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# "OLD MARY"

By Louis Becke

T. Fisher Unwin, 1901

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## I

Early one morning, just as the trade wind began to lift the white mountain mist which enveloped the dark valleys and mountain slopes of the island, Denison, the supercargo of the trading schooner *Palestine*, put off from her side and was pulled ashore to the house of the one white trader. The man's name was Handle, and as he heard the supercargo's footstep he came to the door and bade him good morning.

"How are you, Randle?" said the young man, shaking hands with the quiet-voiced, white-haired old trader, and following him inside. "I'm going for a day's shooting while I have the chance. Can you come?"

Randle shook his head. "Would like to, but can't spare the time to-day; but Harry and the girls will be

delighted to go with you. Wait a minute, and have a cup of coffee first. They'll be here presently."

Denison put down his gun and took a seat in the cool, comfortable-looking sitting-room, and in a few minutes Hester and Kate Randle and their brother came in. The two girls were both over twenty years of age. Hester, the elder, was remarkably handsome, and much resembled her father in voice and manner. Kate was of much smaller build, full of vivacity, and her big, merry brown eyes matched the dimples on her soft, sun-tanned cheeks. Harry, who was Randle's youngest child, was a heavily-built, somewhat sullen-faced youth of eighteen, and the native blood in his veins showed much more strongly than it did with his sisters. They were all pleased to see the supercargo, and at once set about making preparations, Harry getting their guns ready and the two girls packing a basket with cold food.

"You'll get any amount of pigeons about two miles from here," said the old trader, "and very likely a pig or two. The girls know the way, and if two of you take the right branch of the river and two the left you'll have some fine sport."

"Father," said the elder girl, in her pretty, halting English, as she picked up her gun, "don' you think Mr. Denison would like to see ol' Mary? We hav' been tell him so much about her. Don' you think we might stop there and let Mr. Denison have some talk with her?"

"Ay, ay, my girl. Yes; go and see the poor old thing. I'm sure she'll be delighted. You'll like her, Mr. Denison. She's as fine an old woman as ever breathed. But don't take that basket of food with you, Kate. She'd feel awfully insulted if you did not eat in her house."

The girls obeyed, much to their brother's satisfaction, inasmuch as the basket was rather heavy, and also awkward to carry through the mountain forest. In a few minutes the four started, and Hester, as she stepped out beside Denison, said that she was glad he was visiting old Mary. "You see," she said, "she hav' not good eyesight now, and so she cannot now come an' see us as she do plenty times before."

"I'm glad I shall see her," said the young man; "she must be a good old soul."

"Oh, yes," broke in Kate, "she *is* good and brave, an' we all love her. Every one *mus'* love her. She hav' known us since we were born, and when our mother died in Samoa ten years ago old Mary was jus' like a second mother to us. An' my father tried so hard to get her to come and live with us; but no, she would not, not even fo' us. So she went back to her house in the mountain, because she says she wants to die there. Ah, you will like her... and she will tell you how she saved the ship when her husband was killed, and about many, many things."

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Two hours later Denison and his friends emerged out upon cultivated ground at the foot of the mountain, on which stood three or four native houses, all neatly enclosed by low stone walls formed of coral slabs. In front of the village a crystal stream poured swiftly and noisily over its rocky bed on its way seaward, and on each thickly wooded bank the stately boles of some scores of graceful coco-palms rose high above the surrounding foliage. Except for the hum of the brawling stream and the cries of birds, the silence was unbroken, and only two or three small children, who were playing under the shade of a breadfruit-tree, were visible. But these, as they heard the sound of the visitors' voices, came towards them shouting out to their elders within the huts that "four white people with guns" had come. In a moment some grown people of both sexes came out and shook hands with the party.

"This is Mary's house," said Hester to Denison, pointing out the largest; "let us go there at once. Ah, see, there she is at the door waiting for us."

"Come, come inside," cried the old woman in a firm yet pleasant voice, and Denison, looking to the right, saw that "Mary," in spite of her years and blindness, was still robust and active-looking. She was dressed in a blue print gown and blouse, and her grey hair was neatly dressed in the island fashion. In her smooth, brown right hand she grasped the handle of a polished walking-stick, her left arm she held across her bosom—the hand was missing from the wrist.

"How do you do, sir?" she said in clear English, as, giving her stick to Kate Randle, she held out her hand to the supercargo. "I am so glad that you have come to see me. You are Mr. Denison, I know. Is Captain Pakenham quite well? Come, Kitty, see to your friend. There, that cane lounge is the most comfortable. Harry, please shoot a couple of chickens at once, and then tell my people to get some taro, and make an oven."

"Oh, that is just like you, Mary," said Kate, laughing, "before we have spoken three words to you you begin cooking things for us."

The old woman turned her sunburnt face towards the girl and shook her stick warningly, and said in the native tongue—

"Leave me to rule in mine own house, saucy," and then Denison had an effort to restrain his gravity as Mary, unaware that he had a very fair knowledge of the dialect in which she spoke, asked the two girls if either of them had thought of him as a husband. Kate put her hand over Mary's mouth and whispered to her to cease. She drew the girl to her and hugged her.

