

Song of the Fool

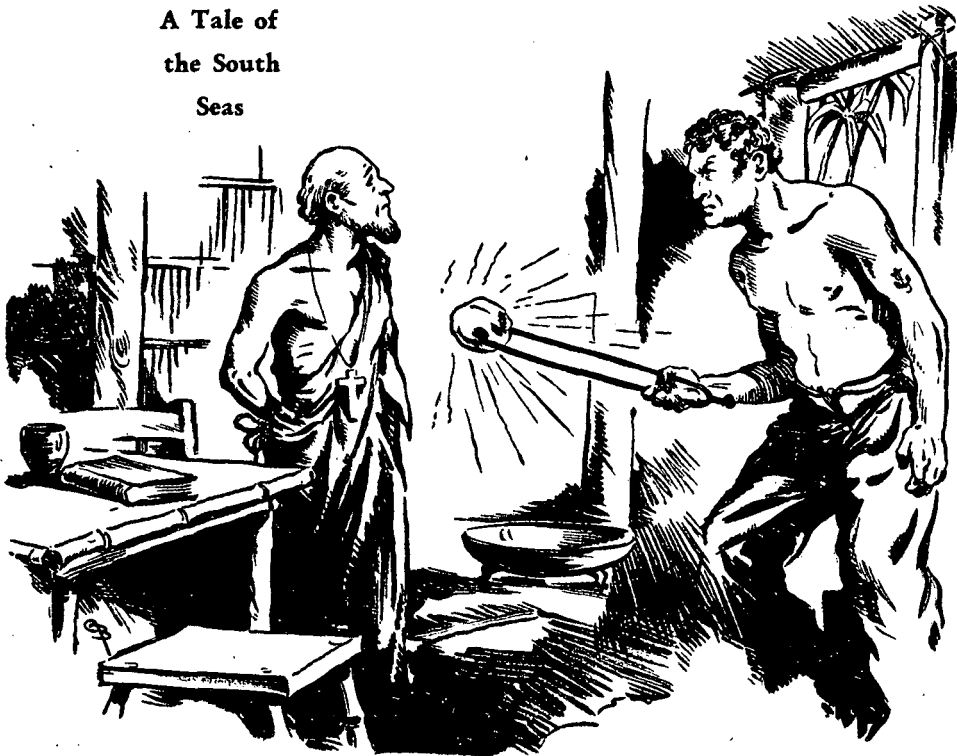
By JOHN G. PEARSON

THE sky was gray, leaden, ominous. The wind blew with a sort of dismal, flat finality, and the force of it sent fierce white spray whipping across the bows of Shark Galin's outrigger. Shark Galin squatted in the stern, his wild black hair whipped back over his big round head. His black eyes glittered as the waves smashed against the oar in his huge hands. The rippling muscles on his giant arms writhed like round snakes under his naked brown skin as he held the insufficient boat steady, smashed through the heavy seas. Shark Galin was in a hurry to get away from Raiatea, the island where he'd gone on a

mission for Father Pierre. He was in a hurry to get back to Te Mahana, where he could reach Father Pierre again. He was in a hurry to get away from Raiatea because there was a dead native back there who might cause Shark Galin a lot of trouble. A native who had been drunk when he'd come over from Father Pierre's island, Te Mahana, with a lustrous pearl entwined in his *pareu*.

That pearl held great promise for Shark Galin, to help him regain the things he'd lost a year ago. A schooner—pearls of his own—money—all locked in the strong box when his schooner, *Tiare*, had gone down in the

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storm off Te Mahana, Father Pierre's island. Ever since that time, Shark Galin had stayed with Father Pierre. He had pretended to help him, while he planned for some way to get a schooner again, to trade in the islands, to cheat the natives, to smuggle opium, to steal and loot again.

Now all of this was in sight for Shark Galin. He had the native's pearl in his pocket. The native was dead, hidden in the rocks along Raiatea's stormy coast. Shark Galin had learned from that dying native's lips that this pearl had been Father Pierre's; that Father Pierre knew where many such pearls could be found. Even now that revelation dumfounded Shark Galin. Riches just before his eyes and he hadn't known it.

Salt spray slapped big Galin in the face. He cursed it as he licked his lips, wiped a huge paw up over his eyes, to push his straggly hair back over his hatless head.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" he muttered to himself. "Father Pierre has pearls, eh? I'd never guessed."

For a year he'd moped about this putrid island, doing the work of a booming slave, wondering where he could steal enough money to get outfitted again. All this time Father Pierre had it. Pearls by the hundred!

Shark Galin's eyes glowed anew as he sighted the wind-whipped, palm-fringed shore of Te Mahana; the white-foamed surf racing up the sandy beach, reaching out with its clutching fingers, only to slip back, as though for a fresh start, to try to gain the hibiscus-studded ferns of the denser growth.

THE boat smashed forward. Shark Galin let go the halyard. He unshipped the mast, stowed it in the bot-

tom of the boat. His great arms worked rhythmically as he pushed back his broad-bladed oar, rode the crest of a swift wave up onto the beach. He leaped over the outrigger's bow as it grated sharply in the sand. His great, bare feet sank into the sand as he drew the craft farther up on the beach with one tremendous heave of his great-muscled arms. His dungarees flapped on his legs in the wind, showed the huge size of the man as he strode up toward the *fare-hau* of Father Pierre's—the priest's house of split bamboo with its thatched roof.

The beach-roller thunder, the roar of the wind through the palms, seemed to talk of wealth to Shark Galin as he moved up the beach to the flower-sided path. Soon he would be on his own deck again. A trim schooner he'd have; a boat that would outsail any of these French Gunboats. A gun on his hip again, a crew of natives to jump when his booming voice roared at them. He'd be the power he used to be, on his own deck, taking what he wanted from whoever he pleased.

Father Pierre's dark-robed figure, his black skull-cap on his head, showed at the window as Shark Galin went to the house. Galin opened the door, let the bar fall into place again as he entered the room, where *tapa* mats covered the floor.

