

MOROBIANS FLEEING EVIL EYE



"An Eye For An Eye"

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tain and his mate found themselves overboard, minus a few teeth and eyebrows, gasping and choking in the stinking waters of a foul dock.

Reaching the gold-rush little port of Wau emaciated and malaria-filled, Doug decided not to recruit more natives and return to his claim, but to start a coconut plantation, become a copra producer, set himself up in a little Garden of Eden and want no more as long as coconuts continued to fall to the ground.

As dusk ushered in the night the cargo boat hove into sight, and there bobbing contentedly in the foam-lashed wake was Doug's "Saucy Sallie." Elated and proudly he viewed the trim ship, and as an expansive mood crept over him he decided that the "Saucy Sallie" should be re-christened and invited the captain of the cargo boat and this three officers to join the celebration. A case of Scotch whiskey was resurrected and the fun commenced. Doug had not had a "drink" for three months, and no white companionship, so "Saucy Sallie's" festival must be made a grand occasion. In the wee small hours of the morning, with a glassy stare in his eyes and great annoyance in his heart, Doug perceived that his companions had one by one passed out into the land of oblivion, so, very thoughtfully, he laid the four ship's officers side by side on the hatch of the cargo boat, imprinted on their bare chests Faith, Hope, and Charity in red paint, and gaily chug-chugged away in the "Saucy Sallie" along the New Guinea coast in search of his haven and prospective coconut plantation.

After probing the coastline for a few weeks, Doug found an ideal stretch of country, with a small horseshoe-shaped harbour in the centre, a few miles east of Morobe. The Morobians bore a gruesome reputation for unfriendliness to the white man, and the finest qualities of Doug's fighting instincts and hard common sense were tested to the full before he gained their respect and allegiance by his courage and fair dealing. Hard work then sprung up on all sides. White man and native toiled and sweated under the fierce equatorial sun. Trees were felled and their huge roots blasted out of the ground with dynamite. Immense boulders of volcanic rock were rolled away into the sea. Swamps were drained, bridges thrown across rapid streams, wells were dug, and in the course of time a clearing of a thousand acres was ready for the seedling nuts.

Doug rapidly discovered that the Morobians worked well if constantly supervised by a white man, but should he happen to turn his back to attend to other affairs, their hitherto free and indolent habits would reassert themselves and they would lay down their machetes and axes, lie down and smoke, and yawn themselves into a blissful sleep. Naturally, this amiable weakness of the easy-going natives was a drag on Doug's bankroll and kept him constantly on the jump, as practically no work would be done during his absence. Unfortunately, there was little he could do about it, as even his "boss-boy" would join the workers in their stolen slumbers.

It takes from six to seven years for a coconut palm to come into bearing, and whilst the young palms were growing, Doug amused himself with hunting kangaroo and wallabies, sniping at crocodiles, shark fishing, chasing wildcats and teaching these erstwhile cannibals to cook their food properly. His own cook-boy would often serve up a dish of blood-oozing wallaby leg or bush pig and thought Doug a "sissy" because he refused to tear the raw lumps asunder and grunt his pleasure between bites. He built himself a fine bungalow and for the natives he erected rows of suitable huts; he also taught them better methods of sanitation and attended their sick and wounded; therefore, it was no wonder that the Morobians looked up to him as something of a god.

This idealistic life had its elements of trouble and anxiety, however. At various times, and they never knew when, they would be raided and attacked by the cannibalistic tribes whose refuge was the mountains. The young women would be carried off, their pigs and chattels stolen, and many of their finest braves tortured and slain. In these fights, Doug, by his keener and sophisticated tactics, would finally drive off the enemy.

Nevertheless, it happened that in one fierce skirmish a spear flashed across Doug's face and cut a deep gash that slit his right eye. Being absolutely without medical aid in Morobe, he took his schooner to Rabaul, from whence he went to Australia.

It was a cruel and difficult matter to leave his growing plantation to the mercy of his Morobians, however faithful; but somewhat assured by their fulsome promises to work as though he were present, he reluctantly took his leave, and as a parting gesture he decorated his "boss-boy" with a tropical hel-

met, to be a mark of dignity and authority.

At the hospital it was found necessary to remove Doug's eye and replace it with an artificial one. The matching was admirable—one unexperienced in these medical arts could scarcely detect his loss.

Three months later Doug picked up the "Saucy Sallie" lying in Rabaul, and with great happiness in his heart set his course for Morobe. As the schooner approached the plantation he took up his binoculars and swept the shore-line. There was a chattering crowd to welcome him, but looking beyond them into the depth of the tall palms he was filled with a terrible apprehension. The neglect was appalling. Tall, wild kunai grass filled the groves; the banana plants were stricken, and as he jumped ashore he saw that his vegetable gardens were a mass of weeds. Brushing aside the natives, his fists clenched as he took in the aspect of his once dapper bungalow. Doug swore some mighty oaths as he wiped the perspiration from his troubled brow. The natives had followed his every footstep. They felt they had failed him, but in their indolent and almost childlike imagination they did not understand how grievously. They gazed at Doug with varying expressions, becoming more and more afraid at his explosions of wrath. The air was tense and mute, suddenly!

Poor Doug, to ease his artificial eye from the trickling sweat that poured therein, he wearily took out his handkerchief, mopped his brow, then automatically removed his glass eye to wipe it.

The effect was volcanic. Howls of dismay rent the air. The natives gasped, some whimpered, and all retreated from him as though he were a plague. Never in all their lives, or in the lives of their ancestors, had they known a man who could take out an eye, hold it in his hand away from his body, wipe it, and then put it back again! They gaped at their witch-doctor, but he, too, was backing away with fright.

Swiftly Doug summed up the situation. More than ever he now held them by the power of white-man magic. An idea flashed through his mind. He would not explain the apparent phenomenon but use to his own advantage this new sign of his omnipotence. Fate had thrown him the chance to play upon the superstition and credulity of the natives. The opportunity was soon to present itself.

Once again before him lay a mountain of work to be re-done. The palm-paralyzing kunai grass had to be uprooted. His bungalow had to be rebuilt. His presence would be needed at the building and at the supervision of the toiling natives on the plantation; and until this moment Doug had not been able to solve the problem of how to be in two places at the same time.

The next day he lined up his workers and allotted them individual tasks along the groves of the coconut palms, so that they were following straight lines and in sight from one spot. On a tree stump facing their trend of work, after a suitably solemn harangue, he placed his glass eye and told them that whilst he was at the bungalow his eye would follow every one of their movements, and report to him at the end of the day.

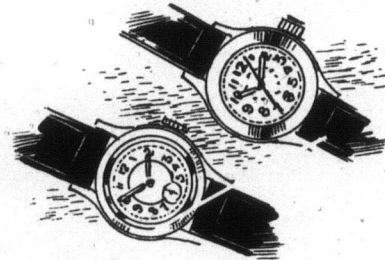
The scheme worked admirably. Never had they labored so assiduously. Doug cackled with joy at this miraculous "break" in his fortunes and went about laughing happily to himself.

Finishing his labours earlier than usual one day, he thought he would take a stroll and check up on the progress of the kunai grass destruction. To his troubled surprise he found his natives lying about in attitudes of pleasant ease, smoking or sleeping the sleep of the innocently soothed. Looking expectantly towards the stump of the tree whereon lay his glass eye, he saw that the "boss-boy" had carefully covered up the watchful orb with the old tropical helmet that was his badge of dignity and authority.



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