



THE FIRST CHAPTER  
"BLUE-GUM" BILL

McBRIDE

"BLUE-GUM" BILL  
McBRIDE stood  
upon the South

Reef beach at Menada,  
looking sadly at the  
Arawanna gradually  
being broken  
up on the coral  
reef beneath her  
by each huge  
Pacific comber  
that raced in  
with a deep boom and a smother  
of foam upon the reef.

The small port of Menada is perched  
upon the north-easterly point of the  
Island of Celebes, one of the outflung  
posts of the great Dutch East Indies,  
and it is the seat of the Dutch

# The CALL of the SEA!

*Young Bill McBride was on a school  
outing when he saw the sea for the first  
time . . . . There was one boy who did  
not return home from that outing . . . .  
Bill had answered the call of the sea!*

Administration of the  
island.

Menada, also, is the  
jumping-off ground for  
that horde of tough, sun-  
baked and hard-fisted  
adventurers who sail  
their small craft the

length and  
breadth of the  
wide, island-dot-  
ted Pacific Ocean,  
carrying copra,  
*bêche de mer*,  
shark fins, pearl

shell, and any old thing they can pick  
up to make a living. When there are  
no real honest cargoes to be picked  
up, then they carry Mannlicher rifles  
in piano cases and Chinese coffins,  
and run them up the Sumatra coast  
for the rebellious Achins to have

another go at their hated Dutch masters with.

These, and a thousand and one odds and ends of contraband, all slipped in and out of Menada, to the anger of the Dutch authorities.

And at the age of nineteen one of the worst offenders in the whole of the Dutch East Indies was that long-legged, red-headed and ham-fisted young Australian known, from his hardness of frame, as "Blue-Gum" Bill McBride.

A Sydney-sider, Bill was born and schooled up in the back-blocks of the Parramatta River, and the less said about the quality of his education the better. Each morning, after he'd milked a dozen cows, he rode fifteen miles in to school from the well-nigh barren patch upon which his stout-hearted Scotch parents were endeavouring to make their living. Schooling over, he rode the fifteen miles back, milked the cows again, then took up a seven-pound axe and gave a hand at dropping blue and red gum trees thirty to forty feet high. At fourteen years old young Bill could fell a gum tree faster than could his father, over whom, even then, he stood a head and a half taller.

But at school Bill was somewhat of a dunce, and all he ever brought home in the shape of medals he wore on his hide, administered by an earnest but irascible old Scotch master who was a sound believer in the old adage: "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Whoever in his school *might* be spoiled, it certainly was not going to be lanky young Bill McBride.

And then, suddenly, came the end of school. A beneficent government brought a host of up-country school children to Sydney for educational purposes. And on that day, for the first time in his life, "Blue-Gum" Bill McBride saw the sea. As he stood staring at it like someone in a trance,

he saw, too, something majestically cleaving the blue waters of the harbour. A great tower of gleaming, sun-lit canvas, with her house-flag flying at the main, and from her spanker halliards the Union Jack—a six-thousand-ton, five-masted, full-rigged clipper ship of a famous line. And as she came up into the wind below Goat Island, before letting go both anchors with a rattle, Bill McBride heard the call of the sea.

There was one boy who did not return home from that outing. Before the police could lay hands upon him, Bill McBride was outward-bound from Sydney to Papiete, in Tahiti, upon an ancient, but seemingly imperishable schooner called the "Arawanna."

He was under the command, though he did not know it at the moment of offering his services, of the redoubtable Captain Jim Burston, a relic of the "good old days" of the Pacific. The fiercest-tempered, hardest-fisted old buccaneer who ever sailed the seas.

And so commenced those four years in which Bill McBride, under the ancient buccaneer and contraband-runner, sailed the Pacific from Singapore to the Kermadec Islands. Four years in which he filled out from a long, lanky lad into one of the most powerful men in the Pacific; a man who, put to it, had broken the hearts—and very nearly the necks—of some of the most notorious toughs in the Islands.

Four years of constant danger, of wild, tropic storms, of running the gauntlet into ports where gunboats lurked in wait in every channel, with orders to sink them on sight.

The Dutch authorities' hatred of the old contrabandist was so great that they would have stooped to any depths to see him finish his days in prison—or up against a stone wall. And, great as was their hatred of the

old captain who had so long defied them, it was no whit less for the young lieutenant Captain Burston had trained to follow in his footsteps—the most daring young raider in the Dutch East Indies and Malay Archipelago.