Father Pierre smiled a welcome that made his face somehow seem clean, holy, as though perhaps it somehow echoed the crucifix that hung suspended about his neck.

"You delivered the medicine, my son?" he asked Galin. "You gave the healing roots to Moana?"

Shark Galin nodded. He felt the hard, round pearl in his pocket, pressing against his leg. Riches . . .

"God bless you," Father Pierre said.

"An errand of mercy for which you will be paid a hundredfold."

Galin felt that he should smile when Father Pierre said that. Sure he'd be paid! Not because he had carried the medicine roots to Moana, but because he'd pumped a drunken native; because he'd killed him to shut his mouth after he had talked.

Off in the far corner of the village, the voices of the natives, lifted in song, came to Shark Galin's ears. They were singing a song Father Pierre had taught them, a song to fit their childish minds, the words of it fitted to a hymn, telling how foolish a man must be who would not listen when the truth was spoken to him. The song of the fool, Galin contemptuously called it. The natives were fools. Father Pierre was a fool.

SHARK GALIN grunted. "Yeah," he said. "I'll be paid." That peculiar note in Shark Galin's voice swung Father Pierre about. Shark Galin took two swift steps forward, grasped the old man's hands, held them and bound them behind the old man's back with the cord Father Pierre wore about his robe at the waist. Father Pierre did not struggle. His face showed neither anger nor fear. He suffered it to be done unto him, without protest.

"Speakin' of payment," Shark Galin said now, pulling the pearl from his pocket. "Look this over. I took it from that houseboy you used to have. He was drunk. He said he swiped it from you. He said you knew where there was plenty more like it. What about that?"

Reluctantly, it seemed, Father Pierre took his eyes from Galin's face, looked down at the pearl, then up at Galin again. "The pearl was mine," he ad-

mitted slowly. "I knew the *Tamaiti* stole it from me."

"And you know where there's more?"

"I do, my son."

Shark Galin grinned, felt elation within him. "All right," he said. "Where?"

The old priest did not speak. Calmly, curiously, he studied Shark Galin's eyes. His composure infuriated Galin. It seemed to mock his strength. He reached out, tore the sacred cloth from the priest's breast. He tapped the bared skin, smooth and soft and hairless as a child's, with a stiff forefinger.

"I've heard of burning Christians," he said hoarsely. "I've never seen it done; but if you don't talk quick, we'll both see it done, here and now!"

"Your need must be great, my son," the old priest said softly. "Tell me your trouble and I will help you. If your cause is worthy I will give you all the pearls you need." His chest rose and fell a little irregularly—the only sign he gave of his knowledge that Galin was a pitiless animal.

Then Shark Galin made his great mistake. He forgot that Father Pierre loved these natives. He forgot that this old man would do anything to keep them from being further despoiled. Shark Galin forgot everything except the riches that were so nearly his.

"My need," he said. "It's a schooner—a swift craft to show a clean pair of heels to these gunboats. I need trade goods, and guns, and rum, and cloth. I need a crew. That's my need!"

Father Pierre shook his head as comprehension came to his faded old eyes. "Not for that," he said softly, calmly, yet so very positively.

Shark Galin cursed. His bare feet rasped on the mats as he paced across the room. He built a fire in the oven

which, after the manner of the white man, was inside the house, instead of outside after the manner of the native. He squatted there, watched the round stones in the oven bottom heat. He took the tongs from beside the oven, lifted a sizzling stone from the red coals, and approached Father Pierre. He pushed that red-white stone against the old man's bare chest.

Father Pierre groaned softly, bit his lips; and his eyes closed while beads of sweat sprang out on his brow. Shark Galin took the rock away. He peered curiously at Father Pierre as the old man opened his eyes again and looked at him.

"Ready to talk?" he asked. "There's plenty of stones!"

Father Pierre shook his head. His pain-filled eyes seemed to hold no grudge against Shark Galin for inflicting the dreadful, searing pain. Only that calm confidence was there. That, and perhaps a little pity.

"No," he said, still softly, still positively.

A BIT uncertainly Shark Galin took another stone from the fire. He pressed it against the old man's chest, watched his face whiten, the sweat pop out on his brow again, like tiny buttons of gold on white parchment, glistening in the yellow light of the burning string of candle-nuts. But no sound escaped the old man's lips. No look of condemnation clouded his eyes when he opened them, to look so steadily at Shark Galin.

"Dam' you," Galin cursed, while the wind moaned outside. "Won't you *ever* talk? I'll burn th' heart right out of you!"

The old man shook his head again, smiled and closed his eyes weakly. "No pearls for your purpose, Shark Galin,"

he whispered, "Not for that! Only for a worthy cause."

Shark Galin cursed as he started the white hot stone forward again. But he didn't burn the priest again. He peered at him curiously. What kind of man was this? An old man. A weak man; suffering horribly, but smiling, and shaking his head. . . .

"You can't stand it," Galin warned finally. "You know you'll weaken after while. You might as well talk now. No human can stand what I'm ready to do to you!"

Father Pierre looked pityingly at the big, savage-visaged man above him.

"Some day, my son," he said softly, "you will understand that love can endure anything. Someday you will know that pain you endure for others is not pain for you. Go ahead. I am ready!"

Shark Galin raised the hot stone again, but stopped and held it just off Father Pierre's chest for a moment. Then he tossed it away. He cursed as he threw the tongs violently from him. What could he do with this fool who didn't know when he was hurt!

Then a smile gradually wreathed his face. He whirled, padded across the room into the corner, dug down into his bed and produced a belt with two holstered guns which he swung up and about his waist. These were the only things Shark Galin had salvaged from his wreck. Two guns loaded with cartridges he hoped would fire. Back in front of Father Pierre, Shark Galin grinned as he listened to the howl of the wind.

