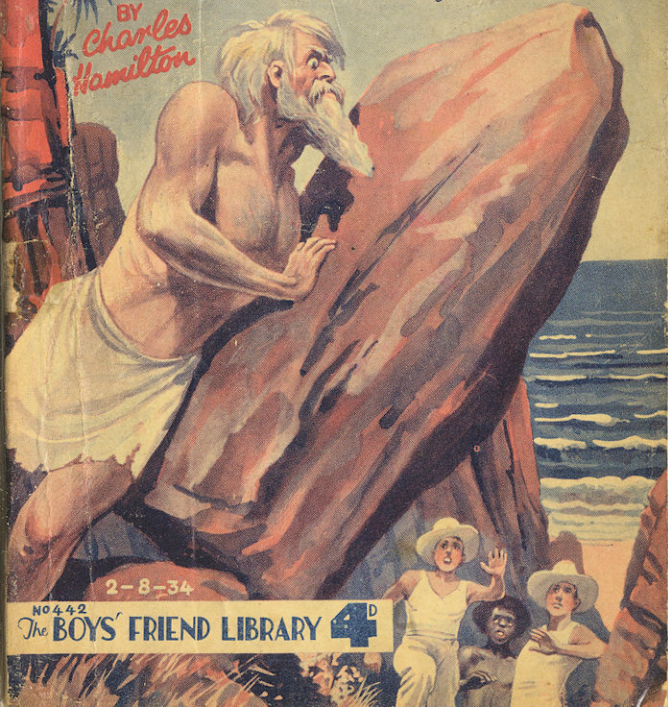


The *WILD MAN* of the ISLAND

'KING OF THE ISLANDS' In An Exciting South Seas Yarn

BY
*Charles
Hamilton*



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The WILD MAN of the ISLAND



By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON.**

THE SKIPPER WITHOUT A SHIP! *When Ken King, famed all over the Pacific as KING OF THE ISLANDS, lost his ketch the 'Dawn,' things looked pretty bad for him and his mate, Kit Hudson. But they fought back grimly against fate and their foes, and out of disaster came triumph and fortune! This engrossing South Seas yarn is Charles Hamilton at his best.*

CHAPTER 1.

Out of the Storm!

KIT HUDSON, mate of the ketch Dawn, grasped the arm of his skipper—Ken King, famous all over the Pacific as King of the Islands—and pointing suddenly to a grim rock that rose above the tossing sea, exclaimed excitedly:

"A man!"

Ken stared incredulously, and was about to speak when Koko, the Kanaka bo'sun, who was at the wheel, chimed in:

"No man stop along Maia!"

"But I saw hi n!" declared Kit positively. "A shipwrecked man, I suppose. Nobody else could be there!"

Ken, puzzled, stared through the murk. Black storm-clouds lowered ever the Pacific, and the ketch tossed like a cork on the mighty rollers. An angry, blood-red sun was setting in the west. Under a rag of canvas the Dawn was running before the wind, and to the ears of all on board came the roaring boom of the surf on Maia.

Maia, a lonely rock that rose sentinel-like from the ocean, a hundred miles from all other land, was uninhabited, save by lizards and crabs and sea-birds. A few palms clustered at the foot of the towering rock, but there was no water save rain-pools in the crevices.

And far around Maia ran coral reefs, many of them submerged, others jutting with knife edges above the water, perilous to approach. No skipper ever came near Maia if he could help it, and King of the Islands was giving it a wide berth as he passed, running before the wind.

His eyes on the half-sunken reefs, he was anxious to leave Maia astern. But now his attention had been called to the summit of the high rock. Black and grim, it stood dark against the darkening sky, backed by black clouds. Round it the wind howled and roared.

"I see nothing, Kit."

"I saw him, I tell you! Just for a second he stood clear against the sky. I reckon he can't stand against the wind! It must hit him like a hammer up there."

King of the Islands scanned the rock again, towering seventy feet above the sea. His look was dubious.

"A man on Maia!" he said slowly. "If you're sure, Kit—"

But the rock seemed absolutely bare. There was no sign of life on it. Even the gulls were clustering down in shelter from the fierce wind.

"Look!" shouted Hudson as, struggling against the wind that seemed to be tearing him away, a figure suddenly stood out distinct on the summit of the rock—a slight figure in tattered ducks that fluttered in the wind. A red-spotted handkerchief was bound over the head. The face, at the distance,

was indistinguishable, but it glimmered white.

"Feller white man stop along Maia!" exclaimed Kaio-lalulalonga in astonishment. The figure, fighting the wind, waved frantically to the ketch far below. Ken waved back, but it was doubtful whether his answering signal was seen. The ketch was speeding on. Already the figure was growing smaller in the increasing distance, and suddenly it vanished.

The shipmates of the Dawn guessed why. The furious wind had hurled the castaway over, and he was now probably sprawling on the uneven summit, out of sight. There was no longer any doubt that there was a man on Maia.

"My sainted Sam!" King of the Islands compressed his lips. "A shipwrecked man, Kit—and we can't take him off! No ship, no boat, could live near the Maia reefs in this sea!" muttered King of the Islands.

Then, far in the distance, the figure in ragged shirt and duck trousers reappeared, on his knees now, his hands clasped together and stretched out towards the ketch.

It was an appeal no sailorman could have resisted, least of all King of the Islands. But the boy trader was helpless, for the approach to Maia was fatal except in the calmest sea. Even in a calm the currents that boiled among the long lines of reef were deadly.

"You feller Lompo!" shouted Ken. "You fetch feller gun along cabin, along deck plenty too quick altogether."

"Yes, sar!"

Lompo darted below, to reappear swiftly, a loaded Winchester in his hands.

King of the Islands took the rifle and fired shot after shot into the air. The reports were swept away on the wind.

"That white feller heard that feller gun speake, ear belong him!" said Kaio-lalulalonga, often called Koko, for short. The signal shots told the castaway on Maia that he was seen—that

there was hope for him. More Ken could not do. He could not reach Maia—could not approach the storm-swept rock, could not even heave the ketch to. The Dawn rushed on, and the figure crouching on the summit of the desolate rock grew toy-like in the distance.

Darkness rushed down on the sea. Maia and the castaway, clinging to the rock, were lost to sight.

Ken, his brow knitted, handed the rifle back to Lompo.

"We can do no more, Kit! He knows now, at any rate, that white men have seen him! We've left him with hope, at least!"

"Thank Heaven we could do as much!" said the mate. "A shipwrecked man on that horrible rock—not a sail to be seen in three months! Ken, we've got to save him!"

"No doubt about that, Kit!" Ken smiled faintly. "But when this gale has blown itself out, Kit, it will still be days before any craft can get near Maia. And—"

He broke off. Ken King was a trader, and to a trader time was money. Saving this man on Maia meant beating back against adverse winds, day after weary day, with trade going to "pot," appointments postponed, cargoes lost! It meant heavy loss to the traders of the Dawn. And there were many trading skippers in the Pacific who would have contented themselves with reporting what they had seen on Maia, leaving the rescue to others—to chance!

But that was not the way of King of the Islands!

CHAPTER 2.

"I'll leave it to you!"

BLACK FURLEY stepped from his whaleboat to the deck of the Dawn, which had just dropped anchor in the lagoon at Lukwe. King of the Islands eyed him grimly, and Kit Hudson gave his belt a hitch to bring his six-shooter a little nearer to

his hand. They were a lawless crew on the island of Lukwe, and Black Furley was the roughest and most lawless of the lot.

Pearler, pearl-poacher, kidnapper, and many other things, the black-bearded ruffian of Lukwe had a bad reputation all through the Islands. Ken had had trouble with the man before, and had got the better of him, which did not make Black Furley feel kindly towards him. As Furley came out of his whaleboat, the shipmates of the Dawn watched him warily.

Black Furley grinned as he saw Hudson's action.

"I ain't come aboard for trouble, shipmates," he said. "You don't want that gun, Hudson."

"What do you want, Furley?" asked King of the Islands crisply. Ken had business with some of the traders of Lukwe, but Black Furley certainly was not among the number.

"News!" answered the Lukwe pearler promptly.

"Little enough news," said Ken. "We're on a round trip among the Islands, and we've seen no news since month-old papers at Fushima. You don't want me to tell you there has been a gale—I reckon it's been scattering the nuts on Lukwe."

"You're last from Fushima? The Flamingo went down in the waters you've sailed over," said Black Furley. "You've heard?"

"Not a word," answered Ken. "They hadn't the news at Fushima when we left. But that's a good time back. The Flamingo of Sydney?"

"Lost with all hands!" replied Black Furley.

"That's bad!"

Ken was concerned to hear of the loss of the Sydney steamer, but he was surprised to see the black-bearded pearler of Lukwe concerning himself about it. He had never expected to hear of Black Furley troubling himself about the fate of shipwrecked seamen and passengers.

"It was a month and more ago," said Black Furley. "Reported lost with all

hands! One of her boats was picked up, stove in. That's all that's known of what happened to the Flamingo of Sydney. But there's people who reckon—or hope, at least—that there may be survivors." He eyed the ship-mates narrowly.

"I'll give you the office, Ken King—you'll hear all about it as soon as you step ashore, anyhow. If you choose to join in, there's nothing to stop you."

"Join in what?" asked Ken puzzled.

"The hunt for the girl," Black Furley grinned. "One of the lost passengers of the Flamingo was a girl—Miss Edna Blake. You'll remember when the liner Mindanao was lost, and Grant Blake, the millionaire, lost with her?"

"A year or more ago," said Ken. "A reward was offered, but Blake has never been found. He's gone for good, I reckon."

"So do I," rejoined Furley. "But his daughter wouldn't believe it. She chartered the Flamingo to search for him, and now the Flamingo has been wrecked, and a Sydney firm are offering a thousand pounds for news of the girl, seeing that the inheritance to the Blake millions is sort of messed up. And I could do with a thousand pounds!"

"Oh!" King of the Islands understood now. "That's your interest in the Flamingo, is it?"

"Just that!" answered Black Furley coolly. "I'm not worrying a whole heap about the fore-castle hands and Kanakas that went down, nor yet about the after-guard. But I reckon I'd like to handle that thousand."

"Little enough chance," said Kit Hudson.

"I know that! But there's a sporting chance! A boat may have got away. They'd save the girl, if they could. There's a sporting chance that the girl's still living. I can tell you that since the news came from Sydney plenty of skippers are looking round and asking questions of every trading schooner and native canoe they meet. If the girl's alive, the man who finds

her gets a thousand pounds. You've seen nothing?"

Ken shook his head.

"No floating wreckage—"

"Nothing."

"Well, I reckoned I'd ask. Plenty of lubbers ashore will be asking. No craft can come in at Lukwe now without being asked for news of the Flamingo.

"She was last heard of at Lolo," he went on, "and would have called at Fushima if she hadn't gone down in the hurricane. She may have been driven off her course and hit a reef somewhere. Her engines ought to have been scrapped ten years ago. She can't have been far off Fushima when she went down. Heard of any wreckage going ashore there?"

King of the Islands shook his head.

"Of course, she's a goner!" grunted the pearler. "I reckon I'll lose a week's time for nothing running across to Fushima in my lugger." He grunted again, and stepped back to the rail.

Evidently the Lukwe pearler was giving no thought whatever, personally, to the lost passenger of the Flamingo. His only thought was of the remote chance of picking up the reward offered by the Sydney merchant.

"Hold on!" said Ken.

Black Furley turned back eagerly.

"If you know anything—if you've seen anything—" he began.

"Nothing, as I told you! But if you're running down to Fushima, you'll pass in sight of Maia."

"I reckon not! I'm giving the reefs of Maia a wide berth."

"The gale's over," said Ken. "You'll find calm waters round Maia now. There's a man on Maia—"

"What about it?" asked Black Furley, staring at him.

"We sighted him, but we couldn't take him off in the rough weather," explained King of the Islands. "But if you're running to Fushima, you can put in at Maia by losing only a few hours."

"To take off a castaway?" asked Furley derisively. "Catch me trusting my lugger among the reefs of Maia! I reckon the man can stay there till he grows a white beard before my lugger takes him off!"

Ken compressed his lips. He was willing, at any cost, to run back to Maia, as soon as the weather permitted, to rescue the hapless castaway, but his course was set for Lalinge, in the opposite direction. The wind was favourable for Lalinge, but the return to Maia meant days of weary tacking, a heavy loss to the boy trader.

But any craft booked for Fushima could raise Maia at the cost of only a few hours lost.

"Look here, Furley," said the boy trader. "That man on Maia has got to be saved. You know what it means to me if I tack back to Maia. If you're for Fushima, you can do in a few hours what would cost me a week. It's up to you, as well as any other skipper, to take a starving castaway off a lonely rock."

"You're thinking of chucking away a week, beating back to Maia to take off some scarecrow of a beggared sailorman?" Black Furley laughed.

"Yes, if there's no other way. But you——"

"I reckon I'll leave it to you, King of the Islands!" grinned the Lukwe pearler.

"Do you call yourself a sailorman?" snapped King of the Islands scornfully. "Look here, Furley, it would cost you a few hours——"

"And the chance of piling up my lugger! Forget it!" said Black Furley. He stepped down into his whale-boat, and his Lukwe boys pulled for the beach.

King of the Islands had a very busy day at Lukwe. The shipmates of the Dawn had agreed that the man on Maia had to be saved. And if he was to be saved, they had to save him. But it was not a light matter to the boy traders.

It was up to Furley, as much as to

any other skipper in the South Seas, to rescue a castaway on a lonely rock. And what meant a heavy loss to King of the Islands would have meant only a few hours' time to the Lukwe pearler, for Maia lay only a score of miles off his course to Fushima.

"The swab!" growled King of the Islands, as his eyes fell on Black Furley's lugger gliding out of the lagoon.

"The lubber!" said Kit Hudson. "I rather wish we'd chucked Black Furley into the lagoon now."

"Well, that wouldn't have helped," Ken smiled. "We've got to make up our minds to it, Kit."

And having made up their minds to it, the shipmates of the Dawn groused no further.

On Lukwe, they found that the chief topic was the loss of the Flamingo, and the hunt for the "thousand-pound" girl, as Edna Blake was called on the beach.

Many skippers were keeping a keen eye open for traces of the wreckage of the steamer, in the faint hope of picking up the reward offered by the Sydney merchant for news of the lost heiress.

But of all the skippers that used Lukwe as a port of call, only Black Furley thought it worth while to make a special trip Fushima way. And Furley was influenced rather by the largeness of the offered reward than by any real hope of picking up news of the lost passenger of the Flamingo.

King of the Islands heard plenty of talk on the subject but gave it little heed. He had other matters on his mind.

Early the following morning the Dawn sailed out of Lukwe. Outside the reef there was plenty of wind, though it was not the wind that King of the Islands wanted. He suppressed a sigh as he saw a Lukwe schooner speeding before the wind for Lalinge, making nine or ten knots. The wind that sped the schooner had to be fought against by the ketch, beating back wearily for Maia.

There was still a heavy swell on the sea from the late gale, but Ken had no doubt that the sea would be calm enough by the time he made Maia. It was not likely to be a rapid run, and it proved to be far from rapid. The Dawn could sail as near to the wind as any ketch in the Pacific, and King of the Islands knew how to get every ounce of speed out of his craft. But adverse winds were adverse winds, and it was long and weary work.

The Hiva-Oa crew, lazy like all Kanakas, jumped actively to work under the eye of the boy skipper, cackling cheerily to the incessant swing of the boom. But even the light-hearted cackle of the Kanakas died away when the sun set and the tall hill of Lukwe was still in sight astern.

The next day a sail was sighted on the rolling sea.

"Feller lugger he stop, sar!" said Kaio-lalulalonga. "Feller Furley be-long Lukwe!"

Ken stared across the heaving waters at the lugger, and smiled rather sourly at sight of the black-bearded Furley, who scowled at the ketch that was passing him on the same tack.

Black Furley was not getting an easy run to Fushima, and the Dawn easily out-sailed the lugger.

"The swab!" grunted Ken. Days of weary tacking lay before him, due to the selfishness of the Lukwe pearler. Easily enough Black Furley could have taken in Maia on his course down to Fushima.

It was some satisfaction to the ship-mates to leave the lugger labouring behind as the Dawn beat on. After Black Furley and his lugger had disappeared, no sail was sighted on the lonely waters. Sails were rare enough in those solitary seas, and steamers almost unknown.

Each day only the waste of rolling waters met the eyes that stared from the ketch. Steadily blew the adverse winds, and by long, long tacks the ketch fought her way to Maia. The swell left by the gale had gone, and the Dawn's prow cut through a calm

and sunny sea. With a favourable wind, King of the Islands would have made nothing of the run. But the wind did not shift, and every foot of the way had to be contested.

It was on the fifth day out from Lukwe that the high rock of Maia was raised on the sea-line ahead. Seldom did any skipper's eye fall gladly on that desolate rock, surrounded by dangerous reefs, but Ken King and Kit Hudson were deeply thankful to see it at last.

King of the Islands brought his binoculars to bear on the tall rock, scanning it eagerly for a sign of the castaway. On the high summit the gulls were screaming, but that was all.

The boy trader's brow was clouded. He had done his best, all that a skipper could do. But seven days had passed since the castaway had been seen signalling from Maia, and in that time it was possible that the man had perished.

The rock rose nearer and closer to view. But if the castaway was there he was not on the look-out, and had not seen the ketch. No sign of him was to be picked up.

"If we're too late—" muttered Ken, lowering the glasses. "Poor chap! He may have fancied himself abandoned—left to his fate!"

"If he's a sailorman, he would know that no craft could get near Maia in rough weather," said Hudson. "If there's food on the rock—"

"There's a bunch of palms, a few coconuts, and plenty of shell-fish," said Ken. "And rain-pools in the rock—he's got water. But—"

Slowly, laboriously, the ketch beat down to Maia. Every brown face on the ketch was grave now. Well the Kanakas knew the peril of the long lines of coral-reef over which the Pacific creamed!

Kaio-lalulalonga stood at the wheel, his strong brown hands on the spokes. King of the Islands watched the sea intently. A half-mile from the tall rock the Dawn was hove to and anchored, and King of the Islands ordered the whaleboat to be lowered.

CHAPTER 3.

"Give me water!"

"WASHY-WASHY along Maia!" rapped King of the Islands, and Koko and Lompo, Lufu and Tamo pulled steadily at the oars, while Ken steered.

Even in the calmest weather the surf broke with a thunderous roar on the reefs of Maia. Creamy foam surged round the whaleboat, and on all sides the teeth of the coral threatened her timbers. No skipper, if he could have helped it, would have risked a boat in such wild waters. It was not surprising, perhaps, that Black Furley had laughed at the idea!

More than once the whaleboat scraped on iron-like coral, and the hearts of the boat's crew leaped to their mouths. But under the boy trader's eye the Kanakas pulled steadily on.

High over the reefs towered the great rock, honeycombed with fissures where gulls had their nests. Not a blade of vegetation grew there. But on one side, at the foot of Maia, was a tiny beach, heaped with sand driven up by the Pacific rollers. There some earth had found a place, and a few stunted palms grew, with patches of straggling bush. There, if anywhere, the castaway would be found.

On the little beach the rollers came in, breaking with incessant thunder. The whaleboat threaded a perilous way, and a heavy roller bore her on to the little beach and bumped her there.

The Kanakas jumped out, grasped the boat, and dragged her on the sand. King of the Islands, drenched to the waist, stood on the beach and looked round.

"That white feller he no stop, sar!" said Kaio-lalulalonga, with a shake of his dusky head. Save for the roar of the surf, to which the ear was accustomed, there was silence. Seagulls, squatting on the rocks, blinked at the boat's crew.

"Ahoy!" shouted King of the Islands. But no reply came, save for the boom-

ing of echoes from the hollows of the high rock.

The boy trader tramped up the beach. Alive or dead, he was there to find the man on Maia. Not until he had made certain of the castaway's fate could he return to the waiting ketch. He could see no footprints in the sand. But the base of the rock was broken into fissures and caves, and it was likely enough that the man had selected one of the caves as a shelter.

Kaio-lalulalonga followed his white master, the other Kanakas remaining by the boat. There was a sudden exclamation from the brown boatswain; further.

"Feller foot he stop along this place, sar!"

Ken glanced quickly at the spot to which Koko's brown finger pointed—a faint mark in the sand. Keen as his eyes were, Ken would hardly have taken it for a footprint.

"You tinkee feller foot he stop, Koko?"

"Me tinkee, sar—one day, two day before," answered Kaio-lalulalonga.

Ken nodded. If the mark was a footprint, it was an old one, almost obliterated by wind and spray—one or two days old, as the boatswain declared. If the castaway was in one of the caves at the foot of the rock, it seemed that he could not have stirred out of his shelter during the past day or two. That was strange enough, as the weather had been fine and sunny since the end of the gale. It could only mean that he was unable to stir.

"Nother feller foot he stop!" said Kaio-lalulalonga. It was another faint trace in the sand. "Plenty feller foot belong that feller, sar."

It was a small footprint, strangely small for a sailorman. Taking a line from the first footprint to the second, Ken tramped on towards the great cliff at the back of the beach. Under the towering rock a cave opened before him, and, according to the footprints, the castaway must have entered the cave and never emerged again.

King of the Islands passed from brilliant sunlight into the deep shadow of the hollow rock, then made a sudden exclamation.

"White feller he stop!" said Kaio-lalulalonga, with satisfaction.

A dozen feet within the cave, stretched on a bed of sun-dried seaweed, lay a haggard figure. Evidently it was the castaway of Maia. He was not sleeping, nor completely unconscious. Through the half-closed eyelids the eyes glimmered feverishly in the shadows.

But the recumbent form made no movement, the pallid lips uttered no word as the boy trader approached. The castaway lived, but it was clear at a glance that he had suffered severely, and that he had laid down to die in the cave.

The face, worn and haggard as it was, looked strangely young, without a sign of beard or moustache. Ken judged that the castaway was a boy, probably younger than himself. His look was not in the least that of a sailor. A passenger, perhaps, from some wrecked ship, who by strange chance had been cast ashore at the foot of the lonely rock by one of the currents that raced round Maia.

The hands and the bare feet were thin, and the duck trousers and loose shirt seemed hardly half-filled by the form within. If the castaway had found food on Maia, he had found barely enough to keep body and soul together. And body and soul were near to parting when King of the Islands looked down with compassionate eyes on the castaway he had come so far to rescue.

Ken knelt by the seaweed bed, and touched the recumbent figure lightly on the shoulder.

"Shipmate," he said, "can you speak? We've come to take you off!"

The voice seemed to penetrate the mists of unconsciousness, for the half-closed lids opened a little wider and the feverish eyes stared at King of the Islands with understanding in them.

The pale lips moved, but Ken had to bend his head low to bear the faint whisper that came:

"Save me! Water—give me water!"

"Koko——" But Koko was already running down to the boat. He came swiftly back with water, and Ken placed a tin pannikin to the dry lips of the castaway, who leaned back, resting on the seaweed, after he had drunk. The eyes, large and dark, were fixed on Ken's sunburnt face. It seemed as if the hapless castaway could not realise that it was rescue at last—life, instead of death!

"I reckon I'll carry you down to the boat," said King of the Islands. "My ship's in the offing—we'll have you aboard pretty soon. You're saved now, shipmate."

The colourless lips moved again.

"I saw a ship—a ketch—it was long ago——" The husky whisper was barely audible.

"A week ago," said Ken, "but we couldn't put in then. We had to run before the gale. We got back as soon as we could. We saw you signalling from the top of the rock. We came back for you."

"Heaven bless you!" whispered the castaway. "How long—how long have I been here—on this terrible rock?"

"What ship were you on?" asked Ken.

"The Flamingo!"

King of the Islands started.

"The Sydney steamer?"

The castaway nodded.

"The Flamingo went down—with all hands, it is said—well over a month ago!" exclaimed Ken. "Maia is sixty miles out of the Flamingo's course—I reckon no one would have thought of looking for a survivor of the Flamingo on Maia. Was the steamer piled up here?"

"On the reefs!"

"I reckon the engines broke down, then, and she was driven far out of her course in the hurricane. You're alone here?"

"Alone—yes—alone!" The castaway

shuddered. The solitude of the desolate rock had been, perhaps, more terrible than the scanty food and the brackish water in the rain-pools.

"But you got ashore," said Ken. "I reckon it was a miracle that you got through alive!"

"I had a lifebelt—the mate put it on me when the ship struck. I was thrown on the sand—"

Ken nodded. He knew now the fate of the lost Flamingo. And if the steamer had come to grief on the reefs of Maia, it was not surprising that all hands had gone down. It was only surprising that even one of the ship's company had been cast ashore living. Some chance current had caught the boy, floating in the lifebelt, and carried him past the teeth of the coral where all others had been dashed to death.

The castaway sat up on the seaweed bed, supported by Ken's strong arm round his shoulders. There was a trace of colour in his cheeks now. He had half-starved on Maia, but it was despair, and the hopelessness of solitude that had stretched him on the seaweed bed in the cave to die. With hope came new life. He drank again from the pannikin, and a faint smile came on the wasted face.

Ken glanced round the cave. Close by the seaweed bed lay a seaman's dunnage bag, evidently cast ashore from the wreck of the Flamingo. The castaway followed his glance.

"That was all that came ashore—all that came from the wreck," he said. His voice was stronger now. "I found these clothes in it, and a knife that I used on the shellfish—"

Ken had wondered to see the boy, evidently no sailor, dressed in the duck trousers and shirt of a seaman, half a dozen sizes too large for him.

"Your troubles are over now," said Ken gently. "You can't walk, I reckon, but I'll carry you down to the boat."

"No! No!" The castaway flushed. "I can walk—help me, and I can walk to the boat!"

Ken gave him a hand to rise, but he

tattered and leaned heavily on the boy trader. Ken smiled.

"I reckon you've got to be carried," he said. "Your weight's nothing to me—here goes!" And he lifted the castaway like an infant.

"Anything you want to take aboard?" he asked.

"The bag—do not leave it! My own clothes are in the bag!"

"You feller Koko, you bring the dunnage!" Ken said.

With the castaway in his arms, he strode out of the cave, followed by Kaio-lalulalonga with the dunnage bag.

King of the Islands laid the castaway on a boat-cloak in the whaleboat, and the Kanakas ran the boat into the water and shoved off, fighting against the rollers that boomed on the little beach. The oars dashed, and King of the Islands steered through the reefs. Surf creamed and foamed round the boat, roaring and echoing.

Ken saw the castaway raise his head, look round him with terrified eyes, then withdraw his face into the cover of the boat-cloak, evidently preferring not to look upon the perils that surrounded him. But the boy trader had no time to give much attention to the castaway. All his attention was needed to get the boat safely back to the Dawn.

It was a long pull, and perilous. Getting off Maia was more difficult and dangerous than landing on the desolate islet. A cool head and an iron nerve were needed. King of the Islands had both. Cool and steady as he was, however, he was glad when the whaleboat emerged at last from the inferno of wild waters and ran under the quarter of the Dawn.

Hudson was looking down over the rail, his eyes on the castaway rolled in the boat-cloak.

"You've got him, Ken! Good luck!"

The castaway was helped on board, the mate of the Dawn eyeing him curiously; the whaleboat was swung up to the davits, and the Dawn made sail. Calm as the weather was, Ken was

anxious to get out of the dangerous vicinity of the lonely rock.

Hudson had taken the castaway down into the cabin, and Danny the cooky-boy set before him the best that his galley could provide. The mate of the Dawn returned to the deck, leaving the man of Maia to his meal.

The ketch was already leaving Maia astern. Glad enough were the shipmates to see the desolate rock sinking into the waves behind them and to feel the ketch running swiftly before the wind. The wind, against which they had struggled so many weary days, was now in their favour, and the Dawn flew over the sunny waters like a thing of life, under a white cloud of canvas. Far behind the creaming white wake of the Dawn, Maia sank into the Pacific.

"A quick run to Lalinge at this rate, Ken!" said Hudson. "We've lost plenty of time and money—but it was worth it to save that poor fellow. He looks little more than a kid. Who is he?"

"I haven't asked him his name, but he was a passenger on the Flamingo," said King of the Islands.

"She went down on Maia, then?" exclaimed the mate.

"So the boy says."

"Sixty miles out of her course, at least! Not much use Black Furley rooting about Fushima waters for the thousand-pound girl!" said Hudson.

"Not much use looking for that poor girl at all, or any other passenger of the Flamingo," said Ken. "The bones of the Flamingo lie under the reefs of Maia, and the castaway we've rescued was the only one that was thrown ashore."

"All we can do for the Sydney merchant is to let him know for certain Miss Blake's fate now that we know what happened to the Flamingo. I wish we could send him better news—but there was only one survivor of the steamer, and that's the boy below."

"Feller lugger, he comey along sea!" shouted Kaio-lalulalonga.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed Hudson. "Furley again!"

From the rim of the sea the Lukwe lugger, beating up against the wind, came in sight. Maia was below the sea-line now. Swift knots were reeling off as the Dawn flew before the wind. Black Furley, left far behind by the ketch when she beat up to Maia, was still labouring on his course to Fushima, and once more his lugger came in sight. Ken turned a grim look on the distant lug-sail.

"That's Furley's hooker right enough!" he declared. "He's got four or five more days of beating up to Fushima—and for nothing! Serve the swab right!"

"Right as rain!" agreed Hudson.

Now that the shipmates knew, from the man of Maia, the fate of the Flamingo, they knew how vain was Black Furley's quest in Fushima waters. He was not likely to find any trace of the wrecked steamer there—still less the thousand-pound girl!

"The swab!" repeated Ken. "If he'd consented to run into Maia for the castaway, like a decent sailorman, he would have learned what we've learned and saved himself a useless run to Fushima. Now let him run, and be hanged to him!"

Danny the cooky-boy came on deck and picked up the bag of dunnage that had been brought aboard at Maia. Apparently the castaway had sent him for it.

King of the Islands followed him below. The castaway had made a good meal, and looked much the better for it. There was colour in his cheeks, and the feverish light was gone from his eyes. He stood up as Ken entered the cabin.

"Feeling better?" asked Ken, with a smile.

"I can't tell you how much better!" The castaway's voice came clear and strong. "You've saved my life, Captain—"

He paused.

"King!" said Ken. "Sometimes called King of the Islands."

The dark eyes looked at him with new interest.

"I've heard of you, Captain King—your name's well known in Sydney. From what I've heard of you, it was like you to come to my help on that fearful rock. If you could get me a steamer for Sydney—"

"We're making Lalinge now, in good time for the Sydney steamer," answered Ken. "When we hit Lalinge I can fix you up for the voyage, and you need not worry about your passage-money—we'll manage that somehow."

The castaway smiled.

"I have nothing," he said. "But if

"That's all right—don't worry!" said Ken reassuringly. "You're safe for Sydney!"

"Once in Sydney, I have more than I need," said the castaway. He paused, and the colour deepened in his cheeks. "You—you don't know—you haven't guessed—"

He broke off.

"What?" asked Ken.

He looked at the castaway in surprise, wondering what was the cause of the deepening crimson in his cheeks.

"I—I—my clothes are in the dunnage bag," he stammered. "I saved them, to use if I should ever be taken off that awful rock. I—I—" he stammered.

Ken looked more and more surprised. He understood why the castaway had donned the seaman's clothes from the dunnage bag, keeping his own for use if he was taken off Maia. He would naturally want to make as decent an appearance as possible if he was taken off on a ship. But Ken saw no reason for the confusion in the castaway's looks.

"You can change in my state-room," he said, and threw open the door from the cabin to the state-room. "While you're on the Dawn you'll berth in this state-room. There are two bunks, you see. You can have one, and my mate and I will take turn and turn about with the other. Why, what's the matter?"

The castaway did not answer. With the bag of dunnage in his hand he stepped quickly into the state-room and

closed the door almost on the nose of the boy trader.

"My sainted Sam!" Ken ejaculated, as he stared at the door.

He returned to the deck, wondering whether the castaway of Maia was quite right in his senses.

"There's Furley!" said Kit Hudson, as the boy trader came on deck. Ken glanced at the lugger. Black Furley could be seen standing on her deck. King of the Islands gave the black-bearded pearler a grim look. Then a thoughtful expression came over his sunburnt face. Hudson, watching him, grinned, reading his thoughts.

"After all, we may as well give the swab a word," said Ken. "He would not put in a few hours to save us a week, but—but we're sailormen, and Furley's a lubberly swab. I reckon we'll give him news of the Flamingo, and save him that run to Fushima."

Hudson nodded. At a word from Ken the course of the ketch was changed to bring her down to the labouring lugger. The two vessels drew nearer and nearer, Black Furley watching the ketch with a scowling face. Probably he guessed that King of the Islands might have news for him, for the lug-sail dropped. The ketch hove to, and the black-bearded pearler stepped into his gig, two black Lukwe boys pulling him to the Dawn. Black Furley swung himself on board.

"Picked up news?" were his first words. "News of the Flamingo?"

"Ay, ay!" answered Ken. "We've learned that the Flamingo went down on the reefs of Maia."

"Maia's a long way out of her course," said Black Furley. He eyed the boy trader suspiciously. "I reckon she must have driven a long way if she piled up on Maia. How'd you know?"

"I told you we were taking a man off Maia. He turned out to be a survivor of the Flamingo—the sole survivor."

"Got him on board?" asked Furley.

"He's below now."

"Well, let a man see him," grunted Black Furley. "Mebbe he knows what

became of the girl. No harm in asking him a question, I reckon."

"You can see him if you like," answered Ken. "Koko, ask the man below to step on deck."

The boatswain went down the companion. A moment or two later his feet came pattering up, and he showed an astounded face on deck.

"Oh, sar!" gasped Kaio-lalulalonga. "Me no savvy this thing! Feller white Mary stop along cabin."

"What!" yelled Ken.

"Feller white Mary, sar——"

The shipmates stared blankly at Kaio-lalulalonga. In the language of the Kanakas, a woman was a "feller Mary." They wondered whether the brown boatswain had gone suddenly insane.

"What the thump do you mean?" roared Hudson. "No feller Mary stop along this hooker!"

"Feller Mary along cabin, sar——"

There was a step on the companion. Ken King and Kit Hudson looked at the figure that emerged on deck, and they could not believe their eyes.

It was a woman—a girl—who stepped from the companion into the brilliant sunlight on the deck. Her cheeks were pink, but there was a smile in her eyes. The amazement of the shipmates evidently entertained her.

"Who— who— what——" babbled King of the Islands.

And then, as he stared, he understood. The girl's face was the face of the castaway of Maia, whom the shipmates of the Dawn had rescued from the desolate rock in the Pacific!

The seamen's clothes from the dunnage bag had deceived them. They had not the faintest suspicion. But now that the castaway had changed she had changed with a vengeance!

"By hokey!" Black Furley gave a yell. "You said it was a man on Maia, King of the Islands!"

"It was—I thought it was—my sainted Sam!" gasped Ken, still bewildered. "Who—who——"

"My name is Edna Blake," said the castaway.

"The thousand-pound girl!" roared Black Furley.

"Suffering cats!" gasped Kit Hudson. "Edna Blake!" said King of the Islands, like a man in a dream. "My hat! We—we beat up to Maia to save a shipwrecked seaman, and—and it's the thousand-pound girl!"

Black Furley spat out abuse. King of the Islands turned on him.

"Silence, you swab! Get back to your lugger! You lubberly scum, if you'd been willing to put in a few hours saving a castaway, you'd have handled a thousand pounds for your trouble!"

Black Furley, gritting his teeth, tramped back to the gig without another word. No one on the Dawn gave him further heed.

The lugger stood back to Lukwe, with the most savagely disappointed swab in the Pacific on board—while the Dawn flew on for Lalinge, bearing the rescued "man" of Maia, otherwise the thousand-pound girl.

"Do you know why I was on the Flamingo, Captain King?" asked Edna Blake, one evening.

"In the hope of finding your father who was lost on the Mindanao," replied Ken. "I know it's hard to give up hope, but to be quite frank, Miss Blake, I think he was drowned. The Mindanao was wrecked a year, or more, ago. If your father had reached some island or reef, he would have been found by now!"

"I believe he is still alive," the girl declared. "Listen, Captain King. I have offered a reward, through the Sydney branch of father's firm—a reward of five thousand pounds for anyone who finds my father. And if anyone can possibly find him, you are the man. Let me charter the Dawn——"

But Ken stopped her with a gesture. "It is hopeless, and it would be wrong of me to let you go on hoping," he said. "I am a trader, and I must keep to my contracts—thank you all the same."

