

THE LOST LAGOON

A Thrilling Tale of the South Seas
Starring KING OF THE ISLANDS

BY CHARLES HAMILTON



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The LOST LAGOON



By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON.**

THE CASTAWAY'S SECRET. A fortune in pearls lay hidden on the shores of a lagoon. Wu Fang, a murderous chinaman, knew about it, and eventually all the crooks in the South Seas got wind of it. But only Ben Keefe, the castaway, knew where that lagoon was, and his secret would have been tortured out of him if KING OF THE ISLANDS hadn't taken a hand in the game. Start now on this stirring yarn of the lawless Pacific.

CHAPTER I.

A Drifting Boat.

KO KO, what name you look along sea-eye belong you?"

King of the Islands, sitting on the taffrail of the ketch Dawn, as it ran before a five-knot breeze, had been watching Koko; the Kanaka boat-swain, curiously for some minutes before asking that question.

It was a blazing day on the Pacific.

The sun burned from a sky of unclouded blue. But for the breeze the heat would have been overpowering. The Hiva-Oa crew lolled on deck. From the little galley the voice of Danny, the

cooky-boy, could be heard singing as he clattered pots and pans.

Kit Hudson, the young Australian mate of the ketch, was stretched in a long chair under the awning aft, half asleep. Ken King had been watching the tall masts bending under the bellying canvas till his attention was transferred to Koko.

Shading his keen dark eyes with a brown hand, Koko was staring across the shining waters as if he picked up some object in the far distance. Only the illimitable Pacific, deep blue to the horizon, met Ken's gaze when he turned in the same direction.

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But he knew that Koko had almost the vision of an albatross, and he had no doubt that the boatswain saw something beyond the range of his own eyes, keen as they were.

Koko gave one last, long stare and turned towards his white master.

"Feller boat stop along sea, sar. Me see um, sar, eye belong me," he exclaimed. "Little feller boat he walk about along sea, sar."

King of the Islands slipped from the taffrail. The Dawn was a hundred miles from the nearest land. It was not uncommon to pick up a native canoe at such a distance from land, but a white man's boat was another matter. The boy trader fixed his eyes intently on the spot indicated by the boatswain's brown finger.

But he smiled, and shook his head. If there was a dim blur on the blue waters, he could not be sure of it.

"You plenty sure you see feller boat?" he asked.

"Plenty too much sure, sar."

"No feller canoe?"

"No feller canoe, sar. Feller boat," answered Koko positively.

"What feller stop along that boat?"

"No see feller stop along boat, sar. Tinkee no feller stop along boat."

Kit Hudson sat up in his chair, rubbed his eyes, and blinked at the boy skipper of the Dawn and the boatswain.

"What's the row, Ken?" he yawned.

"Koko thinks he's spotted a drifting boat," answered Ken King. "Or rather, he knows he has. Koko's eyes are as good as a pair of binoculars. I fancy we'll run down to it. If it's a ship's boat lost in a gale, it may be worth picking up and towing to Lalinge. Lompo, you fetch big feller glass along cabin."

Lompo ran down for the binoculars.

Kit Hudson stared across the gleaming water, but he, like Ken King, failed to pick up the distant object that had caught the keen eyes of Koko.

"No see feller boat eye belong me, Koko!" he grinned.

"Feller boat he stop, sar," said Koko confidently. "Feller master he see along he look along big feller glass, sar."

Lompo came back with the binoculars, and King of the Islands clapped them to his eyes, then uttered an exclamation as a drifting object rushed into the field of vision.

"It's a boat. Looks like a ship's quarter-boat. Nobody in it that I can see," said King of the Islands.

He stared steadily at the distant boat. As the powerful glasses brought it clear to his eyes it lurched and drifted on the Pacific rollers, at the mercy of the sea. It had neither mast nor sail, but he could see an oar that lay idly over a gunwale. What looked like a fold of weather-worn canvas lay crumpled in the bottom of the boat. Of a human occupant there was no sign.

Ken passed the glasses to Hudson.

As the Australian mate of the Dawn turned them on the distant boat King of the Islands rapped out an order, and Tomoo, at the helm, put the wheel over to starboard. Hudson got the range, and stared long and hard at the drifting boat.

"Nobody aboard, unless that old canvas covers something, Ken. And I reckon if there was a shipwrecked man aboard he would be standing up to signal," he said.

Ken nodded. From the boat the tall sails of the Dawn must have been long in sight, if there were eyes to watch.

"Some skipper's lost that boat in a gale of wind, I reckon," added the mate of the Dawn.

"No tinkee, sar," said Koko.

"Eh? What name you no tinkee?" demanded Hudson.

"Feller oar he stop along boat, sar," answered Koko. "S'pose feller big wind he blow, sar, feller oar no stop."

"Good old coffee-bean!" Hudson chuckled. "Koko's right Ken. If that

boat had broken loose in rough weather, the oars would have washed out of her. It wasn't that."

Ken nodded again, his face grave. The ketch had already changed her course, swerving to port to run down the drifting boat. Evidently it was not, as the shipmates had been inclined to suppose, a boat that had broken loose in a gale. In the islands, where small trading ketches and cutters often towed their boats for want of room aboard, such mishaps were not uncommon. But the loose oar that jutted idly across the gunwale showed that the boat had not been adrift in a rough sea.

"There is—or was—some man aboard," said Ken, and his eyes fixed on the crumpled canvas in the bottom of the boat.

The ketch, once headed for the boat, ran down swiftly, and it was now clearly visible to the naked eye. Every eye on board was turned on it. Even Danny had come out of his galley, a saucepan in his hand, to stare. The crew of Hiva-Oa boys—Tomoo, Kolulo, Lufu, and Lompo—watched it curiously.

No sign of life could be seen as the ketch drew rapidly nearer. Unless the ragged canvas hid something, the boat was deserted.

King of the Islands wondered whether some hapless survivor of a wreck, or a fire at sea, lay sheltered under the canvas from the burning sun—dead, perhaps, or dying. A castaway able to stir would have watched the sea for a sail, and would have been signaling frantically to the ketch.

Closer and closer ran the Dawn till she was within a cable's length, when King of the Islands hove to and the whaleboat was lowered. The boy trader stood up in the whaleboat with anxious face and fixed gaze, while Koko and Lompo pulled at the oars.

King of the Islands stepped into the drifting boat as Koko held it by the gunwale. Another oar, an empty keg, dry as a bone, and a biscuit bag in which no crumb remained, lay in the bottom. He stooped and lifted the weather-worn

canvas, dreading what he might see when it was removed.

A huddled figure lay there, apparently lifeless. The mouth was open, the lips black and cracked with thirst. The closed eyes were sunk in the gaunt, haggard face. The man had been of powerful frame, but the huddled limbs seemed shrunken and slight.

The face, little more than skin and bone, was burnt to a coppery hue as dark as a Kanaka's, but it was the face of a white man. He was dressed in tattered cotton shirt and shorts, loose on the emaciated form.

Ken's sunburnt face was clouded with pity. Hunger and thirst had ravaged the gaunt face on which he looked. How long had the hapless man been adrift on the boundless Pacific? Days—perhaps weeks—watching, with weary eyes, for the sail that did not come! There had been food and water in the boat—both exhausted, probably long since.

Hopeless at last, the castaway had dragged the canvas over him, to shut off the burning sun, and lain down to die. There was a sail at last, on the endless sea, but the closed eyes could not see it. The skeleton hands could wave no signal. Had it come too late? But for the keen eyes of Koko, the ketch would have swept on towards distant Lalinge, leaving the boat to drift unseen, unknown. Ken, as he knelt beside the senseless castaway, prayed that he was not too late to save him.

Koko and Lompo stared from the whaleboat, curious, but with the indifference of the unthinking natives of the south.

"My word," said Lompo, "that feller white master he no stop any more altogether."

"That feller he no walk about any more!" agreed Koko. "He go finish. Feller boat he plenty good, s'pose white master take along Lalinge."

Ken's hand was on the shrunken breast under the ragged cotton shirt.

The castaway's heart was beating faintly. King of the Islands felt a throb of relief.

"Water!" he said. Koko passed over a tin pannikin of water. Ken placed it to the dry, cracked lips, lifting the head of the castaway. A quiver ran through the unconscious face, and the sunken eyes opened wildly. It was only for a moment, and they closed again, but the castaway sucked deliriously at the cool water.

"My word!" said Koko. "That feller he stop!"

"He lives!" said King of the Islands. "We shall save him yet. You feller boy, you put feller rope along boat, washy-washy along ketch, plenty too quick."

"Yessar!" said Koko. The drifting boat was taken in tow, and the Kanakas pulled for the Dawn.

Kit Hudson stared down as they came alongside, his eyes fixed compassionately on the shrunken face of the castaway.

"Alive, Ken?" he asked.

"Ay, ay! Pretty far gone, old man, but we shall save him, I hope," answered King of the Islands. "Help me get him aboard!"

Gently the unconscious man was lifted to the deck of the ketch. The shipmates carried him below, and he was laid in Ken's own bunk in the little state-room amidships.

King of the Islands remained with him. There was little he could do beside make the unconscious man comfortable in the bunk and moisten his lips with water. Kit Hudson returned to the deck to take charge. The whale-boat was swung up to the davits, and the Dawn put before the wind again on her course to Lalinge, with the drifting boat now towing astern.

The mate came back to the cabin.

"No name on the boat," he said. "Nothing in her but the oars, an empty keg, an empty biscuit-bag, and a rag of canvas. I wonder what ship she may have belonged to and what may have happened to her."

"We shall know when he comes to—if he does!" said Ken. "Poor fellow—he's been through it, hard! Nothing about him to show who he is, or where he came from. A white man—that's all we know—a sailorman or a pearler, I should fancy."

"He's coming to!"

The sunken eyes opened again, fixing on the shipmates at the side of the bunk with a wild stare.

The dry lips moved, but no word came.

"You're with friends now, my poor fellow!" said the King of the Islands softly. "You're on board ship! You're saved!"

But there was no intelligence in the staring eyes. The boy trader's words seemed to convey no meaning to the castaway.

Ken placed the pannikin to his lips, and he drank greedily. Then he lay back in the bunk, his bright wild eyes fixed on them like the eyes of an animal. They closed at last, and the man slept, his breathing faint but regular.

"Looks like delirium!" whispered Hudson.

Ken nodded. The wild, unintelligent glitter in the sunken eyes in those moments of consciousness told that the castaway had not come to his right senses.

"Godness knows what he may have been through," said Ken. "Days and days, perhaps, of parching thirst—and the sun! But he's sleeping now. I'll leave a man to watch him, and get Danny to fix up something for him when he wakes."

The shipmates returned to the deck. Kolulo was left to watch the sleeping castaway. Under the burning sun the Dawn fled swiftly on, the shipmates pacing the little after-deck and talking in low tones. Danny was preparing an appetising broth for the castaway, for he was in no state to take solid food. The shipmates waited for him to wake.

It was a couple of hours later, and

the red rim of the sun was sinking to the sea-line, when Kolulo put a startled face out of the companion.

"White feller he talk, sar!" said Kolulo. "He talk plenty too much, sar, mouth belong him. Brain belong that feller no walk about any more, sar!"

Ken nodded, and ran down the companion. The castaway was sitting up in the bunk. His eyes were wide open and staring, and he was muttering, thick and fast, words that seemed to tumble over one another, few of them distinguishable. Ken laid a soothing hand on his shoulder, and the man started back as if he had been struck.

From his swollen lips came a husky babble of words, in an incoherent stream. Then suddenly, loud and clear, came the words:

"Twenty on the line! A cable's length on the beach, and five fathoms in the bush! Twenty on the line!" Then a meaningless babble of delirium followed.

CHAPTER 2.

Thrown Overboard.

WU FANG walked along the coral quay at Lalinge, a diminutive figure, looking oddly like a mushroom under his big Chinese hat. Kanakas and coolies, loafing on the quay, glanced at him as he passed, and some of them grinned. For many days, the little Chinaman had been a familiar figure at Lalinge.

He had arrived at the island on a trading cutter from Lukwe, and every day since he had haunted the beach and the quay from sunrise till dark. Almost every minute of every day his slanting eyes were turned on the passage in the reef, where the ships came into the lagoon from the Pacific.

And when a ship came in, whether it was a pearling lugger, a trading ketch or yawl, or the Sydney steamer, Wu Fang's almond eyes fixed on it intently, and watched it to its anchorage. Afterwards, Wu Fang would get into

talk with some of the crew, in his queer pidgin English.

But whatever it was that Wu Fang expected, he seemed to be disappointed every time, for he continued, day after day, to walk the beach and the quay and watch the reef passage across the lagoon.

Chinamen were not uncommon at Lalinge, which was a large island and a centre of trade in that part of the Pacific. The wealthiest merchant on Lalinge was John Chin, a Chinaman. Wu Fang would not have attracted any special attention had he followed any occupation like any other Chinese.

But he seemed to have no occupation beyond watching the sea for a ship that never came, and he watched incessantly, with the impassive patience of the Oriental. Many people had questioned him.

Even Mr. Belnap, manager of the Pacific Company, and a magistrate, had asked him what his game was. And every time the little Chink answered politely, with his bland smile:

"Look see fiend comee along Lalinge!"

But the "friend" never seemed to come, and the loafers on the quay, sprawling in the shade of packing-cases, or sitting on the bollards, would grin and cackle as the little Chinaman passed them. Which Wu Fang did not seem to mind in the least.

On this particular day, however, it seemed as if Wu Fang was to be gratified at last. He came to a halt on the coral quay, his eyes fixed on a handsome ketch that was coming in from the open sea. As the ketch wound her way through the passage it could be seen that she was towing a boat after her—it looked like a ship's quarter-boat. And Wu Fang, standing very still, fixed his eyes on that towed boat, and they seemed to burn as he gazed.

Often enough he had seen some cutter or yawl towing its boat. But this towed boat, obviously, was not the ketch's own boat, for the ketch had a whaleboat

swung at the davits. Obviously the quarter-boat was a craft that had been picked up at sea and towed in. That fact was clear to Wu Fang, and it seemed to interest him mightily.

Seldom had the little Chink addressed a word to one of the loafers of the quay, unless first spoken to. But now he turned to a Kanaka who was watching the ketch come in, in the hope of picking up a job at handling cargo.

"You feller savvy that feller ketch?" asked Wu Fang.

"Savvy plenty!" the islander answered.

"What name belong that ketch?"

"Name belong ketch Dawn."

"You savvy feller skipper belong Dawn?"

The Lalinge native looked almost contemptuous. The Dawn and her boy skipper were not only well known at Lalinge, which was Ken King's home port, but through the length and breadth of the Pacific—from Honolulu to Hiva-Oa; from Thursday Island to Easter Island.

"Feller King of the Islands skipper belong Dawn!" answered the Kanaka. "You no savvy feller King of the Islands? My word!"

The slanting eyes gleamed for a moment. It seemed that Wu Fang had heard the name of the boy trader of the Pacific. He moved away to the end of the quay, and stood watching the Dawn as she emerged from the reef passage and came sweeping across the wide lagoon. He picked up King of the Islands and his mate on deck, and the Kanaka crew, but the slanting eyes searched and searched, as if for another that they did not see.

Then Wu Fang watched the towed boat again as intently as if he would have bored into its weather-worn, sun-blistered timbers with his piercing eyes. Its interest for Mr. Wu was very deep.

King of the Islands was looking towards the quay with a cheery smile on his sunburnt face. After a long trip

among the islands, Ken was glad to be home again—Lalinge was home to the boy trader. Few scenes in the South Seas were unfamiliar to his eyes, but the most familiar of all was the circling beach of Lalinge, with its rows of warehouses and bungalows, the native village back among the palms and the hills rising beyond.

Hands and hats were waved on the beach as the Dawn came in. There were few on Lalinge, white or native, with whom the cheery boy trader was not popular. Even Esau Hunk, the Yankee storekeeper, looked out of his store doorway with an amiable grin on his bony face. King of the Islands, standing by the binnacle, waved a hand again and again in return to some waved greeting as the ketch glided on to the quay.

Several other vessels were anchored in the lagoon or moored at the quay, among them John Chin's brig, and Dandy Peter's cutter from Lukwe, and Black Furley's pearling lugger from the same island. Lalinge was a busy port, and it was seldom that there was no vessel in the lagoon.

As the ketch glided down to the quay, Wu Fang moved again, approaching the space between the lugger and the cutter, where he could see that King of the Islands intended to moor the ketch.

He heard the boy trader rap an order, and watched the fall of the sails; watched a rope thrown from the ketch caught by a Kanaka on the quay and fastened to a bollard. And almost at the moment that the Dawn was moored, Wu Fang jumped from the quay to the deck of the ketch.

The next moment he was kow-towing to King of the Islands, who stared at him in astonishment.

"Who the dickens are you, and what do you want?" exclaimed the boy trader.

"O born-many-centuries-before-me, this humble person is Wu Fang!" answered the Chinaman. He was not speaking pidgin English now.

King of the Islands smiled. As he was at least twenty years younger than the Chinaman, that polite form of address had its comic side.

"Well, what do you want, Wu Fang?" he asked. "Cut it short. This is my busy day."

The Chinaman pointed to the quarter-boat, bobbing on the water at the stern of the ketch.

"You pick up a boat?" he said.

"Aye, aye!" answered Ken. "What about it?"

"This humble person search for a friend who is lost at sea in a boat," said Wu Fang softly. "Seeing a boat, this worm crawl at your feet to ask if you find a man in a boat."

"My hat!" ejaculated Kit Hudson. "If this is somebody who knows the man we picked up, Ken—"

"But the man we picked up isn't a Chinaman, whatever he is," said Ken.

"No Chinaman," said Wu Fang quickly. "This poor person's friend is white man of name Keefe—Ben Keefe."

The slanting eyes searched Ken's face. But he could see that the name was unfamiliar to the skipper of the Dawn.

"You no savvy, sar?" he asked, dropping into pidgin English.

"We picked up a man at sea in the boat yonder a couple of days ago," answered Ken, "but we don't know his name or anything about him. He has not come to his right senses. But you can go down and see him. I'll be glad to find anyone who knows him and can put me in touch with his friends. Take him down to the cabin, will you, Kit?"

"This way, Wu Fang," said the mate of the Dawn, and the little Chinaman followed him down the companionway.

The castaway lay in the bunk which the kind-hearted skipper of the Dawn had given up to him. He was dressed now in a suit of old ducks that Ken had sorted out for him. His gaunt, worn, coppery face showed plainly the traces of the terrible sufferings he had been through, but he looked very different

from the starving, parching man who had been picked out of the drifting boat.

Kind and careful attention and feeding had restored him. There was a faint colour in his thin cheeks, a glimmer of light in his sunken eyes. The fit of delirium had passed. Since the first day he had not been delirious, and it had been a great relief to the shipmates when the fevered babble of words ceased to echo from the cabin. Now he lay quiet, staring with fixed eyes. But in those eyes there was no recognition or intelligence.

Soothing words drew from the hapless man only that rigid stare. His name, his ship, were unknown—not only to the crew of the Dawn, but evidently to the man himself. He remained like a man stunned, eating and drinking mechanically what was given to him, and speaking no word—his silence a strange contrast to the incessant babble of his earlier delirium.

Already his physical strength was returning. But the mind was not so soon to recover, though the shipmates had no doubt that, with careful nursing, he would be himself again in the course of time. And with hardly a word said on the subject, the shipmates had settled that he should have the care he needed.

He was a stranger to them, thrown on their hands like a fragment of the flot-sam and jetsam of the Pacific, but they were the men to stand by a sailorman on his beam-ends.

The castaway did not stir, and his fixed stare did not change, as Kit Hudson came through the doorway from the main cabin into the little state-room. Lying in the bunk, resting on his elbow, he stared with dull, unwinking eyes.

The Chinaman, following Hudson, stopped at the doorway in the bulkhead, his slanting eyes gleaming into the state-room before he entered. Had the mate of the Dawn observed him, he might have fancied that Wu Fang wished to see the castaway before he

was seen himself. But the Australian's eyes were on the man in the bunk.

"You're awake, old bean?" said Hudson gently.

The man did not answer, and his fixed stare looked past the mate of the Dawn, fixed unseeingly on the opposite bunk. He was awake, but the words he heard seemed to convey no meaning to his dazed mind.

"Is your name Keefe?" asked Hudson. If it was the man's name, Hudson reckoned that it might wake him to intelligence when he heard it. It seemed to him that for a moment the dull eyes brightened, but the man gave no sign.

"Come in, Wu Fang," Hudson glanced round. "If you know him, he won't know you—he knows nothing. Look at him, and tell me if you know him."

The Chinaman glided softly into the room, and stood well back from the bunk as he fixed his eyes on the cast-away. Hudson saw his yellow face harden.

"It is Ben Keefe!" said Wu Fang softly.

"Sure you know him?" asked Kit.

"This poor person knows him," said Wu Fang. "He does not know Wu Fang, for his senses are gone, but Wu Fang knows him. It is many years, benevolent one, that he has been the good friend of this poor Chinaman. With the leave of the white lords I will take him into my care, and he shall want for nothing that this humble person can give."

"Oh, good!" said Hudson. He stepped to the companion and called up to King of the Islands. The boy trader came down to the cabin.

"It's all O.K.," said Hudson cheerfully. "He's Keefe right enough, and the Chink knows him. He says he's willing to take charge of him."

"Good man!" said Ken. The shipmates were prepared to keep the cast-away on their hands until his recovery. But it would have been rather a task

on a busy trading ketch, and it was a relief to find that he had a friend at Lalinge who was willing, indeed keen, to take charge of him.

Wu Fang bowed and smiled.

"This poor person's heart is joyful to behold once more the friend he had mourned as dead!" he said. "The blessing of Kwan be upon the benevolent ones who have saved him!"

"That's all right," said Ken, with a smile. "Of course, we shall be glad to hand him over to a friend who will care for him." He paused a moment, and eyed the Chinaman rather keenly. "Are you living on Lalinge?"

"This humble person has a bungalow which is hired from the Melican man Hunk!" said Wu Fang.

"Oh!" said Ken. It was easy to see, from Wu Fang's looks and manner of speaking, that he was no common Chinese coolie. But Ken had wondered whether he was "fixed" to take a helpless man on his hands. That point was settled now. It was evident that Wu Fang had money.

Anyone who could afford to hire Esau Hunk's furnished bungalow could not be poor. The Yankee storekeeper was accustomed to let that "bung" to tourists, and he charged as much for a month's hire as it had cost to build it.

"This humble person is wealthy," said Wu Fang, as if he read the boy trader's unspoken thought, "and all that he has shall be given for the sake of his friend."

"You're a good sort, Wu Fang," said King of the Islands. "I'll get my men to fix up a litter and carry the man ashore at sundown, if you will be ready to take him in then."

"All shall be ready, lord, and I will send my servants with a litter to carry my friend."

"Just as you like." Ken and Kit exchanged a glance of satisfaction. Friendly care in a bungalow on shore was undoubtedly better for the cast-away than what the shipmates could do for him on the ketch. For the man's

own sake, as well as a little for their own, they were glad that Wu Fang had turned up.

King of the Islands turned towards the man in the bunk. He gave a start as he observed that a change had come over him.

The castaway's eyes were fixed on Wu Fang in the same fixed stare as before, but now the eyes were dilated, and it seemed as if a terrified recognition was struggling into them. The coppery face, which had been set and expressionless, was quivering, and the lips moved, though no word came.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Hudson. "Is he coming to his senses? Looks as if he knows Wu Fang, after all."