"All right," he said flatly. "I admit I'm licked. I admit this love you mentioned is stronger than hot stones. But I'm glad you mentioned it. If that's th' strongest thing you got, I'll just use it against you. Before very long you'll see th' natives you converted to your

faith going back to the way they were before you came here. You'll see the sacrificial fires burning up on the High Place. You'll know that long pig is being eaten again; that your little children are going to eat each other again. How many pearls would you give to stop that!"

Father Pierre smiled knowingly.

"You could never do it," he said, confidently.

THE wind growled, moaned miserably at Shark Galin as he barged out of the door and made his way through the scattered huts where the candle-nut lights flickered fitfully in the wind. He pushed his way into the hut of Henui, a huge, muscular Raiatean native, a big-boned Kanaka of rebellious spirit.

"Aue, mountain man," greeted Henui as Galin pushed through the door, closed it against the wind. "The wind blows fiercely."

Shark Galin nodded, noticed that Henui's black eyes glowed at the sight of the two guns slung at his hips.

"It blows," said Galin in the native dialect, as he squatted down beside the calabashes of fish, *fei*, and *poi*. "It blows, but it blows no good. The Supreme God is angry."

Menui gave a superstitious roll to his eyes. His white teeth glistened through his parted lips, a pearly contrast to swarthy skin.

"Ea," he agreed. "Tane, the Supreme God, had been angry for long. The breadfruit withers on the trees; the *fei* is small and wrinkled. Soon, if the rain does come not, our bellies will be wrinkled with hunger."

Shark Galin nodded sagely.

"Hunger is the worst of all things," he said.

"Hunger and the dragon Moo."

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"After hunger might even come the dragon Moo," said Shark Galin. "If a change is not made to please Tane."

Henui sighed. The wind moaned, sounded like the roll of distant thunder as it tore through the lofty coco palms.

"I, too, would be angry," Galin went on, "if I were neglected as long as Tane has been neglected. If I were the Supreme God, Tane, and had been neglected as Tane has been, I too, would wither the breadfruit and wrinkle the *fei*. And if my children worshipped the God of the white father, instead of myself, I would open the gates both under the sea, and above the sea, to let the dragon Moo come forth."

Henui's swarthy face paled. His eyes rolled anew. He moved over closer to the Candle-nuts that flickered so fitfully in the wind that blew through the flimsy split-bamboo hut.

Shark Galin moved his hands forward, made some senseless marks in the sand between his bare feet. He felt the stir of elation. How easy it was to move these child-minded natives with talk of their old Supreme God, Tane. The god of war, and sacrifice. The god whom the natives believed willed them to eat the flesh of humans. How quickly Father Pierre would come to terms if Galin could bring Tane to life. . . .

"It would be only just," Galin said musingly as he seemed to listen to the wind moan. "I am just, and I see the injustice of this thing that has been done. I see that you have forsaken your own gods to worship those of Father Pierre. I see where I, too, would be angry, were I a god who had been forsaken for such a long time."

Shark Galin reached into his pocket, produced the round pearl he had taken from the native he had killed.

"Much could be done," he went on, "if things were as they were—before

the white God took the place of Tane." Galin rolled the pearl out before him, let it glisten in the yellow light.

"If the God of Father Pierre could be sent away, and Tane could come back, there could be the drinking of *ava*, the white man's rum, and even the eating of opium, the gum of pleasant dreams." Shark Galin shrugged, sighed. "But we talk of things that are not to be," he said regretfully. "For Father Pierre's God is still here, and Tane is forgotten. The voices singing in the *himene hau* are for the ears of another God, not for the ears of Tane."

Henui sighed, seemed to be unable to take his eyes from the pearl between Galin's great feet. Shark Galin traced some fantastic patterns in the sand about it.

"I sorrow for your people," he said. "Even I, a white man, can sorrow for those doomed to suffer hunger, and perhaps to feel the wrath of neglected Tane. There should be some way to change it."

Henui sighed tremulously.

"*Ea*," he agreed, "there should be. But there is not."

Galin shrugged again.

"Perhaps it is not time," he said. "Perhaps I have spoken too early. Perhaps when the Supreme God has exhausted all his patience he will give a sign. If, perchance, that sign should be given, I would say that a meeting should be held, up near the caves on the mountain Mauite. If that should happen, perhaps both you and I can do the things we wish to do. I, too, tire of Father Pierre and the ways of his God."

Shark Galin looked up at Henui, continued. "I wish to know where more pearls like this one can be found. Father Pierre knows where they are. But he will not tell. He does not want your

people to drink rum, nor to eat opium gum. But if I could hear the father tell where these pearls could be found, I would help your people. I would give them half of all the pearls."

Henui looked down at the pearl again. The wind howled more dismally. Shark Galin rose.

"Perhaps it would be well to listen for a sign," he suggested. "Perhaps if Tane speaks it will mean that he wishes those things to happen that I have mentioned here."

Shark Galin stepped out into the night again. He pushed through the wind to a hut behind Father Pierre's. He stole into the hut, picked up a log drum, its ends covered with stretched hide. He crept out into the night again and grinned as he made his way through the dense undergrowth, enroute to the High Place, the deserted shrine of pagan worship; that rock-built pyramidlike altar high on the peak of Mount Mauite, where the natives had sacrificed their victims before the coming of Father Pierre.

Shark Galin's naked, bronze-skinned torso glistened with sweat as he climbed upward, through the tearing wind, to come to a halt near the High Place. His great chest heaved as he put down the drum, picked up an ironwood stick with knotted end, started a rhythmic pounding on the drum-head. A savage expression crept into his big-boned face as he sent the throbbing notes booming down toward the village, to remind those peaceful dwellers of the god of an earlier day; a day when this stone altar ran red with the blood of human sacrifice.

Fiercely Shark Galin swung his ironwood club. The deep notes boomed out, went throbbing down into the village. Shark Galin knew what those pulsing tones were doing. They were sending

tingles of superstitious fear through the simple people down there. That savage rhythm was making their hearts beat in the same wild tempo as the booming beats of the drum; even as it made Shark Galin's heart pump fiercely, and caused his eyes to glow with the terrible light of wicked fires.

