

KING *of the* ISLANDS

ROUSING YARN of SOUTH SEAS ADVENTURE

By CHARLES HAMILTON



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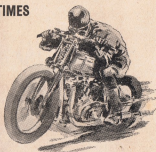
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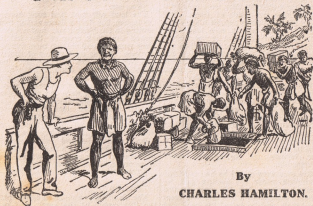
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KING OF THE ISLANDS



By

CHARLES HAMILTON.

From the Solomon Islands to the Marquesas there's no finer skipper or stauncher comrade than Ken King, boy trader of the South Seas. Cool, fearless, and a holy terror when he's roused, Ken's a match even for men like Bolly Samson—blackbirder, pirate and ruthless enemy. Searching for buried treasure, fighting for his life in a desperately tight corner, every one of Ken's amazing adventures will make you hold your breath.

CHAPTER 1.

Cap'n Ken "At Home."

KING OF THE ISLANDS raised his head lazily from the hammock, shaded his eyes with a brown hand, and stared shoreward.

The ketch was anchored between the shore and the outer reef. From the reef came the low, steady boom of the Pacific rollers but the lagoon within was as smooth as glass. The ketch, anchored in sixty feet of water, stirred

not an inch her cable hung down as straight and still as a bar of iron.

The hammock was slung aft, under an awning that shut off the burning blaze of the sun. King of the Islands was stretched in it. He was the only white man on the ketch, and a man he was, though his age could not have been more than sixteen, and his handsome, sun-browned face was very boyish. He wore duck trousers and a silk shirt without sleeves; his muscular arms were

bare and brown, and his feet were bare, though a pair of canvas shoes that lay under the hammock showed that he wore footgear when he was not taking his ease.

The five black men chewing betel-nut forward were much more lightly clad than their skipper; they wore only loin-cloths, and not much of them. But King of the Islands, though his life was passed mostly among men black and brown, never forgot that he was a white man, and on the hottest days, when the sun was like burning brass, and the sea reflected a haze of heat, he never descended to the native rag of tapa. Like so many South Sea traders.

His name was Kenneth King; and his black crew called him Cap'n Ken. But as "King of the Islands" he was known to all the traders and beachcombers from the Marquesas to the Solomons. The nickname had been given him half in jest, but it had clung to him, and he liked it. The Islands were his world, and he had never known any other; but the Islands he knew, and knew thoroughly.

His eyes were closed as he lay in the hammock under the awning, and he seemed asleep; but his eyes opened quickly enough as a yell sounded from the beach, and he raised his head and looked to the shore.

From the edge of the lagoon, a dazzling beach of white sand and powdered coral ran to a fringe of palm trees. The beach baked in the sun, aching to the eye. Not even a land-crab was stirring in the tropical heat; even the parrots were silent. But from the feathery screen of palms a running figure had suddenly burst.

Ken stared at it.

The man was a Kanaka, clad in red-striped calico shorts, the rest of him bare, save for the tattoo-mark which, at a distance, looked like a shirt. Only his thick black hair protected his head from the blaze of the sun. He was running as if for his life, the perspiration streaming down his brown face and his powerful limbs.

King of the Islands watched him as he broke from the palms, and watched for his pursuer or pursuers to appear, for it was plain that the man was being chased. As he watched he rapped out: "You feller Lompo!"

One of the black men jumped up.

"Yes, sar."

The loud yell that had rung across the lagoon, the fleeing figure racing and panting in the blazing sun, had not disturbed the black crew of the ketch. They sprawled and chewed betel-nut regardless. It was no business of theirs, and the South Sea Islander gives no attention to anyone else's business, and very little to his own. A man running for his life was no more concern to the ketch's crew than were the mosquitoes that buzzed round them—rather less, for the mosquitoes were bloodthirsty and irritating, and occasionally a brawny black hand would smash a dozen of them with a mighty smack.

But Lompo jumped up actively enough at the skipper's call. King of the Islands never had to give an order twice on board the Dawn.

"You bring my feller Winchester—quick."

"Yes, sar."

The black sailorman dived below into the tiny cuddy of the ketch, and reappeared almost in an instant with the repeating rifle.

Quick as he was, King of the Islands was out of the hammock when he returned, and standing by the teak rail, his face set and tense as he watched the scene on the shore.

The running Kanaka was making great efforts, but he was spent with his exertions. He was slackening and staggering on the coral beach, and his breath came in great agonised gasps.

Behind him, from the palms, two pursuing figures had emerged. They were fuzzy-haired, brawny black men whom Ken knew at once to be Solomon Islanders—the fiercest race in the South Seas.

Their heavy black faces were lighted up with murderous ferocity as they

gained on the Kanaka, and their spears were lifted to strike him down as soon as they drew nearer.

"Him rifle, sar," said Lompo.

Ken took the Winchester without looking round. With the rifle in his grasp he watched intently.

Lompo looked at the scene with idle interest.

"Him dead man, sar," he remarked.

"Him make kai-kai along of Malaita boy! Him feller all up!"

Ken did not answer; he watched.

The running Kanaka was between him and the pursuing Malaita men, and he hesitated as yet to shoot.

But the rifle was at his shoulder, and his eyes glanced along the barrel.

Lompo looked at his master with a trace of anxiety.

"Cap'n Ken no shootee," he said. "Malaita boy bad man—make enemy, my word! Kanaka feller no belong Cap'n Ken."

Captain Ken smiled grimly.

He knew the native mind too well to expect any of his black crew to take the slightest interest in the Kanaka who was about to be butchered under their eyes, if King of the Islands did not save him.

Neither did he expect them to understand in the least why he was going to intervene.

Between the mind of the white man and that of the black man there was a great gulf fixed, never to be bridged by mutual understanding.

Unheeding the black seaman's remonstrances, he watched and waited.

The rest of the crew were now staring shoreward, without so much interest in the wild scene as they might have shown in a scene at a theatre.

"Him down!" said several voices at once, and one of the black seamen laughed, as at a comic episode.

The Kanaka, catching his foot in a coral rock, staggered forward, and fell at full length on the beach.

He made an attempt to rise, but fell again, evidently utterly exhausted.

Loud and savage sounded the triumphant yells of the Malaita men as they raced on with spears upraised to impale the fallen man.

Crack!

The field was clear now for Ken to fire, and he pulled trigger. The crack of the Winchester rang across the silent lagoon with a crash almost like thunder.

One of the Malaita men was a pace or two in advance of the other, and it was upon him that King of the Islands had fired. The running man ran on a few paces after he was struck, and then suddenly crumpled up and rolled on the beach.

The other halted.

With almost stupid surprise he stared at the ketch and the white man with the rifle standing at the polished teak rail. Hitherto, his eyes fixed on his intended victim, he had not seen the vessel.

Ken took aim, but he paused. The Malaita man whirled round to run; and King of the Islands would not fire on a fleeing man.

Lompo, in his excitement, touched his master's arm.

"You killee now!" he exclaimed. "Him bring other feller Malaita you no killee."

"Talkee too much along you," rapped out Ken.

"Yes, sar."

"Get out the whaleboat," said Ken curtly.

"Yes, sar."

The fleeing Malaita vanished into the palms.

The man who had fallen to the bullet lay still. He did not stir; he was never to stir again of his own volition.

The sprawling Kanaka lifted his head, staring round him. He had expected instant death under the spears of the Malaita men, and he did not yet comprehend how he had been saved. The tiny whaleboat of the Dawn dropped into the water, and, with two black men pulling, shot towards the beach, King of the Islands sitting in the stern with his rifle between his knees.

Ken's brow was thoughtful and rather dark as the whaleboat bore him to the coral beach.

The island where the Dawn lay at anchor was known to few, and marked on no chart. Whether it was inhabited or not, Ken did not know. He had intended to land in the cool of the evening, hoping to light upon a native village and trade for a few tons of copra. That any other vessel was at hand, in that lonely corner of the Pacific, he had not dreamed.

But he knew now that there must be some vessel anchored along the coral shore. The Kanaka had come from somewhere, and the men who had been pursuing him were Malaita men, from the Solomon Islands; and the coral island was five hundred miles from the Solomons.

It was unlikely that Solomon Islanders had voyaged so far in a canoe; and, if not, they belonged to a crew of some white man's vessel anchored off the isle. Ken frowned at the thought. The coral island was his find, and he did not want rival traders there—especially a trader with a savage Malaita crew.

Traders' methods in outlying corners of the South Sea Islands had little regard to the law, and many a time blood has been shed like water for the prize of a ton of copra. King of the Islands carried his life in his hands, as he well knew, when he sailed off the track of the big ships.

The whaleboat grounded on the sand, and Ken stepped lightly ashore. Leaving the black seamen in the boat, he tramped up the shelving beach to the spot where the exhausted Kanaka lay.

The brown man had risen to a sitting posture, and he sat, breathing in great gulps, as he watched the white man coming up the beach with his rifle under his arm.

Ken stopped within a few paces of him, looking at him keenly. The Kanaka was a powerful man, almost a giant; mighty muscles rippled under his brown skin. His broad, brown face was good-humoured, and there was already

a grin on it. The fearful danger through which he had passed had left absolutely no impression on the infantile mind of this child of the careless South.

"You white marster shootee debblish good!" he said, ducking his head to Ken. He spoke in the beche-de-mer English which is the common language of the Pacific Islands. "Me deader you no shootee."

Ken smiled.

He rather liked the looks of the brawny Kanaka, and certainly he was glad that he had saved him from the murderous spears of the Solomon Islanders.

The Kanaka looked at him intently.

"Me know white marster plenty," he said, with respect and admiration in his look and voice. "Me see white marster one time on beach at Nukahiva. White feller marster King of the Islands."

Ken nodded.

The Kanaka rose to his feet, and, taking Ken's hand, placed it on the top of his black mop of hair.

"You wantee good sailorman?" he said. "You wantee plenty good boat-swain. Feller Kanaka sail along white marster."

"I've got a full crew," said Ken, smiling. "As many as my trade will carry, I reckon. But you can berth on the ketch. What name belong feller Kanaka?"

"Name, Kajo-lalulalonga."

Ken chuckled.

He was well acquainted with the lengthy and musical names of South Sea natives. Those names were generally cut very short by the white "marsters." His man Lompo's name was Lompolukono, but on the ketch it was cut down to Lompo.

Kajo-lalulalonga grinned. He was quite well aware of what the white men thought of the unending names of the Kanakas.

"White marsters call um Koko," he explained.

"I fancy I'll call you Koko, too," grinned Ken. "Get into the boat."

Kaio-lalulalonga, or Koko, as the white men called him, tramped down the beach to the whaleboat. Ken followed him, after a keen glance towards the fringe of palms. There was no sign of the Malaita who had fled. The two black seamen in the whaleboat grinned at the Kanaka.

"My word! You mighty near makee kai-kai along Malaita boy," said Lompo.

"You makee plenty kai-kai," said the other seaman, who was called Danny on the ketch, because his native name was too long for human remembrance.

He glanced at the Kanaka's great limbs as he spoke, appreciatively. Possibly Danny himself had joined in feasts of "long-pig" in his time.

"No makee kai-kai this time," said Kaio-lalulalonga coolly. "Sail along white marster King of the Islands."

"Washee-washee!" rapped out Ken, as he stepped into the whaleboat.

Lompo and Danny pulled back to the ketch.

King of the Islands stepped on board, and the Kanaka, fatigued as he was, clambered lightly enough up the side. The little whaleboat was slung up again. On the dazzling beach, which had been lifeless before the Kanaka had appeared from the palms, there was now a stirring of life. From innumerable holes and crevices land-crabs were crawling towards the still form of the dead Malaita man.

Ken leaned on the teak rail, his eyes thoughtfully on Koko, the Kanaka.

"You can berth on the ketch, and pull and haul for your keep, Koko," he said. "But I reckon I want to know what you were doing on this island. What ship belong you?"

"Him name Shark."

Ken started.

"The Shark! That's Bully Samson's ship!"

"Yes, sar."

Ken knitted his brows.

Bully Samson, pearler, blackbirder, rader, kidnapper, and, according to rumour, pirate, was not a neighbour

that King of the Islands wanted in a lonely anchorage.

"Where's the Shark now?" asked Ken abruptly.

Koko waved his hand to the island.

"Other side feller island, sar."

"You shipped with Bully Samson?"

"Yes, sar, along Malaita boys and Tonga Island boys. Me boatswain," added Koko proudly. "No common sailorman. Boatswain."

"Then why have you deserted?"

"No savvy, sar."

"What made you cut and run away feller Samson's schooner?" asked Ken, putting it in South Sea English.

"No like feller Samson," answered Koko. "No likee see white marster prisoner on feller schooner. Me try helpee white marster prisoner, and Bully Samson shootee." Koko put his hand to a gash that ran under his thick black hair. "No shootee straight like feller King of the Islands," he went on cheerfully. "Me run deblish quick, and Bully Samson sendee Malaita boys after."

Ken stared at him.

"You mean that Bully Samson has a white man a prisoner on his schooner?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sar."

"Who is it?"

"No savvy. Him killee plenty soon," said Koko. "Me hear. Tie um to palm-tree and land-crab makee kai-kai."

"My sainted Sap!"

Ken King stared questioning and doubtfully at the Kanaka.

He had heard many a wild and dark tale of Bully Samson, whose schooner was well known in the South Seas to be what the sailorman called a floating hell.

But it was difficult to believe that even Samson of the Shark was capable of inflicting South Sea native tortures upon a fellow white man.

"You talkee straight talk along me, Koko," he snapped.

"Talkee straight talk, sar," said Koko. "Night he come, Bully Samson

givee white man prisoner to him land-crab. Tie um to tree, and land-crab him eatee, piecee-piecee."

Ken shuddered.

"But why?" he demanded. "What name Bully Samson he givee white man to land-crabs?"

"No savvy."

"And you tried to help him escape?"

Kalo-lalulalonga nodded.

"Koko him good Kanaka boy," he said. "All samee white men. No common Kanaka."

Ken knitted his brows in thought.

He judged that the Kanaka was speaking the truth; and what he told was more or less in keeping with the character of Bully Samson, the grim, black-bearded skipper of the schooner Shark. Samson was one of the skippers who lived up to the old ruffianly traditions of Bully Hayes and the old South Sea freebooters.

If the ruffian had some rival lawless trader or pearl-thief in his clutches, it was no business of King of the Islands. But he could not dismiss the matter from his mind.

"You no savvy what name prisoner him call?" he asked.

"No, sar."

"What is he like—a sailorman—a trader?"

"Him boy."

"A boy?" exclaimed Ken in astonishment.

"All samee King of 'The Islands."

Ken whistled.

"English?" he asked.

"Tinkee Australian man—all samee."

"How did he get on Bully Samson's ship?"

"Piekkee off wreck—cattle-boat. Him ship with cattle. Carry long whip like Australian cattle-man."

Ken was more and more puzzled. He could not imagine why an Australian cattle-man should have incurred the deadly hatred of Bully Samson. Samson's lawless ruffianism was generally reserved for rival copra traders and pearl poachers.

"I reckon I'm looking into this game," said Ken. "Bully Samson isn't giving a white Australian to the land-crabs if I can stop him. You can beat it, Koko."

Kalo-lalulalonga went forward to join the crew, leaving King of the Islands in deep thought. Ken King had dropped anchor at that little unknown coral isle to trade for copra, and generally, when he was in the way of trade, he dismissed other matters from his mind. But he could not help thinking of the prisoner in the ruthless grasp of the skipper of the Shark, and his mind was already made up to attempt the rescue of the Australian.

CHAPTER 2.

Bully Samson!

BULLY SAMSON jerked the black cheroot from his mouth, and spat on the dirty deck of the schooner. The burly, black-bearded skipper of the Shark was wearing nothing but a dirty sarong, but he ached with heat in his canvas chair. He cursed the sun, and cursed the sea, and cursed the island, with a fluent and extensive vocabulary of expletives. The black crew of the schooner—Malaiti and Tonga men—eyed him uneasily, and kept their distance, evidently in great fear of the savage-tempered skipper.

Samson heaved up his heavy bulk from the creaking chair and stared at the shore. The schooner lay anchored in a little inlet among the reefs, scarce a mile from where the Dawn lay; but the island was between, and lava rocks and palm-trees shut off the view beyond the dazzling beach. So far Bully Samson had no suspicion that King of the Islands had anchored on the other side of the coral isle.

The schooner lay baking in the heat which drew a variety of offensive smells from every part of the vessel.

The Shark had carried many and varied cargoes in her time, and every cargo seemed to have left its own peculiar smell to mingle with the rest.

The decks were dirty, the ironwork rusty, the brass unpolished.

Bully Samson drove his crew hard in his own way; but he cared nothing for such things as that. His ship was the foulest in the South Seas.

He tramped down from the deck into the low-ceiled cuddy.

If it was hot on deck, it was like an oven in the cuddy, and added to the heat were the stale fumes of liquor and tobacco. Cockroaches crawled unregarded, and a myriad of mosquitoes buzzed and hummed.

In a corner of the stuffy, dirty room a lad lay, with his arms and legs bound with knotted ropes.

He lay leaning back against the wall, in the angle of the corner, resting his head against the dirty woodwork.

His face was blistered with countless mosquito bites, and the cockroaches crawled over him as he lay.

Bully Samson stopped before him and stood staring down at him with a grim and savage face.

The boy returned his look with steady coolness.

"I reckon you find it warm here, Kit Hudson," said the skipper of the Shark.

"I'm not exactly freezing," admitted the Cornstalk.

"Do you know what's happened to that nigger who tried to let you loose?"

Kit Hudson's brow darkened.

He did not answer; but the anxiety in his face brought a jeering grin to Bully Samson's black-bearded visage.

"He got away," said Samson, "and I sent two of my Malaita boys after him. I reckon they'll make kai-kai of him in the bush."

"I hope he'll get clear," said Hudson.

"You can lay to it that he won't!" jeered Samson. "And if he did, you won't. I reckon I've got you tight."

"You needn't trouble to tell me that, skipper. If I'd known this craft was the Shark, I wouldn't have let you take me off the cattle-boat when she went down."

Bully Samson grinned.

"I reckon I was glad to see you," he said. "And what was you doing, working on a Sydney cattle-boat, when you could find your way blindfolded to John Chin's pearl island?"

"I'm not a pearl-thief like you, Bully Samson."

"You could lay your hands on a big fortune," said Samson, between his blackened teeth. "You could make yourself rich, and me, too. Say the word now, and I'll take you on in equal shares."

"Equal shares in another man's pearls? Not good enough, skipper."

"Keep that talk for a Sydney-side Sunday-school!" growled Samson. "It don't go down in the South Seas."

Kit Hudson did not answer.

"You're keeping your mouth shut, then?"

"Yes."

"Lookee here," said Samson, with a black scowl at the Australian. "I've been looking for years for a chance to lay hands on one of John Chin's men. Now I've got you. If you don't talk, I reckon I'll find another man some day who will talk. You savvy that? But you'll be a dead man when that happens."

No reply.

"You know these islands," went on Samson. "Arter sundown the beach will be crawling with land-crabs. What will happen to a man tied to a stump at high-water mark?"

"You've told me that before," said Hudson. "Whatever happens, you won't get me to help you to rob John Chin."

"A swab of a Chink!" growled Samson.

"Think or not, you won't rob him with my help."

Bully Samson looked round the cuddy, and picked up a long-thonged whip from the rickety table. It was an Australian stock-whip, and Kit Hudson's eyes lingered on it as the brutal skipper handled it. It was his stock-whip, and

he had the almost uncanny skill of the Australian stockman in handling it. But it was strange to the grasp of the Shark's skipper, and he handled it clumsily enough.

With a malevolent glare at the bound youth, the skipper struck full at him with the stock-whip.

The result was unexpected, to Bully Samson.

The immensely long whip curled in the most unlooked-for manner, and the end of the thong stung across the skipper's own cheek, almost drawing blood as it struck.

Bully Samson started back with a yell.

Hudson grinned.

Samson pressed his hand to his burning cheek.

"By hokey!" he panted. "By hokey! I—I'll—"

A sudden shouting from the deck of the schooner interrupted the skipper. There was a sound of splashing, and of a man crawling up the side. A moment later a Malaita man, dripping from the sea, panting for breath, appeared at the cuddy door. It was one of the Sotomon Islanders who had been sent in pursuit of Kalo-lalulounga.

The skipper swung round towards him.

"You got him?" he snarled.

"No, sar."

"What?" roared Bully Samson.

The Malaita man trembled.

"No could help, sar," he babbled.

"You let that nigger get clear?" snarled Bully Samson, with a deadly glare at the shivering black man.

"Where's Kuno?"

"Him dead!"

"Dead?"

"White marster him shootee!"

"You lying dog!" roared Bully Samson. "There's no white man on the island!"

"White marster King of the Islands, sar," panted the Malaita. "Him shootee Kuno, him deader. Him takee Kalo-lalulounga on him ketch."

Bully Samson gritted his teeth.

"You saw the ketch?"

"Yes, sar. Him anchor in lagoon."

"By hokey! He's taken that nigger on his ketch? And what, did you do, you black lubber?"

"Me run, sar."

"Take that, you swab!"

The skipper reversed the stock-whip, and struck at the Malaita with the heavy butt. The black man reeled under the blow, and fell with a crash among the cockroaches on the floor.

"That'll larn you, you swab!" raved Samson. "As for King of the Islands, I reckon I'll deal with him!"

He flung down the stock-whip, and buckled a belt round the sarong he wore, and examined a heavy Navy revolver before he thrust it into the holster. Then, paying no further heed to the prisoner or to the stunned Malaita on the floor, the skipper of the Shark tramped heavily up to the deck and roared for a boat.

"Sar!"

Koko, the Kanaka, put his head under the awning that sheltered King of the Islands from the sun.

Ken glanced at him.

He was thinking, as he lay in the hammock, not of copra and native chiefs and tobacco spicks, but of the prisoner on Bully Samson's schooner, and of his determination to help the unknown Australian out of the South Sea ruffian's clutches.

"Sar!" Koko's brown face was wildly excited. "Bully Samson him comee!"

Ken was out of the hammock with a bound.

On the dazzling white beach a tall and powerful figure was striding down to the lagoon.

Ken knew Bully Samson by sight—there were few traders in the South Seas who did not know the burly, black-bearded skipper of the schooner Shark.

Ken regarded him coolly.

"I reckon he's after you, Koko," he remarked. "That Malaita boy must have told him you got on the ketch."

"Yes, sar! Him comee for me," said the Kanaka.

"Let him come," said Ken. "You can cut below, Koko."

"White marster shootee from ship, killy Bully Samson on bench," suggested the Kanaka.

"Cut below, I tell you. Bully Samson's the man to shoot at sight if he sees you."

"Me savvy! Me no flaid if me gettee knife," said the Kanaka. "You lettee Bully Samson come in ship, me throw knife."

"Get below!"

Kajo-lalulalonga went down the little companion. Ken King stood watching the black-bearded ruffian on the beach. Even at the distance he could read the passionate rage in Bully Samson's face.

The black crew of the Dawn watched Bully Samson also. They watched him with awed looks. Not a black man on the ketch would have raised a finger against the blackbearded, savage ruffian at any price. If it came to trouble, King of the Islands had only himself to depend on. But Ken was used to relying solely upon himself.

Bully Samson reached the water's edge and stopped there, his bare, huge feet in the lapping water. He looked a strange and terrible figure, with his bushy black beard, a great grass-hat on his head, and the dirty, red sarong with the leather belt buckled round it. The ketch was anchored a score of fathoms out, and Samson put his hands to his mouth and hailed:

"Ketch ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" called back Ken.

"Send a boat!"

Ken called out an order, and the whaleboat pulled away from the ketch. A couple of minutes later, Bully Samson stepped from the boat to the Dawn.

King of the Islands greeted him with

a nod and a smile. From his cool and civil manner it might have been supposed that he regarded this as a friendly call.

Bully Samson eyed him rather uncertainly.

He had come there to demand the Kanaka, with the fixed intention of shooting the man dead as soon as he was handed over. From Bully Samson's point of view, Koko was a deserter from his ship; and Bully Samson's methods with deserters were drastic.

He was quite prepared for a fight if the boy captain of the Dawn refused to hand the man over. His heavy hand lingered near the butt of the big Navy revolver protruding from the holster at his belt. But the smiling coolness and cordiality of King of the Islands puzzled him and a little daunted him, bully as he was.

"I reckon I never looked to see a white man here, Captain Samson," said Ken. "Lompo, give the white master a chair."

Lompo slid forward a cane chair, but the skipper of the Shark did not take it.

"I reckon I'm here on business, Ken King!" he growled.

"Sit down to it, captain."

A grunt was the only answer.

"No good offering you limejuice," smiled Ken. "Brandy and soda is yours, captain. Lompo—"

"I ain't here to drink with you."

"You're changing your customs, captain. Is it only just a little friendly talk?"

"You've got a deserter from my ship on board here, Ken King!" growled Samson, coming to the point.

"A deserter?" repeated Ken.

"A Kanaka, called Koko."

"You want him?"

"I want him, and I mean to have him!" said Bully Samson, with savage emphasis. "I reckon I don't allow black sailormen to run from the Shark's Where is he?"

"But what's the use of the man to you, captain?" queried Ken. "You sent two Malaitas after him, and they'd have stuck him like a pig if I hadn't weighed in with a Winchester. You've done with the man."

"I tell you I want him!"

"What for?" asked Ken, looking the black-bearded skipper full in the face.

Samson scowled.

"That's my business!"

"Mine, too, as he's on board my ship," said Ken pleasantly. "What do you want him for?"

"To send him to the sharks!" snapped Samson. "That's my way with deserters from my schooner."

"I reckoned so," assented Ken. "Keep your ways for your own ship, captain. They won't do for the Dawn."

"I want that man," said Samson, his voice husky with rage. "Are you handing him over, Ken King?"

"No!"

"I'm not going without him."

"That's really good of you, captain," said Ken. "I'll have the pleasure of your company all the while I stay here, and it's a lonely place. I never counted on seeing a white man here, and it's a real pleasure to keep you on the Dawn. I can fix you up with a berth, though I reckon you'll find it too clean to please you—no dirt and no cockroaches."

And he laughed lightly.

The South Sea ruffian, trembling with rage, gripped the butt of the revolver.

A moment more the weapon would have been drawn, and King of the Islands would have rolled on his own deck with a bullet through his heart.

But the boy skipper of the Dawn was on the watch.

He was watching and waiting for the ruffian to grip his weapon; and even as Samson's grip closed on it, Ken leaped forward with the swiftness of lightning.

Crash!

A clenched fist that seemed as hard and heavy as a lump of pig-iron landed

fairly between the eyes of the South Sea ruffian.

Bully Samson went down on his back on the deck with a shock that almost shook the little ketch.

He lay dazed and almost stunned, and King of the Islands bent over him and wrenched the revolver from his grasp.

It circled in the air, gleaming in the blaze of the sun, and dropped into the lagoon a dozen yards from the ketch.

Bully Samson raised himself on his elbow, staring up with dizzy eyes at the cool, handsome face above him.

Ken's eyes gleamed down at him.

"Now, you dog!" said King of the Islands, between his teeth. "Why shouldn't I tell my men to throw you into the lagoon after your shooting-iron—"

"By hokey!"

Bully Samson staggered to his feet.

He was disarmed now; but as he stood, his rugged features convulsed with rage, he towered over the boy skipper of the Dawn.

"Knocked down—knocked down by a boy!" he gasped as if he could scarcely believe what had happened. "By hokey!"

He made a spring like a tiger at King of the Islands.

Ken leaped back.

His hands went up like a flash, and he grinned over them at the cowering skipper of the Shark.

"Come on, captain—if you're not satisfied," he said. "You want to learn that you can't swagger on the deck of the Dawn."

Bully Samson did not speak; he attacked the boy skipper of the Dawn with savage ferocity. What followed seemed like some evil dream to the bully of the Shark.

The black crew stood staring on at the scene with bated breath. From the companion-way Koko the Kanaka's brown face stared out. Burly and powerful as the skipper of the Shark

was, Ken King was handling him in a masterly way.

The frantic blows of the ruffian never reached his cool, handsome face. But all the time the iron-like knuckles of the boy skipper were beating upon the rugged, furious face, till at last Bully Samson went to the deck again, and lay there, gasping.

"Feller Samson him no good!" chuckled Koko. "Little white marster him plenty too much good, my word!"

Ken was breathing hard, but he was still cool, and a smile lurked on his face.

"It's hot weather for scrapping, captain," he remarked. "But if you want a little more, get up on your hind legs and say so."

The breathless ruffian only panted.

"Koko!" called out Ken.

"Yes, sir."

"Pitch that swab into the lagoon!"

The exhausted ruffian stirred feebly as the Kanaka grasped him. In the mighty arms of the brown-skinned giant he was swept up from the deck almost like an infant.

Splash.

The burly skipper of the Shark went deep under, and it was some moments before he came to the surface, gasping and spluttering wildly.

Ken looked down at him over the rail, and pointed to the beach.

"Beat it, captain!" he said tersely.

"Next time you come around my ship look out for a Winchester bullet. Beat it!"

The black-hearted ruffian struck out for the shore. He dragged himself up on the white beach, and turned back towards the ketch. A savage fist was shaken in the air, and a stream of curses poured out. Ken picked up the Winchester and showed the muzzle over the teak rail. Bully Samson's cursing stopped suddenly, and he whirled round and ran for the palms.

Ken laughed as he dropped the butt of the rifle to the deck.

CHAPTER 3.

A Fearful Doom!

NIGHT, with the suddenness of the tropics, fell on the vast Pacific. Sea and land were wrapped in darkness. In a dark, velvety sky the stars came out in glittering myriads.

The blazing sun was gone; but the heat in the stuffy cabin of the Shark was scarcely less intense.

Kit Hudson groaned in sheer misery.

The ropes on his snowy limbs cut into the flesh; thirst parched his throat; his skin was torn by the bites of countless mosquitoes.

He lay in the darkness, aching with heat, aching with suffering. A bullet from the revolver of Bully Samson would have been a relief to him.

But if his body suffered, his spirit was as indomitable as ever. Not for a moment did he think of yielding to the lawless skipper of the Shark. Not for a moment, either, did he believe that it would save him to yield. Once the secret of the pearl island was in Bully Samson's possession it would be the deep sea and the sharks for the young Australian, and he knew it well. Bully Samson was not the man to share a treasure.

He lay in misery and waited.

His threatened doom was a fearful one, and that Bully Samson intended to keep his word he was assured. But even that doom was almost welcome as a relief from what he now endured.

Bully Samson had returned to the schooner, he knew. He had heard his loud, savage voice soon after sundown, cursing the blacks, and he had heard the sound of blows and cries. Bully Samson had returned in a savage mood, and when his temper was roused the man was more like a demon than a man. His terrified crew shrank out of his way; they obeyed his orders swiftly, and almost anticipated them; but that could not save them from his brutal fury. A crew of a dozen brawny men, some of them cannibals, all of them savage and ferocious, trembled at

the rage of the black-bearded skipper, and never dreamed of resistance. And yet, if a chance had come, and they had been able to take him off his guard, they would have turned on him like tigers, and Bully Samson would have gone to the cooking-pot on board his own ship. But they feared his brawny fists, his ready pistol, and the glitter of his fierce eyes; and Bully Samson was not a man to be taken off his guard.

Kit Hudson would have been glad to hear the sounds of revolt, though a successful revolt of that savage crew would have meant the cooking-pot for him as well.

But he heard only howls of terror and yells of pain following the sound of blows.

Kit Hudson wondered what had happened.

He had caught the name of King of the Islands on the lips of the Malaita man; a name he knew, though he had never seen him who bore it.

He had felt the faintest throb of hope when he heard the name. King of the Islands was a white man, and might help another white man in the clutches of a savage ruffian.

But the hope was faint.

He had heard many tales of the boy skipper—he knew that King of the Islands sailed a ketch with a handful of black men as his crew, trading along the islands for copra and pearls. King of the Islands, if he heard of his fearful extremity, might desire to help him, but he could not. There were over a dozen savage blacks on the schooner, and though they shrank with terror from their brutal skipper, they would fight like tigers at his order—like fierce bloodhounds, crouching to a master's hand, yet ready to tear the master's enemy in pieces. If Ken King attempted to intervene he could only find his death at the hands of the crew of the Shark.

There was no hope in King of the Islands. Even if he came, Bully Sam-

son was the man to shoot him down at sight; and at Samson's order the whole of the crew would have fastened on him. Against such odds, what could the boy skipper of the Dawn do?

Kit Hudson knew that there was no hope; he knew that that hot, starry night was to be his last.

For a long time he lay unheeded; he almost thought that Bully Samson had forgotten him. The rage in which the ruffian had returned showed him that he had not been successful in his visit to the Dawn. Ken King had evidently held his own, and Bully Samson had come back more like a fiend than a man. Hudson wished that King of the Islands had put a bullet through the ruffian's head. Yet that would have left the prisoner in the hands of the black crew, and that, sooner or later, would have meant the cooking-pot. Relieved of their skipper and the fear of him, the blacks would have seized the schooner—and the prisoner.

Kit Hudson lay and listened to the wash of the water round the hull of the Shark.

The tide was going out.

His time was drawing near. When the tide was out he was to be taken ashore and tied to a stump. There the hideous land crabs would gather to their meal—their living meal. Only by betraying the secret of the pearl island could the prisoner win a respite—and he knew that it would be nothing more than a respite—he knew that Bully Samson's promises were worth nothing.

A Tonga man came down the cuddy steps at last, and lighted the smoky swinging lamp.

He grinned down at the prisoner in the dim light.

"White marster him comee," he said "You makee kai-kai along land-crab plenty soon."

Bully Samson tramped down into the cuddy.

The prisoner stared at him.

The ruffian's face was a mass of dark bruises, and one of his eyes was almost closed.

The Cornstalk understood now how he had fared at the hands of King of the Islands and why he had returned to the schooner in so fearful a mood.

The skipper of the Shark glared down at him.

"You going to talk?" he snarled.

"No."

"You'll die and keep the secret of John Chin's pearl island?"

"Yes."

"That does it!" hissed Samson. "You feller niggers, you take white feller on deck."

Two or three black seamen grasped the Australian and dragged him roughly up the cuddy steps to the deck of the schooner.

Kit Hudson looked round him with haggard eyes.

The sea was a sheet of molten silver in the gleam of the stars; like dancing silver the water creamed over the reefs. The island lay a black mass against the starry sky. Feathery palms stood out, tall and graceful, against the stars. It was a night of the South Seas—a night of almost unearthly beauty—in grim variance with the demon's work that was going on on board the anchored schooner.

"Fling him in the boat!"

The bound prisoner crashed into the boat that rocked alongside the Shark.

Bully Samson followed him, and six of the black crew. There was a revolver in Samson's belt, and he held a rifle between his knees. The crew were armed with long Malaita knives. Darkness enwrapped the shore, and all was silent and still, but Bully Samson knew the South Seas too well to trust to appearances. He and his savage crew were armed and on their guard as they pulled for the beach.

The boat grounded.

Round the boat, and on the beach uncovered by the receding tide, crabs were crawling—sea crabs and land crabs

—hideous, crawling things in the gleam of the stars.

A shudder ran through Kit Hudson.

Bully Samson grinned savagely as he noted it.

"There's time yet!" he snarled.

"Your life for the secret of John Chin's pearl island, you young fool!"

Kit did not answer.

Bully Samson tramped ashore on the sand.

"Here!" he rapped out.

The blacks seized Kit Hudson and dragged him from the boat to a stump in the beach near high-water mark.

He was placed with his back to the stump, and a rope was run round him, securing him to it.

The blacks were grinning, and jabbering in their own savage dialect. To them the fearful torture of the young "white marsier" was an entertainment.

Bully Samson growled an order, and the blacks went back to the boat.