The Chinaman drew a hissing breath and stepped back quickly, placing himself so that King of the Islands stood between him and the man in the bunk.

But the staring eyes of the castaway followed him, and the look of terror that grew in them was now unmistakable. Hudson caught his breath, and Ken's face set sternly. For the first time, suspicion shot into their minds of the Chinaman who claimed the castaway as a friend. For it was plain that the hapless man knew him, and that the terror of the recognition had roused him, in part at least, from the torpor in which he had been sunk.

"The Chink!" The words dropped in a husky, gasping mutter from the castaway. "The Chink! The Chink!"

He shrank back in the bunk, stretching out his skinny hands as if to ward off the Chinaman.

For a second the smiling yellow mask of Wu Fang's face changed and the rage of a demon burned in his slanting eyes. But it was only for a fleeting second. Then he was the smiling, impassive Celestial again.

"He knows this poor person!" murmured Wu Fang. "But his senses are gone."

King of the Islands knitted his brows.

"He knows you—and not as a

friend!" he rapped out. "Get out of this state-room!"

"O born-before-me——" pleaded Wu Fang.

"Get out!" roared King of the Islands.

The Chinaman backed through the doorway into the main cabin. He was only in time. In another moment King of the Islands would have grasped him and flung him headlong out.

"The Chink!" came the castaway's voice in a scream. "The Chink!"

"Look after him, Kit!" said King of the Islands. He followed Wu Fang into the cabin and grasped the Chinaman by the shoulder. The slanting eyes burned at him.

"You dog!" said Ken, between his teeth. "So you were tricking me! You're no friend of that poor fellow—but an enemy, and the sight of you has frightened him out of his wits! You villain, what was it you intended for him?" He shook the Chinaman savagely. "What's your game, you yellow scoundrel?"

"What have you done to that man that the sight of you has driven him nearly insane? And I came near handing him over to you—you treacherous hound! Get off my ship!"

With a swing of his powerful arm the boy trader dragged the struggling Chinaman up the companionway and swung him out into the blazing sunshine on deck.

There he flung him down, and Wu Fang sprawled on his back, gasping, and spitting out savage words in Chinese in a shrill scream of rage.

There was a cackle of astonishment from the Hiva-Oa crew. They gathered round, staring. Seldom had they seen such fierce anger in the face of their white master. The knowledge that he had been within an ace of handing over a helpless man to an enemy, the mere sight of whom drove him frantic with fear, roused the boy trader's deepest anger.

Who the Chinaman was, what he

wanted with the castaway, what their previous dealings had been, Ken could not begin to guess. But one fact was clear as daylight—Wu Fang was the man's enemy, a cruel enemy who inspired him with mortal terror.

"Koko!" shouted Ken. "Throw that Chink into the lagoon!"

"Yessar!" grinned Koko.

Wu Fang scrambled to his feet like a cat, and ran for the rail to leap back to the quay. But the boatswain of the Dawn grasped him before he could leap, and the Chink swung in Koko's mighty arms.

There was a flash of steel in the sunlight. The Hiva-Oa boys gave a startled yell. A knife glittered in the hand of Wu Fang.

But he had no chance to use the weapon. A swing of Koko's arms sent him whirling over the rail into the lagoon, and he disappeared with a splash. There was laughter from the native crew, and they ran to the side to watch the man in the water.

Wu Fang came up like a cork. His hat floated away as he struck out for the quay. He scrambled on the coral, and stood there, dripping, his loose garments, soaked with water, clinging round his limbs. For a few seconds he stood panting, dripping, and muttering in Chinese. Then he turned and ran along the quay and disappeared up the beach.

CHAPTER 3.

The Lukwe Cutter.

LIKE a yellow sickle the moon hung over Lalinge. The lagoon lay like a sheet of molten silver. Tall palms nodded black against the blue of the sky, and from the palms came the sound of music and laughter, where a crowd of natives, in white lava-lavas, with scarlet hibiscus-blossom twined in their dark hair, were dancing.

Among them were the Hiva-Oa boys from the Dawn, on shore-leave—with

the exception of Danny, the cooky-boy, who had the duty of keeping watch on the moored ketch and keeping an eye on the sick man below.

King of the Islands and Kit Hudson came up to the deck in their shore-going outfit, spotless ducks and pipe-clayed shoes. They were going to supper at Manager Belnap's bungalow, the largest residence on Lalinge, from which lights were gleaming out in the dusky tropical night.

Keefe—if the sick man's name really was as the Chink had stated—was sleeping peacefully in his bunk. After the visit of Wu Fang, the hapless man had shrieked and raved for minutes, and the shipmates had feared a return of delirium. But he had calmed down at last, and now he slept, much to the relief of Ken and Kit.

"You feller Danny!" called out Ken. "You stop along cabin belong me, you watch feller along bunk, eye belong you. You no shut eye belong you. You no leave that feller."

"Yessar!" said Danny cheerfully. "Me watch that feller, sar, plenty too much, eye belong me."

And the cooky-boy went down to the state-room.

Ken and Kit stepped ashore on the quay. As they moved along they passed the cutter moored near the Dawn, and the soft notes of a flute, well played, fell on their ears. Peter Parsons, of Lukwe, sat in a chair on the cutter's little deck, extracting music from his flute. Dandy Peter, the handsome, dapper blackguard of Lukwe, the toughest and most ruthless of all the rough crew on that island, looking anything but the ruffian he was as he sat there.

It was odd to see the soft-toned flute in the hands that were ready to crack a native boy's head with a capstan bar. But the dandy of Lukwe played remarkably well, and Ken and Kit paused for a moment to listen, forgetful that they were on the worst of terms with Dandy Peter and likely to meet only as enemies when they met at all.

The flute ceased as the Lukwe skipper sighted the two figures on the quay in the moonlight. Dandy Peter rose—a slim, elegant figure. He was the only skipper of Lukwe who ever wore a full suit of clothes, or knew how to wear them. In other days Peter Parsons had been something other than a trading skipper in the South Seas.

"Ahoy, King of the Islands!" he called out.

"Ahoy!" answered Ken cheerily.

"What name you throw feller Chink along lagoon?" asked Dandy Peter, unconsciously falling into the broken English he used in speaking to his Lukwe crew.

Peter Parsons had witnessed the episode of the afternoon, and he was curious.

"He asked for it," answered Ken briefly. "Do you know the man?" he added.

"I gave him a passage here from Lukwe weeks ago," said Dandy Peter. "He was still here when I ran into the lagoon yesterday. Looking for a friend lost at sea, according to his yarn."

"That's what he told me," said King of the Islands, "and it was a lie."

"I reckoned so," said Parsons, with a grin. "I saw him handling a knife on your deck. Some old enemy of yours?"

"No. I'd never clapped eyes on him before to-day."

"What was his game, then?" asked Parsons.

Ken told him. There was no secret about it, and the boy trader intended to inquire up and down Lalinge in the hope of finding someone who might know something of the mysterious cast-away. Peter Parsons looked thoughtful as he mentioned the name.

"Keefe!" he repeated. "I knew a pearly named Keefe in the Paumotos. Might be the same man."

"Step on board to-morrow and have a look at him," said Ken.

"But why was the Chink after him?" asked Parsons.

"You must ask Wu Fang that!" answered Ken, and with a nod to the Lukwe skipper he walked on with his comrade.

Dandy Peter sat down again, and watched the shipmates till they disappeared up the beach towards Manager Belnap's bungalow. His face had a thoughtful expression. He stared across the water towards the moored ketch standing out dark against the moonlight. The flute lay unheeded on his knee.

His three Lukwe boys, who had been listening to the music from their skipper's instrument, curled up on their mats and went to sleep now that the music had ceased. Peter Parsons leaned back in his long chair, and his eyes half closed. But he was not sleeping; he was thinking.

Faintly from the shore came the tinkle of ukuleles, where the native dance was going on under the palms. An hour passed, then the splash of a paddle in the lagoon came softly to the ears of the Lukwe skipper. He did not heed it, for plenty of natives went out in their canoes to fish at night in the lagoon.

But a minute later there was a soft thud, and he knew that the canoe had touched alongside the ketch moored only a biscuit's toss from his cutter. The Lukwe skipper sat up, his eyes wide open and alert, and stared at the Dawn.

Vague in the dim moonlight a canoe floated under the rail of the Dawn, and a black hand was holding on. A black, fuzzy-haired Santa Cruz boy was standing, holding on to the ketch, and three others knelt to the paddles.

And a little figure, whose slanting eyes caught for a moment the gleam of the moon, was climbing silently on the ketch.

Dandy Peter watched. There was a mocking grin on his hard face. He gave no sign and made no sound.

King of the Islands and his comrade were in the Belnap bungalow, unsus-

pecting. The crew were ashore, dancing under the palms with the natives. If a Kanaka had been left on board, more likely than not he was sleeping.

And Wu Fang, silent as a snake in the dim moonlight, was creeping on the ketch, the sick man at his mercy! The blackguard of Lukwe watched, grinning derisively. King of the Islands was no friend of his—they had been foes, and Dandy Peter had not forgotten it, if Ken King had. Peter Parsons had no intention of intervening. He stood silent in the shadow of the cutter's tall mast, strange thoughts in his mind.

The Chinaman stepped on the deck of the Dawn, and stood with bent head, listening. He knew that captain and crew were ashore. The ketch had been watched. He made a sign, and two of the black boys followed him over the rail. With the little Chink in the lead, they disappeared down the companion.

No sound reached the ears of the Lukwe skipper. Whatever was done on the ketch, out of his sight, was done in silence. He waited and watched, hardly breathing in his tense excitement.

A minute passed — another — and another—then there was a movement on the ketch again. The Chinaman emerged from the companion and shot a rapid, suspicious glance round, over the lagoon, the quay, and the other moored vessels at a little distance. But Dandy Peter had taken care, and the sharp, slanting eyes did not pick him out in the cover of the cutter's mast.

Wu Fang made a gesture, and the two black boys followed him out of the companion. They carried between them an inert form, and Dandy Peter did not need telling that it was that of the castaway—either unconscious, or bound and gagged.

The inert form was passed down to the waiting Santa Cruz boys in the canoe, and laid there. Then Wu Fang and his companions dropped over the rail, and a paddle shoved the canoe off from the Dawn.

The castaway lay silent and still where he had been placed in the bottom of the canoe. Wu Fang squatted beside him, and Peter Parsons caught, for a moment, the glitter of his eyes. Four paddles dipped, sweeping the water almost without a sound, and the canoe glided away from the Dawn.

But it did not turn towards the beach. As Parsons fully expected, it shot away across the lagoon, heading for the reef passage. Wu Fang, with the castaway in his hands, was making for the open sea.

Dandy Peter drew a deep, deep breath. He watched the canoe till it was lost in the moonlight on the lagoon. Then he stepped towards his crew and shook them into wakefulness. The Lukwe boys opened their eyes, staring stupidly at the tense, set face of the skipper of the Sea-Cat.

"You feller boy, you show a leg along you!" hissed Dandy Peter. "This feller cutter he go along sea, plenty too quick."

Surprised as they were, for they knew it had been their master's intention to remain several days at Lalinge, the Lukwe boys jumped to obey. They knew better than to hesitate when Dandy Peter had that look on his face—he was ready to back up his orders with clenched knuckles or a capstan-bar.

Swiftly the mooring-ropes were cast loose, the cutter shoved off from the quay, the sail shaken out, and under the night wind from the hill the Lukwe cutter glided out to sea in the wake of the fleeing canoe.

CHAPTER 4.

The Deserted Bungalow.

KING OF THE ISLANDS jumped lightly down from the quay to the deck of the ketch, followed by Kit Hudson and Koko. The brown boatswain had joined his white master on his way back to his ship, but the

rest of the crew were still absent, for the native dance was not over yet.

The boy trader had noticed, as he came along the quay, that the Sea-Cat was no longer moored there, but he gave that no thought, only supposing that Dandy Peter had taken advantage of the night wind off shore to start on his return trip to Lukwe. So far, not the remotest suspicion crossed his mind of what had happened on the ketch during his absence.

But as the boy trader descended the companion, a faint, mumbling sound came to his ears. He started, and stared in amazement.

Danny lay stretched on the planks, bound hand and foot with tapa cords, with a rag of tapa stuffed in his mouth. The hapless cooky-boy stared up at Ken with dilated eyes, struggling to get rid of the gag.

Ken stared at him, for a second, in blank astonishment. Then he ran to the cooky-boy and dragged the gag from his mouth. Danny spluttered and gasped, and Ken, opening his sheath-knife, cut through his bonds.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed Kit Hudson. "Who's done this?"

The cooky-boy staggered up, with a helping hand from his master, gasping for breath.

"Feller Chink, sar!" gasped Danny.

"A Chink!" exclaimed Ken. "Wu Fang?"

"Yessar, same fellar Chink comey along ketch, sar," spluttered Danny. "Name belong him Wu Fang, sar! Santa Cruz boy comey along that fellar, sar! Chink put fellar knife along neck belong this fellar, sar! Santa Cruz boy tie um rope along leg, along arm, belong this fellar. My word! This fellar boy plenty too much fright, sar!"

It was clear that the cooky-boy had been made a prisoner under threat of the Chinaman's knife. But why? Ken's thoughts raced to the sick man in the state-room. That the Chink had wanted to get the castaway into his hands was certain, though Ken had

never dreamed that he would dare, or that he had a sufficiently powerful motive, to use desperate measures like this.

"Sick feller he stop!" exclaimed Ken. "No, sar! Sick feller he no stop," answered Danny. "Santa Cruz boy carry away sick fellow, sar. Me see, eye belong me."

Ken dashed across the cabin into the little state-room. But he hardly needed to look. The castaway's bunk was empty. Kit Hudson and Koko stared in from the cabin.

"Gone!" gasped the mate of the Dawn.

"That sick feller he no stop any more!" said the amazed Koko. "That bad fellar Chink he takee sick feller, my word!"

"Get your gun, Kit!" Ken said tensely. He jammed a revolver into his pocket. "The Chink's got him—and, by gum, we'll get the Chink! If he's harmed the man, there'll be a dead Chink on Lalinge before night's much older. Follow us, Koko!"

King of the Islands ran back to the deck, Hudson at his heels. The boatswain followed, staying only to catch up a capstan-bar before he jumped to the coral quay after his white master.

Ken's eyes were glinting as he ran up the beach. What the mysterious Chinese wanted with the castaway, King of the Islands could not know, but the hapless man's terror at the sight of him, showed that he had cause to dread the slant-eyed little Chink. And now Keefe was in his hands—forcibly seized on board King of the Islands' ship!

The boy trader's heart throbbed with rage as he headed for the bungalow that Esau Hunk let to visitors to Lalinge. The Chink must have taken his prisoner there.

The bungalow stood dark as he reached it, not a glimmer of light came from the building. Ken tramped into the veranda, and struck loudly at the door. There was no answer, no movement, from within.

"Koko! You break in this feller door!" Ken ordered.

Crash, crash, rang the capstan-bar in Koko's powerful hands, and the door flew in pieces under the mighty blows.

King of the Islands rushed in, his revolver in his hand.

"Wu Fang!" he shouted. "Where are you, you dog? Show a leg, you yellow scum."

"Not here, Ken!" panted Hudson. The interior of the bungalow was dark. Hudson struck matches, found a lamp, and lighted it. The shipmates hunted through the building, the mate of the Dawn holding up the lamp—Ken, with his finger on the trigger of his revolver. But the bungalow was deserted. O! the castaway, of the Chink and his black servants, there was no sign.

"That feller no stop, sar!" said Koko.

"They must be on Lalinge!" breathed Ken, as he tramped out into the veranda again. "By gum, I'll find that yellow scoundrel—"

From the store, at a little distance from the bungalow, the bony figure of Esau Hunk came striding. The crashing of the breaking door had reached the Yankee storekeeper, and brought him to the spot, anxious for his property. He yelled up to the shipmates in the veranda:

"Say, what's this game, King of the Islands? What the great horned toad do you figure you're at? I guess that damage will set you back twenty dollars! I guess—"

"Where's the Chink that hired this bungalow of you, Hunk?" rapped out King of the Islands.

"I guess he's gone fishing on the lagoon, in his canoe, with his black boys, and that's sure an hour or more ago," answered Esau Hunk. "I'll say he's there now, as he hasn't come back yet. What the thunder—"

Ken gritted his teeth, and muttered:

"Fishing on the lagoon—fishing for the sick man on my ship! And he's got him! I'll comb the Pacific for him, if I have to hunt him from Thursday

Island to Frisco. Kit, they've run out to sea—and we're going after them as fast as the Dawn can make sail!"

"I reckon so," said the mate. "It beats me hollow what that Chink wants him for—but it's clear that he wants him bad!"

"We'll leave word with Belnap. If he's still on Lalinge, the native police will find him. But it's a sack of pearls to a fathom of shell money that he's run out to sea." Ken spoke with conviction. "That's the only way of safety for him—with a prisoner in his hands! But, by gum, it shan't see him safe!"

"We may pick him up outside the reef—or news of him. Peter Parsons has sailed, and he may have seen something of him in his cutter. We're not losing a second—we've got to save that man, Kit!"

"You bet!" said Hudson. And King of the Islands did not lose a second. He had a brief word with the Pacific Company's manager, who promised that the native police should comb the island for the missing man, but he had no doubt that the Chink had carried his prisoner away from Lalinge as fast as paddles could drive.

By the time Ken returned to the ketch, Koko had rounded up the Hiva-Oa crew and they were all on board cackling with surprise and excitement. King of the Islands' voice rang out rapid orders, and the ketch was swiftly gliding across the lagoon in the dusky moonlight, heading for the reef passage.

With clanking boom and belying sails, the ketch swept out to sea, and every eye on board watched the moonlit waters as Lalinge sank to a dim blur astern, keen on the trail of the Chinaman's canoe.

Wu Fang would have a lot to answer for when Kit eventually overlook him. Not only was there the kidnapping of Keefe, the castaway, to be answered for, but the man-handling of Danny, the cooky-boy. Ken allowed nobody to take liberties with his crew!

But Peter Parsons had forestalled him, which Ken did not know. Parsons had kidnapped the pearler, Keefe, and carried him away in his cutter, hoping to learn his secret. And Wu Fang was raging bitterly, for Keefe held the clue to a fortune locked away in his deranged mind.

In the sunny days and starry nights that followed, Ken and Kit gave plenty of thought to the vanished castaway, and discussed the strange affair often enough. They had little doubt that the man had, or that Wu Fang believed he had, the secret of a rich find in pearls—his delirious mutterings while on board the ketch confirmed that view.

And if he was still in Wu Fang's hands, the Chink might be driving him, perhaps by torture, to reveal his secret. That was a bitter reflection to the shipmates of the Dawn.

Day and night, King of the Islands swept the sea with keen eyes, though he knew he was hoping against hope. For wherever Wu Fang was, it was fairly certain that he could not have remained so long at sea in a canoe. He was ashore or on a ship, there could hardly be a doubt of that.

On the fourth day from Voa, the Dawn ran into the lagoon at Tu'ua, a familiar island to Ken. Only one vessel was at anchor there—a handsome two-masted schooner, from whose deck two or three black boys stared at the ketch as she ran in before a fresh breeze in the sunny morning.

A boat, piled with casks, was coming off to the schooner, which looked as if her skipper had put in at Tu'ua for water.

King of the Islands lost no time in landing his cargo. For some time he and his crew were busy, and he came back to the Dawn with a cheerful expression on his sunburnt face.

"We've struck lucky here, Kit!" he said. "I've got the offer of a full cargo of copra for Lalinge, and a straight run home."

"Good luck!" said Hudson.

"We can get the stuff on board this afternoon, and tow out at sundown," said King of the Islands. "Here, you feller Danny, you bring feller lime-squash along this feller."

"Yessar," squeaked the cooky-boy from the galley.

It was nearly noon, and work was suspended till the heat of the tropical day should have passed. As the cooky-boy brought the lime-squash for his master, Ken's eyes turned rather curiously on the schooner that had been at anchor. The vessel was towing out of the lagoon astern of a whaleboat packed with black boys. They were pulling hard, sweating in the heat, towing the schooner into the reef passage.

"That skipper must be in a hurry, to set his boys to work in this blaze," remarked the boy trader.

"Taking it easy, all the same," said Hudson with a grin. "He's not on deck."

No white man was to be seen on the schooner. There were black boys in the boat, black boys on the deck, a black boy at the helm. Apparently the skipper was below, which was singular enough when the vessel was towing out through a dangerous passage in the reefs!

Danny, the cooky-boy, glanced after the receding schooner and gave a cackle.

"My word, sar, me plenty glad that hooker no stop," he exclaimed.

Ken glanced at him, and asked:

"Why you plenty glad that hooker no stop, Danny?"

"Me no likee Santa Cruz boy, sar!" said Danny. "That Santa Cruz boy plenty too much kill this feller Danny, my word! Kill this feller along rope, along leg belong him, along arm belong him, sar!"

"What!" gasped Ken, and stared at the cooky-boy blankly. "What time that feller Santa Cruz boy he kill you?" exclaimed King of the Islands.

"Along Lalinge, sar," answered

"Along me watch along sick feller, sar, along night feller Chink he make sick feller along sea along canoe."

"Ken! We've got him!" Kit Hudson roared.

King of the Islands stared after the schooner now gliding into the reef passage.

On the night that the castaway had been kidnapped from the Dawn, Danny had been left on board to keep watch, and had been bound and gagged by Wu Fang and his Santa Cruz boys. Evidently he had recognised his assailants among the crew of the schooner. But, with the irresponsibility of a Kanaka, he had never thought of mentioning the fact till it came out by chance!

"You plenty sure, Danny?" exclaimed Ken.

"Me plenty sure, sar," answered the cooky-boy. "Me savvy that feller Santa Cruz boy too much altogether. Me plenty glad that hooker no stop along lagoon."

"Koko!" shouted Ken. The brown boatswain, who was busy in the trade-room below, put his head out of the companion. "Koko! You look along feller schooner, eye belong you. That feller black boy, what feller island he pop?"

"He stop along Santa Cruz, sar," answered Koko, after one glance at the distant schooner. There was not one of the hundred races of the Pacific that Koko did not know at a glance.

"A crew of Santa Cruz boys," said Hudson, "and Danny thinks he knows some of them! And the skipper keeping out of sight while the schooner tows it—and they stopped only to get the water on board after we came in. Ken, Wu Fang's on that craft!"

"It's a sack of pearls to a bag of pora!" Ken agreed. "You feller boy, you jump along boat plenty quick!"

He ran down to the cabin and returned with his own and Hudson's revolvers. The whaleboat that had brought him from the beach lay beside the Dawn with the painter tied. The

Hiva-Oa boys tumbled in headlong, and Ken and Kit jumped after them and cast off the painter. King of the Islands pointed to the schooner.

"You feller boy, you washy-washy along that hooker, plenty too debblish quick!" he panted. The Kanakas bent to the oars, and the whaleboat shot after the schooner.

King of the Islands sat in the stern of the Dawn's boat, his eyes on the schooner as the Kanakas rowed hard and fast. The butt of his six-shooter was ready to his hand. He knew that he might need it if Wu Fang was on board the towing craft. And it seemed a sure thing—if the cooky-boy was not mistaken in his belief that he recognised among the crew his assailants on that wild night at Lallinge.

And why was no skipper to be seen on the schooner? It was incredible that a skipper should remain below while his black boys towed through a dangerous passage against the wind—unless he had a powerful reason.