FOR half an hour, until his arms ached, Galin pounded the drum. He stopped, lifted it, carried it down the mountain slope. He kept from the main path, scrambled across streams, smashed through the vine-barricaded undergrowth. He crept through the village again, stole up to the hut behind Father Pierre's, and hid the drum. Shark Galin saw swift, furtive figures flitting through the village. He sensed a tense, fierce undercurrent that was everywhere. He saw a string of dark, glistening shapes as they started up the trail that led to the High Place. Natives creeping along under the low, scurrying clouds, going toward the worship place of Tane, the god of old. Shark Galin grinned savagely. He had done it! It was working! Pearls . . . riches . . . power . . .

Shark Galin hurried, tore through the brush again, made his way swiftly up to the caves near the High Place, where he had suggested to Henui that a meeting be held. He squatted at the entrance to a cave, quieted his tortured breathing, waited till he saw the huge form of Henui coming through the trees. Henui was ahead of a group of other natives. They came forward cautiously, and Shark Galin grinned as he watched them. They were scared. They had the shakes, all of them. They'd do anything he suggested.

Galin rose from his place in the shadows. The natives scattered, started to run. All but Henui, the Raiatean. He

stood his ground, called out to Galin. "A sign," he said. "A sign of which we spoke. Did you too, hear it, mountain man?"

"Ea," said Galin. "Surely. I heard and I came to see if indeed it was Tane, giving his consent to all those things of which he spoke. Has he spoken to you?"

"He did not speak," said Henui. "But it must be so. We have agreed to chase away the God of the white father and sing to Tane alone."

"And what of the other things?" asked Galin. "Did you learn from the white father where more pearls can be had? Have you thought of that, so you will have money for rum and opium?"

"Ea," Henui nodded. "In that too, we are agreed. But we bring evil tidings also. A taboo has been placed upon you, mountain man. Those who will still remain faithful to the God of the white fathers have placed it upon you. For a burning, they say. It is a long taboo. A taboo in which you will waste away, wither like the breadfruit now withers on the trees. You will finally die."

Henui uttered that confidently, fearfully.

Shark Galin gave a great booming laugh. But suddenly the laugh stilled in his massive throat. *Taboo!* It was a deadly thing. They *did* pray men to death. Shark Galin had seen them do it, on other islands. He had seen men die from the taboo. Then he chuckled. The taboo was not for white men. It was only for the natives. Their own superstitious fear killed them.

"Taboo!" he said scornfully, then touched his naked chest. "A taboo cannot harm me!"

SHARK GALIN watched the natives. His scorn of the taboo seemed not to impress them at all. They

had faith in it. Taboo! What if it *did* work! The thought angered Galin. It couldn't work, he argued with himself. It was impossible.

"Come with me," he commanded. "We go to the village. We shall make the white father tell where we may find pearls. This taboo matters not to me. We shall tell the white father that his God is replaced by Tane."

"*Aue*, and we shall make *long pig* of the white father," said Henui as he fell in beside Galin. "We shall roast him to please our god."

Shark Galin squinted craftily up at the nearly obscured moon, concealed behind scurrying clouds.

"*Ea*," agreed Galin. "Sacrifice the white father. But not now. Wait till the moon is big and round; until the eye of Tane is wide open so that he might better see the thing that you do."

"That too would be well," agreed Henui. "We shall cook him when the moon is round."

Shark Galin smiled as he marched along. Father Pierre would be sacrificed when the moon was full. That would be two weeks at the least; that would leave plenty of time for Shark Galin to persuade Father Pierre that the loss of his pearls would be better than to have his natives revert to cannibalism. Galin grinned. The joke of it was that Father Pierre wouldn't know that his beloved children would revert to their old customs anyway. Now they'd do it, whether he told Shark Galin the location of the pearls or not. They'd cook and eat the man they had loved. But that was the way of native minds.

The yellow lights of the village came into view. Shark Galin stopped. Suddenly he felt peculiar. A sharp pain smote him in the pit of his stomach. Beads of sweat stood out on his brow

as an awful agony clutched his vitals. He felt sick. He *was* sick! He was choking, like a strong hand was about his throat. The fearful thought that the taboo had struck him came to Galin and made his heart pound fast.

Henui peered curiously at him, while the other natives stopped behind them.

"We do not go on?" asked Henui.

That terrible agony in Shark Galin's stomach made his voice hoarse. Only by tremendous will did he keep from doubling up.

"You go while I stay," he said. "It is you, not I, who have forsaken a god. To prove your worth go on alone. Tell the white father of your decision. Show Tane that you are men who stand by themselves, not women who need a stick on which to lean. Show Tane that you do not need a white man to guide you, neither the white father, nor me, even though I have shown you the way. Tane would frown upon a white man leading his children."

Henui seemed to grow in stature. His white teeth flashed. "That is true," he said. "We shall do it ourselves."

"And from the lips of some of those who still follow the white father's God," Shark Galin went on, "you may perhaps discover the hiding place of many pearls, half of which shall be yours."

"For rum and sweet gum opium," reminded Henui longingly.

"*Ea* for rum and opium," assured Shark Galin. "Or even for guns, so that you will not have to fight with the spear and club."

SHARK GALIN leaned weakly against the rough trunk of a coconut tree as Henui led the natives on. His stomach writhed. He was violently sick. He wondered if he had eaten something poisonous. Or perhaps it was

a cramp caused by that cold water splashing on his bare belly when he was so violently hot. But Shark Galin kept thinking about the taboo. Taboo made you sick. It choked your throat. It poisoned the food you ate. Slowly but surely you died. Shark Galin cursed. What was he thinking of anyway? They couldn't work a taboo on him! Not on a *white* man.