Whilst the meal was being prepared Denison was studying the house and its contents. Exteriorly the place bore no difference to the usual native house, but within it was plainly but yet comfortably furnished in European fashion, and the tables, chairs, and sideboard had evidently been a portion of a ship's cabin fittings. From the sitting-room—the floor of which was covered by white China matting—he could see a bedroom opposite, a bed with snowy white mosquito curtains, and two mahogany chairs draped with old-fashioned antimacassars. The sight of these simple furnishings first made him smile, then sigh—he had not seen such things since he had left his own home nearly six years before. Hung upon the walls of the sitting-room were half a dozen old and faded engravings, and on a side-table were a sextant and chronometer case, each containing instruments so clumsy and obsolete that a modern seaman would have looked upon them as veritable curiosities.

From the surroundings within the room Denison's eyes wandered to the placid beauty of the scene without, where the plumes of the coco-palms overhanging the swift waters of the tiny stream scarce stirred to the

light air that blew softly up the valley from the sea, and when they did move narrow shafts of light from the now high-mounted sun would glint and shine through upon the pale green foliage of the scrub beneath. Then once again his attention was directed to their hostess, who was now talking quietly to the two Randle girls, her calm, peaceful features seeming to him to derive an added but yet consistent dignity from the harmonies of Nature around her.

What was the story of her infancy? he wondered. That she did not know it herself he had been told by old Randle, who yet knew more of her history and the tragedy of her later life than any one else. Both young Denison, the supercargo of five-and-twenty, and Randle, the grizzled wanderer and veteran of sixty-five, had known many tragedies during their career in the Pacific; but the story of this half-blind, crippled old woman, when he learnt it in full, appealed strongly to the younger man, and was never forgotten in his after life.

They had had a merry midday meal, during which Mary Eury—for that was her name—promised Denison that she would tell him all about herself after he and the Randles came back from shooting, “but,” she added, with her soft, tremulous laugh, “only on one condition, Mr. Denison—only on one condition. You must bring Captain Pakenham to see me before the *Palatine* sails. I am an old woman-now, and would like to see him. I knew him many years ago when he was a lad of nineteen. Ah, it is so long ago! That was in Samoa. Has he never spoken of me?”

“Often, Mrs. Eury—”

“Don't call me Mrs. Eury, Mr. Denison. Call me 'Mary,' as do these dear friends of mine. 'Mary'—'old' Mary if you like. Every one who knew me and my dear husband in those far, far back days used to call me 'Mary' and my husband 'Bob Eury' instead of 'Mrs. Eury' and 'Captain Eury.' And now, so many, many years have gone... and now I am 'Old Mary'... and I think I like it better than Mrs. Eury. And so Captain Pakenham has not forgotten me?”

Denison hastened to explain. “Indeed he has not. He remembers you very well, and would have come with me, but he is putting the schooner on the beach to-day to clean her. And I am sure he will be delighted to come and see you to-morrow.”

“Of course he must. Surely every English and American in the South Seas should come and see me; for my husband was ever a good friend to every sailor that ever sailed in the island trade—from Fiji to the Bonins. There now, I won't chatter any more, or else you will be too frightened to come back to such a garrulous old creature. Ah, if God had but spared to me my eyesight I should come with you into the mountains. I love the solitude, and the sweet call of the pigeons, and the sound of the waterfall at the side of Taomaunga. And I know every inch of the country, and blind as I am, I could yet find my way along the mountain-side. Kate, and you, Harry, do not keep Mr. Denison out too late.”

By sunset the shooting party had returned, and after a bathe in the cool waters of the mountain stream Denison returned to the house. Kate Handle and her sister, assisted by some native women, were plucking pigeons for the evening meal. Harry was lying down on the broad of his back on the grassy sward with closed eyes, smoking, and their hostess was sitting on a wide cane bench outside the house. She heard the young man's footstep, and beckoned him to seat himself beside her. And then she told him her story.

## II

“I don't know where I was born—for, as I daresay Randle has told you, I was only five years of age when I was picked up at sea in a boat, the only other occupant of which was a Swedish seaman. The vessel which rescued us was one of the transports used for conveying convicts to New South Wales, and was named the *Britannia*, but when she sighted the boat she was on a voyage to Tahiti in the Society Islands. I imagine this was sometime about 1805, so I must now be about seventy years of age.

“The Swedish sailor told the captain of the *Britannia* that he and I were the only survivors of a party of six—among whom were my father and mother—belonging to a small London barque named the *Winifred*, She was employed in the trade between China and Valparaiso, and my father was owner as well as captain. On the voyage from Canton, and when within fifty miles of Tahiti, and in sight of land, she took fire, and the Chinese crew, when they saw that there was no hope of the ship being saved, seized the longboat, which had been prepared, and was well provisioned, and made off, although the cowardly creatures knew that the second boat was barely seaworthy. My father—whose name the Swede did not know—implored them to return, and at least take my mother and myself and an officer to navigate their boat to land. But they refused to listen to his pleadings, and rowed off. The second boat was hurriedly provisioned by my father and his officers, and they, with my mother and myself and the Swede—all the Europeans on board—left the burning ship at sundown. A course was steered for the eastern shore of Tahiti, which, although the wind was right ahead, we hoped to reach on the evening of the following day. But within a few hours after leaving the barque the trade wind died away, and fierce, heavy squalls burst from the westward upon the boat, which was only kept afloat by constant bailing. About dawn the sea had become so dangerous, and the wind had so increased in violence, that an attempt was made to put out a sea-anchor. Whilst this was being done a heavy sea struck the boat and capsized her. The night was pitchy dark, and when the Swede—who was a good swimmer—came to the surface he could neither see nor hear any of the others, though he shouted loudly. But at the same moment, as his foot touched the line to which the sea anchor was bent, he heard the mate's voice calling for assistance.