If the schooner's skipper was Wu Fang, his reason was powerful enough—likewise his reason for getting out of the lagoon now that King of the Islands had arrived there! King of the Islands felt almost certain—and, anyhow, he was going to know. Hard and fast the Hiva-Oa boys pulled, Koko setting the pace with a mighty stroke. The whaleboat flew across the shining water, rapidly overhauling the towed schooner.

"Lucky we made the trip to Tu'ua, Ken," said Kit Hudson. "We've got him! If the Chink's there, his prisoner's there—out of sight under hatches, what?"

"Ay!" answered Ken, his eyes never leaving the schooner. "Faster—faster—washy-washy too quick altogether, —you feller boy!"

The oars flashed hard and fast.

Black boys on the schooner stared back at the boat and babbled together. One of them ran below, and the shipmates knew that he had gone to tell his unseen skipper that a whaleboat

was following into the reef passage. But Ken had no doubt that a slanting eye was already on him from a port-hole.

He would not have been surprised to hear the roar of a rifle from the schooner, so he watched like a cat. On Tu'ua there were only a few white traders—no law to hold the Chink, no force to back up the law.

But King of the Islands was ready to take the law into his own hands, relying on his own gun and his mate's to see him through—if Wu Fang was on board the schooner. And he had little doubt of it.

The black boys in the towing boat rowed hard, but the towed schooner moved slowly behind them. There was no chance of the schooner making sail till she was outside the reef, for the wind was dead on the entrance of the lagoon. It was only a matter of minutes before the Dawn's boat ran her down.

In the reef passage, with barely more than room for the boat between the schooner's hull and the coral rocks, the pursuers came alongside, and Hudson hooked on to the chains. A startled black face looked down.

"You feller white master, what you want along this feller schooner?" asked that Santa Cruz boy.

"Call your captain!" rapped Ken from the stern of the whaleboat. "This feller white master he talk along captain belong you."

"Captain belong me he sick, stop along cabin belong him, sar!" said the Santa Cruz boy. "You talk along this feller, sar! This feller he Pipiteto, feller mate belong this hooker, sar."

"This feller white master come aboard!" answered Ken.

"You no come along this hooker, sar!" Pipiteto, mate of the Flamingo schooner, lifted a belaying-pin in warning.

Ken made a spring, caught the schooner's rail and clambered on board. Pipiteto jumped back, his thick lips and

gleaming white teeth in a snarl, but he did not venture to handle the belaying-pin. King of the Islands dropped on the deck, revolver in hand, and the black crew backed away from him, muttering.

There were six or seven on deck, as well as ten in the towing-boat. The schooner had a full crew. But the "feller gun," and still more the glinting blue eyes of the white master daunted the Santa Cruz blacks.

Kit Hudson followed his skipper on the schooner. Koko was only a moment behind him. The Hiva-Oa boys held on.

Ken turned to Pipiteto.

"Drop that belaying-pin!" he ordered. "Now you takee this feller along captain belong you! Step lively!"

Leaving Koko on deck to keep an eye on the crew, Ken and Kit tramped down the ladder after Pipiteto into the schooner's cabin.

They went gun in hand, no longer doubting in the least that Wu Fang was on board, and ready for trouble. If the kidnapped pearler was there, they did not expect the Chink to yield him up without resistance. And if Wu Fang was there, they had no doubt that the castaway was there.

"Wu Fang!" shouted Hudson, at the sight of a diminutive figure in Chinese garb in the cabin.

To the amazement of the shipmates, the Chink kow-towed to them, with a bland smile on his impassive face.

"O born-before-me," said Wu Fang, in his soft voice, "this humble person is honoured to see the great and admirable ones on board his ship!"

King of the Islands stared at him blankly. A treacherous shot or a thrown knife would not have surprised him, but this bland and smiling Oriental politeness took him aback.

"Where's the man you stole off my ship at Lalinge, you heathen scoundrel? Have you got him on board?" Ken demanded.

"That white feller Keefe he no stop along ship belong me," said Wu Fang. "Me no savvy where he stop."

The slanting eyes searched Ken's face.

"Me no savvy, sar!" he repeated.

Ken's face set like iron. He lifted his revolver, and took point-blank aim at the little yellow face. Wu Fang stood still, but his slanting eyes glittered at the boy trader like a snake's. Ken spoke between his teeth.

"You took the man out of my ship at Lalinge," he said. "You carried him off in a canoe. I give you one minute to cough it up! One minute, Wu Fang—and you're a dead Chink!"

The Chinaman spat out hurried words:

"That feller Keefe he stop along Cap'n Peter Parsons!"

"Peter Parsons!" Ken exclaimed. "You lie, you yellow scum! What would that Lukwe swab want with him? You've killed him, and, by thunder, your life shall pay for his! Hudson, the man's dead—and this villain shall follow where he's sent him!"

He jammed the revolver in his belt, and grasped the shrinking Chinese. Wriggling in the boy trader's sinewy grasp, the Chink was hustled up to the deck. Pipiteto followed, his black eyes gleaming, but cowed by the six-shooter in Hudson's hand. There was a cackle from the Santa Cruz boys as King of the Islands emerged from the companion with the Chink squirming in his grasp.

"Koko!" rapped Ken. "You take care along this feller Chink!"

Wu Fang crumpled in the mighty grasp of the Kanaka boatswain. His yellow face was almost grey with fear, his slanting eyes bulging.

Ken called up Danny from the whaleboat, and the cooky-boy pointed out the Santa Cruz blacks who had seized him at Lalinge. King of the Islands questioned them, and they stammered out what they knew. There was no doubt that it was the truth.

They were too scared by the boy trader's fierce look to give him "bad feller talk."

The Chinaman, in Koko's powerful hands, listened in terror, with the knowledge that his life depended on King of the Islands being convinced. Fortunately for him, the boy trader was convinced.

"Our man was captured by Peter Parsons," said Ken, between his teeth. "But we know where to look for Peter Parsons, and he shall answer for it! Koko, you takee feller lawyer-cane, you givee that feller Chink plenty too much lawyer-cane along back belong him."

"Yessar!" grinned Koko.

The Santa Cruz boys stared on, some of them grinning, while Koko yielded a thick lawyer-cane, and the Chinaman yelled under a rain of lashes.

The shipmates watched the punishment grimly, and not till twenty-five lashes had fallen did Ken make the boatswain a sign to desist. Spitting with fury, Wu Fang dodged down the companion and disappeared.

"Back to the Dawn!" said King of the Islands.

And the whaleboat pulled away from the schooner.

King of the Islands picked up no cargo at Tu'ua, after all. Time was money, and trade was trade, but now that the shipmates knew where to look for the lost castaway they gave no thought to time or trade. Under the blazing sun, the Dawn towed out of the lagoon, and outside the reef all sails were shaken out, and the course set for distant Lukwe.

With a fair wind, and all canvas drawing, the ketch raced through the blue waters like a thing of life. But, fast as she fled, she seemed slow to the shipmates watching the Pacific for Lukwe to rise from the sealine.

But at Lukwe a talk with a rascally trader, Black Furley, soon proved that Parsons had been ashore with the cast-

away, but had gone again on his cutter, the Sea Cat.

Ken told Furley the story of Keefe, and at the mention of pearls the trader's eyes glowed greedily.

"So that's why the swab was so kind to a castaway!" he growled.

Ken learnt that Parsons was heading for O'ua, and then set sail in pursuit.

CHAPTER 5.

Keefe's Revenge!

LIKE a mass of jewels, the Southern Cross blazed from a sky of dark velvet. Through the long Pacific rollers, silvery in the starshine, the Lukwe cutter ran on her way, far to the west of O'ua now, in wide waters where there was no land save scattered atolls, few and far between.

Trade with the brown natives of O'ua had been dismissed from Parsons' mind. He gave hardly a thought to the cargo of trade goods he had brought out from Lukwe. Chaffering for copra and pearl-shell was not in his mind now. He was thinking of pearls—pearls!

The pearler of the Pautomus and his secret were at Peter Parson's mercy—and Dandy Peters had as much mercy as a tiger-shark swooping on its prey.

The man was in his right senses now. He could set a course if he liked. And King of the Islands could not help him!

The sea-lawyer grinned as he saw Keefe's eyes turn on the cutter's boat. The Sea Cat, like many small vessels in the Islands, towed her boat, having no room for the dinghy on board. Bobbing on the sea at the end of the tow-rope, it was out of reach of any desperate attempt on the part of the Paumotus pearler, if he thought of making one.

He had escaped from Wu Fang's schooner by casting loose a boat at night, and taking his chance on the sea. But he could not play the same game on Dandy Peter's cutter.

There was a haggard, desperate look on the pearler's coppery face. Many times his glance turned on Peter Parsons, his eyes glinting, and Dandy Peter, grinning, tapped the butt of the revolver in his belt. He would have pulled trigger on the man without the slightest compunction, and Keefe was well aware of it.

But there were desperate thoughts in his mind. He had been one of a rough pearling crew, accustomed to taking his life in his hands.

"Sit down, man!" Dandy Peter called to him, and pointed to a deck-chair. "It's time to talk, Keefe!"

The pearler dropped into the chair. Under his haggard brows his eyes glinted at the dapper sea-lawyer.

"We're going into this together," said Parsons. "I've got the ship, and you know where to lay your hands on the pearls. We share!"

"Cut it out, Peter Parsons!" muttered the man from the Paumotus. "Don't I know what they say of you on every beach in the Islands? Once you get your claws on the pearls, my share will be a lump of coral tied to my feet, and a dip in the Pacific. Cut it out!"

"You won't trust me?"
"I'd sooner trust a Solomon Island cannibal!" retorted the pearler.

"I reckon you've got no choice!" Parsons laughed. "You talked pretty freely when you were out of your wits, and I know you raised a pearl island in your lugger. Where does it lie?"

"Where you will never find it!"
"I reckon you had a rough time with Wu Fang on his schooner," said Peter Parsons. "Keep that up, and you'll wish you were back with the Chink!"

The pearler breathed hard, then muttered:

"Look here, Peter Parsons! You've got me. We'll make terms. Put me on King of the Islands' packet——"

"You'd trust him?" grinned Parsons.

"There's few skippers in the Pacific I'd trust with such a secret," Keefe

replied, "but I'd trust King of the Islands. They say he's the whitest man in the Pacific. And you—"

"The blackest!" grinned Dandy Peter. "But I reckon you've got to trust me, Keefe. You'll set me a course for your island!"

"You'd never make it if I did! I tell you the island is thick with niggers—black cannibals. They got every man that was with me—and they'd get you!"

"All the cannibals in the Pacific won't stop me from lifting the pearls," Parsons answered. "You can wash that out, Keefe. I'll take my chance with the cannibals. You've got the bearings of the island, and you'll put your finger on it on the chart."

"It's not marked on any chart. No white man ever set foot on it, I reckon, until we got there in the lugger—and we'd never have made it if we hadn't been driven out of our course by a hurricane. You can hunt for it till you're as old as the Flying Dutchman without finding it."

"You won't get any help from me. Put me on King of the Islands' packet, and I'll make it worth your while when I've lifted the pearls. That ought to be good enough for a white man."

"I reckon we forget, sometimes, that we're white men in the Islands," said Dandy Peter coolly. "You've got the bearings of the island, and if it's not marked on my chart, you'll mark it there! If you want a sample of Solomon Island tortures first, it's your look-out. If I set my black boys to work on you, you'll sing out fast enough!"

The Lukwe skipper's face hardened, and his eyes gleamed like cold steel.

"You've heard what they say of me on the beaches, Keefe, and you know I'm not a man to be played with. You feller Talito!"

He called to one of the sleeping Lukwe boys.

Talito sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"You fetch feller chart along cabin!" snapped Parsons.

Talito brought the chart. Dandy Peter pushed aside bottle and glasses on the little skylight at his side, and spread out the chart in the brilliant light of the stars. It was a chart of the Pacific from the Gilberts to 105 east, from fifteen north to fifteen south.

As the pearler looked at it, his brows setting doggedly, it was plain enough to Parsons that the pearl island, wherever it was, lay within the limits of the chart. That knowledge, however, was of little use to Dandy Peter. Within so vast an area there were probably a thousand unknown islands or more.

"You'll put your finger on the spot—and the right spot!" said Dandy Peter, in a low tone of menace. "You won't waste my time sending me on a wild-goose chase, as I did that swab King of the Islands. You'll wish you were back with Wu Fang, or in the hands of Solomon Island bucks, if you play tricks with me. I'm waiting!"

But Keefe did not stir.

"Do you know what the Lu'u bucks do with their prisoners?" said Dandy Peter, in the same tone. "They break them joint by joint. I've seen it, in the Solomons! Do you want me to see it on this hooker?"

Keefe dragged himself from the chair.

"You've got me!" he muttered.

He stepped to the sea-lawyer's side, and his hand moved over the chart. Dandy Peter's eyes glittered, and his breath came fast. In that moment of tense excitement and greed, the sea-lawyer was off his guard.

With the sudden swiftness of a swooping sea-hawk, the pearler turned on him, grasped him, and bore him backwards to the deck.

Dandy Peter went down heavily, the desperate pearler sprawling over him. A yell of rage broke from the Lukwe skipper and he tore the revolver from his belt.

But even as he pulled trigger the pearler struck it from his hand, and

the bullet whizzed towards the stars as the revolver flew from the sea-lawyer's grasp to the deck.

Locked in a desperate grip they struggled, and Dandy Peter yelled breathlessly to his crew.

"You feller boy, you bear a hand!" he screamed. The sea-lawyer of Lukwe was strong and wiry, but no match for the burly pearler now that his weapon was gone.

Kiki, at the tiller, stared on blankly. Talito and Jacky jumped up from the tapa mats, blinking.

The two struggling men rolled to the side as the cutter heeled over to the wind. Keefe gained his feet, the sea-lawyer struggling and wrenching in his powerful grasp. His face was set and desperate.

He had only a few moments before the Lukwe boys would have been upon him. But those few moments were enough. With all his strength Keefe hurled the Lukwe skipper over the low rail!

There was a splash in the sea. Keefe panted. As the cutter tore on, the waters of the Pacific closed over the head of Dandy Peter. A second more, and the pearler leaped to the revolver, caught it up from the deck, and its lifted barrel threatened the Lukwe boys. But he had no trouble to expect from the Lukwe crew now that Dandy Peter was gone.

"You feller boy belong me now, all same this feller cutter," he said. "Cap'n Parsons no stop! This feller stop plenty too much. You savvy?"

"Savvy plenty, sar!"

The pearler stared back over the Sea-Cat's quarter. In the distance a white face showed above the water in the shine of the stars, then vanished in the foaming wake of the cutter!

"Twenty on the line! Niggers in the bush—niggers in the bush!"

There was a cackle of laughter from the Lukwe boys on the deck of the Sea-Cat as they listened to the mutterings of Keefe, the pearler.

"My word! Brain belong that feller no walk about any more!" said Jacky, the boat-steerer.

Keefe did not heed them. He sat near the tiller, with his back to the taffrail, Dandy Peter's revolver in his nerveless hand. The wind had changed with the dawn, and the cutter was running east, the Lukwe crew keeping her before the wind. There was no longer a white man in command, and the black crew did that which was right in their own eyes. Dandy Peter had gone over the side, and his crew had no doubt that he had gone to "walk about inside feller shark." To the dandy of Lukwe they did not give a single further thought.

Had Keefe remained in his senses, the black boys would have obeyed his orders, as they had obeyed the orders of Peter Parsons. He was a "feller white master," and that was enough for their fuzzy brains.

But the stress of the desperate struggle with Peter Parsons had been too much for the pearler, barely recovered from long weeks of illness. He had recovered his senses only to lose them again, and the keen eyes of the Lukwe boys had noted it at once.

He had slept on the deck, the revolver in his hand, and he had awakened with the light of intelligence gone from his eyes, and words of delirium on his lips.

The three blacks watched him like cats, their looks growing more and more hostile. Yet for hours they did not venture to draw near him, daunted by the revolver in his hand.

Jacky, at the tiller, ventured at last to reach out a bare black foot and kick the revolver from the pearler's hand.

It clattered along the deck and rolled into the scuppers, and the white man made no movement.

"My word," said Jacky, "that feller go finish! This feller cutter belong us now!"

"Feller cutter, feller cargo, all thing belong us feller!" said Kiki, showing

all his white teeth in a joyous grin. "Feller Parsons he no stop! That feller white master he no stop! Us feller stop plenty too much."

"That feller go finish along sea!" suggested Talito, the third of the crew.

"Along feller shark!" added Kiki.

But Jacky, the boat-steerer, shook his head. Killing a "feller white master," even one who was delirious and did not know what was happening, was rather too serious a matter. Other "feller white masters" had a way of finding out such things.

"No kill-dead that feller white master," he said. "Plenty too much white master, savvy. S'pose white master savvy, this feller Jacky go finish along rope along neck belong him."

"S'pose white feller he stop, this feller ship no belong us feller," said Kiki.

Jacky grinned, and pointed to where a single tall palm waved above the sea.

"That white feller no stop along this packet," said Jacky. "He stop along feller rock along sea!" Kiki and Talito grinned approval.

The cutter was running down to a solitary rock that rose twenty feet above the sea, and on one side was a tiny beach where the Pacific rollers broke with an endless murmur, and a single tall palm. Near the palm, a spring bubbled from the rock, and though it was far from the track of ships, skippers who knew of it sometimes ran down to it to fill their casks.

As the Sea-Cat approached the solitary rock, the Lukwe boys eyed the white man anxiously. But there was no danger from Keefe.

The delirium was upon him, and he sat and stared with unseeing eyes as the cutter ran down to the lonely rock and hove to.

The dinghy which was towed behind the cutter was drawn alongside, and Kiki and Talito stepped up to the white man and lifted him in their brawny arms.

The pearler made no resistance. He was dropped into the dinghy like a sack of copra, and two of the Lukwe boys jumped down after him; Jacky watched them over the rail.

"You feller washy-washy along rock plenty too quick!" called out Jacky, and Kiki and Talito put out the oars and pulled for the little beach where the Pacific broke in a line of white foam.

Jacky watched them with a grinning face as they grounded the boat and lifted the white man ashore.

The pearler was carried up the beach beyond high-water mark, and laid down where the trickling spring formed a pool in the rock. Then they padded back to the dinghy and pushed off.

A few minutes more, and the dinghy was tied on again and the cutter put once more before the wind.

The three black boys stared back at the white man. They saw him raise his head and stare about him, and then sink back again. Then he was gone from their sight, and ere long the rock itself dropped below the sea-line as the cutter ran swiftly on.

CHAPTER 6.

Utterly Mystified.

KING OF THE ISLANDS leaned on the teak rail of the Dawn and watched the beach of the O'ua lagoon. Ashore, the scene was busy. The heat of the day was past, and crowds of brown-skinned natives had come down to the beach to trade with the white men.

In the glowing sunset the whale-boat made its last trip, and Kit Hudson returned. As the stars came out, the shipmates sat in deck-chairs under the velvety sky, and Danny brought them their evening meal. Koko's dark eyes dwelt several times on the thoughtful, clouded face of the boy trader, and his own cheerful brown

face clouded in reflection of his master's mood.

"White master tinkee plenty too much head belong him!" Koko remarked to Ken King at last. "Plenty good trade, sar! What name white master he no smile?"

"Tinkee along feller pearler, along cutter belong Cap'n Parsons," answered King of the Islands.

Ken leaned back in his chair, gazing thoughtfully at the surface of the lagoon that mirrored a thousand stars.

"Nothing doing, Ken!" said Hudson, breaking a long silence. "We've got all the Pacific to choose from if we look for Peter Parsons. And if he's forced Keffe to set him a course for the pearl island at the muzzle of a gun, we can't make the remotest guess at it."

"I know," Ken nodded. "But we'll reckon with Peter Parsons some day. There's nothing doing till then. And we've got to think of the trade, Kit. We get the anchor up at dawn for Ututo." And the shipmates went to their bunks, while Koko twanged his ukulele and kept watch on deck.

With the new day, the anchor was lifted, and the ketch glided out of the reef passage to the open sea.

The wind came from the west, and King of the Islands set a course for Ututo, which lay far to the north-east of O'ua.

Under the burning sunshine King of the Islands looked back into the west, and thought of the castaway on the Sea-Cat, whom he had been unable to save. Useless as it was to hunt for the cutter in the trackless Pacific, it was bitter to be forced to give up the chase, and to leave the castaway to the mercy of the Lukwe sea-lawyer.

Ken's face was clouded that day, and the cloud was reflected on the brown countenance of the faithful Koko. The Hiva-Oa crew laughed and sang at their work, and Danny cackled a song of the Marquesas as he washed pots and pans in his little galley.

But Koko, as he often said, was no common Kanaka, and he remembered

the castaway on the Sea-Cat because his white master remembered him.

It was high noon, and Kit Hudson was taking his "watch below" in a hammock slung under the canvas awning aft, half-asleep.

Ken sat in a long chair, with one eye on the binnacle and the other on a trade book in which he was casting up accounts. A sudden yell from Koko startled them both.

"Feller sail he stop, sar!" roared the brown boatswain; and he jumped towards King of the Islands and in his excitement grabbed his white master by the shoulder. Koko's eyes were dancing.

Ken stared at him. Koko's grasp jerked him out of the chair, and the trade book went with a crash to the deck.

"What name——" began Ken.

"Feller sail he stop, sar!" chuckled Koko in great glee.

"You plenty big fool Kanaka, you never see feller sail one time before, eye belong you?" rapped out King of the Islands. "What name you make plenty too much noise mouth belong you?"

Koko's face fell.

"Me makee plenty too much noise, sar, along me tinkee you plenty glad see feller Sea-Cat——"

Ken gave a bound.

"The Sea-Cat!" he gasped.

"Feller cutter belong Cap'n Parsons, sar, he stop!" said Koko, his glee reviving as he saw the effect produced by his unexpected announcement. "Eye belong you, see feller Sea-Cat, sar!"

Hudson sprang from the hammock. In amazement the shipmates stared at the sail almost directly in the course of the ketch. It was a cutter, as they could see. It was too far off for the white men's eyes, but they knew that they could trust to the eyes of Koko.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed Hudson. "If that's the Sea-Cat, we're in luck, Ken!"

"Me savvy, sar!" grinned Koko.

"Me savvy feller Sea-Cat plenty too much!"

Ken called to Lompo to bring the binoculars, focused the glasses on the distant sail, and watched the cutter in sheer astonishment.

"It's the Sea-Cat," declared Ken. "But there's something wrong aboard her. Dandy Peter can't be there! Looks as if she's deserted by captain and crew, but—" He shook his head. The puzzle was too much for him.

"What the dickens can it mean?" exclaimed Hudson in amazement.

"Ask me another!" said Ken. "But we'll find out as soon as we run her down! Parsons' crew may have risen on him and kai-kai'ed him, but—"

The ketch bore swiftly down on the cutter. That Dandy Peter could not be on board was quite clear, for the Sea-Cat made no effort to escape. Mainsail and foresail were set, and when the wind filled the canvas the Sea-Cat shot along like a sea-bird, only to wallow in the sea again.

It was easy enough for the ketch to overhaul the Sea-Cat, and as it drew nearer, every eye on the Dawn was turned on the cutter.

"Lukwe feller sleep along deck!" said Koko suddenly. "Three Lukwe feller sleep along deck belong cutter!"

Now that the ketch was close, glimpses could be had of the three Lukwe boys, sprawling on the deck of the Sea-Cat, fast asleep. Of a white man there was no sign. In amazement, the shipmates watched, and the Lukwe boys snored on while the ketch ran swiftly down to the drifting cutter.

~~It was easy then to scarp the black crew of the Sea-Cat into telling what had happened, and Ken shaped a course for the marooned keefe.~~

CHAPTER 7.