He listened to the sounds that floated out to him from the village. There was shouting. He heard vile names being flung at Father Pierre. Insults to the white God. Shouted challenges to the faction loyal to Father Pierre, all borne to Shark Galin on the wings of the whipping wind. Through the trees, backed by the flickering lights of the village, the moving forms of the natives danced crazily in his vision. The shrill cries of conflict came to him. The glimmer of whirling war-clubs showed in scintillating arcs in the pale light. He heard the thud of those clubs on heads. Cries of triumph, among which the deep voice of Henui rose above the others, came to Shark Galin as he stood there, sick, dizzy, some inexplainable thing stealing the starch from his legs and making jelly of his backbone.

His belly writhed again. He bent over, vomited violently. Taboo, he thought as he straightened. Then he cursed himself for a fool. It couldn't be taboo. But he knew it *was* taboo. He knew he was under that mysterious spell cast on men by natives. But he wouldn't admit it, even to himself. It wouldn't do.

With a mighty effort he straightened, threw off that sickening dizziness. He couldn't let Henui see that he was sick. He couldn't let these natives think their taboo was working. It *wasn't* a taboo. His stomach was upset, that was all. But the fear in his heart told him

it was something worse than that. *Taboo . . .*

"Mountain man," called Henui's voice. "We have won. You were right. Tane was with us. Come now and ask the white father the secret of the pearl lagoon."

Shark Galin stepped out through the trees. His face twisted into a grin as he went up to where Father Pierre stood, his black skull cap gone, his crucifix torn from his neck, standing before the grouped natives. But Father Pierre had that same calm expression of sufference on his face that had been there when Shark Galin had burned him.

"Now," Shark Galin said in English, a language the natives could not understand, "Now what about it? Here are your loving children, all ready to sing their songs to Tane. All your work these past twenty years is gone up in a night. They're all set to make long pig of a French priest. Which will it be, Papa Pierre? Will it be long pig or pearls? A word from me and I can bring 'em back to you just as easy as I took 'em away!"

A great pain showed in the white-haired old man's eyes—a suffering greater than when he had been burned—and Shark Galin marveled at it.

"You force me to choose between two evils," said Father Pierre haltingly, his English imperfect. "Which, I wonder, is the greatest?"

GALIN had that agonizing twinge in the pit of his stomach again. He forced a laugh to hide it, to conceal the quiver of fear that chilled his vitals; that made him know taboo had him in its insidious clutches.

"That's easy," Galin argued. "Your best shot is to tell. Then I take a boat an' run. When you're rid of me you can

work on these natives again. The other way . . ." Shark Galin shrugged. Henui pushed forward again, peered curiously at Father Pierre, at Shark Galin.

"Will he speak?" Henui asked in the native dialect. "Will we have rum and opium and guns?"

Old Father Pierre's eyes flashed as Henui spoke in the native tongue. He smiled that calm smile again that taunted Shark Galin.

"You'll never get them," he said, so calmly confident that Galin wondered.

Shark Galin raised his hand to strike the old man. He lowered it again.

"Take him away," he told Henui. "He speaks only insults to Tane, your god. Perhaps in a day, a week, or even a month, he will speak of the pearls."

"Before that time he will be a sacrifice to Tane," promised Heuni ominously.

Shark Galin watched them lead Father Pierre away, wondered if he could curb their zeal in making sacrifice to Tane for long enough for Father Pierre to talk. He watched the beaten members of the village stealing back to their huts, squatting at their doors like dark-faced mummies, whipped, subdued, but still loyal to Father Pierre. Henui led his victorious crew over to the *himene* house—the religious house where songs were sung to Tane. Galin heard their voices raised in song as they sat cross-legged on the ground, swaying to the rhythm of the native chant.

Shark Galin smiled as he listened. Father Pierre would hear those songs too. It would tear the heart from the old priest to know that his life's work was being undone. He'd weaken soon, surely. But Galin's smile was sickly. His face was pasty. That sickening gnawing was in his vitals again. That whispering, insinuating voice was tell-

ing him that the taboo was working on him. Shark Galin, the mighty, would become weak. He would die . . .

Galín stood there seeing the natives who watched him with their round eyes, searching for a sign that their taboo prayers were working. He held his great head up, his shoulders back, when he wanted to bend double with pain. Great beads of sweat sprang out again on his brow. But he marched past them, a scowl on his face, a careless swagger in his long-strided walk as he made his way back into Father Pierre's house. He'd never let them see he was sick. But he was sick—pain in his insides . . .

Then Shark Galin doubled with agony. He gagged. His throat felt as though a tight string was about it. It was agony to breathe. He dropped to the floor, lay there, nausea shaking him; his great body shivering with a terrible sickness that somehow seemed unreal.

HE LAY there, listening to the shouted songs that rose from the *himene* house. All night long, until the rising sun came up like a great ball from out of the sea, Shark Galin's mind was clouded by visions of mummy-faced natives squatted at the doors of their huts, watching him for signs of the taboo, the curse they prayed would kill him.

Then he rose, peered through the bamboo slits. The natives were still there. Galin made his way on shaky legs to the door that led to the room where Father Pierre lay near the center post, unbound, beside the calabashes of *poi*. Funny, how weak he was. Funny how his legs shook, his hands trembled.

"Hear 'em last night?" Galin asked the old man. "Hear 'em singing to

Tane? You better talk! I don't know how long I can hold 'em off, now that they're good an' started. The longer they go, the harder it'll be to stop 'em. But if you talk right now I can swing 'em off this stuff right way."

"To fill them with rum and opium!" said Father Pierre scathingly. "I'd rather die fifty deaths than have that happen!"

Shark Galin grinned confidently, turned and left the room. But he didn't feel confident. That damnable gnawing was in his belly again. It paled his face, made him sweat. He hid in the house so no one could see him. He ate some breadfruit, some *fei*, but as soon as it touched his stomach it sickened him, and he felt shaky, panicky, as he staggered about.

He huddled in the house all day. He tried to eat again at dark, but he sickened again. He staggered in to where Father Pierre was imprisoned, glared at him like a wild animal.

"You think I'm sick too, don't you?" he asked harshly. "You think their taboo is working. You think I'm gonna die! Well, you're wrong! There ain't any such thing as taboo working on a white man!"