The skipper of the Shark stood before the bound man, his eyes fixed on the white, tormented face. Round him the crabs were crawling. He cursed and kicked the hideous creatures away with his feet.

"You mad swab!" he growled between his teeth. "What's the secret worth to you when the crabs are biting?"

No answer.

"I'll give you a chance yet," muttered Samson. "Look ye, once I step in the boat I go, and I don't come back. Once I'm in the boat, I swear that I pull for the Shark and leave you to the crabs."

"Go, then!" breathed Hudson.

"Give a hail if you change your mind!" snarled Samson. "Once I'm in the boat it's too late."

He tramped back to the boat.

He went slowly, for he clung to the hope yet that the Cornstalk would weaken; that he would buy his life, even a respite, with the secret of the pearl island. And if he did it should not save him, the savage ruffian was determined. But his intended treachery,

as clear to Kit Hudson as to himself, defeated his own object. If Kit had been tempted to weaken, as he was terribly tempted, the knowledge that it was useless restrained him and strengthened him. He knew that the black-bearded, black-hearted South Sea ruffian was not to be trusted, and that, if he betrayed his secret, he would betray it in vain. He shut his teeth hard.

Bully Samson reached the boat.

There he paused.

But no word came from the prisoner bound to the stump—the prisoner round whose helpless limbs the crabs were crawling.

With a curse, Bully Samson stepped into the boat.

"Washy-washy um schooner!" he snarled.

And the blacks pulled for the anchored vessel.

Bully Samson stared back at the dark shore. The still figure bound to the stump became a faint blur to him; it disappeared from sight in dark shadow as the boat pulled on.

The boat bumped on the schooner.

The prisoner was invisible now, wrapped in the darkness of the shore. But as Bully Samson stepped on his ship there came a cry from the darkness that made even the hardened South Sea ruffian start and blanch.

He muttered an oath and tramped below. But that fearful cry was still ringing in his ears; and though he strove not to listen, he could not help listening. And again and again from the shore the cry was repeated till there came sudden silence!

CHAPTER 4.

Ken Takes a Hand!

KING OF THE ISLANDS wrinkled his boyish brows in deep thought as he watched the sun dip behind the little coral isle.

With Bully Samson anchored only a mile from the Dawn—though to sail

round the isle to the inlet was a matter of many miles—Ken knew that there was danger in the air.

Flight was easy enough, if Ken had thought of that, for the boy captain of the Dawn would not have hesitated to take the ketch out among the reefs by the light of the stars.

But he was not thinking of flight.

He was thinking of the Australian lad held a prisoner by the bully of the Shark, and doomed to so fearful a fate.

To leave a white man to such a fate was not to be thought of.

Ken King was thinking hard.

An attack on the Shark was out of the question. So long as the prisoner remained on the schooner Ken could not help him. But he was thinking of what Koko had stated—that the Australian was to be bound to a stump and left to the crabs at nightfall. In that there was a chance.

He called Kalo-lalulalonga to him at last.

"What many boys um schooner?" he asked.

"Three five," answered Koko.

Fifteen was beyond the Kanaka's computation, but he had his own way of expressing a number.

"Three five," said Ken thoughtfully.

"Malaita and Tonga men?"

"Yes, sar."

Ken glanced at his own crew—five of them—happy, peaceful natives from Hiva-Oa.

They would not have been of much use in a fight with fierce Solomon Islanders and Tonga men.

They were good seamen, cheerful and happy and obedient, and with rifles served out to them would have stood by to drive off an attack of natives on the ketch, as was sometimes necessary in trading among the islands. But the idea of leading them to attack Bully Samson and his fierce crew made Ken smile.

Koko, however, was a Kanaka of quite a different stamp. He was, as he had proudly stated, no common

Kanaka. He was a man of herculean strength, and a fighting-man.

Ken looked to the dark shore.

After the way he had handled Bully Samson he would not have been surprised had the skipper of the Shark led his men across the island to attack the ketch.

But there was no sign of it.

Not that such an attack would have made Ken uneasy. On the open beach the enemy would have been under his fire, and he could have picked them off with the Winchester long before they could have run out a boat and reached the Dawn. And Bully Samson would have stopped the first bullet, as he was doubtless well aware.

Ken was not afraid of an attack while he lay at anchor in the lagoon. At sea the matter would have been different; his position would have been perilous enough with the schooner itself attacking him, running alongside and hurling a crowd of fierce blacks upon his deck.

"You can pick your way back across the island to the anchorage of the Shark, Koko?" he asked.

"Um easy."

"Good! You'll come with me then."

Koko looked at him.

"White marster goee findee Bully Samson?"

"I'm going to find his prisoner," answered Ken. "I'm going to try, at any rate. You're not afraid, Koko?"

"No, fiald, s'pooee you givee Kanaka um knife?"

"You shall have a knife, and a spear, too, if you like. Plenty on board the Dawn."

The Kanaka shook his head.

"No spear," he answered. "Koko no common nigger. Allee same white man."

Ken grinned.

"Just as you like, Koko."

"Koko civilise Kanaka," explained Kalo-lalulalonga. "Nebber entee long-pig, nebbber :nakee kai-kai um white man."

"Not even of Bully Samson, if you get a chance?" grinned Ken.

"No makee kai-kai—cuttee off head," said Koko.

Ken glanced at the shore again. It was time to make a move if he was to attempt to help Bully Samson's prisoner. But the situation was full of danger. Leaving the ketch in charge of the black crew was not to his liking. He could depend on the faith of the Hiva-Oa men, but not on their courage or their resolution when he was not present. He was risking the safety of his ship—all that he had in the wide world. But he had to take the risk.

He called Lompo to him and gave his instructions.

Rifles were served out from the cabin to the five blacks, with orders to shoot at anyone who attempted to approach the ketch in Ken's absence, whether white men or black or brown.

Then Ken stepped into the whale-boat with the Kanaka.

Koko was armed with a bush-knife, as keen as a razor, and almost as heavy as an axe—a terrible weapon in his powerful hands. King of the Islands carried his Winchester.

Ken beached the boat under the shadow of a big rock, and taking the oars from it, concealed them in a crevice near at hand.

Then he tramped up the beach with Koko.

From the woods of feathery palms the boy captain of the Dawn came out at last on the western shore of the coral isle.

Well out from the shore, the Shark lay at anchor in the inlet. No lights burned on the schooner, but her graceful lines were clearly seen in the gleam of the southern stars.

Her boat was slung up to the davits, and here and there a dark figure could be seen moving.

"Hark!" exclaimed Ken suddenly.

From the blackness of the shore opposite the anchorage of the Shark came a sudden thrilling cry.

Koko gave a violent start.

"Um aloo!" he muttered, his brow

face suddenly pale. "Um aitoo on dis island, sar!"

The cry was repeated again and again. It was strange and wild, and eerily thrilling.

Koko clutched his arm.

"No good aitoo," he muttered through his chattering teeth. "White marster comee back."

"Don't be a fool!" growled Ken. "That was a human cry."

"We two be deaders we see aitoo."

"It isn't a devil, you black fool! It's a man in danger—a man tied up for the land crabs, savvy?" snapped Ken.

Koko understood.

"Me follow white marster," he said.

Ken was already running down the beach. The cry of the helpless victim of Bully Samson's ferocity rang in his very heart. He had no doubt what it meant—that fearful cry, charged with pain and horror and indescribable fear, told its own tale.

With a white, set face, Ken ran down the beach. Past behind him came the Kanaka.

Kit Hudson shrieked aloud again and again. His face was white as chalk, his eyes almost starting from their sockets. Bound to the stump, he could move neither hand nor foot, and round him, thick, crawling, innumerable, were the hideous crabs, swarming on their prey.

Like some hideous nightmare it seemed to the Australian, as he tugged and wrenched frantically at his bonds.

The black men of the schooner had tied him securely; the ropes were strong and fast knotted. He was helpless to raise a finger to avert his terrible doom.

He hardly knew that he was crying out. Shudders ran through him as he felt the nipping of the crabs at his legs.

They were swarming round him.

Horrible, clinging creatures covered his feet and clambered over his legs. It was only a matter of time—long, long minutes, but only a matter of time—before he was devoured. In shuddering horror he shrieked again.

But for his cries Ken would never

have found him in the darkness of the beach. But they guided King of the Islands surely to the spot.

In the midst of his horror, Kit was suddenly conscious of the sound of hurried, tramping footsteps grinding on the sand. But he was almost mad now with fear and pain and horror, and he did not realize that it was rescue.

Ken King's heavy sea-boots tramped furiously on the crawling crabs, smashing them by dozens. With his bare hands he tore the clinging creatures from their helpless victim, receiving several nips himself as he did so.

Hudson was still calling for help.

Koko reached the spot in a few moments more, and his heavy hands dashed the clinging crabs away.

"Cut him loose, Koko!" panted Ken.

The keen bush-knife flashed over the ropes. They dropped in fragments round the stump.

Kit Hudson was free.

He staggered blindly away from the stump, even yet hardly realising what was happening. Ken caught him in a strong arm as he reeled.

"Carry um white marster, Koko!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sar."

The giant Kanaka picked up the rescued prisoner as if he had been a baby and slung him across his shoulder.

Hudson's cries had ceased; half fainting, he lay like a sack of copra across the mighty shoulder of the Kanaka, who bore him swiftly up the beach to the woods. By the stump lay the cut ropes and a hundred smashed crabs.

Ken, following the Kanaka, looked back as he ran. He half expected to see a movement from the Shark, lying out in the inlet. But there was no motion, no sound of alarm. Evidently Bully Samson and his crew had not seen the rescue, in the darkness of the beach, and did not suspect that help had come to the doomed man. No doubt the bully of the Shark believed that it was death that had stopped the cries of the prisoner he had given to the land-crabs. At that moment Ken would not have

been sorry to see Bully Samson in pursuit. He would gladly have sent a bullet from the Winchester through the black heart of the South-Sea ruffian.

In the depths of the palm woods Koko halted and put his burden down. Kit Hudson was himself again now. He lay on the ground, panting, and staring up at the dim figures in the pale glimmer of the stars through the feathery fronds.

"You've saved me," he muttered huskily.

"Yes, sar," grinned Koko. "White marster King of the Islands save um. Me tinkee sitoo when me hear; white marster savvy."

"It was horrible!" he breathed. "I—I think my nerve went when they crawled over me and—and—" His voice broke.

"I think anybody's nerve would have gone," said Ken.

Hudson peered at him.

"You've saved my life," said Hudson—"saved me from an awful death. You've made a friend who will die for you if need be. I can't believe yet that I've really got away from that horror." He shuddered again and gritted his teeth. "I'll get a chance at Bully Samson some day, with a gun in my hand. I'll go back to the Shark now if you'll lend me a gun!"

"You won't, shipmate," said Ken. "They're too many for us, or I'd go with you and see you through. Bully Samson will keep. You're coming with me to the Dawn now."

"You've got your ship near?"

"In the lagoon across the island. Can you walk? Koko can carry you if you like."

"I can walk."

Ken helped the Cornstalk to his feet, but Hudson staggered blindly. Ken held him, or he would have fallen.

"You're not fit yet," said Ken.

"Carry feller white marster, Koko."

"Yes, sar."

"I reckon I'm played out," said Hudson ruefully.

"Not quite fit now to go back to the Shark and handle Bully Samson—what?" chuckled Ken.

"No."

"Get on, Koko!"

The Kanaka carried Hudson onward with ease. Through the dark palms they threaded their way till they came out at last on the shore of the lagoon.

Hudson's eyes turned on the handsome little ketch floating out on the starlit waters.

"That's your craft?"

"That's it."

"She's a beauty."

"I reckon she is," said Ken. "I reckon she can beat any craft her size in the Pacific, and sail a point nearer the wind than most."

He picked the cars out of the crevice, threw them into the whaleboat, and pushed the boat into the water. Koko dropped the rescued prisoner into it and took the cars.

Hudson sat in the whaleboat, breathing hard and deep.

Even now it was difficult for him to realise that he was out of the clutches of Bully Samson and saved from the revenge of the ruffian.

Ken regarded him rather curiously.

"How did you put Bully Samson's back up to that extent?" he asked. "Samson is the blackest scoundrel in Pacific waters, and that's well known from Nuka-hiva to Honolulu; but I reckon giving a man to the land-crabs is the limit, even for Bully Samson. You must have riled him sore."

"He wanted to know something that I could tell him."

"And you wouldn't?"

"No."

"You've got some nerve."

"I was with John Chin at his pearl island once," said Hudson. "I could take a ship there, and Bully Samson knows it."

Ken whistled.

"John Chin, the richest Chink in the Pacific!" he said. "And you could steer a craft to his pearl island?"

"I could." Hudson gave King of the Islands a quick look. "You're not the man to ask me to do it."

Ken chuckled.

"No; I'm not a South-Sea skipper of Bully Samson's calibre," he said. "I've traded with John Chin, and he's a square man, though he's a Chink, and he's got a keen eye to a bargain. It's John Chin that's going to buy my copra when I've finished this trip among the islands. Koko tells me you were taken off a cattle ship."

"Yes. I was broke to the world, and I shipped on a cattle boat at Sydney. She went down in a typhoon. Bully Samson was glad to get hold of a man who had sailed with John Chin. My name's Kit Hudson, white Australian. If you want a man on the ketch, I can work for my keep till you can put me on the beach somewhere."

The whaleboat bumped on the ketch.

Koko lifted Hudson on board, with the help of the staring Hiva-Oa men above.

He was taken down into Ken's cabin and placed in Ken's own bunk. For some time Ken was busy, rubbing the rescued man's bites with a native ointment and bandaging his legs. Hudson watched him in silence.

"You're a white man, Ken King," he said at last. "I've often heard of King of the Islands, but I never reckoned I should drop across him like this. You don't ship a white man on this ketch?"

"I've been looking for a mate," answered Ken, "but I haven't found one yet to suit. You've sailed with John Chin?"

"Third mate of the Saraband," answered Hudson. "That is, of course, I acted as third mate. You could put all my certificates into a nutshell, and it would still be empty."

Ken laughed.

"You're looking for a job?"

"Yes."

"I'll give you a trial on the Dawn, then. If you were good enough for John Chin, you're good enough for me,

and I reckon I should be glad to have a white man aboard. And a fellow who can stand the racket as you've done is a fellow I can trust."

"Done!" said Hudson. "I reckon I shall be able to report for duty to-morrow, sir."

"You can cut out the 'sir,' excepting on duty," said Ken, laughing. "If we sail together we shall be friends. Now you'd better get some sleep."

"You're staying in this lagoon?"

"Only till dawn," answered Ken. "I was here to pick up copra trade with the natives, if there are any; but I reckon trade's off with Bully Samson hanging around. I doubt if there are any natives, either. I've landed here for water and coconuts before, and I know the island well, but I've never seen any natives. This trip I wanted water chiefly, but I was going to look over the island and see whether there was a native village tucked away somewhere along the shore."

"You'd better up anchor before dawn, if you know your way out of the reefs."

"Why?" asked Ken.

"Because Bully Samson will find out at dawn that you've saved me, and it won't be healthy for you here after that."

"You reckon he will bring his schooner round to the lagoon?"

"I'm sure he will," said Hudson earnestly, "and once he lays you aboard with his crew of black devils you won't have an earthly."

"He hasn't laid me aboard yet," said Ken, with a smile. "And the Dawn isn't easy to catch."

"The schooner's got twice your spread of canvas," said Hudson. "I know she's a good craft, but canvas tells. The Shark will go four knots to your three."

"Just about," assented Ken coolly. "But I don't think Bully Samson will lay me aboard very easily, for all that. The Shark sails four knots to my three, but she draws ten feet more of water."

He rose from beside the bunk.

"You get some sleep now."
"Right!"

Hudson closed his weary eyes, and Ken King returned to the deck of his ketch.

CHAPTER 5.
In Chase!

BULLY SAMSON had slept badly that night.

Deep draughts of brandy had failed to produce their accustomed effect; the skipper of the Shark slept ill, and tossed and turned in his bunk through the hot night.

Hardened ruffian as he was, Samson was feeling something like remorse. The fearful cries from the darkened beach, the cries of the man he had consigned to so fearful a doom, still seemed to echo in his ears. If he did not repent, at least he felt remorse.

The cries had been suddenly stilled, and Samson had no doubt of the cause. His victim's sufferings had been briefer than he had expected. That the Australian had escaped did not even cross his mind. It occurred to him that Koko might have told King of the Islands that there was a white prisoner on board the schooner, but he gave no thought to it. He did not even know that Kaio-lalulalonga had overheard him tell the prisoner that he was to be tied up for the land-crabs at nightfall; but, in any case, he would not have expected the skipper of the Dawn to concern himself about the matter.

That the young Cornstalk was dead, and that he had died terribly, Bully Samson had no doubt whatever. It was that certainty that made him shudder to recall the fearful cries that had rung and echoed in the night.

At the first glimmer of dawn Bully Samson left the cuddy, reeking with the fumes of liquor.

He went to the rail and stared at the coral shore, but at the distance his bleared eyes failed to pick out the

stump to which Hudson had been bound.

"You feller Kalua, you bring long-see glasses!" he snapped.

Kalua brought the glasses promptly. The haggard ferocity in Bully Samson's face had scared the clustering blacks into awed silence the moment he appeared on deck.

Under the powerful glasses the beach and the coral rocks rushed into close view at once.

Samson focused them on the stump to which Hudson had been found.

He hardly knew what he expected to see—fragments of clothing and sagging bones left in the ropes, perhaps. But what he actually saw was the bare stump with dead crabs lying about it.

The skipper of the Shark rubbed his bleared eyes and stared again. He could scarcely believe his eyes or the glasses. Not a trace of clothing remained on the stump—not a trace of a rope. But as he stared he picked out the ropes that lay round the stump among the dead crabs. Of the prisoner, dead or alive, there was no sign.

The change that came over Bully Samson's face was terrifying to his crew.

He knew now that the prisoner had escaped. It was not death, but rescue, that had stilled the cries in the night. The land-crabs could not have left the spot without a trace of their victim.

Samson dashed down the glasses with an oath.

"By hokey! He got away! Lower the boat!" he roared.

All the way to the beach Bully Samson cursed volubly. Not a trace of remorse remained now. His only feeling was one of demoniac rage at his victim's escape.

He leaped out before the boat reached the sand, and trampled furiously to the stump.

There his bloodshot eyes quickly detected what had happened. The clean cuts of a keen knife showed plainly on the fragments of rope. Footprints were

deep in the sand, and the track led away up the beach towards the palm woods.

Bully Samson raved with rage.

"King of the Islands!" he hissed. "By hokey! King of the Islands! He's taken him! By hokey!"

It was the only explanation, and Bully Samson knew the truth at once. King of the Islands had rescued the prisoner, and Kit Hudson was at that moment undoubtedly safe on board the ketch.

Safe! The bully of the Shark swore furiously that he should not be safe from his vengeance, on the ketch or anywhere else. He had more than one account to settle with King of the Islands now. He passed his hand over his bruised face and blackened eye.

He returned to the schooner in a raging temper.

His first thought was to lead his whole savage crew across the island and attack the Dawn as she lay anchored in the lagoon.

But, enraged as he was, Billy Samson had not lost his caution.

At close quarters, hand to hand, he and his wild crew would have made short work of the ketch's company, but an attack on the ketch from the beach was not likely to reach close quarters. Samson knew that Ken was a crack shot with the Winchester.

He shook his head.

But there were other ways. The ketch was swift—swift as a seabird in her flight. But she could not perform miracles. The schooner was twice her size, and had twice her spread of canvas, and was a good boat—and Bully Samson, brute and ruffian as he was, was as skilful a skipper as any that sailed the Pacific, and he knew how to get the last ounce of speed out of his craft.

On the open seas, Billy Samson would have undertaken to run down the Dawn almost in the teeth of the wind.

A scramble on board from the open beach, exposed to the fire of a Winchester repeating-rifle in a sure hand

was one matter. A rush alongside in his schooner, and his whole savage crew leaping down on the low deck of the Dawn in a yelling bunch, was quite another. Why, he told himself furiously, the Shark was big enough and heavy enough to run down the little ketch and cut her in two with its prow, as Samson had run down and cut in two many a native war-canoe in his time. Once in sight of the ketch on the open waters, sea or lagoon, and King of the Islands would be utterly at his mercy—and Hudson, too, and the Kanaka deserter. Only the seabirds would behold the savage deed—only the sharks would know what became of the victims. The black crew of the schooner would tell no tales; it would not be the first crime in which they had shared with their skipper.

Samson roared orders for the anchor to be weighed, and the rusty iron chain creaked and rattled up.

Only one doubt assailed him.

The ketch had been anchored in the lagoon, and few skippers would have cared to take her out through the reefs in the dark. But he knew that King of the Islands was a master of his craft, and would not have feared to run the reefs by the light of the stars. If he had done so, if he had fled, the ketch was beyond the reach of Bully Samson's vengeance.

On that point alone was the South-Sea ruffian anxious.

If the ketch was in sight, at any distance, he would run her down; but if King of the Islands had fled by starlight, the vast Pacific might have swallowed her from all discovery.

The next meeting might be at Papeete, or Taot-hae, or under the hills of Samoa, where Bully Samson would not dare to use such methods. Only in the lone waters of deserted seas, with no human eyes to witness his deeds, did he dare to sink a white man's ship.

Had King of the Islands fled under the stars? That was the question that Bully Samson asked himself savagely.

as he toiled the schooner out of the inlet into the open sea.

But the reefs were rounded at last, and he came round the island with almost every stitch of canvas on the Shark full and drawing, his black crew standing keen and watchful at sheet and halyard.

A shout of triumph, like the roar of some savage beast, burst from the brawny throat of Bully Samson.

There was the Dawn!

Bully Samson's deep-set, inflamed eyes danced with glee.

There she was—on the deep waters, under his savage stare—quitting her anchorage—too late! Too late—with an enemy on her track that sailed four knots to her three!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Fate of Bully Samson.

KING OF THE ISLANDS looked back, with a smile on his lips. Like a mountain of belying canvas, the Shark was tearing through the water in his wake. Fast as was the little ketch, the pursuer was coming up land over list.

"Feller Samson him killee every feller um Dawn!" said Kato-lalulalonga. "Him crew makee kai-kai every feller, my word!"

That was the fixed opinion of Kato-lalulalonga; but he spoke coolly enough, his brawny hand on the heavy bush-knife slung at his hip. When the finish came, Koko the Kanaka would be ready for it. Watching the tearing schooner behind, he calculated how many minutes it would be before she swooped down on the ketch and her wild crew came leaping aboard, to slay every soul on the Dawn after a fierce and hopeless fight against overwhelming odds. That must be the end now, so far as Koko could see, and he was ready for the last desperate struggle.

Kit Hudson shared his opinion, and his face was shadowed as he stood,

pale and bandaged, on the tiny after-deck of the ketch. His eyes lingered on King of the Islands' smiling face, and he could not understand his smile.

Ken caught his questioning eye.

"Four knots to our three—what?" he said.

"Quite—and more," said Kit Hudson. "You're not getting all that you could out of the Dawn, even now."

"That's so."

"You've left it too late, King," said Kit Hudson gloomily. "We're for it now. Bully Samson won't spare a soul aboard. He dare not! He daren't leave a man alive to tell among the islands what he did to the Dawn."

"We're not sunk yet," said Ken.

He regarded the Cornstalk curiously.

"You think we're done for?"

"I know we are," answered Hudson gruffly. "I'd have risked taking the ketch out through the reefs in the dark. Better pile her up on the rocks than give Bully Samson a chance at us."

"I could have taken the Dawn out in the dark without scraping an inch of paint off her," answered Ken.

"And you didn't? You waited for daylight—why?"

"To give Bully Samson a chance."

Hudson stared at him.

"You can see that you'll never get the heels of him?"

"Quite!"

Hudson looked back at the towering canvas of the Shark.

"She's got the wind of us. There's not a dog's chance of getting clear. In ten minutes she'll swoop, and either lay us alongside or run us down and cut us in half."

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Ken. Hudson bit his lip.

He simply could not understand the careless recklessness of the boy skipper of the Dawn.

Ken stared back at the swooping schooner with a cool, calculating eye.

The Shark was near enough now for him to make out the towering figure

of Bully Samson, shaking a brawny fist at the ketch, and the stirring forms of the black crew. He caught the glint of sunlight on the points of spears and the flashing steel of bared knives.

Yet he still smiled, but his smile was grim. Murder on the high seas was what Bully Samson intended, and it seemed to Hudson and the Kanaka that no human agency could now avert that fate.

"I know what I'm doing, shipmate," said Ken quietly. "I sailed at daylight to give Bully Samson a chance. I knew he would bring his schooner round the island after me—I hoped he would, at least."

"Give me your rifle," said Hudson. "I might pick the scoundrel off when they close in."

Ken shook his head.

"No need!"

"Oh, you're asking for death!" exclaimed Hudson. "We're for the jaws of the sharks in under ten minutes from now."

"I know what I'm doing. The Shark sails four knots to our three—and draws twenty feet of water to our ten."

"What difference does that make?"

Ken's smile was grim.

"You don't know these seas?" he asked.

"I've never sailed here before. That island yonder is marked on no chart," answered Hudson.

"I've sailed here a dozen times and more. I was in a wreck here when I stood no higher than that teak rail," said Ken, "and if the Dawn drew twenty feet, I reckon we should be food for fishes at this very minute, shipmate."

A glimmering came into his mind of what the boy skipper of the Dawn had planned, of what he intended.

"Bully Samson has got to pay for tying up a white man for the land-crabs," said Ken, and his blue eyes glistened. "That's why I waited for daylight, shipmate; that's why I gave Samson a chance to get after me. The Pacific has seen enough of Bully

Samson and his crew—I reckon the sharks are going to see the last of them!"

"Oh!" gasped Hudson.

The Dawn cut through blue, rolling waters, keen as a knife. Hudson, had he been asked, would have said that clear water ran to a bottom at least a hundred yards below, and more likely a thousand. But he knew of the hidden deadly reefs of the Pacific—he knew the lurking perils of uncharted seas. What Ken knew Bully Samson did not know; but Kit Hudson realised now that the boy skipper of the Dawn knew what he was about, and that he was leading on the South Sea desperado to his doom.

Bang!

A trade-gun roared on the schooner, and the lump of old iron with which it had been loaded sang through the shrouds of the ketch.

Ken laughed aloud.

"That's the last word of Bully Samson!" he said.

He was right.

"Look!" he said.

Hudson watched with dazzled eyes.

At one moment the schooner was coming on like some gigantic sea-bird, sweeping under belying canvas, rushing down on her prey like a giant albatross. The next—

Crash!

Mainmast and foremast on the schooner went like sticks as she struck. Topmasts and canvas sprawled over the side in a maze of tangled rigging. The Shark heeled over to port, and a fearful yell rang from her slanting decks.

Bully Samson clutched at a stanchion, his black-bearded face suddenly white, hoarse curses streaming from his lips. His ship was reeling and staggering under his feet as the sharp teeth of the hidden reef tore the copper bottom out of her.

Wild and shrill, in a terrified falsetto, rose the shrieks and yells of the Solomon Islanders and Tonga men, already splashing in the water that rushed into the schooner.

King of the Islands stared back. His handsome face was grim, his eyes glinting. From Koko the Kanaka came a yell of glee.

"Him feller schooner sinkee! Feller Samson makee kal-kai um shark!"

Kit Hudson stared with fixed eyes.

The schooner heeled over on the sunken reef. Wilder rose the cries of the black crew, swimming among the wreckage in terror of the tiger sharks.

The Hiva-Oa men watched with indifferent faces. Koko the Kanaka was grinning with glee. But Kit Hudson's eyes turned on King of the Islands. He did not speak; but his look was a mute appeal.

Ken met his eyes, and the grim sternness of his face relaxed.

For a long moment he hesitated, and then he rapped out an order. The Dawn, tacking almost in the teeth of the wind, swept back towards the reef and the wrecked schooner. And the voice of King of the Islands rang out again:

"Lower the whaleboat!"

Ken stood in the whaleboat, his handsome face set and tense. It was against his better judgment that he had resolved to save Bully Samson and his crew; but having once made up his mind, he cast hesitation behind him. And there was no time to lose; the terrified shrieks of the Malaita men told him that the tiger sharks were already among them. Ken had lost sight of Bully Samson, but a dozen of the black crew could be seen swimming desperately or clinging to wrecked spars. Save for spars and tangled rigging wallowing in the waves, the schooner was out of sight now, settling down deep on the sunken reef.

"You feller Kanaka, washy-washy plenty quick!" snapped Ken.

Two Hiva-Oa men tugged at the oars of the whaleboat. The rest were standing along the low rail of the Dawn, with ropes to throw to the struggling Malaitas. Koko, his brown face expressing grim disapproval, flung out a rope to a drowning Solomon Islander.

Disapproving or not, Kalo-lahulalonga did not think for a moment of disputing the command of "feller white marster."

The whaleboat glided among the wreckage, and three or four black paws grasped at the gunwale. Dripping and panting, the black men rolled into the boat. But if the rescue was swift, the tiger sharks were swifter. Three black men rolled panting into the whaleboat; four were dragged up the low side of the ketch. Another, with his hands on the gunwale, was torn away as he clambered, and disappeared under the waves with a gurgling cry. Ken stood and stared round over the curling waves, but of the crew of the Shark there were no more to be seen.

"Where's Bully Samson?" muttered Ken.

Lompo grinned, and pointed with his oar.

"White feller him swim um island—feller shark get him plenty quick."

Ken gritted his teeth.

"The fool!" he muttered, staring after the swimmer.

Bully Samson was already at a distance.

Certainly the skipper of the Shark had had no expectation of being picked up by the ketch, and he had struck out desperately in the direction of the island. It was a desperate—or, rather, a hopeless—attempt, but it was Bully Samson's only chance, and he was swimming strongly and fiercely. But close by him a black fin glided over the blue water.

"Feller shark get him!" repeated Lompo.

"Pull!" shouted Ken. "You feller boy, pull like thunder!"

The Hiva-Oa men bent to the oars, and the whaleboat shot in pursuit.

King of the Islands grasped his Winchester.

The black fin had disappeared; Bully Samson was still swimming strongly. The whaleboat raced through the water, the sweat running in streams down the brown skins of the Hiva-Oa men as they pulled. Again the black

fin glanced in the sun, closer to the swimmer. Ken fired, and the bullet glanced on the water, splashing spray over the dark head of Bully Samson. The swimmer's haggard eyes turned back and took in the whaleboat, the straining oarsmen, and King of the Islands standing rifle in hand.

A husky yell of defiance burst from the ruffian, and he swam on again desperately. The skipper of the Shark did not understand that it was rescue, and he did not doubt that the bullet that had gone so close had been aimed at him. Only too well the South Sea desperado knew what he would have done in Ken King's place, and he judged others by himself. He struggled furiously to escape, unconscious and heedless of the fearful monster now close upon him.

"Fool!" muttered Ken again.

The whaleboat was rapidly overhauling the swimmer. But the shark was closer.

There was a gleam of white in the sun close by Bully Samson as the shark turned over to bite.

Ken's face was white and rigid as he glanced along the rifle. Brute and bully as Samson was, stained with the crimes of a lawless life in wild seas, such a fate was too terrible. Ken's heart was sick within him as he saw the gleaming white of the shark's belly, and caught a glimpse of the fearful rows of teeth, but his hand was steady as a rock. A moment more and the sharp teeth would have been shearing through the limbs of Bully Samson.

Bang!

A husky yell came from Samson, a yell of piercing terror as he realized that the shark was upon him. For a second King of the Islands thought that his aim had failed.

But the next he knew that he had not failed. A wave of crimson dyed the water, and spray flew like rain as the shark's tail thrashed the sea.

Bang! Bang!

Twice again King of the Islands fired, and each bullet struck the hideous fish.

The whaleboat rushed on, and Lompo leaned over and grasped the collar of Bully Samson's shirt.

"Get him aboard boat belong us!" panted Ken.

"Yes, sar!" grinned Lompo.

The ruffian did not resist now. A dozen yards from him, the shark, mortally wounded, was thrashing up the sea. Bully Samson was only too glad to clamber into the boat with Lompo's helping hand, if only to find himself a prisoner there.

He sprawled in the boat, in a pool of water.

"Washy-washy um ketch," said Ken. "Feller shark him smashes boat you no washy-washy like thunder."

"Yes, sar!"

The Hiva-Oa men pulled for the ketch. Behind the boat the struggling, squirming shark thrashed the sea with a noise like thunder.

Bully Samson lay panting in the bottom of the boat for a full minute, and then, as he struggled to his knees, his hand grasped at the knife at the back of his belt.

"Drop it!"

A gleaming eye looked at him along the slanting barrel of a rifle.

"You dog!" said King of the Islands. "I've saved you from the shark, and I'm a fool for my pains. Drop that knife into the sea or I'll send a bullet through you. Sharp's the word!"

Bully Samson drew a hissing breath. The knife flashed in the sun as it was flung into the Pacific.

"You've got me!" muttered Samson. "You've sunk my schooner, and you've got me. But wait till my turn comes!" He ground his teeth. "I'll get you, Ken King! I'll hunt you through the islands——"

"You feller Samson talk too plenty much mouth belong you!" said Ken, with a grin. "Stow the cackle, Samson, and feel thankful that I didn't leave you to the sharks as you deserve, you scum!"

And the South Sea ruffian sat in

savage silence while the whaleboat pulled back to the Dawn, and he was passed up the side of the ketch—a prisoner.

CHAPTER 7.

Aiteo!

KOKO, the Kanaka, fixed a grim look upon Bully Samson as the skipper landed, dripping, on the deck. His brown hand went as if by instinct to the handle of the long Malaita knife at the back of his calico trousers. Ken gave him a warning look. Reluctantly the boatswain relinquished the weapon.

"S'pose you no killy Bully Samson, Bully Samson him killy you bimeby," said Kalo-lalulalonga.

"I guess the nigger's right," said Bully Samson hoarsely, with a glare of defiance at King of the Islands.

"That's enough!" said Ken curtly. "You won't do any more harm when I'm done with you. Lash those niggers, Koko."

"Yes, sar!"

The four blacks picked up by the ketch already had their arms bound. The three from the whaleboat were secured in the same way. The Malaita men submitted quietly, indifferently. With their arms bound, the prisoners squatted on the deck, staring about them curiously, and already forgetful of the fearful peril through which they had passed, and of their shipmates who had gone down.

"Now feller Samson," said Ken.

Bully Samson clenched his hands convulsively as the Kanaka approached him, rope in hand.

But the Winchester in Ken's hands enforced obedience, and Samson's sinewy arms were bound behind his back.

"That's the last of the Shark," remarked Kit Hudson, staring back at the tossing fragments of wreckage as the Dawn glided away swiftly from the sunken reef, once more before the wind.

Ken nodded.

"A good riddance," he said. "It was in my mind to let Samson and his crew go down with her, but—" He laughed. "One must remember that one is a white man, even in these waters. There'll be a good many in the islands, white as well as black, who'll be glad to hear that the Shark will never sail the Pacific again. Where did you pick up that hefty whip?" he added, with a glance at the Australian stock-whip tucked under Hudson's arm. "I haven't seen that before."

Hudson laughed, and jerked his thumb towards the reef astern.

"I spotted it floating among the wreckage and picked it up. I was mighty glad to see it again," he said. "I had it on the cattle-boat out of Sydney. You've never seen an Australian stockman handle a whip like this?"

"Never," said Ken.

"Look!" said Hudson.

He slipped the whip into his hand. Koko, the Kanaka, was standing twenty feet away forward, with his back to the two white men.

A jerk of Hudson's wrist, and the long lash of the stockwhip shot through the air and curled round the huge grass-plaited hat on the Kanaka's head.

The big hat was lifted from Koko's head as if by an invisible hand, and landed in an instant upon the coamings of the cabin skylight at Kit Hudson's side.

"By gum!" ejaculated Ken in astonishment.

It was his first experience of the uncanny skill of the Australian stockman with his whip.