Black Furley Laughs.

THE lug dancing on the blue waters was visible to the eyes of Peter Parsons for long minutes before he dared to believe that it was a sail.

Another day had dawned on the Pacific, and the sea-lawyer of Lukwe clung to a spar he had found.

Many times a winging albatross had tantalised him with the hope of a sail, and now that his dizzy eyes fell on the lug that bobbed and danced over the waters he did not believe it. He stared at it for a moment or two, and sank back again on the driftwood with a groan. It was only another sea-bird winging through the blue, he thought. It was long minutes before he lifted his head and looked again.

And then he knew! His haggard eyes brightened. He dragged himself up on the rocking spar, shaded his eyes with his hands, and stared. It was a sail!

The lug was beating north, directly towards him as he floated, and on its present tack the crew could hardly fail to see him. If it was a Lukwe craft he would know the men on board. He knew every ruffian on Lukwe.

New strength came to him at the thought of rescue, and he dragged himself astride the plunging spar once more and waved his hands wildly. Then he tore off his shirt to wave as a signal.

He could make out the craft at last. It was a large whaleboat, carrying only the lug-sail and he caught a glimpse of a burly, black-bearded man who stood by the mast. It was Black Furley, the pearl-poacher of Lukwe, an old acquaintance, if not a friend, of Dandy Peter. He knew that they had seen him, for the black-bearded ruffian was staring directly towards him, and Parsons saw him lift glasses to his eyes and stare again.

Others in the whaleboat were staring—he counted five faces over the gunwale, faces he knew! Often enough he had seen Black Furley and his rough crew drinking and gambling in Lukwe. Jim Furley was not the man to concern himself much about a shipwrecked seaman. But surely even the hard-hearted ruffian would pick up a lost man from a floating spar!

There was a doubt in Peter Parsons' mind, and he waved and tried to shout, but only a husky groan came from his dry throat. Then the plunging top-mast rolled under him, and he fell splashing into the sea.

He grasped at the spar and caught on, still trying to shout. The shadow of the lug fell across him, he felt a grip on his arm, and he was dragged into the whaleboat.

"Dandy Peter, by hokey!" said Furley. The pearl-poaching crew stared at him as he sprawled in the boat. The haggard, desperate wretch who lay in the bottom of the boat was very unlike the carefully dressed, dapper dandy of Lukwe.

Parsons tried to speak, but no word came. With his finger, he pointed to his mouth, and Black Furley placed a tin pannikin of lukewarm water to his lips. He swallowed it at a gulp. It was tepid and tainted from the bottom of a keg, but to Dandy Peter it seemed like nectar. It gave him new life, and he sat up. The water had given him back his voice.

"Water!" he muttered.

"I reckon we're short of water, Peter Parsons," grunted Furley. But he filled the pannikin again, and gave it to the sea-lawyer. Parsons gulped it down and signed for more. It seemed as if he could never slake his burning thirst.

"We're short of water, I tell you!" grunted Furley.

"Give him water, Furley," said another of the crew. "We're making Long Palm rock by noon."

"Not in this wind, Dick Finn!"

"Give him water, I tell you!" And as the black-bearded ruffian made no movement, Finn filled the pannikin again, with the dregs from the keg, and handed it to Dandy Peter.

Parsons closed his eyes, and leaned back against the mast. His strength was coming back, and with it his coolness and courage.

"Where's your cutter, Peter Parsons? Piled her up on a reef?"

Parsons shook his head.

"Where's the man you took out of Lukwe—Keefe, the pearler?" Furley demanded.

Black Furley's words cut into the reverie into which he had fallen.

"He put me over the side, and he's got my cutter!" Parsons answered wearily.

Black Furley stared at him for a moment, then burst into a roar of laughter, in which the whole crew joined. Parsons scowled at them blackly.

"By hokey!" roared Black Furley. "That's the best I've heard! You've lost him, and lost your cutter! And we've come after you for nothing!"

"You came after me?" ejaculated Parsons. "How did you know—"

"You kept the man close on Lukwe," sneered Furley. "You weren't letting old friends into the game, Peter Parsons. King of the Islands came to Lukwe after you—and after the pearler—and I got it from him! And I reckon we were following you to O'ua, to tell you that there were six more to stand in when the pearls were raised. Savvy?"

"You're not making O'ua now," said Parsons.

Furley snarled in his black beard.

"The wind's changed, you lubber. We couldn't make O'ua, and the water ran out. We're beating up to Long Palm now to fill the kegs."

"Lucky for you, Parsons," said Dick Finn.

"And we've had the trouble for nothing," growled Black Furley. "You've lost the pearler, and lost your cutter! Did you get anything out of Keefe before you lost him?"

"Nothing!"

"You wouldn't let on if you had!" snarled Furley.

"Right!" said Dandy Peter coolly. "I wouldn't let on if I had. But I got nothing out of him, all the same. He took me by surprise and put me over the side—and now he's sailing

my cutter with my crew." The dandy of Lukwe clenched his fists. "I'll run him down yet—the Pacific isn't wide enough to hide him."

The black-bearded pearl-poacher gave a jeering laugh.

"Talk's cheap!" he grunted.

He turned away from the sea-lawyer, scowling, and there were mutterings among the pearl-poaching crew. They had followed Dandy Peter from Lukwe, in the hope of sharing his plunder, and they had gained nothing by a weary struggle with baffling winds.

Now they learned that there was no hope of laying hands on the man with a secret—Dandy Peter had lost him, and they had lost him, too. They had had the run for nothing—for certainly they did not count the saving of Dandy Peter's life as a consolation.

They could not run back to Lukwe without filling the kegs, which meant long hours more of sailing close-hauled until they raised the islet marked by a single tall palm-tree, where there was a spring of fresh water.

Dandy Peter did not heed the savage, disappointed mutterings of the pearl-poaching crew. He was thinking, as he lay against the mast, of his lost cutter, of the remote chance of finding the Sea-Cat again, and finding the man Keefe, who knew the secret of the pearl island. His mood was as bitter and savage as Black Furley's.

Far ahead, over the sea, at last, a tall palm rose into view. It was the landmark the pearl-poaching crew had been watching for. The Lukwe whaleboat ran down to the islet, under the blaze of the midday sun. There was a sudden shout from Dick Finn.

"By gum! There's a man on Long Palm!"

On the little white beach, backed by the tall rock, a figure could be seen, watching the whaleboat as it ran in, and waving a palm branch as a signal. The pearl-poachers stared at him, and Dandy Peter turned his head.

The next moment Parsons leaped to his feet with a yell:

"Keefe—the pearler!"

Black Furley stared at him in blank amazement for a moment. Then he broke into a hoarse laugh.

"By hokey!" he chuckled. "We're in luck!"

CHAPTER 3.

Marooned!

KEEFE stood staring at the whaleboat as it ran into the little beach at the foot of the tall rock. After the Lukwe boys had marooned him on the solitary islet, the pearler had fallen into a deep sleep, from which he awakened with his mind clear, but amazed to find himself where he was.

He knew that he must have lost his senses on the Sea-Cat, and that the black crew must have rid themselves of him by marooning him, but he remembered nothing of it. How long he had been there, whether hours or days, he could not guess.

There were coconuts at the foot of the tall palm, shaken down by the wind, and ample water in the pool formed by the spring, and while he ate and drank he searched the sea with his eyes, in the hope of picking up the cutter.

There was no sign of the cutter, but his eyes were gladdened by the sight of a lug-sail rising out of the blue. He could guess easily enough that it was some crew running down to the islet for water. No crew could have any other reason for visiting Long Palm.

He waved a broken palm branch as a signal to the boat's crew, though it was hardly needed, for the lug-sail was coming down to the islet. But as the boat ran in, and he recognised Peter Parsons among the crew, the hope died out of his face. The sea-lawyer had not, after all, gone to the sharks. And on that solitary islet, lost in the immensity of the Pacific, they had met again.

The whaleboat grounded on the sand, and Peter Parsons was the first to leap ashore. But Black Furley was swift after him, and the whole crew tramped after Furley up the beach.

"You swab!" Dandy Peter hissed out the words. "Where's my cutler! Did you reckon the sharks had got me?"

Dandy Peter broke off as the heavy hand of Jim Furley thrust him aside. The sea-lawyer of Lukwe reeled and fell.

"Hands off, Peter Parsons!" chuckled Black Furley. "I reckon we've found what you lost, and he belongs to us now!"

The sea-lawyer rose to his feet, his eyes blazing. But the once strong and wiry dandy of Lukwe was the mere wreck of his former self, and as Furley shoved him roughly back, he fell again, and this time he lay panting.

"Hands off, Peter!" grinned Dick Finn. "You don't come in here! You lost your man, and we've found him."

"You're Keefe?" exclaimed Black Furley, staring at the drawn face of the pearler.

"I reckon I know you. I saw you on Lukwe, though Parsons kept you close enough," grinned Furley. "How'd you get on Long Palm? Parsons let on that you put him over the side, and seized his cutler—"

"That's true," muttered Keefe. "But I reckon I must have lost my senses, and the black boys left me here, to get rid of me. You'll take me off? You'll keep me out of the hands of that villain?"

"You bet!" chuckled Furley. "You're done with Dandy Peter! You're sailing with this crew, Keefe—equal shares in the pearls."

"That's good enough, shipmate," said Dick Finn.

Keefe did not answer.

"It's got to be good enough," said Black Furley. "Every man here stands in—Keefe the same as the rest. Get into the boat, man!"

The pearler hesitated.

A white man's sail on the sea had been a glad sight to his eyes. He might have remained for weeks, or months, on the lone islet, had not Black Furley and his crew been driven to run down to Long Palm for water.

But even solitude on the lone isle, watching for a sail, was better than falling into the greedy hands of a gang of pearl-poachers—men of the same kidney as the sea-lawyer from whom he had escaped.

"I reckon I'll take my chance here!" he said at last.

There was a jeering laugh from the Lukwe crew. Black Furley tramped closer to the castaway, his bearded jaw jutting, his heavy brows contracted, his deep-set eyes glinting.

"Get into the boat!" he said savagely. "You're sailing with this crew! Get into the boat!"

"I reckon—"

"Put him aboard!" snarled Furley.

Two of the Lukwe ruffians grasped the arms of the castaway and hustled him down the beach. Keefe resisted for a moment, but only for a moment. He was helpless in the hands of the pearl-poaching crew, and he stumbled into the boat.

The water-kegs were rolled ashore, to be filled at the spring. Dandy Peter staggered to his feet, and stood with a black brow, while the kegs were filled and rolled back to the whaleboat and packed aboard. The sea-lawyer's eyes were burning.

With a weapon in his hand, feeble as he was, he would have faced the whole rough crew, rather than have yielded up his prize to Black Furley. But he had no weapon but a sheath-knife, and in his present state he was no match for a single one of the pearl-poachers.

He could only watch, with bitter rage and hatred in his heart, unheeded by the Lukwe ruffians.

When the water was on board and the crew pushing the boat off the sand, Dandy Peter came down to the whaleboat. Furley, standing by the boat with the water washing round his sea-boots, gave him a grim stare.

"I reckon I've got to trade with you!" snarled Dandy Peter. "We're in this together, Furley."

"You should have said that back on Lukwe, Peter Parsons," retorted the

black-bearded pearl-poacher coolly. "You left me out, and now I reckon I'm leaving you out!"

Dandy Peter gritted his teeth.

"Do you fancy you'll get away with that, Jim Furley?" he snarled. "Once I'm back on Lukwe, with a gun in my hand——"

"You ain't back on Lukwe yet," answered Furley. "Who's told you that I'm giving you a passage in my whale-boat?"

Parsons started, and exclaimed:

"You're not leaving me here?"

"Ain't we?" jeered Furley. "That's just what we are doing, Peter Parsons; and you can lay to that. I reckon you can stay here and watch for a ship. You don't sail in this packet."

Dandy Peter stared at him, almost choking with rage. He had made up his mind, reluctantly, to share with the pearl-poaching crew—but that, evidently, was not what was in Black Furley's thoughts.

"You reckon I'd trust you on my packet, with the pearler on board!" jeered Furley. "Forget it! You had your chance, back on Lukwe, and you left us out in the cold! Now you can stay out and be hanged to you. Stand back!" he added, in a savage shout, as Dandy Peter, blind with rage, sprang at him.

The black-bearded ruffian struck out fiercely, and the sea-lawyer staggered and fell at full length on the sand.

Furley gave him a contemptuous glance, and turned to the boat. The whaleboat was off the sand now, rocking in deep water. The burly ruffian clambered on board, and the boat shot away from the beach.

Peter Parsons staggered up. He stood in the wet sand, with the surf washing round his feet, watching, with starting eyes, while the lug-sail was hoisted, and the Lukwe boat stood away from Long Palm.

Keefe sat staring back at him. Black Furley waved his hand derisively, and two or three of the ruffians called out a

mocking farewell, as the lug picked up the wind and danced away.

He was marooned! He had been saved from the sea, to be marooned on a lonely rock in the Pacific—to remain there till some crew ran down for water—days or weeks or months! His cutter was stolen by his black crew, plundered and perhaps wrecked.

The man with a secret of pearls was in the hands of his rivals, and he was left to watch the sea wearily for a sail that might never come!

His haggard eyes remained fixed on the lug, dancing and dipping far out at sea. He had lost sight of the Lukwe crew, lost sight of the boat, but for some time the lug-sail remained in sight, glancing in the brilliant sunlight. His staring eyes remained fixed on it—on the dwindling sail that was his only connection with the inhabited world and his fellow-men.

It vanished at last into the boundless blue, and his haggard eyes swept only the waste of waters. Solitude was round him. Silence, broken only by the faint wash of the sea, and the crying of sea-gulls over the high rock.

And Dandy Peter, the reckless black-guard of Lukwe, threw himself down on the sand with a groan of despair.

CHAPTER 9.

The Wrong Man.

THE shadow of the tall palm lay like a black bar across the little beach at the foot of the tall rock. In the shadow of the palm, seeking shelter from the burning sun, Dandy Peter, of Lukwe, stood and watched the sea. Long hours had passed since Black Furley and his gang had sailed away in their boat, taking Keefe with them, and leaving Dandy Peter marooned in his place. Long since the lug-sail had dipped below the sea-line, and only the endless waste of shining waters met the weary eyes of the sea-lawyer.

Once in a month, perhaps, some skipper, short of water, ran down to

Long Palm, to fill his casks at the spring that bubbled from the rock. But it was possible that many months might pass before a sail showed over the horizon.

Yet he was not thinking only of rescue. His thoughts ran to his cutter, left at the mercy of the black crew—all he had in the world lost to him even if he escaped from the lonely rock. And then his thoughts ran to Black Furley and his crew, and the pearler who was now in the hands of the Lukwe gang.

The unknown pearl island had led him, like a will-o'-the-wisp, to his ruin. He had robbed Wu Fang, the Chink, of the man who knew the secret of the pearl island; now Dandy Peter had been robbed in his turn of his guide to a fortune. And while he watched for a sail from that desolate rock, Black Furley would be raiding the pearl island, with Keefe for his guide.

He threw himself down at the foot of the palm at last, and closed his weary, aching eyes. It was useless to watch the sea for the sail that would not come.

Deeper sank the glowing sun in the gorgeous west. The sea-lawyer, weary to the bone, slept the deep sleep of exhaustion.

And while he slept, a speck danced against the glare of the sunset, drawing nearer and nearer to the lonely rock, till it shaped itself into a sail. Had the sea-lawyer's eyes been open, he would have seen a handsome ketch coming down under full sail before the wind. But he slept on.

He did not know that the ketch hove to a cable's length from the rock, and that a whaleboat dropped to the water. It was the rattle of oars in the rowlocks that startled him out of slumber at last. He sat up, leaning on the slanting palm, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared blankly. Then he started to his feet, with a cry:

"A ship!"

The next moment he recognised King of the Islands ketch. And in the boat that was pulling to the little beach

sat King of the Islands himself, with his Kanakas at the oars.

"King of the Islands!" breathed Dandy Peter huskily. It was his enemy who had found him.

The boy trader waved his hand to the haggard figure under the palm. But the sea-lawyer saw the surprise that dawned in the face of the boy trader of Lalinge as he recognised the man on the rock. It was not Dandy Peter that Ken King had expected to find there.

The whaleboat grounded on the sand, and King of the Islands sprang ashore.

He came tramping up the beach to the tall palm, his eyes fixed on the Lukwe skipper, his revolver in his hand.

Parsons grinned sourly. Ken King was his enemy—or, rather, he was Ken's enemy. But he knew that that would not count with the whitest skipper in the Pacific. Ken King would save him from the lonely rock. He knew that. His hatred of the boy trader had never burned more fiercely, but his heart was light. It was rescue—escape—and another chance for the pearls.

"You won't want your gun, King of the Islands," he jeered. "I'm unarmed. I reckon I'm glad to see you."

Ken put away the revolver as he came to a halt, staring at the haggard face of the castaway.

"You, Dandy Peter!" he said. "I reckoned you might have pulled through. They say that those who are born to be hanged cannot be drowned. Where's Keefe?"

"You're too late!" sneered Dandy Peter.

"Listen to me, you scum," said Ken. "Four hours ago I raised your cutter on the Pacific, and got from your boys that they had marooned the pearler here. I want Keefe. Where is he?"

"Where I reckon you'll never find him," sneered the sea-lawyer of Lukwe.

"If you've harmed him——"

"When he knows the secret of the richest pearl island in the Pacific," laughed Parsons. "Do you think I found him here and knocked him on the head?"

"How did you get here?" snapped Ken.

"Black Furley's boat picked me up," snarled Dandy Peter. "They ran down to this rock for water. They've got Keefe and left me here in his place. Black Furley and his gang aren't the men to share a prize; but you're taking me off, I reckon?"

"What course did they set—back to Lukwe?"

"Not likely, with you combing these waters for the pearler. I reckon they're making the pearl island by this time, and Keefe is setting a course with a knife to his throat!" said Dandy Peter, between his teeth.

King of the Islands stood silent. It was a bitter disappointment to the boy trader. Only a few hours too late, but it might as well have been days or weeks. The man with a secret was in lawless hands, and the vast Pacific had swallowed him. But he watched the sea-lawyer doubtfully. Without speaking again, he turned and called to the Kanakas waiting at the boat.

"You feller Koko, Lompo, you look along island, eye belong you, look see feller pearler he stop."

"You reckon I've got him hidden away?" sneered Parsons. "Look for him all you like, you won't find him on Long Pahn."

Leaving the sea-lawyer where he stood, Ken joined the Kanakas in searching the island. But the search was brief—there was little space to cover—and he had to believe that the Lukwe skipper had told him the truth. Parsons watched him with a sneering grin as he came back.

"You're taking me off?" There was a shade of anxiety in Peter Parsons' haggard face. "You're not leaving a white man to this, King of the Islands?"

"You deserve it, and more," snapped the boy trader. "But I reckon I can't leave you to it. I shall run down to Lukwe to pick up news, if I can, of Black Furley, and I'll give you a passage, scoundrel as you are. Get into the boat."

Kit Hudson, leaning on the rail of the Dawn, watched the boat pulling back, staring in amazement at Dandy Peter. Parsons gave the Australian a scowl as he came up the side. There was no gratitude in his heart for his rescue, and he made no pretence of any. It was an enemy whom King of the Islands had saved from the desolate rock, and who sailed in the Dawn when she spread her tall canvas on the course for distant Lukwe.

CHAPTER 10.

On the Chart.

BLACK FURLEY unrolled a tattered chart and spread it on the coral rock. His whaleboat, with the lug-sail down, had moored to a shelf of coral within the reef of Faloo. The Lukwe gang were camped on the beach, and the half-dozen ruffians lay about smoking, their eyes on the copper-faced man who sat leaning against a rock in the centre of the circle.

They had landed on Faloo at a distance from the native villages, and from the bungalow of Gideon Gee, the only white man on the island. There was a dogged look on the coppery face of Keefe, the pearler from the Paumotus, and grim and threatening looks on the faces of the rest.

Black Furley's eyes glittered at the pearler as he unrolled the chart. Ruffian as he was, bully and sea-thief, Furley was not a man to be feared like Peter Parsons the dandy of Lukwe. But he was not a man to take no for an answer when his cupidity was roused. The man from the Paumotus, as he looked round at the circle of grim, surly faces, knew that his life hung on a thread.

"I reckon we're getting down to brass-tacks now, Keefe," said Furley, his savage voice rumbling in his thick black beard. "Here's the chart, and I reckon you're giving us a course."

"We're in this together, shipmate," said Dick Finn to Keefe. "Share and

share alike—and that's better than Peter Parsons would have given you."

"That durned sea-lawyer would have got the location of your pearl island out of you with a sting-ray tail to your back and sunk you in the Pacific with a lump of coral at your heels when he'd got it clear," growled Black Furley. "You know that?"

The pearler nodded. He was in rough and ruthless hands, but it was a change for the better from the dandy of Lukwe.

"Well, we ain't handling you like that," went on Furley. "We're white men and treating you white. We're after the pearls, but I reckon you know you can trust us to keep a bargain.

"Share and share alike it's to be," added Furley. "What you got to grumble at in that? You can't raise the pearls on your own. From what you've said, you sailed with a crew in a lugger when you found the island, and you'd have had to share with them if the niggers hadn't got them. What's the matter with sailing with this crew?"

"You've got a big secret—but what's it worth to you without a ship and without a bean? You can't raise the island alone, and if you did the niggers would kai-kai you as they did your shipmates. I reckon you ought to jump at the chance of sailing with us." Black Furley was keeping his temper, though there was a savage, growling note of menace in his deep voice. "Mebbe you'd rather raise King of the Islands' ketch and sail with that young swab. But you ain't got the chance. Anyhow, you'd have to share with him and his mate. You're sharing with us, and, seeing that we've got you in our hands, we're treating you white."

The pearler lifted his eyes, stared across the reef to the sea, and then along the beach to the trader's bungalow in the far distance. Black Furley watched him, laughing scoffingly.

"Forget it," he said. "There's blacks on Faloo that'd kai-kai you as soon as look at you if you got away in the bush. And that half-caste thief

Gideon Gee wouldn't lift a finger for you. We've landed here because of that. We've got to get stores for the trip, and we can get them from that Portugee and no questions asked. You savvy?"

"You got away in your lugger with a fistful of pearls, when that Chink, Wu Fang, picked you up," went on Furley. "You've lost your lugger and lost your pearls. But there's plenty more on the island. I reckon you ought to be glad to get a crew to sail with to lift them—a crew that'll treat you white and see you get your share."

There was a nodding of heads in the circle of sprawling ruffians.

"I'll make you an offer," said the pearler at last. "Run me to a beach where I can pick up King of the Islands—"

"Cut that out!" snarled the black-bearded pearl-poacher. "King of the Islands doesn't take a hand in this game. You're sailing with this crew to raise the pearl island."

Keefe shut his teeth hard.

"We'll draw up the agreement, fair and square, according to rule," said Dick Finn. "Seven equal shares when the pearls are raised. You stand in with the rest, shipmate."

"Ain't that good enough, you swab?" growled another of the Lukwe gang. "Did Peter Parsons offer you anything as good?"

"No," muttered Keefe. "He threatened me with Malaita tortures—"

"That's his sort," growled Black Furley. "You won't get that from this crew, whether you open your mouth or keep it shut. You know that."

"I know!"

"Open up, then, durn you! We picked you off Long Palm, where I reckon you might have waited half a year to see a sail. But if you don't open up you'll be left where you won't see a sail in half a century." Black Furley struck his clenched fist into the palm of his left hand with a crack like a pistol-shot.