He stood there glaring for a moment, then bolted from the room. Why was he always thinking about taboo? This couldn't be the taboo! This was something different.

"Just my imagination," he muttered to himself. "I think too much about it."

Galin rummaged through Father Pierre's effects, found a bottle of cognac. He drank half a quart without stopping, waited for that delicious, comfortable glow it would bring. But strangely, while he waited, there was no delicious glow. Instead, a violent cramp hit his belly, as if a giant's sledge-hammer had been smashed

against it. He bent double with the agony of it, reached out and grasped the bottle by the neck, smashed it against the center pole.

"I went too long without a drink," he told himself. "I been a year off booze an' try to drink a whole bottle!"

But Shark Galin knew it wasn't that. This was something else. This was something deadly. This was *taboo*! Galin staggered over to the wall, peered through the slit bamboos. His eyes were haggard as he watched the natives out there, squatting around the house, watching it with such intent stares; their eyes shining with purpose, their faces sober. They were praying—praying—praying—for Shark Galin to die.

Shark Galin whipped a gun from his holster, aimed it through a bamboo slit. He dropped the gun back in its holster again. He paced nervously, shakily, about the room, stopped at every round to look in at Father Pierre who sat there, calm, confident, even when he knew he was to be killed and eaten! What was that Father Pierre had said? Love? . . . Some day you'll know that love is the greatest of all things . . .

ANOTHER day and Shark Galin was wan, pale, haggard-eyed. He kept peering out at the natives, still squatted outside, somber, bright-eyed figures, waiting for him to die. Now he had to crawl and his head wobbled crazily as he made his way to Father Pierre's door, to peer dully in at the aged priest.

"You gonna talk?" he asked mumbly. Then he turned and crawled away again, seeming not to care for an answer.

Another day. Still another. Henui, the Raiatean leader, came into the house, looked at Shark Galin squatted

there like a huge crab, watching Father Pierre.

"The moon is round," Henui said to Galin, appearing not to notice his sunken eyes, his haggard face, the flabby flesh that hung loosely on his big bones. "The eye of Tane is open wide. It is time for long pig."

Shark Galin shook his head, made it wag back and forth like a huge, cumbersome thing on his skinny, insufficient neck.

"It is not time," he mumbled. "The white father has not spoken."

The giant Raiatean nodded positively. "It is time," he stated. "Tane had spoken to us. He wants the blood of Father Pierre!"

Galin took a gun from his holster, kept it in his lap so Henui could not see the shake in his hands.

"It is not time," he mumbled again. "The white father must not die until he speaks."

Henui looked at the gun in Galin's hand. His eyes seemed to mock Galin as he looked at the man who used to be the strongest man in the Islands. Henui smiled as he looked at Galin's withered body; took care to let Galin see his eyes noticing the wreck of a man before him. Then he backed out the door with that knowing smile on his lips.

"Taboo," muttered Shark Galin as he watched Henui go. "He thinks it's got me!"

He reached up with his hand, thumped his pitifully skinny chest with a closed fist. "But it ain't got me," he talked to himself. "Not me! Not Shark Galin!"

But Shark Galin knew he was a liar. Shark Galin was done for.

NIGHT came again but Galin knew he could not sleep. If he slept Henui would come and take Father

Pierre away to sacrifice him. Galin dragged a high stool in from the other room, crawled up on it and sat there like a huge, wabbling monkey, with a gun in his hand. Now, if he dozed, he would fall. If he fell, he would awaken. . . .

The whispering of the natives came in to his ears; the rustling of the vines sounded as they tried to peer into the hut, to see if Shark Galin was dead. Galin tried to make his grin wolfish, as he'd always done. But it was a failure. He tried to tell himself that he'd fool them; that there wasn't any taboo. But that was a failure too. There was a taboo. Shark Galin would die. He was dying now.

Slowly, the night passed. Galin dozed. He toppled from the stool, awoke on the floor and waved the gun threateningly at the natives who crowded in the door, their lighted torches throwing a dancing yellow glare on their surprised faces.

"Thought I was done, eh?" he muttered to them in English, shaking his wobbly head while he squatted there like a huge-framed crab, his grinning face a gargoyle. "Thought I was dead. But I'm not dead. Go away."

They didn't know what he said. But they backed away from the gun. The hut was silent again. Galin climbed up on the stool. The whispering came to his ears. That foolish song from the temple of Tane came to mock him again. The song of the fool. The song about the foolish one who listened not to words of wisdom. Maybe Shark Galin was a fool. Maybe he should believe Father Pierre. Maybe love *was* stronger than anything else on earth. Maybe love had made Father Pierre a stronger man than Shark Galin. Maybe Shark Galin was wrong and Father Pierre was right. Then greed

caused pearls, power and lust to fill Shark Galin's mind again. A boat and guns and a crew of hellions. He'd have them yet!

One hour slipped by. Two. Shark Galin nodded again. He toppled off the stool. Weakly, dazedly, on the floor, he tried to reach out, to crawl back up on the stool again. But weakness won, and his head sank back. Deeply, he slept, while dark shadows slithered through the room, while bare feet padded across the mats.

Those soft sounds made Shark Galin open his eyes again. Dumbly, he looked about the empty room, made light by the moon that sifted its light through the open door. He wagged his head stubbornly, pushed himself up on hands and knees, crawled forward through the village while sounds of fighting drifted to him from afar. Henui and his followers were taking Father Pierre to sacrifice; Father Pierre's loyal faction was trying to prevent it.

Slowly, like a crab, his hands raw, his knees bleeding, Shark Galin crawled on. Father Pierre was going to die. But Father Pierre couldn't die! It wasn't time. He hadn't talked. He hadn't told where Shark Galin could get pearls. Funny, how brave that crazy old Frenchman was. Funny, how he'd looked so calmly out of his eyes at those red-hot stones. Perhaps he'd look calm when they made ready to sacrifice him. Perhaps he wouldn't care when they made ready to eat him. Maybe this love he talked of made him that way. Maybe it was stronger than all things. Maybe it was stronger than taboo. . . .