“‘I have the child,' he cried. 'Be quick, for I'm done.'”

“In another minute the brave fellow had taken me from him; then the poor mate sank, never to rise again. Whether I was alive or dead my rescuer could not tell, but being a man of great physical strength, he not only kept me above water with one hand, but succeeded in reaching first the sea-anchor-four oars lashed together

—and then the boat, which had been righted by another sea.

“How this brave man kept me alive in such a terrible situation I do not know. By sunrise the wind had died away, the sea had gone down, and he was able to free the boat of water. In the stern-sheet locker he found one single tin of preserved potatoes, which had been jammed into a corner when the boat capsized—all the rest of the provisions, with the water-breakers as well, were lost. On this tin of potatoes we lived—so he told the master of the *Britannia*—for five days, constantly in sight of the land around which we were drifting, sometimes coming to within a distance of thirty miles of it. All this time, by God's providence, we had frequent heavy rain squalls, and the potato tin, which was about eighteen inches square, and was perfectly water-tight, proved our salvation, for the potatoes were so very salt that we would have perished of thirst had we been unable to save water. Ohlsen cut down one of his high sea-boots, and into this he would put two handfuls of the dried potatoes, and then fill it up with water. It made a good sustaining food after it had been softened by the water and kneaded into a pulp.

“An hour before dawn, on the sixth day, Ohlsen, who was lying on the bottom boards of the boat, was awakened by hearing me crying for my mother. The poor fellow, who had stripped off his woollen shirt to protect my little body from the cold, at once sat up and tried to comfort me. The sea was as smooth as glass, and only a light air was blowing. Drawing me to his bare chest—for I was chilled with the keen morning air—he was about to lie down again, when he heard the creaking of blocks and then a voice say, 'Ay, ay, sir!' and there, quite near us, was a large ship! In a moment he sprang to his feet, and hailed with all his strength; he was at once answered, the ship was brought to the wind, a boat lowered, and in less than a quarter of an hour we were on board the *Britannia*.

“On that dear old ship I remained for five years or more, for the captain had his wife on board, and although she had two young children of her own, she cared for and loved me as if I had been her own daughter. Most of this time was spent among the Pacific Islands, and then there came to me another tragedy, of one of which I have a most vivid remembrance, for I was quite eleven years old at the time.

“The *Britannia*, like many South Seamen of those times, was a letter of marque, and carried nine guns, for although we were, I think, at peace with Spain, we were at war with France, and there were plenty of French privateers cruising on the South American coast, with whom our ships were frequently engaged. But none had ever been seen so far eastward as the Galapagos Islands, and so we one day sailed without fear into a small bay on the north-west side of Charles Island to wood and water.

“On the following morning the captain, whose name was Rossiter, ordered my old friend Ohlsen, who was now gunner on the *Britannia*, to take four hands and endeavour to capture some of the huge land tortoises which abound on the islands of the group. I was allowed to go with them. Little did I think I should never again see his kindly face when I took my seat in the boat and was rowed ashore. Besides Ohlsen and myself, there were two English seamen, a negro named King and a Tahitian native. The youngest of the English sailors was named Robert Eury; he was about twenty-two years of age, and a great favourite of the captain who knew his family in Dorset, England.

“We hauled the boat up on a small sandy beach, and then started off into the country, and by noon we had caught three large tortoises which we found feeding on cactus plants. Then, as we were resting and eating, we suddenly heard the report of a heavy gun, and then another and another. We clambered up the side of a rugged hill, from the summit of which we could see the harbour, a mile distant, and there was the *Britannia* lying at anchor, and being attacked by two vessels! As we watched the fight we saw one of the strange ships, which were both under sail, fire a broadside at our vessel, and the second, putting about, did the same. These two broadsides, we afterwards heard, were terribly disastrous, for the captain and three men were killed, and nine wounded. The crew, however, under the mate, still continued to work her guns with the utmost bravery and refused to surrender. Then a lucky shot from one of her 9-pounders disabled the rudder of the largest Frenchmen, which, fearing to anchor so near to such a determined enemy, at once lowered her boats and began to tow out, followed by her consort. At the entrance to the bay, however, the smaller of the two again brought-to and began firing at our poor ship with a 24-pounder, or other long-range gun, and every shot struck. It was then that the mate and his crew, enraged at the death of the captain, and finding that the ship was likely to be pounded to pieces, determined to get under weigh and come to close quarters with the enemy, for the *Britannia* was a wonderfully fast ship, and carried a crew of fifty-seven men. But first of all he sent ashore Mrs. Rossiter, her two children, a coloured steward, and all the money and other valuables in case he should be worsted. His name was Skinner, and he was a man of the most undaunted resolution, and had at one time commanded a London privateer called the *Lucy*, which had made so many captures that Skinner was quite a famous man. But his intemperate habits caused him to lose his command, and he had had to ship on the *Britannia* as chief mate. He was, however, a great favourite with the men, who now urged him to lead them on and avenge the loss of the captain; so the moment the boat returned from landing Mrs. Rossiter he slipped his cable, and stood out to meet the enemy.

