE PHANTOM SHARK

A RICK BRANT SCIENCE-ADVENTURE STORY, No. 6

By JOHN BLAINE