And then, up in the Banda Sea it happened. A strangely faint voice from the open skylight one night brought Bill McBride down into the cabin on the run, to find his skipper stretched out upon the settle, his old face strangely grey.

"Bill," the old man said quietly, "I'm making my last port. It's a stroke of some sort. I've lived pretty hard, and I dare say I've earned it."

"I'll run for Sourabaya," Bill said. "There's a doctor there——"

The captain waved the suggestion aside feebly.

"Run nowhere, Bill. Doctors can't do anything for me, I know. All I want to say is that the old tub is yours, boy, and everything on her. Look after her; she's old, but she's good for a long time yet. She's been home and a good bit more to me for



As Bill's eye fell on Van Hartog and his merry men walking past the end of the alley, he dived into a doorway and crouched there until they had passed.

nearly forty years; just as you've been a good companion to me in the last four. You're going to make the man I knew you would that first night I clapped eyes on you in Sydney Harbour. I've put some pretty hard things up to you, but you've stood the test every time. I've never known you do a mean or a dirty thing to anyone, and I've never seen

you flinch when death's been flying all round us, free for the asking."

He drew a long, quivering breath and Bill could see he was in pain. The captain picked up a small packet that lay by his side.

"I want you to have this, Bill," he said. "That and the old Arawanna and the bit of ready money that's on board are all I've got. But I don't want you to ask what's in this packet or even open it until the day comes when you're flat broke and can't see a ray of hope anywhere. Sew it into your clothes and leave it there till then. Promise."

Bill took the packet from the limp fingers and gave his promise. The old eyes, now filming fast, wandered about the cabin, taking farewell of objects that had been his silent companions for years.

"There's one thing I'm proud of," he said suddenly. "I've made a *real* sailorman out of you, Bill. You're not the sort who would stack the old girl up and leave her bones to bleach on some darned coral reef or other."

Again there came a silence, then suddenly the white head turned to him again and Bill saw that there was the ghost of a twinkle in the old, tired eyes.

"Bill," he said, "I was nearly forgetting another last bequest I've got to leave. When you run into Menada again, give that fat hound of a Port-Kommanden—the one who had me locked up in the cala-boose—a good kick in the pants for me. What was his name? Van Hartog. Don't forget, boy. Make a job of it."

And Bill, in a choking voice, said that he would not forget.

Another silence, then the old, sun-bronzed hand groped for his.

"I'm making—port—Bill. 'Bye—lad! Good—luck."

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

BILL BUTTS IN!

THERE was a mist in the blue eyes of Bill McBride as he stood watching the old Arawanna slowly but surely being broken upon the cruel coral teeth beneath her. With the huge rollers breaking in after the typhoon that had driven her to her fate, it was only a matter of minutes now before she sank.

All that he had in the world would go with her, with the exception of the clothes he stood up in. A sleeveless singlet that showed the knotted muscles of his arms and a pair of ancient duck pants that clung to him like a sheath. And then, as he watched, the bow lifted high, then dived below—for ever. Without a word Bill turned and stumbled through the burning sand into the palm and mangrove belt that fringed the beach. He could not see very well at that moment; there was a blur over his eyes.

Near the front edge of the palm-fringe the sound of voices stopped him. He moved behind the stump of a big coco-palm and waited. For one thing, he could have sworn that he had heard the Arawanna mentioned. Moreover, it had been in that strange mixture of pidgin English that Dutch officialdom almost always uses to address its Sikh police. The mention of the Arawanna was not so good!

Were they already aware that the old schooner was ashore? Were they trying to snap him up on some pretext or other before he could pick up another craft? Instinct warned Bill McBride to lie doggo for a while and watch events.

He saw the police range up and down the beach searching for any sign of flotsam, but Bill knew it was too early for any to show up yet.

And then, in the shade of a big palm, his fat face glistening with

perspiration, Blue-Gum Bill saw his worst enemy—Kommanden van Hartog. He was in charge of the search, and Bill knew that if the Dutchman laid hands upon him he would get a rough time. A long term in some stinking Dutch prison or the chain-gang, for a certainty—if they didn't make a quicker end of him than that. It was time to get a move on and find a hide-out.

When darkness fell he'd chance the sharks and swim out to one of the British-owned schooners if there were any in. Not one of them would give him up to the Dutch.

Out of the palm-belt upon the port side he slipped, and raced like a greyhound for the first bit of cover—the junk wharves and buildings of some Chinese trader.

In less than two minutes Bill was lost to sight in and out a dozen yellow-inhabited alleys.