Kalo-lalulalonga started convulsively, and his hands went to his head to feel for the hat that was no longer there.

Then he stared upward, and then round him, with an expression of stupefied astonishment on his brown face.

Astonishment gave place to alarm as he found that his hat had utterly vanished.

"Debble!" he gasped. "Debble get um hat belong me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Ken.

There was a cackle of laughter from the blacks who had seen the trick with the stock-whip.

But Koko did not cackle. He was deeply alarmed. He came plunging aft to Ken, with terror in his brown face.

"Little white master, aitoo board um ship belong you!" he stuttered. "Aitoo lift um hat along head belong me. Him feller hat gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Ken. The expression on Koko's bewildered and terrified face was too much for him.

"What make little white master him laugh?" gasped Koko. "Aitoo debble him board ship, his sinky ship, and we all make kai-kai along shark!"

"Hat come back head along you," said Hudson, chuckling.

"No tinky," said Koko.

"You look eye belong you, you see."

Hudson jerked the stock-whip, and the lash closed round the hat again like the tentacle of an octopus.

The big grass-hat was jerked into the air from the skylight coaming, and landed on Koko's astounded head.

"Oh, golly!" gasped Koko.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Him debble whip," said Koko, staring at the stock-whip in awe and wonder. "Him aitoo whip belong you, sar."

"Plenty big aitoo debble in um whip belong me," chuckled Hudson. "Spese you no good black boy, debble whip him lift um head belong you, all samee hat."

Koko retreated forward, still with an uneasy backward eye on the stock-whip, which evidently to his untutored mind was tenanted by a "debble" of unusual powers.

"That's some whip!" said Ken admiringly.

"I was mighty glad to get it back,"

said Hudson. "I've jerked a revolver out of a bushranger's hand at thirty paces with this same whip. I'd feel safer with it than with your Winchester.

"You've got eight prisoners on the ketch," he said. "That's as many as your crew, including ourselves. What are you going to do with them?"

"Get rid of them as soon as possible," answered Ken. "I'd run them back to the island, but I don't want to lose this wind. But we shall raise Talopa to-night."

"Talopa!" repeated Hudson.

"A coral atoll."

Hudson whistled.

"Marooning them?"

"There's nothing else to do with them unless we drop them overboard. It's Talopa or the deep sea—and I've no doubt they'll prefer Talopa," said Ken dryly.

The wreckage of the Shark was far out of sight astern now as the ketch fled on before the wind over the blue Pacific. The long, hot day wore to its close, the round red sun dipping to the waves in banks of purple and gold.

Koko was at the helm. Ken, sitting idly on the teak rail, watched through the soft shadows. From the fore cross-trees came the sing-song voice of a Kanaka on the look-out:

"Feller island him see."

Faintly through the starry gloom loomed the feathery fronds of tall palm-trees.

Nearer and nearer it came, until the ketch glided at last into the glimmering lagoon of the atoll. A word from King of the Islands, and the Malaita men were cast loose from their bonds, one by one, and told to jump. Black man after man plunged into the lagoon and scrambled ashore. Another word, and Bully Samson, shouting wild oaths, was dropped over the teak rail after his men, and went plunging to the coral beach.

Kit drew a deep breath.

"I'm glad we're finished with him. Now for the open sea, and the salt

wind to take the taste of him out of our mouths."

On the beach of the atoll a tall, black-bearded figure stood, shaking a clenched fist after the ketch as her white sails glanced seaward. Swiftly flew the Dawn, vanishing from the sight of Bully Samson and his crew, marooned on a coral speck in the boundless waste of the Pacific.

CHAPTER 8.

The Beachcomber from Faloo.

THE beachcomber would never have set foot on Lalinge had not King of the Islands chanced to be strolling back to the coral wharf from John Chin's copra warehouse.

For Lalinge, for a South Sea island, was a particular place.

It was not, for instance, like Faloo or Falusuta or Lukwe, where no man cared what he looked like or what anybody else looked like, and where a white man was satisfied with a rag of tapa and a floppy grass hat by way of costume.

Lalinge had an unusually large white population—nearly a dozen white men, all told. It had been visited by the district commissioner and his lady, and though the district commissioner's official residence was three hundred miles away, and the D.C. had probably forgotten the existence of Lalinge, still that visit had left behind it an influence of respectability that was un-forgotten. On that great occasion the district commissioner had worn not only trousers and a shirt but socks, shoes, and coat—an accumulation of clothing upon which all Lalinge had gazed in awe and admiration.

From that date, if not from an earlier one, there had been an un-written law on Lalinge. Black men and brown men could dress or not as they liked. Between the black men and civilised respectability there was fixed a great gulf, which no man

thought of bridging. But on the beach of Lalinge no white man was permitted to tread unless clad in the garments of civilisation.

The beachcomber was a white man, though burnt nearly as brown as a Polynesian by tropic suns. From his veranda, where he was sipping his seventh cocktail, Manager Belnap spotted the fact, and in the same glance the fact that the newcomer was lightly clad in a hat and a native loin-cloth. A few words in beche-de-mer English from Mr. Belnap, and two brawny, grinning black servants raced down to the beach, reaching it before the canoe from Faloo nosed into the sand and powdered coral. The beach-comber, about to step ashore, was waved back into the canoe, amid a falsetto cackle of merriment from the Faloo paddlers.

The beachcomber was not a hefty man, but if years of alcohol had robbed him of his strength, he still had the pride of a white man left—in dealing with niggers, at least. With a burst of language that was uncommon on so respectable an island as Lalinge, and which was punishable by a fine of £5 if reported to the district commissioner—three hundred miles away—the beachcomber strove to force his way ashore. Whereupon Mr. Belnap's black servants collared him without ceremony and pitched him back into the canoe in a gasping, spluttering heap, and yelled with laughter as he sprawled among the brown legs of the paddlers.

The beachcomber stood up again in the canoe, red with rage, and talked to the black servants in a voice that was heard over most of Lalinge, and with a selection of language that drew Esau Hunk, the American storekeeper, out of his store to listen in admiring awe. Esau was a master of language that could make even a Kanaka wince, but he admitted that in that particular line the stranger from Faloo had him beat.

It was at this exciting moment that King of the Islands came sauntering

back from John Chin's warehouse, where he had spent a busy hour chaffering over Copra with Chin's wily Eurasian clerk.

The ketch Dawn lay along the corals wharf, moored, and black men had been busy all day unloading the cargo that Ken King had brought in from the islands.

Kit Hudson was swinging in a hammock aft. Koko was singing softly in a crooning voice as he sat on the coming of the cabin skylight and extracted sweet music from a Hawaiian ukulele. The Hive-Oa crew, their work done, lolled on the wharf and chattered and chewed betel-nut. Three other vessels lay along the coral wharf. Lalinge was a busy place.

Three or four houses with shady verandas stood within easy step of the placid bay, as well as a store, and two or three offices, and a line of warehouses. Farther off were the grass houses of the natives of Lalinge. Brown men in tapa kilts, brown girls in the neat and graceful lava-lava, moved on the shining beach, or under the feathery palm-trees, with bright, careless faces.

The whole scene was peaceful, almost idyllic, save for that one spot where the beachcomber stood in the canoe, a blotch on the bright landscape.

Ken King slackened his already leisurely stroll as he came nearer, and stopped at last on the beach opposite the canoe, looking on.

The flow of language from the beachcomber did not please him. But the man was a white man, and looked sober at the moment, though his looks showed that his sober hours were few. Even a beachcomber in a tapa rag and a battered hat was a white man, and not to be handled by black men unless for very good reasons indeed. So King of the Islands looked into the matter as he passed, little dreaming to what it was to lead.

"Belay that!" he called out to the man from Paloo. "That kind of talk won't catch you any fish, you know!"

The man transferred his attention from Mr. Belnap's black servants to King of the Islands, and his mouth opened again for a new volley of profanity, addressed to Ken. But something in the boy trader's look checked him, and the volley remained unuttered. Possibly the wretched loafer of the Pacific beaches realised that one drive from the sturdy young sailor-man's arm would have lifted him out of the canoe and dropped him into the bay. Ken's keen, cool glance, at all events, quelled the man, and blessed silence descended on the beach of Lalinge.

"Now, you feller boy!" Ken turned to the black servants, Ysabel men with kinky hair and brawny limbs. "You feller boy, what name you lay feller hand on white master?"

"Feller master Belnap, him say no come shore feller island," explained one of the Ysabel men, grinning. "White feller um canoe no can—you look eye belong you, sar, you see white feller him no got feller trousers, sar."

Ken stared for a moment, and then grinned.

He had forgotten, but now he remembered that particular law on Lalinge, of which the beachcomber from Paloo seemed unaware.

"Me see plenty," agreed Ken.

"What the thunder is the row about?" roared the beachcomber, moderating his language, though not his voice, in addressing King of the Islands. "I've come up here from Paloo to see John Chin on business. You tell them niggers to let a man come ashore."

Ken smiled and shook his head.

"Nothing doing," he explained. "No white man is allowed to land here dressed as a native."

"What!" yelled the beachcomber.

"That goes on Lalinge," said Ken. "You made a mistake, my friend, in leaving your trousers at home."

The beachcomber stared at him speechlessly for some moments before he burst out again:

"Trousers, is it? What will a man be wanting with them in this climate? Sure there ain't a pair on all Paloo that a man could beg, borrow or steal!"

"You're from Paloo?" asked Ken, eyeing the beachcomber with interest. "Name of Donlan, from Paloo," answered the beachcomber, "with business for John Chin, and a bag of golden sovereigns at the end of it. And them black vermin keeping a man afloat, and I dying of thirst, by the howly saints!"

"I can fix it for you," said Ken soothingly. "You see that ketch yonder, along the wharf?"

"Yis, sorr."

"Tell your paddlers to take you to it. It's my ship, and if you'll step aboard I'll fix you with a shirt and calico bags. You can't land in Lalinge without."

"If I was tin years younger, with tin years less dhrink in me, I'd pitch them niggers to the ground sharks!" growled the beachcomber. "They're plenty too much particular on this island, sorr. But I'll take your offer and thank you kindly for that same, sorr. Here, you feller boy, you washy-washy um ketch plenty quick, or I'll knock seven bells out'er you."

The grinning Paloo paddlers tooted the canoe round towards the Dawn. Ken, smiling, walked along to the wharf, and stepped over the low rail of the ketch as Donlan of Paloo reached it on the other side.

Kit Hudson eyed the wreck of a man with strong disfavour on the deck of the Dawn. He had all a "White Australian's" contempt for a white man who had "gone native." Koko the Kanaka grinned a broad grin at the tattered beachcomber, and ducked his dusky head. To the Kanaka a white master is a white master, even in such a disguise. The man looked like a native, and squatted on the deck like a native, indifferent to the stares of the crew and Hudson's dis-

favouring glance. Ken explained the matter to Kit, whose frowning face broke into a grin. He had heard of the particularity as to costume that obtained on Lalinge, and distinguished that island from other Pacific islands that were not so particular.

"A man's thirsty, sorr," said Donlan, with the accent of an island far from the Pacific.

"Lime or lemon?" asked Ken. "Nothing stronger on this craft!"

His thirst was not, apparently, of the kind that could be quenched by limejuice or lemonade, and he let the subject drop. Koko, at a word from King of the Islands, fetched up the calico shorts and shirt without which the man from Paloo could not land. Donlan was in no hurry to encase his limbs in them, however. For many a long year he had clad himself like a native, and garments irked him as they irked an islander.

"You came along to Lalinge to see John Chin the Chink?" asked Ken.

"Yis, sorr!"

"He's away down at Papete; I've just been doing business with his man; you'll have to wait some days."

Donlan opened his mouth for a curse, which seemed to come to him more naturally than breathing. But he checked it under Ken's quiet glance.

"It's harrd luck, sorr, and so it is," he said, "and I down to my last bit of shell money, which I gave them niggers to paddle me along from Paloo. And a bag of golden sovereigns waiting to be picked up!"

And the beachcomber sighed a deep, long sigh, inspired by the thought of the amount of strong drink that could be obtained for a bag of golden sovereigns.

King of the Islands eyed him curiously.

"Golden sovereigns?" he repeated.

"That same, sorr!"

"You're been dreaming on the beach of Paloo," said Ken, laughing. "Golden sovereigns haven't been seen

in the islands for a long time. It's paper money now!"

"Don't I know it, sorr!" grunted the beachcomber. "But it was golden sovereigns before the war, and many's the chief in the islands who has bags of them stored away in secret places. The Government can say what it likes, but th' niggers'll never bring out their golden sovereigns to change for paper. Oodles and oodles of 'em packed away in tapa mats in these islands, sorr."

King of the Islands nodded.

He was aware of that; in the way of trade, he had found, like other traders, the difficulty of inducing the natives to take paper money in payment for copra and pearl-shell.

To the native mind a golden coin was a golden coin, and a paper pound was a piece of paper which they regarded with uneasiness and suspicion. They could buy the white man's goods at the white man's store with the paper money, but the uneasiness and suspicion remained. Chiefs who stored up treasure wrapped in tapa mats in secret places preferred the solid coin, which had a fixed value that they understood. No doubt they were wise, in a way, for, although the paper pound bore the same face value as a sovereign, the rise in prices which always accompanied the issue of paper money gave it a very different buying value.

"And you've got on to some chief's stack of sovereigns?" asked Kit Hudson.

"That's telling, sorr," said the beachcomber. "I'm telling that to the man who'll hear the story and find a ship to lift the sovereigns and go shares with Patrick Donlan fair and square. I've heard that John Chin's a square man, though he's a Chink."

"Square as a die," said Ken. "The whitest Chinaman in the South Seas."

"But he's gone to Papeete, and I down to the beach!" groaned Don-

lan. "It's harred luck intirely. And the last moment I set me foot ashore, and a man stands me a drink—and sure some kind soul will do that same—the whole story will come out as fast as the drink goes in, and there'll be a crowd after old Mafoo's quids, and where'll I be then?"

"Keep off the liquor," suggested Hudson.

The beachcomber gave a contemptuous snort. Evidently he regarded the Cornstalk as having suggested an impossibility.

He sat disconsolate, blinking about him in the strong sunlight. He gave a sudden start as his eyes fell on the whaleboat, and he read the name, Dawn, painted in white letters. His glance came back eagerly to the boy trader.

"Is it the Dawn, this ketch?" he exclaimed.

Ken nodded.

"Howly Moses! Then one of you will be King of the Islands," exclaimed the beachcomber.

"You've heard of me?"

"Is there a man between the Paumotus and Hawaii that hasn't? You're King of the Islands, and a square man." The gaunt, bearded face of the man from Paloo was eager and tense. "You'll serve my turn as well as John Chin, and better. You're a white man and he's, after all, only a Chink. You'll go half shares in Mafoo's bag of sovereigns?"

"You can spin the yarn if you like," answered King of the Islands. "We're weighing anchor in the morning for the Marquesas; but we can take in Paloo on the way, if there's anything doing."

The tale came out with spluttering eagerness.

Mafoo, chief of one of the tribes that lived on Paloo, was dead. He was well known, according to Donlan, to have accumulated a treasure from his trade in copra and pearl-shell with the white skippers. In his

own tribe Mafoo used the shell-money of the natives, and no man on Faloo knew what became of the gold money he drew from the traders year after year. Tribesmen and inquisitive relatives, who had been too curious on the subject, had gone to the cooking-pot, and the same fate had, at long last, overtaken the ancient chief, and he had furnished "kak-kai" in his own turn. But on the island of Faloo, though many sought, none had found the secret hoard of the old chief; and Donlan had, or believed that he had, a clue.

In his years of beachcombing on Faloo Donlan had kept his eyes, as well as his mouth, open. Many times, he declared, while sleeping off a "soak" in the shade, he had seen old Mafoo stealing away in the high bush towards a certain spot which was called in the native dialect the Place of Skulls—taboo to the islanders. There, he was assured, Mafoo had hidden his store of golden coin; there, now that Mafoo had gone to the cooking-pot, it still lay hidden, waiting to be lifted. But the man who lifted it would take his life in his hand. The tribesmen were fierce and watchful, and he who had killed Mafoo, and was now chief in his place, was searching for Mafoo's hoard; and Faloo was a cannibal island, and— The beachcomber ran on at great length, while the comrades of the Dawn listened.

It was easy enough to guess why the wreck of a man had not undertaken the quest himself. Strong drink had sapped his nerve, and he dared not face the peril of the cannibals, he dared not penetrate into the depths of the high bush where head-hunters lurked watchful for prey. He had combed the beach at Faloo, but he had always been careful to keep out of trouble with the natives. And the mere suspicion in the native mind that a man was hunting Mafoo's treasure would have meant the worst of trouble—sudden death in the high

bush, or the cooking-ovens in the native village.

"You'll try it on, sorr?" urged the beachcomber. "King of the Islands is the man for the job. I'll be waiting here on Lalinge till ye come back, and I'll trust ye entirely on your word. Ye'll stop at Faloo in the way of trade, as I've no doubt ye've done before—"

Ken nodded.

"And ye'll go into the high bush unbeknownst to the naggars," said Donlan, "and ye'll—"

"And we'll leave our heads to be smoked in the canoe-houses of Faloo!" said Kit Hudson grimly.

"It's a risk, sorr, but ye won't pick up coddies and coddies of golden sovereigns without a risk anywhere in the South Seas."

"That's true," said Ken, with a laugh. "You've got it right, Donlan, the treasure belongs to the man who lifts it. The chief who murdered old Mafoo can't be entitled to take it as a reward for killing him."

Donlan stared at him. The moral aspect of the matter, which King of the Islands desired to settle first, did not appeal to the beachcomber. But the human wreck realised that he was dealing with a man very different from himself, and he nodded.

"The goold belongs to nobody," he said. "Old Mafoo's family—thim that he hadn't killed himself—followed him to the cooking-ovens. Ta'a'ava, the new chief, is not of his blood. The goold's nobody's till it's lifted, and it belongs to the man that lifts it. You'll lift it, King of the Islands—you're the man for the job."

"I'll think it over," said Ken.

"And ye'll find me tin pounds, maybe, to see me through till you come sailing home with the golden sovereigns?"

"If I take it on—yes."

And with that the beachcomber of Faloo had to be content.

CHAPTER 5.

The Island of Terror.

NIGHT on the Pacific. Under the clustering stars the Dawn glided out of the bay of Lalinge.

King of the Islands thought it over and consulted with his comrade, and they had decided.

It was possible that the tale of Mafoo's treasure, hidden in the "taboo" spot in the high bush of Faloo, was a figment of the drunken beachcomber's imagination. But Ken had questioned the man closely, and he did not think so.

In his trading through the islands he had heard many a time of Mafoo and his supposed treasure; it was the talk of the island men. For half a century Mafoo had reigned and traded in Faloo, and it was well known that of all the gold he had received for his copra, none had left the island again. Somewhere on Faloo there was a stack of Asutralian sovereigns—that was as sure as anything could be.

The question was whether Donlan was right in his belief that he had spotted the hidden place. That question could only be answered on the spot by searching.

The treasure, as the beachcomber had said, belonged to the man who could lift it. Mafoo, had he been able to express any further wish, certainly would not have wished his hoard to go to Ta'a'ava, the chief who had sent him to the cooking-oven.

Having made up his mind, King of the Islands lost no time; he knew that there was no time to lose.

Ashore in Lalinge the beachcomber—provided with the indispensable garments which the social code of Lalinge exacted—was provided also with cash to see him through while the Dawn sailed to Faloo. The beachcomber's refreshments were likely to be more liquid than solid; which meant that by the next day all

Lalinge would be in possession of the story. It was a case, as Ken told his comrade with a grin, of going early to avoid the crush. More than one craft, white and native, would be heading for Faloo when the tale of treasure had been told along the beach.

And ten minutes after Donlan had gone ashore the ketch was unmoored, the sails shaken out, and King of the Islands headed for the open sea. Long before the sun rose on the Pacific the ketch was many a long mile from Lalinge. With the trade wind filling mainsail, topail and foresail, the graceful little craft sped across the blue waters of the Pacific.

"How many quids, Ken?" asked Kit Hudson, with a laugh, as King of the Islands stood watching the sea for the tall palm-trees of Faloo in the blazing sun of the southern morning.

"Who knows? Old Mafoo must have handled thousands in his time," said Ken. "They say he never parted with one, but that may be gammon. But somewhere on Faloo there must be a stack of them, and if we lift a thousand pounds to share with Donlan that will pay better than drumming round the islands for copra."

"And if the blacks catch us drumming round after Mafoo's treasure we—"

Ken's face was grave.

"We're taking the chance," he said. "There's a big risk. I'm not denying that we're taking a big chance of leaving our heads to be smoked by the devil-doctors of Faloo."

"Life's full of chances like that in the Pacific," said Hudson carelessly. "We'll pull it off."

Koko's voice rang out.

"Him feller land!"

The island of Faloo was rising from the Pacific first. First the cone of a volcanic hill, the sides crusted with lava that glistened in the sun; then the palm-trees at a lower level; then the dazzling beach, the lagoon and the coral reef on which the surf broke

in clouds of spray. It was an island of the Pacific similar to hundreds of others, and familiar to the eyes of Ken King. By the lagoon could be seen the trader's house—there was only one trader on Faloo—only one white man now that Donlan, the beachcomber, had gone to Lalinge.

King of the Islands drew the little ketch at last into the lagoon.

At a word the Hiva-Oa men swarmed aloft, the sails were taken in, and the Dawn rode at anchor a dozen yards from a shore that dropped steeply to a bottom sixty feet below.

There was no sign of life from the grass huts on the beach.

The sun was sinking now behind the tall lava-crustled hill of Faloo. Ken stared thoughtfully towards the shore.

"We're here," said Ken in a low voice. "We shall have to strike inland to get to the Place of Skulls—"

"You know the place?"

"Yes; a grove a mile back from here—where human sacrifices have taken place for centuries. White men are never allowed to see the place—it's taboo even to the natives, except the chiefs and the devil-doctors—but I met a man at Nuka-hiva who claimed to have seen it, all the same; a place piled high with the bones of dead men, with smoked heads hanging from the trees—"

Hudson shuddered.

"Not a pleasant spot," said Ken. "But just the spot that old Mafoo would be likely to choose to hide his hoard. I fancy that the beachcomber was right there, though he never had the nerve to follow Mafoo to the place. I can steer a straight course through the bush. It will be dark in a few minutes now—"

"I'm coming with you, Ken."

King of the Islands shook his head.

"Must leave a white man on the ketch, Kit. This ship would be pie to the natives if they got rough—and they may. You've got to keep an eye

wide open and a Winchester handy."

"Trust me for that. The Dawn will be safe while you're away. But I hate you going into the bush alone."

"I'm taking Koko with me."

"Kalo-lalulalonga plenty glad come along little white master," said the Kanaka.

"Hark!" muttered Hudson.

From the darkening island, ringing strangely eerily from the black shadows of the high bush, came an echoing, lingering cry.

So strange and wild, from the silence of the deepening darkness, that even King of the Islands stared and caught his breath.

"My sainted Sam!" he muttered.

"What—"

Hudson breathed hard.

"It's like—like—"

"Aitoo!" muttered Koko, with chattering teeth. "Him aitoo-debble howl along bush, sar!"

"Rubbish!" snapped Ken.

"There it is again!"

For a second time the long, piercing cry rang from the high bush, echoing and lingering among the rocks of the inlet for long, long moments before it died away into silence.

It was not heard again. Silence, deep and unearthly, settled on the island as the last rays of the sun vanished and blackness wrapped Faloo from sight.

Kit Hudson was the first to break the silence.

"A night bird, perhaps—"

He did not finish. He knew that it was a death-cry that had echoed from the depths of the high bush on Faloo.

Ken gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"Some devil's work of the black devil-doctors," he said. "It's over now, at any rate. You feller boy lower him whaleboat."

The Hiva-Oa men stood in a cluster, listening with bent heads and scared faces for a repetition of the terrible

cry. But they stirred at Ken's voice, and the boat dipped to the calm water of the inlet.

Faio-lalulalonga ventured to lay a brown hand on Ken's sleeve.

"Little white master, him debble howl along bush, you no go shore."

"You talk foolish mouth belong you—I get plenty angry!" said Ken sharply. "Get your knife and an axe, Koko!"

"Him debble along bush——"

"You plenty 'fraid, you stay along ship," said Ken contemptuously. "Feller King of the Islands go alone!"

Koko shook his head.

"Me plenty 'fraid debble along bush, but me go along little white master," he said. "Me no common Kanaka."

"Get a move on, then!" said Ken, with a grin.

And the big Kanaka, his terrors of the atoo in the bush subdued by his devotion to King of the Islands, dropped into the whaleboat.

"Keep a sharp look-out, Kit!"

"You bet!"

Lompo and Lufu pulled the whaleboat to the strip of beach. The greater part of Faloo was of volcanic rock, pushed up from the sea long ages since. On the beach, with powdered coral and sand, Ken's feet trod the dust of ancient eruptions.

The whaleboat slipped back to the ketch, leaving Ken and Koko on the shadowy beach. Ken heard the deep-drawn breath of the big Kanaka close by his side. To the superstitious mind of the islander the blackness was peopled by atooos of unknown and terrible powers. But Kalo-lalulalonga was, as he truly said, no common Kanaka. In spite of the imaginary eyes of atooos that looked at him from the shadows he was prepared to follow the boy trader to life or death. Only his dilated eyes rolled gleaming, and he breathed hard and fast.

"You feller Koko follow on," said Ken.

"Yessar."

Ken plunged into the shadow of the rocks and trod past the silent native houses to where the bush stretched inland—a wide, natural barrier between the tribes that dwelt on the lagoon and the hostile tribes on the more northern side of Faloo. Koko followed in his footsteps, suppressing his hurried breathing lest the atooos of the bush should hear him. The bush rose high above their heads, shutting off the sky, in which the glittering stars were coming out.

Since he had heard that cry, which warned him that human demons, if not atooos, were abroad in the bush, Ken did not venture to show a light for even a second. Yet he was at little loss to find his way through the bush. He had taken his bearings carefully before starting, and here and there, when he was able to scan the sky, the position of the stars gave him his course.

Suddenly his arm was grasped, and Koko panted in his ear:

"Little master! You look eye belong you, you see atoo."

"My sainted Sam!" breathed Ken.

Ahead, shining from the blackness, was what looked like a human face, a dozen feet above the earth. Eyes and nose and mouth were marked by green, fluctuating phosphorescent light, and the sudden vision, staring from the blackness of the bush, was terrifying.

King of the Islands snapped his teeth.

"You fool! It's a trick—some trick of the witch-doctors!"

"Him atoo! Him debble!" babbled the Kanaka.

Grasping his rifle in readiness for use, Ken strode on by the dark bush-path towards the floating, grisly face. But Koko was no longer treading in his wake; he stood where he was, shaking from head to heel.

King of the Islands strode on, his face set and his eyes glinting, closer and closer to the hideous face that grinned from the blackness. There was a rustle in the bush, and he spun towards it, his nerves taut. But even

as he turned invisible hands grasped him in the darkness, and the rifle was wrenched from his grip—hands, and more hands, innumerable as it seemed, grasped and clutched, amid a muttering of strange, animal-like voices—and King of the Islands, struggling desperately, furiously, was swept from his feet and carried bodily onward—onward through the blackness to the Place of Skulls, to the hidden den of darkness and death.

CHAPTER 16.

Fighting the Cannibals!

KIT HUDSON paced up and down the little deck of the Dawn, and every moment his eyes turned to the dark, shadowy rocks that shut in the inlet.

His face was sharp with anxiety.

Hours had passed since King of the Islands and Kalo-lalulalonga had gone ashore. Dawn had come, and on the beach a crowd of hostile natives had gathered, some brandishing spears, others glaring across at the ketch.

Hudson had not thought of sleep.

The Hiva-Oa crew could have been trusted to keep watch, but his anxiety for his comrade was too keen for him to think of closing his eyes.

Had all gone well with King of the Islands, Hudson knew that he would have returned ere this.

Ken had intended to see how the land lay, and to discover, if he could, the location of Mafoo's treasure; but his absence should have been for only a few hours at most.

Once in the night Hudson had heard a sound in the high bush at a distance which seemed to approach the inlet, but it had ceased; and he wondered whether his comrade had been in flight for the Dawn and had been cut off by the savages.

Long he had listened, but there had come no other sound save the sigh of the breeze in the bush and the trees, and the boom of the surf on the coral reef outside.

If the savages of Paloo had been on the watch, it was likely enough that King of the Islands had fallen into a trap. The natives had deserted the beach last night to lull Ken and Kit into a false sense of security. They had captured King and were now attacking the ketch. So thought Kit. It was likely enough that Ta'a'ava, the Chief on Paloo, had guessed why Donlan, the beachcomber, had left the island and gone to Lalinge and had been prepared for the coming of white men seeking Mafoo's treasure. What had happened to King of the Islands?

The Hiva-Oa men stood about, rifle in hand, and Kit Hudson was standing beside a long, brass six-pounder gun mounted amidships. Beside it was a cask filled to the brim with round bullets, buckshot, and fragments of old iron. But if the Paloo savages had watched the coming of the ketch, as he now suspected, and had trapped King of the Islands in the high bush, surely their next step would be to attack the little craft in the inlet.

The Cornstalk loaded the six-pounder, cramming in a huge charge of bullets, shot, and iron fragments. With the Dawn lying almost motionless on the still lagoon, he trained the long gun upon the crowd of blacks ashore. Savage eyes watched him across the expanse of shining water, and knives and spears were thrown, falling far short. Then, all of a sudden, the blacks seemed to realise what was coming, and the crowd broke and rushed helter-skelter away from the beach, heading for the grass houses of the village.

In a wild, yelling mob they poured into the village. Hudson, with a set, grim face, elevated the gun a little, bringing it to bear upon the largest building. The roar of the gun awoke every echo of Paloo, thundering back from the forest and the bush and the lava-crustled sides of the mountain, and rolling away, booming, across the lagoon and the ocean.

Wild yells and shrieks rang from the

native village. The charge, spreading as it flew, tore the council-house to fragments, hurling walls and roof among the other buildings.

"Feller gua him big noise!" chuckled Lompo.

Hudson watched.

From the grass houses a mob of natives poured, streaming away towards the bush inland.

Hudson gritted his teeth.

"Lompo!"

"Yes, sar."

"I'm going ashore. Keep up the fire so long as a house is standing—it will give these demons something to think about."

"You go ashore, sar, you make kal-kal along King of the Islands," stammered Lompo.

"Very likely."

Danny and Lufu rowed the ketch's whaleboat to the beach, and then pulled back to the Dawn. Not one of the Hiva-Oa men expected to see Kit Hudson again, after he had stepped on the beach of Faloo. For the moment the Cornstalk was safe; the blacks were thinking only of flight from the roaring six-pounder on the Dawn.

He hurried along the beach towards the trader's bungalow, while from the ketch, far out on the lagoon, the six-pounder roared again and again, flinging destruction into the village and filling the forest with thunderous echoes—echoes that rang in the ears of King of the Islands as he lay, a bound prisoner, in the Place of Dead Men's Heads.

King of the Islands had been savagely pounced upon. He felt rough hands dragging him down. He crashed his fist into some object, somebody's face he hoped, and heard a muffled grunt.

King of the Islands ceased to struggle. A razor-like edge—the edge of a shark's-tooth knife—touched his throat in the darkness. Five or six brawny Melanestians were grasping him, but, powerful savages as they were, they did not find it easy to hold the boy

skipper of the Dawn. But at the touch of the shark's-tooth knife he ceased to resist. While there was life there was hope.

In the blackness of the high bush he could not see the men who bore him onward to the Place of Skulls, save for a glimmer of rolling eyes, a flashing of white teeth.

Their bare feet were soundless on the bush path; only a faint mutter of voices and the hard breathing of the blacks broke the silence as they tramped on with their prisoner.

From the high bush they came into a grove of banyan-trees—the grove that was the den of the devil-doctors of Faloo.

Overhead, strange and horrible in the darkness, grinned the human face that Ken and Koko had seen at a distance, and which had petrified Kaio-lalulalonga with terror.

King of the Islands was flung to the ground almost underneath the eerie object that swung from a banyan branch.

The blacks still grasped him, while cords of tapa were wound about his limbs and knotted with cruel tightness.

It was futile to resist—and the shark's-tooth knife was still close at hand. In a few minutes Ken was lying helpless on the earth, bound hand and foot, and the blacks stood about him in a muttering group.

Then they vanished into the night, leaving Ken alone under the big banyan.

Ken listened intently.

From the silence of the night came a distant sound of rustling and crashing in the tangled bush.

He could guess that Koko was in fight in the high bush, probably with the savages of Faloo on his track.

The boy trader lay staring about him, peering through the heavy gloom under the banyan.

An acrid smell of wood-smoke came to his nostrils, and every now and then he saw a flicker of flame.

A fire, thickly covered, was burning at a little distance, dense smoke rising from it, and floating away through the banyan branches.

Ken started as he discovered that he was not, as he had supposed, alone. A black figure, clad in a dirty loin-cloth, sat by the covered fire, tending it, and turning in his hands something that was suspended from a branch above, in the smoke.

Ken did not need telling what was the object that swung in the smoke—he knew the customs of the Melanesian savages.

It was a human head—now in the process of being smoke-cured, for preservation as a trophy.

King of the Islands lay there for hours on end. He was dead tired, but caution made him stay awake.

Slowly the night rolled away.

With almost haggard eyes he watched the light of the rising sun filtering through the thick foliage of the banyan. The old devil-doctor by the fire seemed tireless; he seemed to need no sleep. At all events, he was wakeful whenever Ken's eyes fell on him in the dusk under the banyan, crooning to himself as he turned and turned and turned the smoking head.

Weary as he was, and almost in despair, King of the Islands looked about him as the sun revealed his surroundings more clearly.

In the daylight they were less eerie and terrifying, but even, if possible, more hideous to the sight.

Bones innumerable were scattered under the banyan. The place of taboo was a veritable charnel-house. And now that it was light, Ken could see that many more heads were suspended from the branches. Within his view were at least six or seven, as well as the one that Tokaloo was turning over the wood fire and the head of Mafoo that swung over Ken as he lay.

It was a place of death and horror—well named, in the native dialect, the Place of Dead Men's Heads. Old

Tokaloo, withered, aged, shrunken, hideous, might have been Death himself. His clawlike fingers were still turning the head—the relic of some bushman who had fallen to the spears of Ta'a'ava's fighting-men. The fearful thought haunted Ken of how soon his own head might be turning in the smoke under the talons of the shrivelled old savage.

Hope there seemed none.

What had happened to Koko the Kanaka he could not guess. It was likely enough that the Paloo bucks had run him down in the high bush and speared him. Alive or dead, he could not help King of the Islands. Neither could Kit Hudson help him. It was more likely that he and the Hiva-Oa crew of the ketch would fall victims in their turn to the cannibals. Ken gritted his teeth as he thought of that.

It was to this fate that Donlan, the beachcomber, had sent him in his greed for gold, but never a word of warning that the blacks of Paloo were expecting, and on the watch for, an attempt of white men to unearth old Mafoo's buried treasure. But it was useless to repine. And King of the Islands was not the man to repine: he had courage to face his fate, whatever it might be. But there seemed little doubt what it would be.

The crashing of heavy fire that rang from the direction of the inlet soon after dawn warned him that the cannibals were attacking the ketch. He listened in anguish. Whether the attack had succeeded or failed he could not tell—till a reflection came to comfort him.

If it had succeeded, prisoners would have been brought to the Place of Skulls, which obviously was the spot where the Paloo savages smoked the heads of their victims before sticking them up in the canoe-houses. From that reflection Ken drew the hope that the attack on the ketch had failed, and that Koko the Kanaka had eluded his enemies.