The girl pleaded again and again, but Ken King was adamant.

Ken and Kit berthed in the cabin.

during the run to Lalinge. The stateroom was given up to the castaway from Maia.

Naturally, the arrival of the thousand-pound girl caused a sensation at Lalinge. The whole island hummed with the news, and Ken King's luck was soon the talk of a hundred beaches in the Pacific.

The Sydney steamer bore Edna Blake back to her home, and when the steamer touched at Lalinge again it carried a letter for King of the Islands, which contained a draft on the Pacific Company for the amount of the reward—one thousand pounds.

The shipmates of the Dawn shared the reward, with a liberal sum for every Kanaka on board. And while Black Furley still cursed his luck at Lukwe, King of the Islands and his crew were more than glad that they had fought against adverse winds and braved the reefs and the surf to rescue the "man" on Maia!

The adventure seemed to end there, but it was far from the end, although they did not know it.

CHAPTER 4.

White Man and Brown.

KOKO, the brown-skinned Kanaka boatswain of the ketch Dawn, ceased to twang his ukulele and rose from the coamings of the cabin hatch. A grim frown knitted his brows. The Dawn was moored at the coral wharf in the lagoon at Lalinge, in the South Seas, and he was the only man on board.

King of the Islands and Kit Hudson were ashore at John Chin's warehouse. The Hiva-Oa crew were on shore leave, loafing under the Lalinge palms in the blaze of tropical sunshine. Koko, in sole charge of the ketch, had been strumming on his ukulele and humming a Hawaiian song, at peace with all the world, till his dark eyes fell on the white man who came along the wharf. The sight of Peter Parsons brought a glitter

to Koko's dark eyes and a grim frown to his brow.

There were packing-cases, piles of merchandise, and copra sacks on the wharf, and Dandy Peter threaded his way among them, his eyes on the moored ketch. The brown boatswain watched him coming with a hostile stare. Many times there had been trouble between Ken King and the dandy of Lukwe—and Ken's foes were Koko's foes.

The dandy was not looking his accustomed natty self. Of all the rough crew on the island of Lukwe he was the only man who ever wore a full suit of clothes. He was probably the most unscrupulous and ruthless rascal of all that lawless crew, but he disdained to be seen in a cotton shirt and shorts or a loincloth, like other Lukwe skippers. Loafing in his veranda at Lukwe or sailing his cutter under a reckless press of sail, Dandy Peter was always a dandy in spotless ducks, Panama hat, and pipeclayed shoes.

But he looked in hard luck now. His ducks, though clean as a new pin, were mended in many places. His canvas shoes, though spotlessly pipeclayed, were worn and patched. Still a dandy, he looked considerably the worse for wear. And the expression on his handsome, wicked face was hard and bitter.

The tide was low, and the teak rail of the Dawn was on a level with the wharf. Peter Parsons came to the edge of the wharf with the evident intention of jumping down to the deck. But the giant Koko interposed. With the ukulele in his brown hand, Koko coolly pushed the Lukwe skipper back, and said:

"Cap'n Parsons no come along this hooker!"

Dandy Peter stared at him savagely. He was about the last skipper in the Pacific to take "lip" from a Kanaka. His hands clenched, and he looked for a moment as if he would spring at the boatswain of the Dawn like a tiger.

Koko grinned. Parsons, strong and wiry as he was, would have been an

infant in the giant boatswain's hands, and Koko was quite prepared to collar him and toss him bodily back to the wharf.

Dandy Peter checked his rage. It was not fear of the Kanaka that checked him, for fear had been left out of the composition of the handsome black-guard. But Dandy Peter, for once, was not looking for trouble.

"You scum!" he snarled. "Where's King of the Islands? Is he on board?"

"King of the Islands no stop!" answered Koko.

"What place that feller he stop?" snarled Parsons.

"That feller stop along house belong John Chin, along Lalinge."

"Is his mate on board?" Parsons demanded.

"Feller Hudson stop along King of the Islands, along John Chin."

"What time that feller comey back along ketch?"

"No savvy!"

Parsons snarled again, and stared along the coral wharf towards the rows of bungalows and warehouses that faced the shining lagoon. Prominent among them, at a distance, was the mass of buildings that belonged to John Chin, the rich Chinese trader of Lalinge.

White men could be seen among the bungalows, and brown natives, in glimmering lava-lavas, on the beach. But neither King of the Islands nor Kit Hudson was to be seen. Apparently the shipmates were still busy about matters of cargo in John Chin's office.

"I reckon I'll wait for him," growled Parsons at last, and made another motion to leap down on the ketch.

"Feller Cap'n Parsons stop along wharf!" said Koko stolidly. "No comey along this feller ship."

"Stand aside!" roared Parsons.

Koko did not stir. The grin widened on his brown face. As a matter of fact, the boatswain of the Dawn rather welcomed the opportunity of laying his sinewy hands on Peter Parsons.

"Cap'n Parsons stop along wharf!"

repeated Koko, grinning and displaying a magnificent set of white gleaming teeth. "Cap'n Parsons plenty bad feller! Little white master belong me, he no likee feller belong Lukwe. S'pose you comey along this ketch, this feller Kanaka knock seven bells outer you, sar, plenty too quick altogether!"

That was too much for Peter Parsons. On his own cutter, the Sea-Cat, he would knock a black man down with a belaying-pin for a murmur or a surly look. His eyes blazed, and he leaped from the wharf, crashing into the brown boatswain and sending him staggering back.

But it was only for a moment that Koko staggered. He rallied the next moment, his dark eyes flaming and his powerful hands grasping at the Lukwe skipper.

It had hardly crossed Dandy Peter's mind that a native would dare to lay hands on a white man—especially himself! But Koko, as he himself often said, was no common Kanaka, and he had no respect for the Lukwe seelawyer. He laid his brown hands on Dandy Peter—and laid them hard!

Parsons was a little man, but he was strong, with muscles of steel, though in the grasp of Koko he was nowhere. The Kanaka's grip swept him off his feet and he was lifted into the air, struggling and kicking and screaming with rage.

There was a cackle of laughter from natives on the wharf. A dozen black and brown men stared on at the startling scene, cackling. Koko swung the struggling Lukwe man through the air and tossed him off the ketch like a sack of copra.

There was a crash as Dandy Peter landed on the wharf. He sprawled at full length, dazed and dizzy, with an ache in every bone.

Koko grinned at him from the ketch. "No wantee Cap'n Parsons along this hooker! Bad feller Cap'n Parsons stop along wharf, my word!"

Peter Parsons scrambled to his feet, his face convulsed with fury. His right

hand groped at the back of his duck trousers, then flashed out with a revolver in it.

In his fury Dandy Peter forgot that he was no longer on the wild and lawless island of Lukwe, but on law-abiding Lalinge, where there was a white magistrate, backed by native police, to keep law and order. He forgot everything but the fact that he had been handled by a native. His hand shot up with the revolver in it, his finger on the trigger—and Koko ceased suddenly to grin and dodged swiftly down under the rail as the maddened sea-lawyer fired.

Crack! The bullet hummed over Koko as he ducked, and chipped a splinter from the tall cedar mainmast of the Dawn.

"My word!" gasped Koko. He had not expected that, though really he might have expected it in dealing with a man like Peter Parsons. Before the sea-lawyer could pull trigger again, Koko darted behind the mainmast for cover.

"You no shoot along this feller!" roared Koko. "Feller King of the Islands plenty too much cross along you, s'pose you shoot along this feller!"

Crack! Dandy Peter—unopposed now—leaped down on the deck and loosed off the revolver again. The bullet hummed by the mast and whizzed away across the lagoon. He came running on, the smoking revolver in his hand. Had Koko been armed, Parsons would not have taken many steps, for the thrown knife of the Kanaka is as deadly as the white man's gun at close quarters. But Koko had no weapons, and he dodged round the mast as the enraged sea-lawyer came at him.

And as he dodged, Koko caught up a bag of yam from the deck. It weighed nine or ten pounds, but it swung light as a feather in the Kanaka's powerful hand. It was hurled the next moment as Dandy Peter's trigger was moving for a third shot. But that shot was never fired. The whizzing missile struck him on the chest, and he went over back-

wards with a crash on the deck, the revolver flying from his hand.

A second more and a sinewy knee was planted on him, and he was pinned down under the giant Kanaka.

"My sainted Sam!" King of the Islands uttered that startled ejaculation. Ken King and Kit Hudson had come out of John Chin's office and started to walk down the beach, when the crack-crack of the sea-lawyer's revolver on the Dawn came ringing to their ears.

The shipmates stared towards the moored ketch.

"Dandy Peter!" exclaimed Hudson. Ken's eyes gleamed as he said:

"That Lukwe sea-lawyer handling a gun on my ship! Come on!"

He raced down the beach and along the coral wharf, with Hudson at his heels. Ken's feet hardly seemed to touch the coral as he ran. He reached the spot where the ketch was roped to the bollards, shoved his way through a bunch of staring, grinning natives, and leaped on the deck.

But the anger faded from his face and he broke into a laugh as he saw the scene on the Dawn. Dandy Peter, stretched on his back, was wriggling under the knee of the boatswain, yelling with rage. A stream of threats poured from the infuriated Lukwe skipper, all of which left Koko quite unmoved.

"You plenty bad feller!" said Koko, his knee grinding on the wriggling sea-lawyer till the bones almost cracked. "You tinkee shootee along this feller along gun belong you, my word! This feller Koko no flaid along gun belong you! No, sar! This feller Koko give you plenty too much lawyer-cane!"

Dandy Peter ceased his tirades as he caught sight of the handsome, sunburnt face and active figure of King of the Islands. He yelled to the boy trader:

"Call your nigger off, Ken King!"

"You seem to have asked for more trouble than you can handle, Peter Parsons!" Ken laughed. "What are you doing on this ketch?"

"Call your nigger off!" yelled Parsons.

"No hurry!" answered Ken coolly. He stooped and picked up the sea-lawyer's revolver and tossed it into the lagoon. "You're safer without that, Peter Parsons! If you'd done any damage with it, I'd have called you to account. You'd better remember that Lalinge isn't Lukwe."

Kit Hudson followed the boy skipper on the ketch, and grinned down at the enraged face of the Lukwe man. Parsons struggled frantically. But Koko, with a grin on his brown face, kept him pinned to the deck. Danny, the cooky-boy of the Dawn, came off the wharf, and Koko shouted to him:

"You feller Danny! You bring feller lawyer-cane along me!"

Danny, grinning, brought a stout lawyer-cane, which Koko sometimes laid round Danny himself when the cooky-boy needed it, as he often did. Danny was quite entertained at the idea of seeing it laid round a white man.

A moment more and Dandy Peter would have been writhing under a shower of lashes. But Ken King hastily interposed. Rascal as the Lukwe man was, Ken would not see a white man beaten by a Kanaka.

"Belay it, Koko!" he rapped out.

Koko paused, obedient to the command of his "little white master," with the lawyer-cane in the air. But his look was rebellious.

"This feller Parsons plenty bad feller, sar!" he exclaimed. "He comey along this ship, sar, shootee along this feller along gun belong him! Plenty good knock seven bells outer this feller, sar, along lawyer-cane!"

"Belay it!" Ken repeated. "Let him go! You lettee feller Parsons stop along legs belong him."

With a grunt the boatswain reluctantly released the Lukwe skipper. Parsons staggered to his feet, and stood panting, breathless from his struggle with the Kanaka. His face was crimson with exertion and rage. King of the

Islands eyed him with an amused smile.

"If I had my gun—" muttered Parsons between his teeth.

"Lucky for you you haven't," said Ken. "And you're lucky not to be chucked into the lagoon after it!" He pointed to the wharf. "Get out, Peter Parsons! You don't need telling that you're not wanted on this hooker!"

"S'pose little white master say this feller Koko chuck feller Parsons along wharf?" said Koko eagerly.

"He can walk!" said Ken. "And the sooner you walk the better, Captain Parsons! What did you come aboard for, anyhow?"

"I came to talk business with you," snarled Parsons. "Your nigger handied me, and I lost my temper. If you let your cheeky niggers handle a white man—"

"I've no business with you," interrupted King of the Islands curtly. "And Koko was quite right to handle you if you butted in where you weren't wanted. The last time I met you, you were trying to rob a pearler of his pearls. Is that the sort of business you've got on hand now?"

"No!" said Parsons between his teeth.

"Pearl-poaching in Japanese waters?" asked Kit Hudson, with a grin. "Or stealing niggers in the islands—or what?"

Dandy Peter was evidently on the verge of a furious outburst. He controlled his temper, however. He had not forgotten old troubles, but he was not there to quarrel with the shipmates of the Dawn if he could help it.

"You're sailing to-morrow?" he snapped.

"With the wind at sunrise," answered Ken.

"Drumming the islands for copra and pearl-shell?" asked Parsons, with a sneer. "Two sixpences for a shilling in these days, with copra at its present price!"

"I'd like to see copra at twenty-five pounds again," Ken laughed. "But we shan't see that for a long time to come.

Have you got something on hand better than drumming for copra?"

"Exactly!" the other replied.

"And you've come to tell us about it?" grinned Hudson. "That's interesting—if true!"

"Well, it is true!" snarled Parsons. "I've got a proposition to put up to make your fortunes—if you'll go in with me."

"I'd like to make my fortune," Ken chuckled. "What is it—an island where pearls are as thick as fleas on a Frisco whaler? Or where precious pink coral can be picked up by the shipload? Have you come here to tell us a beach-comber's yarn—and think we shall swallow it?"

Dandy Peter scowled. It was clear that he wanted to make use of the shipmates of the Dawn, and at the same time he found it difficult to keep in check his old and bitter enmity.

But for King of the Islands, Dandy Peter would have made his fortune already—in pearls that belonged to another man. The dandy of Lukwe was not likely to forget that.

"Will you hear what I've got to say?" he snarled.

"No harm in hearing it," said the boy trader, smiling. He pointed to a Madeira chair. "Sit down and get it off your chest. We've time to kill until sundown."

Dandy Peter dropped into the cane chair and lighted a black cheroot. Ken sat on the teak rail, and Hudson leaned against the mast, both of them regarding the dandy of Lukwe rather curiously. Koko, from a distance, eyed him with deep distrust. The boatswain, if allowed to have his own way, would have pitched Dandy Peter neck and crop off the ketch, with a dose of lawyer-cane to carry away with him.

"You've heard of the Mindanao?" asked Parsons abruptly.

"Lost with all hands in a hurricane," King of the Islands nodded. "What about the old Mindanao?"

"There was a passenger on board, and—"

"More than one."

"Only one that I'm interested in—Grant Blake, the Sydney millionaire. His people in Sydney think he may have survived the wreck—at least, they hope so—and there's a reward of five thousand pounds out for the man who finds him alive."

"That's the talk of the beaches," answered Ken, thinking of Edna Blake. "You haven't come here to tell us what every man knows from Honolulu to the Marquesas?"

"It's a fortune to the man who picks it up!" said Parsons, unheeding. "Even divided between two—or three—it's a big sum."

"Ay, ay!" agreed Ken. "I'd like to make a tenth part as much on a six-months' trip in the Islands. But what are you driving it? It's a year or more since the Mindanao was lost, and there's been no news of crew or passengers—not even a bit of wreckage picked up! Every man on board was lost when the steamer went down."

"The reward's still out."

"Nobody will ever earn it. The Sydney millionaire had no more chance than any other man on the sinking steamer—less, in fact, as he was a landsman. He went down with the rest."

"That's what most people believe!" agreed Parsons. "But whatever may have happened to captain and crew and passengers, one man survived—and that man was Grant Blake! He's alive—and the skipper who picks him up has only to ask for five thousand pounds! Or—" He lowered his voice, and his eyes gleamed. "Or the man who found him could make terms—fix his own figure for taking a castaway off a reef. You understand?"

Ken's lip curled, and Kit gave a snort of disgust. The shipmates of the Dawn were not the men to drive a hard bargain with a castaway on a reef—even if that castaway was a millionaire, the wealthiest trader in the Pacific. But Dandy Peter Parsons was a man of quite another kind. It was evident that

he was not thinking only of the reward if he discovered the castaway millionaire.

"You say he's alive," said King of the Islands, after a pause. "I can understand his daughter thinking so, or hoping so. But you—if you're not talking out of your hat—must have got some news to believe so!"

Parsons nodded eagerly.

"Well, what's the news?" asked Hudson.

"That's my secret!" answered Parsons coolly. "I'll tell you this—I've had it certain—Grant Blake is alive, cast away on a reef! Never mind how I got the tip! I'm not saying I've got the bearings of the reef, or that he will be easy to find. But a skipper with a ship can find him, and handle a sum that he could never earn in years of drumming after copra."

"And why are you telling us?" demanded Ken. "Why not sail for him in your own cutter, and pocket the reward?"

"You swab!" Parsons muttered. "Do you think I should be here if I could sail in my own cutter to pick him up? I'm here because I'm on my beam-ends. You know that my crew ran away with my cutter. I got it back after the black scum had run it on a reef. It will cost a big sum to refit it for sea, and I'm on the rocks. I was down to my last coin in that venture after pearls—you butted in and got the pearls away from me—I got back to Lukwe in rags and tatters.

"I had to borrow money to hire a native canoe to run me across to Lalinge to see you here. I've the clothes I stand up in, and that's all. If I had a ship and a crew you wouldn't have seen me here, King of the Islands!"

Ken smiled. It was plain, from the shabby look of the dandy of Lukwe, that he was deep down on his luck. He had staked all, and lost all, in that venture after another man's pearls, in which King of the Islands had defeated him. His experience might have taught him that honesty was the best policy,

though it was clear that Dandy Peter had not learned that lesson yet.

"I'd jump at doing it alone if I had a ship!" growled Parsons. "But I'm on the rocks. I've got to get a man with a ship to go in with me."

"Plenty of them in the Islands!" said Ken. "No need to pick on me. Black Furley of Lukwe—or Barney Ham of Tonga—they're men of your own kidney —" He broke off with a laugh. It was not a man of his own kidney that Dandy Peter wanted to join in this venture. He wanted a man he could trust.

"Wash that out!" snapped Parsons. "Will you go in with me? Three equal shares—you and your mate and me. It's worth your while!"

"Find another skipper," Ken answered. "If your tale's true, you'll find one easily enough. Plenty of skippers went hunting for Grant Blake when the reward was first offered. Nobody believes now that there's a dog's chance that he survived from the Mindanao. But if you've got news, as you say—"

"I've got it certain!"

"Well, put your cards on the table," said Ken. "What's the news? I don't want you on my ship, Peter Parsons, but I'd take on the proposition if there was anything in it, and you could trust me to hand over your share of the reward if we found the man. What do you know of Grant Blake?"

"It's my secret!" said Parsons stubbornly. "I'm not giving it away to any man. I'll sail with you to pick up the Sydney man, but I'm not putting it in any lubber's power to handle the reward and leave me out in the cold!"

"Chuck it at that!" King of the Islands rose from the rail. "If you can't trust us to play square without your eye on us, take your proposition to some other skipper. But that's not all!" he added scornfully. "There's something that you don't want to explain—or don't dare to explain! You've never played a square game, Peter Parsons—but you can't pull the wool over my eyes and get my help in foul play! Look for

another ship—you won't sail on the Dawn!"

"Look here!" muttered Parsons, rising from the Madeira chair.

"That's the lot!" said King of the Islands, and turned his back on the Lukwe skipper and walked across the deck.

Dandy Peter's eyes blazed after him. He clenched his hands, and made a step after the boy trader.

"Forget it, shipmate!" said Kit Hudson softly. "Better walk off the Dawn—it's pleasanter than being chucked off!"

Parsons gave him a savage look, turned, and stamped back to the wharf. He turned there, and, before he tramped away, stood for some moments glaring back at the boy skipper.

CHAPTER 5.

The Stowaway.

KING OF THE ISLANDS had a thoughtful expression as he stood on deck watching the glimmering moonlight on the lagoon of Lalinge. Six bells had struck. It was eleven o'clock, and the boy trader was thinking of going below to his bunk. But he was thinking of other matters, too, and Hudson, yawning, watched him with a rather amused grin. He knew what was in his shipmate's mind.

"Nothing in it, Ken," he said, breaking the silence. "Ten to one Parsons was lying. But if he was telling the truth, he's not to be trusted. He's got some swab's game on, and as he's lost his own ship he would like to use ours. I'd rather trust a Solomon Island cannibal on board!"

"That's so," agreed Ken. "But if it's true—if there's a castaway on some lonely reef—even a man like Grant Blake, who, by all accounts, was a pretty hard case—one would hate to leave him to it!"

"He was a hard case, there's no doubt about that," answered Hudson. "The hardest-fisted man in the Pacific—and

that's saying a lot! There were a lot of dry eyes in the Islands when the news came that he had gone down. His relations seem to want him back—but I fancy nobody else does."

"All the same, I'd be glad to pick him off the reef if he's alive and cast away, as that Lukwe lubber says."

"Same here!" said Hudson. "But is it true? Peter Parsons has something up his sleeve—but I don't reckon that it's a castaway. Anyhow, if it's true, he's only got to tell what he knows to get a dozen skippers to back him up. Looks to me as if he was lying—though why he came here to spin us the yarn is more than I can say. If he knows where to pick up Grant Blake, he will pick him up—you can bet on that! He won't let five thousand pounds go begging!"

"That seems pretty certain," agreed King of the Islands. "I reckon we can leave it at that. I'm turning in!"

"Same here!" yawned Hudson. And the shipmates went below. Koko remained on deck, sitting on the hatchway coamings, strumming on his ukulele. The Kanaka's eyes were turned on the beach, where, under the glimmering light of the moon, a swarm of natives were dancing, with the scarlet blossoms of the hibiscus wound in their hair, to the barbaric music of native instruments.

Among them were the crew of the Dawn—Lompo and Lufu, Koluolo and Tomo, and Danny the cocky-boy. And now that his white masters had gone to their bunks, Koko was thinking of joining the others. He rose at last, laid down his ukulele, and stepped from the ketch to the coral wharf. He started up the wharf with a swinging stride, his eyes on the dancers, passing here and there a sprawling native asleep among the packing-cases and bales.

But among them Koko did not observe a slight, dapper figure that crouched back silently into the cover of a pile of copra sacks as he passed. Koko was thinking of the dance in the moonlight, not of Dandy Peter!

Dandy Peter lay quite silent, almost stilling his breathing as the Kanaka passed him. Not till Koko's footsteps had died away on the beach did the sea-lawyer of Lukwe stir.

Then he rose to his feet, and his eyes glittered after the Kanaka. But Koko had disappeared in the throng of natives. Softly, taking care not to awaken any of the sleeping coolies, the dandy of Lukwe crept along the wharf, till he could look down on the deck of the ketch. Keeping in cover of a packing-case, he watched the deserted deck for several minutes with searching eyes.

There was no one to be seen on the Dawn. That the native crew were all ashore, Dandy Peter knew. He had watched them and counted them. Now Koko was gone to join the others, and only the two white men remained on the ketch. Had either of them remained on deck, the sea-lawyer's purpose would have been defeated. But fortune seemed to be befriending Dandy Peter at last.

For minutes he watched in the glimmer of the moon till he was satisfied that the shipmates were both below. No gleam of light came from the ketch, no lamp was burning in the cabin, and there was no doubt that they had gone to their bunks—little doubt that they were sleeping. There was no need to keep watch at night in the lagoon of Lalinge. There was no danger, except of pilfering natives; and no native pilferer was likely to step on board while white men were there.

Silently Peter Parsons crept towards the moored ketch and stepped down on the deck. With the tread of a cat he approached the companion. There he stopped to listen for a full five minutes.

But all was dark and silent below, and Peter Parsons descended the cabin stairs at last and stood in the cabin. He had been on board the ketch many times, and he knew the interior like a book. The darkness was intense, but he did not need a light.

Forward of the cabin was the state-room with its two bunks, occupied by

the white men, separated by a bulk-head from the little forecabin. Aft was the lazarette, with a doorless doorway opening into it. In the floor of the lazarette was the trap that gave access to the water-casks clogged below. That was what Dandy Peter was seeking.

He stowed away there while the Dawn left Lalinge, venturing out at night into the lazarette to find food. Two days and a night he remained undiscovered.

The lazarette was a large room, considering the limited size of the ketch, but it was fairly well filled, canned provisions, sacks of yams, bunches of bananas, trade goods of all sorts and descriptions being piled there.

Dandy Peter was a like a cat in the dark, but, with all his stealthiness, on the second night at sea he knocked over a pile of cans carelessly left by some native in the middle of the room. Five or six cans rolled and clattered, and the sea-lawyer ground his teeth and stood silent and motionless, his ears on the strain.

From the state-room at the other end of the long cabin, through the darkness, came the call of a sleepy voice. One of the white men had been awakened, and Dandy Peter recognised Ken King's voice:

"Avast there, Koko, you lubber!"

Apparently the boy trader supposed that Koko had caused that clatter coming down to his berth on the cabin lockers.

Peter Parsons stood with shut teeth. Another sleepy voice drawled from the darkness of the state-room:

"That's not Koko—the old brown bean is in charge of the deck."

"It was somebody!" growled King of the islands, and Peter Parsons heard the sound of the boy trader rolling out of his bunk. "If it's some stowaway

—"
"Give him one for me!" yawned Hudson, and turned over.

Dandy Peter's heart beat almost to suffocation. He heard the scratch of a match, and caught the glimmer of

a lamp across the length of the cabin. King of the Islands was coming to investigate the cause of the clatter.

There was not a second to waste. Dandy Peter groped desperately on the floor in the dark, found the trap, lifted it, and squeezed below. The trap closed over his head softly, in spite of his frantic haste, as he crouched on the short step-ladder.

His straining ears caught faintly the padding of bare feet as King of the Islands, lamp in hand, came along the cabin to the lazarette. He felt a choking in his throat as a footstep passed on the trap above his crouching head. If the boy trader's suspicions caused him to lift the trap and flash the light down among the water-casks—

A stowaway on a trading ketch, on a round trip among the Islands, was unheard of. But Ken had to make sure, and as no one was in the lazarette, he lifted the trap-door and peered down.

Dimly, he made out the forms of the casks, checked on their sides. There was a smell of bilge. But that was all. It seemed to Ken, as he bent listening, that he heard a sound like that of a scuttling rat.

He stepped down the short, steep ladder. The space was small, and not more than a few minutes would be required to flash the light into every dark corner and reveal anyone who was crouching there.

As he stood among the casks he heard another sound, again like a scuttling rat. But King of the Islands knew now what sort of rat it was that was scuttling! He held up the lamp, and looked round him, half-expecting to see gleaming eyes from the shadows—a skulking, furtive figure behind one of the casks. But he saw nothing.

"Tumble up!" rapped out King of the Islands. "Whoever you are, I know you're here, you swab! You feller boy, you show a leg belong you!"

There was no answer, save the echo of his voice.

Holding up the lamp, he moved along among the checked casks, his head bent a little, for there was barely room to stand upright. Snap! He started at the sound behind him; it was the closing of the trapdoor. Either the hidden man had dodged up from the lazarette, and closed the trap after him, or he had pulled it shut from below.

A scuttling sound, as he flashed the light round, told that the man was still there—dodging among the casks—though why he had pulled the trapdoor above shut was a mystery to the boy trader.

"Show a leg, you swab!" rapped out Ken, angrily and impatiently. "Your game's up—"

Something whizzed suddenly and crashed on the hurricane-lamp, carrying it away. Ken uttered a startled exclamation as the lamp crashed and went out, leaving him in pitchy darkness. Now that the trap in the lazarette floor was closed, not a glimmer of light came from above.

"You swab! I— Oh!"

He broke off with a gasp, as hands were laid on him in the darkness. Almost before he knew that he was attacked, King of the Islands was dragged down. His head struck a cask, dazing him; and then he was on his back, in the grasp of his unseen assailant.

He grappled with the invisible enemy savagely. It was a slight figure that he grappled—strong and wiry and muscular, but slight in build. He could see nothing of it; but the fact that it was clothed told him that his enemy was a white man, not a native.

The man was strong, as well as desperate, but not so strong as the sturdy boy trader. Had it been a test of strength, he would have crumpled in Ken King's grasp in a couple of minutes. But as Ken grasped and grappled, he felt a cold, keen edge on his throat, and a low, savage voice hissed:

"Belay it, King of the Islands! Belay it, you fool! Give in, and keep your

mouth shut! One cry and you will never give another!"

In sheer amazement, King of the Islands relaxed. For he knew the voice that hissed in the darkness—the voice of Dandy Peter Parsons! The skulker in the lazarette was no scared native "boy," after all. It was the sea-lawyer of Lukwe who was a stowaway on the Dawn.

There was a pattering of feet and a rush of footsteps on the companion-ladder. Koko leaped into the saloon, his brown face blanched with fear. Hudson strode to him and grasped him by the shoulder. In spite of himself, the horror in the Kanaka's face sent a cold chill to his heart.

"You lubber!" roared Hudson savagely. "What name?"

"Aie! Aie! Little white master go finish."

"What?" yelled Hudson.

"He no stop!" wailed Koko. "Feller King of the Islands no stop! He no stop along bunk belong him—he no stop along cabin—he no stop any more altogether! Eye belong me no see little white master any more! Debble take little white master belong me."

Hudson stared at the boatswain in stupefaction. Then, without a word, he threw him aside and rushed to Ken's cabin.

"Ken!" He shouted as he ran. There was a jabber of terror on deck. Not a brown man doubted Koko—not a man doubted that the hidden "debble" of the ketch had made away with King of the Islands!

"Ken!" Hudson ran across the cabin to the stateroom. Ken's bunk was empty! He stared round the cabin—he ran along to the lazarette and stared into it. Where was King of the Islands? No answer came to his call.

Only from the deck above came the despairing wail of Koko: "Aie! Aie! Aie!"

From below came Hudson's shouting voice:

"Ken, King of the Islands! In Heaven's name where are you?" The mate of the Dawn stared about him. He tramped into the little state-room forward, where King of the Islands had gone to his bunk at eight bells. Ken King's bunk was empty. He was not in the state-room. He was not in the cabin. He was not in the lazarette aft. Where, in the name of all that was mysterious, was he?

He had not come on deck. It seemed that he had vanished into thin air. Hudson felt the perspiration thick on his brow.

He shouted again, almost frantically. Then, with a white face, the mate of the Dawn came tramping up the companion to the deck. The scared eyes of the Kanakas fixed on him as he emerged into the moonlight. Lompo, forgetful of his duty in his terror, had left the wheel and joined the terrified group. The ketch was yawing, unregarded by the crew.

"Aai! Aie!" Koko was wailing. "Debble makee kai-kai along little white master! Aie! Aie!"

"You lubberly swab!" roared Hudson. "Get to the wheel!"

Koko obeyed, and his brown hands grasped the spokes. But it was clear that Koko cared little what happened to the ketch, now that he had lost his white master. The native crew cared less. Lompo muttered to the others, and there was a rush to the whaleboat to lower it. In their terror of the haunting "aitoo" that had, apparently, made away with the skipper during his watch below, the Kanakas were ready to abandon the Dawn and flee in the boat on the wide Pacific. It was fortunate that the mate of the Dawn had returned to the deck at that moment.

"You feller boy, you no touch boat, hand belong you!" roared Hudson savagely. Heedless of him, the Kanakas were swinging the boat out-board, when Hudson rushed at them, hitting out right and left with both fists. It was no time for gentle measures. What-

ever had happened to King of the Islands—and it was a mystery that utterly confounded his shipmate—the crew had to be kept from deserting. There were loud howls from the brown boys as the stalwart Australian hit out. Lompo went headlong, rolling into the scuppers—Tomo sprawled after him—Lufu and Kolulo dodged away barely in time. Danny skipped back to his galley yelling.

"You plenty bad feller boy!" roared Hudson. "You stop along deck, my word! You go along boat, this feller knock seven bells outer you!" But discipline had dropped like a cloak from the usually obedient Kanakas. Lompo scrambled up, his eyes rolling, and grasped a belaying-pin.

"This feller no stop!" he panted. "No stop along ship along debble he stop! All this feller dead feller s'pose stop along aitoo! This feller go along boat altogether too quick."

"This feller go along boat!" gasped Kolulo. "White master stop along debble, s'pose white master he likee; Kanaka feller no stop."

Hudson gritted his teeth as the mutinous crew gathered for a rush. "You plenty big fool, feller cap'n he stop! He stop along this feller ship."

"What place that feller stop?" demanded Lufu. Hudson could not answer that question. Unless King of the Islands had taken leave of his senses, and squeezed through a port-hole and dropped into the sea, he was still on board the Dawn. But where he was, Hudson knew no more than the native crew.

"You feller boy, you hear, ear belong you!" shouted the mate of the Dawn. "Feller King of the Islands stop along this ship! S'pose he no stop, you go along boat all samee you wantee go. Two-three minute, me findee that feller."

"No tinkee, sar!" panted Lompo.

"You stop along deck, you sec, eye belong you!" snapped Hudson. "Me tell you stop along ship, savvy?"

That was a safe offer. The native crew muttered assent, all eyes turning

fearfully towards the companion doorway.

Hudson was glad enough of the truce; he was feverishly anxious to solve the mystery of his shipmate's disappearance.

"You stop along boat, Koko!" he rapped. "S'pose any feller touch boat, you kill that feller too much along belaying-pin." And Hudson, leaving it at that, tramped down the companion again—and his first action was to get his revolver from the state-room.

CHAPTER 6.

"It's death, Ken King!"

KING OF THE ISLANDS lay in darkness in the hold under the lazarette. He could not see the deck above him, or the water-casks that were chocked on their sides, or the enemy that held him in a savage grip. But he could feel that fierce grip and the keen edge of the knife that was pressed to his throat. Helpless, at the mercy of his enemy he lay, and only by the hissing voice that came from the gloom did he know that that unseen enemy was Dandy Peter Parsons, the sea-lawyer of Lukwe.

The slim, dapper sea-lawyer would have crumpled in the boy trader's grasp in a fair fight. But the knife was at Ken's throat, and, enraged as he was, he forbore to struggle. He had been trapped in the hold of his own ship—and Dandy Peter, the stowaway of the Dawn, had the upper hand!

He heard the panting of the man he could not see. There was silence for a minute, then the sea-lawyer's voice came.

"You're down and out, King of the Islands! Keep a bight on your jawing tackle! If your mate or your crew find you here, they won't find you alive. If you knew I was here, I reckon you were a fool to come down alone looking for me!"

"I never knew you were here, you swab!" said Ken.

Parsons laughed again. He could imagine Ken's feelings when, hunting in the hold under the lazarette for some slinking, scared stowaway, Ken had found himself in the grip of the most desperate rascal in the South Seas.

"You might have guessed," said Parsons.

Ken clenched his hands hard. Even with the keen steel pressing on his throat, it was difficult to keep from driving his fists at the mocking face hidden in the darkness over him.

"Keep quiet!" Dandy Peter seemed to read his thoughts. "It's death, Ken King—I'm a desperate man!"

"You've got me!" Ken controlled his rage and spoke quietly. "But if harm comes to me at your hands, Peter Parsons, my mate will shoot you like a dog!"

"I'm not reckoning on giving him the chance! He won't miss you just yet—I reckon he won't expect to see you on deck till four bells!"

"But what's your game?" Ken was as puzzled and mystified as he was enraged. It seemed to him that the black-guard of Lukwe must have taken leave of his senses. "I don't get you, Parsons! You could have picked up a passage from Lalinge without stowing yourself away on a ketch. You must have had a filthy time in this den with the bilge. And now I've found you, did you fancy I should pitch you overboard? I don't want you on my ship—but I'd have given you a passage and rations to the next island after finding you here. You know that!"

"That's not what I want!" The seawayer's voice came low and cool. "When I talked to you at Lalinge, King of the Islands, I asked you to go in with me—to pick up Grant Blake, the Sydney millionaire, who's lost on an unknown reef somewhere in the Pacific. My cutter's a wreck—I'm down and out—I want a man with a ship to go in with me. You refused!"

"I'd refuse again! I'll have no truck with you!" growled King of the Islands. "If you've really got news of the missing Sydney millionaire, you've only got to

make it known. There's a reward of five thousand pounds out for the man who picks him up, and you'd easily get a steamer skipper to see you through—if you're telling the truth!"