“We, from the hill, watched all this with the greatest interest and excitement, and then Ohlsen turned to the others and said, 'Let us get back to the boat at once. The captain has got under weigh to chase those fellows, and we should be with him.'

“So we descended to the beach, where we met the poor lady and her children, and heard that her husband was dead. She begged Ohlsen not to leave her, but he said his duty lay with his shipmates; then she besought him to at least leave Robert Eury with her, as she was terrified at the idea of having to spend the night on such a wild island with no one but the coloured steward to protect her and her children. At this time—although we could not see them—we knew the ships were heavily engaged, for the roar of the cannon was continuous. So, much to his anger, young Eury was bidden to remain with the captain's wife, her son aged twelve, her daughter Ann, who was three years younger, the coloured steward, and myself. Then, bidding us goodbye, Ohlsen and his three men went off in the boat, and were soon out of sight.

“Young as he was, Robert Eury had good sense and judgment. He was angry at Mr. Skinner venturing out to attack such well-armed vessels with our poor 9-pounders, and although he had been most anxious to join his shipmates, he was, he afterwards told me, pretty sure that the *Britannia* would have to strike or be sunk. The first thing he did, however, was to make all of our party comfortable. At the head of the bay there was an

empty house, which had been built by the crews of the whaleships frequenting the Galapagos as a sort of rest-house for the men sent to catch tortoises. To this place he took us, and set the steward to work to get us something to eat, for Mr. Skinner had sent provisions and wine ashore. Then he took the ship's money, which amounted to about thirteen hundred pounds, and buried it a little distance away from the house. I helped him, and when the bags were safely covered up he turned to me with a smile lighting up his brown face.

"There, Molly. That's done, and if Mr. Skinner has to strike, and the Frenchmen come here, they'll get nothing but ourselves."

"By this time it was well on towards the afternoon, and we only heard a cannon shot now and then. Then the sound of the firing ceased altogether. We got back to the house and waited—we knew not for what. Poor Mrs. Rossiter, who was a very big, stout woman, had sobbed herself into a state of exhaustion, but she tried to brace herself up when she saw us, and when Robert Eury told her that he had buried the money, she thanked him.

"Try and save it for my children, Robert I fear I shall not be long with them. And if I am taken away suddenly I want you to bear witness that it was my husband's wish, and is mine now, that Mary here is to share alike with my son Fred and my daughter Ann. Would to God I had means here to write."

"Robert tried to comfort her with the assurance that all would be well, when as he spoke we saw a sight at which I, girl of twelve as I was, was struck with terror—the two French ships appeared round the headland with the *Britannia* following with French colours at her peak. The three came in together very slowly, and then dropped anchor within a cable's length of the beach. The captain's wife looked at them wildly for a moment, and then fell forward on her face. She died that night.

"The two French captains treated us very kindly, and they told Robert, who spoke French well, that Mr. Skinner had made a most determined attempt to board the larger of the two vessels, but was killed by a musket-shot, and that only after thirty of the *Britannia's* crew had been killed and wounded, and the ship herself was but little more than a wreck, did Ohlsen, who was himself terribly wounded by a splinter in the side, haul down his flag. Then the elder of the two Frenchmen asked Robert which was the child named 'Marie.'

"This is the child, sir," said Eury, pointing to me.

"Then let her come with me and see the gunner of our prize," said he; "he is dying, and has asked to see her."

"I was taken on board the *Britannia*, over her bloodstained decks, and into the main cabin, where poor Ohlsen was lying breathing his last. His face lit up when he saw me, and he drew me to his bosom just as he had done years before in the open boat off Tahiti. I stayed with him till the last, then one of the French privateer officers led me away.

"In the morning Mrs. Rossiter was buried; the French captains allowing some of the surviving members of the crew of the *Britannia* to carry her body to her grave. There was a young Spanish woman—the wife of the older captain—on board the larger of the privateers, and she took care of us three children. I cannot remember her name, but I do remember that she was a very beautiful woman and very kind to us, and told us through an interpreter that we should be well cared for, and some day go home to England; and when she learned my own particular story she took me in her arms, kissed, and made much of me.

"About noon the crew of the *Britannia* were ranged on deck, and the elder of the two French captains called on Robert Eury to step out.

"This man here," he said in English, indicating the coloured steward, "tells me that you have buried some money belonging to the prize. Where is it?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Robert; "the captain's wife told me it belonged to her children and to the little girl Mary."

"The Frenchman laughed. 'It belongs to us now; it is prize money, my good boy.'"

"Eury looked at him steadily, but made no answer.

"Come," said the captain impatiently, "where is it?"

"I cannot tell you."

"The younger of the captains laughed savagely, and stepped up to him, pistol in hand.

"I give you ten seconds to tell."