Old Tokaloo glanced up at the sound

of the firing, but his attention returned to the smoking head. He seemed to have forgotten even the prisoner lying under the banyan. Ken strove again with his stiffened limbs to wrest loose the tapa cords; but the cords had been too securely tied. A dozen yards from him, leaning against the parent trunk of the banyan, was a Winchester repeating rifle, which he recognised as his own. It had been placed there after his capture, and left. Ken knew that it was loaded; his eyes dwelt on it hungrily. If only he could loosen his hands! If only—

But he could not loosen his hands, and his arms ached terribly with the strain of the vain efforts. He ceased, and lay breathing hard on the ash-covered ground. Higher rose the sun over the wide Pacific and the island of Faloo; higher and higher. From the high bush came the sound of wild birds innumerable, the cackle of the parrots, the throaty notes of the pigeons.

Save for old Tokaloo and himself, the Place of Skulls was utterly deserted; of the men who had seized him in the darkness, and gone in pursuit of Koko, not one had returned. But Ken knew that the tabooed den of the devil-doctor was seldom or never visited by any of the Faloo savages, excepting the chief, or by bucks bringing prisoners or the bodies of the slain. Like all the devil-doctors of the Pacific Islands, old Tokaloo laid a "taboo" on his retreat, and surrounded it with the terror of mystery.

How many wretched prisoners had that old shrunken wretch done to death? Ken wondered, eyeing the devil-doctor with loathing. How many heads had he detached with the sharp knife that hung at his girdle, and smoked over the wood fires of which the ashes carpeted the soil under the banyan? Hundreds—perhaps thousands—in a long life of evil. Heads of bushmen; heads of rival tribesmen taken in war; heads of shipwrecked seamen—at the order of old Mafoo, King of Faloo; and at long last the head of Mafoo himself,

at the order of Ta'a'ava, who had overthrown the old chief.

Ken felt that he could have faced his own doom more easily could he have driven a bullet through the old wretch who sat crooning by the pungent fire.

The roar of the six-pounder, beating down the grass houses of Ta'a'ava's village startled Ken, and flushed his face with hope. Old Tokaloo was roused at last from his hideous occupation, and disappeared in the bush, evidently to watch what was transpiring. Yells and howls came faintly from the distance—from the direction of the lagoon.

Ken knew that the Faloo village was being bombarded. It could not be the Dawn—the ketch carried no guns; save, indeed, the brass six-pounder shipped as cargo at Lalinge for a Chinese trader on Thursday Island. Ken wondered whether some new seeker of Mafoo's treasure had arrived from Lalinge and had begun by an attack on the village by the lagoon.

But he knew the report of a six-pounder, and he guessed at last that Kit Hudson had rooted the gun consigned to the Chinese merchant out of the cargo and mounted it on the ketch. His eyes gleamed as he realised it. If it was so, it was proof that the Dawn had escaped the cannibals, and that Kit Hudson was still in command of her.

Old Tokaloo came creeping back to the place of death under the great banyan. He caught Ken's eager glance and grinned like an ancient gnome.

"Feller King of the Islands tinky white man comes," he grinned. "No comee. Big feller gun on um ketch shooter. Papalagi no can come."

He squatted by the fire again. At intervals the gun still roared. Ken heard sounds from the distance that told him that the Faloo tribesmen had fled from their village on the beach, out of reach of the "big feller gun." But they did not approach the tabooed den of the devil-doctor.

But at last there was a footstep on the bush path, and a tall figure came under the banyan. A tall, muscular

black, with a polished brass curtain-ring gleaming in his nose, strings of coral and carriage-clips clinging to his ears, he stood and stared down at the prisoner with a gloomy brow. Ken guessed instinctively that the newcomer was Ta'a'ava, the murderer and successor of old Mafoo.

Tokaloo rose from the fire and bowed low before the chief—the only man in the tribe before whom the devil-doctor bowed his head.

The two blacks muttered to one another in the Melanesian dialect of Faloo, of which Ken understood but few words—it was but one of the thousand native dialects of the Pacific.

Ta'a'ava spoke in low tones, his voice hushed by the gloom and horror of the place of death under the banyan and his lurking fear of the withered devil-doctor. Old Tokaloo grinned and showed his yellow fangs of teeth. Ken caught but few words, and understood fewer; but he knew his own fate was being determined. The chief's fierce glances at him told him as much. Ta'a'ava, infuriated by the destruction of his village, and the loss of many of his fighting-men, had remembered the prisoner, upon whom he was able to glut his vengeance.

King of the Islands felt his heart sink: but his sunburnt face showed no concern. His days had not been many, but they had been spent in perilous seas, in incessant danger. If it was death, he knew how to face that which he had risked more times than he could remember.

Ta'a'ava turned to him at last.

"Papalagi dog!" he said, showing his white teeth in a snarl, "Tokaloo takee head belong you, him head smoke in fire all same Mafoo head." He made a gesture to the hideous object that swung over Ken. "You tinky comee find Mafoo him gold. Head belong you hang in canoe-house belong Ta'a'ava. No keep till feast—kill-dead now."

Kit Hudson had done his best, Ken knew that. But the havoc of the village on the beach had hastened the fate

of King of the Islands. He knew now that he was to have been kept alive till the native feast came round, whenever that might be, when "long-pig" fresh from the slaughter would be wanted. But the enraged Ta'a'ava's vengeance would not wait. The white prisoner's minutes were numbered now.

Ken made no answer; his look was steady as he met the cruel, gloating eyes of the savage.

"What name you no speak?" said Ta'a'ava tauntingly. "King of the Islands lost him feller tongue?"

"Feller Ta'a'ava him pig all same pig in bush," said Ken. "Bimeby white feller shoot Ta'a'ava same other pig."

Ta'a'ava's eyes blazed.

He gripped the spear he carried in his hand, as if about to plunge it into the breast of the prisoner at his feet.

But he dropped the butt of the spear to the ground again, and grinned evilly.

"Feller King of the Islands likee kill-dead plenty too much quick" he grinned. "Ta'a'ava savvy. No kill-dead plenty quick—kill-dead plenty slow. Tokaloo him kill-dead longtime."

He stepped back, and, resting on his spear, made a sign to the devil-doctor.

Old Tokaloo came creeping forward.

His foul hands, grimed with smoke and blood, grasped King of the Islands, and lifted him to a sitting posture. He bared the boy trader's neck, and ran a bony finger round it, as if selecting the circle his knife was to follow. His withered old mask of a face was full of unholy glee. King of the Islands sat motionless, and though he would not allow fear to show in his face, his face grew deadly pale, and a shudder ran through him at the touch of the old, cold finger.

Thrice that bony finger traced round his neck, the devil-doctor evidently enjoying the horror of the helpless victim. Then, with a charred ember from the fire, Tokaloo drew a circle on the sunburnt skin, completely round the neck. Then, at last, he bared his knife.

King of the Islands involuntarily closed his eyes.

On his skin, which prickled to the contact, he felt the keen edge of the knife tracing round his throat.

But the edge did not penetrate the skin. At that moment King of the Islands tasted death; but death did not come. His eyes opened again, to meet the grinning, gloating glance of Ta'a'ava and the horrible grin of Tokaloo.

"No kill-dead plenty quick!" said Ta'a'ava.

Again the knife traced round the boy trader's neck, and again it did not pierce.

King of the Islands was white as chalk now, and his breath came in panting gasps. The torture of the suspense brought out the perspiration in thick drops on his brow.

Tokaloo chuckled huskily.

"Feller King of the Islands plenty flaid!" he croaked.

A grimmer look came over his gnome-like face, and his claws took a harder grip on the coral handle of the knife. It did not escape King of the Islands, and he knew that the next circling of the blade would cut into his flesh. Tokaloo raised his hand again, and the knife glistened in the sun-rays filtering through the foliage overhead. And then—

The old devil-doctor started back, tottering, stuttering with amazement and terror, as something invisible plucked the knife from his grasp, staring with unbelieving eyes at the claw-like fingers that no longer held a weapon.

CHAPTER 11.

To the Rescue!

"**P**OR DIOS! I guess that feller door sticks shut."

Gideon Gee, the trader of Faloo, muttered in three languages as the knock came at the door of his bungalow.

The door was bolted; the window shuttered.

Within, Gideon Gee moved restlessly about, with a rifle under his arm, a revolver stuck in his belt, till the knock came; and then he halted, and peered from a shutter, and watched Kit Hudson, standing on the step of crushed lava.

The half-Yankee, half-Portuguese mixed with Kanaka, had "no use" for Kit Hudson just then, as he would have expressed it in one of his native languages.

Bribes of tobacco sticks and cases of gin kept Gideon Gee on friendly terms with the islanders, whatsoever might happen to other white men. But those terms were precarious in days of excitement; and Faloo had never been so wildly excited as by the bombardment of the village along the lagoon by the brass gun on board the ketch Dawn. The grass houses were going up in smoke and flame, and the natives had fled for the bush; and the Hiva-Oa crew on the ketch, standing far out in the lagoon, were still pounding away with the gun, hurling crashing charges of old iron and buckshot into the bush after the fugitives.

Gideon Gee trembled for his copra warehouses and his stores of pearl shell, if not for his life; in their rage and fury, the Faloo blacks might turn on him, as he knew, or at least on his property. No doubt his sympathies were with the white men, with King of the Islands, a prisoner among the cannibals, and with Kit Hudson, who was seeking his comrade in the very jaws of death. But business considerations came first with Gideon Gee; he had not lived thirty years on a cannibal island by allowing his sympathies to get the upper hand of his business instincts.

So he did not approach the door, and Kit Hudson knocked again and again, and received no answer.

Ta'a'ava would not lightly turn on the trader, from whom he drew a regular tribute of sticks of tobacco and square-face and trade-goods—to whom,

indeed, he owed the magnificent ornament that decorated his nose. If Gee was killed in an outbreak of the savages, no other trader was likely to settle on Faloo, and the loss would far outweigh the value of Gee's head hanging in a canoe-house.

But if the trader took the side of the white men who had handled Ta'a'ava's cannibal crew so severely, all those considerations would be forgotten, and Ta'a'ava would think only of revenge. So Gideon Gee intended to keep quite clear of the conflict—and to make it plain to the savages that he was keeping clear.

Knock! Knock!

Gideon Gee shrugged his shoulders.

The Cornstalk could knock as long as he liked—or until an arrow from the bush pierced him between the shoulders from behind. Gideon Gee intended to have nothing to do with him.

Crash!

Kit Hudson drove his boot savagely against the door.

Gee grinned.

The door was strong—no sailorman could have kicked it in. Gee lighted a cheroot, while Hudson kicked and kicked again.

But Gee was dealing with a man who meant business. Kit Hudson was throwing away his life, as he knew, in landing in Faloo to seek King of the Islands amid countless foes, all now savagely exasperated. He was not likely to stand on ceremony with the trader.

"You feller inside!" he shouted fiercely. "You Gee, open the door—I want to talk to you."

No answer.

"You cringing swab!" roared Hudson. "Speak, you dog, or I'll fetch up a lump of coral and beat your durned door into splinters, and then hide up with my stock-whip till you're marked like a tattooed nigger!"

Gideon Gee broke his silence at last. Unless he was picked off by an arrow or a spear, the young Australian could

do as he threatened; and Gee did not like the look of the Australian stock-whip that Hudson carried under his arm.

"I guess you can speak to me through the feller winder," said Gideon Gee at last. "I ain't opening that durned door, not by a jugful. Por Dios! The niggers would be smoking my head ten minutes after, if they saw me gamming with you. I tell you, you're putting my head in danger, as well as my copra, by coming here."

Gideon Gee's voice rose in indignant complaint.

"You come to this here island kicking up a shindy!" he went on. "You ask for it, and you get it! Por Dios! I guess you can sure leave me out of it! You get me? Bom! What name you mix me up along your feller business?"

There was justice in what the trader said, and his queer mixture of three languages—American, Portuguese, and beche-de-mer English—was so odd that Hudson could hardly suppress a smile, in spite of his angry excitement. He answered the trader more civilly through the shuttered window.

"Keep your door shut if you like," he said. "I want you to tip me where to look for King of the Islands. You know this island; it's strange to me. A white man ought to stand by another in a fix like this."

"Bom!" said Gideon Gee, more amiably. His blood was so mixed, and his skin burnt so dark by tropic suns, that he was not always recognised as a white man, and Hudson's words had a rather grateful sound to his dusky ears. "Bom! I guess that's O.K.! But I ain't chipping in, you savvy—plenty too much copra in my sheds for me to risk it. But I'll put you wise, senhor. What you want to savvy?"

"King of the Islands is in the hands of those black demons, at some place that's taboo, in the bush. I'm steering straight there. I want you to give me a course."

"Your head will smoke along head

belong King of the Islands if you butt in at old Tokaloo's den."

"It's my head, not yours!" roared Hudson. "I'm asking you for information, not for advice!"

"Keep cool!" advised Gideon Gee. "I guess I'll hand out the news. You want to hit the bush path that runs from the village inland—you can't miss it if you've feller eyes in your head. Right by the big bread-fruit tree. I guess you'll find plenty niggers around."

"Hang the niggers! If I follow the bush path—"

"I guess it will lead you right to the taboo place—the Place of Dead Men's Heads. You hit a big banyan, with heads hanging from the branches. Your own feller head will hang with the rest soon. I guess it's under a mile."

"You don't want to take a gun and come along and help?"

"I guess not!" said Gideon Gee. "Feller head belong me too valuable, senhor. You hook it, see? Sooner you vamoose, sooner my head's safe on my feller shoulders."

Hudson tramped away without replying.

He had his bearings now, and that was all he wanted.

Gideon Gee watched him from a chink in the shutter as he strode away. A Faloo man, lurking by Gee's fence, leaped suddenly into view, with upraised spear. Gideon caught his breath. For a moment he reached at his rifle, but he did not touch it. One half of his mixed blood prompted him to shoot down the savage and save the white man, the other half urged him to save his own head and his copra and pearl shell; and it was the other half that prevailed. He watched with a clouded brow.

Hudson's rifle was slung over his shoulder, and it seemed to Gee that the Cornstalk must go down under the lifted spear that was about to whiz through the air from a distance of a dozen feet. Obviously he had no time to unslung his rifle and use it.

But there was a sudden crack as the long stock-whip came instantly into action, and, to Gee's amazement, the black man reeled back, dropping his spear.

"Bom!" gasped Gee, in amazed admiration.

The heavy thong of the stock-whip had struck the Faloo buck across the face, almost stunning him. Hudson's action had been lightning swift, so rapid as almost to escape the eye. The black man lay sprawling and howling on the ground, not even knowing what had felled him. In a moment more Hudson reached him, and the heavy butt of the whip crashed on the cannibal's head, completely stunning him.

Hudson strode on.

"That's some lad!" murmured Gideon Gee, greatly relieved by the Cornstalk's escape from what had seemed certain death. "Bom! Bom!"

And the trader of Faloo lighted another cheroot.

From the ketch out in the lagoon the long gun was still pounding. Lompotokuno and the other Hiva-Oa men were enjoying it as if it had been a game, and they grinned and chuckled as the six-pounder raked the beach, the burning village, and the bush beyond, with all kinds of missiles. Gideon Gee listened to the uproar, and smoked his cheroot, and hoped that no ill-aimed charge of old-iron would come crashing through the flimsy walls of his bungalow.

CHAPTER 12.

Under the Banyan Tree!

KIT HUDSON strode rapidly, savagely, on his way. That his life might be counted now by minutes, perhaps by seconds, he knew well enough; but that knowledge did not deter him. If he could not save his comrade, he would die by his side, he was resolved on that.

He knew now where to seek King of the Islands, and that was enough for him. It was easy to find the bush

path—a broad, well-trodden track—winding past the big bread-fruit tree into the high bush. Many feet had trodden that path from the village only a very short time before, as the swarm of savages fled from the heavy fire of the ketch. But the fugitives had followed it only a certain distance—they dared not approach the Place of Skulls, taboo to the islanders.

Fortunately for Hudson they had fled fast, and none lingered on the path; and as he tramped along it he saw where they had left the bush path, fleeing into the high bush on either side of the track, in order to avoid the tabooed spot where the dead men's heads were smoked under the banyan.

But every yard of the high bush might hide a lurking enemy, as Hudson was aware, and his eyes were keen and watchful as he hurried on. At any moment a spear, an arrow, or a whizzing knife might greet him from the dusky, tangled cover of the bush.

Headless of the peril, except that he was wary and watchful, the Cornstalk tramped quickly on.

The beach and the lagoon, the reefs and the ketch, were out of sight now when he glanced round; the high bush encircled him. Round him dropped the fragments of strange missiles, as the six-pounder continued to roar. It was another danger, but he gave no heed to it. At all events, the long gun on the ketch was scaring away the islanders, leaving the bush path clear.

A rustle in the bush, and Hudson whirled round to face a lurking enemy.

"No shoot!" gasped a voice he knew.

"Koko!"

Kalo-lalulalonga emerged from the bush.

His brown face was bedewed with perspiration, his calico shorts torn and rent by the thorns of the bush, his dark skin torn by deep scratches.

"You got away!" exclaimed Hudson, glad and relieved to see the Kanaka alive and free.

"Me run in feller bush," said Koko. "No could comee back along ketch.

Plenty too much niggers foller. Hide in bush."

"And King of the Islands——"

"Him catchy."

"A prisoner?" Hudson had been sure of it before. "You ran into the bush and left him?"

"Koko plenty flaid aitoo debble in um dark," said the Kanaka. "Him debble along banyan. More day he come. Koko comee back lookee along King of the Islands, no can see."

"I know where to look for him if he is still living," said Hudson. "You follow on, Koko."

"Yes, sar!"

Hudson hurried on again along the bush path. Kalo-lalulalonga followed him. In the sunlight that streamed down on the high bush, the Kanaka had lost some of his terrors of the "debble" that had scared him so terribly in the night. But his terrors were by no means quite gone, and it was with deep uneasiness that he followed Hudson deeper and deeper into the bush. Yet, in spite of his superstitious fears, the Kanaka had returned to seek King of the Islands when the new day dawned on Faloo, after hiding in the bush.

The unreal terrors that oppressed the Kanaka were more real to his simple mind than the actual dangers that surrounded him. His rolling eyes watched the shadowy bush, less in search of savage cannibals than of terrifying "aitocs." Brave the Kanaka certainly was, but he was almost trembling when he sighted the great banyan looming in the midst of the bush—the great tree that, with its innumerable branches and many stems, covered a quarter of an acre of ground.

Under the banyan the ground was clear of bush and thick with ancient ashes. Kit Hudson trod on, cautiously, winding among the innumerable stems, and suddenly he came on a scene that made him halt and set his teeth.

King of the Islands sat bound and helpless, his face white as chalk, and over him bent the devil-doctor, knife in

hand. A few yards distant stood Ta'a'ava, leaning on his spear, watching the scene of torture with cruel, gloating eyes.

Hudson stood for a moment transfixed with horror. The knife was at the throat of his comrade!

More by instinct than thought Kit Hudson's arm jerked, and the long lash of the stock-whip flew. The lash curled round the knife in Tokaloo's claw, and jerked it away as if an invisible phantom hand had plucked at it.

A moment before, and the weapon had been at the throat of King of the Islands; the next, it lay in the ashes at Kit Hudson's feet. Tokaloo stared at his empty hand with dilated eyes full of terror. He had not even seen the flashing lash that had torn the knife from his grasp.

"Atoo!" he panted.

Like many a wretch who trades on the superstition of others, the devil-doctor was not free from supernatural terrors himself. To his bemused mind, it seemed that an invisible "debble" had torn the knife from his gnarled claw.

Ta'a'ava started forward.

His amazement was as great as that of the devil-doctor.

Tokaloo stared round as if in search of the vanished knife. His black face was grey with fear, and his shrunken knees knocked together. Ta'a'ava's look was startled and fearful.

A moment more and Kit Hudson was rushing forward. Then Ta'a'ava and the devil-doctor understood.

"Papalagi!" croaked Tokaloo.

Ta'a'ava grasped his spear and raised it. Before he could use it the heavy butt of the stock-whip crashed on his head, and he rolled in the ashes under the banyan.

Tokaloo leaped back with a croak of terror as the Australian turned on him. But his leap did not save him. The heavy metal butt crashed on his head, and the devil-doctor sank to the

ground, his long career of cruelty and wickedness ended by that one terrible blow.

"Kit!" panted King of the Islands, hardly knowing whether he was awake or dreaming.

Hudson turned to him.

"Koko, your knife!"

Koko slashed at the boy trader's bonds. Stiff and cramped, King of the Islands rose to his feet. He stood dizzily, and Kit Hudson caught his arm to support him. Kalo-lalulalonga gave a chuckle of glee.

"Feller King of the Islands no kill dead. Him head no smookee along fire! Koko plenty too much glad."

King of the Islands leaned on the huge parent trunk of the banyan, breathing hard and deep. The sudden turn of fortune almost dazed him. On his sun-browned neck was the charcoal circle that Tokaloo had traced, the circle that the knife had followed in mockery, and that it would have followed in murderous earnest but for his comrade's arrival. For several minutes King of the Islands leaned on the banyan, dizzy, breathless, while the restored circulation in his cramped limbs racked him with pain. Ta'a'ava raised his head—the chief had been stunned, but the skull of the Melanesian islander was thick, and he had escaped the fate of Tokaloo.

He fixed one savage look at the group by the great trunk of the banyan, and then leaped up and dashed for the bush. Koko turned, knife in hand, a moment too late. The chief of Falco was gone, the crashing in the high bush telling of the haste of his flight. Kit Hudson did not even heed him—his eyes fixed anxiously on King of the Islands.

"You're not hurt, Ken?"

Ken panted.

"No—only cramp! It will pass! But—but you've saved me, old man! Saved me from—" He shuddered, as his glance went to the swinging heads on the banyan branches. "God bless you, Kit! It was a lucky

day for me when I got you away from Bully Samson!"

He glanced at Tokaloo.

"Him deader," said Koko, with a grin. His terrors of the devil-doctor were gone now. "No smokee head belong King of the Islands. Him own head smokee bimbeby. S'pose we stop, head belong us smokee allee same. Plenty nigger be come."

"That's sense," said Ken, with a faint smile, "but I can't use my legs yet. I'm cramped and numbed—"

"S'pose you no walkee—Koko carry."

"Where's the ketch, Kit?"

"Out in the lagoon, pumping old iron at Faloo," answered Hudson. "That brass gun you shipped at Lalinge for Thursday Island—"

"I guessed it was that. You're some shipmate, old man!" said King of the Islands. "But we're not out of the wood yet."

"S'pose feller Koko carry little white marster," said the Kanaka anxiously. "Black feller be come plenty quick!"

"Better," said Hudson. "The sooner we're clear of this fearful den the better, Ken."

A loud and savage yell from the bush followed the Cornstalk's words. King of the Islands nodded. No more was said. The brawny Kanaka lifted Ken to his broad shoulders as if the skipper of the Dawn had been an infant, and they plunged into the high bush, while behind them and round them rang the vengeful yells of the Faloo cannibals.

CHAPTER 13.

The Maroon

BULLY SAMSON shaded his haggard eyes with his hand and stared away seaward. Sky and sea, sea and sky met his weary eyes as for days and days past—years and years and years it seemed to the freebooter, marooned on the lonely coral atoll in the trackless waste of the Pacific.

How many days had passed since

King of the Islands had marooned him there, with the survivors of his savage crew, and sailed away in the ketch to drum round the Islands?

Samson did not know. He had lost count.

The Dawn had vanished across the sea, and since then no sail had approached the lonely isle, and Bully Samson had almost given up hope of seeing again a white man's sail.

Day after day the skipper of the Shark tramped the coral beach, and ever his eyes turned to the sea; and many a time an albatross, gliding afar, even a seagull skimming the waves, had raised a false hope in his breast of a sail—a transitory hope that, when it died away, left blacker despair behind it.

The Solomon Islanders who had been marooned with him accepted their fate in a very different spirit. On the atoll were coconuts in abundance, yams growing wild, a few bread-fruit trees, and ample water. With their wants thus provided for by the hand of Nature, the blacks loafed and lounged the idle days away, eating, drinking, and sleeping and quarrelling, careless of the morrow, careless of the future as of the past.

Bully Samson saw little of them. On the atoll they were able to give their savage skipper a wide berth and they kept their distance. Samson was glad enough to let them go; for the Malalta men were cannibals, and had the whim moved them to turn on their skipper, he would have had little hope of escaping the cooking-pot.

By this time Samson had almost forgotten their existence. For days and days he had not seen them. The blacks had no interest for him now, unless they should take it into their kinky heads to attack him.

Of King of the Islands, of Kit Hudson, the ruffian thought with unavailing rage. He knew that he had escaped cheaply in being marooned on Talopa. He had intended a harder fate for King of the Islands. But sometimes as he

tramped the beach, or lay in the shade of a rock—always watching the sea—he wished that Ken King had driven a bullet through his heart instead of marooning him on the atoll.

Ships, he knew, seldom or never came within sight of the atoll. It was one of the thousand unknown, uninhabited specks on the Pacific, in the waste of waters between Tahiti and the Solomons. The chance of rescue was so faint that Bully Samson hardly counted upon it at all. Yet he dared not give up hope of seeing a sail break the monotony of the boundless blue.

So many times had false hopes deceived him that when, in the golden sunset, a gleam of white showed from the blue of the sea, Bully Samson stared at it all with dull, stoney eyes, haggard and hopeless. It was a seabird again, skimming the Pacific rollers—an albatross winging its long flight far from land. But the white gleam became clearer and nearer, and Samson started convulsively and clenched his hands till the nails dug in the palms. It was no sea-bird this time! It was a sail!

The skipper of the sunken Shark stood dazed for some minutes. The sudden revulsion from the depths of despair almost overcame him. Then he shaded his eyes with his hand and stared seaward—stared hard, with a fixed, desperate gaze. Yes, it was a sail, and it was drawing nearer, heading for the atoll.

He watched and watched. The rig of the vessel, as it came closer into view, was that of a brig—and a swift sailer, as he could see. To the eyes of a landsman, a brig is a brig and a schooner, a schooner. To a sailor-man's eyes every vessel has its own individuality, and Samson, brute and ruffian as he was, was a sailorman born and bred. He soon knew that he had seen that craft before, and ere long he knew what craft it was. When it was a mile distant he could have picked it out from a hundred other craft of the same rig.

"John Chin's brig!"

Often enough he had seen that org in the lagoon at Lalinge, moored off the coral wharf opposite John Chin's line of copra warehouses.

He had traded with the Chinese merchant of Lalinge, and he knew John Chin well. The Chink was a friend of King of the Islands, and if Chin learned, if he knew, that Samson had attempted to sink the Dawn, John Chin would not save him; he would leave him to his deserved fate.

But did he know? It was more likely not, if John Chin's brig had come up from Tahiti. Samson, at least, would not tell him. Then, with a curse, he remembered the Solomon Islanders. They would chatter at once. The whole story would come out.

The brig hove-to at last, and Samson saw a whaleboat drop into the water. Six Kanaka seamen, armed with rifles, pulled it to the beach, and in the stern sat a little, slim, neat man in white ducks, with an almost expressionless yellow face and almond eyes—John Chin, the Chinaman. There were casks in the boat, evidently for filling with water on Talopa.

Bully Samson tramped down the beach as the boat nosed into the sand. The Kanakas stared at him in amazement, chattering with excitement at the sight of the wild-eyed, haggard man. John Chin looked at him without a change of expression, his yellow face impassive as the visage of an image carved in ivory.

"Cap'n Samson!" he said.

"Ay, ay!" muttered Samson, hoarsely.

"Your ship here?"

John Chin's face was still impassive, indifferent, but his slanting eyes shone with wariness. Many tales were told at Lalinge of what had happened to traders who had encountered the Shark in lonely seas.

Bully Samson shook his head.

"My ship went down in a hurricane." The bully of the Shark had already decided upon the tale he would tell, des-

perately hoping that the black crew, sprawling in the shade on the other side of the atoll, would not observe the brig till she had sailed again.

"I got ashore on a spar," muttered Samson.

"Alone?"

"As you see, John Chin."

The slanting eyes watched him keenly.

"I'll pay for a passage to Lalinge," said Samson huskily. "I guess you can name your own figure, John Chin."

The Chinaman flushed faintly.

"Askee nothing savee shipwrecked sailorman," said John Chin. "You steppee in boat, takee to Lalinge, velly welcome, Cap'n Samson."

The bully of the Shark breathed hard.

It was escape—it was freedom and the hope of vengeance—if only John Chin sailed again without seeing the Solomon Islanders.

"You're after water?" asked Samson. The Chinaman nodded. John Chin was a man of few words.

"I guess there's water a-plenty on this side."

"Savvy velly well," said John Chin. "Knowee Talopa. Cap'n Samson steppee in boat."

The freebooter tramped into the whaleboat and sank down on a seat, almost giddy with mingled relief and anxiety. John Chin's slanting eyes still watched him. He might have had some suspicion that Samson's savage crew were ambushed at hand; he did not trust Billy Samson farther than he could watch him, if as far as that. But he seemed satisfied now that Samson was alone, and that treachery was not intended. He gave the Kanakas an order, and they rolled the casks along to the fresh water from which Bully Samson had drunk for many weary days. John Chin stood by the boat, a rifle under his arm, watching the beach for a sign of danger, and with the corner of a slanting eye on Bully Samson.

Samson watched the Kanakas at work with open impatience, obvious to

the eyes of John Chin. His impatience to be on board the brig was natural enough in the shipwrecked sailorman that he represented himself to be, and it finally removed John Chin's lingering suspicions. The casks were rolled back to the boat at last, John Chin stepped in, and the Kanakas shoved off and took the cars.

Bully Samson clambered up the side of the brig, still trembling between hope and fear. If one of the Malaita men wandered round the atoll and saw the brig in time, John Chin would stay to take him off—Samson knew that he would have stayed, had he even suspected that there were other castaways on the atoll. He panted with relief when the casks were slung on board the Pagoda.

"Now for Lalinge!" he breathed.

John Chin smiled.

"Little timee yet," he remarked. "Wantee mole watee."

Bully Samson choked back a curse.

The whaleboat made another trip to the atoll, the black-bearded ruffian watching almost with anguish in his eyes. Every moment that the brig lingered in sight of Talopa was an hour of bitter anxiety to him.

But the Malaita men, on the other side of the atoll, were sleeping in the shade, utterly unconscious how near rescue was, had they only known it. Again the whaleboat came off, and this time, to Samson's intense relief, the boat was swung up to the davits.

A minute more, and the brig made sail, and was running swiftly before the trade wind.

Bully Samson leaned on the rail, clutching it with his brawny hands, staring back at Talopa. His thoughts were travelling faster than the brig, fast as she flew before the south-east trade—to Lalinge, and to revenge upon King of the Islands.

The sun that blazed down on the lonely atoll blazed with equal fervour on the cannibal island of Faloo in the

Melanesian sea. In the high bush of Faloo the heat was stifling, and in the sickening heat, flies innumerable and countless mosquitoes buzzed and hummed, and bit and stung.

The sweat rolled down the brawny limbs of Koko the Kanaka as he bore King of the Islands on his broad back, away from the banyan-tree. Kit Hudson tramped ahead, his coiled stock-whip stuck in his belt now, and his rifle in his grasp. In the distance the comrades of the Dawn could hear the yells of the cannibals, seeking them in the bush. Twice Hudson had fired at a black face glaring from the tangled scrub. The Cornstalk came to an abrupt halt.

"What name feller Hudson he stop?" panted Koko. "Feller black mans foller plenty too quick."

"Feller black man ahead, too!" snapped Hudson.

"Aie, aie!" gasped the Kanaka.

King of the Islands slipped from the brawny Kanaka's back. His cramped limbs were recovering now from the grip of the tapa cord.

"I can walk now," he said. "Give me my rifle, Kit."

Hudson had picked up Ken's rifle from under the banyan, and slung it over his shoulder. He handed it to King of the Islands.

"You'll want it," he said grimly.

Through an opening in the bush where at some time a bush-fire had burned away the thickets, he had sighted the beach and the lagoon, and the ketch lying far out towards the outer reef. The long gun on the ketch was silent at last; either Lompo and his comrades had exhausted their ammunition, or something had gone wrong with the six-pounder—likely enough in the careless hands of the Hiva-Oa men. He could see the trader's bungalow near the beach, and could guess that Gideon Gee was watching anxiously from the shuttered window. But what fixed his attention was the swarm of savages that cut off the retreat to the beach of the lagoon. Between King of the

Islands and the sea were more than a hundred foes.

"Back into cover!" muttered Hudson. The three stood panting in the moist heat of the bush. Retreat towards the sea was cut off, even if they could have hoped to cross the beach and reach the ketch, under whizzing spears and arrows from the Faloo blacks. Trade guns—old muzzle-loaders charged with big round bullets—were banging in the bush, loosed off in wild excitement by the men of Faloo. Kit Hudson gave a grim laugh.

"We came here for old Mafoo's treasure," he said. "It looks as if we've come to stay, Ken. The black demons are all round us in the bush."

"We killy plenty too much black feller before we makee kai-kai along Faloo cooking-ovens," said Koko.

King of the Islands glanced at him with a faint smile. Kalo-lalulalonga, who had been "plenty too much afraid" of the "debbles" in the bush the night before, had no fear of the swarming cannibals, though he had given up all hope of escaping the cooking-ovens of Faloo.

"We're not in the cooking-ovens yet," said Ken.

"Not yet," said Hudson. "But we can't make the ketch."

"No."

"You know this devils' island, Ken. Is there any pince where we can stall off those black demons?" muttered Hudson. "If they rush us in the bush we're done for."

"We can't make the beach," said King of the Islands. "We've got to strike inland and reach the northern beach."

Hudson looked round him blackly.

The high bush, far higher than a man's head, cut off all view, save at that one opening where they had a glimpse of the shore and the sea. Hudson had been used to the bush in Australia, but he felt himself baffled now. High thickets and tangled creepers hemmed them in, shutting off

even the sun, though not the heat of the sun.

King of the Islands led the way now. At intervals where the high bush cleared a little a glimpse could be had of the mountain that rose in the centre of Faloo—the ancient volcano that had been silent for centuries, and so they went, making northwards.

CHAPTER 14.

Bully Sampson at Lalinge.

BULLY SAMSON muttered a curse as the drunken beachcomber reeled against him, and shoved the man violently away. The wretched wreck of a man, who had once combed the beach of Faloo, and now loafed away his days under the nodding palms of Lalinge, blinked dizzily at the burly skipper, mumbled, and sat down, or rather collapsed, at the foot of a palm. From his brown skin Samson supposed, for a moment, that he was a native, and he lingered to bestow a kick upon a native who had dared to reel against him while under the influence of kava. But the next glance showed him that the beachcomber was, or had been, a white man, and that he was under the influence of drink more potent than kava. So Bully Sampson held back the intended kick, and stared down at the man instead. The man was muttering inanely, but a word on his babbling lips caught Samson's ears sharply:

"King of the Islands."

John Chin's brig, Pagoda, had landed Bully Sampson at Lalinge. The maroon of Talopa had been saved by the Chinaman and carried to a white man's port—surly and thankless for the service rendered. John Chin could do no less for the man he supposed to be a shipwrecked sailorman; and during the run before the trade wind from Talopa to Lalinge Samson had kept his own counsel, never even mentioning the name of King of the Islands. But on the beach of Lalinge they parted,

John Chin politely, suavely, but unmistakably making it clear that he wanted nothing to do with the ruffianly skipper of the sunken Shark. Samson was on his way to Esau Hunk's store when the beachcomber reeled into him.

"King of the Islands."

Bully Sampson had come to Lalinge because that was the destination of the Chinese trader's brig; but Lalinge served his purpose as well as any other place. His purpose was to pick up the track of King of the Islands, and in Lalinge he was likely to hear of him. And, strangely enough, it was of the boy trader that the beachcomber was muttering as he sprawled under the feathery shade of the palm. Bully Sampson stared down at the miserable specimen of a man and listened.

"Golden sovereigns—oddes and oddes of 'em! Golden quids! King of the Islands is a broth of a boy." The beachcomber blinked up at Samson's lowering, black-bearded face. "You feller sailorman, you seen ketch belong King of the Islands?"