"It's the truth! It got out before I left Lukwe—you'd have heard it before long. I've got a clue to the cast-away—I've got it certain that Grant Blake never went down in the old Mindanao—he's living on a lonely reef, watching the sea for a sail! I'm not saying I can put my finger on the reef—it's got to be hunted for. I want a ship and a crew to hunt for it!"

Ken stared up in the darkness at the unseen man. It seemed to him that there was truth in Dandy Peter's voice, yet it only made the mystery of his actions deeper.

"Say it's true," he said, "any skipper would go in with you if you put your cards on the table—and told what you know. Five thousand pounds isn't to be picked up every day!"

"Five thousand pounds—for finding a man worth millions! Ten times as much wouldn't be too much!" said Parsons scornfully. "Grant Blake will make better terms than that after a year of Robinson Crusoe on a reef!"

"I reckoned you had something up your sleeve!" said Ken, between his teeth. "That's it, then—you want to find the man, and make him pay through the nose to be taken off the reef!"

"I'm in this game to make my fortune—I never was a philanthropist!" answered Parsons coolly. "I'd have made my fortune in pearls at Aya-ua if you hadn't butted in and queered the game. You owe me something, King of the Islands!"

"I owe you the hiding of your life for handling me like this—and you'll get it when I get loose!"

"You're not loose yet! Keep still, you fool! I'm making you the same offer that I made you at Lalinge. I'll sail with you—and I'll stand you a fair share of Grant Blake's ransom. Is it a go?" The sharp edge pressed harder on the boy trader's throat.

"If I were swab enough to join in such a game"—Ken's voice was bitter with scorn—"do you think I believe you'd play me fair? You may stick Grant Blake, if you find him, for half his fortune—and he's the richest man in the Pacific! And you'd tip me over the side on a dark night sooner than share!"

"I'll steer a plain course with you!" said Dandy Peter. "If I'd sailed with you from Lalinge to pick up Grant Blake, I'd have got rid of you and your mate from the ketch sooner or later. Now you know! You refused my offer—you're no better off! I'm on your ship—and you're in my hands. I'd have marooned you somehow where you could do me no harm—and I'll maroon you yet!"

"So that's the game!" Ken laughed scornfully. "You've stowed yourself away here to try to steal my ship?"

"You've got it!" said Parsons coolly. "Get on with it, then! As soon as Hudson misses me, he will root through the ketch from stem to stern till he finds me. I pity you then!"

"I reckon you can keep your pity for your mate, if he finds me here in the dark with a knife in my hand," said Dandy Peter coolly. "You haven't had much luck, King of the Islands. I was going to keep out of sight till we were in more lonely waters, but you've forced my hand by finding me here. Put your hands together, Ken King—I'm going to take a bite on your wrists."

Ken's hands were clenched convulsively. What had mystified him was clear now—terribly clear! Parsons had a clue to the missing millionaire. Had the reckless ruffian still been in possession of his cutter and crew, Ken would have seen nothing of him. But the scoundrel of Lukwe was down and out—right on the rocks. He wanted a ship and a crew—and such a game as he now contemplated could not have been played on a steamer or any big ship. That was why he had selected the Dawn—that, and his old, bitter enmity for King of the Islands.

He had stowed himself away on the ketch with the deliberate intention of seizing the ship at sea—it was all clear now. Desperate and reckless as Dandy Peter was well known to be, this was perhaps the most desperate and reckless scheme of his whole wild and lawless life. Yet he had a chance—a sporting chance, at least. Ken had played into his hands unconsciously; he, at least, was no longer able to stand in the desperado's way.

King of the Islands trembled with rage. But for the knife at his throat—As he made a convulsive movement the keen edge almost penetrated his skin. The low, hissing voice came from the blackness:

"If you will have it!"

Ken was still again. It was instant death to struggle! That would not save his ship! A man's life would not stand between Dandy Peter and a fortune—an enemy's life!

"Put your hands together! I've got a cord here. King of the Islands, you're a dead man if you kick!"

The Lukwe man's left hand groped for Ken's wrists—his right held the knife hard at the boy trader's throat. Ken's wrists were drawn together and a loop passed over them. It was drawn taut and knotted by the sea-lawyer's nimble fingers. It was that or death—and a turn of fortune was coming! King of the Islands did not believe that the sea-lawyer would succeed in his desperate design—he had the mate of the Dawn to deal with yet. Gritting his teeth, Ken felt his wrists securely knotted together.

A hand groped over his face. A lump of crumpled tapa was driven into his mouth, half choking him. Then the knife was withdrawn, and the sea-lawyer used both hands. Ken felt a string of tapa passed round his head and knotted, binding the gag in place. Then the groping hands went over him again, and tapa cords bound his ankles together. He heard Dandy Peter pant in the darkness:

"That fixes you, King of the Islands!

I reckon you won't raise an alarm now. Count yourself lucky that you're still alive, you swab!"

Again the hands groped. Ken heard the sea-lawyer mutter savagely as he groped for a revolver in the hip-pocket. There was none there; and Ken was deeply thankful for it. He realised that, save for the knife, Parsons was unarmed, and had hoped to find a revolver on the boy trader. But Ken had not thought of arming himself when he descended into the hold to look for a stowaway. He was glad of it now. Parsons gritted his teeth. If Kit Hudson searched the ship for his comrade, as it was certain that he must do sooner or later, it was fairly sure that he would come weapon in hand. Dandy Peter had won the first move in the game!

He moved away in the darkness; Ken was left lying, bound hand and foot, gagged, silent, helpless. In black and bitter rage he lay, listening. At four bells he would be missed—perhaps sooner. Hudson would root through the ketch from end to end in search of him. And he would come armed—surely he would come armed!

In the lazarette above there was a sound of footsteps, followed by the creaking of the trapdoor as it opened. And Ken's heart thumped as he heard it.

Kit Hudson gripped his revolver and came into the dusky lazarette, where trade goods and supplies of all kinds were stacked, leaving little space. But the floor space was clear round the trapdoor. Faintly from the deck the Australian could hear the frightened cackle of the Kanakas. Below there was no sound but the wash of the waves on the teak ribs of the Dawn. Where was King of the Islands?

There was only the hold left unsearched. For what imaginable reason Ken could have gone down into the hold after midnight, and why he should be dumb while his comrade hailed him, was a mystery. But if he was on the ketch,

he was in the hold—and there Kit Hudson determined to search.

Hudson lifted the trap and flung it back. Blackness lay below, and he stared down, seeing nothing.

"Ken!" he shouted.

The booming echo of his voice in the hollows answered him.

King of the Islands heard—but could not answer. Another heard—but was careful to make no sound. But of that other Hudson knew and suspected nothing. Not for a second had he dreamed of the presence of a hidden stowaway on board—it was unthinkable; and even had he thought of it, he could have imagined no reason why a stowaway should seek or dare to harm the skipper of the Dawn.

"Ken—Ken, old man! If you're there, answer me!" shouted Hudson.

He stood staring into the gloom, puzzled. Hudson lighted a hurricane lamp and stepped down through the hatch. His revolver was gripped in his right hand. He had no hint of a human foe in the darkness, but he instinctively gripped his six-shooter as he descended.

He stood among the water-casks and threw the light about him, then moved on, searching. In the confined space he had to bend his head, and except where his light fell the blackness was like pitch.

A faint brushing sound of a stealthy movement reached him from behind, and he spun round, startled. Unconsciously, as he turned he straightened, and his head struck the deck above. It was a slight blow, but with his nerves already taut it gave him a shock, and he started and dropped the lamp. Instantly he bent to recover it—and, as he bent, something that flashed in the lamplight whizzed over him.

He heard a sharp ping as it struck into woodwork beyond him. It was a thrown knife! It was stooping for the lamp that had saved him from the missile—it would have struck him a second earlier. It had barely missed him as he stooped. In dazed amaze-

ment he realised that he had an enemy to deal with, and in the same flashing moment he knew what must have happened to Ken. If there was a hidden foe in the darkness of the hold, all was explained. And the thrown knife told him so.

Crack! In the close space the report of the revolver roared like thunder, as Hudson fired in the direction whence the knife had come. He heard a sharp cry. Either his bullet had hit, or it had gone close. There was a stealthy scuttling sound in the blackness. Hudson panted.

He caught up the hurricane lamp, which still burned, with his left hand, and the finger of his right was on the trigger of the revolver. With blazing eyes, he tramped towards his unseen enemy. The thrown knife hinted that it was a native—though he knew there were white men in the islands who had learned that deadly trick from the Kanakas. White man or black, Hudson hunted him with savage rage in his eyes, ready to drive a bullet through him at sight.

What had happened to his shipmate? He was there—he must be there; and if he was silent, did it mean that he had fallen a victim to the knife that had so narrowly missed the mate of the Dawn? With rage and vengeance in his heart, Hudson hunted his unseen enemy. He stumbled over something that lay among the casks, and gave a cry.

"Ken!" The light of the hurricane-lamp gleamed on an upturned face—the face of his shipmate—silent. For one terrible instant, Hudson believed that it was the body of a murdered man that he had stumbled on, and he cried out hoarsely in horror. But the light gleamed on living eyes, gleaming back, and he saw that Ken was struggling madly with the gag that was fastened in his mouth.

It was only for an instant that Hudson was off his guard. But that instant was enough for the desperate man whose life was now at stake, who knew that he would be shot down like a dog

if the mate of the Dawn hunted him out. Dandy Peter had lost his knife—he had only his bare hands against the six-shooter in Hudson's grip—and it was neck or nothing.

As Hudson, for one terrible moment spellbound with horror, stared down at King of the Islands, a lithe figure leaped from the darkness like a tiger, and Dandy Peter's clenched fist lashed out and struck the mate of the Dawn.

Hudson pitched over like a log. But as he fell by the side of his bound shipmate, he twisted round and pulled trigger, and the roar of the revolver boomed again through the ketch. Hurried as the shot was, it grazed the sealawyer as he scrambled at Hudson like a cat, whipping a strip of skin from his cheek.

Headless of the burning sting of the bullet, Dandy Peter threw himself on the mate of the Dawn, striking out madly with clenched fist, and the blow drove Hudson's head against the orlop-deck, half-stunning him. With his senses reeling, the mate of the Dawn fired again, but the shot went wide. The next moment the revolver was wrenched from his hand, reversed in Dandy Peter's grasp, and the heavy metal butt came crashing on Kit Hudson's head.

A thousand sparks seemed to dance before the eyes of the mate of the Dawn. As his senses fled, he saw the white, desperate, evil face of the sealawyer of Lukwe—the face of a demon in the glimmer of the hurricane-lamp—and he knew who had struck him down. But he knew no more, as he sank senseless by the side of his shipmate.

CHAPTER 7.

Dandy Peter Takes Control.

"AIE! Aie!" groaned Koko, the brown boatswain, who stood leaning on the whaleboat and the belaying-pin dropped from his hand. The five Hiva-Oa boys gabbled with fear. Thrice, from the depths of the ketch,

had come the roar of the white master's revolver—the last report followed by a deadly silence. In deadly fear, the Kanakas listened for some further sound. But for a long time there was silence. Spellbound with terror, the crew of the Dawn had forgotten even their thought of escaping from the ketch in the whaleboat. They stood rooted to the deck.

But they woke to life at a sound below of something living. That was enough for the terrified Hiva-Oa boys. Without a word, but with concerted action, they leaped at the boat. Koko made no attempt to stop them now.

The Kanakas swung out the boat, loosed the falls, and dropped it to the Pacific in such clumsy haste that it shipped water. Madly they flung themselves into the boat and fended off with the oars. Of the madness of fleeing in an open boat on the boundless Pacific, without food or water, they thought nothing—to food or water they gave not a single thought. Only one frantic desire was in their minds—to get away from the doomed ship. But even in that moment of insane panic, Lompo called to Koko.

"You feller Koko, you comey along boat, along us feller!"

"You jump along boat!" shrieked Danny, as he drove an oar at the Dawn to push clear.

"This feller Koko stop along ship," answered Koko, in a trembling voice. "Little white master go finish, this feller go finish all samee little white master!"

"You comey!" yelled Kolulo. "You go finish along aitoo, s'pose you stop along ship! Brain belong you no walk about any more, you feller Koko!"

A moment more, and it was too late for Koko to jump, if he had wanted to jump. The whaleboat rocked away on the sea, and the Kanakas shoved out the oars in frantic haste and pulled clear. They stared back, as they pulled, at the giant figure of

Koko, a bronze statue in the brilliant moonlight. He did not heed them.

Escape was not in his thoughts. Life had no attraction for the faithful Koko, now that his little white master was, as he believed, "finish." But his heart almost died within him at a sound on the companion. It was a footstep—but it was not the step of his white master, or the mate of the Dawn! The Thing was coming!

Death had no terrors for Koko—but he crouched back against the rail, paralysed with horror, his dark eyes starting from his head as he watched the companion, whence in a moment more the Thing would emerge. It emerged—and Koko doubted the evidence of his senses.

It was a slim, lithe, dapper figure that stepped out on deck, clad in ducks that had once been neat and natty, but were now crumpled and soiled and foul with bilge. The hard, evil face, stubbly with the growth of several days' beard, was the face of Dandy Peter of Lukwe—a face that Koko knew only too well. And in the sea-lawyer's hand was gripped the revolver he had taken from the senseless mate of the Dawn.

Dandy Peter was armed now—and prepared to make his last bid for the mastery of the ship. With a firearm in his hand he had no fear of any number of Kanakas. An evil grin wrinkled his face at the sight of Koko's staring eyes. He stepped towards the Kanaka boatswain, half-raising the revolver.

Koko drew a long breath. For a moment his brain seemed to spin in the shock of surprise. But the truth came clear to him quickly enough at the sight of Dandy Peter. How he was there, why he was there, Koko had not the remotest understanding. But he was there—and the terror of the supernatural vanished from the boatswain of the Dawn.

His eyes blazed, his lips were drawn back in a snarl, his white teeth flash-

ing in the moonlight. He drew himself from the rail, half-crouching for a spring.

"You feller Koko, you savvy me plenty!" grinned Parsons. "This feller skipper along this ship—you savvy? You—"

Koko came at him like a tiger. If the sinewy brown hands had closed on him now, a plunge into the Pacific would have been the end of Dandy Peter's lawless career. But Dandy Peter watched him coolly as he sprang. It was only because he wanted a crew to work the ketch that he did not drive a bullet through the giant boatswain and stretch him dead or disabled on the deck.

He gripped the revolver by the barrel, and met the leaping Kanaka with a crashing blow from the heavy metal butt. It was a blow that would have cracked the skull of a white man like an egg-shell. It flung Koko backwards, and he rolled on the deck, stunned. Parsons spurned him with his foot.

He turned from the still form of the boatswain. With savage eyes, he stared about the deck, amazed by the absence of the crew. He had expected to find all the Kanakas on deck. But in a moment he noted that the whaleboat was gone, and his gaze turned seaward—on the crew in the boat, pulling away as if for their lives.

He spat out an exclamation. The crew were running—if they escaped him, he was master of a ship without a crew! With success in his grasp, he was left to the mercy of wind and wave. Not if Dandy Peter could help it!

He leaped on the teak rail, holding on to a guy-rope with his left hand, brandishing the revolver in his right, and yelling fiercely to the boat's crew.

"You feller boy! You stop along ship! You comey back along ship! You hear me, ear belong you!"

In sheer amazement, the Hiva-Oa boys ceased to pull. With staring, starting eyes, they gazed at the lithe

figure. All the crew knew Dandy Peter by sight.

"Feller Parsons!" babbled Danny.

"You hear me, ear belong you!" roared Parsons. "You washy-washy along ship, plenty too quick, along you no wantee feller gun shoot along you feller."

There was a babble in the boat. The Kanakas were still easily within pistol-shot, and in the brilliant moon, the Pacific was almost as light as by day. The desperate rascal standing on the rail of the Dawn could have picked off every man there, one after another, with perfect ease.

And there was no doubt that he would shoot if he was not obeyed. Well the brown-skinned seamen knew the reputation of Dandy Peter of Lukwe, but they hung on their oars in amazement and terror. The sight of Dandy Peter on the ketch utterly astounded the Kanakas. They stared at him with almost unbelieving eyes.

Crack! A bullet from the revolver skimmed over the boat. Dandy Peter did not intend it to hit—he needed a crew! But he was reckless, as usual. The bullet passed between Danny and Kolulo, narrowly missing both, and there was a squeal of terror from the cooky-boy.

"You no shoot along this feller!" roared Danny.

Parsons brandished the smoking revolver.

"You feller boy washy-washy along ship!" he shouted. "S'pose you no washy-washy, you plenty dead feller!" The warning bullet was enough for the Kanakas. The boat came round, and pulled closer to the ketch. But it did not close in. Lompo stood up to speak.

"You white master Parsons!" he stammered. "You no shootee along this feller. All this feller good feller along you, sar! All this feller plenty too much fright comey along ketch, along debble he stop."

Parsons stared at him blankly for a

moment. Then he burst into a roar of laughter.

"You lubberly swabs!" he bawled. "You tinker feller debble stop along this hooker?"

"Yes, sar, feller debble he stop!" babbled Kolulo. "That feller debble make kai-kai along King of the Islands, along feller Hudson. Us feller plenty too much fright along that feller debble, sar."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Parsons. "You cowardly scum! Feller debble he no stop—this feller stop! No feller debble—this feller Parsons! You savvy?"

The Kanakas stared at him from the boat. It was not easy for them to change their fixed ideas on the subject, but slowly into their fuzzy brains the truth forced itself. And with a realisation of the truth their terrors left them. They feared the dapper desperado of Lukwe, but not as they feared the mysterious, unseen spirits of the air. The living enemy had no such terror for them as the unreal enemy conjured up by their superstitious imaginings.

They rested on their oars, staring at the grinning Parsons. He gave them a few minutes to think it over. He did not want to shoot if he could help it. But he soon lost patience. The revolver was aimed at the boat, and Dandy Peter's eyes glinted over it.

"Washy-washy along ketch!" he barked. "My word, you feller no jump to orders along me sing out, you kill-dead close up! Washy-washy, you scum!"

Slowly the Hiva-Oa boys pulled in under the rail. Their terror of the supernatural was gone, to be replaced by a lesser, but very real, fear of the Lukwe desperado. Under the threatening revolver they clambered on board, and the whaleboat was swung up to the davits at Parsons' sharp order. The Kanakas looked at Koko, stirring feebly and groaning on the deck.

"That feller Koko plenty kill, along butt belong gun belong me," Parsons snarled. "S'pose you no jump along

orders, you kill all same feller Koko, you savvy? This feller Cap'n Parsons he cap'n along this hooker."

"Feller King of the Islands cap'n along this hooker, sar!" ventured Lompo. Dandy Peter did not answer him in words. He lashed out with his fist, and Lompo went spinning along the deck, to crash into the scuppers. There was an alarmed cackle from the rest of the crew and they backed away.

"You talk good feller talk along me!" roared Parsons. "You scum, you savvy this feller cap'n along this hooker?"

"Yes, sar!" gasped Kolulo. "Us feller savvy plenty you cap'n along this hooker, sar! Us feller good feller along you, sar."

Peter Parsons of Lukwe had won his desperate game!

"Piracy!" muttered King of the Islands. "Piracy on the high seas!" He had bitten away the gag at last, and had the use of his voice. "Piracy!"

Hudson pressed his hands to his aching forehead. His wrists were bound together, like those of his shipmate. Sunrise was on the Pacific, glimmering through the skylight into the cabin. The shipmates of the Dawn were still in the hold, but the trap above them was open, and a glimmer of light came down from the lazarette.

Kit sat leaning back against a cask, his face white under its tan, a thin red trickle oozing under his dark hair. His head ached terribly, though he had long since recovered his senses to find himself a bound and helpless prisoner.

King of the Islands lay where Dandy Peter had left him, too tightly bound even to assume a sitting posture. It seemed to him ages that he had lain there, in the dimness and the reek of bilge. But bodily discomfort was almost forgotten in his intense rage.

Fortune had proved the sea-lawyer's friend; wild and desperate as Dandy Peter's game was, he had won it.

Against all chances, he had got the upper hand of the mate of the Dawn—and Hudson was a prisoner like his skipper. In the Kanakas they could have little hope. The Hiva-Oa boys were loyal to their white master; but a white man with a gun in his hand could drive any native crew. Only in Koko, perhaps, they had a lingering hope. But that hope died away as the minutes crawled by, and the dismal night gave place to sunny dawn.

If anything could have added to the deep rage of King of the Islands, it was this contemptuous disregard on the part of his enemy. It seemed as if Parsons had forgotten him. He lay unheeded there, while the night wore away.

From the motion of the ship he knew that the course was changed. It was certain that Dandy Peter would get away, as fast as he could, from the islands where the Dawn was known. Only in the wide seas could he hope to escape the consequences of his reckless rascality.

It was piracy on the high seas—and Dandy Peter was risking his neck. A desperate gambler to the finger-tips, he was staking his life against a fortune.

What had happened on deck the shipmates did not know—except that the ketch was now in the Lukwe skipper's hands. They could hear the rattle of blocks, the swing of the boom; the Dawn was under full sail, and speeding on her new course. They had heard one shot on deck during the night. It was the shot Dandy Peter had fired at the boat; but there was a deep dread in Ken's heart that the faithful Koko had fallen.

Nobody came below. Dandy Peter was not likely to give the crew a chance of getting at the white masters and releasing them. It was not till after sunrise that the shipmates heard footsteps in the cabin over the hold. It was not the soft padding of a naked foot, so they knew that it must be Dandy Peter who was there, and they expected to see his handsome, evil face

grinning down at them from the lazarette.

But he did not appear—though for a long time they heard him moving about. He had taken Ken's keys before he left him, and the boy trader could guess that he was going through locked receptacles in the state-room now—looking, most likely, for firearms. Common prudence would cause him to make sure that all the firearms on the ketch were in his own possession. When at last he looked down from the lazarette, it was a changed Dandy Peter that the shipmates saw. He was washed and shaved, and clad in a suit of spotless ducks belonging to Ken. The grimy stowaway had completely disappeared. Peter Parsons was the neat, clean dandy again, and there was a grin on his face as he looked down and hailed the prisoners in the hold:

"Ahoy, King of the Islands!"

"Ahoy, you piratical swab!" answered King of the Islands. "You will hang for this at Fiji!"

"Who knows?" Dandy Peter laughed. "It's a gamble, and I reckon I'm going to win. I've got your crew feeding from my hand, Ken King! Only your boat-swain's given trouble, and he's tied to the mast—and will stay tied till he's ready to jump to orders. And you won't give me any trouble, I reckon."

"I'll give you all I can, you pirate and thief!"

"That won't be a lot." Dandy Peter turned his head, and called up to the deck. "You feller Danny! You come along this place."

Danny came running down. Obviously Parsons had told the truth—he had the native crew feeding from his hand. Danny was cringing as he came padding into the lazarette. All the crew knew now that the skipper and mate were prisoners in the hold, at the mercy of the sea-lawyer who had seized the ship. Danny peered down into the dusky alley between the chocked water-casks.

"You go along hold!" snapped

Parsons. "You bring feller skipper, feller mate along cabin. Take away rope along leg he stop; no take rope along hand he stop. Eye belong me watch you plenty too much. Take feller lamp along you."

"Yes, sar!" stammered Danny. The fat cooky-boy descended into the hold. Parsons had no desire to enter that murky den again. He watched the cooky-boy, revolver in hand. If Danny had thought of attempting to help his white masters, the watching eyes and the ready revolver above would have banished that idea.

The cooky-boy released Ken's legs from the tapa cord, so that he could walk, and helped him to his feet. Ken did not speak, but he gave the cooky-boy a look that Danny understood. If he could have got his hands loose, the boy trader would have tried the most desperate chance. But Danny dared not risk it. And Ken could hardly blame him, for the Lukwe sea-lawyer was watching like a cat, his finger on the trigger.

"You come along cabin, sar!" faltered Danny.

With their legs free, but their hands still tightly bound, Ken and Kit moved along to the steep steps. Danny helped them up it from below, and they emerged into the lazarette. Dandy Peter made a gesture, and they passed on silently into the cabin. At another gesture from the sea-lawyer Danny scuttled up to the deck again and vanished.

White-faced, savage-eyed, the ship-mates of the Dawn faced the sea-lawyer. Parsons slipped the revolver back into his hip-pocket, selected a cigarette from a case he had looted from the cargo and lighted it.

"My win, King of the Islands!" he said. "I've got you where I want you—and I'm keeping you there! I'd let you loose—but I reckon you'd give me too much trouble if I did.

"I'm going to maroon you—where

you won't be picked up in a hurry—and keep your ship and crew till I raise the reef where Grant Blake's to be found. Till then you're prisoners—so long as you take it quietly. But"—the sea-lawyer's smile vanished, and his eyes gleamed like cold steel—"give me trouble, and you go over the side! I'm not sticking at trifles in a game like this."

Then he turned on his heel and tramped up the companion to the deck. His eyes were wary as he emerged into the bright sunshine, and his revolver was in his hand again. But it was not needed.

Koko, with a lump on his head, was bound to the mizzen. His eyes fixed on Dandy Peter when he came in sight, and spoke volumes of hate and vengeance. But he could not stir a limb. The Lukwe sea-lawyer hardly glanced at him. Lompo was at the wheel, steering the course set him by the new skipper of the Dawn. Kolulo and Lufu and Tomo were on deck, and all the Kanakas eyed Dandy Peter with fear. He glanced at the binnacle and smiled grimly. Lompo was steering his course as carefully as if he were still under the orders of King of the Islands.

Dandy Peter grinned as he lighted another cigarette. He had won the game—he had a ship and a crew, and was sailing to pick up a fortune!

CHAPTER 8.

The Cunning Cooky-Boy.

KIT HUDSON rose from the lockers and strode restlessly about the cabin. King of the Islands, sitting on the edge of the table, watched him in silence. They had the use of their legs, but their hands were secured. Strong tapa cords were knotted on their wrists. They could use their hands for eating, but not for resistance. More times than they could remember they had strained

their strength on the cords—tried their teeth on the knots.

But it had been futile, and at frequent intervals Peter Parsons inspected the bonds, and saw that they were safe. And when Danny was sent down to give them food and drink, the sea-lawyer always came, too, revolver in hand. The rascal who had seized Ken King's ketch like a pirate on the high seas took no chances.

It was hot in the cabin, and stuffy. The tropical sunlight blazed on the skylight overhead. Through the portholes only a waste of waters was to be seen—no sign of land; no sight of a ship. The sea-lawyer who was sailing a stolen ship was keeping to unfrequented waters.

"How long's this going to last?" muttered Hudson. "If a man had a chance—a ghost of a chance!"

"Will that scoundrel give us a chance?" said Ken bitterly. "He's got our ship—and got us! Koko's locked up safe, and the other Kanakas dare not lift a finger. If I ever get my hands on Dandy Peter—"

"He's coming!" grunted Hudson.

There was a footstep on the companion ladder. Danny the cooky-boy came down, carrying a tray with food. Close on his heels came Peter Parsons, dapper and neat in spotless ducks and pipeplayed shoes. Kit Hudson made a movement towards him. Helpless as he was—unable to use his hands—it seemed as if he would hurl himself at the dandy of Lukwe.

"Belay it!" grinned Parsons, tapping the butt of Hudson's own revolver, which was sticking in his belt.

"You scum!" hissed the mate of the Dawn.

"Hard words break no bones!" said Peter Parsons. "Here's your rations. I'm not letting you starve!"

Danny placed the tray on the table. He grimaced apologetically at his white masters.

"Me plenty solly, sar!" mumbled

Danny. "Me good boy along you, sar; but this feller Danny plenty fright along feller Parsons, sar!"

"You feller Danny go along deck," Dandy Peter said.

"Yes, sar!" said the cooky-boy humbly. "Me speak along King of the Islands, sar, along that feller good master along this boy, sar!"

"That's enough from you!" Parsons snapped.

"Yes, sar! Me make nice feller pie along you, sar!" said Danny, addressing his skipper. "Me tinkee you likee that feller pie, sar!"

King of the Islands nodded, with a faint smile, and Parsons chuckled again. The cooky-boy dared not make any attempt to release his master, much as he would have liked to do so. Apparently he was trying to make up for it by providing the prisoners with tasty food. The pie on the tray was undoubtedly a good pie, with a beautiful crust, for Danny was the best native cook in the South Seas. But rations were a matter of small concern to the shipmates of the Dawn now.

"You good feller boy, Danny!" said Ken. He was grateful to the cooky-boy for doing what he could, little as it was. Danny, with his back turned to Dandy Peter, closed one eye at the white master. Ken gazed at him. He realised that this was a sign—though of what he could not guess. The next moment the cooky-boy shuffled away.

Ken's heart beat quickly. The Hiva-Oa boy had meant something. What? Was it possible that a turn of affairs was coming?

"You can eat!" said Peter Parsons, with a grin. "Your hands are loose enough for that. I'm treating you well, King of the Islands. Black Furley would have put you over the side, I reckon!"

"You reckon you're getting away with us, Peter Parsons?" asked Hudson between his teeth.

"Looks like it!" said Parsons. "I'm raising the reef to-morrow where I'm going to maroon you—far enough out of the track of ships to keep you safe, I reckon. I shall land your boatswain with you, if I don't throw him to the sharks sooner. The rest of the crew jump to my orders. You've seen that.

"I reckon I'd no choice. My cutter's a wreck, and I'm down and out—stony broke and right on the beach! I had to have a ship to hunt for Grant Blake, the millionaire who was lost when the Mindanao went down. I've borrowed your ship, Ken King—I reckon you can have it back when I'm done with it. But I'm making my fortune first. I'm the only man in the Pacific who knows that the Sydney millionaire is alive and cast away on a reef.

"I've got to find that reef, and I want your ship and crew till I've found it. Count yourself lucky that I'm marooning you instead of dropping you over the side. I reckon you—"

He broke off as a call came from the deck in Danny's voice.

"Feller sail he stop!"

Peter Parsons made one bound for the companion. If there was a sail in sight the Dawn had to change her course—it was strictly needful for the sea-lawyer to keep clear of other craft.

"That fool Danny—what did he want to sing out for?" growled Hudson. "We might have been run down by a skipper who would have spotted how matters stood and given us a hand!"

They stared from a porthole. But if there was a sail on the sea, they saw nothing of it.

A minute later Dandy Peter's angry voice rang on the deck:

"You plenty too much fool. What place that feller sail he stop? You tinkee feller albatross one feller sail, you black swab!"

"Me solly, sar—me tinkee me see

feller sail, eye belong me, sar!" whined Danny. There was a sound of a blow and a howl. It was a false alarm, and it had irritated the savage temper of the sea-lawyer. The shipmates heard Danny's bare feet patter away in haste.

"Not a sail!" grunted Hudson. "That fool of a swab—" He swung away from the porthole. "May as well eat."

Ken nodded, and they sat down at the table. With a big complication of knots to each wrist, and only a few inches play between, it was not easy to use their hands. And they had no implements—Dandy Peter was not likely to trust them with a knife or fork. They had to use their fingers, like the Kanakas. Kit Hudson broke the crust of the pie and took a chunk of it in his fingers, and Ken followed his example.

And then, instead of lifting the food to their mouths, the shipmates of the Dawn gave a simultaneous gasp. For through the opening in the broken crust a gleam of sharp steel came—the gleam of a yam-knife hidden in the pie by the cunning cooky-boy.

King of the Islands jumped to his feet. His eyes glittered. His fingers trembled as he drew the knife from the interior of the pie. It was a short, sharp knife that Danny used for slicing yams in the galley. It had an edge like a razor—and they could guess that Danny had whetted it with care before he concealed it in the pie.

"Danny's no fool!" grinned Hudson, his eyes dancing.

Ken understood now that sign from Danny—why the cooky-boy had winked at him when he placed the pie on the cabin table. He understood, too, why Danny had given that false alarm of a sail—it was to get Peter Parsons back to the deck before the pie was opened. Danny was as artful as any monkey in his native island of Hiva-Oa, and he was trying to help his white masters out of their scrape. It

was not to please their palates that he had made that luscious pie—it was to convey the concealed knife to them unsuspected by Dandy Peter.

Ken King held the knife in his fingers, his heart throbbing. Hardly more than a minute was needed to saw the keen blade across the tapa cords that held his mate's wrists together—less than a minute more, and he also would be free. Unarmed—for Peter Parsons had rooted through the ketch, securing every weapon—but free to use their hands to make a bid for the capture of the ketch.

The sea-lawyer's revolver would not stop them if they had a chance, and the Kanaka crew, cowed as they were, would rush to their aid if they saw them free and assailing the ruffian of Lukwe. If only Dandy Peter stayed on deck for a couple of minutes now

"Quick!" breathed Ken. He gripped the wooden handle of the yam-knife in both hands. Silently Hudson held up his bound wrists. Their hearts beat almost to suffocation. If only they were granted sixty seconds in which to act!

"Keep her steady!" came the snapping voice of the sea-lawyer on deck.

"Yes, sar!" answered Lompo, at the wheel, obediently.

"You feller Kolulo! You put hand belong you along belaying-pin, you go along shark plenty too quick."

"No touch belaying-pin, sar, hand belong me!" came in trembling tones from the native seaman.

"Take that, you scum!" There was a blow and a fall. The yelling of Kolulo was heard. Whether the Kanaka had thought of handling the sea-lawyer with a belaying-pin or not, Dandy Peter was taking no risks. He ruled the stolen ship with a hand of iron, and was as ready with a blow as with a word.

Ken sawed at the strong rope between Hudson's wrists. The perspira-

tion streamed down his sunburnt face. The tough tapa was parting—in a few moments the mate of the Dawn would be loose—

Crack! The report of a revolver rang through the cabin with a sudden crash that seemed deafening. Ken gave a cry. The knife, smashed from his fingers by the bullet, flew across the cabin and clanged on the planks. He stood with numbed hands. Hudson gave a roar of rage. Standing in the companion, grinning at them over the smoking revolver, was Dandy Peter of Lukwe!

Hudson wrenched madly at his bonds, partly cut through. But they held. Perhaps it was as well for the young Australian, for Dandy Peter's revolver was aimed, his finger on the trigger, and he would have fired without compunction had it been needed. But it was not needed—he had descended in time.

Ken stood with numbed hands, aching from the shock. His eyes burned at the grinning sea-lawyer. The disappointment was overwhelming. The chance that had seemed so promising had gone, vanished at the crack of the sea-lawyer's revolver.

Dandy Peter came across the cabin. "A near thing!" he said. "Where did you get that knife?"

Neither of the shipmates answered. Parsons crossed the cabin and picked up the yam-knife. They watched him in savage silence. For some moments the sea-lawyer was puzzled. He had searched too carefully for any weapon to have been left within reach of his prisoners. Yet they had come within an ace of cutting themselves free. But it did not take the Lukwe skipper long to guess how the matter stood. He glanced at the pic on the table, and exclaimed:

"So that was it! A close thing! The cocky-boy—that's why he called me on deck—I fancied there was something—lucky I came down to make

sure." He half-raised the revolver and drove Hudson into King-of-the Islands!

Ken did not move. With teeth set, his lips drawn back in a snarl, Parsons advanced on him, and jammed the muzzle of the revolver into his face. His eyes glittered over it.

"Get moving! I'm taking no more chances with you! Get moving, you scum, or I'll shoot you dead where you stand! Get into the state-room, the state-room forward." In the doorway he gave him a savage shove with his left hand, and Ken reeled over between the bunks.

Peter Parsons slammed the door, locked it, and slipped the key into his pocket. Then he turned on Hudson. The Australian was wrenching madly at the tapa cords.

"Stop it!" said Parsons, in a low voice. "Get loose, you fool, and you're a dead man! Hold your hands here! If you keep me waiting one second, I'll crack your skull before I tie you up again."

It was clear that the desperate rascal was alarmed as well as enraged by his narrow escape of having the tables turned on him. He reversed the revolver in his grasp, and it seemed for a moment that he would strike the mate of the Dawn senseless with the heavy metal butt. He was in the mood for it, in his alarm and fury. Hudson, choking with rage, held out his hands, and the sea-lawyer bound them close together, with savage tightness.

"You're safe now!" he grated. "You'll stay safe till we raise the reef where you're going to be marooned. I'm taking no more chances. Whistle for your rations, you dog!" Taking the yam-knife, the sea-lawyer returned to the deck. Hudson threw himself on the lockers with a groan of despair. The last chance was gone now.