"Five will do, monsieur," replied Robert, in French, "and then you will be losing five seconds of your time. I shall not tell you. But I should like to say goodbye to my dead captain's children."

"The young Frenchmen's face purpled with fury. 'Very well then, you fool!' and he raised his pistol to murder the young man, when the older captain seized his arm.

"Shame, Pellatier, shame! Would you kill such a brave man in cold blood? Let us be satisfied with getting such a good ship. Surely you would not shoot him for the sake of a few hundred dollars?"

"There may be thousands. How can we tell?" replied Pellatier.

"Robert laughed, and then raised his hand in salute to the elder captain.

"Captain Pellatier is right, sir. Madame Melville told me that there were thirteen hundred pounds in the bags which I have buried. And on certain conditions I will tell you where to find it."

"Name them."

"The money is fair prize money. That I admit. But you will never see it, unless you agree to my conditions, and pledge me your word of honour to observe them honourably. I am not afraid to die, gentlemen."

"You are a bold fellow, and ought to have been a Frenchman—but be quick, name the conditions."

"Half of the money to be given to these orphan children, whose pitiable condition should appeal to you. And promise me on your honour as men that you will land them at Valparaiso, or some other civilised place, from where they may reach England. If you will not make this promise, you can shoot me now."

"'And what of yourself?' said Pellatier, who was a little dark man with very ugly monkey-like features; 'you would be the guardian of this money, no doubt, my clever fellow.'

"The insulting manner in which he spoke exasperated Eury beyond endurance, and he made as if he would strike the man; but he stopped suddenly, and looking contemptuously at the Frenchman uttered the one word

"'Babouin!'

"It nearly cost him his life, for Pellatier, stung to fury by the loud laughter of his fellow-captain, again levelled his pistol at the young man, and again the older captain seized his arm.

"'By Heaven, you shall not harm him!' he cried, amid a murmur of applause from the crew. Then addressing Eury he said. I give you my promise. The children and yourself are under my protection, and when we reach Valparaiso I will put you all on shore.' Then he ordered one of his officers to escort Robert ashore and get the money.

"Eury thanked him quietly, and then he turned to Pellatier, and said he was sorry he used an offensive word to him; but Pellatier received his apology with a scowl, and turned away. In half an hour Eury returned with the officer, carrying the money. It was counted and divided, and it was easy to see that Dupuis, the elder captain, was very pleased when the young man asked him to take charge of the half of the money belonging to the Rossiter children and myself.

"The three ships sailed in company for South America a week later. I remained on board the *Britannia* together with Robert Eury and six others of her original crew, the Rossiter children being taken by the Spanish lady on board the larger of the privateers, the second lieutenant of which, with about twenty men, were drafted to the prize. After keeping in close company for four or five days we lost sight of the privateers, much to the annoyance of our captain, who was a very indifferent navigator, as he soon showed by altering his course to E. by S. so as to pick up the coast of South America as soon as possible. This was a most fortunate thing for us, for at daylight on the following morning two sail were seen, not five miles distant, and to our intense delight proved to be English letters of marque—the barque *Centurion* of Bristol and the barque *Gratitude* of London. They at once closed in upon and engaged us, and although the Frenchmen made a good fight, they had to strike after a quarter of an hour's engagement, for the *Centurion* was a very heavily armed ship.

"Her captain was a very old man named Richard Glass. He came on board the *Britannia* and spoke very good-humouredly to the French lieutenant, for on neither side had any one been killed, and he saw that the *Britannia* was a fine ship. He told the Frenchmen to take the longboat, and as much provisions and water as they liked, and make for the coast, which was less than seventy miles distant. This was soon done, and our former captors parted from us very good friends, every one of them coming up and shaking hands with Robert Eury and calling him *bon camarade*.

"Captain Glass put his own chief officer in charge of the *Britannia* (with Robert as his mate) and ordered him to proceed to Port Jackson and await the arrival there of the *Centurion* and her consort. We arrived at our destination safely, and as soon as my story was known many kind people wanted to adopt me; but the agent of the *Britannia* took me to his own home, where I lived for many happy years as a member of his family. Robert Eury was then appointed mate of a vessel in the China trade, but I saw him every year. Then when I was seventeen years of age he asked me to marry him, and I did so gladly, for he was always present in my thoughts when he was away, and I knew he loved me."

### III

"My husband invested his savings in a small schooner, which he named the *Taunton* and within a month of our marriage we were at sea, bound on a trading voyage to Tahiti and the Paumotus. This first venture proved very successful, so did the two following voyages; and then, as he determined to found a business of his own in the South Seas, he bought a large piece of land on this island from the natives, with whom he was on very friendly terms. His reasons for choosing this particular island were, firstly, because of its excellent situation—midway between Port Jackson and the Spanish settlements on the South American coast, which were good markets; secondly, because great numbers of the American whaling ships would make it a place of call to refresh if there was a reputable white man living on the island; and thirdly, because he intended to go into sperm whaling himself, for it was an immensely profitable business, and he could, if he wished, sell the oil to the American ships instead of taking it to Port Jackson. The natives here in those days were a very wild set, but they really had a great friendship and respect for my husband; and when they learnt that he intended to settle among them permanently they were delighted beyond measure. They at once set to work and built us a house, and the chief and my husband exchanged names in the usual manner.