"You get me? Open up and come in with this crew, or we'll maroon you on

the loneliest rock in the Pacific. Then you can think of your pearl island while you're combing the rocks for shell-fish, year in and year out. I reckon this crew ain't low-down swabs like Peter Parsons, but you won't get off easy. Treat us white and we'll treat you white. Now, then!" The Lukwe gang waited for the pearler's answer.

Long minutes passed before the man from the Paumotus spoke. There was a sort of rough justice, a kind of ruffianly honesty in the Lukwe gang of pearl-poachers. It was not the crew he would have chosen to sail with, and seven shares in the pearls meant that he would lose a fortune. But lawless ruffians as they were, they were the men to treat him "white," as they expressed it, if he joined them and became one of themselves. There was little choice for the man from the Paumotus, and he made up his mind at last.

His hope had been fixed on King of the Islands. But if the boy trader was still seeking him, what chance had he of finding him? Little or none, and none at all if Furley carried out his threat of marooning him on some unknown reef. He drew a deep breath and nodded his head.

The Lukwe crew exchanged glances of satisfaction. Black Furley's scowling face cleared.

"I'm in your hands," muttered Keefe. "I'll stand in with this crew unless King of the Islands shows up in the offing. I reckon there's little enough chance of it. But, maroon me or not, I tell you plain that if King of the Islands shows up I throw this crew over and keep my secret."

"I reckon we can let it go at that," said Furley. "You won't see King of the Islands in a hurry, my bucko. He's a hundred miles from Faloo and gone back to his trade, I reckon. Set us a course for the pearl island and we'll take the chance of Ken King."

"That's agreed, then," said Keefe quietly. "I'm joining this crew on that condition. If we don't sight King of

the Islands before the pearls are raised I'm standing in with you."

"Good enough," said Dick Finn, and there was a general nodding of heads. No man in the rough crew expected to sight Ken King's ketch, and the condition did not trouble them in the least.

Black Furley, with eager eyes, spread out the tattered chart on a flat surface of coral. The Lukwe crew gathered round.

"You got the bearings of the island and you can mark it on the chart?" said Finn.

"Our skipper took the bearings," answered Keefe. "I can put my finger on the spot to a cable's length." And slowly, with obvious reluctance, the pearler ran his finger over the tattered chart. Every eye was fixed on it as it stopped. Furley gave him a suspicious glare.

"You ain't fooling us?" he muttered threateningly. "There's no land marked for hundreds of miles—"

"It's an unknown island," said Keefe. "I doubt if a white man ever set foot there before our lugger was blown there in a squall. Most of the niggers had never seen a white skin before—only a few of them, who had been to other islands. You'll be taking your lives in your hands—the bush swarms with cannibals."

"I reckon all the cannibals in the Pacific won't scare this crew away from a pearl-bed," chuckled Furley.

CHAPTER 11.

The Cooky-boy's Saucepan.

"THERE'S the Flamingo!" exclaimed Kit Hudson.

King of the Islands fixed his eyes on the schooner that lay at anchor in the lagoon of Lukwe as the Dawn came in through the reef. It was the schooner of Wu Fang, and on her deck he could see the black faces of the Santa Cruz crew, and the diminutive figure of Wu Fang himself.

"Wu Fang—here!" exclaimed Ken.

"The Chink's a sticker!" Hudson chuckled. "He's after Dandy Peter and the pearler. He can have Dandy Peter, but he'll have to hunt for the pearler."

Under the glowing sunset, the ketch ran into the lagoon and dropped her anchor. From the schooner, Wu Fang watched. Peter Parsons grinned savagely as he glanced at the Chink. If Wu Fang had followed him to Lukwe in the hope of recapturing the man with the secret, he was too late.

The Chinaman remained on his deck, his impassive yellow face expressionless, but his slanting eyes glittered like a snake's as he watched the ketch.

King of the Islands gave him little heed, and the boat was lowered to take the boy trader ashore. He was at Lukwe to pick up news, if he could, of Black Furley and his crew. He signed to Dandy Peter to step into the boat, anxious to see the last of the sea-lawyer.

Dandy Peter's brow was black as the boat pulled to the beach. His life had been saved, but he had come back to Lukwe with little more than the tattered clothes he stood in—his ship lost, his cargo lost, his hope of a fortune gone.

Sooner or later the Sea-Cat might be recovered, but it was doubtful, and at the moment the dandy of Lukwe was almost down to combing the beach. It ought to have been a lesson to him, that honesty was the best policy, but lessons of that sort were lost on Peter Parsons.

He sat silent and scowling in the boat, and when it reached the shore he tramped up the sand without a word of thanks or farewell to his rescuer, and up the coral path to his bungalow. He did not know, and would not have heeded had he known, that the slant eyes of the Chinaman on the schooner watched him as he went.

Darkness had fallen on Lukwe and the stars were shining on the lagoon when Ken returned to the ketch.

Kit Hudson met him with an inquiring look,

"No news of Furley," said Ken, in answer to that look. "I've questioned nearly every man on the beach. Furley never came back to Lukwe—nothing's been heard of him since he pulled out for O'ua."

"That tears it," said Hudson. "We've lost our man, Ken. We've done all we can for Keefe. Furley's the man to make him talk, and ten to one they're steering for the pearl island now. We can't comb the Pacific from the Gilberts to the Galapagos looking for him."

"No!" There was a deep shade of thought on the boy trader's brow. "Ten to one, as you say, they're steering for Keefe's island. If only we could get the bearings of that island!"

"There's a clue in what the man was muttering when he was delirious on board the Dawn after we picked him up at sea. You remember—"

"Every word." Hudson grinned. "Twenty on the line—a cable's length on the beach, and five fathoms in the bush! Bags of pearls—and niggers in the bush! If you can make head or tail of that, Ken—"

"Twenty on the line!" said King of the Islands. "That's the sentence that's stuck in my mind, Kit. He repeated it a hundred times or more. Is that the position of the island, Kit?"

"If it is, it will want some finding. Sailormen call the Equator the 'line,' and that may be what he meant."

"I think that was what he meant," said Ken. "And if his island was on the Equator itself, that gives us the latitude."

"It's a sporting chance. But it leaves you twenty-five thousand miles to choose from for longitude."

"Twenty degrees—east or west."

"My dear fellow, twenty degrees west is in the middle of the Atlantic—far enough from these seas. Twenty degrees east is in the middle of Africa—no islands there!" Hudson laughed. "You don't fancy that Keefe found his

pearl island in the Atlantic or in Africa?"

"No!" Ken laughed. "But——" He wrinkled his boyish brow. "I can't figure it out, Kit, and that's a fact. But I'm convinced that Keefe was babbling out the bearings of his island when he was delirious—if one could only work it out and find the clue. I'm going to try to worry it out somehow. The clue's there, and if we could raise the island, Kit, we might save the man yet—and perhaps do a good stroke of trade at the same time. But it beats me as yet."

Kit Hudson went in the boat for a run ashore, and the Kanaka crew went with him on shore leave. The ketch was to pull out of the lagoon at sunrise.

Once more King of the Islands had been beaten in his hunt for the lost pearler, and there was now no hope of finding the man unless he could solve the riddle of the bearings of the pearl island.

As he sat in a deckchair looking towards the beach, Ken was thinking of the muttered words of the delirious pearler. He was convinced they would give him the clue to the island if he could but get hold of it.

Lights were gleaming from the line of bungalows ashore. As the night grew older they went out one by one. But from the dusky beach came a bound of music from native instruments, where a swarm of Lukwe blacks were dancing under the stars, the Kanaka crew of the Dawn with them. Dimly in the starlight Ken could see the crowd of moving figures, and the twang of barbarous music came clearly across the lagoon to his ears. He was alone on the ketch, save for Danny the cooky-boy, who was snoring in his galley. From moment to moment the canoe of some night fishermen glided past in the dusk of the stars, and there was the faint splash of a paddle.

Deep in thought, Ken gave no heed

to his surroundings. If he heard a faint splash under the quarter of the anchored ketch, he did not heed it. He did not know that a boat had glided silently under the quarter, and that black hands were holding on. His face was turned to the shore, and it was from the other side that the silent boat glided.

The black hands of Santa Cruz boys held on, and a diminutive figure rose slowly over the rail behind the boy trader. A little yellow face, with slanting, glittering eyes, looked across the shadowed deck.

Wu Fang made no sound. Slowly, stealthily, the Chinaman raised himself higher and higher, till his knee was on the rail.

Under his loose tunic his yellow hand grasped the haft of a knife. But he did not draw the weapon. The back of the deckchair was between him and the boy trader, only the white top of the boy trader's cap showing over it. There was no chance of throwing the knife, in the way of the South Sea native. Wu Fang released the weapon.

For some moments he remained still, his knee on the rail. Then, with infinite caution, he climbed over and lowered himself without a sound to the deck. And his soft slippers made no sound as he crept across the teak planks towards the deckchair in which King of the Islands sat, unconscious of danger.

Behind the chair the Chink paused, and now the knife was in his yellow hand. The life of the boy trader of Lalange hung by a thread!

"My sainted Sam!" It was almost a shout from King of the Islands. He started up from the chair.

The riddle that had baffled, puzzled, almost beaten him, was a riddle no longer. He had believed that the clue to the pearl island was to be found in the delirious mutterings of the pearler—in the words, oft repeated, "Twenty on the line." He had been sure of it, yet to make sense of the words had been beyond him. And

now, like a flash, the answer came, and he wondered that he had not thought of it sooner. He knew that he could stick a pin in the chart on the spot where the unknown island lay—the island where Ben Keefe had found a fortune in pearls, where the pearls still lay hidden, waiting to be lifted.

No wonder it was an unknown island. Who would have looked for land in that waste of waters far from all known land? No wonder the island had never been discovered, that its wealth in pearls had never been suspected. But King of the Islands knew now. He was convinced that he knew, and he was eager for Hudson to return to tell him. The riddle had been solved, the problem was a problem no longer. Twenty on the line! The words that had seemed so mysterious told their own secret, and he was amazed that he had not divined it before. In great excitement, his eyes blazing, King of the Islands fairly bounded from the chair.

"My sainted Sam! And I never guessed—" He broke off with a startled cry. Even as he leaped from the chair in the excitement of his discovery, there was a flash of bare steel in the starlight, and the Chinaman's blow missed him by hardly more than an inch.

There was a thud as the keen blade, missing the boy trader, struck into the basket-work of the chair and quivered there.

For an instant King of the Islands stood spellbound, staring at the yellow, enraged face of Wu Fang. Not a sound had warned him. He had been utterly unconscious of danger. It was his sudden movement that had saved his life.

"Wu Fang!" gasped Ken. "The Chink!"

He had not given a thought to the Chinaman. He had forgotten the schooner that rode at anchor a cable's length from the ketch. He stared at the little yellow demon as he might have stared at a ghost.

The keen knife had sunk inches into the chair, so great was the force of the blow. Wu Fang had to exert his strength to drag it out again. But he tore it loose, and, with a snarl of fury, sprang at King of the Islands.

Ken leaped back, dodging the slash of the keen steel, which slit his drill jacket in its passage. The Chink came at him like a cat, his slanting eyes ablaze, his teeth gleaming in a savage snarl. But as the knife slashed again King of the Islands caught the yellow wrist and turned the blow aside. A second more, and he was grasping the little Chink, and they were struggling breast to breast.

Spitting like a cat, Wu Fang strove to drag his knife-hand loose. But Ken's grasp was on his wrist like steel. He knew that if that grasp relaxed he was a dead man, and the Chink hissed with pain as his bones almost cracked in that iron grip. Ken's left hand held the knife away, baffling the Chink's fierce attempts to stab him, and his right arm was round the slight figure, grasping, while the Chink's left hand tore at him like a claw. Locked in a desperate struggle, they staggered to and fro on the deck.

King of the Islands was strong and sturdy, and he almost towered over the little Chink. But Wu Fang was wiry and strong, and he struggled with desperate energy. He seemed like an eel in the grasp of the boy trader, squirming and wriggling in his grasp, dragging frantically at his knife-hand to free it.

To and fro they reeled, the savage Chink striving to stab, the boy trader holding off the knife, which tore his clothes and grazed his skin again and again.

From the Santa Cruz boys in the boat came a startled cackle. Black faces rose into view over the teak rail, staring at the struggle on the deck. There were four blacks in the schooner's boat, overwhelming odds if they had joined in the conflict. But

they cackled with excitement, and stared with rolling eyes, without coming up over the rail, fearful of attacking a "white master" on a white master's ship, anchored within sight of the houses of other white masters. From the Chinaman, as he struggled, came a hoarse, panting yell to the black seamen.

"You feller boy, you comey, you comey plenty too quick!" yelled Wu Fang. The little yellow demon had planned to carry out his deadly vengeance silently, giving no alarm, and he had been within an ace of success. But silence and stealth could not serve him now, and he yelled furiously to the Santa Cruz boys to help him. But the blacks, jabbering at the rail, still hesitated.

In the galley forward the deep snore of Danny the cooky-boy had ceased to rumble. Danny, knuckling his sleepy eyes, stared out on the starlit deck, drowsily wondering what was going on. His eyes almost started from his head at the sight of King of the Islands struggling with the cat-like Chink and the four staring faces over the rail.

"My word!" stuttered Danny.

For a moment or two he stared, his fuzzy brain slow to take in what was happening. Then he reached into the galley, grasped a saucepan by the handle, and came padding along the deck.

"Danny!" shouted King of the Islands.

"This feller comey, sar," panted Danny. He whirled up the heavy saucepan by the handle as he rushed on the scene.

It was only just in time. The Santa Cruz blacks were coming over the rail, and King of the Islands had his hands full with the Chinaman, who struggled and tore and clawed like a maddened cat.

Crash! The cooky-boy struck at the Chinaman's head a blow that would have cracked Wu Fang's skull like

an eggshell had it landed there. But it missed the Chink's head as he writhed and twisted, and crashed on his right shoulder.

Wu Fang gave a scream of agony, and his arm fell numbed, his fingers relaxing, and the knife clattering to the deck.

"Now, you scum!" panted King of the Islands. He released the Chinaman's wrist, and grasped the struggling Chink with both muscular hands. Wu Fang crumpled up helplessly in his powerful grasp.

Exerting all his strength, King of the Islands swept the diminutive Chinaman from his feet into the air. With a swing of his sinewy arms he flung him, like a sack of Copra, at the jabbering blacks clambering over the rail.

There was a yell of affright from the Santa Cruz boys. The hurtling Chink crashed on them, knocking two of them clean off the rail into the boat below, and falling after them. The other two blacks, as the boy trader sprang towards them with flashing eyes, leaped after their comrades into the boat. One of them yelled as Danny's saucepan cracked on the back of his head as he leaped.

A black hand shoved frantically at the hull of the Dawn, and the boat rocked away on the lagoon. Wu Fang lay in the bottom, groaning with the pain of his injured shoulder, his slanting eyes burning up at the boy trader looking over the rail. The blacks groped in terrified haste for the oars.

"Danny, you bring feller gun belong me, along cabin he stop!" shouted King of the Islands.

Danny ran below for the revolver.

There was a howl from the blacks in the boat. They grasped the oars, slammed them into the rowlocks, and pulled wildly to escape before the "feller gun" was in the hand of the white master whose fierce face stared at them over the rail of the Dawn. The boat rocked away towards the

anchored schooner, from which excited black faces were watching in the glimmer of the stars.

The cooky-boy came running back from the cabin, and Ken snatched the revolver from his hand. His eyes blazed over it as he threw it up to fire.

Crack, crack! Wild yells from the rocking boat answered the shots. The Santa Cruz boys pulled with frantic haste as the bullets whizzed among their woolly heads. Twice a bullet struck the boat within inches of Wu Fang. Ken heard the Chink screaming to the blacks to pull, and the boat shot away into the dimness of the lagoon. In their terror the Santa Cruz boys pulled past the anchored schooner, and hooked on to the farther side, sheltered from the fire of the angry white master.

Ken stared towards the Flamingo, a dim shape in the dusk, with gleaming eyes. The Chink had got back to his ship, but the boy trader was not done with him yet.

He crossed the deck, and looked across the water to the beach. The shots would have been heard ashore, and he had no doubt that they would bring Hudson and the crew back to the ketch in haste. All was dark on the beach at Lukwe, and the last light had been extinguished in the traders' bungalows. But under the palm-trees the figures of the native dancers could still be seen, and the strains of savage music came floating out across the lagoon.

By the coral quay, where the Dawn's boat was moored, Ken picked up moving figures in the dusk, and he knew that Hudson and his Kanakas were coming. And when they came Wu Fang and his crew would not be long in hearing from King of the Islands.

But Wu Fang had guessed that, had cut his cable and sailed away. And Peter Parsons was lashed a prisoner to his foremast. Pinfido had captured him on Wu Fang's instructions, in case he had learnt Keefe's secret.

CHAPTER 12.

Twenty on the Line!

KING OF THE ISLANDS turned out of his bunk as the sunrise glimmered over Lukwe. He was soon on deck, and Koko's whistle piped all hands. The anchor rose from its coral bed, and before the earliest white man on Lukwe stepped out into his veranda, the ketch was gliding out of the reef passage to the Pacific. Danny, in the galley, sang merrily as he prepared breakfast for the white masters.

Before breakfast was set out on the after-deck the Dawn was clear of the reef, standing eastward under a cloud of canvas, and Lukwe was dropping into the sea astern. Ken had set a course for Lompo, at the wheel, and he smiled at the puzzled expression on Hudson's face as the mate sat down to breakfast. The course he had set was a mystery to the Australian.

"Whither bound, skipper?" asked Hudson at last. "Are we combing the Pacific again to look for Keefe, or what?"

"I reckon we've a chance of finding Keefe," said Ken.

"Not in your lifetime!" answered Hudson. "Black Furley and his gang have got him—and they'll make him steer for his pearl island. Furley isn't the man to stand on ceremony with a fortune in sight."

"That's what I reckon!" assented King of the Islands. "Furley isn't a black-hearted swab like Dandy Peter, but he's a rough customer, and I don't fancy he'll take no for an answer from Keefe. I've no doubt they were making the pearl island before we raised Lukwe."

"Well, then," said Hudson, perplexed, "if we're going to look for Furley's boat, we've got all the Pacific to choose from. Keefe's pearl island may lie anywhere between Honolulu and the Marquesas, for anything we know. You don't figure that we've a

chance of dropping on Furley in a few thousand square miles of the Pacific?"

"I figure that we've a chance of beating him to the pearl island," answered Ken. "Furley's sailing a whaleboat under a lugsail, and look at our canvas."

Ken glanced up with an eye of pride at the belying sails, and the tall cedar masts bending under their load. Before the wind that came out of the west the ketch was walking the waters like a thing of life.

"We could walk over Furley's boat if we sighted it," said Hudson. "But we shan't sight it in a lifetime, Ken, unless we hit on a clue to Keefe's island."

"Exactly!" said Ken.

Hudson jumped.

"You don't mean——"

"But I do!" said King of the Islands. "When you left me on board last night, Kit, I told you I was going to worry it out. Well, I got my teeth into it, and worried it out. I fancy I've hit on the secret."

Koko was seated on the coamings of the cabin hatch, twanging his ukelele. He ceased to twang, and listened to the talk of the white masters with keen interest. Kit Hudson was astonished, but Koko the Kanaka was not at all surprised. There was nothing surprising to Koko in any wonderful thing done by his white master.

"But——" gasped Hudson. He stared at the boy trader. "Mean to say you've set a course for Keefe's pearl island, Ken?"

"I think so!"

"Well, if you're right, it's jolly well magic," exclaimed the mate of the Dawn. "So far as I know, Keefe's island might be anywhere in the Pacific, and it's a large spot to search. If you're making for the pearl island now, old man, more power to your elbow; but how did you figure it out?"

"You don't believe it yet," Ken laughed. "But I think you'll agree

I'm right when I make it plain, Kit. The only clue we had was what the poor chap was babbling in his delirium after we picked him up at sea, you remember?"

"Twenty on the line," grinned Hudson, "a cable's length on the beach and five fathoms in the bush!"

"That's it."

"And you picked some sense out of that?" asked Hudson. "Well, make it clear. I'm all ears! I heard the man babbling it over and over again, but all it meant to me was that brain belong him no walk about any more."

"I was sure all the time that he was babbling out the bearings of the island if we could only have understood him, Kit. You thought the same. The trouble was to get at what he meant."

"Some trouble," grinned Hudson.

"Well, think it over," said Ken. "Sailormen call the Equator the line, and from the first I fancied that that was what he meant. If so, his island lay on the Equator, which means that we needn't ask for the latitude."

"We've been through that," said Hudson. "But twenty on the Equator could only mean twenty degrees, if it meant anything, and twenty degrees east or west of Greenwich, where would that land you? In the Atlantic or in Africa."

"All we want is the longitude——"

"All!" grinned Hudson. "They used to tell me at school in Sydney that the world was twenty-five thousand miles round. Looks like a lot of longitude to pick and choose from to find a small island."

"I'm serious, old chap," said Ken. "I believe I've got it. What about a hundred and twenty on the line?"

"What?"

"A hundred and twenty degrees of longitude," said King of the Islands quietly. "East, it would land you in the Dutch islands, near Borneo. That's not it, of course. West——"

"Yon feller, Koko, you bring feller chart, along cabin, plenty quick!"

rapped out Hudson, interrupting the boy trader, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Yessar!" The brown boatswain jumped up and ran down to the cabin. He returned in a moment with the chart.

Hudson pushed the breakfast things recklessly aside, and spread out the chart on the table. His finger dropped on the Equator, and ran along to a hundred and twenty west.

"Open sea!" he said. "No land marked here."

"No land would be marked, if it's an unknown island that Keefe raised," answered Ken.

"That's so! But——"

"It flashed into my mind all of a sudden, when I was worrying it out last night," said Ken. "Keefe, when he was delirious, repeated again—and again, 'twenty on the line.' And I knew in my bones that it was the bearings of his island.

"What he really meant was a hundred and twenty. I've heard sailormen speak that way many a time. I remember a man on Lalinge giving the longitude of that island as thirty-five west, the hundreds being taken for granted in these seas."

"My hat!" said Hudson. "I believe you've got it, Ken! Why, we ought to have jumped to it at once."

King of the Islands laughed.

"That's what I thought when I did jump to it," he said. "But we didn't, and Dandy Peter didn't, either! Parsons must have heard the same babbling—Keefe was still a sick man when that scoundrel got hold of him—but his ravings told him nothing, any more than they told us, till now!"

"If you're right—and I believe you are, Ken—all we've got to do is to hit the line at a hundred and twenty west——"

"That's how I've figured it out, at any rate!" said King of the Islands. "If I've got it wrong, it means a long trip for nothing in lonely seas; but I think I've got it right, Kit—and that means

raising the pearl island. If we find the niggers reasonable, it means a big stroke of trade in an island rich in pearls where a white man's ship never touches. That's where we come in."

"Not much chance of that," said Hudson, shaking his head. "According to Keefe, they're fierce black cannibals. We've lost time and money, Ken, and we shan't see it again in the way of trade. But——"

"But we're making the island, win or lose," said Ken. "We saved that man's life, Kit, and he's in lawless hands. It's up to us to see him through if we can. If we lose on it, it's all in the day's work."

"I'm with you, all the way!" said the mate, his face eager.

Neither of the shipmates doubted that they had, at long last, hit on the clue hidden in the delirious mutterings of the pearler. Indeed, they wondered now that they had not guessed it before.