Dandy Peter stepped out into the brilliant sunshine on deck to meet the scared eyes of the Kanaka crew and the terrified stare of Danny. The hap-

less cooky-boy's heart almost died within him at the sight of the yam-knife in the Lukwe skipper's hand. He had failed and the ruthless ruffian of Lukwe knew what he had done. Danny cringed with terror.

"You feller Danny!" said Parsons.

"Oh, sar, me plenty solly, sar!" howled Danny. "You no shoot along this poor boy, sar, gun belong you. This feller Danny good boy along you, sar, plenty too much altogether."

The sea-lawyer levelled his revolver. Danny dropped on his bare brown knees on the hot planks of the deck.

"You no shoot along this feller, sar!" he wailed. "This feller Danny plenty too much good boy, sar, along you."

Dandy Peter had no intention of shooting the cooky-boy—he needed all the native crew on the ketch. But for a full minute he kept the wretched Danny quaking in terror under the levelled revolver, while the other Kanakas stared on in trembling silence.

"You takee knife along that feller along cabin he stop!" said Dandy Peter, between his teeth.

"This feller Danny plenty solly, sar!" quavered the cooky-boy.

"You scum!" Parsons lowered the revolver at last. "You feller Tomo! You takee lawyer-cane, you give that feller Danny five-five along lawyer-cane, plenty too much!"

Danny panted with relief. He was used to the lawyer-cane, which had often been laid across his back by Koko. Under the threatening eyes of the sea-lawyer, Tomo laid it on hard—he dared not do otherwise. Danny's yells rang through the ketch and far over the shining waters of the Pacific.

The cooky-boy crawled away to his galley at last, groaning. Danny was not likely to make another attempt to help King of the Islands. And no other Kanaka on board was allowed below deck. But Dandy Peter's heart was not light as he flung himself into the

Madeira chair, scowling savagely at the scared Kanakas.

Until the white men were gone from the ketch, his position bristled with perils—and it was yet another day before he could raise the lonely reef where they were to be marooned. Every man on board was eager to turn on him, and a moment's unwariness would have been fatal. Dandy Peter had more nerve than any other desperado in the South Seas, but he needed it all now.

CHAPTER 9.

A Surprise for Barney Hall.

BARNEY HALL, the trader of Tonga, stood in his lugger, shading his eyes with the brim of his big grass-hat, staring across the curling waters. A grim figure the burly Barney made as he stood, clad only in a loin-cloth like a native, with a leather belt round it supporting his revolver. His limbs were burnt by the sun almost as brown as those of the six Tonga boys who formed his crew.

Burly, brown, rough-bearded, with his hard, tanned, lined face, and his brows knitted over sunken eyes, the trader of Tonga looked what he was—as rough and unscrupulous a ruffian as any within the wide limits of the Pacific Ocean. For minutes he stood staring at the ketch, savage and puzzled. He turned at last and spoke to the boat-steerer at the tiller.

"You feller Tokalaloo, you savvy that feller sail?" he snarled.

"Yes, sar," answered the Tongan. "That feller sail Dawn, sar, belong feller King of the Islands."

"I reckon she is!" growled Barney. "But, by hokey, what name that feller ketch stop along these seas?"

"This feller Tokalaloo no savvy," answered the boat-steerer.

"You black swab, you figure that I s'pose you savvy?" snarled Barney Hall. "You shut up mouth belong you!"

Tokalaloo obediently shut his mouth. The other Tonga boys, behind Barney's back, grinned at one another. Barney's temper was not good—it seldom was; but now it seemed worse than ever. The lugger stood on towards the ketch, and the graceful lines of the Dawn grew clearer every moment. Barney Hall grabbed up his binoculars and stared long and hard at the handsome little craft of King of the Islands.

The wind was from the south, and the ketch was tacking eastward, and the Tonga lugger, coming up from the south, drew nearer and nearer with a full lug. Barney's sunken eyes were keen, and the powerful glasses brought the ketch close to the view; but he was savagely puzzled by what he picked up on the deck of the Dawn. Only a week ago he had fallen in with King of the Islands, out from Lalinge, in waters far away from these.

He knew from the talk on the beach that the boy trader was on a round trip among the islands, and now he had sighted the Dawn a good hundred miles from the nearest island on Ken King's beat. And neither Ken nor his mate was to be seen on the ketch, nor Koko, whose gigantic figure would have been unmistakable. He picked up several of the Kanaka crew, but there was no white man to be seen. A Madeira chair stood on the little after-deck near the binnacle, and if a white man sat in it, Barney could not see him.

Lompo was at the wheel, and Barney saw him staring steadily back at the lugger which was, on its present course, a little astern of the Dawn on the star-board quarter. Now that the lugger was in sight from the ketch, the helmsman stared at it, but with stolid indifference. Barney saw Tomo and Kolulo lift their heads and stare, and he discerned a lurking grin on their faces. There had been some change on the ketch since he had last seen King of the Islands, though he could not make out what it was. If there was a white master in the Madeira chair on deck, he could not see the lugger coming on

before the wind, but it was strange that the crew did not call his attention to it.

Barney Hall's rough hand closed on the butt of the revolver in his belt. He released it again, and glanced round at the Tonga boys. They had been grinning behind his back, but their dark brown faces became grave at once under his savage eyes.

"You feller boy!" said Barney Hall. "You see feller ketch belong King of the Islands, eyes belong you. This feller lugger run aboard that ketch. You no flaid along Hiva-Oa boy belong King of the Islands?"

"Us feller no flaid along Hiva-Oa boy, sar," said one of the Tongans. "Us feller flaid along white master, no flaid along Hiva-Oa boy."

"I reckon you can leave the white masters to me!" growled Barney Hall. "If I lay that ketch aboard, I'll handle King of the Islands and his mate, too!" And his sunken eyes blazed savagely.

The Tongans eyed him curiously. They were accustomed to the lawless ways of the trader, but an attack on a white man's ship on the high seas was something rather out of the common, even for the bully of Tonga. There was a perceptible hesitation in the looks of the Tonga crew. They were accustomed to backing up Barney Hall in many a lawless deed, but piracy on the high seas was a matter that might come under the hands of the High Commissioner!

"You listen along me speak, ear belong you," said Barney Hall. "Feller Parsons belong Lukwe stop along that hooker. I want him! And, by hokey, I'm getting him, if I have to shoot King of the Islands dead on his own deck!"

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The Tonga boys exchanged glances, but did not speak. Their looks showed that they did not relish the idea of shooting a white master dead on his own deck.

"S'pose we get that feller Parsons, us feller plenty rich!" said Barney Hall. "You feller boy savvy name belong Grant Blake, big rich man along Sydney he stop?"

"Us feller savvy, sar."

"Along we stop along Lukwe, me hear, ear belong me, talk along beach," went on Barney Hall. "Me savvy that feller Parsons pick up bottle along sea, along paper he stop along bottle. He savvy along paper along bottle, feller Grant Blake he stop along reef along sea, you savvy. That feller Parsons ship along King of the Islands, along look-findee feller Grant Blake. Savvy?"

"Along feller findee Grant Blake, that feller plenty too much rich!" went on Barney Hall. "S'pose we get feller Parsons, get paper belong him, we findee Grant Blake, every feller belong this lugger plenty rich. Me give every feller whaleboat."

There was a cackle from the Tonga crew, and every eye gleamed. To possess a whaleboat was the dream of every islander's life. Barney Hall had touched the right chord. From the mats at the bottom of the lugger the Tonga boys sorted out axes and knives. There was no doubt now that they would back up the bully of Tonga to the limit!

The trader turned his eyes on the ketch again. Two or three of the Hiva-Oa crew were staring at him, close at hand now. But if there was a white man in the Madeira chair, he had not risen, and knew nothing of the lugger coming on swiftly before the wind. The Tonga trader watched intently. He was puzzled, but he was savagely determined.

But the unwariness of King of the Islands perplexed him: he was coming down on the ketch before the wind hand over hand, and if Ken or Hudson saw him, neither could doubt that he was coming as an enemy. And if they did not see him, why did not the Kanakas report the sail? Any sail in those solitary waters would have been

heeded—and the Hiva-Oa crew remembered Barney as their master's enemy. Yet they stared at the lugger in silence, without a sign.

It was a strange mystery to Hall. But it gave him the chance he wanted of laying the ketch aboard. On her present tack, the Dawn was simply asking for it. But if she had chosen to run, the wheel hard-a-starboard would have sent her spinning away from the lugger, and with her superior sailing powers she would have left the lugger standing. King of the Islands was not the man to run—yet any peaceful trader might well have avoided the meeting when it was so easy to be avoided. But the Dawn swept on the north-eastern tack, and the lugger ran at her like a shark on its prey. Unless at the last minute they jammed over the wheel—

But Lompo, at the wheel, stood like a statue. His last order had been to keep her steady, and he was keeping her steady. Barney Hall breathed hard and deep. It was a matter of minutes now if King of the Islands did not wake to his danger. Was he below—were both the shipmates below—leaving the deck to unthinking natives—or what? It was a puzzle—it beat Barney Hall. But it was what he wanted, and his eyes gleamed under his shaggy brows as the lugger glided swiftly on.

He glanced round at his crew. Their dark faces were set and fierce, and every dusky hand had a weapon. They were good to deal with the Hiva-Oa boys if there was resistance. He fixed his eyes on the ketch again. A matter of minutes and he would hook on and leap aboard over the low rail; and if King of the Islands was there, if he showed fight, it would be hand-to-hand. Luck could not have stood by him better. In brilliant sunlight, on a wide sea, he was taking his enemy by surprise; it was such luck as he had never dreamed of—such luck that it seemed unreal.

Hardly half a cable's length separated

the two vessels when a figure in white ducks rose from the Madeira chair on the deck of the Dawn. Barney Hall caught his breath. The back of the figure was to him, but he knew Dandy Peter Parsons. His teeth shut hard; his hand grasped his revolver. Even then the dandy of Lukwe did not look round—and of Ken King and Kit Hudson there was no sign. A minute more—The lugger rushed on!

Dandy Peter rose from the chair and stretched himself and yawned. In the blazing heat of the tropic day he had almost slept. Dozing in the Madeira chair, he had not quite fallen into slumber—he dared not. Indeed, it could hardly be said that the sea-lawyer had slept at all in the days and nights since he had stolen Ken's ship and taken command of her. If he had slept, it was in cat-naps, with one eye open.

Never had there been a chance of taking him off his guard. There had been watchful eyes and ready hands, and had he been caught napping a crashing belaying-pin or a whizzing knife would have ended his command of the ketch. Only too well the desperado knew it. Incessant vigilance was the price of his safety, and so far he had not failed.

Now, in the drowsy heat, he had almost yielded to sleep. Yet Lompo, close at hand as he stood at the wheel, was aware that if he made a hostile movement the seemingly dozing white man would leap into instant activity. And Kolulo, and Lufu, and Tomo, and Danny had the same certainty. For a long time Dandy Peter had sprawled there at ease, his face shaded by his Panama hat, and the Kanaka crew had not ventured to take risks.

He rose at last to his feet, stretching and yawning, perhaps some sixth sense warning him of danger, though not from the crew. He became instantly aware of the Kanakas watching him intently—not with hostile or threatening looks but with an intense curiosity and alertness. Danny's fat face peered

out of the galley, with the same intent expression on it. Dandy Peter drew a quick, sharp breath, and by instinct his hand went to his revolver.

His swift, suspicious glance shot along the deck. There was nothing to alarm him. The fo'c'sle was safely locked, holding Koko a prisoner in its dusky interior. Ken and Hudson were safe below. The crew were all under his eyes. Yet there was danger, and he knew it. On board the Dawn, none; and there was only one other possible source of peril—a sail or steamer on the sea.

And with that thought flashing in his alarmed and suspicious mind, Dandy Peter swept a quick, fierce glance round at the shining, blue Pacific—and a yell of rage left his lips at the sight of the lugger rushing down on the starboard quarter. Now he knew the cause of the crew's silent intentness; now he understood their air of suppressed expectation. They had seen the lugger afar, and not a word, not a sign, had warned him of it.

Whether Barney Hall came as a friend or a foe to King of the Islands mattered little to the Hiva-Oa boys, as matters stood; that he came as a foe to the man who had seized Ken's ship was enough for them. The coming of any white man spelled danger to the adventurer who was sailing another man's ship—and to that danger they had left him, unwarned. A few minutes more and Hall would have been aboard, and no native's hand would have been raised to stop him.

Dandy Peter's eyes blazed with fury as he realised it. He glared at the brown, tanned face of Barney Hall in the lugger, and Hall's eyes glittered back at him. The lugger spun on. Hall, standing on the gunwale with his hand on a guy-rope, was ready to leap. A minute more—

"Hard-a-starboard!" yelled Dandy Peter. Without waiting for Lompo to obey the order, he leaped at the wheel and wrenched it over. Lompo shrank,

frightened, from the fiendish rage in his face. The ketch's nose swung away, and there was a roar of rage from Barney Hall.

"Stand by, you swabs!" roared Dandy Peter. "Stand by, you feller boy! You stop along rope, you black scum!"

He fired a shot over the Kanakas' heads, and they rushed to obey him. Then he leaped to the taffrail and stared at the lugger. The Dawn, swinging away before the wind, had eluded Barney Hall, but only just in time. The swift change of position brought the lugger astern, but she was so close that Parsons could read every line in the furious, disappointed face of the Tonga trader. Hall's brown fist came up with his revolver.

"Heave-to, Peter Parsons!" His bellow came down the wind. "Heave-to, you Lukwe lubber!"

Dandy Peter laughed savagely. His escape had been narrow, but he had escaped! The Dawn, if he liked, could sail two fathoms to Barney Hall's one. His slim hand came over the taffrail with a revolver in it.

"Barney Hall, you nigger-stealing, pearl-poaching swab, what are you doing in these waters?"

"Heave-to!" roared Hall.

"Likely!" grinned Dandy Peter.

"What have you done with King of the Islands, you swab? Have you put him and his mate over the side?" roared Hall. It was easy for the bully of Tonga to see that Dandy Peter was in command of the ketch.

Parsons did not answer. He lifted his revolver and glanced along the barrel. There was a howl from Tokalaloo as a bullet tore a strip of skin from his brown arm. He jumped and released the tiller, and the Tonga boys ducked for cover. As the lugger yawed, Barney Hall threw up his revolver and fired at the grinning face over the taffrail of the Dawn.

The sea-lawyer ducked. The next

moment he was pumping bullets at the lugger. Hall, with a roar of rage, drove the boat-steerer back to the tiller, and the lugger held on. A bullet from the ketch spun the grass-hat on his head, another grazed his arm, another tore through his rough beard. The Tonga boys, with howls of alarm, hunted cover from the raining lead.

Barney Hall, frantic with rage, opened fire again—but the gun went crashing from his hand as a bullet tore along his arm, taking off a strip of skin from elbow to shoulder. The blood ran down his dingy loincloth, and he clapped his left hand to his right arm, yelling with fury.

The wind carried back Dandy Peter's mocking laugh, and he could see the sea-lawyer's grinning face and the flash of his white teeth. Mad with rage, the Tonga trader shook his left fist at the grinning face over the receding taffrail of the Dawn. Dandy Peter fired a last shot that ripped a patch of skin from his tanned cheek.

Down the wind from the lugger came the hoarse voice of the bully of Tonga, roaring with rage. But Parsons gave him no further heed now. With the wind abaft, the Dawn was walking away from the Tonga lugger, and the sea-lawyer had nothing to fear from him. In a few minutes the lugsail was low on the sea astern.

Dandy Peter reloaded his revolver coolly. The Kanakas were watching him with eyes of fear. Lompo's brown limbs trembled as the sea-lawyer's eyes turned on him, glinting.

"You see feller lugger, eye belong you," said Parsons. "What name you no sing out, along you see feller lugger he comcy?"

"Me no savvy, sar!" stammered Lompo.

"You no sing out, along you likee feller Hall kill this feller plenty too much!" snarled Parsons. "My word! Me knock a dog-watch outer your black hide." His clenched fist crashed

into the helmsman's brown face, sending Lompo spinning on his back. There was a yell from Lompo as he went crashing down. Dandy Peter grasped the wheel. "You feller Lompo!" With his free hand, he aimed the revolver at the sprawling Kanaka.

"Get up, you swab! You stop along deck, my word, me shoot along gun plenty too quick!"

Lompo staggered to his feet.

"Takee wheel, you scum!" snarled Parsons, and the Hiva-Oa boy, panting, frightened to the marrow of his bones, obeyed. Dandy Peter turned to the crew. They backed away in fear from his evil eyes.

"You likee this feller go finish!" he snarled. "You tinkee this feller go finish along feller Hall, you likee plenty too much. You scum!" With his clubbed revolver in his grasp, he rushed at the crew. The burly Kanakas scattered with howls of terror from the scoundrel of Lukwe. But they scattered in vain. With the heavy pistol-butt Dandy Peter struck crashing blow after blow, knocking them right and left. He glared at them like some savage demon, as they sprawled, groaning, on the deck.

"My word! Me teach you feller 'bey order along me!" he snarled. "S'pose you see feller sail, eye belong you, you sing out plenty quick!"

"Yes, sar!" groaned Kolulo, rubbing his bruised head. "Us feller sing out plenty too quick, sar, s'pose see sail eye belong us feller, sar!"

Parsons thrust the revolver back into his belt. He stood at the taffrail and stared back across the sea, red in the shining sun. Only a faint speck in the distance told that Barney Hall's lugger was still keeping on her course in the wake of the swift ketch. Parsons laughed mockingly. Barney Hall was welcome to keep his mast-head in sight till the fall of night hid it from his eyes, if he liked.

Till the sun was gone the ketch fled

on before the wind. Not till then did Dandy Peter tack eastward and resume his former course, making for the lonely reef where King of the Islands was to be flung ashore from his stolen ship.

CHAPTER 10.

On a Speck of Land!

KING OF THE ISLANDS dragged himself wearily from the bunk, and stood at the porthole staring out at the sea. A night and most of a long day had passed since the sea-lawyer had locked him in the stateroom. From the porthole a shaft of bright sunlight fell across the little room. During those weary hours neither food nor drink had been brought to him. The heat in the stateroom was stifling, and thirst dried his throat. His arms ached from the tapa cords.

Sometimes he heard Kit Hudson stirring in the adjoining cabin. Once or twice they called to one another through the locked door. Since his narrow escape, the rascal of Lukwe had been merciless—he was not taking a chance with his captives again. The teak door between the shipmates remained shut and locked—they could not hope to help one another, and there was no help from the cowed crew.

They could only wait till the ketch raised the lonely speck in the boundless Pacific where they were to be cast ashore. Hope of turning the tables on their enemy was dead in their breasts now. The long minutes seemed like hours—the hours like days—but the weary time passed, and now it was near the finish. The sounds of activity on the deck above told King of the Islands that Dandy Peter was in sight of his destination.

From the porthole he could see only the waste of waters. Exactly what course Dandy Peter had steered he did not know, but he knew that it lay east and by north. The ketch was some-

where in the watery wilderness east of the Marshalls and the Gilberts. He knew that much. Dandy Peter was taking little risk of the maroons being picked up when once he had landed them.

The ketch was running down to some lonely, uninhabited islet, some speck on the boundless Pacific. There the shipmates were to be marooned—while the sea-lawyer sailed away in the stolen ship, to seek for the lost millionaire—to hold him to ruthless ransom if he found him!

And desperate as the Lukwe ruffian's game was, he was succeeding in it—he had the ship and the crew he needed, and King of the Islands could not lift a finger to stop him. Ken ground his teeth as he thought of it. A day should yet come when he would reckon with Dandy Peter of Lukwe.

"Ken!" came Hudson's voice.

"Ahoy!" called back Ken.

"They're making the landfall! The game's up, old man! If ever I get my hands on Peter Parsons again—" The Australian's voice was husky with rage.

Ken laughed wearily.

"Same here! But we're getting no chance! Who would ever have dreamed that a sea-thief could get away with a game like this? But I reckon that sea-lawyer wins, and we're for it, Kit."

Ken moved back to the porthole. He could see nothing of the island ahead, so far. But he had not long to wait now. He could hear the creaking of blocks and tackle. The ketch ceased to move through the water. Then, as the Dawn was hove-to, the island came within his range of vision.

"Maroon Island!" The words dropped from his lips, and there was something like despair in his heart. The sunlight glimmered on a tiny lagoon, with a shelving beach of sand and powdered coral, backed by tall palms, with black, impenetrable bush rising on

the slopes of a hill beyond. Surf broke on the sharp coral reefs that showed over the blue waters, creaming white in the sun, with a dull boom that was incessant.

There was no entrance to the lagoon for a ship, even for so small a craft as a ketch. That mattered nothing to Dandy Peter, who was there only to land his prisoners and have done with them. The Dawn had hove-to hardly more than a cable's length from the creaming surf on the reef. The weather was calm, and the wind light—on a rough day it would have been perilous to approach the lonely island. Coral reefs, above and below the curling blue water, ran far into the Pacific, spelling deadly danger to any craft.

Ken's eyes were fixed on the dark jungle-clad hill beyond the glimmering little lagoon. Its bare lava-rock summit rose conically, almost like a spire, against the deep blue of the sky. Once before King of the Islands had seen that spire-like lava summit, the remains of a volcano extinct centuries ago, when he had been driven far out of his course in the grip of a typhoon.

Only when a ship was driven far out of her course did any seaman's eye fall on that high lava rock; or, on still rarer occasions, when some hapless maroon was landed there. The island was marked on no chart, but its existence was known, and tales were told on the beaches of crews marooned there by South Sea pirates in old days—tales, true or false, from which the lonely speck of land derived its name.

"Maroon Island!" repeated Ken. Not a lonelier speck of land, probably, in all the wide stretches of the Pacific. The sea-lawyer of Lukwe knew the Pacific like a book, and he had chosen well. Many a long year might elapse before the maroons on that lonely island sighted a sail rising from the sea.

The key grated in the lock and Ken

turned to the door. It was flung open, and Peter Parsons stood there, grinning at him.

"Land at last, King of the Islands! Step on deck."

Ken followed him in silence. With his hands bound, he stumbled up the companion to the deck.

Hudson was already there, his face pale with rage in the brilliant sunlight. The whaleboat had been lowered, and Kolulo and Lufu were in it. Lompo and Tomo and Danny, on deck, looked sadly at their white master. They could not help him, and they had to look on while he was taken ashore and abandoned on that desolate isle. The faithful Koko was still locked in the forecabin.

A few things for the use of the maroons had been thrown into the boat. Dandy Peter was ruthless where his own safety was concerned, but he was not inhuman. But there was no weapon of any kind, not even a knife.

Ken looked at the lonely island and at the surrounding sea—vast, limitless, stretching as far as the eye could reach, without a sign of other land, or of a sail, or of a native canoe.

"You're marooning us there, Parsons?" he asked.

"I reckon you'll be safe on that spot of land, King of the Islands." Parsons laughed. "When I've found Grant Blake I reckon I'll send your ketch back to Lalinge, and give your friends your bearings—they can look for you if they like. The South Seas will be done with me when I've handled Grant Blake's fortune." He broke off, and turned to the watching Kanakas.

"You feller boy, you put white feller along boat!" he rapped.

Lompo and Tomo, with clouded brown faces, lifted their bound skipper down the low side of the ketch into the waiting whaleboat. Hudson was dropped after him. Lufu and Kolulo placed them in the stern.

Then Koko was brought out of the forecastle. The giant boatswain of the Dawn blinked in the sunlight, and then his eyes fastened on Dandy Peter, glittering with rage and vengeance. Koko's sinewy arms were bound behind his back, and he was powerless. And the revolver was in Dandy Peter's hand.

Parsons paused, regarding the Kanaka boatswain keenly. He would have been glad to keep Koko on board—the best man in the crew. But Koko, as he often said, was no common Kanaka, and he was not likely to jump to orders like the Hiva-Oa boys. He had been kept a prisoner, like his white masters, till now, and his look showed how little his spirit was subdued.

"You feller Koko, you likee stop along ketch?" asked Parsons. "S'pose you good boy along me, me makee you rich feller."

"This fellow Koko belong King of the Islands," answered the boatswain. "S'pose rope no stop along hand belong me, me killy feller Parsons plenty too quick altogether."

Parsons laughed.

"You wantee stop along island, along no ship he comey, along you never see face belong any other feller boy any more altogether?"

"Me wantee stop along King of the Islands, white master belong me," said Koko. "S'pose me stop along this hooker, bimeby me killy feller Parsons."

"Throw that feller Koko along boat!"

The boatswain was dropped into the whaleboat. At a sign from Parsons Lompo and Tomo followed, and then the scoundrel of Lukwe jumped lightly down. Only the cooky-boy was left on the ketch while the boat made the trip to the shore. Dandy Peter was taking no risks of the Kanakas making sail and leaving him in the lurch.

The oars splashed into the water, and the Hiva-Oa boys pulled for the

reef. Parsons steered into a channel in the coral and brought the boat alongside a flat shelf of rock, hardly a foot above the water.

The Kanakas held the boat fast and Parsons signed to the shipmates to step out. For a moment King of the Islands hesitated. The dark, handsome, wicked face of the sea-lawyer hardened, and his grip closed on his revolver-butt. With a deep breath the boy trader stepped out on the rock. Kit Hudson followed him in silence, and then Koko. At a word from Parsons the Kanakas tossed ashore the few supplies that had been brought for the maroons.

Parsons tossed a sheath-knife on the rock.

"I reckon you can cut yourselves loose," he said. "You'll have plenty of time to get loose and scramble across the reefs before the tide rises."

Koko pounced on the knife. He gripped the handle with his flexible toes, which Koko, like a true Kanaka, could use as a white man used his fingers, and jerked the blade from the sheath. A moment more, and Koko, with the knife firmly gripped in his toes, was sawing at Ken's bonds.

Parsons burst into a laugh. He could read the Kanaka's thoughts, but he was not likely to give the maroons a chance of making a desperate attempt to seize the boat.

"You feller boy, you push off, oar belong you!" he rapped.

The four Kanakas in the boat did not stir. At the last moment it seemed that the Hiva-Oa crew were making up their minds to resist, to give their white master a chance. But it was only for a moment. The sea-lawyer of Lukwe was not a man to be trifled with.

"You hear me, ear belong you?" he roared, and with the butt of his revolver he struck the nearest Kanaka a savage blow, sending Kolulo crashing into the bottom of the whaleboat.

"Yessar!" panted Lompo, and he seized his oar and drove at the rock, and the whaleboat spun away.

The other Kanakas put out the oars. The whaleboat glided down the coral channel and slid into the open sea. Dandy Peter, as he cleared the reef, looked back with a mocking grin.

Koko had freed King of the Islands, and Ken, taking the knife, cut loose the mate and the boatswain. The boat had almost reached the ketch. Standing on the rock, with the water lapping at their feet, the three maroons gazed after the boat.

Dandy Peter waved a hand in ironical farewell. The whaleboat bumped on the Dawn, and he jumped lightly on board. The Kanakas followed him, and the boat was swung up to the davits.

King of the Islands, in bitter silence, watched as the sails were shaken out and picked up the wind. The shipmates of the Dawn were marooned, lost on a speck of land in the boundless Pacific, while the sea-lawyer of Lukwe sailed away in quest of a fortune in a stolen ship!

A long sigh escaped Ken. His ship was gone. It was only too likely that he would never see her again—or any white man's ship. Only by the remotest chance could any vessel touch at the island, many days' sail out of the nearest track of trade. Marooned—and lost to the world—but Ken was thinking less of his own situation than of the graceful ketch that had sailed away into the boundless blue.

He turned at last to his companions. Kit Hudson stood silent, grim, savage. Koko had his dark eyes on his master. While King of the Islands was thinking of his ship, the faithful Koko was thinking of his white master. The deck of the Dawn or the beach of the desolate island were the same to Koko, so long as his white master was there.

"He's gone!" Hudson spoke at last.

"Gone—to make a fortune—leaving us to rot here!" The Australian shook a clenched fist after the vanished ketch. "How long do you reckon, Ken, before we see a sail in the offing?"

"Weeks—months—years!" answered King of the Islands quietly. "We've got to bite on to it. Dandy Peter's picked out a good spot for marooning a man whose ship he has stolen. We've no chance of being picked off—not an earthly. No ship ever touches here."

"You've seen the island before?" asked Kit.

"Once, driven a hundred miles out of my course in a typhoon. That doesn't happen often."

"Did you land?"

"No fear! Ken smiled faintly, and waved his hand towards the lines on lines of jagged reefs that stretched out into the Pacific. "I was only too glad to be able to beat to windward of a deathtrap like this. I know no more of the island than you do. I don't suppose a foot has trodden here for twenty years—perhaps for fifty. It's called Maroon Island. It's said that pirates marooned prisoners here in the old days. Otherwise, it's never been inhabited. We've got our little world to ourselves, Kit!"

The Kanaka boatswain suddenly pointed across the reef to the lagoon. In one spot there was a sparkling and flashing of water, where a torrent leaped down the steep hill and flowed through a channel it had cut in the sandy beach into the lagoon.

"Plenty good fresh water stop along island, sar!" he said.

"Ay, ay, we shan't want for fresh water," said Ken. "I remember seeing that torrent from the sea, when I passed the island long ago."

"P'laps feller skipper come along this island, wantee water, sar!" said the Kanaka. "Me tinkce, sar, head belong me."

Ken nodded slowly. There was a

remote chance that some skipper, short of water in those solitary seas, might run down to Maroon Island to fill his casks.

"Good old coffee-bean!" said Hudson. "A chance in a hundred is better than nothing, Ken. By gum! I'd be glad to see any craft raise the island—the roughest pearling crew in the Pacific, or a whaler out of Frisco. Anyhow, here we are, and here we've got to stop—and I reckon we'd better see about fixing up something for the night. We don't want to be standing on this reef when the tide turns."

"It's turning," said Ken. "Let's get going." They picked up the few articles that Dandy Peter had landed for their use—a bag of cooking utensils, some sailcloth, a bundle of clothes, some tools, blankets and tapa mats, and a little food. But for a sheath-knife they had no weapons. But weapons were not likely to be needed on an uninhabited island, far from any possible visit of savages in canoes. The tide was already beginning to wash over the low reef as they started inland.

It was hard work tramping over the rugged coral, broken into strange shapes, with hollows and crevices and gullies by the action of the sea. Carrying their burdens, they tramped on, with the surf booming behind them, and reached the beach of the little lagoon. Here and there the thick bush that clothed the island grew almost down to the lagoon. There was a rustle in a tangled thicket, and a pair of sharp, twinkling eyes stared out for a second; then a wild pig went racing away in the bush. Startled for the moment, they stopped and stared after it.

"Only a wild pig!" Ken exclaimed.

"Bacon to-morrow!" said Hudson, who was already recovering his spirits. Even the disaster that had overtaken the boy traders could not cast a gloom over the cheery Australian for long.

"My word!" said Koko, standing still and staring in the direction the fleeing wild pig had taken. "This feller no savvy."

"What thing you no savvy, Koko?" asked King of the Islands. "You see plenty feller wild pig, plenty time, eye belong you."

"Yes, sar! Wild pig he run along bush!" said Koko. "The thing me no savvy, sar." The shipmates stared at him. The most natural proceeding for a wild pig, at the sight of humans, was to "run along bush." Yet that natural proceeding seemed to surprise Koko. Slowly Koko turned his keen glance along the beach, over the lagoon, over the bank of high bush that clothed the rising ground.

"Me no savvy!" he repeated. "You plenty sure no feller stop along this island, sar?"

"Plenty too much sure," answered Ken.

"What name feller pig he run, sar?" asked Koko.

"He run along he plenty fright," answered Ken. "What on earth have you got in your brown noddle now, Koko? I've never seen a wild pig in the islands that did not run if anyone came near it."

"Me no savvy what name feller pig he run, sar, s'pose no feller stop along this island. What name he fright, s'pose no feller stop?"

The shipmates stared at one another blankly. If the island was uninhabited, as utterly deserted as it looked, the wild pig could never have seen a human being. Many tales had the shipmates heard on the beaches of men who, landing for the first time on an uninhabited island, had found the animals tame, approaching them without fear. That was what the castaways might have expected on Maroon Island, if theirs were the only feet that had trodden that lonely beach. Yet the pig, at the sight or scent of them, had scuttled away in fear into the depths of the bush.

"Me no savvy!" repeated Koko.

"I'm dashed if I savvy, either, Ken!" said Hudson. "If that porker had never seen a man before—Ken, is it possible that there is someone on the island—some other maroon or castaway?"

He broke off, staring round at the silent lagoon, red in the setting sun, at the silent stretches of dark bush. Save for the eternal boom of the surf, and the crying of gulls hunting fish in the hollows of the reef, there was no sound. Silence lay heavy on the lonely island.

"Goodness knows!" said Ken at last.

And the maroons tramped on, puzzled, Dandy Peter had picked out Maroon Island to land them as the loneliest and least likely to be visited of all the lonely specks of land in the vast Pacific. Yet was it possible, after all, that the solitary island was inhabited—that other feet had lately trodden where now they tread?

CHAPTER 11.

"We're not alone!"

NIGHT had fallen on the tropical isle.

The dark blue dome of the sky was spangled with glittering stars. Far away to the south the Southern Cross hung like a flaming jewel. The shipmates had lost no time before the sun dipped. They had camped where the stream from the torrent flowed into the lagoon, to have the supply of fresh water close at hand. The day had been hot, but the night, as was common in the tropics, was cold, and they were glad of the blankets they had brought ashore.

Koko had cut poles in the bush, the shipmates had gathered broad leaves of pandanus, and a flimsy shelter had been run up for the night. Within the palm-leaf hut they bedded in the soft sand, wrapped in blankets, on tapa mats. Ken and Kit were weary, and

ready to stretch themselves in slumber. But Koko sat on his mat at the doorway of the hut, evidently not intending to close his eyes. Hudson was already fast asleep. But twice Ken raised his head and looked at the boatswain in the gloom.

The boom of the surf on the coral rocks was incessant, but their ears were so accustomed to it now that it did not seem to break the silence. And all other sounds were still, save for the occasional splash of some fish in the lagoon close at hand, and every now and then a faint rustle of foliage as the wind stirred the bush.

Koko was listening. Ken smiled faintly. The incident of the wild pig was puzzling, but it seemed to linger more in the mind of the Kanaka than in the minds of the white men. For that there could already be anyone on the lonely island seemed, when the shipmates pondered over it, a sheer impossibility. For an hour, at least, the Dawn had been in full sight of the island that day, and a castaway, if one had been there, would surely have come running down to the reef in the hope of being taken off. As for savages, it was known that the island was not inhabited by natives—and natives, too, had they been there, would assuredly have shown up at the sight of a ship. But it was clear that Koko was not easy in his mind.

"Plenty better you sleep, Koko," said Ken.

"No wantee sleep, sar!" answered the Kanaka. "This feller tinkee plenty too much, head belong him."

"You tinkee feller stop along this island? Then what name that feller no comey, along he see us feller?" asked Ken.

"Me no savvy, sar! P'laps black fellar, sar?"

"No black feller stop along this island," answered Ken, shaking his head. "But keep watch if you like. old coffee-bean."

And Ken drew his blanket over him again, closed his eyes and dropped at once into slumber.

Koko sat leaning back against a palm-pole, his eyes wide open, watching the beach that glimmered in the starshine. The shipmates slept soundly, but the eyes of the Kanaka did not close. The night grew older, and still the sleepless Kanaka watched the beach. Where it was open the starlight lay like dusky silver. But here and there coral rocks jutted up, casting black shadows. All was still and silent as the grave. But suddenly he stirred, and a quiver ran through his sinewy brown limbs. His eyes were fixed on a black shadow of a rock at a distance of three or four fathoms—and unless his eyes had deceived him that shadow had stirred.

Koko drew a long, deep breath. The shadow of the rock could not stir—but a creeping enemy skulking in the cover of it could. With his heart beating faster the Kanaka watched intently. The long, black shadow cast by the rock was extending—something that moved there was adding its shadow to the shadow of the rock. Something that crept and crawled without a sound—for not the slightest sound reached the straining ears of the Kanaka.

He knew that it was a human foe—it could only be a foe, coming silently and stealthily in the night. The shadow lengthened—a creeping form was moving round the rock. Koko groped for his axe, and gripped it hard. He leaped to his feet, and at the movement the shipmates awakened.

They started up together, to see the giant figure of the Kanaka leaping out into the starlight, axe in hand. They were both on their feet in a twinkling. Ken grasped his knife—Hudson caught up a cudgel. They leaped to the doorway, staring after the Kanaka.