From the end of one of them he got a sight of the small harbour. Lying out in the stream was the Dutch patrol-gunboat Amsterdam, and coming ashore from her in a swift motor-launch were three or four of her officers. No friends of Bill McBride, any of them. For the second time he ducked well out of sight.

The sun was blazing down now upon his bare head; but for the thick red thatch of hair that covered it he would have stood in danger of being sun-struck. His clothes, such as they were, saturated with hours and hours in sticky salt water, were now dried upon him and stuck to his skin. Gingerly he pulled them from his hide for a bit more freedom. Under his singlet, still upon the bit of lanyard about his neck, he felt old Captain Burston's mysterious packet. It had stuck to him through it all.

"Looks like as if you're going to be opened pretty soon," he said. "If a man can be up against it harder than

I am this minute, then he's in a bad state."

He was in the very act of fingering it when his eye fell upon a group of men hurrying past the end of the alley—Van Hartog and his merry men! Bill dived into an adjacent doorway and crouched there until they had passed.

Slipping out of it again, Bill raced for the jungle fringe. He'd have to take to the inland a bit—till dark, at any rate. Maybe at some plantation bungalow he could get a bit of grub.

Out of the edge of the clearing he came suddenly upon a low, native-built, palm-thatched bungalow. Behind it he could see stretching a well-ordered cocoa plantation. There was someone on the wide veranda, too—a white girl and—yes, a Dutch policeman. The policeman was bawling at the girl, and she was crying. From where Bill was the sound of her convulsive sobbing drifted across to him. What in blazes was this game?

Blue-Gum Bill didn't know much about girls, but he could see that this one was young and very beautiful, and that she was as good as she was beautiful, he was certain.

That the Dutch policeman—Bill could see that he was sergeant—was bawling questions at her in such English as he could speak, proved that the girl was British. He was questioning her over something, and doing it as brutally as he knew how. Bill's big fists began to clench as hard as a cannon-ball. Something would have to be done about this!

With his natural gift for decisive action the instant he had made up his mind about anything, he *did* that something. From out of the jungle edge came a series of cries that might have come from a person in mortal agony. The sergeant swung round, peering intently at the direction from which the ghastly sounds had come.

A second series brought him across to the jungle-edge and into it.

His hand dived for his pocket when he caught sight of the tattered figure that stepped from behind a tree, cutting off his retreat.

"*Verdammed* Britisher," he growled.

Bill's first upper-cut took him squarely under the chin and, heavy as he was, lifted him nearly a foot from the ground. Then a sweet right-hand swing spun him around like a top, and he dropped flat upon his face—out to the wide world.

In a couple of minutes Bill had stripped him to his shirt, lugged him across and tied him securely to a palm trunk. Then he donned the sergeant's duck uniform and in it went across to the veranda.

The girl's astonishment at this newcomer once over, Bill soon got the story of her trouble from her; one that made him regret that he had not given the sergeant a double dose whilst he was about it. But he was not the *real* villain of the piece, and that person would get *his* if Bill swung for it.

It was a simple, sad story the girl had to tell. The orphaned daughter of a dead planter, suddenly left alone and penniless, she had taken a post as companion to an invalid Dutch woman whose husband was a big friend of Van Hartog. Her employer suddenly succumbing to illness, the girl had had to suffer the unwelcome attentions of Van Hartog. She had tried to leave the place, but her money had been withheld and she had not a penny or a friend in the world. To hold her securely, a charge of theft had been trumped up against her, and she was terrified that Van Hartog would have her thrown into prison.

Bill's big hand patted her upon the shoulder as consolingly as he knew how.

"Don't you worry, little lady," he said. "You've got a friend, all right. I'm not much to look at, but before Bill McBride lets you down somebody is going to get all mucked up!"

She stared at him in astonishment.

"McBride!" she gasped. "If you are McBride, the gun-runner, they are hunting for you everywhere. It was known last night that your schooner was in these waters and nearly dismantled. There is a reward of two thousand *guilders* offered for you, alive or dead."

*Alive or dead!* That didn't sound any too good to Bill.

"Oh, please, go, and save yourself," the girl urged him. "I must get along as best I can."

But Blue-Gum Bill McBride shook his head.

"That's not my way, lady," he said quietly. "When I start anything, I *finish* it."