Before a seven-knot breeze, the Dawn fled on east by north. Far away on the sea a sail glimmered against the blue, unheeded by the shipmates. It was Koko who drew their attention to it at last.

"Feller Chink he stop, sar!" said Koko, and pointed at the distant top-sail.

"Is that the Famingo?" asked Ken, staring at it.

"Me tinkee, sar."

King of the Islands turned his binoculars on the sail astern. There was no doubt of it—it was Wu Fang's schooner coming down before the wind. But it was not nearing the ketch. Wu Fang was content to keep his distance.

"Suffering cats!" ejaculated Hudson. "Is the Chink looking for trouble with us on the high seas?"

Ken's face set grimly.

"I'd be glad to give him a chance," he said. "But he's not trying to overhaul us. If the scoundrel hadn't the wind of us, I'd be inclined to run back and talk to him. Let him rip."

All through the burning day the schooner's topsail hung astern. No doubt there was a man in the cross-trees keeping the ketch in sight, but with the fall of night the sail was lost in the dusk of the sea. The ketch ran swiftly on under the stars, and the shipmates gave no further thought to the Chink.

CHAPTER 13.

His Own Medicine!

WU FANG stood in the cross-trees of the Flamingo, his slanting eyes scanning the sea from under the brim of his big Chinese hat. North and south, east and west, the great rollers gleamed in the sunshine, without a sight of land, of a sail, or of a steamer's smoke. In the lonely waters that stretched endlessly north of the Marquesas, Wu Fang did not expect to sight land, or a steamer. He was straining his slanting eyes for a sail. But only the sea and the sky met his searching gaze.

The Chinaman's yellow face was calm, impassive, but the glitter of his slanting eyes told of his rage and disappointment. He left the cross-trees at last, and slid down the shrouds, dropping to the deck with the activity of a cat.

Wu Fang entered his cabin. The dapper figure of the sea-lawyer of Lukwe stood at the stern window, staring out at the sea and the streaming white wake of the schooner.

Peter Parsons turned as the Chinaman came in, eyeing him savagely. His hands were bound behind his back, which was the only reason why Dandy Peter did not leap at the throat of the Chink. For days and nights the dandy of Lukwe had been a prisoner on board the schooner—raging like a caged tiger.

"Feller King of the Islands no stop!" said Wu Fang.

"You've lost him!" sneered Dandy Peter. "You yellow fool, you could have run him down any time you liked.

You've twice his spread of canvas on this packet."

"You no savvy," said Wu Fang quietly. "No wantee lun down feller King of the Islands. Tinkee feller Keefe stop along ketch, tinkee follow King of the Islands along pearls."

Dandy Peter laughed scoffingly. He had wondered why the schooner was hanging in the wake of the Dawn. The Chinaman believed that the pearler was on board King of the Islands' ship, steering for the pearl island.

It was a natural supposition, for Wu Fang knew that Ken had chased Dandy Peter to rescue the pearler, and he had seen Parsons brought back to Lukwe in Ken's ketch. He knew nothing of the part played by Black Furley and his crew.

By sunny day and starry night the schooner had followed the ketch, always at a distance, but always keeping the Dawn in sight.

Every sunrise had shown the ketch in sight on the sea till now. But at long last the ketch had vanished in the darkness of a night, and the Chink was left guessing.

Parsons had been puzzled by the course the Dawn was steering. It was far from all known land and all the routes of trade. Had Keefe been with the boy trader, he would have understood. But the pearler was in the hands of Black Furley, and Ken had no guide to the pearl island—unless he had some clue that Dandy Peter knew nothing of.

Why he had taken the trouble to shake off his pursuer now was another puzzle, unless he was, as the Chink believed, steering for the pearl island, and drawing near to his destination. Wu Fang, at all events, had no doubt of it.

"That fellow no stop!" said Wu Fang. "Along night he lun along sea, eye belong me no see that feller ketch, you savvy. You feller Parsons, you savvy what place that feller island he stop. Now you talkee."

Dandy Peter drew a deep breath.

The Chink believed that he had wrung the secret from Keefe while the man was in his hands. That was why he had been kidnapped at Lukwe.

Now that he had lost the ketch on the boundless Pacific—lost, as he believed, his guide to the Island of Pearls—the Chink had a second string to his bow—Dandy Peter.

"You yellow-faced heathen," said Parsons. "I've told you already that Keefe said nothing when I had him. He was delirious most of the time, and after he came to he tipped me over the side of the Sea-Cat."

"No tinkee!" said Wu Fang. There was grim disbelief in the yellow mask of a face.

Wu Fang knew that the Paumotus pearler had been in Dandy Peter's hands for weeks. He did not know that the man had been delirious till at last, when his senses came back, he had got the upper hand of the sea-lawyer.

Dandy Peter would have forced his secret from him—by torture, if there was no other way—and the Chink did not doubt that he had done so. And the look in the Chink's slanting eyes told the sea-lawyer that as he would have done, so he would be done by. He was in hands as ruthless as his own.

While King of the Islands' ship was in sight Wu Fang had not needed him. Now he did need him, and the sea-lawyer had to tell the secret he did not know, or what he would have done to Keefe, so the ruthless Chink would do to him!

"You talkee?" Wu Fang asked at last, in his soft voice.

"I've nothing to tell you, you yellow scum!" snarled Dandy Peter.

The Chinaman smiled, a slow and terrifying smile. He stepped to the companion and called up to the deck.

Two of the black Santa Cruz boys came down to the cabin. They took Parsons by either arm and led him to the deck, the Chinaman following.

Parsons stood blinking in the

dazzling sunlight. The black crew stared at him curiously, some of them grinning. At a word from the Chink, he was stretched on his back on the deck, in a spot where the shadow of the sails did not fall.

Tapa cords secured him there, a heavy spar tied to his feet. He closed his eyes to the glare of the sun that burned on his unprotected face like a furnace.

The Chinaman stood looking down at him.

"Me tinkee you talkee plenty soon!" he murmured softly.

The Chink padded aft on his slippered feet, and sat down in a long chair under the awning. He sat there like a yellow image, calm and patient, not even glancing at the man who lay stretched under the burning glare of the tropic sun. Wu Fang was content to wait—with the ruthless patience of the Oriental.

Hours—years as it seemed to the tortured sea-lawyer—passed before the burning sun was gone. But the heat relaxed at last, and the scorching rays of the sun no longer blazed on his upturned face.

With the night came coolness and the blessed dark, and he could open his eyes. But more and more fiercely the aching thirst burned in his throat. Hunger he did not feel, but the thirst was a torment that racked him with suffering.

In the darkness, staring with hopeless eyes at the black sky, he longed for death. Sleep would not come to his weary eyes. He knew that he would not sleep till the long sleep from which there was no awakening.

And then suddenly from the silence of the sea there came a rending, crashing sound and an uproar of voices—white men's voices that shouted and yelled. There was a startled jabbering from the black men on deck, but Dandy Peter was straining his ears to the sounds from the sea—the shouting of men whose boat had been run down

in the darkness and was sinking under the bows of the schooner.

It seemed to him like a dream as he heard the fierce roar of Black Furley, the pearl-poacher of Lukwe!

CHAPTER 14.

Run Down!

BLACK FURLEY sprawled half-asleep, his arm flung over the tiller of the Lukwe whaleboat.

Night lay on the Pacific, with hardly a star twinkling through the masses of cloud that banked the sky. Black as pitch the night seemed after the burning glare of the day. Faintly through deep darkness came a glimmering of the Pacific surges, with here and there a reflected star gleaming from the heaving waters. The wind was light, but it filled the lug-sail, and the Lukwe boat glided on in the darkness.

Keefe, his hand on the sheet, was the only man in the crew who was wide awake. The rest of the Lukwe gang lay sprawled about the boat sleeping, heads pillowed on arms.

A sound came to him from the sea—a sound that was not the eternal wash of the waves. He started and sat up, staring into the darkness. From the night came faint sounds, the creaking of blocks and tackle. But if it was a ship, she was burning no lights.

The crash came even as he started up. High over the boat loomed a dark shadow—a hull and bellying sails. Booming canvas was over his head, the jib of a schooner. Bowsprit and jib-boom stretched over the Lukwe boat, as the schooner's cut-water crashed into her, head on.

With startled cries, the Lukwe crew sprang up from their sleep, with the boat shivering and crashing under them—run down at sea by an unseen craft. The Pacific was washing over them as they leaped up.

With a roar of surprise and rage, Black Furley leaped to his feet. The whaleboat, smashed by the shock, was

canting over by the bows, and the stern was flung up as she went.

Furley's head almost touched the bowsprit of the schooner, and with instant swiftness, knowing that the whaleboat was going down under his feet, the Lukwe ruffian leaped and hung on to the bowsprit. He clung to it as the schooner surged on over the wrecked boat.

Swinging in the air, he was carried on, and behind him, in the wash of the schooner, cries and shrieks from the Lukwe crew rang fearfully in the night.

Burly as he was, Furley was as active as a cat. He swung a leg over the bowsprit, shouting he hardly knew what. He could hear a jabbering from the ship that had run his boat down—the jabbering cackle of excited black men.

It was a native crew on the schooner, but the skipper, surely, was white. And any white skipper would heave-to, to save men whom he had run down in the darkness. But the schooner surged on, and the wreck of the whaleboat, and the cries of the men clinging to it, were lost.

Black Furley snarled with rage. Ruffian as he was, he would have stopped to save men from death in the sea. But the skipper of the schooner appeared to have no such thought. Alive or dead, clinging to the wrecked boat or sinking in the Pacific, the Lukwe crew were left to their fate.

"By hokey!" Black Furley growled. "The scum—the lubberly swabs!"

He alone had leaped to safety. His five comrades, and Keefe, the pearler, were left astern of the schooner, lost in the black night. The cries that he had heard showed that some of them, at least, were clinging to the wreck. And the schooner that had run them down was standing on her course unheeding, leaving them to death.

Black Furley dragged himself up on the bowsprit, snarling with rage. He could hear the jabbering of the native crew, but evidently they had not seen

him, and did not know that a man had leaped from the wrecked boat to the bowsprit of their vessel.

He groped for the revolver in his belt, to make sure that it was safe and ready, and then crawled along the bowsprit to the fore-castle head. His teeth were set, his eyes glinting. If the skipper of this unknown craft was not the man to heave-to to save sinking sailormen, Black Furley was the man to make him, at the muzzle of a pistol.

A voice reached him as he clambered along, the voice of a native.

"My word, sar, that feller boat go along bottom sea. S'pose this hooker go about, sar, along pick up feller belong that boat?"

"Feller belong boat stop along sca, you feller Pipiteto," a soft voice, not the voice of a South Sea native, answered. "No wantee along this hooker."

Black Furley crawled on the fore-castle. He had a glimpse of the man who spoke—a diminutive figure in loose-flowing tunic and a big Chinese hat. He had seen the man before, and knew him—Wu Fang!

Furley rose to his feet, the revolver in his hand now.

"You yellow scum!" he roared.

Wu Fang spun round with a yell of surprise, and there was a jabber of amazement from the Santa Cruz boys as the black-bearded ruffian leaped from the fore-castle to the deck.

Dandy Peter fancied that he was dreaming or delirious, as he lay stretched on his back on the schooner's deck, his feet tied to a heavy spar, his arms bound to his sides.

He tried to cry out, but only a hoarse gasp came from his parched, crackled throat. He could not speak, only listen, with wildly beating heart. Like the roar of an enraged bull, the voice of Black Furley thundered through the schooner.

"Bout ship, you lubberly Chink! You'll leave white men to the sharks, will you, you pig-tailed son of a slush-bucket! 'Bout ship!"

The brawny ruffian of Lukwe towered over the little Chink, who stared at him like a man in a dream, his almond eyes distended. Davy Jones rising from his locker could hardly have astounded the yellow man more than the sight of Black Furley on his deck.

"Feller Furley!" gasped Wu Fang.

"Feller Furley belong Lukwe!" stammered Pipiteto.

Black Furley glared at them over his half-raised revolver.

"You hear me, car belong you?" he roared. "'Bout ship, you heathen! By hokey, if you don't put the schooner about this minute, you're a dead Chink!"

"Feller Furley talk plenty too much, mouth belong him!" snarled Wu Fang, his slanting eyes glittering like snake's. "Feller schooner belong this Chinaman, no belong feller Furley."

"You've run my boat down!" bel-lowed Furley. "You'd leave my crew to drown, would you? Put the ship about, you dog, or I'll drop you on your own deck!"

The Chinaman leaped back from the Lukwe ruffian's threatening face and lifted revolver, yelled to his crew, and tore out a revolver from under his loose tunic.

And the blacks, strong in numbers, obeyed his call and swarmed at the white man, knives and belaying-pins in their hands.

Black Furley did not retreat an inch.

"Back, you scum!" he roared.

His revolver spat at the same moment. Wu Fang dodged round the mainmast, and escaped the bullet, and next second Black Furley was firing into the thick of the crew.

The Santa Cruz boys broke and ran, the burly ruffian of Lukwe chasing them along the deck like rabbits.

Wild howls rang from the panic-stricken blacks as they ran, twisted and dodged, four of them diving into the fore-castle, one or two down the companion, and the others clambering

madly into the rigging. Even the man at the wheel deserted his post and ran below.

Wu Fang dodged into the companion, where he turned to fire at the Lukwe ruffian, a hurried shot from a shaking hand that missed by a yard. Then the Chink scuttled below.

"You scum!" roared Black Furley, storming along the deck, where three or four half-stunned blacks crouched and groaned.

He pitched bullets into the fore-castle, and the terrified blacks howled and dodged and crouched. Then, as he turned to tramp aft, he stumbled over a figure spread-eagled on the deck. For a moment he supposed that it was one of the crew who had fallen, then stared in amazement at a glimmering white face. A husky voice, cracked and broken, barely audible, came in a whisper.

"Furley! Bear a hand, shipmate!"

"By hokey!" Black Furley fairly stuttered in his amazement as he bent down and stared at the bound man. "Dandy Peter, by thunder!"

"Give me water!"

"Peter Parsons!" repeated Furley blankly. "By hokey!"

He rose and stared along the deck. For the moment he was master of it. The only blacks in sight were clinging to the rigging, staring down at him in terror.

Laying down his revolver for a moment, Furley whipped open his sheath-knife, and cut the ropes that fastened Dandy Peter. Then he grasped the revolver again, his watchful eyes about him.

Dandy Peter made an effort to rise, groaned, and crawled on his hands and knees to the water-keg by the fore-mast. Black Furley watched him in wonder. He was amazed to find the sea-lawyer of Lukwe a prisoner on the Chink's schooner.

But only for a few minutes did his eyes linger on Dandy Peter. He was thinking of his crew, far behind the schooner on the darkened sea. He

stared up at the blacks in the rigging, and waved his revolver, shouting savagely to them:

"You feller boy, you comey along deck! You jump along order, along me, you savvy, or me knock seven bells outer your black hides!"

"You no shoot along this feller black boy, sar!" gabbled Pipiteto, from the cross-trees. "This feller good boy along you, sar."

"Show a leg, you black trash!" roared Furley. "This feller skipper along this hooker now, by hokey! My word, you no jump along order along me, you go along inside feller shark plenty too quick!"

"Yessar! Us feller good feller along you, sar!" babbled the Santa Cruz blacks.

Not a black man on the schooner had a thought of contesting further with the bull-voiced ruffian from Lukwe. In his cabin the Chink raged alone, while the black crew tumbled up at the order of the man who had taken command of his ship.

Pipiteto took the wheel, and the black crew hastened to obey the roaring voice of the Lukwe skipper. Furley hardly wasted a thought on the Chink lurking in the cabin. He roared his orders to the black crew, and the schooner was put about, to search the sea for the wreck of the whaleboat.

Wu Fang's almond eyes glittered in the light of the smoky cabin lamp as there was a footstep in the companion. The Chink had been listening to the tramping of naked feet on deck, the swing of the booms and the rattle of the blocks, the roar of Black Furley, and the scared jabbering of the blacks.

But Wu Fang was thinking less of the ruffian who had dispossessed him of his ship than of the sea-lawyer whom he had tortured, and who was now a free man. And when he heard the footstep in the companion, he guessed who was coming, and his hand sought a knife under his tunic. It was Dandy Peter who entered the cabin.

his eyes glittering from his blistered face, a capstan bar in his hand.

The Chink's hand flew up, with the knife in it, and the whizzing blade missed the sea-lawyer by barely an inch as he ducked.

The next moment the Chink was dodging frantically round the cabin, with cat-like agility, and eluding the crashing capstan bar in Dandy Peter's hand. He darted into the companion and flew for the deck, with the sea-lawyer at his heels, panting with rage.

Black Furley was standing by the man at the wheel, searching the dark sea with his eyes.

The Lukwe skipper had almost forgotten Wu Fang, when the Chinaman ran out of the companion and dodged aft, with Dandy Peter in pursuit. Furley stared at the terrified Chink, and burst into a hoarse laugh as Wu Fang doubled behind him for protection. He stepped into Dandy Peter's way and waved him back.

"Avast, there!" he roared.

"Stand aside, Furley!" snarled the sea-lawyer. "You know how you found me here! I'm getting that Chink!"

"Who's skipper of this packet?" roared Furley threateningly. "You'll jump to orders like the niggers, Parsons, or you'll go over the side! Drop that bar, or, by hokey, I'll drop you!"

The ruffian's six-shooter was jammed almost in the face of Dandy Peter. For a moment Parsons looked as if he would rush on it, and Black Furley's eyes blazed over the barrel. Then the capstan bar went with a clang to the deck.

"You swab!" snarled Dandy Peter. "You've seized the schooner—that's piracy! For your neck's sake, you want to put that Chink into the Pacific!"

"No killy this pool Chinee!" wailed Wu Fang. "Handsome Captain Furley no killy this pool Chinee!"

"Stand back, Parsons!" growled Furley. "I've seized this schooner to pick up my men, and I reckon I'm sailing her from now on, seeing that

my boat's gone to the bottom. I reckon the Chink's got himself to thank for that. But I never was a piratical thief like you, Peter Parsons, and I'm stealing no man's ship, so belay your jawing tackle!"

"If you stood in my boots this blessed minute, you'd put me over the side, and you know it! I reckon I ain't that kind of a swab. But if you sail on this hooker, you sail under orders—and if you jib at that, I'll make the niggers tie you up again as I found you!"

Parsons answered only with a snarl of rage, but he stood back. Black Furley turned to the cringing Chink.

"As for you," he growled, "you've run my craft down, and you'd have left my men to drown, durn your yellow hide! I'm borrowing your schooner to finish my cruise, and if you've got any objection to make, cough it up, and I'll leave you to Peter Parsons."

"This Chinaman likee plenty too much Cap'n Furley takee schooner," panted Wu Fang.

"Like it or lump it, that goes!" snapped Furley. "I reckon your niggers won't give me any more trouble. And if you give any trouble, you yellow-skinned, heathen, you go to the sharks, plenty too quick!"

"No givee touble, O Born-before-me!" gasped Wu Fang.

"You'll get your ship back when I've done with it," added Furley. "You've sunk my boat, and I've got no choice. But when we raise Lukwe again, I'm done with you and your schooner. Keep your hands off the Chink, Parsons, or you'll deal with me. I've shot three niggers since I stepped on this hooker, and I'll send you after them as soon as look at you!"

With that, the Lukwe skipper gave no further heed to either Parsons or the Chink. He stared over the shadowy sea in anxious search for the whaleboat. The schooner was circling back, and the clang of the ship's bell rang far over the waters.

Furley signed to the black at the bell to be silent, and bent his ear to listen. In the darkness, it was hardly possible to see a couple of fathoms from the schooner's side, but the ship, with the lanterns gleaming from her rigging, must have been visible to the wrecked crew if they were still afloat, and the clang of the bell must have reached them.

Furley's rugged, black-bearded face brightened as there came the faint sound of a distant call over the dark waters. He put his hands to his mouth to make a trumpet, and roared back:

"Ahoy! Ahoy, shipmates!"

"Ahoy!" came the distant call from the sea.

Furley rapped orders to the helmsman. Again and again came the calling voices, as the schooner glided down to the wreck.

In the flare of the lanterns the Lukwe crew were revealed at last, clinging to the wreck of the boat. Furley counted the faces that stared up from the sea—Keefe the pearler, Dick Finn, and two others. Two of the Lukwe crew had gone down, but the rest had clung to the wreckage, and were holding on, rocking in the wash of the schooner.

Ropes were thrown, and the survivors of the Lukwe crew clambered on board the Flamingo. And they were hardly on deck before Black Furley was shouting orders to the crew, and the schooner was making sail for the Island of Pearls.

CHAPTER 15.

The Cannibal Island!

"LAND!" exclaimed the mate of the Dawn. "Keefe's island at last, Ken!"

Ken looked at the feathery waving palms against the deep blue of the sky. Then his glance swept over the sea. Lonely, untenant, the Pacific stretched on all sides. Seldom, indeed, did a sail glance on those solitary

waters, or a steamer's smoke blue the horizon. The ketch and her crew seemed to have a world of water to themselves.

"It's the island, Ken!" said Hudson. "Keefe's island—no doubt about that! I reckon we're first in the field—we've beaten Black Furley."

"I reckon so! And we dropped Wu Fang and his schooner far away," answered King of the Islands. "I fancy the Chink suspected something, Kit, to make him follow us from Lukwe. But I reckon we're done with the Chink, though Furley's a different proposition."

"We shall see Furley in the offing sooner or later, and Keefe with him. It will be a surprise to him to find us here—and to Keefe, too! It may come to fighting when Furley and his crew butt in."

"Let it," said Hudson carelessly. "We'll give those Lukwe swabs all they want, and a little over."

Higher and higher rose the tall palms from the sea, as the ketch ran down to the island.

The shipmates watched with eager eyes. Few white men had ever looked on that lonely island before—none, so far as they knew, but Keefe and his pearling crew, of whom only the man from the Paumotus had got away alive. They had combed the lagoon for oysters, rotted them on the beach, and found a treasure in pearls. But the pearls were still on the island, and the heads of the pearling crew smoked in the canoe-houses of Tame'eto and his bucks.

King of the Islands shortened sail, and circled the surf-beaten reef, looking for the passage into the lagoon.

More and more natives appeared from the palms and from the dark openings of the bush, and staring eyes were turned on the ketch. The gleam of spears could be seen in the sunshine, and from the distance the deep drone of a beaten drum boomed across the lagoon.

Ken expected trouble with the natives, for he had had one brush with their war canoes under the command of Tame'eto, their chief.

Tame'eto's canoe was still far out at sea, and the sight of the tall sails was the first intimation the islanders had that a white man's ship was in the offing. But the news was spreading fast over Aya-ua.

A break in the line of creaming surf told the location of the reef passage. King of the Islands scanned it keenly. On one side of the channel were low-stretching reefs, barely covered at low water, thick with seaweed to a height of twenty feet above the sea.

On the uneven summit of the cliff three or four blacks could be seen, and as the ketch turned her prow towards the channel, they were joined by more from the inner beach. King of the Islands eyed them grimly as the Dawn neared the reef.

Lompo, at the helm, rolled his eyes uneasily at the Aya-ua blacks gathered on the coral cliff, staring down at the approaching vessel. To enter the lagoon, the ketch had to pass within three fathoms of the cliff on which the natives were bunched.

"Steady, Lompo!" snapped King of the Islands. "Kit, let them have it if they lift a finger!"

"Leave it to me!" said Hudson. His rifle was in his hands, his finger on the trigger.