"Koko!" shouted Ken.

The giant boatswain stood there in

the starlight, his arm uplifted, the axe glistening. But no one else was to be seen. From the bush close at hand came a faint rustle, and that was all.

"My word!" gasped Koko.

"What name?" exclaimed Ken impatiently.

Without answering, Koko stared round the rugged rock where he had seen the shadow move, and stared towards the bush. Then, slowly, he came back to the palm-leaf hut, the axe tightly gripped in his hand, his dark eyes shining with excitement.

"What you see, eye belong you, Koko?" asked the mate of the Dawn.

"Me see black feller he stop, sar!" answered Koko.

"Black feller?" exclaimed Ken.

"Me tinkee black feller, sar! He run along bush plenty too quick, no see plenty too much along that feller."

That there was a "black feller" on Maroon Island the shipmates did not believe for a moment. Savages on the island would have known of their presence at once and would certainly have shown up long since. And a single black feller, alone on the island, was hardly imaginable.

"You've been dreaming, Koko," said Ken at last.

"No dream, sar! How can, along me no sleep?" said the boatswain.

"A shadow, I suppose," said Hudson, with a yawn. "Or perhaps our friend the wild pig, looking for grub, what?"

"Me see that feller, sar, eye belong me," said Koko obstinately. "Me no see that feller plenty too much, along he run along bush too much quick, but me see that feller, sar."

"There's nobody on the island, old coffee-bean," said Hudson. "Nobody but us and the wild pigs."

"No tinkee, sar."

"Well, I'm going back to my blankets!" Hudson laughed. "Give me a hail if he lays us aboard again."

"Me no tinkee feller stop along this island, Koko," said Ken, shaking his head. "Plenty better you sleep, along night he stop."

"This feller Koko no sleep, sar!"

Ken laughed, and followed Hudson's example and went back to his blankets. Neither of them doubted that the uneasy Kanaka had been startled by some stirring shadow, or the rustle of a wild pig rooting in the bush. They were fast asleep again in a couple of minutes.

But there was no sleep for Koko. Axe in hand, with unwinking eyes, the Kanaka watched, till the stars paled in the dawn and the rising sun glimmered over the bush and was reflected back from the surface of the lagoon.

But if an enemy had approached in the night, he had gone, and he did not return. When the rising sunlight streamed down on the beach the shipmates awoke, and turned out. They smiled at the sight of the watchful Koko.

"No see that feller any more, eye belong you, old coffee-bean?" asked Hudson, with a chuckle.

"No, sar!"

"That feller walk about head belong you, along you sleep," chuckled Hudson.

"Me no shut eye belong me, sar!"

Koko stepped out of the hut now that his white masters were up. They followed him out. They were turning towards the lagoon, to begin with a dip in the shining waters. But Koko moved towards the high coral rock, in the shadow of which he believed he had seen the "black feller" in the night.

"That feller he no stop, along day he come, Koko!" said King of the Islands, with a laugh. He did not believe that there had been a "feller" at all.

"Me savvy, sar! Me tinkce findee mark belong foot, belong that feller, sar!" explained Koko. "Tinkee findee now day he come."

"Now looking for the trail?" grinned Hudson. "Well, if any black feller came along in the night, he must have left

traces. This soft sand would keep his tracks. Let's look, Ken!"

Ken nodded, and smiled, and they followed the Kanaka past the coral rock. Beyond it, the soft sand lay glistening in the rising sun. Koko, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes, pointed to the sand.

The shipmates stared blankly. Deeply marked in the soft sand was the trail of bare feet. Human feet had trod there, and the tracks led away up the beach, to the nearest point of the bush. Ken and Kit gazed at the footprints almost in stupefaction. The trail was unmistakable, both coming and going. Someone had crept down from the bush in the night, and lurked in the shadow of the rock, spying on the camp. The maroons were not alone on the island! And if Koko had not been on the watch, what might have happened? The unseen, unknown enemy had crept within a few fathoms of where the shipmates lay sleeping—for what?

"My hat!" Hudson broke the silence. "We're not alone on the island, after all, Ken—and—we've got an enemy here."

King of the Islands nodded in silence. It could not be doubted now—the footprints told their own tale! But who—what? His eyes searched the beach, and the black, silent bush beyond. Whoever was the mysterious dweller on Maroon Island who had crept round the camp, an enemy in the night, the dark, impenetrable bush hid him now, and the bush kept its secret.

CHAPTER 12.

Koko's Fight for Life.

THE savoury scent of broiled fish greeted the shipmates of the Dawn as they came back from a dip in the lagoon. Koko opened the earth-oven in which he had cooked the fish, caught in the shallows of the lagoon, and grinned cheerily at his white masters. They sat down on lumps

of coral to breakfast of broiled fish and ship's biscuit, with fresh water from the stream to wash it down, and the milk of young drinking-nuts close at hand.

The maroons were not likely to want for food on the lonely island. The lagoon swarmed with fish, coconuts and bananas grew in wild luxuriance, and there were wild pigs in the bush. From where they sat at their meal they could see across the lagoon and the outer reef, far across the rolling Pacific beyond. Far to the horizon stretched the limitless expanse of blue, unbroken by a sail. Gulls innumerable called and cried over the wide stretches of the reefs, and unceasingly came the boom of the surf on the hard coral.

Every now and then the eyes of the shipmates turned on the black wall of bush, and they wondered whether eyes were watching them from the dusky shades. Nothing had been seen or heard of the strange denizen of the island since day had dawned. But here and there, in the sand of the beach, traces had been picked up of old foot-prints—the prints of naked feet, showing that the Man of the Island had been used to coming down to the lagoon.

Who and what he could be was a mystery. The naked footprints seemed to indicate that he was a native, and it seemed certain that a white man, a castaway, would have shown up at once as a friend and not as a foe, overjoyed to see other white men again. That, indeed, could hardly be doubted, and it drove the shipmates to the conclusion that the man was a native, black or brown. Yet it was strange that a savage should be there alone, and it seemed clear that he was alone.

A native canoe might have been driven on the lonely island in a hurricane, yet if one man had escaped alive from the wreck, why not others? As they ate, the shipmates were thinking over the curious problem, and it occurred to Ken that the Man of the Island might be some maroon, like themselves, perhaps marooned by his

skipper for a crime on shipboard. But he shook his head at that idea.

If it was so, the man would have been glad to join up with other white men, eager to hear a human voice again after long solitude and silence. He would have had nothing to fear from them. It was a mystery which the shipmates could not solve.

King of the Islands rose and stretched himself. Koko crooned softly an Hawaiian song as he washed tin pannikins and plates in the stream. Crusoe life on Maroon Island did not damp Koko's spirits. So long as he was with his white master, the faithful Koko was content.

Hudson sat whittling a lawyer-cane with the knife. With tough pandanus fibre he bound a jagged lump of coral to the end, to make a war-club. Now that they knew they were not alone on the island, the shipmates realised that they might need weapons.

Ken threw his head back and gazed up at the high volcanic peak that rose above the bush. That spire-like peak was visible from a vast distance at sea, from all sides of the island. Over the bush-clad hill the peak rose in a hundred feet of glistening lava. Kit Hudson glanced at him inquiringly.

"No ship ever comes near this island, except by chance, Kit," said the boy trader. "But that peak can be seen against the sky from sixty miles out, I should say."

"Likely enough," assented Hudson. "All the worse for us, Ken! It's a warning to skippers to steer clear."

"But a signal-fire on the summit!" said Ken.

"Some climb!" said the mate of the Dawn.

"We've got time on our hands here," said Ken, with a smile. "I'm reckoning on going aloft this morning, Kit, to see what can be seen from the top. And there's more than enough fuel for a fire."

"You're not going alone," Hudson said. "Our unknown friend may be

hanging about in the bush, watching for a chance at one of us."

"We'll make it together, then," said Ken. "Koko's our builder, and he can get on with the hut while we're going aloft."

"This feller makee plenty good hut, sar," said Koko. "Makee strong feller hut, along night he come."

Ken nodded. The flimsy shelter that had been put up was useless for defence if the shipmates had to meet an attack in the dark hours, which seemed not unlikely after the strange happenings of the night. A "strong feller hut" was a necessity if they were to sleep in safety when night came again.

"Go it, old coffee-bean," said Hudson, "and keep one eye open for squalls."

Koko swung his axe, and grinned.

"S'pose that feller he comee along this place, along day, me see um, eye belong me," he said. "Me cut off head belong that feller, along axe belong me, all samee Solomon Island feller."

Koko was already at work when the shipmates started from the beach. His devotion to his master overcame the laziness that was natural to a Kanaka. Any other of the crew of the Dawn would have laid down idly in the sand, once the white men were out of sight. Not so Koko, who prided himself on being no common Kanaka. His axe was swinging actively, cutting palm poles to build the walls of a hut, as the shipmates tramped away towards the bush, and the ringing of the axe followed them long after they were out of sight.

To reach the lava peak was, as Hudson had said, "some" climb. On an inhabited island there would have been runways in the bush, but on Maroon Island the bush grew thick and close and tangled, sharp with thorns, sickening with the smell of rotting vegetation. It was yet early, but the sun was high, and already the heat was intense. Here and there were open spaces, where old ridges of lava lay, but for the most part the shipmates had to push aside bush and bramble to advance.

Once in the bush, they lost sight of beach and lagoon and ocean and sky. A dusky twilight reigned, though the sun was burning with a fierce glare. Few white men could have kept a sense of direction in the tangled wilderness. But Hudson was used to the bush in his native Australia, and Ken had a sailor's sixth sense in such matters. And the upward slope of the ground was some guide.

Hudson fanned himself with his hat. They had been struggling for more than an hour in the bush, and a rest was welcome. Faintly from the distance came the hollow boom of the surf. There was no other sound save the buzzing of innumerable insects, and every now and then the scream of a cockatoo. But as the shipmates stood at rest a sudden rustling came to their ears from the jungle. There was a crackling and brushing that told of hurried flight, and it was approaching them.

Instinctively they gripped the loaded lawyer-canes, and stared round, the thought of the mysterious denizen of the island in their minds. But it was a wild pig that suddenly burst into view, appearing from the bush and vanishing into it again.

The animal was plainly in flight, and it could have only one pursuer—the mysterious Man of the Island. King of the Islands and his mate stood with tense nerves, watching for him to appear on the track of the fleeing animal. The continued rustling told that he was not far away, and they had no doubt that in a few moments more their eyes would fall on him.

But the rustling suddenly ceased. Ken's eyes met Hudson's.

"He's spotted us!" muttered the mate of the Dawn. Ken nodded.

They watched the bush in the direction where the rustling had ceased. But all was still and silent. Wary as the wild animal he had been hunting, the Man of the Island had discovered their presence, and was keeping in

cover. It gave them an eerie feeling to know that his eyes were watching them from the tangled bush. But there was no sound.

"Give him a hail!" said Hudson at last. "White man or black, we're not his enemies, if he could understand it."

"Ahoy!" King of the Islands shouted. "Ahoy! You feller stop along bush, you hear me sing out, ear belong you? You show a leg, you feller! This feller plenty good feller along you." The echoing of his shout died away, and dead silence followed. They waited, but the stillness was unbroken.

"Let's get on," said Hudson at last. "But keep your weather-eye open. If it's some black cannibal, a knife in the back would be no joke."

The shipmates tramped on again, their eyes keenly on the alert. If the unseen man was some savage, who did not understand even the beche-de-mer, the common language of the South Seas, it was likely enough that a whizzing knife or stone might fly from the thickets. And surely the Man of the Island must be a black savage, for there was no imaginable reason why a white man should keep out of sight so warily.

But there was no attack, though every now and then a faint rustle in the bush behind them told that the unseen man was following. From moment to moment they stopped and faced round, but immediately the pursuing rustle ceased. It was heard again when they resumed their way. Hudson gritted his teeth.

"This is getting on my nerves, Ken! What about hunting him in the bush and making the swab show up?"

"No chance," answered Ken. "Might as well hunt a needle in a haystack." Hudson grunted, but he knew that his shipmate was right. Tracking the unseen man in the tangled bush was a hopeless task. He had only to stand still, and they might have passed within a yard of him, unseeing.

But they were getting on the higher

ground now, where the old streams of lava from the volcano lay thicker and wider, and the bush consequently thinned. And as the cover thinned, the pursuing rustle was heard no more. Evidently the Man of the Island did not intend to emerge into the open. The pursuit had ceased, and the shipmates breathed more freely as they pursued their way.

They emerged from the bush at last into the open, a blaze of brilliant sunshine after the dusk of close vegetation. Before them lay the ancient crater of the volcano. But for a few shrubs, and a straggle of low bushes, it was clear of vegetation. The lava was dazzling to the eye, and hot to the touch.

Aching with heat, streaming with perspiration, they clambered doggedly on, till they stood on the summit, lava crunching under their feet. The old crater was blocked with solid lava, and here and there shrubs grew, where in far-off days the fire-torrent had poured out. Panting, the shipmates of the Dawn stood on the sun-scorched summit, and looked round them.

The whole island lay at their feet. From the summit of the lava peak, they looked over the top of the highest bush, over branches that grew sixty feet from the ground. Small in the distance they saw the lagoon, and the strip of beach, dazzling white in the sunshine. An antlike figure moved against the dazzling white. It was Koko at work building the hut. But the Kanaka was far too distant for recognition.

Their glances swept round at the sea, open to their sight for an immense distance from the lava peak. But only the rolling blue met their gaze—no sign of a sail, no trace of a steamer's smoke. They might have fancied that the island was the only land in the globe, and all the rest unending water.

It was close on noon now—the climb had taken hours. The blaze of the sun

on the hot lava was almost unendurable. But the shipmates had a task to perform, and after that long scanning of the encircling waters they set about it. Wood dry as tinder in the hot sun, was gathered from the sparse growths in the crannies and gullies of the lava, and piled on the highest point. In spite of heat and fatigue, they laboured hard and steadily, and the pile grew.

It was packed close, to burn as slowly as possible, for to replenish the fire meant another weary climb to the summit of the peak. But Ken had made up his mind to make the climb once a day to keep the fire going—it was the one chance the maroons had of attention from any vessel that might pass far out at sea.

Ken set a match to the pile, the flames licked up, they retreated from the heat, and a long rolling column of smoke went floating away against the brilliant blue. That signal-smoke would be visible at an immense distance across the sea, and any skipper who sighted it would know what it meant. Then the shipmates of the Dawn left the lava summit and plunged once more into the dimness of the bush.

The downward way was easier and swifter. Through the dim heat of the bush they tramped, with wary eyes and ears for the Man of the Island. But they saw and heard nothing of him. At last their ears were gladdened by a sound from far ahead—the ringing of Koko's axe. The Kanaka was still at work cutting poles, regardless of the tropic day.

For several minutes as they threaded their way onward and downward they heard the strokes of the axe. Then the sound ceased. No doubt Koko was carrying the poles he had cut down to the site of the building. They tramped on, listening for another sound from the Kanaka. When it came, suddenly, it was startling. From the direction of the beach, now close at hand, came a sudden startled yell in the voice of Koko. It was followed by

a fierce howl as of some savage man or beast.

"My sainted Sam!" panted King of the Islands. "Koko—look alive, Kit!" He raced on through the bush, reckless of tangled branches and piercing thorns. Hudson raced at his heels. Both knew what it meant—the Man of the Island! Again that fierce howl, which seemed as if it could come from no human throat, rang from the beach, and as they tore desperately on they heard fierce panting and struggling, and they knew that Koko, in the grasp of the wild denizen of Maroon Island, was fighting for his life.

CHAPTER 13.

The Message in the Bottle.

"HONOLULU to Sydney—plenty of room to look!" Dandy Peter of Lukwe snarled the words aloud, and Kolulo, at the wheel of the stolen ketch Dawn, started and eyed him uneasily. Peter Parsons did not glance at the steersman, but sat in Ken's Madeira chair aft, his brows knitted over glinting eyes, scowling. Tomo and Lufu and Lompo, on deck, stood ready to jump to orders at a word from the sea-lawyer. In the galley Danny the cooky-boy was singing over his pots and pans.

The Hiva-Oa crew of the Dawn were attached to the skipper they had lost, but in the lighthearted way of the South Sea Islanders they did not let the loss weigh on their minds. Dandy Peter was captain of the Dawn now, with a ready fist and revolver to back up his command, and the chief feeling of the Kanakas was a desire to avoid his fierce eye and savage temper.

Why the Dandy of Lukwe was looking morose now the brown boys did not know. He had taken out a leather case, opened it, and from it drawn a sheet of paper, which he unfolded. On it was pasted a thinner sheet, to keep it from falling to pieces. This was a

leaf torn from an ordinary pocket-book, written on in indelible pencil, but partly illegible from the action of water. Evidently it had been in the sea.

That scrap of paper was worth a fortune to Dandy Peter. Two words on it, though smudged by water that had long since dried, stood out plain and clear; a signature—and the signature was "Grant Blake."

Dandy Peter had laughed when he heard of the reward of £5,000 offered by the firm at Sydney for news of the lost millionaire. No more than any other South Sea skipper did he believe that there had been any survivor from the Mindanao. But now he believed it—for he knew!

He knew—under the hand of Grant Blake himself—the hand that had traced those half-obliterated words on a sheet torn from a pocket-book and consigned it in a bottle to the sea! Dandy Peter had been at the lowest turn of Fortune's wheel when that strange stroke of luck came his way. His native boys had run away with his cutter and piled it on a reef. He was at Lukwe almost in tatters, cadging drinks from the rough traders there, ready for any desperate deed to retrieve his fortune. And the lapping tide in the lagoon had cast that floating bottle almost at his feet!

He had cracked the bottle on a chunk of coral, and a damp paper lay in his hand—and the name that was signed to it had electrified him. Grant Blake! But he shrugged his shoulders the next moment—ten to one it was a hoax. With little belief in its genuineness, he showed the signature to two or three men on Lukwe who had had dealings with Grant Blake and knew his "fist." And they pronounced it genuine—and then Dandy Peter realised what a fortune lay in his grasp.

Had he still had his cutter, the Sea-Cat, all would have been plain sailing. But his cutter was piled up, his crew gone—and he was almost without a

bean. Plenty of the rough crew on Lukwe would have joined in such an adventure—but that was not what he wanted. Already at the back of his mind was the scheme to find the lost millionaire—not for the reward, large as it was, but to make terms with him—to hold him to ransom for a fortune!

A man worth millions would pay high to be taken off a desolate reef—and the sea-lawyer had no scruples. He wanted a ship and a crew—and now by a mixture of cunning and sheer desperate hardihood he had them. And had at the same time paid off his old bitter grudge against King of the Islands. Now to find the reef where the millionaire watched for a sail—not an easy task, for many of the words in the message from the sea were obliterated by the water that had soaked into the bottle, and the thing was by no means clear.

The men on Lukwe had talked—he had left the beach buzzing with rumours of what he knew. There were plenty of men on Lukwe who would have stopped at little to get a sight of that paper—among them Barney Hall, the trader of Tonga, whose lugger had been in the lagoon at the time. Barney Hall, he knew, was aware that he was on the Dawn, and was hunting him—it was only a couple of days since he had dropped the Tonga lugger astern. Likely enough, he might fall in with the lugger again on his course back from Maroon Island. He cared little—there was no man in the Pacific whom the iron-nerved sea-lawyer feared.

With knitted brows, Peter Parsons scanned the half-illegible scrawl on the paper as he had scanned it a hundred times already. There were many blanks that he had to fill in by guesswork. But sooner or later he would get it clear. He scowled savagely as he scanned it, and the Kanakas eyed him with uneasy glances.

"Feller sail he stop!" came from Kolulo.

Dandy Peter muttered an imprecation. Sailing a stolen ship, driving a stolen crew, any sail on the sea spelled danger to the reckless adventurer who was risking the fate of a pirate. He thrust the paper back into the case, the case into his pocket, and leaped to his feet.

Kolulo pointed. A lug-sail glanced on the sea, almost directly in the course of the ketch. Dandy Peter stared at it long and hard, and recognition came into his eyes.

"Barney Hall, by thunder!"

It was Barney Hall's lugger, beating to the north-east. The sea-lawyer watched it. The Tonga trader was still hunting the ketch. He knew that Dandy Peter was on board, but he did not know what had happened to King of the Islands and his mate. And it did not suit Dandy Peter to let him know. He did not want the news to spread on all the beaches in the Pacific that he was sailing a stolen ship.

He snarled an order to the crew and the ketch was put before the wind. He gritted his teeth as he saw the lugger come about in pursuit. But he laughed the next moment—the Dawn could sail two fathoms to the lugger's one. Standing at the taffrail, he waved a mocking hand at the lugger.

From under the brown, patched lug-sail a stream of white smoke spurted. The bullet came before the report, faint in the distance, rolled on the sea. By good marksmanship or luck it came close, and Dandy Peter felt the wind of the bullet before he knew that Barney Hall had fired. It hummed by, grazing his cheek, and he started back, stumbled, and fell to the deck.

There was a sudden cackle from the Kanaka crew. Tomo and Lufu and Lompo made a forward movement—Kolulo left the wheel—Danny slid out of his galley. Had that bullet struck the lawyer, as the Kanakas for the

moment believed, Dandy Peter would have had short shrift!

But in a moment he was leaping up—and the Kanakas stopped dead in almost ludicrous surprise and terror as he gained his feet and grasped the revolver from his belt. Kolulo jumped back to the wheel—Danny vanished into his galley—Lompo and Lufu and Tomo backed away in fear. The sea-lawyer's eyes blazed at them.

"You scum!" he snarled. "You tinkee this feller plenty kill along gun—you tinkee throw this feller white master along shark, along sea! You wantee this feller knock seven bells outer you, my word!"

With his clubbed revolver he rushed at the Kanakas. There were wild howls of terror as they dodged the savage blows. When Dandy Peter went back to the taffrail there was a rifle in his hands and a murderous light in his eyes as he glared back at the lugger. But already the Dawn was walking away from her pursuer and the lug-sail sinking into the Pacific.

CHAPTER 14.

The Smoke Signal.

"**K**OKO!" panted King of the Islands. Breathless, panting, scratched by unheeded thorns, the boy trader burst from the bush, with Hudson at his heels.

Blinded for a moment by the sudden change from the dusk of the bush to the brilliant sunlight on the beach, King of the Islands stared round him. Only that one cry had come from Koko—one yell of mingled rage and terror. He was fighting for his life, and he needed all his breath for the desperate fight.

A startling scene burst on the eyes of the boy trader. Two figures, locked in a death grapple, rolled on the beach, kicking up clouds of sand and powdered coral as they struggled. In that fight it was not easy to distinguish

one from the other—but Ken glimpsed a strange wild figure grappling with the Kanaka—a figure of terrible aspect. So wild and shaggy was it that he might almost have supposed that it was a gorilla, had it been possible to imagine a gorilla on the island.

But it was a man—though whether white or brown or black could hardly be said. It was a man of herculean strength, that was clear, for although of lesser stature than the giant Kanaka, he was getting the upper hand in the struggle. Koko, a giant of strength, was fighting his hardest, eyes gleaming and teeth shut hard, but he was barely holding his own.

Near by lay scattered palm poles, which the Kanaka had dropped when he was attacked. With watchful cunning, the wild man of the island had waited till the Kanaka laid down his axe and started carrying the cut poles down to the site of the hut. Then he made the attack with tiger-like suddenness when Koko had no weapon in his hand, and was cumbered with his burden.

But for the fact that the skipper and mate of the Dawn were returning from the hill, and were close at hand, it might have gone hard with Koko, powerful as he was. It was amazing to see the gigantic Kanaka, whose strength was enormous, struggling in vain in the grasp of any man. There was something terrifying in the strength of the wild man of Maroon Island.

Ken raced to the spot, his loaded stick uplifted. But he did not strike. The two desperate combatants, laced together, rolled over and over, and it was impossible to strike without as much risk to Koko as to his assailant. King of the Islands dropped the lawyer-cane and flung himself on the Man of the Island, grasping at him fiercely.

His arms locked round a muscular bull-neck, and he dragged with all his force. But he could not drag the wild man loose from Koko, and the three rolled over together in the spurting sand.

"Kit!" panted the boy trader.

But Hudson did not need the call. He was only a moment or two behind his shipmate. He hurled himself into the fray, grasping the enemy and dragging at him. A yell burst from the Man of the Island—a yell as fierce and savage as the war-yell of any savage in the Solomons. Terrible as his strength was, he had no chance against the three, and Ken and Kit together dragged him headlong off the almost exhausted boatswain.

"My word!" gasped Koko, as he sprawled in the sand, panting for breath. "My word! That feller plenty strong feller too much!"

There was another fierce yell from the wild man as he struggled furiously in the grasp of the shipmates. Strong and sturdy as they were, he dragged them to and fro as they clung to him, like a powerful stag with the hounds hanging to him. Koko staggered to his feet to go to their aid. The wild man was seeking to escape now, struggling fiercely to get away to the bush.

"Hold him!" panted Ken.

But it was not easy to hold the wild man. With herculean strength he tore himself loose, and leaped away from the panting shipmates. They reeled breathless, and the wild man sprang, with the activity of a wild animal, to a distance of a dozen feet, and stood glaring back at them.

For the first time they had a clear view of him, and his aspect might have struck a chill to the stoutest heart. He was six feet in height, but the wild, tangled shock of hair on his head made him look taller. His face, as brown as a native's—if it was a white man's—was half covered with a rough and shaggy beard, which grew down to his bare, brown chest. His only clothing was a kilt of plaited pandanus fibre, belted round his waist. If he was a white man, he was burned so brown by the sun that he was as dark as any native of the Islands.

His eyes rolled and glittered with the

savage fierceness of a wild beast's. For a moment he stood there, a hideous and terrifying figure in the brilliance of the tropical sun. Then, as the shipmates made a movement towards him again, he turned and ran for the bush.

King of the Islands dashed in pursuit.

"After him, Kit!"

Who the man was, what he was, the shipmates could not begin to guess. But, for their safety's sake, they had to secure him if they could. They rushed up the beach after the fleeing islander, and Koko, gurgling for breath, rushed after them.

The wild man ran with almost incredible speed. Fast as they were, they dropped behind by yards as he fled like a hunted deer. He was far ahead of them when he reached the bush and plunged into its dusky shades. The crashing and rustling in the bush told that he was still fleeing at frantic speed after he had vanished.

They halted on the edge of the bush, panting, listening to the crashing and rustling that died away in the distance.

"My word!" breathed Kiko, rubbing his aching arms. "That feller plenty strong feller too much! S'pose white master no comey along this place; me tinkee that feller plenty kill this Kanaka, my word."

"If that swab Parsons had left us a gun—" muttered Hudson.

"We've got to stick together after this!" said King of the Islands, with a deep breath. "Some savage wrecked from a canoe. Savage as a wild beast; crazed by solitude, perhaps—goodness knows! We've got to keep our weather-eye open after this, Kit!"

"You bet!" said Hudson.

The bush was silent now. The wild man was gone. In the long, hot hours that followed, the shipmates worked hard, helping Koko build the hut for defence when the night came. Nothing more was seen of the wild man of the island; but they had an uneasy feeling that fierce eyes might be watching them from the shadows of the bush.

While they laboured through the hot

hours, planting strong palm poles and binding them together with fibre, the smoke from the fire on the summit of the peak rolled thick and black against the sky over the hill. It could be seen for many miles across the ocean, and from the bottom of their hearts the maroons hoped that there might be eyes to see it. It was late in the afternoon when Koko, glancing up at the summit over the high bush, ejaculated suddenly:

"Feller smoke no stop!"

Ken and Kit stared up at the peak. When they had last glanced up a black volume of smoke had been rolling against the sky. Now only a few light wisps floated away on the blue. The fire had been banked up with ample fuel to last a long day, but it was burning no longer. The signal-smoke, on which the only hope of rescue from the lone isle depended, was blotted out.

"That swab of a nigger has put out the fire!" muttered Hudson, between his teeth.

It was clear that the wild man of the island had extinguished the signal-fire—whether with a purpose, or in mere senseless fury, could not be told. King of the Islands drew a deep breath.

"We've got to get him, Kit," he said. "We've got to get him—or he will get us!"

The sun was sinking to the Pacific. The hut was finished before the light was gone—strong walls of poles firmly planted, with a roof of poles strongly bound in place with wiry fibre, and a door of palmwood, with stout bars to secure it. And when the brief, tropical twilight was over and darkness descended, the maroons were glad to camp inside that safe defence. In the hours of darkness, more than once they awoke to hear a brushing sound outside, and they knew that the wild man of the island was prowling round them in the night. But the walls were strong, and the wild man prowled in vain!

Crash! King of the Islands started suddenly out of slumber. In the silence

of the tropic night the sudden crash came like thunder.

"Black feller belong island he stop!" came the voice of Koko, the Kanaka boatswain. "Black feller stop along this hut, sar!"

In the darkness of the hut the three shipmates started to their feet. The walls, built of palm-poles planted firmly in the earth, bound together by pandanus fibre, were strong. But the little building almost rocked under the crash.

"The wild man!" breathed Ken King. The crashing came again, evidently from a heavy coral rock wielded in powerful hands. This time it landed on the palmwood door. Three strong bars held the narrow door in place, but it creaked and groaned under the concussion. Then there was a thud on the beach. The heavy rock had slipped from the hands that held it.

"My word!" murmured Koko. "That black feller wantee come along this place, along killy us feller altogether!"

"The Man of the Island means business, Ken," said Kit Hudson, with a faint grin in the darkness. "He doesn't seem to want strangers on his jolly old island!"

Ken King stepped to the wall beside the door, where a crack let in a shaft of moonlight. A brilliant moon sailed over the lonely island, turning the lagoon to a sheet of silver, and the powdered coral of the beach glistened white. He peered from the narrow crack, and a thrill ran through him at sight of the wild figure without—hardly a couple of yards from his eyes.

As Ken watched him he stooped and grasped the jagged coral rock again with both strong hands and lifted it for another attack.

"It's coming!" muttered Ken.

Again the palm-pole hut shivered under the terrific blow. Koko groped in the dark and picked up an axe.

"This feller hut plenty strong feller hut, sar," he whispered. "But me tinkee that black feller come along this hut close-up!"

"The door won't stand much more of that, Ken," said Kit Hudson.

"Me killy that black feller, along axe belong me, along he comey," said Koko. "Me cut off head belong him, all same Solomon Island feller."

"We've got to handle him," said King of the Islands; "make him a prisoner if we can! The wretched brute must think we're enemies!"

"Plenty better killy that feller, along axe belong me, sar!" urged Koko.

"Belay it, old coffee-bean! S'pose me makee that feller savvy us feller friend along him, he friend along us feller," said Ken.

"The brute's as savage as a tiger-shark, Ken!" muttered Hudson. "I've heard him prowling round the hut a dozen times since we turned in. He must think we're afraid of him, or he wouldn't be trying this game!"

"An unreasoning savage," said Ken. "But—"

Crash! The door groaned, and one of the bars fell from its fastenings. A shaft of bright moonlight came in at a wide crack. Koko's grasp tightened on the handle of the axe. The hut had been built strongly for defence, but it was not built to sustain an attack from a heavy rock wielded in hands of enormous strength. A couple more such blows and it was certain that the door would burst in.

"Stand ready!" muttered the boy trader, as he removed the remaining bars from the door. It was futile to wait till the palmwood was beaten in by the crashing rock, and Ken was anxious to get hold of the wild man and secure him. His panting breath could be heard outside the hut. They waited, with tensely strung nerves, for the next blow. It came, the great rock crashing on the door like thunder. The door, no longer fastened, flew wide open on its fibre hinges, the rock clattered into the hut, and the wild man, taken by surprise by meeting no resistance, staggered after it and fell on his knees in the doorway.

"Get him!" Ken roared. Had Koko been allowed to have his way, the whirling axe would have felled the wild man before he could have gained his feet. But the boy trader's word was law to Koko, and he withheld the blow. Ken and Kit leaped together at the man and grasped him.

They strove to drag him into the hut, where with the three against him he could have been secured. But with a strength that was amazing, he scrambled to his feet, with the shipmates clinging to him like cats. Instead of dragging him in, Ken and Kit were dragged out into the moonlight. A claw-like hand tore down Hudson's face, a fierce blow jarred on Ken's jaw and staggered him.

Involuntarily they relaxed their grasp, and the wild man wrenched loose. The next instant he came at them with clawing hands and blazing eyes—and it was well for the shipmates that Koko dashed from the hut, brandishing the axe. As the giant Kanaka rushed at him, the wild man leaped back, snarling, and fled along the glistening beach.

"If that swab Parsons had left us a gun—" gasped Hudson as he rubbed his face, wet with blood where the skin was torn.

With the speed of a wild pig in the bush, the man of the island fled along the beach. It was useless to pursue him. They returned into the hut, and the door was barred again. But it was not easy to return to sleep.

Ten minutes later there was a whisper from Koko.

"You listen, sar, ear belong you. Black feller comey!"

Ken shivered. From outside the walls of the hut came a sound of feet. The wild man was there again, prowling like a wild animal. More than once they heard his panting breathing through the slits in the palmwood walls. But there came no attack—the wild man seemed to have realised that that was futile. The prowling ceased when the light of dawn glimmered in the sky.

When the door was opened at last,

and the maroons came out of the hut into the bright sunrise of the Pacific, there was no sign of the wild man to be seen.

CHAPTER 15.

The Clue in the Bottle!

DANNY the cooky-boy howled and dodged round the mainmast of the ketch Dawn, then back to his galley, with one brown hand clasped to his ear, ringing from a savage smack. Tomo and Lufu. Kolulo and Lompo, eyed Dandy Peter with uneasy eyes.

The sea-lawyer was in a savage temper, and every Kanaka on the ketch dreaded to catch his eye. Ken King's crew lived in terror of the piratical adventurer who had seized the boy trader's ketch. The hapless Danny had given no offence—he had staggered under that savage smack simply because he happened to be nearest, and because Dandy Peter believed in ruling "niggers" with a heavy hand.

Many a mile had reeled off astern since Peter Parsons had sailed away from the lonely island where he had marooned the shipmates. But the wind had failed him now, and the ketch lay still.

There was land in sight—one of the tiny uninhabited islets on the vast space of ocean east of the Marshalls—where, as Dandy Peter knew, there was fresh water to be had. Only in such an isolated spot could the sea-lawyer fill his casks. In a stolen ship he dared not put into any white man's port.

A calm at sea meant waste of time. And Dandy Peter, with knitted brows and gleaming eyes, stared round at the circle of brilliant blue, and muttered imprecations on King of the Islands' windjammer. In a wind, the Dawn was as good a craft as he could have desired—a ten times better craft than his own cutter, which had been piled on a reef. But without a wind the ketch rocked to the motion of the sea, helpless and useless.

"That feller Parsons plenty mad,

along feller wind no come!" Kolulo whispered to Lompo.

"He plenty too much mad," murmured Lompo. "S'pose catchee that feller sleepee bimeby, killy that feller plenty too quick, knife belong me!"

The Kanaka crew had not forgotten King of the Islands. In the happy-go-lucky way of the South Sea Islander, they gave him little thought. But he was not forgotten. And their fear and hatred of the Lukwe skipper were intense. When he slept, it was in the state-room below, with the door locked, and a revolver ready to his hand. Many times when he had been below, the Kanakas had debated in whispers, in their own Hiva-Oa dialect, the idea of fastening down the companion and the lazarette hatch, and thus making him a prisoner below decks. But they feared the desperate rascal of Lukwe too much to make the venture—yet, at all events.

Dandy Peter stared savagely towards the atoll ahead. A whisper of wind came from that direction, hardly enough to fan his face. Save for that speck, the vast space of ocean was empty. That was at least a satisfaction. The sea-lawyer did not want to sight a sail while he was playing the part of a pirate on another man's ship.

He sat down on the taffrail, and drew from his pocket the paper that he had scanned hundreds of times already—the message written by Grant Blake, the millionaire castaway, and consigned to a bottle floating in the sea. His brow cleared a little as he glanced over it. Imperfect as it was, it was the only clue that existed to the castaway millionaire of Sydney.