"Has the ketch been at Lalinge?" asked Samson.

But Donlan was too confused with his potatoes to heed. He mumbled on:

"King of the Islands will lift old Mafoo's quids—King of the Islands will do it! He'll come sailing back to Lalinge with a tapa-sack full of golden quids! Ooddes of 'em. Three shares—and one for me. King of the Islands is a broth of a boy!" The beachcomber turned his bleared face towards the bay and blinked at the three or four vessels moored along the coral wharf. "You sailorman, is the ketch in the bay? Eye belong me no see."

Bully Sampson drew a deep breath.

King of the Islands had been to Lalinge, he knew now, and was expected back there. Samson, like most of the South Sea skippers, had heard the rumour of old Mafoo's store of golden sovereigns. The beachcomber's mumbblings told him where Ken King

was, and upon what quest he was engaged.

The beachcomber mumbled on, but Bully Samson no longer listened. He tramped along the dotted bungalows of Lalinge until he came to Esau Hunk's store.

Esau Hunk, the American storekeeper, sprawled in a hammock under an awning in front of his store. He moved his head the merest trifle as the burly figure of Bully Samson cast a shadow on him, moved it just sufficiently to bring the newcomer within his range of vision. For more exertion than that he was not disposed till the heat of the tropic day had passed.

"Hallo, Cap'n Samson!" he yawned.

He spat again.

"Shark at the wharf?" he asked.

"You'll want stores?"

"The Shark's at the bottom of the Pacific."

"Gee!"

After that ejaculation Esau Hunk lost his interest in Captain Samson. If the Shark was at the bottom of the Pacific she could not want stores.

Samson gave him a black look.

"I'm not on the beach!" he snarled. "I've got enough in my belt to buy you and your store."

"Glad to hear it, cap'n. Go inside and my black boy will fix you up with a drink."

"King of the Islands has been here?"

Esau nodded.

"Where is he now?"

"In a cooking-oven, I guess!" grinned Hunk. "Feller King of the Islands won't be seen at Lalinge again, cap'n."

Bully Samson stared at the yawning man in the hammock.

"How do you make that?"

"He's gone to Faloo, after old Mafoo's sack of sovereigns," drawled Hunk. "A beachcomber came to Lalinge with the story, after Mafoo was killed. He told it to King of the Islands first, and then to all Lalinge when the boys stood him drinks. Old Mafoo's

dead, and his sack of quids is hidden away where the other niggers can't get a paw on it. King of the Islands kept mum, and sailed for Faloo in his ketch; but Doulan told the yarn up and down the beach next day when he was full." Esau chuckled. "Three craft went after, and five or six gangs in canoes. They all came back."

"Why?"

"They found Faloo wild," grinned Hunk. "Ta'a'ava, the new chief, and his bucks are out for heads, and not a man put a foot on the shore. Gideon Gee, the Portuguese trader there, told the boys that King of the Islands was caught by the niggers. I guess Gideon was shaking in his shoes for his copra warehouse now the niggers are up. King of the Islands is long pig afore this."

"Oh!" muttered Samson.

"Sorry, too!" yawned Hunk, without a trace of emotion, however. "He was some lad, that King of the Islands. All Faloo is raging now, and not a white man would set foot on the beach for twice Mafoo's treasure. You'll never see King of the Islands again, cap'n."

"And that shipmate of his—Cornstalk named Hudson?"

"Gideon told a steamer skipper that Hudson had gone ashore to look for King of the Islands—went to look for him in a taboo place."

"And the ketch?"

"Standing off an' on in the lagoon at Faloo when she was last seen. King's niggers waiting for him to come back." Hunk grinned. "I guess they'll have a long wait, cap'n."

Bully Samson drew a deep breath.

"And the beachcomber who brought the tale here—"

"You'll find him on the beach if you want him—screwed, most likely."

"I've seen the man. And he's spinning a yarn that he knows where old Mafoo hid his sack of sovereigns?"

"Sure!" said Hunk. "That's what sent King of the Islands to the cooking-ovens on Faloo. I'm sorry for that lad."

Bully Samson's eyes glittered.

"You say that a crowd followed after King of the Islands to Faloo?"

"Sure—and came back in a mighty hurry when they found that the niggers were up," grinned Hunk. "Faloo ain't healthy when the niggers get wild. Gideon Gee will find that out some day. I guess his head will be smoking in a Faloo canoe-house one of these days."

"I'm here without a ship or a crew," said Samson. "I want a fast canoe and six good paddlers, and stores for a trip. Get a move on, Hunk."

Hunk sat up in the hammock and stared.

"You're for Faloo?"

Samson nodded.

"You won't come back."

"That's my business. Get me what I want, and get it sharp! I'm not staying an hour at Lalinge."

Hunk rolled unwillingly out of the hammock. Even business, with a handsome profit attached, would hardly have made him exert himself in the tropic heat. But Bully Samson was not a man to be denied.

"At the wharf in an hour, you savvy?" said Bully Samson.

"Sure."

Within the hour a long canoe, with six brawny black Ysabel men at the paddles, rocked on the blue water under the wharf. Bully Samson came down from Hunk's store with a bag of dunnage, a revolver in his belt, and a rifle on his back. He tossed the bag into the canoe.

The canoe rocked under Bully Samson's heavy tread as he tramped in. He jerked a brown thumb to the open sea.

"You feller boys washee-washee along Faloo plenty quick!"

"Yes, sar!"

The canoe glided out of the bay under the flashing paddles, the sweat rolling down the brawny limbs of the Ysabel men as they paddled tirelessly in the burning heat of the sun. Bully Samson sat in the stern, a cigar be-

tween his teeth, and watched the sea for the first sight of the mountain of Faloo.

Samson's eyes searched the wide sea. Far in the distance, beyond the mountain of Faloo, there was a haze against the brilliant sunlight. In the cloudless sky overhead there was not a speck; but Samson knew the meaning of that drift of lacy mist on the far horizon. Many a long league distant a sea-fog blotted the Pacific—a mass of vapour so clearly defined that the edge of it rose almost like a perpendicular cliff. Where it lay and rolled there was burning sunshine within a few yards of dense fog.

But the floating fog was still far distant—far beyond Faloo. It was rolling up, Samson knew by the faint, almost imperceptible signs on the horizon. But he had ample time to reach Faloo before the fog was near enough to blot out the island.

He shouted again and again to the sweating paddlers, urging them to greater efforts. Higher and higher rose the mountain; and the belt of forest came into sight, and the dazzling beach and the coral reef, with the Pacific rollers creaming over it. Samson steered for the opening of the lagoon, and his eyes blazed at the sight of a ketch idle in the lagoon, her canvas reefed.

"The Dawn!" he said.

The canoe glided through the passage in the reefs into the shining lagoon. On the beach Gideon Gee was standing in the doorway of his bungalow, staring across the lagoon. But Samson did not glance shoreward. His gleaming eyes were fixed on King of the Island's ship.

There lay the Dawn, guarded only by the Hiva-Oa crew, if what he had heard at Lalinge was true. King of the Islands and Kit Hudson, his mate, were in the hands of the cannibals—dead or alive, Samson cared little. If they were still ashore, that was all he wanted. The Hiva-Oa men were nothing to him. Five Polynesian natives were not worth a thought, in the eyes of the black-

bearded South Sea ruffian. But had matters changed since news from the savage island of Faloo had been received at Lalinge?

Samson's face was tense.

If King of the Islands was on board the ketch, his attempt was hopeless. A bullet from a Winchester would knock him over before he could set foot on the Dawn. He had to take the risk. With a revolver gripped in his brawny hand, he watched the ketch with savage eyes, as the ceaseless strokes of the paddles drove the canoe nearer and nearer.

Dark faces stared at the canoe over the teak rail of the Dawn. No white face was to be seen.

Samson's bronzed face broke into a grin.

"Washy-washy too plenty quick!" he snarled. "You lay canoe along white feller ship, you savvy."

The Ysabel men paddled on.

The Hiva-Oa men stared blankly at the black-bearded ruffian. They had last seen him when King of the Islands had marooned him on Talopa. Lompa had a rifle in his hand; but he did not lift it towards Bully Samson. The Hiva-Oa men would have fired on blacks who had attempted to approach the ketch. But firing on a white man was a very different matter—though they could have had no doubt that Bully Samson's intentions were hostile to their master.

The canoe ranged alongside the Dawn. Over the low teak rail was scarcely more than a stride to the long-limbed skipper of the Shark.

His heavy tramp rang on the polished deck.

Lompo and Danny and the others stared at him wonderingly, uneasily; but without lifting a hand—without even thinking of lifting a hand. "Feller white master" was sacred in the eyes of the Hiva-Oa crew.

Bully Samson grinned sourly.

He knew what to expect if King of the Islands and Kit Hudson were not on board. He knew that the mere terror of his look would be enough for

the natives from Hiva-Oa—without the heavy revolver that was gripped in his hand; and which he was, however, fully prepared to use at a sign of resistance. But there was no hint of resistance; only fear in the looks of the Hiva-Oa natives.

Bully Samson snapped an order to the Ysabel men, and the canoe paddled out of the lagoon, on its long return trip to Lalinge. Bully Samson had done with the hired canoe now—he was on board the Dawn, to sink or swim with her. Ysabel men cast fearful glances towards the beach and the high bush of Faloo as they paddled away for the open sea; and they lost no time in getting clear of the island. For a radius of a hundred miles and more it was known that the blacks on Faloo were "up"; and while that state of affairs obtained, the vicinity of the island was dangerous. The Ysabel men paddled swiftly till the canoe was a mile out from the reef; after which they idled their way back to Lalinge at their leisure.

Bully Samson breathed hard and deep with satisfaction as he trod the deck of the Dawn. King of the Islands had sunk his schooner—now he was master of King of the Islands' ketch.

He had a sound, swift craft under his feet—and a crew that would obey his orders, from fear if not from love. To stand out to sea and make sure of his capture was his first thought—later, when matters had calmed down a little on Faloo, to return and make the attempt to lift Mafoo's sack of sovereigns.

Fortune was smiling at last on the skipper of the Shark. He could not take a stolen craft into a white man's port—but the Pacific was wide.

"You feller boy!" rapped Samson.

"Yes, sar," said Lompo.

"Where feller King of the Islands and other white feller?"

"Along island, sar."

"Kill dead along niggers?"

"Yes, sar, me tinkee."

Samson laughed grimly.

"You've got a new skipper now.

Savvy? Me captain along Dawn, you feller boy belong me, you 'bey orders plenty quick."

"Yes, sar."

And Bully Samson, in undisputed authority on board King of the Islands' ketch, rapped out orders, the sails were shaken out, and the South Sea ruffian at the wheel steered the Dawn through the reefs into the open sea.

CHAPTER 15.

Seeking the Treasure.

IT was night on the Pacific. The island of Faloo was a black mass on a starry sea.

Above the island and to the westward the sky was velvety blue, spangled with gleaming stars. Low to the south hung the Southern Cross, scintillating. Westward, stars and sky were blotted out by a wall of sea-fog creeping slowly, with snail-like pace, towards the island. But the creeping vapour had not yet touched the island. Where King of the Islands stood with his comrades the air was crystal clear.

King of the Islands looked gloomy. Earlier on in the day he had sent Koko to see if the ketch was still safe. Koko had accomplished his mission in safety, and had returned to tell Ken that the Dawn was no longer in the lagoon.

It was bad news. King immediately concluded that the natives had attacked the ketch and overpowered the Hiva-Oa crew left in charge. But when Koko said he had climbed a lofty palm and surveyed practically the whole of the island to see no trace of the Dawn whatsoever, Ken wondered. If natives had captured the ketch they would not have sailed away with it. Perhaps, suggested Hudson, the natives had sunk it.

Hence Ken's frown.

The three were on the edge of the northern beach of Faloo, having reached there safely. Ken was looking out to the shimmering sea, his

thoughts with the Dawn. Kit, by his side, lay sprawled on the soft grass.

Ken stirred.

"Well, I suggest we make a move. We know that the treasure is hidden somewhere in the witch-doctor's den. How about trying to find it? Anything's better than staying here."

"I'm game." Kit drew himself to his feet. "Lead on, skipper! Come on, Koko!"

The Kanaka fell in by their side.

Ten minutes later the comrades of the Dawn were picking their way through the high bush.

King of the Islands could not repress a shudder as he stepped into the shade of the great banyan, the haunt of death and terror—taboo to the islanders, unapproachable by the natives except on a signal given by the tap of the devil-doctor's drum.

Back into his mind came the fearful hours he had spent in the shadow of the tree of death; and he seemed to feel again the knife of the devil-doctor tracing round his neck.

The spot was utterly deserted now. Old Tokaloo had gone to his account, but the taboo still ruled—even had any native cared to venture into that place of terror. The tribesmen, still watching the gully, were far from the scene; it was, as King of the Islands had said, a chance that was never likely to recur, of seeking the treasure that had brought the adventurers to the savage island.

Koko had lost his terrors of the aitoos that haunted the forbidden spot, since he had seen old Tokaloo's skull cracked by the butt of the Australian's stock-whip. The "devil-devils" who had been unable to save old Tokaloo from that fate were no longer feared by the Kanaka, in the presence of the "feller white masters."

Ken was rooting about under the branches of the vast banyan-tree that dominated the Place of Skulls. Suddenly he gave a cry.

"Here! There's a path of some sort through these stems of the banyan!"

With Kit and Koko at his side, Ken pushed a way through the myriad stems of the banyan. There was a path, though ill-defined.

"We know that the treasure is buried under this banyan," said Ken. "It shouldn't take us long to find it."

The path led them at last into a small clearing. There was a hut of palm-leaves wedged between two stems of the banyan.

"This was the old rascal's hut," breathed Ken. "I reckon the treasure must be somewhere near here. Examine the ground."

King of the Islands lighted a lantern. Then the three of them inspected the soil in a systematic search. Kit whispered:

"Look here! The earth looks as if it has been newly turned."

King of the Islands bent over the Cornstalk, his knife in his hand.

The keen bush-knife prodded the soil, and the blade sank in to the hilt. Evidently the soil had been turned in that spot before. It had been turned not once, but many times.

Using the broad blade of the bush-knife as a spade, King of the Islands turned up the earth.

Six inches below the surface the knife found an obstacle. There was a metallic clink.

King of the Islands hacked away the soft soil. The first plunge of the knife had barely missed the buried sack. Hudson watched him breathlessly.

"My stars!" breathed Hudson. "Fancy lighting on the treasure as easy as all that! Luck certainly is in our way!"

"Well, this is a pretty safe place to hide a treasure on this island," said Ken. "The natives wouldn't come up here to save their lives, and it's hardly likely that a white man would search here unless he knew what we know."

King of the Islands dragged a heavy tapa sack from the excavation. He gashed it with the knife.

Within it were packed a number of tapa bags. As he lifted them one by one, from each there came a musical

clink. He opened one of the bags, and the lantern light glinted on a stack of golden sovereigns. Ken caught his breath.

"Mafoo's treasure!" breathed Hudson.

"Belong King of the Islands now!" grinned Koko.

It was the treasure of Mafoo—the golden coins accumulated during long years of trade by the old King of Faloo—accumulated, hoarded, hidden away under the fatal tree where the devil-doctor had his den—a hiding-place cunningly chosen, protected from curious eyes by the terror of taboo.

And Tokaloo, the only man on Faloo that shared the secret, had kept his own counsel, gloating over the hoard that was now his, breathing no word of his knowledge to Ta'a'ava or any other—keeping the secret, had he only known it, for the white men who came over the sea.

There were twenty of the little tapa bags, and each of them was crammed with golden coins.

There were three to carry the tapa bags. King of the Islands replaced the sack in the excavation, and stamped down the earth again. It was unlikely that any native would ever penetrate to the hidden spot, now that Tokaloo could no longer tell his secret; but it by chance any eye looked into the recess behind the liana screen, no sign remained to tell that the treasure had been hidden there, and that it had gone.

Ken shut off the light of the lantern, and the comrades of the Dawn went back by the winding ways through the clustering stems, and emerged at last from under the death tree into the bush-path, where the stars glittered down at them from a cloudless sky.

King of the Islands' face was dark and thoughtful. He had lifted the treasure, but his thoughts were with the Dawn—his ship. To have set foot again on the polished teak deck of the Dawn he would have given twice the treasure of Mafoo.

"Bimeby feller ketch he come!"

said Koko, reading the thought in his master's face. "Bimeby he comee along Paloo. He not sunk. Someone capture him."

Ken nodded grimly.

CHAPTER 16.

Bully Samson's Plan.

BULLY SAMSON was in difficulties. Experienced sailorman as he was, Bully Samson could not have told where the ketch was; the fog was blinding. He knew that the bank had been creeping from the west, and he had struck into it from the south. From that moment it had swallowed him.

For all he knew, he might be running back to Paloo, and might hear at any moment the roar of the surf on the coral reefs, and hear the grinding of his hull on the sharp teeth of the coral. But when night descended on the Pacific he snarled orders to the Hiva-Oa seamen to take in the canvas, and the ketch drifted.

Strangely, eerily, from the glooming mist came a hoarse screeching sound, and Bully Samson started and scowled again. It was the howl of a steamer's siren, and it was close at hand, though the steamer could not be seen, and no light flashed from the fog. Somewhere in the mist a steamer was groping her way, sounding the siren continuously. Almost in a moment, as it seemed, a ghostly shape loomed up with a glimmer of lights and a screech of a siren!

There was a startled howl from the Hiva-Oa crew, a snarl of startled rage from Bully Samson. Right across the bows of the Dawn glided the great bulk of the steamer, not a cable's length from the bowsprit. Had the ketch been still under sail a collision would have been inevitable; she would have crashed fairly into the steamer's side. As it was, Bully Samson caught his breath, and the Polynesian seamen yelled aloud with startled terror. From the unknown ship came a shouting of voices

—angry shouting—but the words were lost.

Like a spectre the steamer had appeared, like a spectre she vanished. Samson bit hard on his cigar, his heart throbbing with relief. Fortune was still befriending the bully of the Shark; he had chosen the perils of the fog to escape King of the Islands, and the perils of the fog had spared him. Only a few seconds had made the difference between safety and a grinding collision and destruction and death in the deep waters. Samson shrugged his shoulders, and turned a savage eye upon the jabbering Hiva-Oa men.

"Plenty too much talk along you!" he snarled. "You shut up mouth belong you, or me knock seven bells and a dog-watch outer you, boy, plenty quick."

And the crew of the Dawn was silent.

A quarter of an hour later, with a suddenness that was startling, the fog was gone. The ketch glided, under bare poles, out of the banks of vapour into the light of the stars. Behind the Dawn, great cliffs of fog banked the sea; ahead of her was the calm, smiling Pacific, reflecting myriads of stars.

"Feller fog he go!" exclaimed Lompo, in great relief.

Samson snarled an order, and the topsails were shaken out again. The ketch picked up speed, and the fog-banks dropped farther and farther astern. Bright as a jewel, the Southern Cross blazed from the sky, and Bully Samson was relieved to see it—not that the beauty of the glorious constellation was anything to him, but it was a guiding light to the sailorman. He set a course for Lompo at the wheel, and for the first time since he had set foot on the ketch he went below.

His rugged, bearded face was grinning with satisfaction now. He was master of King of the Islands' ship, and all that it contained was his. His first search was for rum—a search that proved vain. Danny, the cook, came trembling down the ladder as Bully Samson roared to him.

"Where feller King of the Islands he keepe feller rum?" roared Samson.

"No savvy!" stammered Davy. "Feller rum he no belong along ship belong King of the Islands."

"By hokey! A temperance ship! Take that, you swab!"

Danny yelled, and fled from the crashing fist. It was not Danny's fault, if fault it was, that there was no strong drink on board the Dawn; but that was Samson's way of ruling a native crew. A savage word, followed fast by a savage blow, was his method. On board his own ship, the Shark, he had ruled fifteen fierce Solomon Islanders and Tonga men by that method, and though every man of them had longed to drive a Malaita knife to his heart, none had ever raised a hand against him. And the milder and more pacific Polynesians who manned the Dawn shrank from the burly bully and his fierce voice and heavy hand with a greater fear than they would have felt of the most potent "devil-devil" in all the islands.

While the ketch glided on under the stars, Bully Samson searched his prize, and though he found no rum he found enough to cause him to chuckle with satisfaction. King of the Islands had taken aboard only a part of his cargo when he had left Lalinge to seek the treasure on Faloo; but there was enough to reward the freebooter richly.

The bully of the Shark was as nearly in a good humour as his savage nature permitted when he tramped up to the deck again and set Lufu to relieve Lompokuno at the wheel. He had his bearings now, and his plans were settled. He knew a German trader within a day's sail who would take the Dawn's cargo off his hands without asking questions. There he could revel in the carouse for which his brutal nature longed, while he waited for the excitement among the natives to die away on Faloo. After that, Faloo, and the search for Mafoo's tapa sack of sovereigns!

That was the programme mapped

out by Bully Samson as the Dawn glided swiftly under the stars.

King of the Islands stood with his feet planted firmly in the fork of a high swaying branch and scanned the blue stretches of the Pacific.

Fifty feet below him was the beach of Faloo, where Kit Hudson and Koko stood watching him.

Save where the bulk of the volcano in the centre of the island barred the view, King of the Islands could see the whole of Faloo from the swaying tree-top, and the blue ocean heaving round the coral reef.

Day after day had passed, and the white sails of the ketch had not yet glanced into sight.

Day after day—of isolation and hardship and short commons for the castaways.

On that solitary little beach on the northern side of Faloo, shut off from the island by a thick ring of pandanus woods and high bush, the trio had remained undiscovered by the natives. Since the expedition to the Place of Dead Men's Heads, when the treasure of Mafoo had been lifted from its hiding-place under the banyan, they had not gone through the woods. Food was short, but the most tempting shot at a wild pig did not tempt them to use a firearm. A shot would have echoed far and wide and warned Ta'ava and his cannibal crew that white men were still on the island. No fire was needed, save for cooking purposes. And when a cooking fire was needed, it was lighted in a hole excavated in the soft sand and covered with branches to conceal the smoke.

Only by keeping their presence on Faloo a secret could they save themselves from the cooking-ovens, and they were never off their guard for a moment.

Coconuts, gathered in abundance, wild yams, fish caught in the shallows, birds' eggs from the bush, made up

their diet—as long, hot day followed day.

Of the natives they saw and heard nothing, though once they caught sight of Gideon Gee, the half-breed Portuguese trader, in his whaleboat, manned by natives, pulling past the beach. They were careful to keep out of sight until the whaleboat was gone. Gideon Gee they could have trusted, but his native crew would have betrayed them. And an attack by Ta'a'ava and his bucks meant certain destruction.

More than once from the tree-top King of the Islands had seen craft tacking into the lagoon on the other side of Faloo. The excitement on the island was dying down. The pursuit of the three had fizzled out, and the natives were resuming their usual lazy existence in their grass villages along the lagoon. Trade was resuming; white men's ships came to Faloo as of old; Gideon Gee bought trade goods and sold copra and pearl shell as he had done on Faloo for thirty years. But the Dawn did not come.

Once more King of the Islands, standing with careless ease like a born sailorman in his precarious position at the top of the high tree, scanned the Pacific.

Once more his keen eyes failed to raise a sail.

Boundless, endless, the blue Pacific stretched away till it met the blue horizon.

Ken descended from the tree at last. His sunburnt face was clouded as he dropped to the beach.

"Feller ketch he no come?" asked Kajo-lalulalonga.

Ken shook his head.

"It's ten days now," remarked Kit Hudson.

"Two-five!" said Koko.

Kajo-lalulalonga, though he was, as he often said, no common Kanaka, was a true Kanaka in his arithmetic. He counted to five and then began again.

"Two-five feller day he come, two-five feller day he go," said Koko. "We wait three-five—we wait four-five—ketch he come."

"Ten days!" repeated Kit. "And you still think that the ketch will come, Ken?"

"I reckon so."

"We could get off," said Hudson. "The niggers are quiet now. It would be easy enough to get round to the lagoon and bag a canoe."

"I know."

"We could lift a canoe at night and clear off to Lalinge," said Hudson.

"We've got enough to get a new ship."

"I know," repeated Ken.

"Or if we showed up when a steamer was in the lagoon, the niggers would not dare to lift a hand," said the Cornstalk. "We could take a passage off the island."

"I know," repeated Ken, for the third time.

Hudson smiled faintly.

"But you're set on hanging on for the Dawn?"

King of the Islands was silent for a long moment.

"We could get a new ship at Lalinge," said Ken. "But I want my own ship.

I know we're risking our lives every minute we hang on here. But I'm not going without my ship. Only I don't want to keep you, Kit, if you'd rather —"

Hudson grunted angrily.

"Don't be an ass, Ken! Shipmates sink or swim together. I'm staying as long as you do."

"That's until we raise the Dawn in the offing," said Ken, with a smile.

"Ay, ay!"

In the hot afternoon, Koko clambered up the high tree. Ken, from the sands, watched him idly as the Kanaka's brawny form rose into view from the foliage at the tree-top. High over the thick, clustering green the Kanaka's broad shoulders rose, and his head turned slowly as his keen eyes swept the horizon and finally turned south, where the lagoon gleamed in the sun.

There was a sudden breathless shout from Koko.

He disappeared into the foliage

Ken sprang to his feet as the Kanaka came slithering down the tree. His face was bright with hope.

Koko leaped to the ground—so hurriedly that he rolled over, and rolled fairly to his master's feet. Ken, in his eager impatience, stooped and grasped him by the shoulder and shook him.

"What——"

"Feller ketch!" panted Koko. "Feller ketch he come along island!"

Ken gave a shout.

"You've seen her?"

"Koko see eye belong him. Feller ketch he drop feller anchor along lagoon!"

A second more, and King of the Islands was clambering madly up the tree. Far across the pandanus wood, far across the high bush, his keen eyes stared to where the waters of the long lagoon gleamed in the sinking sun. One craft lay in the lagoon—a ketch; and five dusky figures in lava-lavas were on the deck, infinitesimal in the distance—but Ken knew his crew. A burly, black-bearded figure towered there.

"Bully Samson!" said Ken, between his teeth.

Bully Samson! King of the Islands had never expected to set eyes on his ruthless enemy again, yet here he was at Faloo, in swaggering command of the Dawn. Some passing ship, the boy trader knew, must have rescued Samson from the coral atoll of Talopa; the thousand-to-one chance had come off for the sea scoundrel.

Ken's fists clenched. Strangely enough, after the first instant of startled bewilderment, he felt no surprise. True, he could not have guessed that the devil's own luck had come Samson's way—that he was no longer a helpless prisoner on Talopa. Still, Samson was one of the few men in the South Seas with nerve and daring enough for ship-stealing.

Ken watched, grim-eyed and tense.

The whaleboat dropped from the side of the Dawn; the towering figure in

the red sarong, with the black beard and the great grass hat, stepped into it. Bully Samson was going ashore. King of the Islands, swaying in the tree-top, watched him with glinting eyes.

"Senhor O Capataz Samson! Bom!" said Gideon Gee, with a grin of welcome that was more than half assumed.

Gee clapped his hands, and a native servant appeared from the house.

"You feller boy, you bring feller rum plenty quick!"

"Yessar!"

Bully Samson tramped up the steps of the veranda of the trader's bungalow on Faloo. Under his heavy tread the planking shook and creaked. He dropped into a long cane chair, and the veranda shook again. Gideon Gee pushed a little bamboo table towards him, and the black servant placed bottle and glasses there.

"Bom!" repeated Gideon, rubbing his oily, dusky hands. "Plenty glad see Cap'n Samson along Faloo, I guess. What you look-see along Faloo?"

Bully Samson grunted.

He did not trouble to reply till he had mixed himself a drink that would have made Gideon's hair stand on end, hardy drinker as the Portuguese was. Bully Samson drained it off as if it were the milk of a young nut.

"I guess I'm here in the way of trade," he said. "I've heard that there's been ructions on Faloo."

Gideon Gee shrugged his shoulders.

"Twice in the year there are ructions," he said. "I keep my peace with gifts of tobacco-sticks and trade gin. With a case of square-face I can always soothe the niggers. Bom! But it has been more trouble than usual. Old Mafoo was killed by Ta'a'ava and his friends, and Ta'a'ava is now chief. And since then white men came to search for Mafoo's sack of Australian sovereigns. There has been the dickens to pay! But all is quiet again now. If you are for copra and shell——"

"Any news of King of the Islands?"

Gideon Gee grinned a dusky grin as he stared out from under the awning to the lagoon, red in the sunset, and watched the graceful ketch riding at her anchor far out from the beach. He knew the Dawn well enough; and as Bully Samson had come to Faloo sailing King of the Islands' ship, he could guess that the South Sea freebooter was anxious for news of King of the Islands.

"I know nothing," he said. "They were besieged by Ta'a'ava and his bucks, but they escaped. The blacks believe that they were spirited away by Tokaloo, the devil-doctor—that is to say, his spirit." Gee grinned. "One of them knocked Tokaloo on the head; he is kill-dead—finish!"

Bully Samson nodded.

"The senhor has not been to Lalinge?" asked Gideon, with a sly grin.

He knew that the freebooter dared not put in at a white man's port with a stolen ship.

Bully Samson scowled.

"No; I've been waiting at Fusai for things to settle down here. King of the Islands sank my schooner—I've got hold of his ketch. I've kicked his crew into shape. They'd feed out of my hand now, durn their black hides. Any news of Mafoo's treasure?"

Gee's sly eyes narrowed. He knew now why the freebooter had come back to Faloo in the ketch.

"It is not found," he said. "I guess old Mafoo hid it deep and safe. I advise you not to seek it, senhor, unless you have another head on your ship to replace the one you now wear." And the trader chuckled.

Samson made no reply. From the beach there came a jabber of excited voices—crowds of natives were swarming out of the grass houses and palm-leaf huts, staring at the Dawn as she rode the shining lagoon at anchor. Many of the islanders knew Ken's ship.

"Feller King of the Islands!" ran from mouth to mouth.

"They guess that King of the Islands is on the ketch," grinned Gideon Gee. "They know it's his ship. Stay where you are, senhor, and mix yourself another drink, and I will explain to them, or there may be an attack on your craft."

The Portuguese went down the veranda steps and walked across to the beach, where he addressed the swarm of natives in a mixture of pidgin English and the Melanesian dialect of the island. He pointed out Captain Samson, sitting scowling on the veranda; and Ta'a'ava, the chief, came back to the bungalow with him.

"Feller King of the Islands no belong ship?" asked the new chief.

"No!" growled Samson. "The Dawn is my feller ship now—feller ketch belong me. Me comee trade along Faloo, you savvy. Me no savvy where King of the Islands he belong."

"S'pose King of the Islands comee along Faloo—he makee kal-kal along cooking-oven," said Ta'a'ava.

"I guess I'd like to see nothing better."

And Ta'a'ava, satisfied that the breaker of the taboo, the seeker of Mafoo's treasure, had not returned to Faloo, retired. Bully Samson lighted a strong Manila cheroot.

"That buck hasn't found old Mafoo's treasure?" he said.

"No; I reckon old Tokaloo was the only nigger who knew where it was, and he had his skull cracked along King of the Islands. I guess the sack of sovereigns will never be lifted now."

"The sack of sovereigns is there for a man to find, and I reckon all the niggers on Faloo won't keep my hands off it when I get the bearings of it," answered Samson. "I reckon it's safe for a white man to go into the bush to shoot wild pig—savvy?"

"Bom! But if a white man wanders to a taboo place, he will need to watch that his head remains on his shoulders."

"They've never had my head yet, and I've been in some tight corners along

the islands," growled Samson. "I'm going into the bush to shoot wild pig to-morrow. You come along?" He lowered his voice. "You know the island from end to end, and I guess I'll share with you if we lift the treasure. Is it a trade?"

"Senhor, as I have said, I have but one head," answered Gideon Gee. "I guess I stop along bungalow till ketch he sail."

"As you like, you durned half-hearted half-caste."

And Samson tramped away again, leaving the trader grinning.

It was a disappointment to him that old Tokaloo was dead; he had hoped to force the old devil-doctor to reveal the hiding-place of Mafoo's treasure, but his plans remained unchanged.

He little dreamed, as he thought things over, that the treasure of Mafoo was already lifted, and that the boy skipper of the Dawn was near at hand, waiting—waiting only for the sun to dip below the Pacific.

CHAPTER 17.

For Life or Death!

"FELLER sun he go!" muttered Kaio-lalulalonga.

The sun's rim dipped below the far horizon.

Darkness rolled, like a cloak, over Faloo.

The heaving ocean, the coral reefs vanished from sight; the woods and the high bush were a black mass against the sky.

In the velvety darkness the stars began to gleam.

King of the Islands rose from the coral rock where he had been seated. In the glimmer of the stars he examined once more his rifle.

"It's time!" he said quietly.

"Ready!" said Hudson.

The Australian had been waiting impatiently for the dark.

King of the Islands led the way.

For the second time the shipmates of

the Dawn left the beach and plunged into the blackness of the woods.

From the woods they passed on to the bush, taking care, however, to avoid that spot where they had lifted the treasure of Mafoo, and where old Mafoo's head still swung from the branches of the banyan. A new devil-doctor was in the place of Tokaloo; the hideous place was still haunted by death and terror.

Trackless as the high bush seemed, King of the Islands scarcely faltered once on his way. Here and there, when a glimpse of the stars was to be had, they guided him; the compass and his sense of direction did the rest. King of the Islands led the way, his rifle under his arm; Kit Hudson followed him, his stockwhip in his grip, his rifle on his back; and Kaio-lalulalonga brought up the rear. Only when the dense bush barred the way, and a knife was needed, Koko passed to the front, and hacked a way with his keen, heavy bush-knife.

A silvery glimmer struck the eyes of the shipmates at last. It was the lagoon. They were through the bush, and the beach of Faloo, on the southern side, lay before them, with the palm-leaf huts of the natives scattered along it. Far out on the lagoon a black shadow on the water showed the ketch—riding without a single light. Ken's eyes glinted as they fastened on that shadow.

"The Dawn!" he whispered.

King of the Islands led the way on once more. A wide detour was made to avoid the native houses, and the four reached the beach at last, where the soft lap of the waters of the lagoon made a faint murmur in the night. There they stopped again.

King of the Islands had planned to seize a canoe belonging to the natives to reach the Dawn. The war canoes of Faloo were safe in the canoe-houses, watched and guarded; but it was more than likely that some fisherman's canoe was left beached for the night above high-water mark—indeed, many of

them. But if that resource failed, the comrades were prepared to swim out to the ketch, taking the risk of the sharks.

"Remain here!" whispered Ken.

Leaving his comrades he crept silently along the sand in the direction of Ta'a'ava's village.

As he expected, he found five or six fishing canoes beached well above the lapping waters of the lagoon.

King of the Islands passed among them, looking for one in which the paddles might have been left.

There was a sudden gasp in the darkness, and from one of the canoes a black face and rolling, startled eyes rose, staring at the shadowy figure of King of the Islands.

Ken's teeth snapped.

He had known that it was possible that some native might be sleeping in his canoe in the sultry night, and he had had to take the risk.

One cry from the startled islander was enough to give the alarm and to bring a swarm of savages yelling to the spot, and the man's mouth was already opened for a yell.

But that yell was never uttered.

The clubbed revolver of the boy trader crashed on the fuzzy head, and the islander dropped back into the canoe with a low groan.

King of the Islands straightened up, his heart thumping, his head bent to listen.

There was no sound of alarm. The other canoes were untenanted. For a full minute he stood breathless, tense. But there was no sound save the soft lapping of the lagoon.

It had been a narrow escape, but it did not linger in Ken's mind. He grasped one of the canoes and half-carried, half-dragged it over the soft sand, after groping in the interior and finding two paddles there. From the black man he had struck down came no sound; he was stunned, and safe for a time at least.

At the edge of the water Ken left the canoe and hurried back to his comrades.