An arrow whizzed in the air and dropped on the ketch, sticking quivering in the planks. A spear came whizzing, falling hardly a fathom short.

It was a warning of what was coming, and the ketch was gliding into closer range. Once in the reef channel it would be fairly under the showering of spears and arrows from the cliff, and from such a fusillade hardly a man on deck could have escaped alive.

Hudson's rifle was clamped to his shoulder, and he pulled trigger. The

Winchester sent a stream of bullets into the thick of the blacks.

Wild yells and howls answered, and the blacks scattered and ran from the fire. Three of them, bolder than the rest, stood fast and drove whizzing arrows at the ketch, one of which carried the hat from the head of King of the Islands. Hudson, with a grim face, streamed bullets at the savage bowmen. Two of them rolled over on the coral, and did not stir again, and the third tossed his bow aside and ran.

The coral was clear of natives as the ketch glided under the cliff. Yells and howls sounded from a distance, but the Aya-ua blacks did not seek close quarters again. Hudson watched with ready rifle, but it was not needed.

There was deep water in the channel and a clear passage, and in a few minutes the prow of the Dawn was cleaving the shining waters of the lagoon. King of the Island stood on across the lagoon, and the anchor was dropped in sixty feet of water a quarter of a mile from the beach.

On the beach the blacks swarmed, yelling and shouting, and the beating of the war-drum came with an incessant drone from the bush.

"We've raised Keefe's island, Ken," chuckled Kit. "And I reckon we've raised a hornets' nest at the same time! I'm not surprised that the Paumotus crew got wiped out now I've seen the show. But I'm surprised Keefe got away alive when the rest were kai-kaied."

"We're seeing it through, though, Kit," said King of the Islands.

"You bet!" said Hudson tersely.

But King of the Islands, as he looked with thoughtful eyes at the swarming beach, wondered whether they had reached the Island of Pearls only to leave their heads to be smoked in the wood fires in the canoe-houses of Tame'eto!

"Plenty too much black feller, my word!" said Koko.

His face was grave as he looked

across the sunlit lagoon of Aya-ua. So were the faces of the remainder of the Hiva-Oa boys.

Ken King was standing by the rail watching a fleet of high-prowed canoes gathering on the lagoon, every one packed with black men.

By his side stood Kit Hudson, rifle in hand, a faint grin on his sunburnt face.

Round the lagoon circled the beach of white sand and powdered coral, shelving up to the palm-trees, and broken only where a passage through the reefs gave access to the Pacific.

Back of the palm-trees was high, thick bush, which covered the island from the inner beach to the outer reef. It was a large island, and more than one tribe dwelt on it, waging endless warfare on one another in the dark runways of the bush.

Far as they were from other islands, the natives were accustomed to cannibal feasts following the fighting, and in the canoe-house of Tame'eto, chief of the tribe dwelling near the lagoon, many heads smoked in the wood fires.

"There's trouble brewing, Ken!" remarked Hudson.

"Looks like it!" King of the Islands agreed.

"We had plenty of trouble picking up Keefe's island!" Kit went on. "It wasn't easy to get here, and it looks as though it's going to be a jolly lot harder to get away again."

"I'm not thinking of getting away, Kit! And you're not?"

"No fear—we're seeing it through."

There was time for King of the Islands, had he chosen, to lift the anchor and sail out into the Pacific before the crowd of canoes closed round his ketch. But the boy trader did not choose.

"There's Tame'eto!" Hudson pointed with the rifle to the tall chief of Aya-ua, standing in one of the canoes. Brass ear ornaments, and a brass ring in his broad, black nose, glistened in the sun. "I could get him at this range!"

"We won't fire the first shot."

"Right-ho!" agreed Hudson. His rifle-butt dropped to the deck. "But it's going to be a dickens of a scrap, Ken!"

"No doubt about that! We've offered them peace and fair trade, but they choose scrapping. Let 'em get on with it!" said King of the Islands. He glanced at Koko's grave, brown face and smiled. "You feller Koko, you no fright along plenty too much black feller?"

"Me no fright, sar!" answered Koko, with a sniff. "Tinkee plaps head belong me smoke plenty soon, along canoe-house belong Tame'eto! But me no fright along black feller! Me no common Kanaka, sar!"

"Right! Up hook!" ordered King of the Islands.

The boatswain's whistle piped, and the Hiva-Oa boys' brown faces brightened as they rushed to lift the anchor. At least two hundred blacks were gathering in the war-canoes by the beach, a quarter of a mile away, and the Kanaka crew would have liked nothing better than to run out to sea.

The wind was ruffling the shining surface of the lagoon, and it filled the foresail and jib as the canvas was shaken out. But King of the Islands was not thinking of running out to sea. There was ample room for handling the ketch in the wide lagoon, and he did not intend to remain at anchor when the islanders attacked.

"This feller ketch go along sea, sar?" asked Lompo at the wheel.

"This feller ketch stop along lagoon!" answered Ken. "This feller ketch plenty kill canoe belong Tame'eto bimeby!"

All round the ketch, above the rail, were lines of barbed wire to keep off boarders. That was a precaution often taken by South Sea traders in dangerous waters—and there were no waters in the Pacific so dangerous as the lagoon of Aya-ua that bright morning.

Every man on the ketch was armed with repeating rifle and axe. Behind the

barbed wire, few as they were in numbers, they could give a good account of themselves. But King of the Islands knew that it was likely enough that the Dawn would never sail again from Aya-ua!

Keefe the pearler was the only survivor of the pearling lugger from the Paumotus that had raised pearls in the lagoon, and what had happened to his lugger might happen to the ketch. But the boy trader was as cool as ice.

"Black feller come!" announced Koko. The canoes were putting off from the beach. Twelve tall-prowed canoes, crammed with black fighting-men, headed for the Dawn across the shining waters. By the grass-houses on the beach, a crowd of islanders stood and watched, and the dull drone of a war-drum sounded from the distance.

In the leading canoe stood Tame'eto, his brass ornaments shining, a spear glistening in his hand. His fierce eyes were fixed on the ketch, which was now gliding through the water under easy sail. At a gesture from the chief, the canoes spread out to surround the white man's ship.

Every black face was fierce and set. The plunder of the ship meant untold wealth to the blacks. And more attractive than the plunder was the prospect of the cannibal feast, and of heads smoked as trophies in the wood fires.

Many heads smoked in the canoe-house of Tame'eto, tended by the devil-doctors—white men's heads as well as black—and the fierce chief of Aya-ua had no doubt that he was going to add to the number.

As the chief's canoe drew nearer, King of the Islands raised his hand and shouted to Tame'eto. It was war—war to the death—but he gave the black chief a last warning.

"You feller chief Tame'eto, you stop along beach! You hear me, ear belong you?"

"Me hear you, sar!" answered Tame'eto contemptuously. "This feller big chief come along ship belong you, kill-dead every feller, smoke head be-

long you, along canoe-house, my word! This feller no fright along you, sar!"

"He's asking for it!" said Kit Hudson, and lifted his rifle. Tame'eto ducked under the high prow of the canoe as the rifle cracked, and the bullet whizzed over his black shoulder and passed through one of the paddlers behind. The paddler sprawled over, yelling. Tame'eto shouted and waved his spear, and the paddles flashed like lightning as the crowd of canoes rushed at the ketch.

King of the Islands snapped an order. The ketch swung towards the chief's canoe, and rushed it down before the paddlers could dodge the collision. Wild yells rose from the blacks as the cut-water came crashing through the canoe, smashing it and sinking it, and leaving Tame'eto and his warriors struggling in the water.

But almost in the same moment a canoe closed in on either side of the ketch, fierce black hands took hold, and savage faces and flashing spears and axes swarmed up over the rail.

"Fire!" King of the Islands shouted. Every rifle on board sent bullets into fierce black faces and brawny bodies swarming up the sides. The ketch rushed on over the wreck of Tame'eto's canoe, leaving the chief and his men swimming far astern. Swift as the canoes were, the Dawn, with her foresail and jib bellying in the wind, was swifter, and the greater part of the Aya-ua war fleet dropped behind.

Two canoes were holding on, their crews clambering up the side, to be met by shot and steel. But for the lines of barbed wire, the ketch would have been boarded, and the struggle would have been hand to hand on her deck—a struggle that could have ended only one way against such overwhelming odds.

The blacks screamed and yelled as they struggled at the wire. And all the time tearing lead and flashing axes met them from the Dawn's crew, crashing them back.

Koko's heavy axe rose and fell with

lightning swiftness, and every blow sent a yelling savage splashing into the water. Heads cracked under the iron saucepan wielded by Danny the cooky-boy.

Tomoo, Kolulo, and Lufu blazed away with their rifles, and at point-blank range even the excited Kanakas did not miss.

Of all the savage swarm that came up the sides of the ketch, only one got through the barbed wire and reached the deck—to fall under a bullet from King of the Islands' revolver.

The Dawn swept on, leaving the two canoes rocking on the water, with but two or three men in each. Swimmers struggled in the water, and among them black fins and hideous snouts appeared. There were sharks in the Aya-ua lagoon, and the sharks were active! And few of the blacks who fell into the water succeeded in scrambling back into the canoes.

King of the Islands looked back as the last clambering savage was struck away by Koko's axe. The war-canoes were paddling fiercely in pursuit of the ketch.

The Dawn was close to the reef passage now, and probably the islanders supposed that Ken was seeking to escape to the open sea. They paddled with savage energy. Escape would have been impossible, for in the passage of the reefs Ken would have had to pick his way slowly. The canoes would have closed in on him, and there would have been no room for manoeuvring.

But King of the Islands was not thinking of escape. Within half a cable's length of the reef, the Dawn spun round in the wind as the boy skipper rapped an order. Almost across the noses of the cluster of canoes she shot across to the distant beach. With a burst of fierce yells, the canoe crews swung in pursuit again.

Crack! rang the rifles from the ketch, and over the taffrail a stream of bullets pitched into the crowded canoes,

sending paddler after paddler sprawling.

"Keep it up, old man," said Ken to Hudson. "We're not out of the wood yet. Keep them at arm's length, and we've got them on toast!"

Hudson pumped bullets at the canoes, and every whizzing shot rolled over a yelling savage. Keeping the enemy at arm's length was the game, and luckily for the Dawn's crew there was plenty of sea room.

The boom swung and the canvas roared as the ketch tacked across the lagoon and came about. Whizzing spears crashed on her sides and flew over the deck. But not one of the canoes came close enough to board.

The Dawn turned on them like a hunted stag turning on hounds and came rushing down on the canoe fleet before the wind. Crash came the Dawn's prow, and one canoe, and then another, crumpled under, and then a third. Three canoes had gone to wreck, two score of savages to the sharks.

But as the Dawn swept on through the savage fleet, the others clustered round her. Once more black hands grasped, and ferocious faces rose over the rail. Axes slashed and spears thrust, and the Dawn's crew fought furiously to drive off the attack.

Again the barbed wire held back the swarm, and the ketch rushed on, leaving the canoes astern. Twenty or more savages were clinging to her, striving to reach the deck. Axe and rifle-butt knocked off man after man into the water, to the jaws of the tiger-sharks waiting below.

Running before the wind, the ketch dropped the war-fleet behind. And now the Hiva-Oa boys were cackling with glee as they blazed away at the enemy. They saw victory ahead. Eight canoes were afloat, four were wrecked, and half the swarm of blacks had fallen to the sharks.

And when the Dawn came about again, the islanders put the canoes about and made for the beach, paddling

frantically to escape before the tall, sharp prow could come crashing among them.

"Black feller no stop!" chuckled Koko. "My word, black feller no likee stop along this feller ketch!"

"Our win, Ken!" gasped Hudson, dropping his rifle-butt and mopping his streaming brow.

"Black feller run along beach!" chuckled Danny. "Black feller he no likee stop along inside feller shark."

The ketch stood on towards the fleeing canoes rapidly overhauling them, frantically as the blacks paddled.

King of the Islands would gladly have spared an enemy who was running, but the black islanders of Aya-ua had to learn to leave a white man's ship alone. He ordered the Kanakas to cease firing.

The savages were not yelling now. In the way of the savage they had changed almost in a moment from mad ferocity to panic terror. Kneeling in the canoes, they strained every nerve to escape, paddling with lightning speed for the beach, where a crowd of other blacks watched them from the grass-houses under the palms.

Crash! The hindmost canoe went crumpling under the prow of the Dawn. The black crew swam for their lives, and not a shot was fired from the ketch. The Hiva-Oa boys stood ready for an attempt to board, but the blacks were now thinking only of escape from the terrible white men who had taken such a toll of their tribe.

Another canoe went under the water, and its crew splashed into the lagoon, swimming wildly for the beach. Six canoes won the frantic race. They crashed on the sand, and the crews scrambled wildly ashore and raced up the beach, leaving the canoes at the mercy of the victor. Swimmers struggled out of the water and went running for the grass-houses, while the ketch hovered at a cable's length from the shore.

Among the dripping figures on the beach the shipmates saw Tame'eto for a moment running as hard as the rest. The chief of Aya-ua had escaped with

his life, but a hundred of his tribesmen had gone to the sharks of the lagoon.

"Lower the whaleboat!" ordered Ken, and when that was done, he stepped into it with Koko and Kolulo, and it pulled for the beach.

Kit Hudson stood rifle in hand, ready to cover them with his fire if the blacks turned. But the fleeing savages did not even stop at the village, but fled on beyond it into the bush, leaving the grass-houses deserted. The deep high bush of Aya-ua swallowed Tame'eto and his defeated savages.

The whaleboat reached the beach, where the abandoned canoes lay. Koko went from canoe to canoe with matches and a can of oil, and canoe after canoe shot up in flames. What remained of Tame'eto's war-fleet burned and roared when the whaleboat pulled back to the ketch.

"That's that!" said Kit Hudson, as King of the Islands stepped aboard. "I fancy they'll let us alone now, Ken!"

King of the Islands looked towards the beach. Not a native remained in sight—the beach that had swarmed with howling enemies was utterly deserted. He had sailed into a hornets' nest, but the hornets had had their lesson. And the boy trader hoped that he was done with Tame'eto and his cannibal crew for good and all.

CHAPTER 16.

The Desperate Swimmer.

BLACK FURLEY, in the cross-trees of the Flamingo, shaded his eyes and stared into the north-east. The sun was low in the west, the level blaze of the sunset turning the wide ocean to a sheet of crimson, shot with gold.

The twilight of the tropics, swift and short, was at hand. But there was enough left of the dying day to enable Furley to pick up the clustering palms that rose from the sea in the far distance. It was land at last, and the free-

booter of Lukwe knew that he was in sight of his goal.

Long and earnestly he stared at the distant palm-tops, a fringe on the sea that might have been anything to a landman's eyes, but which Furley knew to be trees and land.

From the deck, all these men, together with the crew of the Santa Cruz blacks, watched Furley. Every face was eager and excited. He slithered down the rigging at last. There was a look of satisfaction on his sunburnt, black-bearded face.

"I reckon it's the island," he said. "Keefe, you figure that it's your pearl island?"

"If you've sighted land, it's the island," answered the pearler. "There's no other land in these seas—except reefs and rocks—for a hundred miles at least. It's Ayu-ua—that's what the niggers call it."

"We shan't make it before sundown," said Furley. "I reckon we'll stand off till morning, and then run into the lagoon. You know the channel, Keefe? You ran the reef when you were here in your lugger with the Paumotus crew."

Keefe nodded.

Furley and his men were eager, excited, but the Paumotus pearler's brow was dark. It was not willingly that he had set a course for the Island of Pearls as a member of Black Furley's crew. But he still had a faint hope that Ken King's ketch might be sighted when Ayu-ua was raised.

"What's the passage like?" asked Furley.

"Easy enough to run in the daylight. At night, you'd pile the schooner up on the coral!" answered Keefe.

"We run it at sunrise, then! We'll run down to the island, and stand off till dawn," said Black Furley. "We're in luck!" he chuckled. "I reckoned the game was up when the Chink ran down our boat, but the luck's held!" He glanced, with a jeering grin, at the yellow face of Wu Fang. That yellow mask of a face remained impassive, but the slanting eyes gleamed.

"We've lost two of our crew and the boat," went on Furley. "That leaves five of us to share—us four and Keefe! I reckon that you'll own that we're treating you white, Keefe. What do you figure Peter Parsons would do in my place—with the island in sight, and nobody wanted to steer a course? Your share would be a bar of lead at your heels and a dip in the Pacific. Lucky for you we ain't that kind of swabs, Keefe."

"And where do I come in, Furley?" asked Peter Parsons.

"You don't come in at all. Peter Parsons," answered Furley surlily. "You had your chance at Lukwe. If you'd offered us shares, we'd have gone in with you. You left us out—and now, by hokey, you're left out! We found you a prisoner on this schooner, with the Chink putting you to torture—I reckon you're lucky we saved your life. You don't come into this game."

"You'd better think again, Furley —"

"Belay your jawing tackle!" interrupted Furley roughly. "You're a passenger on this craft, Parsons—and a passenger that's not wanted. If I were your sort of swab I'd put you over the side and get shut of you, and you know it! Keep quiet while you've got a whole skin!"

Dandy Peter made no reply. He lounged away and stood by the rail, staring moodily towards the distant blur on the sea that was Ayu-ua.

He was, as Black Furley had said, out of the game—lucky to be given a passage on the schooner to watch his rivals take possession of the treasure of Ayu-ua!

But if a chance came, Dandy Peter was the man to jump at it, and he had not yet abandoned hope of getting his hands on the pearls.

The schooner surged on before the wind as the sun sank lower. Higher and clearer the distant palm-trees rose to view, and before the sun dipped, the Lukwe crew had a glimpse of the coral

reefs and the white foam of the eternal surf that broke round the island.

Darkness fell on the Pacific. Under shortened sail, the schooner stood on towards the island, as the glittering stars came out in the sky.

Dandy Peter had wondered whether Wu Fang would make some attempt to turn the tables on the freebooters who had seized his schooner. But there was no sign of it. If treachery could serve the Chink's turn, he would not fail. But he dared not lift a hand against the Lukwe ruffians, and the black crew would never have backed him if he had.

Black Furley had the Santa Cruz boys feeding from his hand, and Pipiteto, the mate, jumped to his orders as he had never jumped to the orders of the Chink.

A mile from the island the Flamingo was hove-to, to wait for dawn. The night was calm, the sea smooth.

Dandy Peter moved about restlessly, listening every now and then to the muttered talk of the Lukwe crew, smoking and staring towards the shadowy island and across the starlit sea.

Dandy Peter leaned on the rail again, staring towards the dim island. A few hours to sunrise, then the schooner would make the reef passage and drop anchor in the lagoon of Aya-ua. And then he would look on while the pearls were lifted and the Lukwe crew sailed away with the fortune he was not to share.

He knew Keefe's story of the Paumotus crew and what had happened at the pearl island. They had made a rich find, rotted out the oysters, and packed the pearls in a tapa sack hidden in the bush. Then they had searched for more pearl-oysters, without finding any, till the blacks came down on them. As often happened, there had been a rich patch of oysters in one spot, and the Paumotus crew had exhausted it.

There would be no delay at the island. It was only a question of lifting the hidden sack of pearls on which Keefe could lay his finger, and then up anchor

and away. And Dandy Peter was to look on, lucky if he was not left marooned at the mercy of the cannibals when the schooner sailed.

But running in Dandy Peter's mind were the babbled words of the pearler, when the man had been a prisoner in his hands and babbling in delirium—"A cable's length on the beach—five fathoms in the bush!" That was where the cache of pearls lay. Parsons had no doubt about that.

There could be no other meaning to the words the sick man had muttered again and again. The sack of pearls was hidden in the bush at some spot a cable's length from the lagoon and five fathoms from the edge of the bush. Likely enough, near the spot where the lugger's crew had camped and rotted out the oysters—a spot it would be easy enough to locate from the heaps of shells.

A resolve was growing in the desperate heart of Dandy Peters as he thought it over and stared in the dim starlight towards Aya-ua.

There were cannibals on the island—a swarm of savages, according to Keefe. They had massacred the lugger's crew, only Keefe escaping, through happening to be on board the lugger when his comrades were attacked on shore. By a miracle he had got out to sea and escaped. But Peter Parsons gave little thought to the savages. The thought of the pearls and of beating Black Furley dominated his mind.

His resolve became fixed as he stood there leaning on the rail, staring shoreward. It was a mile to the dim mass of Aya-ua, but a mile in a calm sea was nothing to a swimmer like Peter Parsons. If there was a chance of getting ahead of his rivals, and unearthing the cache of pearls, no thought of danger was likely to stop him.

With the treasure in his hands he could make terms with the Lukwe crew, or he might steal a native canoe and escape to sea. At least, he could defeat his rivals.

Dandy Peter made up his mind. He

stood up from the rail and glanced round the shadowed deck.

The schooner was burning no lights—Black Furley did not want to advertise his arrival to the natives, if they were on the watch. From the shadows came the muttering voices of Harris, Preece, and Finn. Aft, he picked out the red glow of Black Furley's pipe. Most of the Santa Cruz boys were asleep on their mats, but, in any case, he had nothing to fear from them.

Softly, silently, Dandy Peter slipped over the rail and held on with his hands, his feet swinging over the calm water. As soon as he dropped, the Lukwe crew would hear the splash and know that he had gone—would know why he had gone. Bullets might be splashing round him in the sea as he swam.

For a long moment he held on to the schooner's rail. Then, with set teeth, he let go his hold and dropped. Splash! The next moment he was swimming, heading for the island with long, rapid strokes. There was an outburst of voices on the schooner. Black Furley leaped to his feet, dropping his pipe and grasping his revolver. Dick Finn gave a shout and pointed to a dark head on the water, where the shining sea parted and rippled under the swift strokes of the swimmer.

"Dandy Peter's gone!" yelled Finn.

"By hokey!" Furley rushed to the side, revolver in hand. He roared to the swimmer, his bull-voice booming far over the sea.

"You swab! Come back, Peter Parsons; come about, you lubber, or I'll riddle you!" Bang! The revolver roared and a bullet splashed into the water a yard from the swimmer.

The Lukwe crew clustered at the rail, staring after Dandy Peter, who was swimming swiftly and strongly, already vanishing into the shadows of the sea.

"The madman!" said Keefe. "He has gone to his death!"

"He's gone after the pearls," Furley roared.

"He'll never find the pearls," said

Keefe quietly. "He will find his death on Aya-ua! If he reaches the beach the blacks will get him!"

Furley lowered his revolver. He hesitated, doubtful whether to lower a boat and hunt for the escaping sea-lawyer. But he shrugged his burly shoulders at last.

"Let him go!" he growled. "I reckon if the niggers kill him, nobody in the Pacific will miss Dandy Peter. Let him go!"

"Aye," agreed Finn. "Let him go! He can't do us any harm. If what Keefe says is true, the niggers'll get him before he gets anywhere near the pearls!"

Parsons had taken a desperate chance—more desperate than he knew. The Lukwe crew had no doubt that Keefe was right and that Dandy Peter had gone to his death. And to Dandy Peter himself, as he swam under the stars, it seemed only too likely.

CHAPTER 17.

Five Fathoms in the Bush.

"**K**ING of the Islands!" Dandy Peter breathed the words in utter wonder. He looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Sunrise was creeping over the Pacific and the island of Aya-ua. The tall fronds of the palm-trees glistened in the coming light, and the lagoon caught the gleam. Day was coming, and Dandy Peter, waking in his bed scraped out in the sand of the beach, rose and looked about him. And almost the first object that he saw was a ketch at anchor far out in the lagoon.