Sea-water that had penetrated into the floating bottle had obliterated many of the words, leaving blanks that Parsons had to fill in by guesswork. Wreckage of the Mindanao had been picked up on beaches in the Marshalls and the Gilberts, and Parsons did not doubt that it was on some lonely reef in the neighbourhood of those groups that Grant Blake watched the sea with anxious

eyes for a sail. What could be read of the message ran:

"... finds this message . . . take offices of Grant Blake, Sydney . . . believe . . . only survivor . . . Mindanao . . . typhoon, after . . . far from her course . . . thrown on . . . reef after . . . for hours on a spar . . . cannot tell what island . . . but . . . uninhabited . . . no other land in sight . . . small island, with . . . covered with bush, and . . . The finder . . . paper . . . richly rewarded . . .

"GRANT BLAKE."

Dandy Peter knew that the message had contained some clue to the whereabouts of the island on which the millionaire had landed. But it was in vain that he strove to decipher the smudges. He would have to search the seas in the hope of hitting upon the island, rescuing Blake, and claiming the reward. And he had the advantage over others, for he was the only man in the Pacific who knew that the millionaire was alive.

He thrust the paper back into a leather case, and rose from the taffrail. Somewhere along by the Marshall or Gilbert groups he would find that lonely reef, he was sure, and the fact that it was out of sight of other land suited his book. He did not want to sail a stolen ship where other men sailed.

Why, it was barely possible that that nameless atoll where he was going to take in water, which lay so irritatingly in sight but unattainable, was the spot where the richest man in the Pacific watched sea and sky for rescue. Parsons turned his eyes curiously on the speck of land as the thought crossed his mind. And as he looked, he saw something that shifted over the reef in the brilliant sunshine.

At the distance the naked eye had not picked up the bare pole that rose beyond the reef, but now that canvas was run up he picked it out, and he knew it for a mast. Behind the coral some vessel lay—a yawl or lugger. And as he thought of a lugger, Dandy

Peter saw that it was a lug-sail that was hoisted, and he remembered Barney Hall, the trader of Tonga.

"Barney Hall! A thousand pounds to a fathom of shell-money it's Barney Hall!" he breathed.

Slight as the wind was, it was enough to move the lugger. Over the coral, Dandy Peter saw the sail in motion. And now the Hiva-Oa boys of the Dawn observed it, and watched it curiously. The lugger emerged from behind the reef at last, and then there was an excited cackle from the Kanakas

"Feller Barney Hall!" exclaimed Lompo.

In the lugger a burly, rough-bearded figure in a huge grass hat and a loin-cloth could be discerned, and stirring figures of brown men. They were too far off for recognition, but the Dawn's crew knew the lugger. It was Barney Hall's craft, and the burly man in the grass hat was the bully of Tonga.

Dandy Peter's grasp closed on the butt of his revolver. He knew now that the Tonga trader must have spotted the ketch from the reef, and that was why he was coming out, though the wind was so faint that the lugger seemed to crawl on the face of the Pacific like a fly on a mirror. But that mere breath of wind was in the Tonga man's favour. Such as it was, he had it, and the ketch, which could have walked away from him in a wind, was helpless.

Parsons glanced round at the Kanaka crew. They avoided his eyes, but he could read in every face suppressed excitement and enmity. Barney Hall was nothing to them, but they knew that he was the Lukwe skipper's enemy, and for that reason they welcomed his coming. Not a man among them would raise a hand against the lugger's crew. Dandy Peter breathed hard and deep.

Barney Hall and his crew were coming, and on his own craft five Hiva-Oa boys watched him like cats, longing for a chance to turn the tables on him. It was a situation that might have shaken the bravest man's nerves, but the sea-lawyer of Lukwe did not turn a hair. He picked up his rifle and examined it

carefully, and, holding it in the hollow of his arm, stood and coolly watched the lugger creeping down under the whisper of a breeze.

"Tokalaloo!" grunted Barney Hall to the boat-steerer. "Lay her alongside!" The trader of Tonga fixed his deep-sunken eyes under the shaggy brows on the ketch that lay almost motionless, like a picture on the sea. "By hokey! We've got him this time!"

He glanced round at the brown-skinned, long-limbed Tonga crew. All of them had sorted out knives and hatchets. Lazy good nature had given place to fierce intentness in their brown faces. Barney Hall grinned with satisfaction. Then he watched the ketch again anxiously.

If the wind came—and it was coming—he would be left standing if the ketch chose to run before the wind. But the breeze that pushed on the lugger had not yet reached the ketch. Catspaws ran on the shining water ahead of Barney Hall's prow, but they did not reach the becalmed Dawn.

If, when the wind reached him, King of the Islands turned tail, he would be within easy shot. And Barney Hall had his rifle ready!

As the lugger crawled nearer, he made out the dark, handsome face under the Panama hat, looking at him over the Dawn's rail, and recognised Dandy Peter of Lukwe—the man with the secret learned from the bottle in the sea, of whom he was in quest. But of Ken King or Kit Hudson he saw nothing.

What had become of the shipmates of the Dawn was a mystery to him, though he suspected that Peter Parsons had somehow got the upper hand of them and was in command of King of the Islands' ship.

There was barely a mile to cover from the reef to the becalmed ketch. But the lugger crawled almost like a snail, and minute after minute passed as she drew slowly nearer. The catspaws running ahead of the lugger reached the becalmed ketch when Barney Hall was

at a cable's length. He watched savagely, half-expecting to see the ketch prepare for flight. His rifle was ready to drop the man at the wheel. If the Dawn strove to escape, it would not escape without a running fight.

He saw the ketch stir and the canvas shake under the first puff of wind that reached her. But Dandy Peter gave no orders. He stood with his rifle under his arm, watching the lugger.

Closer the lugger crawled, and now Barney Hall's deep voice came ringing across the water: "I'm coming aboard, Peter Parsons. Where's King of the Islands?" bawled the Tonga trader. "I reckon he's not on board, nor his mate either. You'd like me to report at Lalinge that you're sailing Ken King's ketch, and giving orders to his niggers? By hokey! It will pay you better to come to terms with me, Peter Parsons."

"What do you want, Barney Hall?" Dandy Peter's voice came across scarce ten fathoms of water. "Give it a name."

"I reckon you know!" growled Barney Hall. "Every man on the beach at Lukwe knows that you picked up a bottle from the sea with a paper in it in Grant Blake's fist, and you know where to pick him up, you swab. There's five thousand pounds reward offered in Sydney for news of him. You're not leaving me out of that. You reckon I don't know your game?" he roared. "You've stolen King of the Islands' ship to look for Grant Blake. You're liable to be hanged for a pirate at Fiji."

"You won't tell them anything at Fiji, Barney Hall!" said Dandy Peter, between his teeth. "It will be a long time before you see a white man's port again."

"I'm coming aboard!" said Hall doggedly. "I'm having a sight of that paper. Share and share alike—I'll stand by that. And if you don't like it, I'll send you where you've sent King of the Islands, and that's to the sharks, I reckon. You feller Tokalaloo, put her alongside."

Barney Hall, finger on trigger, watched Dandy Peter. The latter's rifle was still under his arm, and at the first hostile movement the Tonga trader was ready to pull trigger. There was a glint of the sun on the rifle-barrel as Peter Parsons slipped in into his hands. Hall, without a moment's hesitation, fired. The bullet flew over the sea-lawyer's head as he ducked below the rail.

The next instant Dandy Peter was up again and shooting. There was a roar from the Tonga trader as he staggered backwards and fell with a crash into the lugger. A second and a third bullet missed him by inches as he fell.

"By hokey!" panted Barney Hall. He strove savagely to rise, groaned, and fell on his side helplessly.

From the Tonga crew came a wild and fierce shout. Crack, crack, crack! came the bark of the rifle from the ketch, and the Tonga boys scrambled wildly for cover. Hardly three fathoms from the ketch, axes and knives were useless against the white man's rifle.

Not till he had emptied the rifle did the sea-lawyer cease to fire. Then he flung the rifle to the deck and drew the revolver from his belt. The lugger drifted helplessly, unguided, yawing with swinging tiller. Leaning over the Dawn's rail, the sea-lawyer emptied the revolver into the lugger, the fusillade answered by howls of pain and fear. The catspaws were ruffling the sea round and beyond the Dawn now, the canvas humming in the rising breeze.

Parsons yelled to Lompo to take the wheel, and Lompo leaped to obey. As the ketch moved through the water the lugger was left helplessly drifting astern, and Dandy Peter flung back a savage laugh as he left her to drift.

CHAPTER 16. Raining Rocks.

"LOOK out, Ken!" yelled Kit Hudson. But King of the Islands was looking out. He dodged as the lava rock came crashing a foot from

his head. Brilliant sunshine blazed down on Maroon Island. High over the thick bush the summit of the extinct volcano rose, the bare lava slopes glistening in the blaze, hot and burning to the touch. Far away on the beach Koko was building a canoe for fishing in the lagoon.

Ken and Kit had struggled up the bush-covered hill and passed beyond the bush to the bare lava slopes high above, to light again the signal-fire on the summit. From a lava ridge above them the wild, tangled head and glaring eyes of the Man of the Island came suddenly in sight, and a lump of jagged lava was hurled.

"That swab again!" panted Hudson. The coppery face, the gleaming eyes glared down at the shipmates, and the claw-like hand grasped another fragment of lava. The wild man was a dozen yards above them, and the slope was steep. They watched him breathlessly, prepared to dodge the missile when it came. There was something appalling in the wild, unreasoning ferocity of the dark, shaggy face.

"Look out!" breathed Hudson. "That mad nigger will get us if he can!" The next moment he was dodging, narrowly escaping the whirling rock. "If a man had a gun——" Hudson muttered.

Ken, watching the wild face above intently, waved his hand. He shouted to the wild man: "You feller boy, us feller friend along you!" It seemed that the copper-faced man did not understand. If he was some native from a remote island, it was likely enough that even the common language of the Pacific was unknown to him. At all events, he made no answer, save a savage snarl.

"You savvy what me say, mouth belong me?" shouted King of the Islands.

This time the answer was a whizzing fragment of lava. Ken dodged, and it crashed past and clattered down the hill. He gritted his teeth, clambered up

the slope, and exclaimed: "Come on, Kit!"

The wild man was groping for a fragment of lava. But he seemed to change his mind, and, turning, bounded away like a goat. From one rock to another he leaped with almost incredible speed and activity, which even the active sailormen could never have hoped to equal. In a few moments he vanished from sight. The sloping sides of the lava peak were broken into innumerable fissures and gullies and gaps, and there were a hundred hiding-places at hand for a man seeking cover.

Keeping a careful look-out for the enemy, the shipmates clambered on up the steep slopes of rock to the summit. The ancient crater, choked with lava, had here and there a pool of rain-water, and in crevices and gullies grew patches of thorny bush. Breathing hard, and dewed with perspiration, the shipmates sat down to rest on a ridge of rock before commencing to gather fuel for the signal-fire.

Crash—clatter! A jagged lump of lava smashed on the rock between them as they sat, scattering fragments over them. The comrades leaped to their feet. From a ridge a dozen yards away, the wild, tangled head of the Man of the Island rose to view. It was evident that he had been watching them from cover. Another rock was in his hand, and it whizzed even as the shipmates stared round and sighted him.

King of the Islands gave a cry, staggered back, and fell. The jagged missile had caught him full on the chest, knocking him over like a skittle. A screech came from the wild man as the boy trader sprawled over.

"Ken!" panted Hudson. With fury in his face, the mate of the Dawn clutched up a fragment of lava and hurled it in return as the wild man lifted his hand with another missile clutched in claw-like fingers. There was another screech from him as Hudson's rock crashed on his brawny, bare shoulder.

der, sending him spinning backwards. He disappeared from sight, but his screeching voice could still be heard.

Hudson spun towards his comrade. But King of the Islands was already rising to his feet. His face was pale, and he breathed hard. The heavy blow had severely shaken him.

"All serene, Kit!" he gasped. "Only a bruise. It might have been worse."

Hudson, gripping his loaded lawyer-cane, darted towards the lava ridge behind which the wild man had fallen, clambered over it, and had a glimpse of a shaggy figure vanishing behind a rock in the distance.

For the next hour, in the blazing sunlight on the hot lava summit, the shipmates were hard at work, gathering fuel from the crevices and stacking up the fire. Nothing more was seen or heard of the wild man while they worked. He had had a hard knock, and they hoped he was learning to keep his distance. The fire was set going at last, a thick column of smoke rolling against the deep blue of the sky.

From the high peak that volume of smoke was visible from an immense distance at sea, and, lonely as Maroon Island was, there was a good chance that it might be seen from some vessel. But there was little doubt that the savage of the island would scatter the fire, as he had done before, when it was no longer guarded. Instead of descending the hill, the shipmates took cover in a crevice of the rocks at a little distance and remained on the watch.

With dogged patience the shipmates waited and watched. Rescue from Maroon Island depended on keeping the signal-fire burning, and it could not be left at the mercy of the unreasoning savage. The silence was broken only by the crackle of the fire. But another sound was heard at last—a stealthy, creeping footstep. Ken grasped Kit's arm.

"He's coming!" he breathed.

Keeping in cover of the rocks, they watched breathlessly. The wild, shaggy

figure appeared in sight, creeping like a watchful animal, his bright eyes glancing right and left. The creeping figure passed within a few yards of the hidden shipmates and stopped. Then he turned towards the fire, his back to them.

"Now!" exclaimed Ken. Like an arrow from a bow, he leaped out from the crevice, and his grasp fastened on the wild man. Hudson was hardly a second behind him. A startled yell broke from the Man of the Island, and he whirled round, his eyes ablaze, grasping at them.

He went down with a crash on the rocks, the shipmates sprawling over him, struggling like a savage beast. Both the shipmates were strong and sturdy, but the Man of the Island seemed to have the strength of a maniac. He rolled over and over, dragging them with him, screaming with fury.

In spite of his furious resistance, he would have been made a prisoner had the struggle been fought out to a finish. But as the three rolled and scrambled in that desperate wrestle they pitched together down a steep slope of the lava, landing in a bush thirty feet below.

The fall hurled them apart. Ken rolled in one direction, Hudson in another, and the wild man leaped away like an ape. With amazing agility he scrambled up the slope down which they had pitched, and had reached the top before the panting shipmates were on their feet. Grinning down at them like some savage gorilla, the wild man began hurling jagged lumps of lava. The missiles crashed round them almost like hail.

"Cover!" panted Ken.

With the jagged rocks raining from above, they had to hunt cover. In the thick bush they stopped, screened from the sight of the wild man, and leaned on the trunks, panting and exhausted. From the distance above they could hear the sounds of the wild man scatter-

ing the fire they had built with so much labour. Through the branches they saw the column of smoke dissipate into thin wisps and fade away. But they were too exhausted to think of clambering up the steep summit again. The wild man of Maroon Island had beaten them!

Propped on a heap of tapa mats, his tanned face grim and haggard, Barney Hall stared across the sunlit sea at a tall peak that rose above the waters far away. Tokalaloo, lounging at the tiller, hummed a Tonga song. The other Tonga boys sprawled about the lugger idly. Save for that tall peak that jutted into the blue, there was no sign of land in the rolling waste of waters. But land was there—and Barney Hall was glad to see it. Land meant food and water, both of which were running short on the Tonga trader's lugger.

How many days had passed since his fight with Dandy Peter, Hall did not know, and could not even guess. For days and nights he had lain half-conscious, disabled by his wound, roughly tended by the Tonga boys. They had done their best for him, but it was only because the bully of Tonga was a giant of strength that he had pulled through.

Barney was recovering, but he was not a strong man again yet. But his mind was clear, and he was able to give orders. He ground his teeth with rage when he found how his crew had been wasting the stores, and that the last keg of water had been started. But he was not in a state to take a belaying-pin and handle his crew with its aid. It was in vain that he questioned the Tonga boys as to the days that had passed while he lay unconscious of time.

He knew that many days must have passed, and that was all. The lugger had been running all that time, generally eastward. It was a speck on the waste of waters stretching from the Marshall group to the far-away continent of South America.

To think of beating northward to Hawaii, or southward to Fanning or Christmas, was hopeless, and no sail or steamer broke the eternal monotony of sea and sky. But the Tonga trader knew of an island in that solitary waste where there was ample fresh water, trees laden with coconuts, and bananas, and plantains, and wild pig in the bush—plenty of food and water if he could strike Maroon Island before both ran out. It was with deep relief that Barney Hall saw the volcanic peak rising against the blue.

"Feller island he stop!" remarked Tokalaloo, sighting the peak a good hour after Barney Hall had been watching it. Hall snorted. The other Tonga boys rose to stare at the distant peak, and then resumed sprawling and chewing betel. With the wind light but steady the lugger ran on towards Maroon Island.

Barney Hall watched the bush-covered hill come into sight below the bare lava peak, and saw at last the wide reefs on which the Pacific broke in unceasing surf. He rose from the heap of tapa mats, took his binoculars, and scanned the nearing island closely. The soaring peak was a warning to all skippers to steer clear of dangerous reefs. But he had no choice in the matter now. He had to run down to Maroon Island for food and water.

There was no passage for a ship into the lagoon, but he had no doubt that so small a vessel as the lugger could creep in. He was lucky to find a calm sea, a smiling sky, and a fair breeze. In rough weather the lugger would have been piled up on the coral. With the binoculars clamped to his eyes, Barney Hall watched the reefs and the breaking foam, and snapped orders to his crew.

Over the low reefs he could see the lagoon shining in the sun, and the beach of sand and white, glistening powdered coral. There was no sign of any inhabitant, but Hall knew that Maroon Island had been deserted ever

since the ancient days when pirates had marooned their prisoners there. Where the torrent came down from the hill and poured into the lagoon through the channel it had cut in the beach was a dark object that looked like a palm-pole hut. But Hall did not even see it—he was watching the reefs, dangerously near now. It did not even cross his mind that living men might be on the solitary island.

With tense eyes he watched the only break where the lagoon communicated with the sea.

Reefs were taken in the canvas, and under a rag of sail, feeling her way almost inch by inch, every hand ready and every eye on the alert, the lugger crept in on the tide. Brief as the passage was, anxious minutes passed before the nose of the Tonga lugger was parting the waters of the lagoon, and Barney Hall wiped great beads of perspiration from his brow.

The cable ran out, and the lugger came to anchor. Half a cable's length away the sand shelved down to the lapping waters, red in the sinking sun, and beyond the sand was black bush, thick and jungly.

"You feller boy, bring feller boat alongside!" snapped Barney Hall. The tiny dinghy towed behind the lugger was pulled under the side, and Barney swung himself into it. One of the Tonga boys dropped in to pull him ashore.

It was sheer joy to the Tonga trader to stretch his legs on the sand of the beach, after the long, weary days in the close space of the lugger. The sun was dipping to the Pacific, and the shadow of the lugger's mast lay a strangely elongated black bar on the lagoon, reaching almost to the beach where the trader had landed.

One of the Tonga boys was left on the lugger. The rest came ashore with their tapa sleeping-mats, and mats and rugs for their master.

But the sun was gone a few minutes

after the crew had landed, and the starry night closed in on the lone island. Tokalaloo went along the beach with a can, to fill it at the stream. When he returned with the fresh water Barney heard a cackle among the brown boys, in their dialect of Tonga, and caught a few words that he understood

"What thing you talk, tongue belong you, Tokalaloo?" he demanded.

"Me tell other feller, sar, me see hut stop along beach, along water he stop," answered Tokalaloo.

"A hut on the beach!" Barney repeated. "You see any feller stop along that feller hut?"

"No, sar! Feller hut he stop, no feller stop along that hut."

Barney grunted. He concluded that the hut had been put up by some crew that had touched at Maroon Island for water and camped on the beach for the night, as he was now doing. He rolled himself in a blanket, and lay down on a heap of tapa mats at a little distance from the crew. Save for the unceasing surf, all was silent on the island. Barney Hall was soon asleep, and the cackle of the native boys died into silence and slumber.

Barney came out of sleep with a start and a gasping cry, to feel a fierce grip on him. He rolled over, panting, struggling, fiercely returning grip for grip. His first impression was that one of the Tonga boys had attacked him in his sleep. There was, so far as he knew, no one else on the lone island. But the grip that was on him was stronger than that of the strongest man in his crew—it was like the grasp of a giant. He had a moment's glimpse of a dark face, with fiercely rolling eyes, and lips drawn back in a snarl from gleaming teeth. Brawny as the Tonga trader was, he was like an infant in that terrible grip, and he yelled to his crew as he struggled for his life.

There was a startled cackle from the Tonga boys, the patter of bare feet running on the sand.

"Help!" yelled Barney, struggling wildly. "You feller boy—"

But the Tonga boys had fled to the bush, firmly convinced that their white master was in the grip of a "debbil." Nothing on earth could force them to tackle a "debbil."

It was Ken King and Kit Hudson who, hearing the racket, raced to the beach to the rescue. Hearing them coming the ~~old~~ man of the island broke from Barney Hall and fled into the darkness of the bush with the speed of a deer. But by that time Barney Hall's senses had left him.

When he came round it was daylight. He was amazed to see who had rescued him, and he was quick to notice that Ken, Kit and Koko were armed with his weapons.

"So that's how Parsons got rid of you!" he said. "Marooned you!"

"He did, and he'll pay for it," said Ken. "Now that your lugger is here—"

"You get no passage aboard my boat," roared Barney Hall. "We've never been pals, King of the Islands. Why should I help you?"

Through the open door of the hut he saw his Tonga boys down on the beach, no doubt wondering where he was.

"But you can't leave us here," put in Kit.

"I can—and I will," hissed Barney. "Leave you to rot on Maroon Island. You'll never be picked off—a ship won't raise this speck of land once in three years. Do you reckon I'd have run into the lagoon here, at the risk of piling up my lugger, if I could have helped it? That swab Parsons knocked me out and left me to drift, and the boys ate and drank all there was on board while I was on my beam-ends, or I'd never have raised this island! You reckon that will happen again? No! You'll rot here for years—and I'll leave you to rot!"

The shipmates looked down at the savage face staring up at them from the palm-leaf bed. Barney Hall, lying

helpless at the mercy of the shipmates, was as truculent as ever. King of the Islands smiled, and Hudson burst into a laugh. Barney did not seem to realise how matters had changed on Maroon Island, since the wild man had struck him down.

"Is that all you've got to say, Barney?" asked Ken.

"That's the lot—and you can chew on it!" snarled Barney. "You've got my gun, but I reckon you don't dare to put a bullet through my head."

"We're not putting a bullet through your head," said King of the Islands. "But we've got you where we want you, Barney Hall. And you won't lift anchor and sail away in your lugger and leave us here! You can bank on that."

"And you can count yourself lucky if we don't pinch your lugger, as Parsons pinched our ketch, and maroon you here," added Hudson.

"You reckon that I'm your prisoner!" snarled the Tonga trader.

"Looks like it to me," said Ken. "If you give us trouble I'll tell my Kanaka to rope you up, hand and foot. We shan't stand on ceremony with a swab of your kind."

"And what about my boys?" hissed Barney Hall. "I've got six Tonga boys here—more than enough to make kai-kai of you if I give the word!" And with a sudden effort he raised his voice and roared: "You feller boy! Toka-laloo! Taio! You feller boy, you come along this place, killy white feller too much. You makee kai-kai along white feller—"

His voice died in a gasp, and he sank fainting from the effort. But as he fell there came a cackle of voices from the Tonga boys on the beach, and a rush of pattering bare feet.

King of the Islands rushed out of the palm-pole hut, Hudson at his side. Barney Hall's savage roar had called the Tonga boys to action. Since the trader had fallen into the hands of the shipmates, the Tonga boys had

gathered on the beach, muttering to one another in their own dialect, and looking towards the hut, uncertain what to do. There were five of them, without counting the man left on the lugger—brawny fighting-men of Tonga, armed with knives.

There was a knife in each brown hand now, as the crew came running towards the hut in answer to their master's call. Koko, the brown boatswain of the Dawn, stood facing them, his axe lifted in both powerful hands, eyeing them grimly as they came. Kit Hudson clamped the rifle to his shoulder. King of the Islands jerked the revolver from his belt, and levelled it at the same moment.

Crack-ack! The rifle and the revolver rang together. One bullet carried away an ear ornament from Tokalaloo, the other whipped a strip of skin from a Tonga boy's brown leg. That warning was enough. With almost ludicrous suddenness, the Tonga crew halted, turned, and rushed away along the beach in a yelling bunch towards the lugger's dinghy, which lay on the lagoon's margin where it had been beached.

"After them!" panted Hudson. "If they get the boat—"

"They won't!" said Ken grimly. The shipmates ran swiftly along the sand. The Tonga boys had seized the dinghy to run it into the water. A bullet whizzed over the boat, and splashed up sand over them.

"You feller boy, you no touch feller boat, hand belong you!" roared King of the Islands. "You run along beach!" And as the natives still dragged at the boat, a bullet tore a strip of brown skin from Tokalaloo's bare shoulder. With a howl the crew abandoned the boat and scattered up the beach.

"Our win!" grinned Hudson. He pitched a couple of rifle-shots after the Tonga crew, and, howling with alarm, Barney Hall's crew vanished into the bush.

"My word!" chuckled Koko. "That

Tonga feller no likee feller gun speakee! That Tonga feller run plenty too quick altogether."

From the anchored lugger, the Tonga boy left on board was staring beachward with wide, startled eyes. His five comrades had disappeared in the bush, and nothing more was to be seen of them. Koko, at a word from his master, dragged the little dinghy into the water, and the three stepped into it. The boatswain took the oars and pulled for the anchored lugger.

"You no comey along this ship, sar!" said the Tonga boy, as Hudson hooked on. "This feller lugger belong Barney Hall, sar. Him no likee you comey along this ship."

"You plenty bad feller Tonga boy!" exclaimed Koko scornfully. "What name you sing out, mouth belong you, along little white master belong me? S'pose you no shut up mouth belong you, this feller Koko kill you plenty too much along lawyer-cane, my word." And Koko leaped on board the lugger. The Tonga boy eyed him savagely, but backed away, daunted by the white masters and their fire-arms. Koko grabbed the knife from his loin-cloth and tossed it into the lagoon. The Tonga boy's eyes blazed, but he made no resistance.

"This feller lugger belong white master belong me, you Tonga feller," said Koko. "You run along beach along other Tonga feller! You savvy, you plenty bad feller?"

"The lugger's ours, Kit," said King of the Islands. "It would serve that swab Hall right to maroon him on the island with his crew, but we're not sea-lawyers like Parsons! We're taking possession for the present, and I reckon Barney Hall will come to terms. Koko, old coffee-bean, you stop along this lugger. S'pose Tonga feller comey, you knock that feller along lagoon, along belaying-pin."

"Yes, sar!" grinned Koko. "Tonga feller no comey along this feller lugger, along me stop! Me knock that feller along lagoon plenty too much."

At a gesture from King of the Islands, the Tonga boy dropped into the dinghy, and the shipmates pulled back to the beach, leaving Koko to keep guard on the lugger. As soon as the dinghy touched the sand, the Tonga boy leaped ashore, and scuttled up the beach to join his comrades in the bush. He was out of sight in a few moments.

"Barney Hall's crew won't help him much!" remarked Hudson. "We've got that swab where we want him, Ken, and I reckon he'll be glad to come to terms!"

The shipmates of the Dawn beached the dinghy, and walked back to the hut with smiling faces. Their weary sojourn on the desert island was drawing to its end at last!

CHAPTER 17.

Till the Pacific Runs Dry!

BARNEY HALL slouched to the door of the hut and stood staring out into the brilliant tropical sunshine. There was a sound of rolling casks and splashing water up the shallow stream. Barney glanced in that direction and scowled blankly. King of the Islands and Kit Hudson were completing the task left unfinished by the Tonga boys, of filling the casks belonging to the lugger. Of the Tonga crew nothing was to be seen. They had not reappeared since they had taken to the bush.

Looking towards the lugger, Hall could see Koko sitting on the gunwale and twanging a ukulele. There was a lump on Barney's head, and a savage ache in it. But he was almost himself again now. If there had been a weapon in his hand, the bully of Tonga would not have hesitated to try conclusions with the shipmates. But his rifle was slung on Hudson's back, and his revolver in Ken King's belt. He gritted his teeth with rage as he realised how the tables had been turned on him.

But Barney Hall was not beaten yet—or at least he would not admit that he

was beaten. He stood for some minutes in savage thought, then stepped out of the hut and strode swiftly towards the dinghy beached on the margin of the lagoon.

The Kanaka was on guard on the lugger, the white men ashore. It was hard for Barney to believe that a Kanaka would venture to keep him off his own vessel by force. It seemed to him that his enemies had unwittingly given him a chance, and he was not slow to use it. He half-expected to hear a shot ring out, and to feel the wind of a bullet as he hurried down to the boat. But if the shipmates saw him leave the hut, they took no heed. He grasped the dinghy, heaved it down into the water, and pitched himself into it. A moment later he had shoved off and was pulling for the lugger.

The twanging of the ukulele ceased. Koko laid down that instrument, and rose to his feet. He picked up a belaying-pin, and watched the Tonga trader as he pulled with savage haste for the lugger. There was a faint grin on the bo'sun's brown face. Koko had not the slightest hesitation in handling Barney Hall at the order of his white master.

The dinghy crashed on the lugger, and Barney Hall grabbed hold and glared up fiercely at the brown face above him.

"Stand back, you scum!" he snarled.

"You no comey along this feller lugger, sar," Koko answered. "S'pose you comey along this lugger, sar, me crack head belong you along feller belaying-pin!"

"If I had a gun——" breathed Barney.

"Feller gun stop along King of the Islands!" chuckled Koko. "This feller no fright along you, sar! Tonga boy plenty fiald along you, sar. This feller Koko no fright, my word."

Hall stood in the rocking boat, holding on to the lugger, mad with rage. There were firearms in the little cabin aft, if he could have got at them. He would not have hesitated to shoot the

Kanaka dead with a gun in his hand. The voice of King of the Islands rang from the beach:

"You feller Koko!"

"Yes, sar!" called back Koko.

Hall glared round savagely. Ken and Kit were on the beach, looking towards the lugger. As Hall had taken the dinghy, they could not get on board, but they did not seem uneasy. The shipmates were aware that they could rely on the brown-skinned boatswain of the Dawn.

"S'pose that feller Hall come along lugger, you tie up that feller along rope, along hand and foot belong him!" called out King of the Islands.

"Yes, sar!" grinned Koko.

Hall panted with rage. Slipping his hands along the lugger's rail, and shoving the dinghy with his feet, he moved suddenly and swiftly out of Koko's reach. Before the brown boatswain could stride along and reach him, he plunged headlong on board, rolling over into the lugger. He had no time to rise, but he twisted desperately out of the way as the belaying-pin came crashing down. It struck the planks an inch from his head. The next moment he was on his feet, and before Koko could lift his weapon for another blow, he sprang at the Kanaka.

"My word! You plenty bad feller!" gasped Koko. The belaying-pin dropped from his hand as he grappled with the Tonga trader, and they rolled over in fierce conflict.

"Koko will handle him!" said King of the Islands, staring from the beach.

"Hall hasn't a dog's chance with Koko's hands on him, Kit!" The Australian nodded, but he watched rather anxiously.

The lugger's freeboard was low, but the shipmates could only catch glimpses of the struggling figures.

Barney Hall was quick to realize that he had no chance against the giant Kanaka hand-to-hand, and that Koko, native as he was, had no hesitation in handling him. With a powerful effort he tore himself loose from the Kanaka,

and plunged fiercely for the tiny cabin aft. If only he could get his hand on a gun—

But the Kanaka's grasp was on him again in a second, and he went down with a crash. Madly he struggled, but he was stretched on his back, with a bare, brown, sinewy knee jammed on his chest. Koko grinned breathlessly down at him.

"You swab!" panted Barney Hall, in helpless rage. "Belay it, you nigger! Belay it!"

"No tinkee, sar!" grinned Koko. "White master he sing out tie up feller Hall along rope, along hand and foot belong him!"

Barney Hall struggled frantically, but in a few minutes more he lay breathless and exhausted under the gripping knee of the Kanaka. He could only gasp feebly as Koko rolled him bodily into the little low cabin, picked up a rope, and proceeded to bind him hand and foot. With steady skill, Koko knotted the ropes, and the Tonga trader lay bound and helpless. Koko left him lying, and went out into the bright sunshine again, to wave a brown hand to the white masters on the beach.

"Good old coffee-bean!" grinned Hudson. "Barney's safe now, Ken."

Lying in the hot, stuffy little den, with cockroaches crawling over him, Barney Hall writhed with rage, and wrenched in vain at his bonds, while he heard the castaways getting the water-casks on board. It was clear that they were making preparations for leaving Maroon Island—they were not working on Barney Hall's account. He ground his teeth with helpless rage as he thought of it. King of the Islands looked into the stuffy little cuddy at last, and Barney's eyes met him with a malevolent glare. The boy trader smiled down at the helpless ruffian.

"You swab!" howled Barney. "You're seizing my ship—you pirate! I'll have you hanged at Fiji, King of the Islands!"

"Who's seizing your ship, Hall?" asked Ken.

"You lubber! Ain't you getting ready for sea?" panted Hall.

"We're sailing when we've got the food on board—your rations seem to have run pretty short, and it will take some time. We shall have to load with bananas and coconuts and yams. Luckily we've got some canned stuff that Parsons left us. But we're not getting the anchor up till you give the word, Hall! It's your ship!"

"Till I give the word!" Hall stared at him blankly. "You figure that I'll give the word to sail, with you on board, and my boys in the bush? Forget it! Sail this lugger on your own, and you're a pirate—and if you play Peter Parsons' game you'll get what's coming to Dandy Peter!"

"I'm not the man to seize another skipper's ship!" said King of the Islands. "I shall wait for you to give orders to sail, Hall."

"You'll wait till the Pacific runs dry, then!" hissed Barney.

"That's a long time," said King of the Islands, with a laugh. "But have it your own way. The lugger's yours, and it's for you to give orders to lift the anchor. I'll see you again later—I've work to do now."

"Heave to, you swab!" roared Barney Hall. "How long d'you reckon you're going to keep me triced up like this?"

"Until we sail!" answered King of the Islands, with a smile. "And we shan't sail till you give orders to lift anchor and offer us a passage in your lugger. If you wait till the Pacific runs dry you'll get a bit cramped—and I reckon you'll be hungry and thirsty! We're not bound to provide rations for a skipper who refuses us a passage from a desert island. I fancy you'll run dry before the Pacific does!" The boy trader turned on his heel, and Barney Hall was left alone—except for the cockroaches.

Through the long, hot afternoon the shipmates were at work ferrying loads of island produce to the lugger and stacking it away for the voyage. They

had plenty to do, and were in no hurry. They had no doubt that Barney would give orders to "lift anchor" by the time they were ready to sail—and if he did not, they were prepared to wait until he did!

Night came eventually. Stars in silvery myriads glittered over Maroon Island and the encircling Pacific. King of the Islands, leaning against the mast, looked at the black mass of the island, where the dense bush covered the hill, and at the lava peak of the old volcano rising high towards the stars. The hour was late, and Kit and Koko were fast asleep.

The shipmates were passing the night on the lugger, running no risks of the Tonga boys stealing back under cover of night and seizing the craft on which they depended to escape from the lonely island, and Ken was keeping watch. Barney Hall, bound hand and foot, stirred and muttered in the little cuddy.

Far away across the blackness of the bush, Ken's eyes picked up a reflection of dancing flame. He could guess that the Tonga boys had camped there, and were burning a camp-fire. They had not been seen since they had taken to the bush, and somewhere in the unending bush was the "wild man" of the island, whose missile had so fortunately struck down Barney Hall.

The stirring and muttering of the ruffian in the cuddy caused Ken to glance in that direction. He had little compassion to waste on Barney Hall. He would not seize the lugger, as Peter Parsons had done the Dawn. But he could hardly be expected to let Barney sail away, leaving him marooned on the lonely island—perhaps for ever. Only because he was adrift on the Pacific, short of water, and Maroon Island was the nearest land, had Hall come there—and it might be years before another sail hove in sight. Ken reckoned that the bully of Tonga would not hold out longer than the night.

His eyes gleamed as he thought of

Dandy Peter Parsons, sailing his ketch, bullying his crew, searching along the Marshalls for Grant Blake, the lost millionaire. Once he was afloat again, he would hunt down the sea-lawyer of Lukwe and bring him to account. The Dawn was Ken's livelihood, almost all he had, and the loss of trade since Dandy Peter had seized her was a heavy blow to the boy trader.

"King of the Islands!" Barney Hall's gruff, savage voice came from the stuffy cuddy. "Will you let me loose? I'm crawling with cockroaches!"

