

The Girl of the Nutmeg Isle

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Illustration by Harvey T. Dunn

"HARRH!" came a bloodthirsty shout over my shoulder.

I sat up suddenly. A kitchen-stove-colored savage, with huge nostrils and glaring black-glass eyes, was standing at the head of my long chair, scratching his head with one hand and holding out a cup of soup with the other.

"Harrh!" he yelled again, as if I were a prisoner taken in battle and about to be slain. "You have one-fellow soof?"

He shook the cup of soup at me with a vigor that some of it splashed out on my pajamas.

"Ah, it's you, Bo," I said, reaching for the cup.

The savage of New Britain is scarcely a useful type of attendant for a sick-room;

Gore and I were not out to find fault with any conditions that gave us a roof over our heads and a "boy" to work for just then. I had been fairly ill for a few days, and was recovering. To-day I had so far returned to myself that I was able, lying out on the veranda, to take note of where I was, and to wonder at the crudity of the place.

Herbertshöhe, one of the many abandoned capitals of Kaiser Wilhelm Land, is some ten miles from Rabaul, along the New Britain coast. I do not know how Gore had obtained leave for himself and me to camp in a forgotten neck of a hotel there; probably he had more friends than I knew of, or than it was judicious to speak about, in the country. At all events, he had carried me there on the night of our arrival, and here we still remained, in a structure that looked like somebody's cardboard model

PAUL CORBET, a twenty-two-year-old clerk in his father's Liverpool factory, hears that the famous explorer, Vincent Gore, is about to sail for New Guinea. The lad, keen for adventure, fights the great man's valet and embarks in his place, presenting himself to his astonished employer only after the ship is under way. The trick appeals to Gore, who before long makes Corbet his secretary. The ship touches at Banda Harbor, where Corbet has a curious encounter with a young girl whom he meets walking in a nutmeg grove. Later the same girl turns up as a passenger aboard the ship. Corbet has already allowed himself to drift into romantic thoughts about her, and his interest increases when she comes to him one night and warns him that some of the Germans on board, whom Corbet has antagonized, suspect the object of his and Red Bob's venture—a secret pearl fishery—and are plotting against him. Corbet only comes to the full realization that he is in love, however, when he hears, to his consternation, that the girl, whose name he has mistaken, is married and is going out to join her husband, a German, in New Guinea. At the landing he takes leave of her, as he thinks, forever. Soon after he comes down with fever,

of a hotel he had intended to build and didn't—a crazy two-story contrivance of carved, flimsy woodwork.

Nobody lived there. There was a new hotel further on, carefully described as a private club in order to discourage the passing traveler. You could camp among the decaying furniture of the old hotel, in its paintless, dropping-to-pieces rooms, for a sum that would have given you lodging in the Savoy at home. You could find your own boy, and send across to the "club" for a stray meal, which might be accorded you or might not. You could not travel about. When you had been there for two or three weeks, you would get notice to the effect that strangers were not permitted to take up residence there, and you would then—if you were not Red Bob or Red Bob's companion in adventure—hasten obediently on to the *Prinz Sigismund*, when

she came in from Singapore, and steam away to Australia.

But if you were Red Bob or Paul Corbet, you would not contemplate doing anything of the kind.

Bo, having given me the soup, left the veranda in two bounds that shook its crazy structure from end to end, and went to wash dishes. I lay on my long chair, congratulating myself on the return of a normal temperature, and looking out across the roadway to the sea beyond the belt of palms—a hot-weather sea of curiously transparent blues and greens.

I WAS wondering where Gore could have disappeared to all afternoon, and how soon he meant to come back, when I heard the tramp, tramp of bare feet—military bare feet—on the veranda. I sat up. It was Hahn, my old acquaintance of the duel, with his police, march-

ing somewhere or other (he was a government officer of fairly high standing), and calling in on the way to see me.

"Well, my nut, how are you this afternoon?" he shouted cheerily. Hahn prided himself on the accuracy of his English slang. "I have to march these beggars up to Toma, and I have at the club, for some beers to give me heart, just now called in. When will you be fit again?"

He seated himself astride the remnant of a chair, and gave an order to his police, who were standing at "attention." They squatted down outside.

"Where is that chief of yours?" he asked. "I thought I saw him going down to the company's launch."

"Perhaps," I said, leaning back on my pillow to shade my eyes from the light of the westering sun on the sea. "I don't know where he has gone."

"So," said Hahn, obviously not believing me.

He stopped talking for a minute, and began to roll a cigarette. Somehow, I recalled a fragment of counsel once thrown to me by Red Bob.

"Better make your own cigarettes. They take the place of a snuff-box, on occasion. You remember how all the old diplomats used to take snuff—because it gave them time to think when talking."

"Have you seen Herr Richter since you came?" asked the young officer presently.

I picked my way in replying:

"Why, no. I've been pretty ill, off and on. Is he here?"

"Certainly not. His residence is in Rabaul," replied Hahn.

I don't know why, but the answer con-



"She was poor; she brought her daughter to the dying man, and the pastor married them."