"But Van Hartog will be here just after sunset," she warned agitatedly. "I heard him tell the sergeant so. He will find you here and—"

"He'll find me here, all right," Bill said grimly. "And when I'm through with him he'll wish he hadn't. Don't you be scared—stand on me. But if you could find me a bite to eat—"

### THE THIRD CHAPTER

#### HARTOG GETS HURT!

IT was late afternoon when Bill, fed, and like a giant refreshed, drew that little packet from about his neck and opened it. With this girl in the trouble she was, this seemed to be about the time, if it was ever going to do any good at all, that it began doing it. As he undid the last piece of wrapping, something in cotton wool gleamed up at him—something that made him catch his breath. *It was a huge red pearl!*

Bill knew enough of the stones to know that in his hand was as sure



Bill's upper-cut took the sergeant squarely under the chin and, heavy as he was, lifted him nearly a foot from the ground. Then a right-hand swing spun him round, and he dropped flat upon his face—out to the wide world!

a thousand pounds as though he held it in good bank-notes.

For a long time he sat staring at it while many thoughts raced through his mind. When he got up his jaw was set with the determination of a man who has made up his mind to do something—do it—or bust!

"I'm going down into the port," he told the girl. "Don't worry about me. I'll get through and back, somehow. While I'm gone, pack as many of your clothes as you can get into a bundle that I can carry. Keep the door locked and don't let anyone in until I come." From the pocket of the sergeant's tunic he took a small automatic pistol. "If Van Hartog shows up before I get here, you know what to do. Hold him up with this until I arrive. So long—and don't be scared."

It was nearing dusk when Bill got back. In his pocket were bank-notes for six hundred pounds, all a pearl-buyer would pay him for what was perhaps the finest red pearl in the world. The old shark had rooked him right and left, of course; Bill knew that. But a man with two thousand *guilders* on his head, dead or alive, hasn't time to stick around bartering. And, anyhow, there was this girl; she had to be got out that night, somehow or another. And as he had slipped back cautiously from the port, Bill had worked out a plan. It was a bit risky with a young lady on hand, and that gun-boat out there; but, again, beggars can't be choosers.

Waiting in the bungalow for night-fall, Bill came across a bundle of malacca canes standing in a corner. He picked one out and gave it a testing swish. Good little stick; just the ticket for something he had in view!

It was dark, and Bill was beginning to get a bit restless, when a rickshaw

raced up to the front of the bungalow. From the shelter of some curtains he watched Van Hartog lumberingly descend. He looked about him for a moment, then hurried into the house.

A door closed behind him as if by its own volition, and the hard barrel of the sergeant's automatic was rammed suddenly into his fat stomach.

"Come in, *m'neer*," an ice-cold voice greeted him, a voice that made him start and suddenly tremble. "I've been waiting for you."

One grab for his gun Van Hartog made. It was torn out of his hand with a wrench that made him cry out. Down upon his fat carcass descended the malacca cane, every cut like the slash of a sabre. In an iron grip he writhed, trying in vain to bite and kick. Steadily that merciless flail came down upon him until the smart white duck uniform he wore was a tatter of blood-stained rags, its wearer a huddled, moaning mass.

"Now get up!" Blue-Gum Bill ordered; and, as well as he could, the stricken Van Hartog lumbered up upon trembling legs.

He was indeed a pitiable-looking object.

"I've got a legacy for you," Bill went on grimly. "One I promised faithfully to see you got. Turn around."

Sobbing, the unhappy Van Hartog did so. Then Blue-Gum Bill took a kick with one of the sergeant's heavy boots that sent Van Hartog flying up against the opposite wall.

"That's from old Captain Jim Burston," he said, "and you may think yourself lucky he didn't leave you a hundred! You'd have got 'em all—every one!"

He roped the panting, sobbing Kommanden up to a bed-head, and left him to think things over. Outside the girl was waiting, her bundle



beside her. Bill tossed it into the rickshaw and helped her in, then pushed his gun into the rickshaw boy's startled face.