"Yours is a dirty ship, Hall!" answered Ken. "I reckon I'm none too pleased to sail in such a craft. If I'd any choice, you wouldn't see me on board the dirtiest craft from Valparaiso to Manila. Did you ever make your boys handle a holystone?"

"Will you let me out of this?" yelled Hall.

"You know the terms," answered King of the Islands. "Are you fool enough to think that I'd let you leave me marooned, while Peter Parsons sails my ship? Think again!" He stepped along to the black little cuddy and peered in. Hall's glittering eyes showed in the darkness from the floor.

"Have a little sense, Hall!" said the boy trader quietly. "You're a brute and a bully, as big a ruffian as any man in the South Seas, and you deserve to be chucked on the beach and left there. You've asked for what you're getting—and more! If you stood in my shoes, you'd fling me into the lagoon. All you're wanted to do is to give three castaways a passage off a desert island—any man but you wouldn't need asking. We'll pay a fair price for a passage to the nearest island. We're not asking for the trip for nothing."

"Did Peter Parsons leave your money in your pockets?" growled Barney.

"Parsons is a piratical swab, but he's not a pickpocket," Ken answered. "We've got money in our pockets—more than enough to pay a fair price for a trip on this lugger."

"Let me loose," muttered the Tonga trader, "and we'll make it a trade; I can't stand any more of this."

King of the Islands lighted the lamp, and in its smoky glimmer scanned the hard, bearded face of the bully of Tonga. Hall met his gaze with sullen animosity.

"If you mean that fair and square, Hall, I'm glad!" said Ken. "But if you're thinking of treachery, better think again. I've searched your lugger for firearms, and we're taking care of them. You've no chance of getting a gun. I don't want to have to shoot you, Hall, but if you're thinking of getting hold of a belaying-pin and starting trouble, remember that I'll put a bullet through you as soon as look at you."

"Three of you, armed, and afraid of one man with his bare hands?" jeered Hall.

"I'm only warning you," Ken said. "If you mean business, well and good. I'm going to let you loose." He opened his knife and cut through the trader's bonds. Hall staggered to his feet and lurched out of the cuddy, rubbing his cramped limbs. King of the Islands resumed his position against the mast. He had expected Hall to come to terms, but he did not trust him an inch, and he was on his guard.

For a long time the burly ruffian stood rubbing his limbs, cramped by the cords that Koko had knotted. Koko lifted his head from his sleeping-mat and stared at him with suspicious eyes.

"All serene, old coffee-bean," said Ken, with a smile. "Feller Hall makee good feller friend along us feller."

"Tinkee feller Hall plenty too much bad feller, sar!" answered the Kanaka. "This feller no sleep any more, eye belong him." And Koko rose from his sleeping-mat. He sat down on the low top of the cuddy, with a belaying-pin in his brown hand, and his watchful eyes never left the Tonga trader. Barney Hall gave him a savage scowl, and turned away to stare at the darkness of the island. His eyes lingered on the

reflection of a fire away in the black bush. He guessed, as King of the Islands had done, that the Tonga boys were camped there.

If Barney Hall had entertained any reckless scheme of getting hold of a belaying-pin and attempting to turn the tables on the three shipmates, he had to give it up now. Possibly he had hoped that he might have a chance of taking them by surprise before sunrise. But with the Kanaka watching him like a cat, and ready to knock him senseless at the first hostile movement, Barney had to give up that idea.

But other ideas were working in his mind. His men were in the bush; but the flicker of distant firelight told him where to seek them if he got to the shore. They had run from the firearms in the hands of the white masters, but with Barney to lead them—Staring towards the bush, Barney thought it over, as he had thought it over and over while he lay bound in the cuddy. To the truculent ruffian, the most desperate chance was better than taking orders from the boy trader. He made up his mind at last. There was a sudden splash in the lagoon, and Barney was swimming desperately for the beach.

Koko leaped up with a yell.

"That feller Hall run along lagoon, sar! You shootee along gun! That feller run along bush, along Tonga Boy, sar!"

King of the Islands stepped to the side. In the gleam of the stars he spotted the dark figure of the swimmer cleaving a rapid and desperate way shoreward.

"Ahoy, Barney Hall!" he shouted. "The anchor goes up at dawn—if you're not on board it's your own look-out!"

The shout reached the swimmer, but it did not make Barney Hall stop or turn. He swam savagely on, in fear every moment of a bullet. But King of the Islands did not pull the trigger. In the starshine, he watched the burly form drag itself dripping from the

water. He saw the Tonga trader turn on the beach and shake a clenched fist. He shrugged his shoulders.

"We've given him all the rope he's going to have," he said to Kit. "I let him loose because he agreed to make it a trade. If he backs out now, he takes his chance. We sail at sunrise."

"Good egg!" yawned Hudson, and went back to his blankets.

"Plenty much better shoot along gun, along that feller Hall!" growled Koko.

Ken smiled, and shook his head. Barney Hall had had his chance, and if he chose to throw it away it was his own look-out. With or without the Tonga trader, the lugger was going to pull out of the lagoon of Maroon Island when dawn came.

CHAPTER 18.

Trapped in the Bush.

BARNEY HALL had hardly expected to escape so easily. But he had escaped, and he was free to carry out his desperate plan. He ground his teeth as he brandished his brawny fist at the lugger.

"By hokey!" he breathed. "The anchor goes up at dawn, does it? I reckon something's going to happen before dawn, you swab! If I have any luck you'll be food for the fishes in the lagoon before you see sunrise, King of the Islands." And the ruffian turned and tramped up the beach towards the bush.

The darkest hour would be before dawn, and Barney Hall and his crew would be swimming round the anchored lugger, with knives in their teeth.

It would be easy enough for the Tonga boys, quick and active as monkeys, to swarm aboard, port and starboard, fore and aft, taking the three castaways on all sides. Shooting would be wild in the dark; the knife of a native as deadly as a white man's fire-arm, or deadlier. It was all mapped out in Hall's savage mind—a fierce and

desperate chance, but one he was resolved upon taking. There was ample time to find the Tonga boys and lead them down to the beach. They could hardly be a mile away.

The bully of Tonga halted, and stared at the sky over the dense bush that clothed the hillside. The flickering of the flames could still be seen, though it was fainter. The fire was dying down, the Tonga boys probably fast asleep round it. Having taken his bearings, the Tonga trader plunged into the bush.

From the starlit beach to the dense bush was a change from twilight to blackness. The bush was thick and tangled; there were no runways, as on an inhabited island. Thorns tore Hall's clothing and his skin, and at almost every step he had to part thick stalks of high ferns, or bunches of lianas, or branches of thorny bushes.

Barney Hall was a seaman, but he was not unaccustomed to the ways of the bush, and in the day-time he would have kept his bearings; a glimmer of light would have been enough for him. But in the dense blackness that reigned round him he was beaten.

It was "high" bush on Maroon Island, meeting and tangling overhead, and hardly a single gleam of the stars came through. The ruffian struggled on for more than an hour, then he had to admit to himself that he was "bushed."

He came to a halt, breathing hard with rage and weariness. If he failed to find the camp of the Tonga crew before daylight, it was the end of his scheme. In the hope that the camp might be within hearing of the point he had reached, he shouted with all the strength of his lungs, his voice echoing and booming in the gloom:

"You feller boy! You Tokalaloo! Ahoy! Barney Hall hailing! You feller boy, you sing out, mouth belong you!"

Booming echoes of his shouting, from all sides, answered him. But no other answer came.

Again and again he shouted, with a roar like an enraged bull. But either the Tonga crew were out of hearing or they were sleeping too soundly to hear. Exhausted at last, and panting for breath, Barney Hall gave it up and leaned on a tree-trunk.

There came a sound from the bush—a rustle that told something was stirring. It might have been a wild pig, but hope sprang up in Barney's heart that it was one of his crew, and he shouted:

"Ahoy! That you feller Tokalaloo? You feller boy! This way, durn your black hide! You hear me, ear belong you?"

Barney Hall listened, but there came no reply, and he savagely concluded that it had been a wild pig creeping in the bush. Then, after a few minutes' silence, the rustle came again, and it was closer at hand. Hall stared round him in the black darkness. It could not be a wild pig—his savage shouting would have scared the animal away. It could not be one of his crew, or the man would have answered his hail. Who—what was it that was creeping towards him in the darkness of the bush?

Hall felt a thrill of terror. He was unaccustomed to fear, but there was something nerve-shaking in that stealthy creeping of an enemy he could not see. An enemy it must be—or why did he not answer? Back into his mind came what King of the Islands had told him of a "wild man" in the bush. He had not believed it then. Was there, after all, a wild man on Maroon Island—was it some fierce and remorseless savage who was stealing on him in the dark?

The rustle ceased, and Barney Hall breathed again. The sweat was thick on his brow. He remembered how he had been attacked when camping at night on the beach of Maroon Island. He had believed that it was the boat-swain of the Dawn who had seized him that night, and had scoffed at the tale of a wild man on the island. But he

remembered the overpowering grip of his assailant, and how powerless he had been in that terrible grasp. If it was that assailant who was at hand now—

He had no weapon; only his bare hands against an enemy whose strength was twice his own. The rustle was heard again, and Barney Hall, the ruffianly bully of Tonga, trembled. He licked his dry lips and stared into the blackness, with the cold fear of death in his heart.

He could see nothing but he could hear the rustle of parting bush—the hurried, suppressed breathing of something unseen. A scream broke from him as he felt a touch, and he leaped away like a scuttling cod from a shark! But a grip was on him as he leaped, and he struck out wildly, blindly. Under his hands he felt something wild and shaggy—tangled hair, tangled beard—and in the dense darkness he caught a glitter of wild eyes.

He screamed again in terror, struck madly, and tore himself loose and bounded away into the bush, reckless of thorns and torn skin, shrieking as he went. Behind him sounded a screeching yell—the yell of the wild man of Maroon Island. And with the yell came tearing and brushing in the thickets as the unseen savage pursued. Yell on yell of unreasoning fury rang in his ears, spurring him on to frantic efforts to escape.

He had forgotten his desperate scheming now—forgotten everything but his terror of the wild man of the bush. Like a madman he plunged through the tearing bush, torn and bleeding, panting for breath, spurred on by deadly fear. Long after the rustling behind him had died away he panted and staggered on, not realising that his pursuer had lost track of him in the blackness and was no longer following.

Not till he was too utterly spent to take another step did the trader of Tonga halt, reeling against a trunk, his knees giving under him. Then the silence around him told that his enemy had lost him in the bush. He sank down on the earth, aching with fatigue,

trembling in every limb, trying to still his panting breathing lest his enemy should hear and find him again. How long he lay there, almost senseless, he could not know. But he became conscious at last of a dim greyness replacing the blackness that surrounded him. It was the dawn! Faintly, dimly, shapes of bushes and trees loomed from the shadows, and the sound of awakening birds was heard.

Barney Hall staggered to his feet at last, and, his heart beating in great throbs, he crept through the tangled bush, seeking his way back to the beach. And when at last he staggered into the open in the light of the brightening sun, he could have cried for joy at the sight of the lagoon, with the lugger riding at anchor, and the face of King of the Islands looking over the side.

“Tumble up!” Kit Hudson’s voice rang out cheerily, and King of the Islands sat up in his blankets and rubbed his eyes. Hudson had taken the second watch while his shipmate slept, but Koko had not closed his eyes since Barney Hall had been released. Had the bully of Tonga succeeded in carrying out his plan, he would not have taken the lugger by surprise.

Men rose to his feet. Koko was already preparing breakfast for the white masters. There was a savoury scent of frying fish on the lugger. King of the Islands glanced towards the beach, glistening in the rising sun. Only the crawling crabs were to be seen there. Far in the distance, over the bush, a trail of smoke rose to the sky from the camp-fire of the Tonga crew.

“No sign of Barney Hall!” said the boy trader. “Well, he’s got another hour before we get up the anchor. The three of us can sail this lugger, Kit, if he doesn’t choose to give us his company.”

“Better without him!” grunted Hudson.

"Plenty too much better that feller Hall stop along island, sar!" said Koko.

Ken shook his head, and gave another glance at the beach, before he sat down to breakfast. "I hope he'll show up!" he said. "It will be close packing, on a fifty-foot lugger, with Hall and his crew. But I'd give a good deal not to leave them marooned. They may be in danger from the wild man—Hall will believe in him, fast enough, when he comes across him. And the brute's asked for it, but I hate the idea of sailing another's man's ship—too much like Peter Parsons' game to suit me."

"We'll give him a passage, if he comes down to the beach and asks civilly!" said Hudson, laughing.

While they ate their breakfast, Ken half expected to hear a hail from the beach. But neither Barney nor any of his crew appeared in sight. After the meal was over, the boy trader stood looking towards the beach with a troubled brow. He had told Barney Hall that he would sail at sunrise, but now that the time had come, he hesitated. Brute and bully as the man was, little as he deserved consideration from the castaways, it went against the grain to play a game like Dandy Peter's.

Hudson understood his shipmate's feelings, but Koko prowled about the lugger restlessly, grunting with unconcealed impatience. The sun rose higher over the bush and the tall volcanic peak. The tide was running out of the channel in the coral reef, and Koko's impatience grew.

"Feller anchor come up, sar!" he said at last. But King of the Islands waited. Not unless he was driven to it would he sail in another skipper's ship, and leave that skipper stranded. His eyes swept the beach and the bush anxiously.

"My sainted Sam!" he ejaculated suddenly. A tattered, haggard, exhausted figure staggered from the bush and came tottering down to the lagoon.

"Barney Hall!" Hudson whistled.

"My hat! He looks as if he's made a night of it!"

"He's here, at any rate—and he doesn't look as if he's hunting trouble," said King of the Islands, with a deep feeling of relief.

"He looks as if he's found all he wanted—and a little over!" Kit Hudson chuckled. "Bushed, I reckon. He was a fool to go ashore."

It was clear that something had happened to Barney Hall, as the burly bully came unsteadily down to the lagoon. Every other moment he glanced over his shoulder at the dark bush behind him.

"Tinkee feller Hall findee wild man, along bush!" Koko said. "Plenty too much fright stop along that feller Hall."

"Looks like it, by gum!" said Hudson. King of the Islands stepped into the dinghy and pulled to the beach. He reached it before the stumbling trader arrived at the water's edge. Hall stumbled on. He did not speak, but he panted with relief as he splashed into the shallow water and scrambled into the boat. He sank down in the dinghy as if he had crumpled up. Ken eyed him curiously.

"Shove off!" breathed Hall huskily.

"You've seen the wild man of the island?" asked Ken.

Hall shuddered, and said:

"Get back to the lugger! It's a trade—I'll agree to anything you like! By hokey, I only want to get the anchor up and get to sea."

Ken pulled back to the lugger. Hudson gave the bully of Tonga a helping hand on board; he needed it. Barney Hall plunged into the cuddy, and there was a gurgle of liquid from a bottle to a glass. There was a sudden shout from Koko: "Tonga boy come along beach!"

Ken and Kit grasped rifles at once. There was a yelling of voices on the beach as the Tonga crew came scampering from the bush. But at a glance,

CHAPTER 19.

Good-bye to the Lugger.

the shipmates saw that it was not an attack. There was fear in the looks of the Tonga boys as they ran, and its cause was soon apparent, as a screeching yell rang from the bush. It was the wild man of Maroon Island that had scared them.

They raced down to the lagoon. Without stopping, they plunged into the water to swim. From the bush, a wild, shaggy figure appeared for a moment—the figure of the wild man of Maroon Island. For some moments he stood staring towards the lugger and the swimming Tonga boys; then he vanished into the bush again, and was gone.

"I'm glad to see the last of him, Ken!" muttered Hudson.

Ken nodded. He stepped to the side and called to the Tonga boys. Brown hands grasped at the lugger, and the Tonga boys stared up at him as he made a gesture with his rifle.

"Us feller comey along lugger, sar!" panted Tokalaloo. "Us feller plenty too much fright along black feller along bush, sar! Brain belong him no walk about any more, sar—us feller too much fright!"

"You feller boy, drop feller knife along lagoon!" rapped out Ken. "Along this lugger, you jump along order along me, you savvy?"

"Yes, sar, us feller savvy!" gasped the boat-steerer.

Long knives went shimmering to the bottom of the lagoon. Then the Tonga boys were allowed to clamber on board.

"Up anchor!" said Kit Hudson joyfully.

Barney Hall was still in the cuddy. It was King of the Islands who shouted orders to the Tonga crew, and they obeyed him promptly. The anchor came up, Koko took the tiller, and the lugger glided from the lagoon into the reef channel, coned out to sea by King of the Islands. And the faces of the shipmates were bright as they watched the tall lava peak of Maroon Island sink to the waves!

"FELLER island no stop!" Koko, the Kanaka, spoke in tones of satisfaction. There was a cheery grin on his brown face as he stood on the deck of Barney Hall's lugger and stared back at Maroon Island.

Ken King and his mate, Kit Hudson, looked back also, as glad as the brown-skinned boatswain that they were at last getting away from the lone island that had been their home for weary weeks. It seemed like months since Dandy Peter had marooned them on that solitary speck of land, stolen their ketch, the Dawn, and sailed away with it.

The lugger was making hardly three knots, and Maroon Island sank slowly to the sea-line astern. The shining lagoon, the wide-stretching reefs on which the surf broke in eternal foam, and the black mass of the bush had sunk out of sight, but still the tall volcanic peak stood out clear to the view.

On those high bare slopes of lava it seemed to King of the Islands that something stirred, tiny, toylike in the increasing distance. He took Barney Hall's binoculars and turned them on the lava peak. A wild figure shot into view as he focused the glasses—a figure with tangled hair and beard, in a kilt of twisted bark.

Ken lowered the glasses. He had looked for the last time on the wild man of Maroon Island. Koko gave a chuckle. His keen eyes had picked up the strange figure on the lava ridge.

"That feller wild man look along this lugger, eye belong him," he said. "He likee plenty too much us feller no stop along island belong him, sar!"

"He's welcome to his jolly old island!" said Kit Hudson. "I'm glad to see the last of him and his island, too!"

The shipmates' eyes lingered on the lava peak till it vanished, and the Pacific rolled bright and blue without

a speck. Glad as they were to escape from the solitary island and its perils, their thoughts lingered on its strange denizen, now left to utter solitude. Black, white, or brown man, whatever he was, he had been a savage enemy to the castaways, but they could only pity him.

"Well, we're done with him and Maroon Island," said Ken. "Now we've got the future to think of and a reckoning with Peter Parsons!"

He turned to Barney Hall. The burly Tonga trader was sprawling on a tapa mat, chewing tobacco. His bearded face wore a sullen scowl, and his eyes glinted as they met Ken's.

Barney spat out a stream of tobacco-juice, turned his "quid," and snarled: "You've got me, King of the Islands, and my ship! I reckon I'll make you pay some time!"

"Exactly what I want!" said Ken, with a laugh. "We're not sticking you for a passage as distressed mariners, Barney! Peter Parsons stole my ship, but he did not pick my pockets, and we can pay for the trip. Take that scowl off your face, man, and talk business. You would have left us marooned on that island, and you couldn't expect us to stand on ceremony with you—we might have waited years before another skipper ran into Maroon Island for water. You're a bully and a swab, Barney Hall, but I'm not stealing your ship as Peter Parsons has stolen mine! From now on you give orders on this lugger!"

From that moment Barney Hall resumed command of his lugger, and the shipmates of the Dawn were merely passengers. But the passengers were careful to keep all the firearms on board in their possession in case the Tonga trader's hostility should break out again.

One long hot day followed another, and the shipmates discussed their plans for hunting down Parsons and the Dawn.

"Nothing against the Dawn," said Hudson, with a grin. "She'll beat any

other old wind-jammer in the Seven Seas. And all the more for that reason we're not going after her under canvas. I know a trader on Uta who's got a daisy of a motor-boat—fifty feet and a real clipper—built for trade in the Solomons. We can afford to hire it. I can run it, while you watch for the Dawn and Koko plays the ukulele—what?"

After much discussion, so it was settled. It was a week after Maroon Island had dropped below the horizon that the lugger raised Uta, an outlying island of the Marshalls, and there Barney Hall landed his passengers. And they were glad enough to see the last of the Tonga trader's scowling face!

CHAPTER 20.

"Feller Tick-Toek Boat!"

DANDY PETER PARSONS stood on the glistening white beach of Lola, an unlighted cheroot sticking out of the corner of his mouth, his hand resting on his belt near the butt of his revolver, watching Lompo measuring off yards and yards of coloured calico. Trade was brisk on the beach of that lonely atoll.

The Dawn lay at anchor in the lagoon, and the whaleboat ferried to and fro, laden with trade goods. Since sunrise the natives had thronged down to the beach in greater and greater numbers, among them the two or three white traders who lived on Lola.

Lola was an outpost of the Gilberts, in solitary seas. But even there Dandy Peter would not have dropped the anchor if he could have helped it. The man who had stolen a ship and a crew wanted to keep clear of all ports, especially where there were white men. But the Dawn could not keep the seas for ever without coming in for supplies, and supplies had to be paid for. And Ken King's cargo had to pay for them. Parsons had picked Lola as the loneliest and most secure spot for carrying out his purpose, but no spot in the wide

Pacific was quite secure for a pirate on the high seas. He was feverishly anxious to get to sea again.

When Dandy Peter had first seized Ken King's ketch, he had hoped that a search of two or three weeks would be long enough to raise the unknown reef where Grant Blake, the Sydney millionaire, was cast away. But week followed week without any luck. The document he had found told him that the Sydney millionaire was alive and cast away, but little more. He knew that the Mindanao had been driven far out of her course in the typhoon that had finally sunk her.

So far as he could judge, the likeliest hunting-ground was among the scattered islets off the Marshalls and Gilberts groups. But he knew that he might be on a false scent; that the shipwrecked millionaire, drifting on a spar, might have been carried in quite another direction. Wreckage of the steamer had been picked up in the Marshalls, and that was all he had to guide him.

But Dandy Peter's determination never relaxed for a moment. He was going to find the castaway millionaire and hold him to ransom for his rescue. He was thinking of the fortune to come as he watched Lompo measuring off the roll of calico, and Kolulo and Tomo and Lufu ferrying more and more trade goods ashore.

Goods were going cheap. Dandy Peter wanted to get through and be gone, and he sold Ken King's cargo at prices that brought the natives down to the beach in eager swarms. The white traders eyed him curiously and suspiciously. He wondered whether Ken King had ever touched at the atoll, and whether they knew that the Dawn was Ken's ship. He cared little. Once he had his supplies on board he would soon be far enough from Lola. A ship did not arrive there more than once in six months, and news of him would be slow in spreading to other beaches.

The Kanaka crew of the Dawn eyed him with fear, and jumped to obey his

orders. He was readier with a blow than a word, as ready with a pistol-butt or capstan-bar as with his fist. Had they talked on Lola, he would not have feared interference from either native or white trader. But they did not talk. He had warned them, and they heeded his warning.

As the sun sank lower on the Pacific, and the long, hot day drew to its close, prices dropped, and the trade goods went faster and faster. Not a single thought did he give to the terrible loss he was inflicting on the boy trader whose ship he had stolen. It was every man for himself, in Dandy Peter's opinion. It was ruin for King of the Islands, even if he ultimately escaped from the remote island where Peter Parsons had marooned him.

Parsons was rowed back to the ketch under the glimmering stars, and to a late hour the Kanaka crew were kept busy getting supplies on board. And then there was no rest for the weary crew or for Parsons himself. He had no intention of remaining in the lagoon an hour more than was needed. Gladly the Hiva-Oa boys would have brought out their sleeping-mats and turned in on deck under the stars. When Parsons gave the order to up anchor, there was, for once, a murmur from the crew he had cowed into obedience.

"Plenty too much work along us feller, sar," said Lompo. "Us feller likee sleep, sar, plenty too much. What name we go along sea, sar, along night he stop?"

"You black scum!" snapped Parsons. "You talk bad feller talk along me, my word! You wantee this white master knock seven bells out of you?"

"Too much work along this feller, sar!" said Lompo sullenly. "No too much work along feller King of the Islands he stop. Along you, sar, plenty too much work."

Dandy Peter picked up a belaying-pin, and Lompo went spinning under a blow that would have cracked a white man's skull.

"You scum!" roared Dandy Peter.

"You talk bad feller talk along this white master?"

"No, sar," panted Lufu. "Us feller good boy along you, sar! You no kill this poor Kanaka along belaying-pin, sar!"

"Get to it, you scum!" snarled Dandy Peter.

Lompo picked himself up, rubbing his head, and said no more.

The anchor came up, and the ketch glided out of the reef passage into the dimness of the Pacific. Dandy Peter knew that he was leaving surmise and suspicion behind him on Lola, and he was anxious to drop the atoll below the sea-line. The ketch turned her stern to Lola, and sailed away into the dusky sea.

At night, Dandy Peter never closed his eyes. His sleep was taken in the heat of the day, and even then it amazed the crew that he needed so little. Kolulo was at the helm, and Parsons sat on the taffrail near him, smoking a cheroot, calculating the course he would set in the hope of picking up that elusive reef where the Sydney millionaire was cast away. The sea was silent, save for the wash of the waters round the timbers of the gliding ketch.

Parsons noticed Kolulo start a little, bend his ear to listen, and stare across the dark waters. He listened himself, and a faint sound came to his ears from the sea. It was a low, distant throbbing, strangely like the beating of a great heart in the darkness.

"A steamer!" muttered Dandy Peter. He strained his eyes, but there were no lights of a ship to be seen. If there was a light, it was too low down on the water for him to see it. Yet that faint throbbing told that some vessel was at hand, and it was growing more distinct. The craft, whatever it was, was steering to pass the Dawn in her course, and heading for Lola.

"No steamer, sar!" said Kolulo. "Tinkee feller boat, sar, along no sail he stop—feller tick-tock boat, sar!"

Dandy Peter nodded. He knew now that it was the chugging of a motor-

boat that he heard. He shrugged his shoulders carelessly. Plenty of traders ran to and fro among the Islands in motor-boats. He sat on the taffrail again, and resumed smoking his cheroot. Faintly, passing him in the distance, came the throbbing of the petrol motor, and he had a glimpse of a low light winking like an eye from the dusky sea. Then the sound died away in the direction of Lola, already distant.

Not for a moment did the thought cross his mind that King of the Islands—no longer a prisoner on Maroon Island, as he believed—had passed him on the shadowed sea. And King of the Islands, sleeping rolled in a tapa mat while Kit Hudson ran the Uta motor-boat on to Lola, was unaware that he had passed within a few cables' length of the man who had stolen his ship!

The following day Parsons still held command of the Dawn.

Blazing sunshine turned the Pacific to glistening gold. Brass fittings on the ketch were too hot to touch, and but for the wind the heat would have been overpowering. Lompo was taking his turn at the wheel, and every now and then he cast a curious eye on the stained, crumpled paper in the hands of Dandy Peter. For the hundredth time, Peter Parsons was poring over the document providing the elusive clue to the shipwrecked millionaire. Sea-water had obliterated many words, and he muttered as he strove in vain to decipher what the missing words had been. Had the missive been intact, Parsons knew that he could have set a straight course for the Sydney millionaire. But he puzzled unavailingly over the blanks. "Uninhabited—no other land in sight—small island—covered with bush—" He muttered the words aloud. "Ten thousand islands in the Pacific answer to that description! But I'll find him if I have to comb every island from New Guinea to the Marquesas!"

Only too well Dandy Peter knew that, after all his desperate efforts, he might find that he was too late! But it was the chance of a fortune—a fortune that

would enable him to bid a long farewell to the South Seas, to petty trading and chaffering for copra and pearl shell. The richest man in Australia would pay high to be taken off that lonely reef, and Dandy Peter would see that he paid high!

The ketch was provisioned and supplied now for a three months' cruise, ample time for Parsons to comb the ocean far and wide. He could be patient, with a fortune in the offing—and the owner of the ship he sailed marooned on the loneliest speck of land in the Southern Seas. But again and again he pored and puzzled over the missive, striving to elucidate some clue that might have escaped him.

Lompo eyed him from time to time, wondering. That mysterious paper, over which Parsons pored so long and so often, was an object of strange interest to the Kanaka crew. It was some sort of white man's magic—they had no doubt of that!

A five-knot breeze came from the east, and the Dawn leaned gracefully to the wind as she cut through the glassy water. Ahead, a blur on the sunset, was a bunch of palms that indicated land—one more of the lonely atolls that Dandy Peter was combing for Grant Blake. Save for that the sea was clear of land or sail.

As Parsons sat lounging in the Madeira chair, poring over Grant Blake's missive, there was a call from Lufu:

"Feller canoe stop, sar!" Peter Parsons was on his feet at once. A sail, or the smoke of a steamer, was enough to make the man who sailed a stolen ship change his course immediately, but a canoe he was glad to see. A hundred times he had intercepted native canoes in the hope of hearing of some castaway.

Would he hear the news he wanted, this time? He was doomed to more than disappointment. He heard not of Grant Blake, but Ken King! The men in the canoe had seen him!

Parsons stuttered with rage. He could not believe it—yet he had to be-

lieve it! King of the Islands had escaped from Maroon Island, and he was at hand. Dandy Peter had been heading for the very atoll where the motor-boat had put in, when he raised the canoe. Had he kept on his course, he would have run into King of the Islands. It was incredible; but he knew in his bones that it was true. Only for a few moments, however, did he give way to his fury. Then he roared savage orders to the crew, and the ketch stood on under full sail, changing her course to give the atoll a wide berth.

The Hiva-Oa crew were exchanging glances and buzzing with excitement. They knew that their white master was at the little atoll, and that if he was watching the sea, the tall sails of the ketch must be in his sight.

Sailing as close to the wind as he dared, Dandy Peter was leaving the island to starboard. But he knew only too well that the Dawn must be visible there, if eyes were watching. How, in the name of all that was unlucky, had King of the Islands escaped? Dandy Peter could guess only too easily that King of the Islands was combing the Pacific for him, while he was combing it for Grant Blake.

Heedless of the excited cackle among the Hiva-Oa boys, Dandy Peter watched the palm-trees that dotted the blue horizon. If he was seen, it meant a chase—and that meant a fight. Not for a moment did he dream of surrendering the stolen ship. Any desperate act was better than that. He was a good sailorman, and he got every ounce of speed out of the ketch—one of the fastest sailers in the Pacific. He watched, and watched, and longed to see the nodding palm-tops sink into the sea.

CHAPTER 21.

"We've got him, Ken!"

KING OF THE ISLANDS sat on the gunwale as the motor-boat lay on the calm waters of the tiny lagoon. He was watching Koko,

"walking" up the trunk of a tall, slanting palm on shore to shake down the coconuts. Kit Hudson, in blue overalls, an oily lump of cotton waste in his hand, and a cheery grin on his face, was giving a touch or two to the engine.

Keen as he was to run down Dandy Peter, it was sheer joy to Kit Hudson to be running the Uta motor-boat. She was a fifty-foot craft, with a cabin fore and aft, and an engine which, according to Hudson, a baby could have run. Anyhow, Hudson ran it like a charm, and he extracted a speed from the "tick-tock" boat that would have left the Dawn, fast as she was, standing. Ken smiled as he glanced at him, with the oily waste in his hand and a smear of oil on his nose, grinning with satisfaction over his task.

Hudson laughed as he looked round and caught the boy trader's eyes.

"Give me a squirt at the Dawn's topsail, and let Peter Parsons look out," he said. "She's a goer, Ken—but we'll make rings round her with this boat!"

"Ay, ay!" assented King of the Islands. "And we know she's in these seas, Kit. We were only a few hours behind her at Lola, where that thieving swab sold our cargo."

"We'll make him pay for that, along with the rest," said Kit. "We're ready for sea, as soon as Koko's finished nutting. Ahoy, Koko!" shouted Hudson, to the shore. "Look alive, man!"

Koko had clambered almost to the summit of a sixty-foot palm. But instead of giving his attention to gathering coconuts the Kanaka was hanging on to the tall, slanting trunk with a foot and a hand, shading his eyes with the other hand, and staring seaward across the reef. He seemed to have forgotten what he had ascended the palm for as he hung there motionless, his gaze fixed and intent.

"Koko!" shouted King of the Islands, getting up from the gunwale.

The shipmates had put in at the island to fill up with fresh water and

take on board island fruits to eke out their stores. But they did not wish to delay there. They had found To'o'ole and his canoe crew there, and questioned them, but learned nothing from the natives. They were keen to recommence combing the Pacific for the ketch.

Koko must have heard the shouting from the boat, but he gave no heed. Motionless, he hung to the tall palm and scanned the distant sea. Suddenly, with such swiftness that the shipmates fancied for a moment that he had fallen, Koko slithered down the palm. He came racing down the beach, regardless of the pile of coconuts and a stack of wild yams he had collected. He was at the lagoon almost in a bound, and with another bound was on board the boat, landing with a concussion that made her rock. His brown face blazed with excitement.

"Me see, eye belong me!" he panted.

Ken started. It flashed into his mind what the Kanaka must have seen from the palm-top to excite him to such an extent.

"Koko! You've seen——"

"Feller ketch belong white master!" gasped Koko. "Me see um, sar, eye belong this feller!"

"The Dawn!" roared Hudson.

"Yessar—feller ketch stop along sea, makec sail along this island!" answered Koko.

"Coming here!" yelled King of the Islands.

He made a jump to the rifle leaning on the after cabin. His eyes gleamed.

Hudson burst into a joyous laugh.

"We knew she was in these waters. We nearly had her at Lola!" he exclaimed. "Dandy Peter's hunting for Grant Blake, and this is just the spot he would comb for a castaway! I shall be glad to see his face when he raises us here. It will be worth seeing!"

King of the Islands turned his eyes seaward, following the direction of Koko's pointing finger. Far away on the wide waters was a speck that might

have been a winging albatross. But the boy trader, now that his attention was turned to it, knew that it was the sail of a craft coming down to the atoll before the wind. He put down the rifle, took his glasses, jumped to the beach, and clambered up a high coral rock. With the binoculars clamped to his eyes, he picked up the distant sail, and his heart gave a great leap. The powerful glasses brought it near and clear, and he knew every line of his ship.

"The Dawn!" breathed King of the Islands.

He watched. The ketch, when first sighted, had been bearing down on the atoll, running before the wind that came out of the east. But as Ken watched, he saw her hove-to on the sea. Tiny in the distance, he picked up the natty, dapper figure of the dandy of Lukwe, and the big blue dinner-plate that shone on the brown chest of To'o'olo. He knew that Dandy Peter had stopped to speak to the canoe that had left the atoll a couple of hours since.

Standing like a statue, with the binoculars to his eyes, the boy trader saw the two craft part company and the ketch stand away to the south-west. Dandy Peter had changed his course, standing away as far as he could edge to the south. He did not intend to make the atoll after all.

A grim smile came over Ken's face as he lowered the glasses. He did not need telling that Parsons had picked up news of white men at the atoll, and was seeking to give it a wide berth. He ran back to the boat. The engine was already throbbing.

"They've got news from the niggers in the canoe," said Ken. "Parsons is going all out to keep clear!"

"That feller savvy we stop!" said Koko.

"Looks like it. To'o'olo knew me by sight," said Ken. "Run her out, Kit. It's going to be a test of speed now! For the first time since I've owned her, I wish the Dawn could not sail so near the wind!"

Hudson chuckled.

"If she could sail in the wind's eye, old man, she wouldn't get away from us," he said confidently. "Give me a squirt of her topsail, that's all!"

The motor-boat throbbed out of the tiny lagoon into the Pacific, red in the sunset. Hudson steered her, his eyes sparkling. The wind came direct out of the east, and the ketch was running before it, edging to the south. Watching her, Ken had to admit that Dandy Peter was handling her as well as he could have handled her himself.

But the Uta motor-boat cut through the smooth sea like a knife, and every minute the tall sails of the ketch grew clearer to the eye. From the engine came a deep-throated roar, and the boat quivered like a thing alive. The sea screamed before her prow, spray dashing over her, drenching her crew.

"She's moving!" yelled Hudson.

Ken did not answer or hear. His eyes were fixed on the racing ketch. His hand rested on his rifle. His stolen ship was in sight at last! He could not tell whether Dandy Peter had seen the pursuit yet—but he soon knew! The Dawn ceased to edge southward and ran direct before the wind. Parsons was aware of the chase, and was banking on speed.