Weakly, while he crawled along, Shark Galin unbuckled his gun belt, let his guns drop in the mud. They bothered him, and he wouldn't need them now.

"White man," a voice came out of the shadows while Galin crawled along in the mud. "Mountain man."

"Begone," muttered Shark Galin hoarsely.

"Taboo will kill you!" came the voice from the dense brush again. "Even now you are no longer a man. You crawl like a turtle in the mud; and soon you will die. But before you die there is something the good white father wishes you to know. Will you listen, mountain man?"

Shark Galin stopped. He lay there in the mud and panted. *Ea*, he would listen. Why not? He must rest. He could listen while he rested. He could do nothing else but listen.

"*Ea*," he muttered hoarsely.

"The white father will shortly die," the native's voice came again. "But he talked to me before Henui wrested him from us. He asked that I tell you he held no malice toward you. He asked that I plead with you to forego your evil ways. He asked that I plead with you to use your strength for good instead of evil. For Father Pierre does not know that you will die. He does not believe that taboo will kill. He believes that you will be well again, and believing this, he asked me to plead with you. He asked that I say that he was glad to die to save us from evil, just as the One who saved the world by death on the cross was glad to die. That is all, mountain man. I have delivered my message. Now I will watch you die. You are a dog, and perhaps you will yelp when death draws near."

SHARK GALIN lay there and listened. There was no sound, but he knew the native was there, waiting, watching till a dog would die. Dog . . . Maybe he was a dog. But he wouldn't yelp when death came. Or would he?

What would taboo do to a man? Could it take his heart and make it yellow, as it made jelly out of strong muscles? And love—the love that Father Pierre had said was strong. What of it? Father Pierre was on his feet, facing death calmly, while Shark Galin groveled in the mud!

Funny how things worked out. Funny how Shark Galin remembered the calm in Father Pierre's eyes. Funny how he remembered him saying that pain he endured for others was not pain for him. Strange, how queerly it affected Shark Galin to have that native tell him that Father Pierre was glad to die; that he held no malice—no malice toward the man who had tortured him, the man who was causing him to be eaten. Funny . . . Funny as hell, how some men were. . . .

All his life Shark Galin had fought. He had never thought of men as being good and bad—they were merely opponents and from all of them he had always expected the same reactions. Men, in Shark Galin's experience, were like he was. They reacted definitely to gold, to rum, to women, and they never turned the other cheek.

So he was a dog. Funny too, how Shark Galin couldn't forget that. He was a dog, he guessed. A dog for burning Father Pierre. A dog for causing him to be eaten.

"I am a dog, truly," Shark Galin muttered and was surprised that he had said it aloud.

"*Ea*, that is true," came the voice from the shadows.

"A dog and a fool," said Shark Galin. "For wealth I have betrayed a man who would save me with his dying breath. Only a dog that is mad will do that. Only a dog snaps at the hand which offers it food."

"Wisdom comes to you, mountain

man," said the unseen native. "But it comes too late."

"*Ea*, too late," muttered Galin. "For if it were not for this hurt that gnaws at my belly—if it were not for this thing that makes my arms weak when they should be strong, I would save the white father."

The silence was deep, then the native spoke again. "Why?" asked the native. "Why would you save him?"

Shark Galin shook his head dumbly, dazedly, weakly. Truly, he did not know. Something, something about a man dying on a cross and being glad; something about Father Pierre dying up there and being glad, because he thought it would keep harm from his converts. That, maybe, or maybe something about Father Pierre saying he held no malice. He did not know. He could not rationalize the change in himself. He only knew that he *had* changed and that his new purpose was steady and sure and that the knowledge of it gave him a peace he had never known before.

"I only know it is true," Galin muttered. "Why, I do not know."

That deep silence came again. The native was there, watching. Shark Galin was there, dying, weak, sick, dizzy.

"There is no taboo upon you, mountain man," the native's voice came suddenly. "I now have lifted it. You are stronger. You are well again. That is true."

Shark Galin squinted his eyes in puzzlement. He listened some more, but heard nothing. He saw nothing. But gradually, miraculously, he felt something. He felt the shake leave his hands. He looked down at them, and they were steady. He reached out and picked up a stick from the mud. He grasped it and his fingers curled about

it. His fingers were strong. Fearfully, lest he should be wrong, Shark Galin exerted his strength, bended his hands against the stick. It cracked, broke, and Shark Galin's heart beat high, tumultuously, within his breast. Taboo . . . There was none. It was lifted. He was strong!

But was he strong, Shark Galin wondered, because the taboo had been lifted, or because of his determination to save Father Pierre. He did not know; he only knew that he felt stronger and more purposeful now than he had ever felt before in his life.

Slowly, he rose to his feet, and he could stand! He took a step and he could walk! He hurried and he could run. He ran for the sheer joy of running. He wanted to yell, to shout. He smashed through the brush. He crashed through the vines. He climbed the steep, rock-strewn slope of Mauite mountain and felt the sting of swift, fierce elation in his blood. Strong again! Shark Galin, strong, strongest man in the islands! Like the Crusaders must have felt, he felt now. There was a force in him that would not be denied and he realized that never before in his life had he been happy—not as he was now.

THEN suddenly Galin stopped. Up ahead of him now he could see the two groups of natives. He saw Henui, and saw that Henui had Father Pierre in his power. He saw the faction loyal to Father Pierre cowering away from the larger group, beaten, subdued, afraid. Shark Galin stood still. His heart beat fast, but not with exertion now. It beat high with excitement, with the sheer lunacy of the thing Galin knew suddenly he was going to do. He was going to do the thing he had said he would do. The man on the cross . . .

the white father who was glad . . . the love that was strong. . . . The calmness in an old priest's eyes . . . All of those things? One of them? Shark Galin didn't know.