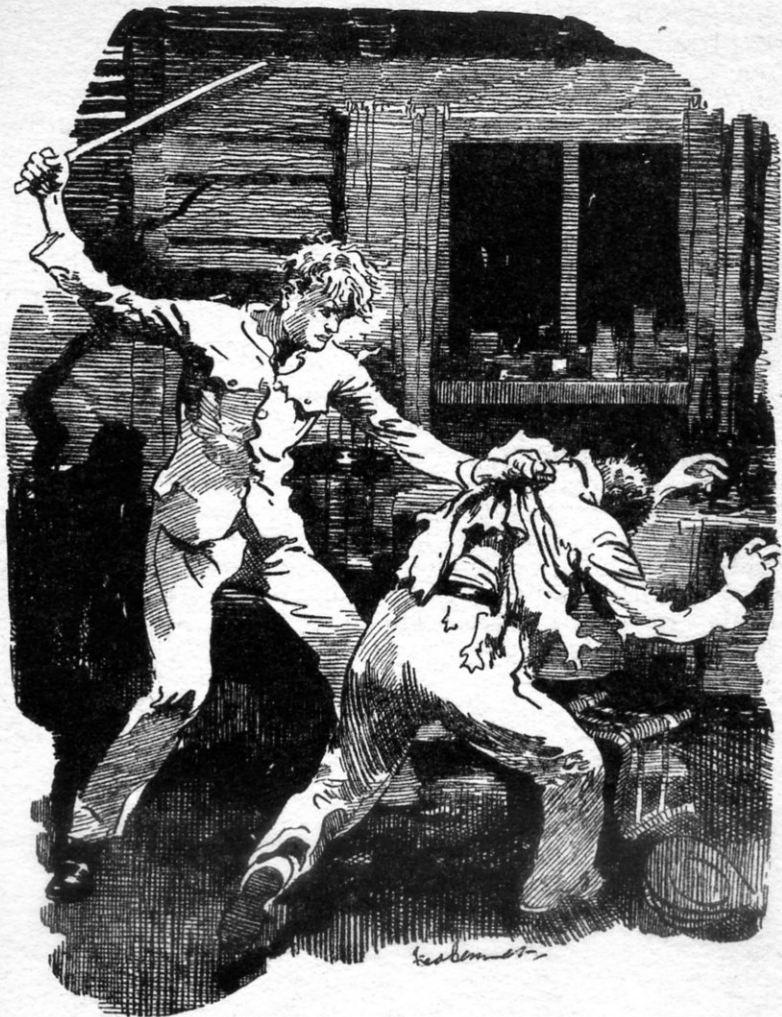
"You get down to the wharf as fast as you can make it," he commanded, "and if you let out one squeak that you've as much as *seen* this lady, or me, next time I come to Menada I'll blow your head right off your shoulders! Savee?"

Bill jumped in and seated himself beside the girl. From inside the room the sound of convulsive sobbing floated out to them. Bill grinned quietly to himself.

"What has happened to him—Van Hartog?" she asked.

"Me," answered Blue-Gum Bill McBride, positively if not grammatically. "I've happened to him, and it hurt!"

It was upon the pier that the last chapter of Bill's getaway was enacted. A long shadow moved along in the dim wharf lights, followed closely by a shorter one. A policeman was standing on guard by where the fast motor-launch of the gunboat was tied up. Something took the man



Steadily that merciless flail came down upon Van Hartog, writhing in Bill's iron grip, until the white duck uniform he wore was a tatter of rags.

under the ear, and a moment later he was tied and gagged securely. Bill hid him in an old customs shed where he was certain he would not be found until morning.

Out into the dark water the nose of the motor-boat shot, jumping at once into high speed. Out past the gunboat she belonged to, out to windward of the reef that stretched

across the mouth of the little harbour.

"It all hung on the good luck that the patrol had not her searchlight on," he told the girl. "If she had, we'd have had to run it under her quick-firers."

Then Bill stepped on the gas, and the light craft fairly flew from wave-top to wave-top down the Celebes Straits.

It was after a long silence that he turned suddenly to her and pressed a packet into her hand.

"That's yours," he said shortly.

"Mine?" she asked wonderingly.

"Yours. It—er—was all a frame-up, that about your dad not leaving you any money. I—I heard all about it while—while I was down in port this afternoon. A swindling lawyer had got it, and was hanging on to it," he lied valiantly. "But I made him pass it over. Threatened to shoot him if he didn't."

"But——"

"There isn't any 'but,'" he hurried on quickly. "There's only just the money—five hundred pounds in all. That'll see you O.K. for a bit

when you get to England. We'll pick up the steamship 'Malaya' sometime about daylight. She'll be making down the Celebes and then up for Singapore. Captain Andy Melrose is a friend of mine; he'll see you're all right for home."

"Home," she echoed.

"England. We colonials always call England 'home.' In a sort of way, it is. Pretty good place, too, I reckon. I'm hoping to see it myself one of these fine days."

It was as Bill stood up in his boat waving a farewell hand to a figure at the stern-rail of the fast-retreating Malaya that a year-old and still green and sad memory came into his mind.

"That's what you'd have had me do with the red pearl, skipper," he said softly. "For all your blustering and raving, that's what you'd have done yourself, and without hesitating a minute. And, anyhow," he concluded half-defiantly, "we Britons have got to stick together, and that's a fact!"