"Follow on!" he breathed.

Silently as ghosts the three trod along the soft sand glimmering in the starlight. The canoe was pushed into the water and the four stepped aboard. Koko grasped a paddle.

"Feller tide he go!" murmured Kaio-lalulalonga. "No wantee washy-washy along canoe—feller tide he go."

"Good!" breathed Ken.

Once afloat, the canoe was drawn away from the beach by the receding tide. Far out on the barrier reef there was a deep murmur of waters pouring through the rocky channels to the open sea. Fortune was favouring King of the Islands—the tide had been on the turn; it was not necessary to paddle. Koko steered the canoe with his paddle, and the tide carried them far out from the beach.

Perhaps in order to give no guidance to possible enemies, the Dawn showed no riding-lights as she lay at anchor, her cable taut, the tide pulling at her hull. Only the black shadow against the starlit sky showed where she lay.

Ken's heart was beating fast.

Under the stars the canoe glided silently, softly over the lagoon, slowly, slowly but surely, drawing nearer to the anchored ketch.

Of the Hiva-Oa crew Ken had, of course, no fear. He knew they would be glad to welcome back their skipper. But he did not know whether Bully Samson might have shipped new hands on the Dawn; he did not know whether Bully Samson was on the watch on the shadowy deck. The risk had to be taken; but at every moment King of the Islands feared to hear the crack of a rifle from the vessel. There was no sound in the canoe as it glided onward. In the deep silence the trembling of the beach-comber could be felt. Nearer and nearer—

From the deck of the ketch there came the sound of a voice. It was the soft, musical voice of one of the Polynesian seamen singing in the starlight. Ken's heart thumped. He recognised

the voice of Lompo. The twang of a ukelele accompanied the voice. Lompo was awake and on deck, but where was Bully Samson? The deep, hoarse voice of the bully of the Shark answered the question.

"Belay that shindy, you black scum!"

Bully Samson was on deck. Ken was close enough now to pick out the red, glowing end of a cigar from the darkness.

There was the sound of a blow, and a whimper. Pattering footsteps were heard on the deck. Lompo, his song silenced, had fled from the brawny fist of the freebooter.

"You sing out along my ship, me knock seven bells outer your black hide!" roared Samson.

"Yessar!" answered Lompo's trembling voice.

The red end of the cigar glowed over the rail. Bully Samson was leaning there now, staring across the water towards the shadowy shore, where a light burned in Gideon Gee's bungalow.

The gliding canoe was directly in his line of vision now, though almost swallowed up in the shadows on the lagoon.

There was a sudden flash of light—it came from the burning cigar as it dropped into the sea. Bully Samson had seen the canoe. The cigar dropped from his mouth—his brawny hand grasped a revolver.

"You feller canoe, you steer clear along my ship!" he shouted. "You wantee trade, you wait along sun he come. Sheer off, or I'll shoot!"

Evidently the bully of the Shark supposed that it was a native canoe, manned by natives, that was gliding down on the ketch. Whether the natives came as friends or foes, Bully Samson was taking no chances. His revolver glinted in the starlight over the teak rail. The canoe was not a dozen yards from him now.

"You washy-washy along shore, plenty quick!" he roared; and then, in the gloom, he glimpsed a white face in the canoe, and a startled oath broke from him. Whether it was that the

thought of King of the Islands was in his mind, or whether his keen eyes picked out the face of the boy trader in the faint starlight, the name came from his lips in a yell of rage.

"King of the Islands! By hokey!"

His finger was pressing the trigger.

Crack!

King of the Islands, standing up in the gliding canoe, fired at the black-bearded ruffian, even as Samson pulled the trigger.

There was a wild yell on board the Dawn, and a crashing fall that made the teak deck rock. King of the Islands gave a gasping cry as he felt the wind of a bullet on his cheek. But he had pulled trigger first, and Bully Samson's bullet had been deflected as he staggered. His shot whizzed away harmlessly towards the beach, while the bully of the Shark crumpled up on the deck of the Dawn.

A moment more, and the canoe bumped against the Dawn, and King of the Islands had leaped over the low rail and was standing on his own deck. A yell of surprise and delight from the Hiva-Oa crew greeted him.

"Cap'n Ken!"

"Feller King of the Islands he come."

Bully Samson, sprawling on the deck, made a fierce effort to raise the revolver again. Ken kicked it from his hand. The muzzle of the Winchester jammed on the brawny chest of the freebooter.

"Lie still, you scoundrel!" said King of the Islands, between his teeth. "Lift a finger, and I'll riddle you!"

The wounded ruffian lay like a crouching wild beast, fierce curses pouring from his lips. Kit Hudson leaped on board, and Kalo-lalualonga followed. The canoe went rocking away on the tide towards the reef.

Five minutes later King of the Islands was steering the Dawn through the channel of the reef, heading for the open sea. Bully Samson, his hands bound, lay on the deck; the Hiva-Oa crew stood at the sheets, singing aloud in their glee. Ken's eyes were dancing. Under mainsail and topsail the Dawn

swept out into the starry Pacific, King of the Islands at the helm, master once more of his own ship—and the cannibal island of Paloo—the island of terror and treasure, dropped astern and was lost in the mist of the stars.

CHAPTER 15.
Man Overboard.

KAIO-LALULALONGA, at the helm of the Dawn, crooned softly a Hawaiian song as he kept the ketch before the wind. King of the Islands sat on the teak rail, heedless of the dip and swing of the ketch as she cut through the starlit Pacific. A landsman would have been hurried backwards into the heaving sea, but the skipper of the Dawn sat as carelessly and comfortably as in a rocker on the club veranda at Lalinge.

Kit Hudson was below, taking a spell of sleep in his bunk. On a heap of tapa mats on deck lay Bully Samson—a prisoner.

The Hiva-Oa crew were all on deck. The "watch below" seldom slept in the tiny forecabin of the Dawn—they were accustomed to bring tapa mats on deck and sleep under the gleam of the stars. But not one of the five Polynesian seamen was sleeping now. They were all awake, and muttering together occasionally in the soft dialect of Hiva-Oa, their black eyes continually roving to the burly form of Bully Samson. Ken understood a good deal of the dialect of the Marquesas—and perhaps for that reason Lompokuno and his comrades muttered and whispered softly, so that not a syllable came clearly to their captain's ears.

Lompo rubbed a deep cut on his brown cheek, made by the hard knuckles of Bully Samson. His black eyes glittered as he rubbed it. Bully Samson, so recently in command of the ketch, had made the weight of his heavy hand felt by all the native

crew—not a man of the five but had marks to show. But Bully Samson lay wounded now on the tapa mats, a prisoner in the hands of King of the Islands, and the Polynesians did not fear him.

That something was toward among the crew Ken would have guessed at any other time. Usually peaceful, contented, laughing and happy, the Hiva-Oa men were now grim and sombre, and their dark glances at the bully of the Shark were full of unspoken threats.

King of the Islands rose at last from his precarious seat on the low rail and yawned.

It was more than time for Hudson to relieve him on deck, but the mate of the Dawn had not awakened.

"Keep her steady, Koko!"

"Yessar!"

King of the Islands, crossing to the cabin hatchway, paused to look down at Bully Samson.

The black-hearted ruffian was not sleeping.

His fierce eyes met Ken's with a savage stare.

Samson's wound had been bandaged. The bullet from Ken's rifle in the lagoon at Paloo, had knocked over the South Sea freebooter who had seized the Dawn, and he was severely hurt. Ken had done what he could for him, but loss of blood had sapped away the giant strength of the bully of the Shark, and he lay helpless. Powerless now from the effects of his wound, Ken had ordered his hands to be unbound, and he was free—but weakness, strange and unaccustomed to the Herculean freebooter, chained him to the heap of tapa mats on which he lay.

But if Bully Samson's strength had failed him, his savage spirit was as fierce as ever. He glared defiance at the boy trader.

"Anything more I can do for you before I go below, Captain Samson?" asked Ken.

"I guess I'm asking nothing at your

hands, Ken King," answered the freebooter, between his teeth. "Only—what are you going to do with me?"

"Take you to Luckwe Island," answered Ken. "The District Commissioner is there now, and I'm going to hand you over to him—and wash my hands of you."

"Plenty much better sling Bully Samson along sea, sir!" said Koko. "Plenty better feller Samson mkaee kai-kai along feller shark."

Ken smiled.

"That's not a white man's way, Koko!" he answered.

"Feller Samson way!" said Koko.

"Very likely; but not mine."

"Better take the nigger's advice!" jeered Bully Samson. "My turn will come, King of the Islands, and then look out for yourself!"

Ken smiled contemptuously.

"What have you done with my cargo, Samson?" he asked.

"I guess I sold it for a song to the German trader at Fusia," answered Samson, with a sour grin. "You'll never see it again. You've got your ship, but you won't get your cargo!" He spat out a curse. "And you'll never lift the treasure of Mafoo; the niggers on Faloo will see to that."

King of the Islands laughed.

"Mafoo's sack of sovereigns is lifted," he answered. "Every coin that old Mafoo stored up under the devil-doctor's tree is now on board the Dawn!"

A stream of curses came from Bully Samson.

Ken smiled, and went down the cabin steps.

He passed through the cabin to the little state-room amidships, where Hudson was in his bunk. From the deck, following him, came a deeper murmur of the voices of the Hiva-Oa men. The departure of their skipper seemed to have lifted some restraint from the crew.

Ken did not heed it.

His mind was now filled with the thought of his ship, recaptured at last

from the freebooter who had seized it, and his heart was light, his face contented and smiling. At any other time the strange unrest among his crew would certainly have roused his attention. A white skipper with a native crew in the Pacific needed to be wary and watchful. But other thoughts were in Ken's mind now, and he gave no heed to the men of Hiva-Oa.

"Kit!"

The Cornstalk awakened at a word.

"My watch?" he asked.

"Ay, ay," answered Ken, with a smile. "I wouldn't wake you before." Hudson rolled out of the bunk.

There was a sudden cry from deck.

Splash!

King of the Islands started.

"What—"

"Man overboard!" shouted Hudson.

"On a night like this no lubber would be lubber enough to fall overboard. Danny chucking some garbage from the caboose over the side, I reckon!"

But King of the Islands hurried back to the companion-ladder. He did not believe his own words. The plunge into the sea had been too heavy to be accounted for by the throwing away of garbage by the native cook. Yet the ketch was sweeping on her rapid way unchecked, and there was no sound of alarm from above. Puzzled and vaguely alarmed, King of the Islands ran up the companion-ladder. Kit Hudson followed him fast.

Ken leaped out on deck.

Koko, standing like a giant statue of bronze, was at the helm, massive and calm. The Hiva-Oa men were in a bunch, whispering. All were there. It was not a case of "man overboard."

"What name feller splash along sea?" asked Ken, puzzled.

For the moment, he did not think of Bully Samson. The wounded freebooter was not likely to leap into the sea, even if he had sufficient strength remaining to leave the heap of mats.

There was no answer.

"What name?" rapped out Ken sharply.

The Hiva-Oa men did not speak. They huddled together, evidently in dread of their skipper's wrath, but dumb. Koko kept his eyes steadily on the sea, silent.

"What has happened, Koko?" roared Ken, shaking the native. For a moment Koko hesitated, then, frightened by the look in King of the Islands' eye, he stammered:

"Bully Samson, he gone along shark, he bad man——"

"What!" shouted Ken.

He sprang towards the pile of tapa mats. No burly figure lay there now. The ketch swept on with belying sails before the trade wind, leaving a long wake astern. Ken stared at the tapa mats, and then at the line of foam that lay behind the Dawn.

Bully Samson was gone!

"Bout ship!"

For a moment King of the Islands had stood rooted to his deck as he realised what the Hiva-Oa men had done—that Bully Samson had been flung headlong into the sea by the brown-skinned seamen whom he had bullied and man-handled. They had just waited until their skipper's back was turned, and then the bully of the Shark had gone over the rail, and it was the splash of his huge body in the Pacific that Ken and Kit had heard in the state-room below.

The next moment King of the Islands was roaring orders.

The crew were slower than usual to obey. But the look on Ken's face enforced obedience. His look was almost terrible, and it put fear into the hearts of Lompo and his comrades. Koko looked sullen and dissatisfied. He had seen, with ruthless approval, the fate of Bully Samson. But he obeyed the boy trader's commanding voice, as did the Hiva-Oa men. And the great boom swung over, and the ketch swept round into the wind.

It was the boast of the Dawn's boy skipper that the ketch could lie as

close to the wind as any craft in the Pacific, or closer; indeed, the graceful little craft could almost look the wind in the eye. But even the Dawn, good ship as she was, and handled by a master's hand, could not sail in the teeth of the trade wind. As close-hauled as was practicable, she circled back to the spot—as near as it could be judged—where Bully Samson had been tossed into the ocean.

Ken's face was black with anger, wrinkled with anxiety. Bully Samson deserved his fate, and more; and had the situation been reversed, he would have flung Ken to the sharks without a second's scruple. But Ken's ways were not the freebooter's ways. He was as keen to save the ruffian from the sea and the sharks as if Bully Samson had been a shipmate instead of a deadly enemy.

"Can you hear anything, Kit?"

Hudson shook his head.

He was listening intently. But from the shadowy sea came no cry for help, no call from a swimmer.

"Not a sound!"

Ken set his lips.

"We must save him if we can. But he must have been left a mile astern, or nearly. He hadn't a dog's chance—wounded as he was, too!" King of the Islands gave his crew a grim look. "Even if he floats yet, we may miss him by a dozen cables' length—unless he can shout for help. My Sam! Hark!"

There was a sound from the starlit waters—an indefinable sound—but it gave King of the Islands hope.

He shouted to the crew, prompt to obedience now. Never had they seen their boy skipper with that look on his face before. The vengeful Polynesians who had tossed Bully Samson over the rail were eager to save him now to avert the wrath of King of the Islands.

The ketch hove to on the calm waters, and the whaleboat dropped swiftly from the davits. Lompo and Lulu took the oars, while King of the Islands stood in the boat, scanning the sea and shouting:

"Ahoy! Samson, ahoy!"

But no answer came.

In the perplexing dimness of the starlit waters something was visible—something that moved—but assuredly it was not a swimmer. It was possible that some fragment of wreckage was floating on the sea, and that the sinking man had clung to it. Ken stared at the dim shadow and steered the whaleboat for it, shouting to the dusky oarsmen.

"Washy-washy plenty quick. Put your beef into it! By gum, me knock seven bells outer you s'pose you no washy-washy debblish quick!"

The whaleboat fairly flew over the water.

"A canoe!" shouted Ken, in astonishment.

Clearly now the splash of rapid paddles came to his ears across the sea.

It was a native canoe that was gliding under the stars.

"Ahoy!" roared King of the Islands. "Ahoy, the canoe!"

No answer came back.

But the paddles flashed more swiftly than before, and the canoe raced away from the whaleboat.

The splash of the paddles died into the silence of the sea. Lompo and Lufu, straining at the oars, could not equal the speed of half a dozen paddlers.

Ken gave it up.

"Washy-washy along ketch!" he snapped.

And the whaleboat pulled back to the Dawn.

Ken had had only a shadowy glimpse of the canoe. Whether the paddlers had picked up Bully Samson or not he could not guess, but it seemed unlikely enough.

But there was nothing more to be done. If Bully Samson was still in the sea he had gone down by this time.

The whaleboat bumped against the hull of the Dawn.

Ken swung himself to the deck.

"No luck?" asked Hudson.

"No."

"Then—he's gone."

"I'm not sure. There was a canoe—I saw it for a moment. It's barely possible he may have been picked up—just a chance, at least."

"A canoe—so far out at sea!"

"Nothing unusual in that—the natives make trips of hundreds of miles in their canoes in calm weather. That canoe was probably making Fusal from Lalinge or Paloo—some native trader. They fled from my boat, and did not answer my hail. They may have picked up Samson."

"There's a chance, anyhow."

"We can do nothing more, at any rate," said King of the Islands.

The whaleboat was swung up and the Dawn was put before the wind again. Ken called the crew together, and the Hiva-Oa men clustered on deck with troubled faces. They had followed the impulse of their untutored natures in flinging into the sea the ruffian who had bullied and hazed them, and they had no regrets on that score. But they feared deeply the anger of King of the Islands.

"You feller boy, what you do along Cap'n Samson plenty no good," said Ken sternly. "I plenty mad along you feller boy."

"Feller Samson he plenty kill Hiva-Oa, feller, sar," said Lompo. "You look eye belong you, sar, you see face belong me plenty kill."

"You look-see, sar," said Lufu, touching his ear, the lobe of which hung in rags. "Feller Samson he kill ear belong me, smashee plenty, sar."

The ear ornament worn by Lufu had been smashed off by a brutal blow, and part of the ear had gone with it.

"Plenty solly, sar," said Danny humbly. "Savvy plenty we do no good along Bully Samson, sar."

"What you do along Bully Samson he no good, he plenty bad," said King of the Islands. "Me plenty angry along you feller boy. Me think sendee you all back along Hiva-Oa—me think ship more boy along Nuka-hiva."

There was a wail of dismay from the

Hiva-Oa men. The five of them began jabbering at once.

"You no sendee feller boy back along Hiva-Oa," gasped Lompo.

"You no sendee feller boy back along ship!" said Lulu. "Feller King of the Islands no like Nuka-hiva boy along ketch. He no good."

"S'pose Cap'n Ken kill Hiva-Oa boy along rope, Hiva-Oa boy stop along ketch," suggested Danny.

Ken had hard work not to smile at the simple suggestion that a rope's-end in hand would meet the case!

Ken hardened his heart, and rated the shrinking crew for a good ten minutes, and by the time he dismissed them there was no doubt that they were sorry for themselves.

Ken went below for his spell of sleep, and the crooning love-song of Hawaii was heard again from Kalo-lalulalonga at the helm, the clouds chased from his brow by the assurance that his white master would not "stop mad along him." The ketch glided along swiftly under the stars, and the shadowed sea astern hid the fate of Bully Samson.

CHAPTER 15.

Ken to the Rescue.

"HOT!" yawned Kit Hudson.

"Warm!" agreed Ken.

The Dawn lay moored at the coral wharf at Lalinge.

Under the striped canvas awning aft Kit Hudson was stretched lazily in a hammock. King of the Islands sat in a long cane chair, of which the arm-rests were so long that the legs could be stretched along them, and in that comfortable if not elegant attitude the boy trader was taking his ease.

The crew were ashore, but the tall figure of Lompokuno could be seen strolling idly along the wharf towards the ketch in the blaze of the tropical sun.

Lalinge was hot and drowsy. Two or three natives, in lava-lavas, that shone white in the sun, loafed under the palm-

tree near the beach. No other craft but the Dawn was moored, but a schooner was moving out of the bay, slowly, towed by a whaleboat crammed with black rowers. There was hardly a breath of wind stirring.

Hudson glanced across at the schooner. A fat man, in white ducks, could be seen on her deck—a man with a darkly-bronzed face, thick lips, and heavy features. Slowly the schooner glided across the motionless water, heading for the channel in the reef outside the bar that led to the open Pacific. The tide was low, and the reefs on either side of the channel were uncovered and scorched dry in the heat. Slowly, heavily, the schooner—a Dutch schooner, broad in the beam—surged after the towing boat.

"Captain van Tromp won't find much wind outside," yawned Ken, as he followed Hudson's glance.

"You know the man?"

"I've come across him a good many times." Ken shrugged his shoulders. "A bad hat—smuggler mostly—smuggling birds of Paradise from New Guinea, and rubber from Malaya, and niggers from the islands. A thorough bad hat! The less I see of him the better I like him. It's a dirty ship, and half his crew are shanghaied, I've heard."

Lompokuno stepped on board the Dawn.

Ken sat up in his chair.

"It's time Koko was back from John Chin's office. As soon as it's cool I want to get the cargo on board."

"We sail to-morrow," yawned Hudson.

Ken smiled.

"We've had a week of lazing here—I'm keen for the salt sea breezes again. This will be a good trip, Kit. Donlan is pitching away his share of old Mafao's sovereigns on rum and trade-gin ashore. We've done rather better with our lot. We shall have a cargo this trip that will make us a little fortune in the islands."

"Bom—as that Portuguese on Faloo used to say."

"Lompo!" called out Ken.

"Yessar!"

The Hiva-Oa seaman came aft.

"What name Koko he no come? You see Koko along beach eye belong you?"

"Me see, sar! Koko he no come, no can!"

"What! And why?" asked Ken, in surprise. "Which way Koko he come along ketch?"

Lompo pointed a dusky finger at the Dutch schooner crawling across the bay in the wake of the towing-boat.

"Feller Koko he shanghai along Dussman," he said.

"What!" roared Ken.

A minute before King of the Islands had been the picture of restfulness.

He did not look idle now.

He sprang to his feet, a blaze in his eyes.

"Koko shanghai!" he exclaimed.

"Yessar! Shanghai along Dussman!" said Lompo cheerfully and with perfect calmness. Kalo-lalulalonga was on the best of terms with all the crew of the Dawn; but the South Sea Islander has an infinite capacity for minding his own business. The fact that Koko had been kidnapped by a Dutch skipper who happened to be short-handed did not appeal to Lompo as a matter important enough to disturb his calm. Indeed, he would not have mentioned the circumstance at all had not Ken questioned him as to the whereabouts of the Kanaka.

"Shanghai!" repeated Ken, setting his teeth. "That fat Dutchman has had the cheek to shanghai a man belonging to my ship! My Sam!"

Ken's eyes blazed across the placid bay at the Dutch schooner.

"By gum!" Kit Hudson was on his feet now. "Koko shanghai on board that Dutch tub! And she's going out to sea! She'll be in the channel in ten minutes more!"

Ken gritted his teeth.

There was no time to unmoor the Dawn from the wharf, even if there had been sufficient wind from the shore to sleer her across the bay. The

Dawn's best boat was ashore, up-ended across the wharf, in the process of receiving a new coat of paint. In ten minutes at the most the towed schooner would be passing through the channel in the coral reef, and once outside the reef she would be gone. Intervention, pursuit seemed equally impossible—and Ken's eyes blazed with rage.

He put his hands to his mouth and hailed the schooner—almost too far off already for a voice to carry. But Ken's voice carried.

"Ahoj, the Oom Pieter!"

The fat man in white ducks turned round.

"Ahoj, Captain van Tromp!" roared King of the Islands. "You've got one of my Kanakas on board you! schooner. You put him ashore, savvy?"

The Dutchman grinned.

He made a trumpet of his large fat hands and roared back:

"That big feller Kanaka belong you?"

"Yes!" roared King of the Islands.

"Belong me now!"

"Put him ashore, or I'll follow you to the end of the Pacific and hide your fat carcass with a rope!" roared Ken.

The Dutchman shrugged his fat shoulders and turned his back on King of the Islands. That was his answer.

"No chance!" said Hudson savagely.

"They'll be out beyond the reef before we can get a boat or a canoe."

King of the Islands did not answer.

He groped for a second at the back of his belt to make sure that his revolver was there, and with a flying leap landed on the coral wharf.

The next instant he was running like a deer.

Hudson stared after him in stupefaction.

For the moment he did not comprehend the intention of his shipmate, and he could only stare.

"Feller King of the Islands he plenty mad along Dussman," remarked Lompo placidly, and he sat down on the teak

rall to watch Ken as he flew along the wharf.

Ken had no time to explain his intention—there was not a second to waste. As it was, he doubted whether he would be in time. His feet hardly touched the wharf as he sped.

From the coral wharf he reached the beach, and his feet flashed like lightning along the sand.

He was running for the reef.

At high water the coral rocks were hidden deep, and the water lapped on soft mud. But the tide was out now, the beach was high and dry, and from the sand uncovered rocks stretched out to the barrier reef at the entrance of the broad bay of Lalinge.

At low water it was possible to walk afoot to the outer reef, and when the tide was down Lalinge natives would pick their way out on to the rocks to net the fish left in hollows and pools by the receding tide. It was necessary to pick one's way carefully among the sharp rocks and slippery pools, where sometimes a devil-fish, and even that most terrible of creatures, the sting-ray, was left by the tide.

But King of the Islands was not picking his way.

He was running as if for his life.

Leaping from rock to rock, splashing through pools and seaweed, and utterly regardless of the ruin of his spotless white ducks, stumbling and falling occasionally, but springing up again as if made of rubber, King of the Islands raced out to the barrier reef.

The towing whaleboat was drawing the Dutch schooner into the narrow passage now. Even a small vessel had to pick her way carefully through the reef to gain the open sea without scraping on the coral—and the heavily built Dutch schooner was not a small vessel. Her boom swung over the shelves of the coral as she surged into the passage astern of the towing whaleboat.

Breathless, panting, King of the Islands reached the edge of the coral

reef, where the passage opened, half a minute ahead of the Oom Pieter.

He was standing on the edge of the reef, six or seven feet above the level of the sea, as the schooner crawled by.

The whaleboat was well ahead in the narrow passage, the stout coir rope dragging the schooner after the panting oarsmen. The rock where King of the Islands stood rose from the water almost like a wall. On the very edge of it Ken poised himself, crouching ready for a spring as the Dutch schooner floated below.

Captain van Tromp stared at him blankly.

Only by lightning speed had King of the Islands reached the reef before the schooner was towed past; but he was there, crouching for a spring and evidently intending to leap down on the deck of the Oom Pieter as she passed.

Van Tromp's little piggy eyes, almost buried in the fat of his heavy face, glittered with rage.

He dragged a revolver from the back of his huge trousers.

"You feller stop along reef!" he yelled.

Ken sprang even while the words were leaving his lips.

The leap was a dangerous one, but King of the Islands recked little of that. From the coral rock the active figure flew, landing on the deck of the Dutchman. He stumbled on a guy-rope rove to the main boom, and fell along the deck; but he was on his feet again in a moment, his eyes blazing at Gisbrecht van Tromp.

"You Dutch dog!" panted King of the Islands. "Bout ship, you scum, and back to Lalinge!" His revolver was in his grip now. "Bout ship, you scum! You hear me?"

The Dutch smuggler was gripping his revolver; but many eyes at Lalinge were on the schooner, and he dared not use it. But he shouted an order in Dutch to his men, and three of the crew—Dutchmen, like the skipper—rushed on Ken.

"Fling him overboard!" yelled Van Tromp, in his own language, and the mate of the Oom Pieter and two seamen leaped at King of the Islands.

Crash!

A clubbed revolver, crashing in his face, sent the Dutch mate stunned to the deck.

Ken leaped back, his revolver at a level.

"Stand back, you dogs, or——"

Crack!

One of the seamen went down, yelling, with a bullet in his leg. The other backed away in haste.

Ken's revolver swung round at the skipper of the Oom Pieter.

"Drop that pistol, you scum, or I'll drive a bullet through your fat carcass! I give you one second!"

The Dutchman's revolver crashed to his feet. His little eyes glittered like points of fire in his rage, but he was daunted.

"That's better," said Ken contemptuously. He stepped aft to the Dutchman's side. "Order your men to release my Kanaka—sharp's the word!"

The muzzle of the revolver was almost touching the Dutch smuggler's jaw. Choking with rage, Van Tromp called out an order, and Koko was released from his bonds. In a moment the giant Kanaka was on his feet, and he snatched a belaying-pin from the rail and joined his master on the deck.

"S'pose King of the Islands sting out me smashee head belong Dussman!" panted Koko, his eyes blazing at the Dutch skipper.

"Smash head belong Dussman, s'pose he no stop along Lalinge!" said Ken grimly. "You hear me, Van Tromp? Get your schooner back to the wharf, or by heck, your skull's going to be cracked like an egg-shell!"

The whaleboat was still pulling, and the gliding schooner was out of the passage now. King of the Islands had been only just in time. Captain van Tromp struggled with his fury. His

face was crimson with rage. But the iron belaying-pin was rising in the vengeful grip of Kalo-lalulalonga, and the Dutchman dared not refuse. In a choking voice he snarled out orders to the sweating crew of the whaleboat, and the schooner was put about and towed back through the channel.

Slowly, sweating under the hot sun, the crew of the whaleboat pulled across the glistening bay, towing the Dutch schooner back to the wharf. King of the Islands stood grim and menacing by the side of the Dutch skipper, whose little furtive eyes, blinking from layers of fat, watched warily the belaying-pin in Koko's grip. The heavy hull of the Oom Pieter bumped against the coral wharf at last.

King of the Islands belted his revolver.

"Keep your hands off my crew another time, Captain van Tromp!" he said. "You feller Koko, you comey along ketch."

Ken leaped ashore. Koko, the Kanaka, stayed behind one moment. He threw the belaying-pin into the bay, and then his heavy fist, clenched and as hard as iron, smote full in the face of the Dutch skipper. Captain van Tromp, with a yell, went spinning along the deck and crashed down on the planks. Then Kalo-lalulalonga followed his master, grinning.

"Koko!" called out Ken sharply.

"Yessar! Kill face belong Dussman plenty too much!" chuckled Koko.

And Koko followed his master on board the Dawn, while Captain van Tromp sat up on his deck and clutched a streaming nose!

CHAPTER 20.

Missing!

"GOOD man, Ken!"
Kit Hudson clapped his shipmate on the shoulder as King of the Islands stepped on the ketch from the coral wharf,

Ken grinned rather ruefully.

The spotless white ducks which he sported as shore clothes at Lalinge—a rather particular piece in the item of clothes—had been drenched with water and mud; his shoes, formerly equally spotless, were limp and muddy; his hat was gone. He looked the wreck of the handsome young skipper who had stepped ashore from the Dawn.

But he had rescued Kaio-lalulalonga, shanghaied on board the Dutch schooner. That was worth the loss of his best shore-going suit.

"I never reckoned you'd do it," said Hudson. "You were just in time, Ken. And you got the Kanaka."

"Feller King of the Islands he plenty good feller along Kaio-lalulalonga," said Koko. "Dusman he plenty fiald King of the Islands."

"Van Tromp doesn't seem pleased, though he's made you spoil your clothes, Ken," said Hudson, laughing.

From the Dutch schooner along the wharf the voice of Captain van Tromp came clearly to the ketch.

Van Tromp was standing at the rail, shaking a fat fist at the ketch, and pouring out a stream of enraged words.

King of the Islands stared across at him from the ketch. While the fat Dutchman stamped and raved, and shook his podgy fist at the Dawn, the schooner was leaving the wharf again. The black crew of the whaleboat, to which the tow-ropes was bent, sweated and panted as their oars dipped again. Once already they had towed the heavy schooner out to the channel in the reefs; once they had towed it back, with their fat captain quaking under the stern eye and menacing revolver of King of the Islands. Now for a third time they set to their heavy task in the blaze of the tropic sun; and, brawny men as they were, their movements were slow and languid.

The tub of a schooner glided away from the wharf slowly. The bay of Lalinge was like glass, undisturbed by a breath of wind. Outside the reef it was

possible to pick up a breath, but no more. King of the Islands looked puzzled as he watched the schooner glide away and the fat figure of Van Tromp grow smaller across the bay.

"Those niggers can hardly pull the schooner out," said Ken. "Van Tromp will be slower getting to the reef this time. He won't find much wind outside. As likely as not he'll be becalmed in that tub. I don't see his hurry to get out of the bay."

"Same here," said Hudson, puzzled by the same thought. "He won't gain an hour by getting out of the reef before the evening breeze springs up. But he seems set on it."

"If this was Port Moresby I should think he had smuggled goods on board, and was anxious to get clear," said Ken. "But you can take anything you like out of Lalinge—except my Kanaka," he added, with a grin.

"Me tinkee——" said Koko.

"Well, what do you think head belong you?" said Ken.

"Tinkee Cap'n Samson no wantee see along King of the Islands," said the Kanaka.

The shipmates of the Dawn jumped.

"Bully Samson?" exclaimed Ken.

"On board that Dutch schooner!" exclaimed Hudson.

"Me see um, eye belong me," said Koko. "Bully Samson he no go down along sea—no makee kal-kal along shark. Me see um long cabin along schooner belong Dusman."

"My Sam!" ejaculated Ken.

His first feeling was one of astonishment; but it was mingled with relief. Brute and ruffian as Bully Samson was, it had weighed upon Ken's mind that his crew had flung the freebooter into the Pacific. He had hoped that the gliding canoe, of which he had caught a glimpse that wild night, had picked up the bully of the Shark. If Koko had really seen him on board the Dutch schooner, it was evident that he had been picked up.

"You're sure it was Bully Samson, Koko?" asked King of the Islands.

"Plenty sure, sar. See um eye be-long me," said Koko. "Savvy Bully Samson plenty too much."

Ken nodded.

The Kanaka was not likely to be mistaken. Bully Samson, with his black-bearded face and l's burly form, was easy enough to recognise at a glance.

"Well, I'm glad," said Ken, after a pause. "I'm glad he never went down when the black boys chucked him into the sea. I only hope he will never foul my hawse again. We're done with Falco, and I hope we're done with Bully Samson."

"He's keeping out of sight," said Kit Hudson. "That Dutch tub has lain here all day, with a lot of coming and going ashore; but Bully Samson never showed up. He may be afraid of being nailed at Lalinge for seizing the ketch at Falco."

"Anyhow, he's gone now," said Ken.

Slowly but surely the whaleboat was towing the Dutch schooner away towards the passage in the reefs.

The heavy craft was lost to view at last in the reefs at the mouth of the bay; Captain van Tromp had got out to sea; though why he was so pressed to get outside was still a puzzle to King of the Islands. If Bully Samson was lying doggo on the schooner, he could have done so till nightfall, without putting out to sea.

But Ken dismissed the matter from his mind as he went below to clean up and change his clothes.

He had almost forgotten the incident of the shanghaiing of Koko and his bearding of the Dutch skipper on his own deck, when, in the cool of the sunset, he stepped ashore on the coral wharf and walked along the beach towards John Chin's warehouse.

King of the Islands reached the office, and stepped in under the awning.

Chin's Eurasian clerk was in attendance.

"John Chin here?" asked King of the Islands.

"No, sar! Honourable master not yet returning from Kufa," answered the Eurasian.

"Not back from Kufa?"

"There is some unexpected delaying of unaccountable nature," explained the Eurasian. "The expecting was returning early, but honourable master not yet coming."

The Eurasian would have disdained to speak in *beche-de-mer* English like a Kanaka. He had his own educated-Oriental variety of the language.

"I'll wait," said Ken.

"Honourable captain being pleased to take one seat," offered the Eurasian politely.

Ken sat down in a cane chair under the striped awning outside John Chin's office.

Ken waited patiently. He wondered what had happened to prevent Chin from returning to Lalinge on time. It was not a matter of business, he knew; the Chinese merchant was as exact as a clock; and no matter of business, no prospect of profit, would have kept him late for an appointment. But it was scarcely possible to suppose that any accident had happened to him, in his whaleboat on a calm sea in a run of five miles.

The sun sank lower behind Lalinge.

The Eurasian clerk had closed the office now. Ken called to him as he was walking away with elegant, mincing steps, meticulously careful to resemble in no manner whatever the easy roll of a Kanaka—a kind of person much despised by the gentleman who was half a white man.

"No word from John Chin yet?"

"No, sar," answered the Eurasian. "I am giving up expecting to see honourable master this day, and closing office. The delaying of respected John Chin alarmingly perplexes honourable self."

"Something must have happened to the whaleboat!" said Ken uneasily.

"Some accidental happening may be

cause of unaccountable delaying," agreed the Eurasian. "But I hopefully wish that the terrible blows of adversity may be averted by lucky interposition of good fortune."

And, saluting Ken politely, the Eurasian gentleman minced off elegantly. It was useless to wait longer, and Ken, in a troubled frame of mind, walked along the beach of Lalinge to the ketch.

CHAPTER 21.

The Kidnapping of John Chin.