Then there was a slithering sound in the bush. Like a momentary shadow the native who had talked to him just now appeared then vanished. But vanishing, he had left something in Galin's sweaty hand—the gun he'd dropped in the mud back there. A glance told him that the cartridges had been removed; the loyal natives did not trust him enough to give him bullets. But the steel gun-butt would serve as a club—perhaps the empty weapon would frighten Henui and his long-pig party from their purpose.

Slowly, but purposefully, Shark Galin strode forward. How great it was to be strong again! How fine to be big, to be sure, to know he was mighty. Confident, swaggering in the knowledge of his strength, Shark Galin made his way to the faction loyal to Father Pierre. He heard mutters, but listened not at all. He saw the stares of Henui's men, but turned to look at the sullen faces of those loyal to Father Pierre. Shark Galin was now one with these faithful people. He knew now the hidden strength that made them stay with Father Pierre.

"A miracle has come," he said. "The taboo has been lifted from me. My muscles are no longer weak. My mind is no longer dazzled by the sight of riches. It is filled with the thoughts of the things our white father has taught us. I am ready to fight for him. I am ready to lead you. Are you ready to follow?"

They looked at Galin. They hesitated. Then they roared and swept forward, and Shark Galin leaped ahead of them like a great, high-bodied,

super-man, and swept toward the group behind Henui. Clubs flashed in the light of the moon. Spears glittered in the pale light. Shrill cries rose high to startle the night. And they met like two great bodies of irresistible force, smashing, striking, thrusting, with Shark Galin's great arm working like a piston, raising and smashing down on the heads of screaming natives—

A spear flashed through the air, struck Shark Galin in the side. He gasped with pain, reached down and broke off the haft and kept on fighting. Father Pierre's men were winning. Henui and his followers were falling back. Back, farther and farther, Henui and his men were pushed. Father Pierre was alone now. His loyal subjects came to him. The plateau was swept clean. Father Pierre was hurried away. The plateau was quiet. No sound stirred the night, and Shark Galin looked dazedly about and saw that he was alone. Father Pierre was gone. They had taken him back to the village. Henui and his men were in full flight.

Shark Galin staggered now as he walked slowly back down the mountain slope. He felt the warm blood running down his side. He felt weakness assail him again. But he knew this weakness, and he smiled at it. This was weakness from the loss of blood. This was a clean, glorious weakness. A weakness that made Shark Galin hold his head up high; that made a smile that was almost triumphant touch his lips.

On down the slope he went. He fell, and lay there for a moment. He tried to push himself up straight, then knew it would be no use. He propped himself against a tree. His eyes were dimming, and his head was whirling, and the mud was mixed with blood as he

sat there and waited. A stir in the brush made him turn his eyes. A native stepped out and Shark Galin knew by his voice that this was the same native who had talked to him before and had lifted the taboo from him.

"You will perish, mountain man?" the native asked, concern now in his voice.

Shark Galin nodded. "I will perish," he said.

The native squatted down beside him. "I will stay by your side," he said. "It is not well for a man to die alone. I will comfort you. When your heart bleeds, my heart shall bleed also. When the breath leaves your body, the white Savior shall take you in his arms and carry you to Paradise, for you have truly earned it."

Shark Galin rested his head back against the tree. He listened to the night-sounds: the birds, the wind in the trees, and the faint chant of the song that drifted up to him from the village. The song of the fool, it was. Funny, now that it was not ironic to him. Funny, it was true. A man was a fool not to listen to the words of truth. Strange, how Shark Galin knew that this, his own death, was well; that he, Shark Galin, would never have stayed good long. A month, a year, then pearls and wealth and power and greed would have tugged at him again.

It was better this way. There was that something about being glad to die that Father Pierre had said. There was a lot of comfort in the native being here. His heart was bleeding when Shark Galin's heart was bleeding! When the breath left Shark Galin's body, the Savior would take him in his arms and carry him to Paradise! Father Pierre's teaching . . . how strangely it comforted. . . .

MEN OF DARING by STOOKIE ALLEN



**MAJOR
ALEXANDER
DE SEVERSKY**

COURAGE

IT WAS THE WORLD WAR—DE SEVERSKY, A YOUNG RUSSIAN NOBLEMAN, FLYING FOR THE IMPERIAL NAVY WAS SHOT DOWN IN HIS FIRST FIGHT. HIS OBSERVER WAS KILLED. HE HIMSELF LOST A LEG. A LESS COURAGE-
OUS MAN WOULD HAVE QUIT. DE SEVERSKY CRAWLED OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, WENT BLAZING OVER THE LINES AND IN A FEW MONTHS HAD DOWNED 13 ENEMY PLANES. SOON HE WAS MADE COMMANDER OF ALL PURSUIT AVIATION ON THE BALTIC SEA.

By SPECIAL PERMISSION OF THE CZAR HE CONTINUED HIS FLYING WITH AN ARTIFICIAL LIMB. EMPEROR NICHOLAS LATER PRESENTED HIM WITH A GOLD SWORD AND MADE HIM A KNIGHT OF THE ORDER OF ST. GEORGE AND ST. STANISLAV.

WHEN HIS GOVERNMENT WAS OVERTHROWN BY THE REDS HE MADE A THRILLING ESCAPE AND BECAME EUROPE'S GREATEST STUNT FLYER, TOURING ALL THE CAPITALS.

COMING TO AMERICA, HE TURNED TO PLANE DESIGNING—PICTURED HERE IS HIS FAMOUS SEVERSKY AMPHIBIAN. WITH IT HE SET A NEW SPEED MARK FOR AMPHIBIANS. IT IS CAPABLE OF 260 MILES AN HOUR. DE SEVERSKY IS NOW A MAJOR IN THE U.S. ARMY RESERVE CORPS AND HIS FACTORY SUPPLIES THE U.S. ARMY WITH MANY OF ITS FAST PURSUIT PLANES.

IT LANDS ON ICE, SNOW, LAND OR WATER.

A True Story In Pictures Every Week