"My first child was born on the island whilst my husband was away on a voyage to Port Jackson, and, indeed, of my four children three were born here. When Robert returned in the *Taunton* he brought with him a cargo of European stores and comforts for our new home, and in a few months we were fairly settled down. From the first American whalships that visited us he bought two fine whaleboats and all the necessary gear, and then later on engaged one of the best whalers in the South Seas to superintend the business. In the first season we killed no less than six sperm whales, and could have taken more, but were short of barrels. The whaling station was at the end of the south point of the harbour, and when a whale was towed in to be cut in and tried out the place presented a scene of great activity and bustle, for we had quite two hundred natives to help. Alas, there is scarcely a trace of it left now! The great iron try-pots, built up in furnaces of coral lime, were overgrown by the green jungle thirty years ago, and it would be difficult even to find them now.

"The natives, as I have said, were very wild, savage, and warlike; but as time went on their friendship for my husband and myself and children deepened, and so when Robert made a voyage to Port Jackson or to any of the surrounding islands I never felt in the least alarmed. I must tell you that we—my husband and myself—were actually the first white people that had landed to live on the island since the time of the *Bounty* mutiny, when Fletcher Christian and his fellow mutineers tried to settle here. They brought the *Bounty* in, and anchored her just where your own schooner is now lying—opposite Randle's house. But the natives attacked Christian and his men so fiercely, and so repeatedly, though with terrible loss to themselves, that at last Christian and Edward Young abandoned the attempt to found a settlement, and the *Bounty* went back to Tahiti, and finally to Afitâ, as the people here call Pitcairn Islands.

"Four years passed by. My husband was making money fast, not only as a trader among the Paumotus and the Society Islands, where he had two small vessels constantly employed, but from his whale fishery. Then came a time of sorrow and misfortune. A South Seaman, named the *Stirling Castle*, touched here for provisions, and introduced small-pox, and every one of my poor children contracted the disease and died; many hundreds of the natives perished as well. My husband at this time was away in one of his vessels at Fakarava Lagoon in the Paumotu Group, and I spent a very lonely and unhappy seven months before he returned. Almost every morning, accompanied by one or two of my native women servants, I would ascend that rugged peak about two miles from here, from where we had a complete view of the horizon all round the island, and watch for a sail. Twice my heart gladdened, only to be disappointed again, for the ships on both occasions were Nantucket whalers. And then, as the months went by, I began to imagine that something dreadful had happened to my husband and his ship among the wild people of the Paumotus, for when he sailed he did not expect to be away more than three months.

"At last, however, when I was quite worn out and ill with anxiety, he returned. I was asleep when he arrived, for it was late at night, and his vessel had not entered the harbour, though he had come ashore in a boat. He awakened me very gently, and then, before I could speak to him and tell him of our loss, he said—

"Don't tell me, Molly. I have heard it all just now. But, there, I'm home again, dear; and I shall never stay away so long again, now that our children have been taken and you and I are alone.'

"After another year had passed, and when I was well and strong again, the whaleship *Chalice* of Sag Harbour, Captain Freeman, touched here, and the master came on shore. He was an old acquaintance of my husband's, and told us that he had come ashore purposely to warn us of a piratical vessel which had made her appearance in these seas a few months before, and had seized two or three English and American ships, and murdered every living soul of their crews. She hailed from Coquimbo, and her captain was said to be a Frenchman, whilst her crew was composed of the worst ruffians to be found on the coast of South America—men whose presence on shore would not be tolerated even by the authorities at any of the Spanish settlements from Panama to Valdivia. Sailing under French colours, and professing to be a privateer, she had actually attacked a French merchant brig within fifty miles of Coquimbo Roads, the captain and the crew of which were slaughtered and the vessel plundered and then burnt. Since then she had been seen by several vessels in the Paumoto archipelago, where her crew had been guilty of the most fearful crimes, perpetrated on the natives.

"My husband thanked Freeman for his information; but said that if the pirate vessel came into Tubuai Lagoon she would never get out again, except under British colours. This was no idle boast, for not only were my husband's two vessels—which were then both at anchor in the lagoon—well armed, but they were manned by English or English-blooded half-caste seamen, who would have only been too delighted to fight a Frenchman, or a Spaniard, or a Dutchman.

"Ah, 'tis so long ago, but what brave, rough fellows they were! Some of them, we well knew, had been transported as convicts, and were, when opportunity offered, drunken and dissolute, but to my husband and myself they were good and loyal men. Two of them had seen Trafalgar day in the *Royal Sovereign* under Collingwood when that ship had closed with the *Santa Anna* and made her strike. Their names—as given to us—were James Watts and Thomas Godwin. After the fleet returned to England they got into mischief, and were transported for being concerned in a smuggling transaction at Deal, in Kent, in which a preventive officer was either killed or seriously wounded—I forget which. Their exemplary conduct, however, had gained them a remission of their sentences, and the Governor of New South Wales, who was most anxious to open up the South Sea Island trade, had recommended them to my husband as good men, Godwin having been brought up to the boatbuilding trade at Lowestoft in England, and Watts as a gunsmith.