CAPTAIN VAN TROMP had made his way across the Bay of Lalinge to the passage of the reefs in the blazing afternoon sunshine; and his grumblings on deck were echoed by a nasal voice in the stuffy cabin below. In that stuffy cabin, aching with heat and crawling with cockroaches, Bully Samson lay sprawled on a bunk, smoking cheroot after cheroot, filling the stuffy room with the potent fumes of Manila. The skipper of the sunken Shark, in his dirty red sarong and with his untrimmed black beard, his rugged face thick with perspiration, looked a fierce and terrible figure as he sprawled there, smoking.

It had been necessary for Bully Samson to lie doggo while the Dutch schooner was moored at Lalinge. The seizure of Ken's ship at Faloo was a trivial matter to Bully Samson; but it was a matter for which he had to answer—if he was found in a white man's port. His eyes had blazed with rage at the ketch moored at the coral wharf. On Faloo, or Lukwa, or Kusai Bully Samson would not have remained in hiding.

The schooner was out of the reefs at last, the boat was swung up, and the fatigued oarsmen taken on board. Captain van Tromp cursed them volubly, and shouted down the hatchway to Bully Samson.

"You feller Samson, you no stop along cabin."

Beche-de-mer English was the only English that Captain van Tromp had, and Bully Samson had no Dutch.

Samson tramped heavily up to the deck.

Outside the long lines of coral reefs the sea was almost as smooth as glass. Away to the east a speck on the sea showed the low-lying isle of Kufa. A breath of wind came off the shore, and the Dutch schooner was moving under canvas now. Bully Samson breathed hard and deep in the sea wind, and cursed it for blowing so lightly. His savage eyes scanned the sea, and poked up a speck on the water in the direction of Kufa.

"I guess we're on time, after a!" he snarled.

Captain van Tromp nodded, staring in the direction of the speck that showed towards Kufa—a speck which he knew was a whaleboat pulled by four brawny Lalinge natives. In the stern sat a quiet and motionless figure, under a wide silken umbrella. If he had not known that it was John Chin's whaleboat, that umbrella would have told him that the boat contained the Chinese merchant. John Chin's vast umbrella, painted with green dragons, with its handle of solid ivory, was famous in the islands.

"We're on time!" said Bully Samson. "I reckoned that we should lose the Chink when Ken King drove you back into the bay."

"Plenty much time," said Van Tromp. "You plenty sure along pearl island?"

"Once that Chink is in our grip the pearl island is ours for the asking," said Samson. "A rope twisted round his neck will make him set a course for the pearl island."

Captain van Tromp nodded again, but his fat face was unamused. He shared fully the greed of his associate; his little piggy eyes gleamed at the thought of laying his hands upon John Chin's rich store of pearls. But he did not share the hardy recklessness of the

South Sea freebooter. Van Tromp had entered greedily into the scheme for kidnapping the Chinese merchant, but with many doubts and misgivings, greed was stronger than fear, but fear haunted him. He glanced back at Lalinge, and glanced round over the wide sea, as if in dread of seeing a sail, or the smoke of the monthly steamer.

Bully Samson watched his uneasy face with a contemptuous sneer.

The rough and reckless freebooter could hardly understand the weaker nature of the rogue who was eager to grasp at the rich prize, but with hands that trembled while they grasped.

"What are you afraid of?" he jeered. "They'll know nothing on Lalinge—and the British Commissioner is three hundred miles away. You're wanted at Port Moresby for smuggling birds of paradise out—you're wanted at Singapore for smuggling rubber to the Yankees. You'll be booked for trouble on Lalinge when that Kanaka tells how he was knocked on the head and shanghaied—they don't stand for shanghaiing there. You've got a chance now of making a fortune and getting back to Holland a rich man. John Chin will never tell what happened to him. You can lay to that."

And Bully Samson grinned savagely.

"He can tell his tale to the ground sharks when we've done with him!" he snarled. "We've got a clear course, and a safe course, as soon as we get a sight on that Chink."

It was John Chin who had picked up Samson from the atoll where he had been marooned by King of the Islands. But gratitude for favours rendered was not a strong point in Samson's character.

The whaleboat was more than a speck now.

Four dusky men were pulling stoutly for the bay, while John Chin sat aft, motionless as an ivory statue under his enormous shady umbrella.

The schooner was directly in the course of the whaleboat; there was no escape for the Chinaman, unless

Captain van Tromp weakened and gave up the desperate scheme, as his haunting fears of the consequences inclined him to do.

Suddenly the whaleboat changed its course. It was in danger of being run down by the schooner, and doubtless the movements of the latter puzzled the Chinese merchant. Certainly he was not likely to guess that he was the object of a scheme of kidnapping on the high seas. Many a hundred times had John Chin made the passage among the islands in his whaleboat; many a dozen times had he sighted the Dutch schooner. Even if he sighted Bully Samson on the deck—a conspicuous figure in his dirty red sarong—he was not likely to scent danger—he had met the man more than once in the way of trade, and he had saved him from marooning.

Keen as he was—said to be the keenest man in the islands—John Chin was assuredly taken off his guard now. The movement of the whaleboat was simply to avoid being run down by the Dutch schooner.

Captain van Tromp spat out a surly order, and the course of the schooner was deflected to keep her in line with the boat.

Closer and closer the Dutch schooner drew to her prey, the steersman following, moment by moment, the muttered directions of Van Tromp as the whaleboat shifted her course again and again to avoid a meeting.

John Chin stood up at last, his ivory face still impassive, but his slanting eyes gleaming keenly at the schooner, which now towered almost over the gliding boat.

"Ahoy, the whaleboat!" bawled Bully Samson.

"You wantee speakee?" came back from John Chin in his soft voice and Chinese pidgin English; and he bade his men lay on their oars.

"I guess we want to gam with you, John Chin!" shouted Samson. "You step on board. Savvy?"

Even yet there was nothing to warn

the Chinese merchant of danger. But perhaps his keen eyes picked up a hint in Bully Samson's face, and the sly, uneasy, greedy, fat countenance of the Dutch skipper. Suddenly the four oars dipped again, and the whaleboat shot away from the schooner without an answer to Samson's hail.

"I guess he's wise to it now!" sneered Bully Samson. "But it won't save his yellow skin!"

For some minutes there was a strange and breathless contest between the whaleboat and the schooner.

In a good wind even the heavy, clumsy Oom Pieter would have run down the boat in a few seconds, but the breeze was light and fitful, and the Oom Pieter was slow and clumsy. And the whaleboat was active as a flying-fish dodging the jaws of a shark.

The Kanakas were rowing as they had never rowed before. They were pulling to save their lives.

Bully Samson drew his revolver and sighted it carefully. John Chin's life was worth an island of pearls to him; it was not at the Chinaman that he aimed.

Crack!

Over the smooth, silent sea the crack of the revolver rang with startling suddenness, almost like thunder.

One of the black rowers dropped his oar and collapsed into the bottom of the whaleboat.

Bully Samson grinned savagely.

"I guess that will stop them!"

The freebooter was right.

The carmen were thrown into confusion at once, and the whaleboat lost way. Dropping their oars, the islanders crouched low in the boat, seeking cover under the gunwale from another shot. But another shot was not needed.

John Chin's voice had lost its mastery now. The Kanakas crouched in terror. And before he had time even to attempt to get the whaleboat under way again the crash came.

Over the boat loomed the heavy bows of the Dutch schooner, and, with a

rending crash, the whaleboat went under.

Bully Samson grinned with glee.

"Lay to, and drop a boat for the Chink!" he snapped.

The schooner's boat dropped into the water. John Chin was pulled on board—his ivory face still calm, his drenched umbrella under his arm. Three of the Kanakas were picked up; but the man who had been struck by Bully Samson's bullet disappeared in the water. A black fin, gliding for a second over the calm surface, showed what had become of him.

Samson tramped to the rail scowling, revolver in hand, as the castaways were handed up the side.

"What name you pick up feller Kanaka?" he snarled. "I guess we don't want the niggers. Drop 'em into the sea!"

"Feller schooner short-handed," said Van Tromp. "Feller Kanaka belong crew belong me."

And the three Kanakas were kicked forward to the fore-castle. John Chin, dripping with water, stood on the after-deck. Nothing apparently could disturb the impassive calmness of his face, but his slanting eyes burned as he looked at Bully Samson and the Dutch skipper.

Before the wind now the Oom Pieter glided away from Lalinge, and the island sank lower astern.

Bully Samson grinned at the Chinaman.

"I reckon you know what you're wanted for, John Chin!" he said.

"No savvy!" said the Chinaman.

"I guess you remember Kit Hudson who sailed with you once on your brig? I had him in my hands, and tied him up for the land crabs because he made a fuss about steering a course for your pearl island. King of the Islands hooked him out of it. But I guess King of the Islands can't help you now, John Chin."

"Kit Hudson very good fellow, all samee Chink," said John Chin calmly.

"What you wantee along me?"

"I guess we want you to set a course,

for that island of yours that's the talk of the South Seas," grinned Bully Samson. "Get below, John Chin, and think it over. You've got a night before you to think whether you'll set a course for the pearl island, or whether you'll have a rope twisted round your neck till your squint eyes pop out of your yellow face! Get below!"

"Takee umbrella!" said John Chin.

Bully Samson laughed hoarsely.

"I guess you can take your umbrella if you fancy it! Get out of sight! I reckon we may raise another craft before sundown, and you ain't going to be seen on this schooner."

The Chinaman, calm and unmoved, tucked his drenched umbrella under his arm and went quietly and obediently down the companion. Bully Samson chuckled and lighted a cheroot. Before the wind, freshening more and more as night came on, the Dutch schooner glided out to sea, and before the stars came out she was many a long mile from Lalinge.

No one had seen the Oom Pieter run down the whaleboat, and but for the faint chance of wreckage going ashore there was no clue to the disappearance of John Chin.

Bully Samson had a clear field. All he had to do was to get the whereabouts of the island from the Chinaman, and the pearls were his for the taking!

CHAPTER 22.

Cast Up by the Sea!

KING OF THE ISLANDS stepped ashore from the ketch and walked along the beach to John Chin's office in the fresh morning.

Lalinge lay bright and fresh under the rising sun. A crowd of Kanakas were already bathing in the bay, their brown skins gleaming in the sunlight. Black boys in the bungalows were taking their masters the morning coffee—in some cases the morning cocktail.

Manager Belnap, of the Burns Line, aided King of the Islands from his

veranda as he came swinging along with a sailorman's easy gait. Mr. Belnap held up the long glass that his black boy had just filled.

"This way, King! Here, you feller boy, you fill glass along King of the Islands!"

Ken shook his head with a smile as he stopped and looked into the shady veranda.

"Not for me, thanks! Any news of John Chin?"

"I hear that he never turned up at all last night," answered the manager. "His people are in a fluster about it. They're sending over a canoe to Kufa to inquire. It started at dawn."

"Then I'll get along to the office. Something must have happened to the Chink," said Ken.

Manager Belnap nodded. But he was more deeply interested in the contents of his long glass than in the fate of John Chin.

Ken walked on to the Chinese merchant's office, his brows knitted with thought. It was extremely unusual—in fact, unknown—for the Chinese merchant to fail to keep an appointment, and he had failed Ken the previous evening. That he had also failed to return to Lalinge at all was proof that something had happened to him.

Ken had a friendly regard for the Chinaman. Even Kit Hudson, who had little use for the yellow race, made an exception in favour of John Chin. King of the Islands, who had invested his share of the treasure of Faloo in a new cargo for the Dawn, was anxious to get to sea. But matters of trade faded from his mind now. If some misfortune had happened to John Chin, Ken intended to look into the matter before he sailed.

John Chin's office was generally an example of quiet order and precision. But it was in great confusion now. The Eurasian chief clerk met Ken with a long face, almost forgetting to be an elegant and civilised white man in his agitation.

"Honourable master no returning!"

he exclaimed. "I sending canoe to Kufa inquiring questions of esteemed master."

"The canoe's not back yet?"

The Eurasian pointed a finger towards the shining bay.

"Canoe coming to arrive," he said.

Ken looked across the bay. A canoe was paddling swiftly in from the outer reef.

He went down to the margin of the bay, the Eurasian with him. The canoe came swiftly on, paddled by black men, with no sign of a Chinaman in it. If John Chin had stayed the night on Kufa he had not returned to Lalinge in the canoe. With a flashing of paddles the canoe ran at last upon the beach. A breathless Kanaka jumped ashore.

"Honourable master—" began the Eurasian.

"Master he no stop along Kufa!" announced the Kanaka.

"He started back yesterday?" asked Ken. "Feller John Chin he washy-washy along Lalinge day before?"

"Yessar! Feller along Kufa no savvy what name John Chin no come along Lalinge."

Ken compressed his lips.

Something had happened to John Chin's whaleboat on the short run from Kufa to Lalinge—on a calm sea. It was impossible not to surmise that there had been foul play of some sort.

Ken walked back to the ketch with a deeply corrugated brow. Kit Hudson met him with an inquiring glance as he stepped on board.

"No news of the Chink?" he asked, reading the answer in the troubled face of King of the Islands.

"No. He hasn't come back, and they don't know anything on Kufa. He left for Lalinge in the whaleboat as usual."

Hudson wrinkled his brows.

"But what can have happened to him? The weather's been calm—he had a good boat and a good crew, and he's made the trip a hundred times at least. What—"

"Foul play of some sort," said Ken.

"But what—who—"

"That beats me, so far."

"We're not pulling out yet?" asked Hudson.

Ken shook his head.

"Not till we know what's become of John Chin. He's stood by me more than once, like a white man, Chink as he is; and I'm standing by him if he's got fouled by some sea-lawyer."

"His niggers?" suggested Hudson.

"I've thought of that, but it's not likely. John Chin's men are all good boys. A man like that Dutch smuggler, Van Tromp, or a brute like Bully Samson might be kat-kated by his men—but never John Chin. I can't get on to it at all," confessed Ken. "But if we don't get any news to-day I shall drum round in the Dawn looking for him. You agree?" he added.

"You bet!"

It was an anxious morning for King of the Islands. It was towards noon that a hubbub on the beach drew the attention of the shipmates of the Dawn. A crowd of natives had gathered, and were jabbering excitedly. Manager Belnap had come down from his bungalow, and two or three other white men had joined the throng. The Eurasian clerk could be seen wringing his hands in exaggerated grief.

King of the Islands and Kit Hudson hurried along the coral wharf, and ran down the beach to see what was toward. They could guess that it was news of some kind of John Chin.

"The Chink's gone!" said Manager Belnap.

"Gone?" exclaimed Ken.

"His whaleboat has been run down. Some of the natives found this thrown up by the tide, and brought it here."

King of the Islands stared at the object that lay on the beach in the midst of the excited crowd. It was the stern half of a whaleboat, cut clean in two by the crashing bows of some ship that had run it down at sea. King of the Islands stared at it, and he felt a lump rise in his throat. That fragment

of wreckage, tossed ashore by the Pacific tides, was all that remained to tell of the fate of John Chin!

Koko, the Kanaka, ceased to twang his ukulele and to hum a Hawaiian song. The cheery grin died off his brown face.

The tropic sun was blazing down on LaLinge.

Koko, seated at the foot of the mainmast of the ketch Dawn, with his long, brown legs in striped calico shorts stretched out on the hot deck, had been enjoying life.

But as King of the Islands stepped over the low teak rail from the wharf to the ketch the happy, careless contentment faded from Koko's brown face.

King of the Islands was frowning darkly—not with anger, but with troubled thought.

The fate of John Chin, the Chinese merchant, lay heavy on his mind and on his heart.

King of the Islands and Kit Hudson thought the matter over and over again and again with painful intentness; and, meanwhile, the ketch lay idly moored at the wharf.

Idleness, which appealed so strongly to Kalo-lalulalonga, did not appeal to King of the Islands in the least. He was ready for sea, and anxious to get to sea. But while the fate of John Chin remained unknown he would not and could not lift his anchor.

Koko, the Kanaka, gave the fate of John Chin no thought whatever. Like all Kanakas, he thought very little, and people who passed out of his sight ceased to exist, so far as he was concerned.

But the clouded face of King of the Islands made a great difference. That cloud was immediately reflected upon the brown face of the boatswain. Like the sea reflecting the sunshine or the clouds, Koko reflected the moods of his master. The dark trouble on Ken's handsome, sunburnt face was sufficient to shadow the sunny sky for Koko; and as he knew the cause of it, the fate of

John Chin, instead of being a trifle light as air, became a matter of importance to the Kanaka.

He watched King of the Islands in silence as Ken dropped into a long chair on the after-deck. Kit Hudson, who had been seated on the rail idly coiling his stockwhip, gave his shipmate an inquiring look.

"No news?"

Ken shook his head.

"It beats me," said Hudson. "The whaleboat was run down intentionally. There can't be much doubt about that."

"None at all," answered Ken moodily. "Some enemy of John Chin met him on his way back from Kufa, and ran him down. If he's alive, he's in some sea-lawyer's hands." King of the Islands moved restlessly. "I owe a lot to that Chink, Kit. When I first sailed the Dawn he stood me my first cargo on my bare word, and took the risk. If he's in danger—and he must be—I can't leave him to it."

"I've sailed with him, and he was a good skipper to me," said Hudson. "I'm with you all the way, Ken. But what can we do?"

"Wait for news first—and then drum round in the ketch looking for him," said King of the Islands. "I know it means the trade going to pot. After all, we can afford it—for once. The gold we lifted on Faloo will see us through. We haven't got to drum hard for copra to pay the running expenses—for a time, at least. We're in luck, so far as that goes."

Hudson nodded.

"I'm with you all the way, as I said. Let the trade go, so long as we can keep afloat without it."

"We can stand it for a few weeks, at least, without having to mortgage the Dawn to the Jew broker at Lukwe," said Ken, with a faint smile.

Kalo-lalulalonga laid down his ukulele and came aft, his big bare feet pattering on the glistening teak deck.

"Trouble he stop along little white master?" asked the Kanaka.

"Plenty too much trouble to stop along me," answered Ken.

"Little white master he tinkee along John Chin?"

"Yes."

"Me tinkee along John Chin head belong me," said the Kanaka. "Koko savvy."

Ken smiled.

He had little faith in the mental processes in the head of a Kanaka.

Koko smiled, too—not because he saw any reason for smiling, but because the "little white master" smiled.

"Well, what do you think with head belong you, Koko?" asked King of the Islands good-humouredly. "What feller thing Koko savvy?"

"Tinkee back long way," said Koko. "Feller King of the Islands tinkee back along Koko."

"What do you want me to remember?" asked Ken, puzzled. "What name me tinkee back along you?"

Koko made a gesture towards Kit Hudson.

"Tinkee back along feller Hudson prisoner along schooner belong Bully Samson," he said.

"I remember."

"Bully Samson he wantee makee feller Hudson steer course along pearl island belong John Chin."

"Well?"

"Feller King of the Islands sinkee Shark along reef. Feller Hudson he no stop along Bully Samson. Bully Samson wantee find pearl island belong John Chin. S'pose Bully Samson get John Chin, makee guide along pearl island?"

Ken stared at the Kanaka.

"My Sam!" he almost shouted.

It was light on the mystery at last—and it came from Kaio-lalulaliona, in whose mental processes King of the Islands placed so little faith! Only to clear the cloud from the face of his little white master, with absolute unconcern for the fate of John Chin, had Koko set his wits to work. A hundred John Chins might have vanished into the vastness of the Pacific without

causing Koko to cease twanging his musical ukulele for a moment—but for the fact that his master's face was clouded with trouble.

Kit Hudson jumped clear of the rail.

"Koko's hit it!" he exclaimed.

"My Sam!" repeated King of the Islands. "Bully Samson was on board that Dutch schooner—Van Tromp's ship—that was towed out of the bay yesterday. Koko saw him there. Samson wanted you to guide him to John Chin's pearl island. Is it possible that he has kidnapped John Chin for the same reason?"

"Me tinkee head belong me," said Koko proudly. "Dussman he one rascal allee samee Bully Samson."

King of the Islands rose to his feet. His face was full of excitement now. Koko had given him the clue.

"Samson was on board Van Tromp's ship, Kit. If they're in league, that settles the matter. Van Tromp is a smuggler and a thief, but I never reckoned he had the nerve for a kidnapping game—he's a coward, and afraid of his own shadow almost. But Samson may have bucked him up to it. You remember we wondered why that Dutchman was so anxious to tow out of the bay, when there was hardly a breath of wind to be picked up outside the reef. If he knew that John Chin was coming back from Kufa in his whaleboat—and all Lalinge knew that—he was towing out in time to meet the whaleboat."

His glance swept across the shining bay to the outer reef and the boundless Pacific beyond.

"We've got it now!" he said. "It's a hundred to one that that is what happened. But Captain van Tromp is twenty-four hours ahead of us. But his old tub can't sail like the Dawn. If we could raise her topsails, I'd undertake to run her down in the teeth of the wind. But—where is he?"

"S'pose John Chin he set a course, feller Dussman sail along pearl

island," said Koko. "Feller Hudson be savvy pearl island."

"That's true," said Hudson. "I can set a course for John Chin's pearl island, as Bully Samson knew when he had me in his hands. I can take you there, Ken, if you think——"

"Is John Chin the man to guide him there?" said Ken dubiously. "I don't believe he would do it, to save his life."

"Bully Samson won't stand on ceremony with him—any more than he did with me," answered Hudson. "John Chin may guide him to save his life, or to save himself from Malaita tortures."

Ken set his lips.

"I know! The villain is capable of anything! You're sure you can raise the pearl island, Kit?"

"Quite. It's plain sailing," answered the Cornstalk. "I sailed there as mate in John Chin's brig once. I could steer a course there with my eyes shut."

"Then that's our course," said King of the Islands. "If John Chin has set course for him, that's where we shall find him—if not, we'll search the Pacific for the Dutchman's schooner. We know now what craft John Chin is on, at least, and we know it will never come near Lalinge, so we're wasting time here. The pearl island first—and if we don't find him there, we'll drum the Pacific from Tahiti to the Solomons hunting for the Oom Pieter!"

He slapped Koko's brawny shoulder.

"Good man, Koko! You've set us a course, at least, and we can get to sea."

Then Kanaka grinned.

"Koko no common Kanaka," he said. "Tinkee plenty too much head belong him, sar!"

Ken shouted to the Hiva-On crew, lolling idly on the coral wharf.

"You feller boy, you show a leg plenty quick! Tumble up!"

Lompo and Danny and Lufu and the rest clambered on board. The ketch, a minute before a scene of lazy idleness, was now buzzing with haste. The moorings were cast off, the whaleboat

manned, the tow-rope bent, and with the brown-skinned oarsmen pulling hard, the ketch glided out to the reef.

The cloud had passed from Ken's face now that he was active again. Outside the barrier reef, the canvas was shaken out, and the copper-sheathed prow of the Dawn cut the rollers of the Pacific. Koko, at the helm, hummed his Hawaiian song, his brown face happy and contented again, now that his "little white master" no longer frowned.

CHAPTER 21.

The Secret!

His huge bulk jammed in the cross-trees of the Oom Pieter, Bully Samson swept the Pacific with a searching eye. Captain van Tromp watched him from below, his little piggy eyes fixed on the bulky figure in the red sarong. The fat Dutchman's face was anxious. Ghisbrecht van Tromp, in fact, passed his whole life in a state of more or less anxiety. There were few laws of the Seven Seas that he had not broken, but he had not the courage of his misdeeds, and lived in fear of justice overtaking him.

Bully Samson swung himself out of the cross-trees with an activity strangely in contrast with his heavy bulk, and slithered down the ratlines.

"Feller sail?" asked the Dutch skipper.

"Nix."

"Feller steamer he come?"

"Nothing."

The Dutchman looked relieved.

The black-bearded freebooter gave him a glance of sardonic contempt.

He was anxious to drag the secret of the pearl island from John Chin, but the uneasy fears of the Dutchman had held him back so far.

On his own ship, Samson would not have wasted an hour. But his own ship was at the bottom of the Pacific, and on the Oom Pieter Van Tromp was

master. It irked the fierce freebooter to be under another man's orders, but he knew that he had been fortunate in securing Van Tromp's alliance in his scheme. Without a ship and a crew he was powerless; and Samson had no reserve laid by against a rainy day. The sinking of the Shark had left him little to call his own, and the last of his resources had been spent in the expedition to Faloo, where he had failed to lift Mafoo's treasure. John Chin's pearl island was all that stood between him and beggary, and only by Van Tromp's aid could he hope to raise the pearl island and lay his greedy hands upon the pearls.

The Dutchman was still hesitating.

Fifty knots out of Lalinge, on a deserted ocean, with no sign of pursuit, no sign of a passing sail, even Van Tromp felt that all was safe; yet he hesitated to let the bully of the Shark go ahead.

John Chin, the richest merchant in the islands, had many friends—many business associates whose interests were bound up with his. His disappearance was certain to cause a sensation. If it was believed that he had been drowned at sea, all was well. But—many a "but" haunted the uneasy mind of the Dutch smuggler.

"I tell you," said Bully Samson, between his teeth—"I tell you, shipmate, there's half a million in pearls on John Chin's island. Every man in the islands knows as much. It's the chance of a lifetime. We've got the Chink now; we've only got to make him talk."

"Feller Samson go ahead!" said Van Tromp at last.

Samson turned away at once and tramped heavily down the companion into the stuffy cabin of the Oom Pieter.

John Chin was there.

The little Ivory-complextioned Chinaman sat on a locker, impassive as ever. A brawny Tonga man was in the cabin—a guard over the Chinaman. There was no escape for the prisoner from the schooner, whose bluff Dutch bows

were cleaving the Pacific far from any land. But Samson knew the peculiar nature of the Chinese, and he would not have been surprised had John Chin thrown himself overboard, to save his secret from his enemy at the cost of his life. The big Tonga native had been incessantly on guard!

John Chin's slanting Mongolian eyes lifted and fixed on Bully Samson as the freebooter tramped in.

He sat with his hands on the Ivory handle of his umbrella motionless; only his eyes moved.

Bully Samson regarded him with a gloating stare of triumph.

"The time's come to talk, John Chin," he said.

"No wantee talkee."

Samson grinned.

"I guess you'll want to talk plenty quick," he said. He drew the revolver from his belt and levelled it at the Ivory face. Three feet away the black muzzle looked John Chin in the eyes. "I reckon you'll talk before I pull trigger!"

The chinaman looked at the revolver with a steady, unwinking gaze. Not a trace of emotion showed in his face.

The slightest pressure of Bully Samson's finger was needed to send the bullet crashing through the Chinese merchant's brain. Still John Chin did not speak, and he sat and stared composedly, his slim hands clasped on the Ivory handle of the umbrella.

Samson glared at him over the revolver, baffled.

The Tonga man grinned.

With an exclamation, Bully Samson shoved the revolver back into his belt. It had been but an empty threat; the life of the Chinaman was worth half a million to him in pearls.

"I guess you've got a nerve for a Chink," said Samson, in a low voice of deadly menace. "I ain't driving a bullet through you, John Chin! Not so easy as all that!"

"Me savvee!" assented the Chinaman calmly.

"Will you set a course for the pearl island?"

John Chin shook his head.

Bully Samson spread out a chart of the Pacific on the cabin table, and the Chinaman's eyes turned upon it indifferently.

"There's Lalinge." Samson dabbed with a rough forefinger. "There's Lukwe—there's Tahiti. Somewhere in the seas between is your pearl island, John Chin. Put your finger on the spot."

The Chinaman did not stir.

"You won't?"

John Chin shook his head.

"Talfao!" said Samson.

"Yessar!" grinned the Tonga man.

"Take a bight of that feller rope round feller Chink's neck and twist till I give the word."

"Yessar!"

John Chin's almond eyes dilated as the brawny Tonga man stepped towards him, the looped rope in his snowy black hands.

"Spencee!" he said, as the Tonga man's grasp was almost upon him.

"That's sense!" grinned Bully Samson. "I reckoned you'd speak when your squint eyes were popping out—and you may as well speak first as last. Put your finger on the spot."

He placed the chart closer to the Chinaman.

For one moment John Chin hesitated, a strange glitter in his slanting eyes as if he meditated resistance. But the brawny Tonga man was towering over him, ready to grasp him in a grasp that the little Chinaman could never have unloosed. He stirred at last, and a slim finger moved over the chart and came to a stop.

Samson stared at him savagely and suspiciously.

"There's no land, not even an atoll, marked within twenty miles of that!" he snarled.

"Pearl island no malkee on chart," said John Chin.

Samson nodded slowly.

So well had the secret of John Chin's pearl island been kept hitherto that

Samson had suspected that it was one of the thousand isles of the Pacific not marked on any chart. It was likely enough—it was more than likely; but Samson, who trusted no man, suspected trickery.

"If you're tricking me——" he began.

"John Chin tellee thuth."

Bully Samson stared at the chart again and made a rapid calculation.

"That's a hundred miles east of Lalinge," he said.

John Chin nodded.

"And the same latitude, with a quarter of a degree."

Another nod.

"I guess we shall raise it to-morrow even in this durned Dutch tub. If you've tricked me, look out for squalls. I shall savvy to-morrow."

"Chinee tellee thuth."

"I guess it will be better for your yellow hide if you have. But we'll see," grunted Bully Samson. "Who's on the island?"

"Six Chinee."

"Pearl fishers?"

The Chinaman nodded.

"Likely to put up a fight?"

John Chin smiled faintly.

"No tinkee," he said.

"Let them if they like. There's enough niggers on this schooner to kai-kai them if they give trouble. And I guess I can handle six Chinks on my own!" jeered Bully Samson. "Talfao, you keepee eye along Chink; you no keepee eye along Chink, me knock seven bells outer you!"

"Yessar!" grinned Talfao.

Bully Samson, with the chart in his hands, tramped up the companion ladder to the deck. Captain van Tromp eyed him anxiously, and the Dutch mate, Jensen, drew near. Samson held out the chart.

He grinned over it at the Dutchman.

"There's the island—east of Lalinge. That's where John Chin sends his cutter for pearls. That's where Kit Hudson sailed in his brig. That's where we're going to pick up pearls to the

tune of half a million. I guess you can set a course from that."

The Dutchman nodded, his little eyes glistening. He bellowed an order to his crew and yapped at the steersman. The schooner, which had been running north-east before the wind, swung eastward with the wind on her quarter, with a billowing of canvas and a creaking of ropes and spars. Bully Samson paced the deck, his eyes turning over eastward as the sun sank lower to the Pacific. His rugged face was alight with triumph now as he chewed on an unlighted cheroot, his sinewy fingers twitched as if already grasping at the pearls. A fortune was in his grasp if the Chinaman had told the truth. And if he had not, he should yet tell it, if there was power in ruthless torture to make him speak. A fortune to be shared with Van Tromp and the Dutch mate—but still a fortune. And vengeance upon King of the Islands could wait until he was the richest man in the Pacific.

CHAPTER 24.

The Chase!

"MY Sam, we're moving!" King of the Islands spoke with justifiable pride in his craft.

"She's a clipper!" said Hudson.

"If we don't sail two knots to the Dutchman's one, I'll eat the Dawn!" said King of the Islands, with a laugh. "We may beat them to it, Kit. If they're steering for the pearl island we may beat them to it and sight the Oom Pieter before they raised the island."

"There's a chance," said the Cornstalk. "Van Tromp's craft sails like a barge on the Zuider Zee. But—"

"But what?"

The Cornstalk laughed.

"We're after Van Tromp, and I'm with you all the way. But he's got two or three white men in his crew, and not less than a dozen niggers. We're two white men—and Koko. When it

comes to a scrap, we're taking on a full-sized man's job, Ken."

"I know," King of the Islands nodded. "But I reckon Bully Samson is the only man on the Oom Pieter with a real punch in him. But, odds or no odds, we're handling the schooner when we lay her aboard."

Ken knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"We shall have the wind of her. I'd undertake to sail the Dawn round and round that Dutch tub and leave her standing. I wish we had the long gun on board that you used to pound Ta'a'ava's grass houses on Fajoo! But the Winchesters will talk loud enough when we come up with the Oom Pieter."

Hudson glanced at the sky.

"We're getting all the wind we want," he remarked. "I fancy we're going to get a capful more than we want."

"Not before dark," said King of the Islands.

The ketch tore on—at a pace that would have made Bully Samson wish, had he seen her, that he was on board a "ten-cent yawl" rather than a heavy Dutch schooner with a bow like a Dutch cheese. The wind was stiffening every minute, and the Hiva-Oa men looked anxiously at the graceful cedar masts that were bending like whips under their load of canvas. But King of the Islands had sailed the Pacific in every weather—he had been through hurricanes in the reef-ridged seas of the Solomons, through heavy gales among the shoals of the Puumotus, through a roaring typhoon in the China Sea. He knew to an inch what sail his craft would carry in any wind, he knew to an ounce what his sticks would bear. There was more than half a gale blowing when the sun dipped out of sight and darkness fell like a cloak on the Pacific.

It was not till the Polynesian crew were chattering with uneasiness, and Kit Hudson's face was grave, that King of the Islands gave orders to shorten sail. Koko, a figure of bronze, held on his course with one eye on the binnacle—not a slant of either eye at the moun-

tains of canvas overhead. His faith in King of the Islands would not have been shaken had Ken spread out his spinnaker in the teeth of a typhoon—not that King of the Islands was likely to do so.

Under short sail, the ketch still tore through the water.

Not a star gleamed in the sky, blackness, like a pall, lay on the Pacific. Red and green, the lights of the Dawn shone through the darkness as she tore on, with great billows heaving round her, and the spindrift lashing like whips at the faces of the men on deck.

"She's a gale now!" Hudson shouted in Ken's ear. In the roar of the wind it was difficult to make his voice heard.

"Yes. I fancy Captain van Tromp will have reefed down every rag on the Oom Pieter. That Dutchman isn't a pukka sailorman. Let her blow! We shall raise the Oom Pieter by morning if she's making the pearl island."

Hudson grinned through the darkness.

He had no doubt that Captain van Tromp was riding out the gale under bare poles, in uneasy anxiety for the safety of his tub of a schooner.

Bully Samson, if he was heading for the pearl island, would have carried on under sail had it been blowing twice a gale; but the Dutchman was in command of the Oom Pieter. And the Dutchman would never carry sail in the gale that was now churning the Pacific into foam.

Neither Ken nor his shipmate thought of sleep that wild night. In turns they relieved Koko at the wheel. Neither did the Hiva-Oa men think of sleep. The ketch fled before the roaring wind like a frightened bird, wet fore and aft from the seas that broke over the rail. The deck was incessantly awash; the bare feet of the Hiva-Oa men pattered in tepid water.

With the approach of dawn the gale slackened.

The wind was still strong and fierce, but the force of the gale was expended

when the first gleam of light showed over the turbid sea.

"Up mainsail!" shouted Ken. "You feller boy, you look lively along you!"

The big mainsail was swung up. Koko was at the helm again; Ken, in the rising light, swept the sea with his binoculars.

"Nothing—yet!" he said.

Danny, the cook, struggled aft with hot coffee and biscuits for the white masters. Higher rose the sun over the Pacific, showing masses of foam-crested, tumbling waters as far as the eye could reach.

From Lompo, at the masthead, came a shout at last:

"Feller sail!"

King of the Islands threw down his coffee-cup.

"What rig?" he shouted.

"Feller schooner!"

Ken's eyes danced.

"A ton of copra to a fathom of shell-money it's the Oom Pieter!"

He raised his glasses and searched the sea. Far away, rolling under bare poles on the heavy swell of the Pacific, was a bluff-bowed, heavily-built schooner—the schooner that King of the Islands had watched towing out of the bay of Lalinge. King of the Islands handed the glasses to Kit Hudson, with a grin of satisfaction.

"It's the Oom Pieter! We're at the heels of Bully Samson now!"

CHAPTER 25.

Hard Pressed!

DRAGGING a deep-sea anchor, the Dutch schooner had ridden out that wild night on the Pacific with canvas close-reefed. Through the long hours, while the wind roared and the ocean foamed round the Oom Pieter, Bully Samson tramped the slanting deck and gritted his teeth behind his thick black beard. In command of the schooner, Samson would have carried on under head-sails at least; but it was Van Tromp who was in com-

mand, and safety first was the Dutchman's motto.