But fast as the Dawn was, and well as the Lukwe man handled her, she grew clearer and clearer with every passing minute, and the boat's crew could pick up the white-clad form of the dandy of Lukwe, and the brown figures of the Hiva-Oa crew. Again and again a brown face stared back over the taffrail. One after another, Ken recognised his crew—Lompo and Lufu, Kolulo and Tomo, and the fat face of Danny, the cooky-boy. In their fear of Dandy Peter, they were obeying his orders, helping in his desperate striving to escape in their master's ketch. But their thoughts and hopes were with the pursuer—with King of the Islands!

"We've got him, Ken!" roared Hudson. "We've got him beat!"

The red rim of the sun was touching the sea. The Dawn, with every inch of canvas set and drawing, a pillar of white against the glare of the sunset, rushed into the west. Half-blinded by the sun glare, Ken watched her. Dandy Peter was going all out to escape, but he knew, as well as the mate of the Dawn knew, that canvas would not beat petrol.

But sunset was at hand, and Ken, clearly reading the thoughts of the other, knew that Peter Parsons was counting on night to save him. If he kept his distance till the sun was gone, he would vanish like a spectre in the darkness, and when sunrise came he would not be seen again. That was Dandy Peter's only chance.

A puff of white smoke eddied over the taffrail of the ketch, and a bullet dashed spray over the motor-boat. Dandy Peter was desperate and utterly reckless now, and he was firing!

Ken King smiled scornfully. If it came to shooting, that was a game two could play at. He was as ready for it as Dandy Peter.

"My word!" murmured Koko, holding on as the throbbing boat rocked. "This feller tick-tock boat plenty too quick altogether! Plenty too much splash-splash stop along this feller!"

"What's she doing, Kit?" yelled King of the Islands.

"Twenty!" roared back Hudson.

Bang! bang! came from the ketch.

The bullets flew close. Dandy Peter was firing with deadly intent.

Bang! roared Ken's rifle in return, and he saw Parsons duck as the bullet tore through the white canvas of the Dawn. Then suddenly, sharply, like the fall of a curtain in a theatre, the sun was gone. Night came down on the Pacific, and the fleeing ketch vanished from sight.

"Beaten you, King of the Islands! Beaten you, you dog!" Dandy Peter shouted back into the darkness as the ketch tore on. He laughed aloud.

There was a low muttering from the

Kanaka crew. Their eyes gleamed in the dusk at Dandy Peter. The dapper blackguard of Lukwe had them well in hand, but the sight of their white master, the knowledge that he was close at hand and that he had been eluded only by a hair's-breadth, made a difference to the Kanakas.

From the darkness of the sea came the throbbing of the motor as Ken King searched to and fro for the ketch. It was only the rifle under his arm that prevented the Kanakas from rushing on Peter Parsons, and even that hardly held them back. With their white master at hand, they were losing their fear of Parsons.

Lompo, at the wheel, obeyed Dandy Peter's orders as the ketch changed her course to dodge the seeking motor-boat, but it was reluctantly, sullenly, slowly. Lulu and Tomo and Kolulo watched the bully like cats, ready for a spring. From the galley, the fat, brown face of Danny the cooky-boy looked out with glinting eyes. Signs were exchanged among the Kanakas, and their voices came in a low mutter.

Edging to the south again, the ketch ran on, showing no lights in the thickening darkness. There would be a moon that night, but it was not due yet. And before it rose, Dandy Peter counted on shaking off the pursuer. The task he had set himself was infinitely more difficult now—hunted by the boy trader of Lalinge, while he hunted for the Sydney millionaire.

But he was not thinking of that—he was thinking only of escape. He was ready for a desperate conflict, if it came; but the chances of a fight were too terribly against him if it could be helped. And escape was on the cards now, though it had been narrow. He caught the mutter of the Hiva-Oa boys, the gleam of rolling eyes in the dark, and he swung round at them with his rifle half-raised. Well he knew what they were feeling and thinking.

"You scum!" he said, between his teeth. "You tinkee white master

belong you come along this ship! That feller no come along ketch any more altogether. You jump along order, along me talk, or you dead Kanaka, my word!"

Fainter and fainter in the distance came the hum of the motor-boat. Dandy Peter was dropping pursuit. It was more than an hour to moonrise, and he counted himself safe. His savage words drove the Kanakas cowering back.

"Us feller good feller along you, sar!" faltered Kolulo, with an uneasy eye on the rifle.

The Hiva-Oa boys had been on the verge of an outbreak, but they sank into submission again under the fierce eyes of the demon of Lukwe.

Danny, scouring a heavy iron saucepan by the galley, began to sing in the native dialect of Hiva-Oa, in a low, crooning voice. Parsons took no heed of him. He was accustomed to hearing the cooky-boy crooning a native song at his work.

But Tomo and Lufu and Kolulo, and Lompo at the wheel, turned their gleaming eyes curiously in the direction of the cooky-boy. Something in the words of Danny's song attracted their attention, and caused their eyes to glare and their breath to come more quickly.

Parsons stared back into the darkness, and listened to the hum that was growing ever fainter. Every now and then it loudened, then grew fainter again, and the sea-lawyer laughed maliciously. King of the Islands was seeking to and fro, circling and quartering the ground like a hunting dog, in the hope of picking up the lost ketch. It was a slight enough hope. But while Dandy Peter listened to the motor, the Hiva-Oa boys listened to the song of Danny with deeper attention.

Wary as he was, alert as a shark, Dandy Peter did not dream of what the cooky-boy was singing. But in that crooning song Danny was telling the crew what was working in the depths

of his cunning native mind. He was telling them to get Dandy Peter, somehow, to turn his back to the cooky-boy, to draw and keep his attention while Danny had time to act.

Danny, like the rest, was inspired with unusual courage by the knowledge that King of the Islands was close at hand—that a waved lantern on board would bring him speeding down to the ketch! Not a brown man on board dared face the fierce eyes and ready weapon of Peter Parsons, but Danny was a full of trickery as a monkey in his native island.

Danny crooned and crooned, and still the Hiva-Oa boys listened and did nothing, so deep was their fear of the dandy of Lukwe. An impatient note crept into Danny's voice. It was Tomo at last who acted, on a suggestion from the cunning cooky-boy woven in the song. But Tomo's heart almost failed him as he called to Peter Parsons:

"Feller light stop along sea, sar!"

There was no light on the sea. But as Tomo pointed across the rail into the night Dandy Peter stepped across to him, and stared in the same direction. A light could only mean a ship, and he scanned the darkened sea with anxious eyes. It was possible that King of the Islands in the fast motor-boat had passed the Dawn on her new course, and that Parsons was running down to him instead of away from him. He strained his eyes into the darkness, holding on to the rail as he stared across the dark sea.

"No see feller light, eye belong me!" he snapped. "What place that feller light he stop?"

"He see, sar, eye belong me," muttered Tomo, and pointed with a brown finger. His heart was thumping, for from the tail of his eye he saw Danny rise to his feet, the iron saucepan gripped in a brown hand.

Dandy Peter concentrated his gaze on the spot pointed out by Tomo's brown finger. He was off his guard for

a second—no more—and the cunning cooky-boy was behind him—a dozen feet away. Had he crept nearer the softest pad of naked feet would have been enough for Dandy Peter. But the cooky-boy did not stir from the spot where he stood. His right arm flashed up over his head, his hand was thrown back with the heavy saucepan in it—and then shot forward.

Crash! The whiz of the missile through the air alarmed the keen ear of Parsons, and he moved. But even as he moved the iron saucepan struck him on the back of his head, and he pitched forward. Half stunned for the moment, Parsons hung on to the rail, head and shoulders over the sea. His rifle clanged on the deck, his hands clutched instinctively at the rail to save him from falling overboard while his senses swam.

From the Hiva-Oa boys burst a yell that might have come from a mob of demons, and they leaped on Parsons like sharks on their prey. Lompo even abandoning the wheel to join in the fierce rush. Brown hands grasped Parsons, clutching all over him, rolling eyes glittered round him in the gloom, white teeth flashed as lips were drawn back in savage snarls.

Strong hands tore him from his hold on the rail. One fierce, desperate effort Dandy Peter made, knowing that he had been tricked, and it was the end. Then, torn from his hold, he was flung headlong, and a cry and a splash from the shadowed sea came back to the panting Kanakas. There was a moment's glimpse of a white face in the dark waters, then Dandy Peter vanished from sight as the ketch rushed on.

A cackle of delighted laughter rang on the deck of the Dawn. Dandy Peter was gone. The man the crew had dreaded, who had ruled them with a rod of iron, was swamped under the white wake of the ketch!

"That feller go walk about along bottom sea!" chuckled Danny gleefully.

"That feller too much kill feller Kanaka along rope, along belaying-pin, along foot belong him! He no stop any more altogether!"

Lompo, grinning, went back to the wheel. Tomo picked up Dandy Peter's rifle and loosed off shot after shot as a signal to the motor-boat. Danny lighted a hurricane-lamp and hung over the side, waving it to and fro. And in answer to the signals came the hum of the motor-boat, deepening to a roar. King of the Islands was coming!

CHAPTER 22.

A Mysterious Light.

"L O S T!" King of the Islands muttered the word between his teeth. Darkness lay like a black cloak on the Pacific, and Ken King stared savagely through the gloom, searching for the tall sails of the ketch Dawn. But the ketch had vanished, and he searched in vain.

Kit Hudson steered the motor-boat on. Koko the Kanaka scanned the sea, with eyes even keener than his white master's. But even he failed to pick up a sign of the fleeing ketch now that night had shut down on the ocean.

"No see, eye belong me!" he muttered.

"After all, we've had luck, Ken," said Hudson

"Luck!" growled King of the Islands. "That ship-stealing swab Parsons has all the luck!"

"We might have been still on Maroon Island," said the mate of the Dawn, "if Barney Hall hadn't happened along in his lugger. And we might have been knocked out by the wild man of the island—he tried it on often enough. We've had a lot of luck."

Ken smiled. It was the cheery Australian's way to look on the bright side of things. It was Ken's way also, as a rule; but just at the

moment he found it hard to look on the bright side. He had been so near to recapturing his ship, the Dawn—so near, and yet so far.

"You're right, Kit, old man," he said. "But we so nearly had that sea-thief! If only the Hiva-Oa boys had lifted a hand—"

"Feller light stop along sea, sar!" said Koko suddenly.

Ken spun round to the Kanaka.

"Where? What place that feller light he stop?"

Koko pointed with a brown finger.

"It can't be the Dawn," said Hudson.

"Parsons wouldn't show a light. He's not such a fool!"

But Ken stared hard in the direction pointed out by the Kanaka. Far away, gleaming on the shadowed sea, a light was moving, as if it came from a lantern swinging to and fro. Ken gave a sudden start as a distant sound came crackling through the silence. It was a succession of shots far away on the sea.

"My hat!" muttered Hudson. "Is that the Dawn—is that scoundrel Parsons shooting?"

Ken's heart beat fast. He had hoped that his native crew might make some attempt to delay the flight of Peter Parsons. Did the firing mean that they were making the attempt—and that Dandy Peter was shooting? What else could it mean? Yet the gleaming of the light, evidently waved over the side of a vessel, was inexplicable. Someone was signalling with a lamp.

"Put it on, Kit!" breathed the boy trader.

Hudson was already "putting it on." A deep-throated roar came from the engine as the motor-boat tore through the sea in the direction of the distant waving light.

The boat rocked and quivered like a thing alive. The firing had died away, but the light still waved and gleamed, nearer and clearer. Had there been a

struggle, and had Dandy Peter had the worst of it? Were the Hiva-Oa boys signalling to their white master? It looked like it, and Ken's heart beat almost to suffocation as the boat tore on.

"Help!"

King of the Islands jumped.

"Help! Ahoy!"

Ken's eyes were fixed on the waving light. But he stared round, almost in stupefaction, as that faint cry came from the darkened sea. It was a cry for help from the bosom of the Pacific—the cry of some desperate swimmer at his last gasp.

In the gloom, Ken's quick glance picked up a glimmer of a white, despairing face on the black waters.

"Hold on, Kit!" he shouted.

"White feller stop along sea!" exclaimed Koko, in utter amazement. "Me no savvy what name white feller stop along sea."

Hudson shut down the engine. It was a hard thing to have to do, for it seemed certain now that the vessel from which the light was waving was the Dawn, and every moment might be precious. But to leave a drowning man sinking in the sea was impossible. Neither of the shipmates could think of that, whatever was at stake. The motor-boat throbbed to a stop, and three pairs of keen eyes scanned the water.

The white face showed again. Ken threw a line, and it was grasped by desperate hands. A minute more, and a drenched figure was dragged on the boat, to sink down exhausted in a pool of water. A second more, and the boat was rushing on again towards the waving light, while King of the Islands bent over the man who had been so narrowly saved from the sea. A yell of astonishment broke from him as he scanned the white, drawn face of the man he had saved.

"Dandy Peter! It's Peter Parsons!" gasped Ken.

"Parsons?" stuttered the mate of the Dawn.

"Feller Parsons belong Lukwe!" ejaculated Koko, in wonder. "Me savvy that feller plenty too much! That bad feller no stop along boat belong white master. That feller go back along sea, close-up, makee kai-kai along shark!" and Koko's sinewy hands grasped the half-drowned man.

Dandy Peter made no resistance. The last ounce of his strength was gone, and he was sinking into insensibility. But King of the Islands caught the Kanaka by a brown shoulder and dragged him back.

"Belay that, Koko!" he rapped.

Koko grunted discontentedly, but he obeyed the order of his white master.

Ken's eyes were fixed on the light again. He knew now that it was a signal from the Kanaka crew of his ship, the Dawn. Evidently the Hiva-Oa boys had turned on Dandy Peter, and he had gone overboard. He guessed that the firing had been a signal from the ketch. The voices of the Hiva-Oa boys came ringing across the sea, shouting to him.

King of the Islands' eyes danced.

"The Dawn!" he exclaimed. "It's our ship. Kit, we've got her back at last!"

The ketch hove-to. Lights were burning, and Danny the cooky-boy, a huge grin on his fat face, was waving a hurricane-lamp over the side. Hudson ran the motor-boat under the rail, and Koko hooked on. With a bound King of the Islands was on the teak rail, and jumped down on the deck of his own ship. It seemed almost like a dream to him—this moment that he had thought of by day and dreamed of by night. Once more King of the Islands trod the deck of the Dawn.

The dandy of Lukwe was looking little like his usual natty self when he eventually came round to find himself aboard the Dawn. His clothes were crumpled and draggled, his unshaven chin bluish, and his face haggard.

"You've got me, hang you!" he

snarled. "Are you going to chuck me over the side?"

"You deserve it, and more, you scoundrel!" said Ken. "I'm dealing with you as you dealt with me. I'm going to maroon you."

Dandy Peters shrugged his shoulders. "Get to it, then," he sneered. "You got off Maroon Island, where I reckoned you were fixed for keeps, and I reckon I'll get off wherever you strand me."

"You'll take your chance of that," said Ken, "the same chance that you left us, you swab!" He glanced at Koko. "Search him for the paper—you findee little feller paper stop along feller Parsons."

Koko searched, but no paper came to light. It was clear that Dandy Peter had destroyed it—no loss to him, as he had pored over it so long and so often that every syllable was imprinted on his memory.

"Take him below!" said Ken.

And Parsons was taken down to the cabin, put in irons, and the door locked on him. Ken glanced over the sea, and at the tall cedar masts, with their bellying sails. The Dawn was doing ten knots before a stiff breeze. There was a thoughtful shade on Ken's boyish brows. Thoughts had been working in his mind, since he had stepped once more on his own deck, that he had not uttered to his shipmate. He coloured as he caught Hudson looking at him.

"You've got something on your mind," said the mate of the Dawn. "What is it?"

"I've been thinking, Kit," said King of the Islands slowly. "It may seem a bit fatheaded, but I can't help thinking of that wretched swab we left behind us on Maroon Island."

Hudson was silent for a moment or two. Then his face broke into a grin.

"You're an ass, Ken! But it's like you! Eastward-ho for Maroon Island and the wild man, and if he wrings your head off as soon as we get him on board, thank yourself."

CHAPTER 23.

The Wild Man Caught!

THE yell that rang through the bush on Maroon Island was more like that of a wild beast than a human being. Ken King started as he heard it, and grinned.

"Fellow wild man sing out plenty too much, mouth belong him!" said the bo'sun.

"No likee hear that feller sing out, ear belong me," said Lompo, with a shiver. "No likee that black feller."

Crash! The lump of coral rock came whizzing, and rolled down the hot lava slope. Overhead, on a lava ridge, a wild figure stood against the sun and the blue sky—the wild man of Maroon Island! Tall, gaunt, bearded to the eyes and the ears, the shaggy beard covering his chest like a mat, his fierce eyes blazing, his brawny form clothed only in a bark kilt, he was a fearful vision. The Kanakas stared at him with awed, scared eyes.

Outside the reef the Dawn rode the water. Kit Hudson and Danny remained in charge of the ketch. King of the Islands, with Koko and four Hiva-Oa boys, had landed to search for the wild man. They had been ashore for two days and nights—it was now the third day—and they had sighted the strange, wild denizen of Maroon Island at last. Now he stood on the lava ridge, up the hill, with another lump of jagged rock grasped in his hand, prepared to hurl it.

"Look out!" snapped Ken.

The rock came crashing down, to smash into fragments. Ken rushed up the slope, and Koko after him, Lompo and Lufu, Tomo and Kolulo following more slowly. The fierce yell of the wild man rang again as he fled. They clambered on the lava ridge, but the wild man had vanished, running and jumping among the rocks with the speed and agility of a wild pig in the bush.

But King of the Islands kept on steadily, the Kanakas behind him. He remembered the wild man's den—the

cave high up the lava slopes, which the shipmates had discovered during their sojourn on the island. It was likely that the hunted savage had taken refuge there. Ken stood at last in the narrow opening of the cave, scanning the dusky interior. Bones of animals and fish encumbered the floor of the cave, but he could see nothing else in the deep gloom. And then suddenly from the darkness within he caught a glitter of wild eyes, watching. The wild man was there—run down like a wolf in his lair.

"That feller stop!" said Ken quietly, though his heart was beating fast. "You feller look out, eye belong you."

"Yes, sar!" mumbled the uneasy Kanakas.

Ken, with his eyes fixed watchfully on the half-seen glittering orbs in the darkness within, called out:

"You feller along cave, us feller friend along you!"

But he had little hope of being understood. He had tried to talk to the wild man before, in his days on the island, without getting any answer but a savage howl. And that was the answer he received now. From the depths of the cave came the yell of the savage, echoing and booming. It was followed by a panther-like spring. The wild, shaggy figure leaped into view, in a desperate attempt to escape, and Ken grappled with him as he tore past.

Strong and sturdy as he was, the boy trader would have been tossed aside like a child. But the powerful grasp of Koko was added to his, and the savage was held. But the two of them were not too much for the wild man of Maroon Island. He struggled and tore and wrenched, and they rolled over with him on the lava rocks, Ken shouting to the Kanakas to help. Unwillingly, but obedient to their skipper's voice, the Hiva-Oa boys seized on the shaggy figure. But even in six pairs of hands the Herculean savage still

struggled desperately. And Ken knew then what he had suspected before—the man was crazed. It was the strength of a madman that he was exerting.

In a panting heap they rolled on the rocks, but with all his insane efforts the wild man could not break loose. Tomo grasped a loose lump of rock and brought it down with a crash on the shaggy head of the wild man. It was a terrific blow, and it stunned the hapless denizen of Maroon Island. His frantic struggles ceased, and he lay inert. Ken stood over him, panting, streaming with perspiration. He had hoped to secure the man unhurt, but he could not blame Tomo for that blow.

The wild man was stunned and senseless. It was likely to be some time before he came to after that crashing blow. At least it gave the boy trader a chance of securing him and conveying him to the ketch. Black man or white, mad or sane, he should be saved from the terrible solitude of the desert island. And if it was the solitude that had crazed him, there was no reason why he should not recover in friendly hands and with friendly care.

Ken scanned the senseless face with curious eyes. It was the first time that he had been able to examine the man closely. The skin was a coppery colour, as dark as a Polynesian's, but he could see that the features were not native. Most of the face was hidden by the wild, shaggy beard, and the head covered by a matted mop of hair. But Ken had little doubt that it was a white man who lay there—some shipwrecked white man, burnt brown by the tropic sun, crazed by solitude, sunk to the level of a savage animal in the bush.

And from the bottom of his heart he was glad that he had sailed back to Maroon Island, little as he could afford it, to save the unhappy wretch from death-in-life on that lonely speck of land.

The senseless man showed no sign

of returning consciousness as he was carried through the thick bush down to the beach of the lagoon. There the whaleboat was waiting, and the wild man was lifted into it.

"Washy-washy along ketch!" said King of the Islands, and he steered the whaleboat out of the lagoon. Koko's keen eye was on the wild man, and a rope was ready to bind his limbs if it was needed. But the man did not stir.

The whaleboat pulled to the ketch, watched over the side by Kit Hudson, Danny, and Peter Parsons, who was in irons and allowed the run of the deck. There was a sneering grin on his face as he watched. From the talk of the shipmates, he had heard of the existence of the wild man, of whom he had known nothing when he landed them on Maroon Island long ago. And Dandy Peter did not conceal his contempt for a ruined and beggared trader who wasted time and stores in rescuing a black savage from a desert island.

"You've got him?" Kit Hudson hailed the boat as it came in.

"Ay, ay!" called back King of the Islands.

The boat pulled under the rail and the wild man was handed up. He was still senseless. Dandy Peter stared at him curiously, and broke into a sardonic laugh.

"You're down to your uppers, and you've spent time and money to pick up that nigger, King of the Islands!" he jeered.

Ken made no reply.

"Kit, old man, I think you'll be as glad as I am that we came back for him!" said Ken to Kit. "He's mad, poor chap, but he's a white man! Heaven knows how long he was on that island before we got there—years, perhaps—and it turned his brain! I dare say he was a tough character to begin with—he looks it! I'm glad we've saved him, though, and hang the trade!"

"Same here!" said Hudson. Then

his eyes turned grimly on Peter Parsons. "We're leaving that swab here, Ken! He will be better off than we were—there will be no wild man on the island!"

Ken nodded. Dandy Peter's irons were unlocked, and the Kanakas dropped him into the boat. His handsome face was pale, but he would not ask for mercy. The whaleboat pulled shoreward, and landed him on the reef. Standing there against the blue sky, Parsons shook his fist after the boat as it pulled back to the Dawn. With despair in his heart, but defiance in his face, he stood watching the ketch, prepared to see her make sail and abandon him to his fate, as he had relentlessly abandoned the shipmates long weeks ago. But the ketch did not sail.

.

Night had fallen on the Pacific. Maroon Island and its lava peak were blotted out from sight, though the ketch lay only a mile off the reef. King of the Islands had not yet made sail. Kit Hudson, who knew what was in his mind, did not urge him to do so. Dandy Peter, marooned on the speck of land where he had marooned the shipmates of the Dawn, deserved his fate, but the sight of the wild man—a white man crazed and sunk into savagery on that lonely island—gave the shipmates pause.

At the last pinch they could not resolve to do as they had been done by. And though they had said nothing on the subject, both knew that Parsons was to have only a night on the island, and that he would be taken off when the Dawn sailed.

Now King of the Islands was watching by the side of the wild man, lying in his own bunk in the little state-room. He had not come to his senses, although his eyes were slowly opening. Ken had done all for him that could be done. He had been washed and shaved by Danny, and where the shaggy beard had grown the skin now showed white,

in startling contrast to the dark copper of the exposed part of his face. Looking at the unconscious man, Ken could not think that he had been a pleasant or likeable man at the best of times. Every feature was harsh, every line in the face hard. A hard-fisted man, and a hard driver of men, he looked, and there was little doubt that that was what he had been.

It was the solitude, the silence, and despair of the lonely island that had robbed him of his senses. But likely enough, it was the hard, grim character of the man that had caused his madness to take the form of fierce violence and enmity.

But that made little difference to Ken's pity for the poor wretch. He was watching the signs of returning consciousness. Koko was at hand in the cabin. If the wild man awakened violent, he had to be secured. Ken watched the eyes as they slowly opened, and saw in them a dazed stare, and not the mad glitter he had feared to see. He wondered whether the shock of that crashing blow on the head had worked some change in the man. He moved a little nearer.

The dazed eyes fixed on him. But the man made no movement. He seemed weak—strangely in contrast to the Herculean strength he had displayed in his last struggle. His breathing was low and steady. He gazed up at Ken in silence.

"You're among friends here," King of the Islands spoke in a soothing voice. Kit came down from the deck and stood looking in at the doorway, a glance telling him that there was no violence to be feared now. "Can you understand me?"

The man nodded feebly.

"You speak English?" Ken placed water to the man's lips and he drank. Then he made an attempt to speak. The words came husky and broken, like those of a man who had almost forgotten the use of his voice.

"Who are you?" he asked.

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"I'm called King of the Islands," answered Ken.

A gleam of intelligence showed in the sunken eyes. The man had heard of the boy trader of Lalinge, yet in the days on Maroon Island he had attacked Ken more than once, knowing nothing of him in his blind hostility. It was proof that the time of unreason had passed.

"You're on my ketch, the Dawn," said Ken. "We've taken you off an island. You understand?"

"Heavens!" breathed the man in the bunk. "The solitude—the silence—months and months—it may be years since she went down in the typhoon! How many times have I feared that my brain would go—" he shuddered. Obviously he remembered nothing of the immediate past. "Did you find the message?" he added suddenly.

"The message?" For a moment Ken feared that the hapless man's mind was wandering again.

"Yes. Did you find it?"

"No," said Ken soothingly. "But we found you, shipmate. A rascal marooned us on the island. We got away, and came back for you."

"You'd been hunting for me?" asked the man, his voice still slow and cracked and husky, but gathering strength. "You heard that I'd been cast away, and were hunting for me? Well, I'll reward you!"

King of the Islands smiled. Hudson, in the doorway, grinned. The wretched figure in the bunk did not look like rewarding anybody. The shipmates had no doubt that he was a penniless castaway, and that they would have to provide him with clothes to land from the ketch when they reached a port.

"You know who I am!" he snapped. "You don't know? You say you came to the island for me—to pick me up! You did that without knowing—"

"How should we know?" said Ken, smiling. "It was enough for us that you were a shipwrecked castaway. We'll fix you up somehow to go ashore

when we make Lalinge—and put something in your pocket.”

“You fool!” exclaimed the man, and Ken stared at that unexpected answer. The man raised himself on his elbow.

“You don’t know who you’ve picked up!” he rasped. “But I’ll make it worth your while to have taken the trouble. If you’re making Lalinge, I reckon there’s some there that will know me. You’ll get the reward I promised in my message. Don’t stare at me, man! I’m not wandering! A few days after I was thrown on that horrible island, I found an empty bottle on the beach, and I wrote a message and sent it afloat in the bottle. I reckon it’s never been found, but what I said in it holds good. I’ll reward the man who took me off the island. What you’ve done will be worth five hundred pounds to you.”

“We could do with it,” said Hudson, with a grin. “Who may you be when you’re at home, my man? Some bloated millionaire?”

The man in the bunk turned his grim face to Ken.

“How long have I been on that infernal island?” he asked.

“How should I know?” asked Ken, in astonishment.

“I reckon you should know! I lost count of time, but I suppose you haven’t! How long is it since the Mindanao went down?” snapped the man.

“The Mindanao?” Ken stuttered.

“You’ve heard of her, I suppose?” rasped the rescued man. “She was down from Honolulu to Sydney when the typhoon struck her east of the Marshalls. How long ago?”

Ken gazed at him. Kit Hudson caught his breath. The man was a survivor of the Mindanao! Startling thoughts leaped into their minds. It seemed impossible, and yet the man had spoken of committing a message to the sea in a bottle. And it was from a message in a bottle floating in the sea that Dandy Peter had found a clue

to Grant Blake! Was it possible? The shipmates gazed at him, almost dumb-founded at the thought.

“Can’t you answer?” growled the man.

“More than a year ago,” said Ken. “Who are you? Tell me your name!”

“Grant Blake!” came the reply.

“My sainted Sam!” yelled King of the Islands, and jumped to his feet. The wild man of Maroon Island was Grant Blake! Dandy Peter had been searching westward along the Marshalls and Gilberts, and it was to the eastward that the sole survivor of the Mindanao had drifted on a spar. If Dandy Peter had only known it, the castaway he sought was on the very island where he had marooned the shipmates of the Dawn!

“Grant Blake!” stuttered Hudson.

“Ken, old man, kick me—kick me from the taffrail to the bowsprit and back again! You win, old man! I thought you a fool for coming back to pick up a black savage in the bush—and we’ve picked up a bloated millionaire—and five thousand pounds!”

Grant Blake, from the bunk, stared at him grimly. Of his mad, wild life in the bush on Maroon Island he remembered nothing. Months were missing from his life, and he had taken it up again at the point where he remembered. And he was, as the shipmates easily saw, worthy of his reputation as the grimmest, hardest-fisted man in the Pacific.

“Go slow, my man!” he said, with a jeer in his voice. I said five hundred pounds, and good pay, too, for picking up a castaway and giving him a passage on your packet.”

Hudson laughed.

“You can say what you like, Grant Blake, and keep your five hundred pounds and spend it on cigarettes!” he said. “Nobody wants you to pay that, Mr. Blake. For a year past there’s been a reward of five thousand pounds offered by Grant Blake and Co., shippers, of Sydney, Australia, for any man who found you alive and picked

you up. I reckon they never fancied the reward would be earned, but we've earned it, Mr. Blake, and we're going to handle it. And you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Millionaire of Sydney!" And Hudson turned away and went back whistling to the deck.

"The reward is offered by your firm, Mr. Blake," explained Ken. "We shall claim it, of course. We fancied we were rescuing a castaway without a bean, and this is rather a surprise! And we shan't charge you anything for your passage on the Dawn—if that's any comfort to you!"

Grant Blake grunted. But when Ken told him of the rescue of Edna Blake from Maia, he softened, for he

had it during the long days of that run to Lalinge. He learned with utter amazement that the rescued castaway of Maroon Island was the man he had sought in the wrong quarter, and Dandy Peter tasted the full bitterness of defeat and disappointment. At the first white man's port the ketch raised, he was put ashore, and the shipmates were glad enough to be done with him. Then the ketch sailed on to Lalinge, with a joyous crew on board.

Grant Blake was fully recovered by the time the Dawn ran into the lagoon at Lalinge. He was not a pleasant passenger. The shipmates were glad that they had saved him, for his sake and their own, but they could not like him, and when he went ashore they

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loved his daughter, and he promised to double the reward.

Dandy Peter came back in the whale-boat at sunrise, and the ketch made sail from Maroon Island. The shipmates had already relented towards the sea-scoundrel who had harmed them so much, but since the amazing discovery that the wild man of Maroon Island was Grant Blake, the Sydney millionaire, they felt that they could forgive him everything. Wickedness, as often happens, had worked out to good in the end. But for Dandy Peter's rascality, the shipmates would never have seen Maroon Island and been able to rescue the wild man.

If Parsons needed punishment, he

were almost as glad to see the last of him as of Dandy Peter.

It was a joy-day for the shipmates when the reward came through the Pacific Company's agent at Lalinge. They had lost almost everything, but the loss was repaid twice over by the reward for the rescue of the Sydney millionaire. And every man on the ketch was given solid reasons for sharing in their satisfaction.

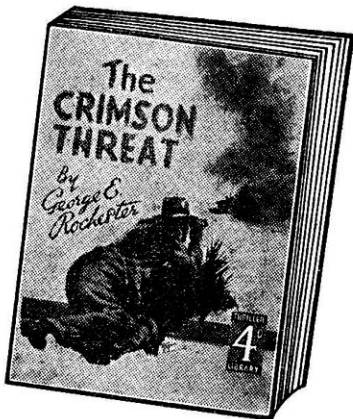
"Money to burn now!" said Kit Hudson, with a chuckle. "What about going in for a gas engine on the Dawn, old bean, eh?"

King of the Islands laughed and shook his head. Wind-jamming was his trade, and he was sticking to wind-jamming!

THE END.

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OUR MAGAZINE CORNER

PACIFIC PUZZLES

THERE are many puzzling things about the Pacific Ocean, and many things that are all wrong. To start with, the first European to discover it and set eyes on it did not call it Pacific. When Balboa saw its waters from a hill-top in Panama, and claimed it for Spain, he called it the "South Sea."

Considering that this ocean extends from the Bering Sea in the north to the Antarctic Circle that name is all wrong. On the other hand, Pacific is all wrong, too, for it is far from that. Magellan happened to be lucky with his weather when he first sailed round the Cape Horn, and so he called it Mar Pacifico, and left it at that.

The Pacific and its history abounds with such errors and absurdities, and its name is one of the most outstanding, for the typhoons of the Pacific are about the worst storms a sailor can encounter. It is doubtful if there ever has been a storm more terrible than that which swept the harbour at Apia in 1839. The place was crowded with shipping at the time, and owing to trouble with the natives there were a number of battleships of the United States, German and British navies. H.M.S. Calliope, under the command of Captain Kane, was the only ship to escape destruction in that storm, and it has become an epic of the sea.

It is said that if any vessel should by chance be caught in the vortex, or centre, of a typhoon, it is fatal, and it would never come out again. But that is not strictly correct, for Captain Voss and two companions, crossing the Pacific rather daringly in a 25-foot yawl, the Sea Queen, was not only caught in the centre of a typhoon, but lived to tell the tale. This happened in 1912, and the Sea Queen was a leaky old tub, too. During the storm an enormous wave washed Captain Voss off

the deck and turned the vessel upside down, with the other two men in the cabin. The next wave righted the ship. Voss got a hold on the gunwale and hauled himself aboard and released his shipmates. Eventually, after many days of staring death in the face, the Ocean Queen, her masts gone, managed to limp into port at Habu, Japan, to find that the village there had been wiped out by the typhoon and a 2,000-ton steamer sunk with a loss of forty lives.

If we are to call places in the Pacific by their first names—that is, the names by which they were first known—the result would be remarkable. For instance, the New Hebrides Islands should be called Australia. That sounds strange, but it is true. And not many people happen to know that the name Australia has really nothing to do with astral things, but Austrian. It all came about in this way.

Just as Columbus set out across the Atlantic hoping to find a new route to India, so another Spaniard, Alvaro de Mendana, left Peru to sail westward across the Pacific with orders to find the land from which it was supposed Solomon obtained gold, fill his ship with the precious metal, and return.

For a start, Mendana discovered an island which he thought was the place, and although he christened it Santa Ysabel, it has been known as the Solomons ever since. There were a good many more islands round there which Mendana never even saw, but the name Solomons has stuck to them all. Mendana reached Manila, was taken ill and died. His lieutenant, Quiros, set the ship's head back across the Pacific and discovered more land which he took to be the long-sought continent. He called it Tierra Australis del Espiritu Santos; firstly after the Royal House of Austria, to which the King of Spain belonged, and secondly, after the Holy Ghost. Actually, that was not Australia as we know it. Captain Cook found those islands again, and called them the New Hebrides.

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

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Those islands were not seen again for a very long time, but the existence of that continent being still believed in they were constantly sought, and when the real Australia was stumbled on it was taken to be the island Quiros had found, and was called Tierra Australis del Espiritu Santos, or Australia for short.

There are thousands of islands in the Pacific, and so many men of so many nationalities have had a hand in discovering them that it is no wonder that at times the names seem strange. The Marquesas were thus named by Quiros after the Marquis of Mendoza, Viceroy of Peru. Cook called the Hawaiian Islands the Sandwich Islands after Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty of that time.

Actually, these numerous islands are mountain peaks of a lost continent. The Pacific sea-bed is volcanic, and new islands are constantly being formed. Such an incident has been witnessed. One ship's company saw an island thrown up out of the sea. They were highly elated, and after some discussion called it, for some reason, Wesley. But by the time the name was settled another disturbance had sunk the island again, and it was lost!

But the Frenchman, Bougainville, one of the most famous of Pacific explorers, has no island named after him at all—only a flowering vine, the Bougainvillaea. But for the most part the names given the islands by the discoverers have proved so absurd that to-day we know them mostly by their native names, although Niuafoou is better known to sailors as Tin Can Island, because ships often put letters in tin cans, toss them overboard to be retrieved by natives, who hand them over to the next ship that passes.

But the greatest piece of trickery to anyone delving into these matters is to find that the original Robinson Crusoe Island, Juan Fernandez, is not one island at all, but three! They are called Mas-a-Tierra, Mas-a-Fuera and Santa Clara. Alexander Selkirk lived on the first named.