"About ten days after the visit of the *Chalice* my husband left in one of his vessels for Vavitaio—only a day's sail from here. He wanted me to go with him, but I was too much interested in a large box of English seeds, and some young fruit trees which the Governor of New South Wales had sent to us, and so I said I would stay and watch our garden, in which I took a great pride. He laughed and said that I must not forget to look out for 'Freeman's pirate' as well as for my garden. He never for one moment imagined that the French vessel would turn up at Tubuai.

"He took with him Thomas Godwin and William Myson, leaving Watts, who was master of the other vessel, with me, to attend to the whaling.

"A week after he had sailed I set out to walk to the north end of the island, where my children were buried. I had with me an active native boy named Tati—who was carrying some plants and seeds which I intended planting on and about the children's graves—and two young women. We started early in the morning, for I intended staying at the north end till late in the afternoon, whilst the two girls went crayfishing on the reef.

"About noon I had finished my labours, and then, as it was a beautifully bright day, I climbed a hill near by, called 'The White Man's Lookout,' which commanded a clear view of the sea all round the island. It had been given this name by the natives, who said that Fletcher Christian and his fellow-mutineer, Edward Young, had often ascended the hill and gazed out upon the ocean, for they were fearful that at any moment a King's ship might appear in pursuit of their comrades and themselves.

"I was again feeling somewhat anxious on account of my husband. He should have returned a week before, for there had been no bad weather, and I knew that his business at Vavitaio should have kept him there only a

day at the most. But the moment I gained the summit of the hill my heart leapt with joy, for there were two vessels in sight, one of which I at once recognised as my husband's. They were about a mile distant, and were running before the wind for the harbour. The strange vessel, which was a brigantine, was following close astern of our own schooner—evidently, I thought, my husband is showing her the way into the lagoon.

"Just as I was preparing to descend the hill my little companion, the native boy, Tati, drew my attention to four canoes which, in company with a boat from Captain Watts' schooner, were approaching the vessels.

"Ah,' I thought, 'Watts has seen the vessels from the whaling station, and is going out to meet them.'

"But presently something occurred which filled me with terror. When the boat and canoes were quite close to the vessels, they both luffed, and fired broadsides into them; the boat and two canoes were evidently destroyed, and the two remaining canoes at once turned round and headed for the shore, the brigantine firing at them with guns which I knew to be long twenty-fours by the sharp sound they made. In a moment I knew what had happened—my husband's ship had been captured by the French privateer of which Captain Freeman had told us, and the Frenchmen were now coming to seize our other selves lying anchored in the lagoon.

"Tati looked at me inquiringly.

"Run,' I said, 'run and tell Uasi (for so the natives called Captain Watts) that the master and his ship have been captured by an enemy, who will be upon him very quickly, for the boat and two of the canoes he has sent out have been destroyed, and every one in them killed. Tell him I am coming.'

"The boy darted away in a moment, and I followed him as quickly as I could; but Tati reached the harbour and was on board Watts' schooner quite half an hour before me, and when I went on board I found the vessel was prepared to defend the entrance to the harbour. Captain Watts had swung her broadside on to the entrance, boarding nettings were already triced up from stem to stern, and on the schooner's decks were fifty determined natives, in addition to the usual crew of twenty men, all armed with muskets and cutlasses. The four 6-pounders which she carried, two on each side, were now all on the port side, loaded with grape-shot, and in fact every preparation had been made to fight the ship to the last. Watts met me as soon as I stepped on board, and told me that before my messenger Tati had arrived to warn him he had heard the sound of the firing at sea, and at once surmised that something was wrong.

"Soon after you left the house, Mrs. Eury, some natives sighted the two vessels to the north-east and I sent the boatswain and four men off in one of the whale-boats, little thinking that I was sending them to their death. Four canoes went with the boat. Just now two of the canoes came back with half of their number dead or wounded, and the survivors told me that as soon as they were within musket-shot both the ships opened fire on them, sunk the boat and two of the canoes with grape-shot, and then began a heavy musketry fire. I fear, madam, that Captain Eury and his ship—'

"Your fears are mine, Watts,' I said, 'but whether my husband is alive or dead, let us at least try and save this vessel.'

"Ay, ay, madam. And if we have to give up the ship, we can beat them off on shore. There are a hundred or more natives lying hidden at the back of the oil shed, and if the Frenchmen capture this vessel they will cover our retreat ashore. They are all armed with muskets.'

"We waited anxiously for the two ships to appear; but the wind had gradually died away until it fell a dead calm. Then a native runner hailed us from the shore, and said that both vessels had anchored off the reef, and were manning their boats.

"All the better for us,\* said Watts grimly; 'we'll smash them up quick enough if they try boarding. If they had sailed in, the Frenchman's long guns would have sunk us easily, and our wretched guns could not have done him much harm.' Then he went round the decks, and saw that the crew and their native allies were all at their proper stations.

"Presently he saw the boats—five of them—come round the point. Two of them we recognised as belonging to my husband's vessel, though they were, of course, manned by Frenchmen. They rowed leisurely in through the entrance till they were within musket-shot, and then the foremost one ceased rowing, and hoisted a white flag.