Through the long night Bully Samson paced the rocking deck, drenched with spray and heedless of it. Had he been aware that the Dawn was in hot pursuit, his rage would probably have broken all bounds, and he might have attempted to force the Dutchman to make sail at the pistol's point. But he did not even dream that King of the Islands was on his track.

Day came at last on a wild and tumbling sea. The gale had spent its force. The fat Dutchman rolled up from his watch blow and blinked round over the sea.

"No see feller sail?" he asked.

Samson gave him a glare.

"Are you still in a blue funk, you Dutch beer-barrel? Are you going to drag a sea anchor until we get a dead calm?"

The savage contempt of the South Sea freebooter brought a flush to the Dutchman's fat face.

"Feller Samson talk too plenty much," he said. "Sp'cee feller Samson he talk too plenty much, me tell black boys knockee seven bells outer feller Samson."

Bully Samson clenched his great hands.

The fat Dutch skipper came very near at that moment to being knocked across his own deck into the scuppers.

But the freebooter controlled his rage.

"Belay chinwag!" he snarled. "Make sail! Are you afraid to carry a topsail in half a capful of wind?"

"Feller ship belong me," answered Van Tromp stolidly. "Feller Samson sail his own ship, no sail ship belong me."

And the Dutchman turned away from Bully Samson and ordered the bo'sun into the cross-trees to look out for a sail. The fear of pursuit was still strong upon Van Tromp, though it never entered Bully Samson's mind for a moment.

There was a call from the man in the

cross-trees as the sun rose higher over the tumbling Pacific.

He called in Dutch, of which Bully Samson understood not a word, but he knew what the man meant.

"Feller sail he see," said Van Tromp, interpreting into beche-de-mer English.

"And what of it?" snarled Bully Samson. "Is this rotten old tub the only craft on the Pacific?"

"Feller John Chin he big man along islands," said Van Tromp. "Plenty too much feller he look for John Chin, p'r'aps."

"I tell you nobody knows what's happened to John Chin. They'll believe at Lalinge that he was lost at sea in his whaleboat."

But the Dutchman did not heed.

He watched the man in the cross-trees anxiously.

They exchanged question and answer in Dutch, and the fat skipper's face grew more uneasy and perturbed.

"What does he say?" snarled Bully Samson.

"Feller ketch he see."

Samson started.

"A ketch! You fat swab, there are ten thousand ketches and yawls plying among the islands! What does a ketch matter? Do you think that King of the Islands has dropped from the clouds upon us?"

The freebooter clambered upon the ratlines and up to the cross-trees in savage haste. In spite of his words to the Dutch skipper, the thought of King of the Islands was in his own mind. After all, King of the Islands had been moored at the coral wharf at Lalinge when the schooner sailed. He might have seen something—suspected something.

Samson shoved the Dutch bo'sun savagely out of his way, and jammed himself in the cross-trees to scan the sea.

His eyes fixed on the sail that the Dutchman had picked up far across the heaving waters.

It was but a distant glimpse, but it was enough for the hawk-eyes of the freebooter.

"The Dawn! By hokey, the Dawn!"

He rubbed the salt sea-spray from his eyes and stared again. To a landsman's eyes one deep-sea ketch is much like another. But not to the eyes of a sailorman. There were, perhaps, twenty ketches among the islands with the unusual spread of sail of the Dawn; but among them all Bully Samson would not have hesitated a moment to pick out the ship of Ken King. He knew that it was "King of the Islands" who was bearing down upon the rolling Dutch schooner.

He released his right hand to shake it clenched in savage defiance at the distant ketch, and then clambered down the ratlines and dropped to the deck.

Van Tromp eyed him anxiously.

"Feller Samson savvy um ketch?" he asked, reading the answer in the enraged face of the freebooter.

"It's the Dawn!" hissed Samson.

"King of the Islands?"

"Ay, ay! Make sail and run him down. This old tub is heavy enough to cut that ten-cent yawl in two!"

"Feller Samson talk plenty fool talk!" snarled the Dutchman.

"You've got twice the crew of that ketch!" Samson snarled. "If they dare to run us aboard we'll send the whole crowd to Davy Jones."

"Plenty fool talk!" snarled the Dutch smuggler. Evidently he was not prepared for such desperate measures. Kidnapping John Chin, lifting the pearls from the secret island, sinking the Chinese merchant in the sea with a pig of lead at his feet on a dark night—of these things the Dutchman was quite capable; but a desperate sea-fight was another matter.

More and more canvas was crowded on the schooner, and she drove fast through the tumbling waters.

But faster and faster came the pursuing ketch, visible now to every eye on the schooner's deck. The black crew watched her with indifference—the three Dutchmen with uneasy faces—Bully Samson with glittering eyes. Far away to the eastward a speck rose from the sea—a speck that was growing larger and larger. It told of the presence of land; and Bully Samson knew what land it was, if the Chinaman had told him the truth. The secret island, the Isle rich in pearls, was in sight; but Van Tromp hardly looked at it. His little piggy eyes turned constantly on the ketch.

Every line of the Dawn's graceful shape was now visible to the Dutch smuggler; he could make out the tall figure of Koko at the helm, and catch glimpses of King of the Islands and Kit Hudson and the Hiva-Oa crew. It was not of stolen pearls that the Dutchman was thinking, but of a court of justice and the sentence for kidnapping on the high seas.

Bully Samson gripped him by the arm.

"That's the pearl island!" he said, between his teeth. "Serve out the rifles to your crew; you've got twice the men King of the Islands has, and we're four white men to two—"

"Plenty fool talk!"

Van Tromp shook off his hand.

"You've got the law of the sea on your side," muttered Samson. "No man can search your ship without an Admiralty warrant. If they run us aboard you've a right to shoot."

"Feller King of the Islands he savvy John Chin along schooner," said Van Tromp. "Spose we beat him off, he go back along Lalinge, all the islands savvy we kidnap John Chin."

"How can he know?" snarled Samson. "He can only guess."

Van Tromp did not heed him. Jensen, the mate, called out in Dutch

CHAPTER 25.

Desperate Measures!

and pointed to a signal run up on board the ketch. It was the signal for the Dutchman to heave to.

The Dutch smuggler's fat face was in an agony of indecision. As Bully Samson had said, the law of the sea gave him the right to resist an unwarranted search. But he knew that King of the Islands, if he was assured that John Chin was on the Oom Pieter, would not hesitate, and the discovery of the kidnapped Chinaman on the schooner would justify him. Only a desperate struggle, and victory, and the sinking of the ketch with all hands could cover up the Dutch smuggler's guilt, and for such measures the fat skipper was not at all prepared.

Samson's savage eyes read surrender in the fat face.

Van Tromp made a step towards the companion. The bully of the Shark strode after him.

"What are you going to do?" he hissed.

"Talk along John Chin!" snapped the Dutchman. "S'pose he say he no make trouble along me, me send him in boat along ketch."

Bully Samson drew a deep, deep breath.

The pearl island was in sight, rising clearer into view every moment, graceful palms showing now against the blue of the sky, swaying in the stiff wind. Success was in his grasp; and all his hopes, all his plans were defeated by the pusillanimity of his associate. King of the Islands had beaten him in the quest of the treasure of Paloo; King of the Islands was beating him again in his quest of the pearl island. The Dutchman tramped heavily below.

All was lost. But desperate thoughts were in the mind of the South Sea freebooter now. And Bully Samson was never so desperate and dangerous as when driven into a corner, as he now was.

CAPTAIN VAN TROMP came waddling up the companion again. Jensen, the mate, was staring back at the Dawn, now close on the Dutchman's starboard quarter, the tumbling sea rolling and foaming between. The boatswain was at the helm. Bully Samson fixed his eyes on the Dutch smuggler's face as he emerged from the companion. He had no doubt that John Chin would agree to make no trouble for his kidnapper on condition that he was sent safely on board King of the Islands' ship. But he still hoped that the Dutchman might fight it out. The desperate scheme that had formed in his lawless mind was a last resource.

But the expression on Van Tromp's face was enough for him. He knew that it was surrender.

"You're going to heave to?" he asked huskily.

Van Tromp nodded.

"And give up the Chink?"

"Ja, ja!"

Bully Samson, trembling with suppressed rage, lifted his hand and pointed to the palms that nodded above the waves to the east. The little island, with its ring of coral reefs, was in full view of both the schooner and the ketch now.

"You're throwing away a fortune, Van Tromp!" said the freebooter hoarsely. "Half a million in pearls on that island—"

For a moment the Dutchman wavered. But his greed was not so strong as his fear. From the ketch rang the crack of a rifle, and the bullet whizzed over the deck of the schooner and cut through the mainsail. It was only a warning shot; but it told that King of the Islands was in deadly earnest. It settled the matter for Ghisbrecht van Tromp. All the courage in his fat body oozed away at the thought of the fearful affray that must follow if he acted

on the desperate counsels of his confederate.

"Plenty fool talk!" he snapped, and turned away from the freebooter.

Bully Samson's teeth came together hard.

The Dutch skipper called an order to the man at the wheel, and shouted to the black crew to shorten sail.

Bully Samson's hand gripped the revolver in his belt.

It was neck or nothing now for the freebooter.

His powerful voice roared, drowning the fat tones of the Dutchman:

"You feller boy, you stand back! You touch along rope, me shoot plenty quick!"

The black crew, pattering to obey their skipper's order, stared in blank astonishment at the ruffian and the revolver that had leaped into his hand.

Crack!

Bully Samson fired a shot over their heads. It was enough for the crew of the Oom Pieter. They scuttled back like rabbits.

Samson's fierce eyes turned on the helmsman.

"Keep her steady!"

The Dutch boatswain blinked at him.

"Skipper he say——"

"Belay jaw and keep her steady! Keep her steady, or, by hokey, I'll shoot you!"

The boatswain obeyed. Captain van Tromp stood rooted to the deck with astonishment and rage. The command of the ship had suddenly been taken out of his hands. Instead of heaving to, the Oom Pieter was still speeding on her way to the pearl island. Van Tromp stuttered and spluttered with rage.

"You feller Samson!" he gasped. "You no command ship belong to me! You no stop along schooner! You go——"

"Hold your tongue!" roared Samson savagely.

"You feller boy, you seize feller

Samson quick!" shrieked the Dutchman, forgetting fear in his fury.

The next moment he was sprawling along the deck as Bully Samson drove his fist into the fat face, almost lifting the Dutchman from his feet.

If the black seamen had thought of obeying the order they changed their minds as the Dutch skipper sprawled over and lay gasping and bewildered.

Bully Samson swung round on the mate.

Jensen was springing towards him, a belaying-pin in his grip, and only a rapid movement saved the freebooter from the blow. The belaying-pin missed him by inches, and the next moment Bully Samson pulled trigger, and the Dutch mate fell almost at his feet.

The boatswain had made no movement to leave the wheel. But he gripped the spokes again as Samson's fierce eyes burned upon him.

The smoking revolver looked him in the face.

"You obeying orders, you Dutch scum!" snarled Bully Samson.

"Ja, ja, mynheer!" stuttered the boatswain.

"Bear in mind that I'm in command now, and I'll send you to the sharks as soon as look as you! Keep her steady!"

Captain van Tromp had sat up. But he did not rise to his feet. He rolled over the companion hatchway and went plunging below, rolling down the ladder, spluttering with terror. Bully Samson had no resistance to look for from him.

He gave the Dutch skipper no heed. He had succeeded in his desperate attempt—he was in command of the schooner now—and, at the same time, liable to be taken and hanged at a yardarm for piracy on the high seas. It was the greatest risk that Bully Samson had ever taken in his wild and lawless life. But he gave hardly a thought to it for the moment. He was in command of the schooner, speeding on towards the pearl island,

and he shouted to the black crew to shake out more sail. They obeyed him with a promptitude they had seldom showed at their skipper's orders. The revolver in Samson's grasp, and his evident readiness to use it at a sign of resistance, enforced prompt obedience. Under a mountain of canvas the schooner raced on before the wind, and Bully Samson shook a menacing fist at the ketch astern.

"King of the Islands, I'll beat you yet!" he roared, and his powerful voice rang across the tumbling waters and reached the ears of King of the Islands on the deck of the Dawn.

"Feller Dutchman catchee plenty soon!" chuckled Kale-lalulalonga.

King of the Islands was staring hard at the Dutch schooner through his binoculars.

The sun was past the zenith now, and blazed down on the sea from an almost cloudless sky. But though the gale had blown itself out, the wind was still strong and gusty, and the sea running high. The glimpses he could catch of what was passing on the Dutchman's deck puzzled King of the Islands at first, but he soon had a fairly clear idea of what had happened.

Knowing the Dutch smuggler as he did, Ken more than half expected Van Tromp to weaken and abandon his lawless scheme when he found himself closely pursued. His doubt was whether Bully Samson's influence would be strong enough to nerve the Dutchman to desperate measures. But certainly he had not expected what he saw now. Bully Samson, single-handed, had seized the command of the Dutch schooner. Ken's face was grave as he lowered the glasses.

"They're putting on more sail!" remarked Hudson. "Dutchy doesn't seem afraid for his sticks now."

"Dutchy hasn't a say in the matter now," answered Ken. "Bully Samson is giving orders yonder. I fancy Van Tromp is sorry by this time that he

leagued with Bully Samson to kidnap John Chin."

Hudson whistled.

"Then we've got Samson to deal with, not the Dutchman."

"Yes; and he will be a harder nut to crack than a dozen Dutchmen," said King of the Islands.

"He's got some nerve!" said the Cornstalk half admiringly. "But he'll never get away with it. The crew must be against him—and we're coming up hand over fist. Hallo! That's from Samson!"

A rifle-shot whizzed across the deck of the Dawn. The Hiva-Oa men ducked and babbled excitedly. Koko, at the helm, laughed.

"Feller Samson no shootee all same King of the Islands," he said coolly. "No hit."

The bullet had passed a foot from the steersman of the ketch. Ken's face set hard, and he gripped his Winchester.

"Samson's opened the ball," he said. "Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

The boy trader went forward, rifle in hand, on to the tiny forecabin of the ketch.

The schooner, under crowded sail, was speeding on towards the island, clearly in view now. The shining lagoon could be seen, barred from the sea by long lines of coral reefs, save in one spot where a narrow channel opened and the sea broke in masses of white foam.

The goal of Bully Samson's quest was close at hand. A line of sheds could be seen against the tall palms beyond the white beach. On one of the shed roofs a Chinaman stood, staring across the lagoon and the reefs at the two vessels.

King of the Islands, lying behind his rifle, watched and waited. Ken was a first-class shot with the rifle; but even at short range shooting was difficult, with both ships plunging in a wild and turbid sea.

Twice again Samson's rifle cracked on the schooner, the bullets tearing through the great spread of canvas on the Dawn.

King of the Islands still waited.

The vessels were close enough now for him to hear the bull-voice of the freshcooter shouting defiance.

Still holding his fire, Ken shouted back:

"Heave to!"

The crack of Samson's rifle was his only answer.

Ken fired in return, and the bully of the Shark dropped his huge bulk into cover. Ken shouted to the steersman:

"Stand clear, or you go down!"

The Dutch boatswain gave him a scared stare, and stared still more fearfully at Bully Samson crouching within six feet of him, with menacing rifle, glaring at him over the barrel.

"Keep her steady!" grated Samson. "King of the Islands may miss you, but I shan't miss you, you Dutch scum! Keep her steady!"

The Dutch boatswain would have been glad enough to abandon the wheel and leave the schooner to yaw, but under the fierce eyes of Bully Samson he dared not. He held on his course.

Ken could have shot the man dead at the wheel; but Bully Samson's methods were not his. He was ready to sink the Oom Pieter with all hands, if it was necessary for the rescue of John Chin; but he would not shed blood if he could help it. He fired, sending the bullet within a few inches of the Dutchman's head. The steersman, with a howl of terror, relaxed his grip, and the schooner yawed.

"Keep her steady!" yelled Bully Samson; and the Dutchman grasped the spokes again just in time.

Bully Samson leaped to his feet, his eyes blazing over his rifle. He knew that the next shot from the ketch would drop the steersman, with disastrous results to the schooner. He fired at Ken, as King of the Islands was pulling trigger.

There was a sharp cry from the ketch. Fortune had favoured Bully Samson once more. His bullet struck the boy trader's rifle, glanced off it, and

grazed Ken's shoulder. Ken's bullet flew yards wide of the mark; and the schooner forged on.

Crack!

A bullet from Kit Hudson narrowly missed the bully of the Shark and drove him back to cover.

Hudson ran forward.

"Ken! You're hit!"

"Only a scratch, I think!" panted King of the Islands. The blood was running down his arm from under the silk shirt.

Hudson's face was tense with anxiety. But it was only a deep scratch, and King of the Islands gave it no further heed when it was bandaged. On board the schooner Bully Samson gave the steersman a menacing glare.

"Keep her steady, you Dutch scum! I guess I've stopped the fire for a spell! Here, you feller boy!"

"Yessar!"

"You get below plenty quick, fetchee Chinese along deck. You no plenty quick, me kill you dead."

The black seamen were quick enough. They had never obeyed Captain van Tromp as they obeyed Bully Samson. Five or six of the blacks scuttled below, and returned in a matter of seconds, hustling John Chin on deck.

The Chinese merchant, impassive as ever, with his dragon-painted umbrella under his arm, stepped out of the companion. His slanting eyes turned for a moment to the Dawn, and then fixed calmly on Bully Samson.

"What wantee?" he asked.

"I guess you know how to steer a craft, John Chin?"

The Chinaman nodded.

"Me savvy velly well."

"Take the wheel from that Dutch scum."

The merchant of Lalinge hesitated a moment.

"Look ye here," said Samson, in a deep, savage voice. "You can see we're just on the island—the pearl island. I guess I want you to take this packet through the channel in the reef. You get me? King of the Islands won't shoot

down his old pal, I reckon. Take the wheel, you scum, and steer to my orders, or I'll give the black boys the word to break all your joints with a belaying-pin—the way the Malaites do with their prisoners when they make *ka-kal* of them! Sharp's the word!"

There was no doubt that the bully of the Shark meant every word he said. The Chinaman knew the custom of the cannibal islanders, of cracking the joints of a prisoner before the hapless victim was placed in the cooking oven. For a second the impassive calmness of the little old Chinaman wavered. But it was only for a moment.

"Me takee wheel!" he said in his soft voice.

"Get a move on! You can skulk away, you Dutch scum!" snarled Bully Samson to the boatswain of the Oom Pieter.

The Dutchman was only too glad to skulk away.

John Chin stood at the helm, a queer little figure in his loose-fitting garments, blown out by the wind, his precious umbrella hooked on his arm. Bully Samson, his rifle in his grip, glared towards the ketch, ready to exchange shots with King of the Islands.

But King of the Islands was not firing now. The scratch on his shoulder gave him little trouble, but Bully Samson had effectually stopped his fire by placing John Chin at the wheel. If King of the Islands had wanted proof that the kidnapped Chinese merchant was on board the Oom Pieter, he had it now; the little Chinaman was in full view from the ketch.

"The swab!" muttered Kit Hudson.

"He's making the Chink run the channel with the schooner. We can't stop him now, Ken, unless we run them aboard."

Ken's eyes glittered over his rifle. But he could not fire now at the steersman of the schooner; and Bully Samson was crouching in cover of a stack of yam sacks, which he had ordered the black boys to pile up along the rail. Ken dropped the butt of his rifle to the deck.

In calmer waters he would have taken the risk of running alongside and boarding the Dutch schooner in the face of Bully Samson's fire. But the sea was running too high.

The schooner fled on, the ketch hanging by her starboard quarter like a staghound on the traces of his quarry. The lines of coral reefs that barred the lagoon of the pearl island were close at hand now, and the Oom Pieter was steering directly for the channel. Between the great rocks where the foam broke in masses of snowy white there was a space of less than twenty yards, and in the channel itself lines of foamy white showed where submerged reefs hid their teeth. The ketch dropped astern of the Oom Pieter, to follow her into the lagoon.

Bully Samson stared at the reefs and the foaming channel; and there was a shade of anxiety on his face.

"You've made this channel before, John Chin?" he snarled.

"Plenty muchee," said the Chinaman.

"King of the Islands has never been here?"

The Chinese shook his head.

"Can that swab Kit Hudson take a craft in?"

"Me tinkee."

Samson gritted his teeth.

"Then they'll follow us into the lagoon! Let them! I guess King of the Islands and his shipmate won't stop me from getting a grip on the pearls. Down mainsail!" roared Samson. "You feller boy look lively!"

Under headsails the schooner glided into the channel. On either side the surf roared and thundered, and the foam dashed over the rail of the Oom Pieter. The ketch was dead astern now, and Samson hardly glanced at her. The dangers of the coral channel occupied his thoughts. In a high wind, with a heavy sea, there was danger for any craft running into the lagoon, even with a steersman who knew the channel like a book, as John Chin knew it. By the group of sheds under the palms, beyond the lagoon, five or six Chinese were clustered, staring at the strange ship

that was coming in—a new happening at the pearl island, hitherto visited only by John Chin's own brig. Bully Samson's eyes dwelt upon them for a moment, and then turned again upon the seething waters of the coral channel.

The mask-like calmness of the Chinese merchant's face was broken by a smile—a strange, slow smile that, as Bully Samson saw it, sent a sudden chill to his heart.

"You durned Chink!" he panted hoarsely. "If you dare to play tricks

He had no time to finish.

The words were still on his lips when the schooner struck. The next moment the boiling surf was raging over the deck, and Bully Samson and the yelling crew were struggling for their lives in the wild waters.

CHAPTER 21.

On the Pearl Island.

"SHE'S struck!"

Kit Hudson shouted out the words.

"My Sam!" muttered King of the Islands. "John Chin has piled her up!"

Every eye on the Dawn was strained on the Dutch schooner. The Dawn had not yet entered the coral channel, but over the low reefs the Oom Pieter was fully visible from the sea. The pursuing ketch was so close behind that little passing on the deck of the Dutchman escaped the keen eye of King of the Islands. He watched the little Chinaman at the wheel, his loose garments blowing in the wind, his ivory face expressionless. He watched Bully Samson towering over the little Celestial with anxiety in his rugged, bearded face. He watched the black crew, terror in their looks as the surf boiled and foamed round them over the sharp teeth of innumerable rocks. And then suddenly the crash came, and the schooner, which a moment before had walked the waters like a thing of life,

crumpled up like matchwood on the fangs of the coral reef.

"Piled up!" repeated Hudson. "Yes, by gum! John Chin could run that passage with his eyes shut if he liked. He's piled her up in the channel. That's his answer to Bully Samson!"

Ken's face was tense.

"We've got to save him. I know he can swim like a dolphin, but in that surf—"

"He's taken the chance," said Hudson. "He's grit all through, Chink as he is. But we'll save him yet."

The ketch was gliding into the passage of the reefs now. The schooner, crumpling on the reef, was not a hundred yards distant in a straight line, but the passage was tortuous, and there was thrice that distance for the ketch to cover, under a rag of canvas, creeping cautiously through the jaws of death.

Kit Hudson knew the passage—he had made it many times in John Chin's brig—and he knew its perils. He rapped out staccato orders to Koko, every order instantly obeyed by the Kanaka at the wheel. To King of the Islands it seemed that the Dawn would never reach the wreck. But he stood silent, with set teeth. The passage was dangerous in calm waters. With the sea running high it bristled with perils, and an instant's recklessness meant the piling up of the Dawn on the glimmering teeth of coral. And that would not help John Chin.

The schooner, pounding madly on the rocks in the raging surf, was going fast to pieces. Her masts had gone at the first shock, and the slanting deck was cumbered with spars and tangled rigging, swept and torn by the wild waters that poured over her. The foam was dotted with the black heads of the crew, swimming for their lives, or clinging to broken spars.

Bully Samson, swept from his feet by the rush of the seas that broke in fury over the wreck, found himself jammed against the stump of the mainmast, and he clung to it and held on, half-stunned, for many minutes.

Through the water that flooded

down the companion the fat and terrified face of Captain van Tromp glimmered. The fat Dutchman rolled out on deck, babbling with terror. The next moment a heavy sea caught him and swept him away from his schooner. His bulky body and spluttering fat face vanished in the foam.

Bully Samson dragged himself up and, holding on to the slanting rail, glared about him with maddened eyes. He had reached the pearl island at last, and this was how he had reached it! The water surged over him and round him up to his bull-neck as he clung there, his savage eyes seeking John Chin. In those desperate moments, with a sinking wreck under his feet, the wild surf roaring round and over him, and his pursuer drawing nearer and nearer, Bully Samson's thoughts were of vengeance—vengeance upon the Chinaman who had played him this deadly trick.

Among the black heads that dotted the waters he caught a glimmer of green. It was the glimmer of the dragon-painted umbrella.

John Chin was already at a good distance, swimming for the lagoon. The light, spare Chinaman seemed to float like a cork on the tossing waters. He was swimming for his life, but he had not abandoned his umbrella. For twenty years John Chin had been a prominent figure in the islands, and he had seldom or never been seen without the green umbrella with the painted dragons. The silken loop attached to the ivory handle had been passed round his neck as he stood at the helm of the schooner. And now Samson's fierce eyes picked it out in the swirling waters.

Most of the swimmers had disappeared now. A sinister fin glided in the water near where the Dutchmen had been. Samson's fierce glance swept round. The ketch was looming over the rocks, close at hand, and he caught the tense stare of King of the Islands, almost within a biscuit's throw. Then he plunged into the sea and swam.

Strong swimmer as he was, a giant of strength, Bully Samson had to fight for

his life in the roaring surf of the coral passage. Again and again he was swept away by eddying waters, but he fought and struggled on, breathless, buffeted, but savagely determined, and he was in the calmer waters of the lagoon at last. Behind him the fragments of the Dutch schooner were pounding to splinters on the reefs.

Dripping, panting, almost exhausted, Bully Samson dragged himself ashore at last on the shelving beach of the lagoon.

He dragged himself to his knees in the soft sand and powdered coral, dashed the spray from his eyes, and stared round him. He had lost sight of John Chin, but he saw him again now. Three or four of the Oom Pieter's crew had struggled ashore, and lay exhausted on the beach. Samson did not give them a glance. His eyes fixed with deadly ferocity on John Chin, lying on the sand not a dozen yards away. He had reached the pearl island a wrecked castaway. But vengeance at least was in his grasp. Only for a long minute he rested on his knees, and then he dragged himself up and tramped across the sand towards the merchant of Lalinge.

John Chin had been lying motionless, as if exhausted by his struggle through the surf. But as Bully Samson tramped towards him the little Chinaman stirred. His eyes had been on the bully of the Shark, and he rose quickly to his feet and unlooped the umbrella from his neck. Umbrella in hand, he stood and faced the freebooter, his mask-like face as calm as ever, though he was breathing hard.

Bully Samson's eyes fairly glomted on him. In the far distance four or five Chinese were clustered by the sheds; but if they came to John Chin's help they would not reach him in time. The ketch, steered through the perilous passage by Kit Hudson, had not yet reached the lagoon. The merchant of Lalinge was at Bully Samson's mercy, and there was as much mercy in the freebooter's heart as in that of a shark.

His rifle had gone down with the wreck. Bully Samson's hand closed on his knife as he drew nearer to the impassive Celestial.

"You durned Chink!" His voice was husky with fatigue and fury. "You durned yellow hound! You've double-crossed me! You've pilled up the schooner!" He choked with rage. "But you're in my hands, you Chink! King of the Islands will never save you now!"

"Bully Samson gleet fool and gleet lascal!" said the Chinaman in his soft voice and pidgin English. "Bully Samson velly gleet fool tinkee John Chin lun passage for him. Bully Samson wantee findee pearl island. Findee pearl island now! How you likee?" The Chinaman grinned. "Bully Samson gleet fool!"

With a hoarse cry Bully Samson sprang at the Chinaman.

The next moment he staggered back as a flashing point of steel reached him. The Chinaman had been unarmed. The kidnappers had seen to that when he was taken on board the Dutch schooner. But now a long, thin, rapier-like blade was glittering in his hand, and the Chinaman grinned over it at the bully of the Shark.

"Bully Samson no savee John Chin's umbrella!" he said.

"You durned Chink!" panted Samson.

He leapt back again, barely escaping another thrust of the long blade. He understood now why the Chinaman had preserved his umbrella with such care. The handle of the umbrella was a sword-stick, and John Chin had drawn the hidden blade. The freebooter's knife was in his grasp, but the knife was of little use against the long blade that flashed like lightning in the hand of the Chinaman.

He leaped back again and again, the Chinaman following him up with deadly purpose. His slanting eyes gleamed. Bully Samson had reached the secret island of pearls, and it looked as if he had reached it only to find his

death at the hands of the man he had kidnapped.

But for the fact that John Chin was exhausted by the struggle in the surf the bully of the Shark could never have escaped the thrusting steel.

John Chin paused, panting for breath, his eyes gleaming at the freebooter over the glittering weapon in his hand.

"You durned Chink!" Samson's voice was hoarse with rage. "You heathen swab!" He gripped his knife hard, tempted to leap at the Chinaman at all risks. But there was death in the ready blade extended to meet him, and in the cold, gleaming almond-eyes that watched him over it. The little Chinaman was almost sinking with fatigue, but he stood ready, watchful, alert. "You pigtailed heathen lubber!"

Bully Samson's hand shot up suddenly. He knew the South Sea Islander's trick of throwing the knife. With almost lightning speed the heavy knife flew from his hand, like an arrow, at the ivory face of the Chinaman.

Crash!

John Chin had been looking for it, and he was ready. His blade met the whizzing knife in mid-air and turned it in its flight, and it dropped on the sand by his side.

The Chinaman grinned.

"Bully Samson gleet fool!"

CHAPTER 22.

John Chin's Prisoner!

JOHN CHIN suddenly leapt forward, the point of his rapier snaking to the giant's throat.

"Move and I killee!" hissed the Chinaman.

Bully Samson stood rooted to the spot. The cold light in the Celestial's eyes sent a cold shiver down his spine. He managed to turn his gaze from John Chin to the lagoon, where the Dawn had successfully negotiated the dangerous channel and was approaching the shore.

Within a few moments the whaleboat had been lowered and Ken and Kit were rowed ashore.

Kit searched Samson for arms and discovered a revolver and a pouch of cartridges. He tossed them on to the beach.

"You won't need those any more!" The Cornstalk grinned and turned to the Chinaman. "We—Ken and I—guessed that Bully Samson had captured you when you failed to turn up. So we came to rescue you, and made for this island as being the most likely place to find you."

"Many thanks, honourable sir," John Chin bowed. "My unworthy self is velly much in debt for honourable Hudson and King of the Islands."

"That's all right," returned Ken. "You've really got to thank Koko for finding you. He's the one that guessed what had happened when you disappeared."

Kit Hudson was eyeing Samson doubtfully, then he turned to Ken and John Chin.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked the Cornstalk. "He knows the secret of the island, and if he gets away alive—"

"Allee light!" said John Chin's soft voice. "You leave Bully Samson to me. Takee plenty care Bully Samson no gettee way. Trust John Chin."

"A prisoner on this island?" asked Ken.

John Chin nodded.

"You'll play square with me, John Chin." King of the Islands' brow was stern for a moment. "I can't leave a white man to be murdered by—"

"John Chin square man, allee same, King of the Islands. John Chin promise no killee Bully Samson."

"That's good enough!" said Ken. "I know your word is as good as a white man's. That goes! Keep him as safe as you like; he's found out the secret of the pearl island, and you'd be a fool to let him go. You've asked for

this, Bully Samson, and you're getting off cheap."

"Up hook!" said King of the Islands.

The sun of a new day was blazing down on the pearl island.

When the ketch was ready for sea and the anchor raised, John Chin stood by the rail looking back at the beach with a smile on his ivory face, a slow and implacable smile.

The Chinese pearl-fishers were turning to work upon the piles of pearl oysters rotting in the sun that lay by the sheds.

Among the Chinese towered a huge and bulky form. It was Bully Samson; and chains were padlocked on his muscular legs and on his powerful arms and round his brawny bull-neck.

The freebooter, giant of strength as he was, was helpless as an infant in the hands of the pearl-fishers. There was a clinking and chinking of metal as he moved, and it echoed on the wind across the shining lagoon to the ketch.

John Chin smiled.

"Bully Samson no likee work," he remarked placidly. "Plaps he likes some day! Plaps he solly makee John Chin steer for pearl island! Bully Samson velly strong man, velly useful on pearl island. What you tinkee?"

King of the Islands did not answer. He turned away and called orders to the Hiva-Oa crew. Bully Samson had brought this fate upon himself, and there was nothing more to be said.

The Dawn cut the long rollers of the Pacific and the pearl island dropped astern, and was lost in the haze of the tropic sun. On the wings of the wind the graceful ketch flew like a sea-bird over the blue waters—back to Lalinge, back to the old trade of drumming for copra and pearl-shell.

Come what might, Ken still had the Dawn—and could ever skipper wish for a better craft?—a staunch pal in Kit and a jolly, happy crew! He was going back to the old trade—back to the old roving, happy life of King of the Islands!

THE END.

OUR MAGAZINE CORNER.

SOUTH SEA SKILL.

A voyage through the South Seas is no longer the perilous journey it once was. Civilisation has penetrated to all the thousand-and-one palm-fringed islands of the Pacific, and where head-hunters once roamed on their blood-thirsty raids, the air hideous with their savage war-cries, a peaceful trading-station may stand to-day.

But though that sort of excitement has died down, the white visitor to the islands can still be provided with plenty of thrills. To watch pearl divers at work is one of them. A swimmer almost before he can walk, the brown-skinned native slips down through the warm, transparent water like a fish. Outwardly without a tremor of fear, he knows that every visit to the lagoon bed, forty feet or more below, in search of the precious pearl oysters, may be his last.

The great man-eating shark, for all its lightning, ferocious attack, is perhaps the least of his dangers. Armed only with a knife, islanders have been known to kill a sea-tiger or drive it away single-handed. Far more terrible are monsters like the octopus, the squid, and the giant clam.

The last, sometimes measuring more than ten feet across, lurks beneath the under-water vegetation until the unwary diver's foot touches its open shell. Instantly the razor-like edges close, and then begins a desperate fight for life. Fierce tugging on the guide-line brings two or three of the captive's comrades diving to the rescue, one armed with an iron-wood spike that he thrusts between the slightly open shells of the clam, loosening the terrible grip till the imprisoned man can wriggle free.

All in the day's work to a pearl diver,

yet seconds like those are crammed with thrills enough to last most people a lifetime.

The South Sea islander is just as much at home on as in the water. With a stout line, some bait, a heavy mallet, and an outrigger canoe barely half the weight of his prey, he needs no help in catching a fifteen-foot shark, while a crew of Solomon Islanders, going "all out," can send their great war canoe through the water at a simply astounding speed.

Their skill with outriggers is almost uncanny. They can take their unwieldy-looking craft skimming like birds over waves big enough to demolish a house. Perhaps the biggest test of their nerve and daring, however, comes in that exhilarating South Sea sport—surf-riding. Starting from a point a mile or more from the shore, and standing fully erect on their narrow boards, the natives allow themselves to be carried from one great roller to another, moving slowly at first, then with swiftly-gathering speed, till the whole yelling crowd is riding along at forty miles an hour.

All you have to do is to keep your balance and let the mighty Pacific do the rest. Sounds easy, doesn't it? But don't try it when there are any sharks around, in case you fall off!

The Islander's spear and bow and arrow are still deadly weapons—at fishing. One instant he will be poised motionless on the lagoon bank or some jutting rock; the next, a brown arm slashes down and a spear cuts through the water with unerring aim, followed at once by its owner to make sure of his kill. Torch fishing, at night, with lighted flares held over the surface of the lagoon to attract the swarms of rainbow-coloured fish, is carried out in practically the same way. It's exciting—and dangerous, however, when a vicious, spike-nosed monster leaps clean out of the water at any part of the fisher's body that it can see.

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