"They want us to surrender without a fight,' said Watts, 'or are meditating some treachery,' and taking a musket from one of the crew he levelled it and fired in defiance. The bullet struck the water within a foot of the boat. The white flag, however, was held up higher by the officer in the stern. Watts seized a second musket, and this time his bullet went plump into the crowded boat, and either killed or wounded some one, for there was a momentary confusion. Then the white flag was lowered, and with loud cheers the five boats made a dash towards us. Telling the gunners to reserve their fire of grape until he gave the word, Watts and the natives now began a heavy musketry fire on the advancing boats, and although they suffered heavily the Frenchmen came on most gallantly. Then when the first two boats, which were pulling abreast, were within fifty yards' distance, Watts and a white seaman sprang to two of the guns and themselves trained them, just as I heard a native near me cry out that in the bows of each boat he could see a man—my husband and his chief mate, who were both bound. Before I could utter a warning cry to Watts, both of the guns belched out their volleys of grape, and with awful effect. The boats were literally torn to pieces, and their mangled occupants sank under the smooth waters of the lagoon; only two or three seemed to have escaped unwounded, and as they clung to pieces of wreckage our savage allies, with yells of fury, picked them off with their muskets; for the same native who had seen my husband bound in the boat had seen him sink.

"No quarter to any one of them!' roared Watts when he heard this; 'the cowards lashed Captain Eury and poor Mr. Myson to the bows of the boats, and our own fire has killed them.'

"He sprang to the third gun, the white seaman to the fourth, and waited for the other three boats, which, undaunted by the dreadful slaughter, were dashing on bravely. Again the guns were fired, and again a united yell of delight broke from our crew when one of the boats was swept from stern to stern with the deadly grape and filled and sank. The two others, however, escaped, and in another moment were alongside, and the officer in command, followed by his men, sprang at the boarding nettings, and began hacking and slashing at

them with their cutlasses, only to be thrust back, dead or dying, by our valiant crew, and the now blood-maddened natives. Nine or ten of them did succeed in gaining a foothold on the deck, by clambering up the bobstay on to the bowsprit, and led by a mere boy of sixteen, made a determined charge; a native armed with a club sprang at the youth and dashed out his brains, though at the same moment a Frenchman thrust him through the body with his cutlass. But the boarding party were simply overwhelmed by numbers, and in less than five minutes every one of those who had reached the deck were slaughtered with but a loss of three men on our side. Those still remaining in the boats alongside then tried to draw off, but Watts, who was now more like a mad animal than a human being, calling to some of the crew to help him, himself cut down the boarding netting, and lifting one of the 6-pounders, hurled it bodily into one of the boats, smashing a large hole through it. Then a score of naked natives leapt into the remaining one, and cut and stabbed the crew till not a living soul remained. Some indeed had tried to swim to the shore a few minutes earlier, but these poor wretches were met by canoes, and their brains beaten out with clubs. The memory of that awful day of carnage will be with me if I live to be a hundred.

“As soon as possible Watts and the carpenter restored some order among our native allies, who, according to their custom, were beheading and otherwise mutilating the bodies of the enemy. We found that we had lost four killed and had about thirteen wounded. Of those killed two were white men.

“Then taking with me half a dozen natives, I went off in one of our own boats to the spot where our grape-shot had sunk the boat in which the native had said he had seen my husband. The water was only about four fathoms deep, and we could clearly see numbers of bodies lying on the white sandy bottom. One by one they were raised to the surface and examined, and the fifth one raised was that of my poor husband. His arms were bound behind his back, and his chest and face were shattered by grape-shot.

“A wild fury took possession of me, but I could not speak. I could only point to the ship. We went back on board, and my husband’s body was laid on deck for the crew to see.

“I hardly know what I did or said, but I do remember that Watts swore to me that I should be revenged, and in a few minutes I was seated beside him in one of our own boats with a pistol in my hand, and we, in company with thirty or forty canoes, were on our way to the ships anchored outside.

“What followed I cannot remember, but Watts told me that I was the first to spring up the side of the French brigantine, and that the captain, as I fired my pistol at him, struck off my hand with his sword, and was then himself cut down by the carpenter. There were but nine men on board, and these were soon disposed of by our men, who gave no quarter. My husband’s vessel was in charge of but three of the enemy, and from them, when they surrendered, we heard that every one of her crew, except the mate Myson and my husband, had been cruelly slaughtered at Vavitao a few days previously. Watts tried to save the lives of these three men, but in vain; the natives killed them, in spite of all his efforts. They died bravely enough, poor wretches.

“Watts and the carpenter succeeded in saving my life, and the stump of my arm healed up very quickly, for I was always a strong and vigorous woman. When they came to search the cabin of the French brigantine they found that her captain—the man who had cut off my hand—was Louis Pellatier, the very same man who, years before, had attempted to shoot my poor husband at the Galapagos Islands.

“I sailed with Watts to Port Jackson a few months later in the French brigantine, which was sold as a prize, and remained there for nearly two years. Then the loneliness of my life began to affect my health, and so I returned here to live and die. And here on this island have I lived for nearly fifty years in peace and happiness, for since Randle and his family came here I have been very happy, and now I only await the last call of all—that call which will summon me to stand before the throne, side by side with my dear husband.”

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK "OLD MARY" \*\*\*

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