For some moments he could not believe what he saw. King of the Islands at Aya-ua! He had believed him hundreds of miles away—perhaps gone back to his island trade, or still seeking the kidnapped pearler—anywhere but at Aya-ua.

Parsons stood on the coral beach and stared blankly. He had made good his swim to the island and landed on

the reef. Even then his energy had not been exhausted, and he had circled the inner beach surrounding the lagoon, seeking the spot where the Paumotus crew had rotted out the oysters for pearls.

And he had found the place. There was still a lingering smell of the rotting oysters by the heaps of shells, and he was left in no doubt that he was near the spot. Then, at last, he had slept till sunrise, resolved to begin his search for the cache of pearls at the first glimpse of day. But even the pearls were forgotten now as he stared with blank eyes at the ketch anchored in the lagoon.

He knew the Dawn well enough by sight, and if he had doubted what craft it was he could not have doubted whose was the slim, sturdy figure pacing the after-deck, rifle under arm, keeping watch and ward. It was Ken King.

A brown-skinned native rose from a sleeping-mat on the ketch's deck, and Parsons recognised the gigantic figure of Koko, the boatswain. The boy skipper and the big boatswain stood looking across the lagoon in the opposite direction from Dandy Peter. Something on the beach on the eastern side of the lagoon seemed to draw their attention, and Parsons wondered what it was.

He stared in the same direction, and, wide as the lagoon was, he could make out the grass village of the natives on the other side. It seemed deserted, for not a single native showed among the grass-houses. Neither was there a canoe to be seen on the surface of the lagoon.

On the Flamingo, Parsons had caught talk among Keefe and the Lukwe crew, and learned from it that the pearler had some vague idea, or hope, that Ken King might be at Aya-ua. It had seemed a wild and impossible idea to Parsons, and he had given it no thought. Yet here was the Dawn, riding at anchor in the middle of the lagoon, with King of the Islands and his crew.

He dropped down among the coral rocks and wondered how long the ketch had been there. Days, perhaps—he could not guess. Had King of the Islands found the pearls and lifted them? Some unknown clue had led him to the island and if he had found the pearls, Dandy Peter was too late, and Black Furley and his crew were too late.

Parsons grinned at the thought of Black Furley's face when he brought the schooner into the lagoon and found King of the Islands there. Likely as not there would be shooting—it was certain that there would be shooting if Ken King had the pearls. Furley was not the man to sail away empty-handed, leaving the treasure to another.

Dandy Peter lay among the coral rocks and watched the ketch. He saw Kit Hudson join his shipmate on deck, and watched Danny bringing out breakfast for the white masters. He saw King of the Islands lift the binoculars to his eyes and sweep the whole circle of the lagoon with the powerful glasses. But he knew that the glasses would not pick him up in his cover.

He was puzzled by the fact that no natives showed among the grasshouses, or appeared on the beach. He wondered whether King of the Islands had already had trouble with the blacks, who had evidently taken to the bush.

In circling the lagoon after landing in the night, Dandy Peter realised he had passed close by the deserted native village, though he had not seen it in the dark. He had seen and heard nothing of the natives. If King of the Islands had frightened them away from the beach, so much the better. Unarmed and alone, Parsons was anxious to avoid the blacks.

He moved away at last, crawling up the beach, keeping as much as he could in cover of the coral rocks and ridges of sand. Thick on the beach were the piles of shell rotted out by the Paumotus pearlers. The wind that came with the dawn stirred the smell that still hung about the heaps.

Keefe and his companions had camped here, diving for oysters and rotting them out in the tropic sun—watched, no doubt, by the natives from the distance, while Tame'eto waited for a favourable opportunity of descending upon them.

The cache could not be far away—it would be somewhere near the pearlers' camp. In the soft sand, Dandy Peter left deep tracks as he moved; but his eyes, keenly about him, failed to pick up any other tracks. If they had landed here from the ketch there would be footprints in the sand.

He was soon sure that they had not landed, for not a single footprint was to be picked up by his searching eyes. Perhaps the niggers had attacked King of the Islands, and kept him busy. At all events, it was clear that he had not yet visited the scene of the massacre of the Paumotus crew. Dandy Peter, after all, was first in the field.

"A cable's length on the beach—five fathoms in the bush"—the babble of the delirious pearler ran in his mind.

Keeping low among the coral rocks and ridges of sand, in fear of being seen by a watchful eye from the ketch, Parsons moved slowly up the beach, counting his paces as he went. Back of the beach were nodding palms, and beyond the palms high bush, as was the case all over Aya-ua. But in most places the bush grew down within half a cable's length of the lagoon.

Back of the spot where the rotting shells lay there was a deep embayment in the bush, where the ground cropped out in rock, and even the hardy bush could not grow. In that spot Dandy Peter measured a full cable's length from high-water mark to the bush.

In that hollow of the bush, screened on three sides by the high jungle growth, he came on the fragments of what had been a hut of palm poles and pandanus thatch. This must have been a shelter put up by the Paumotus pearlers and dragged down by the natives after the massacre. This was the spot that was, as the delirious

pearler had babbled again and again, "a cable's length on the beach."

He reached the edge of the bush. There was no runway, and the bush rose almost like a wall; dark, thick—apparently impenetrable. But the keen eyes of Peter Parsons, searching along the wall of jungle, soon picked up sign of the spot where men had entered—a broken branch, with a fragment of a cotton shirt caught on thorns.

He pushed into the bush, and, impenetrable as it looked, wound his way among tangled thickets. Again and again his searching eyes picked up signs where men had trod before him. He counted his paces, measuring off five fathoms from the edge of the bush, then he stopped.

He was standing close by a massive baobab tree of immense girth, almost hidden by the bush that grew thick and tangled round it. His eyes scanned the ground, but there was no sign of the earth having been disturbed.

His first thought was that the sack of pearls had been buried there. But a keen examination of the ground proved that that was not the case. In a hollow of the tree—perhaps!

The baobab, massive and mighty as it may look to the eye, has a soft interior easy to scoop out with a knife. That was it!

In a flash, Dandy Peter knew it! A cable's length on the beach, five fathoms in the bush, stood that mighty baobab. And in a hollow of the huge trunk the sack of pearls was thrust out of sight. He knew it as if he had seen the pearlers at work.

Thick round the great trunk grew the bush, the hanging creepers, and the giant ferns, hiding what he sought. With gleaming eyes, Dandy Peter set himself to the search, thrusting his arm through the tangled growths, groping over the surface of the hidden trunk in quest of an opening. He laughed aloud as his fingers came on a soft spot, and sank into the seemingly solid trunk.

"The pearls!" breathed Dandy Peter.

He dragged at the tangled bush to clear the spot he had found. Suddenly he stopped, standing quite still, his heart leaping. There was rustling in the bush. Was it an echo of the noise he had made? After he had ceased to move, the rustling in the bush continued, close at hand, and it came from different points. He was not alone in the bush. Others were there—many others.

Dandy Peter's teeth came together, and his eyes burned. Had they seen him, after all, from the ketch, and landed; followed him into the bush, and surrounded him there? It must be King of the Islands.

From an opening of the tangled bush a face looked. But it was not the face of King of the Islands, or his mate, or one of his Kanakas. It was a black face, with nose pierced and ornamented with a brass ring. It was the face of Tame'eto, the black chief of Aya-ua, savage and ferocious, his eyes rolling and gleaming.

Dandy Peter knew nothing of Tame'eto; but as he saw that fierce black face he realised that the savages of Aya-ua were upon him.

Dandy Peter's heart almost stopped beating. Alone, unarmed, the pearls almost in his grasp, and the cannibals around him. All the pearls in the Pacific would have been of little use to him now.

No spear was lifted to strike, but that did not mean mercy—it meant capture, torture, and the cooking-oven!

Dandy Peter clenched his hands till the nails dug in the palms, Tame'eto, grinning hideously, pushed towards him through the tangle. Five fathoms in the bush, hidden from all eyes, and there were white men on the lagoon. They were enemies; but white men who would have saved even their most treacherous enemy from such a fate as hung over Parsons.

The recollection of King of the Islands came like a ray of light in darkness to the doomed man. Then hands were stretched out to seize him, but Dandy

Peter, with the spring of a tiger, leaped away, and plunged madly towards the lagoon.

There was a howl from the blacks, and they swarmed after him. A hand grasped his shoulder, he struck into a black face, and the man went down with a grunt. Another grasp, and another, but he twisted furiously and tore free. Branches caught him, thorns tore him, creepers tangled round him, hands clutched and grasped; but Dandy Peter tore on and burst out of the bush, with the Aya-ua blacks whooping behind.

He ran madly for the lagoon, screaming and shrieking. Only King of the Islands could help him now, save him from a fate that made the flesh creep to think of. Far across the shining water, glimmering in the rising sunlight, lay the ketch, and far across the water rang the cries of the man for whom the hands of the cannibals were outstretched.

He saw the distant faces on the ketch—saw King of the Islands leap on the rail and stare towards him, and heard the shouts of the Hiva-Oa crew. He saw Kit Hundson drag a rifle from the rack by the mizzen, and throw it to his shoulder.

They had seen him, and would save him if they could. He heard the roar of the rifle and the howl of a savage who pitched over the beach, King of the Islands would save him yet.

A grasp on his shoulder dragged him backwards, still a score of yards from the lagoon.

"Bang!" roared the rifle again, and a savage fell across Dandy Peter. He sprang up, but hands gripped him from all sides and dragged him down again, back towards the bush.

He fought like a madman, kicking, clawing, tearing with hands and teeth. He heard the roar of rifles from the ketch and heard the bullets spattering on sand and coral, and the howls of stricken savages. But he was dragged on, and the shadows of the bush hid him from sight of King of the Islands!

CHAPTER 13.

Tame'eto's Triumph.

KEN KING stood on the teak rail of his ship, holding on to a rope and staring towards the shore of the lagoon of the cannibal island of Aya-ua.

On the deck stood Kit Hudson. Lining the rails were the Dawn's native crew of Hiva-Oa boys.

On that part of the shore at which King of the Islands was staring, the sandy coral-powdered beach extended for a cable's length before it was shut off by the high, thick bush. But for a few prostrate natives on the beach, Ken could see nothing but the bush and a large baobab tree growing out of it. But the bush was swaying.

Ken stepped down from the rail at last. His eyes met Hudson's, and the Australian said:

"It's the finish for Dandy Peter!"

"He's a white man, Kit!" said Ken, in a low voice. "A disgrace to his colour—but a white man! A white man in the hands of those demons!"

"We've done our best—more than Peter Parsons would have done for us, Ken," replied Hudson. "But how did he get here?" he added. "He seems to have been alone—there's no boat or canoe even! There must be a ship outside the reef, Ken, but why should Parsons have landed alone?"

"It beats me," said Ken. "He must have got ashore before dawn, or we should have seen him. He's found his way to the Island of Pearls—Keefe's island!"

King of the Islands stared towards the bush again. The wounded savages had crawled away and disappeared. Two lay on the beach who would never stir again. But there was little doubt that from the jungle cover fierce eyes were watching. There were only two white men and six natives on board the ketch. There were more than a hundred of the cannibals. To land and make an attempt to rescue Parsons seemed little short of madness.

"Feller Tame'eto comey!" exclaimed

Koko. From the bush a brawny black figure stepped into view. It was Tame'eto clad in a tapa loincloth and coral necklaces with brass cartridge clips gleaming in his ears.

He stood and looked at the ketch. Even at that distance the shipmates could read the derisive grin of triumph on his face.

"We'll speak to the brute!" said Ken. He rapped out an order to the Kanakas, and the anchor was swung up from the coral bed of the lagoon. Under foresail and jib, the ketch glided towards the distant beach.

Tame'eto stood like a black statue, watching. His eyes were keen for the sight of a lifted rifle, which would have made him leap back into cover. Three or four more black faces peered from the bush behind him.

Within hail of the beach, the ketch hove to, and Ken waved his hand to the savage chief, palm outward, in sign of peace.

But Tame'eto did not advance. Treacherous himself, he feared a trick. He remained where he was, ready to leap back into cover at a sign of a firearm. Where he had appeared bush swept close to the lagoon, and he was within hail.

"You feller big chief Tame'eto, you listen, ear belong you, along what me say!" shouted Ken.

"Me listen, ear belong me!" came back Tame'eto's powerful voice. "What thing you talk along this big feller chief?"

"Me talk good talk along you," said Ken. "White man stop along you feller. Me give plenty shell-money, plenty stick tobacco, plenty trade-box along bell he ring, along you send white feller along ship belong me."

"This big chief no send white feller along ship belong you, my word!" Tame'eto answered. "White feller friend along you, me savvy! That white feller go along cooking-oven belong me. Head belong him smoke along wood-fire! Feast day he come, that

white feller makee kai-kai along Tame'eto."

There was no doubt that the savage chief supposed that his prisoner was one of the crew of the Dawn, who had rashly landed alone. He was rejoicing in his revenge on the skipper who had defeated him and destroyed his war-fleet.

"White feller no friend along me," said Ken. "He no belong along this ship! That feller enemy along me."

"You givee shell-money, stick tobacco, trade-box along bell he ring, along enemy along you!" Tame'eto showed all his teeth in a derisive grin. "This big feller chief no believe! You talk good talk along this feller Tame'eto."

"The brute's not likely to believe that we should ransom an enemy," said Hudson. "He thinks that Parsons is one of us, and he won't give him up for love or money."

"One feller along you, stop along me!" grinned Tame'eto. "Bimeby, all feller along you stop along me, my word! All feller belong that ship go along cooking-oven, along feast day he come! You hear this feller big chief, ear belong you?"

"Nothing doing, Ken!" said the mate of the Dawn.

Ken had hoped to appeal to the greed of the island chief. But vengeance predominated over greed in the savage breast of Tame'eto.

"S'pose you wantee white feller, you comey along beach!" shouted Tame'eto derisively. "Me likee you comey along beach, plenty too much! You plenty too much fright along Tame'eto!"

Ken smiled. That taunt from the savage was not likely to draw him under the spears and hatchets of the cannibals swarming in the bush.

Tame'eto snapped his fingers contemptuously at the white men on the ketch.

"You poor white trash, you plenty 'fraid along this feller Tame'eto!" he bawled. "My word, you altogether too much fright!"

Kit Hudson's eyes glistened, and he threw his rifle to his shoulder. With a bound Tame'eto vanished into the bush.

"We can do nothing, Kit!" King of the Islands said. "But there's a chance for Parsons yet! He must have come here in a ship, and the ship must be outside the reef! The men aboard are enemies, but they may join forces to save him."

"Feller schooner comey along lagoon, sar!" exclaimed Koko.

The eyes of the shipmates turned on the distant reef passage. Coming in from the Pacific was a schooner—a craft well known to their eyes.

"It's the Flamingo!" shouted Hudson. "Wu Fang's ship!"

"Wu Fang's ship here!" said Ken. "With Black Furley of Lukwe at the helm!"

In amazement the shipmates stared at the schooner as it glided in at the reef passage of Aya-ua, and dropped anchor in the lagoon.

CHAPTER 19.

Hand to Hand.

THE Dawn, by hokey!" growled Black Furley, scowling across the shining lagoon at the ketch. His scowl was reflected on the faces of Finn, Norris and Preece. Only Keefe the pearler brightened as he saw the ketch and the two white men on her deck.

The kidnapped pearler had hoped, but had hardly dared to believe, that he would find King of the Islands at Aya-ua. His eyes shone at the sight of the Dawn riding in the lagoon.

Furley had feared that the boy trader of Lalinge might beat him in the race to the Island of Pearls. His square jaw set grimly under his beard.

"If they've got the pearls," he muttered, "there'll be shooting, and you can lay to that!"

The schooner ran on into the lagoon, the sails dropped, and the cable ran

out. Black Furley snapped orders to the Santa Cruz crew, as if the ship were his own, and they jumped to obey the black-bearded freebooter as they had never jumped at the orders of Wu Fang. Furley had put the spell of fear on Wu Fang's crew.

Wu Fang, unregarded on his own deck, watched the Dawn. The Chink was of less account on his own schooner than one of the native hands. What Wu Fang thought, and felt, in that strange situation was not revealed in his yellow mask of a face. He seemed to have submitted to his fate with passive resignation. Only at rare moments his slanting eyes fixed on Black Furley with a deadly glitter in their depths.

The Dawn was gliding back to her former anchorage, and there King of the Islands dropped the anchor, a cable's length separating the two vessels.

Black Furley stood staring at the ketch, and hitched his belt to bring his revolver nearer to hand. The expression on his face was growing darker and more savage. He turned to Keefe.

"You never let on that that kid trader knew the bearings of the island."

He scowled threateningly at the man from the Paumotus.

"I never knew," answered Keefe quietly. "It's got me beat how he raised the island. I reckon he must have picked up something from me when I was delirious on board his hooker, after he saved me at sea."

"Well, he's here! If he's lifted the pearls, it will come to shooting. You standing in with this crew?"

"Never!" Keefe shook his head. "I warned you fair and square that I'd stand in with you unless I got a chance of getting in touch with King of the Islands. You know that."

"And what's to stop me from dropping you over the side and letting the sharks take you off my hands?" roared Furley.

The pearler made no answer. But his coppery face was set and inflexible. Furley glared at him savagely, as if minded to put his threat into execution. Dick Finn broke in.

"Belay it, Furley! Keefe put it fair and square—he never wanted to sail with us. I reckon we can keep him out of harm's way if it comes to fighting with that hooker. Nobody's going to the sharks off this packet, Jim Furley!"

"Run a rope round him!" growled Black Furley. "If he's not standing in with us, we got to keep him safe. Anyhow, he's steered us a course for the island—we've got that much out of the lubber."

Keefe backed away as the Lukwe men advanced on him. He gave a quick look at the ketch, and the shining space of water that separated him from friends and safety. Black Furley dragged the heavy revolver from his belt.

"Swim!" he snarled. "Swim for it if you like—and, by hokey, I'll riddle you with bullets in the water!"

He levelled the revolver at the Paumotus pearler.

"I'm in your hands!" said Keefe. And he submitted quietly while Finn and Preece bound his arms and ran a rope round him and secured him to the mast.

"That's that!" growled Black Furley, putting his revolver back in his belt again. "You're out of this crew now, Ben Keefe, and you don't come in when the pearls are shared out. You can lay to that. Get the boat down. I'm going on board that ketch." He roared to the black crew: "Lower that feller boat, you black lubbers—look lively, along you want me knock seven bells outer your black hides!"

~~But he got no change out of Ken King. All he learnt was that Parsons had been captured by the blacks, and that Ken King meant to help Keefe!~~

Bound to the mainmast of the Flamingo, Keefe watched the Lukwe crew in silence.

The sun was rising higher over the

lagoon and the heat of the tropical day setting in. To that Black Furley gave no thought. He was eager to begin the quest of the cache of pearls. Somewhere on Aya-ua was cached the tapa sack of pearls, taken from the lagoon by the lugger's crew that had perished on the island. The Lukwe freebooter was losing no time.

Half a dozen Santa Cruz blacks manned the boat, and Dick Finn and Preece stepped into it. Harris was to remain on the schooner to keep guard. Black Furley stopped before the pearler.

"You ain't letting on where the pearls are cached?" he asked.

"Never!" answered Keefe.

"I suppose you reckon King of the Islands will get you off this packet?" jeered Furley. "I'm leaving a man on board with orders to shoot if they pull for the schooner. King of the Islands will think twice before he starts trouble."

"The pearls are mine," answered the man from the Paumotus quietly. "Find them if you can. And if you do find them, I reckon King of the Islands won't let you rob me of them, Jim Furley."

"Stand in with us, and we'll share and share alike," growled Furley. "You'll have to share with those swabs on the Dawn if they see you through."

"They won't lose on the trip," answered Keefe. "I'll see to that. But King of the Islands isn't the man to rob a pearler. Find the cache if you can, and be hanged to you!"

"I'll find the cache all right," snarled Furley. "I've picked up your old camp on the beach yonder already, and the cache won't be far away from the camp. I'll raise them pearls before sundown."

Keefe compressed his lips. The pearls were hidden in the trunk of the great baobab tree, which could be seen from the lagoon. They had been safe enough from the natives, who had no suspicion that they were there; but he realised that the hiding-place was not

likely to elude a prolonged and determined search by men who knew that the cache could not be far distant. He cast a glance towards the ketch, riding a cable's length away on the sunny lagoon. And Furley, as he noted it, gave a scoffing laugh.

"Ken King won't help you," he jeered. "Harris, you'll open fire with your Winchester if they come a boat's length nearer."

"You bet!" answered the Lukwe man.

Black Furley tramped to the side and swung down into the boat.

"Look out for the natives," Keefe called as he went. "They got Peter Parsons."

"You can't scare us with the niggers," laughed Furley. "I reckon they wouldn't have got Dandy Peter if he'd had a gun in his hand. They're welcome to smoke my head—if they can get it off my shoulders."

The blacks pulled for the shore, at the point where the bush receded a cable's length from the water. There, with his binoculars, Furley had picked up traces of the pearl-ers' camp, and the heap of shell they had rotted out. He had no doubt that the cache was in the vicinity of the old camp of the Paumotus crew, and that a vigorous search would bring it to light.

Of the natives he had no fear whatever. He was accustomed to dealing with "niggers" with a heavy hand, and he would have laughed at the idea of three white men, armed to the teeth, fearing to land on any island in the Pacific.

Neither did he fear or even think of trouble on the schooner while he was absent. Keefe was a bound and helpless prisoner, and the man Harris was armed and on the watch. The Santa Cruz crew had been kicked into terrified submission, and the presence of one white man was enough for them. As for the Chink, Furley did not waste a thought on him.

Wu Fang, stretched on a tapa mat in

the shadow of the companion, smoking, looked half asleep. Not a word of rebellion, not a sign of resentment, had escaped the Chinaman since the Lukwe freebooters had taken possession of his ship. Black Furley regarded him as of no more account than the cockroaches that crawled in the cabin.

But when the boat pulled away from the schooner, Wu Fang ceased to smoke. He lifted his head in its immense Chinese hat, stared after the boat, and smiled. Then, as Harris' careless glance fell on him, he sank back into his former position, and seemed to slumber in the drowsy heat of the tropical day.

If Wu Fang was biding his time, the time for action had not yet come.

Black Furley steered for the beach without a backward glance at the schooner. He shook a fist at two faces looking from the ketch, that was all. Preece and Dick Finn eyed the ketch rather uneasily. They were within easy rifle range, and in the open boat there was no cover from flying lead. King of the Islands was not likely to burn powder if he could help it; but they were glad when the boat bumped on the beach.

"You feller boy stop along boat," snapped Furley, tramping ashore. The Santa Cruz boys were glad enough to remain with the boat at the water's edge. Their eyes were lingering uneasily on the shadowy bush.

The trampled sand bore many traces of what had happened on the beach that morning, but there was no sign of the natives. The dead and wounded had been removed by Tame'eto's followers. Black Furley stared round and grunted.

"I reckon this is where they got Dandy Peter," he growled. "He'd found the old camp. Keep your eyes peeled for the niggers—there might be some of them around yet."

The bush, dark and to all appearance impenetrable, was silent and still. If savage eyes were watching from the

tangled jungle, there was no sign of them. The three Lukwe men tramped up the beach to the spot where the fragments of the old hut lay. Black Furley paused there, looked round him, and shook his head.

"Not here!" he said. "I reckon the niggers rooted through this pretty, thoroughly when they wiped out the Paumotus crew. Keefe reckons the cache is still safe, and I reckon it was put where the niggers wouldn't look for it. And that's in the bush."

"Dandy Peter knew more than he let on to us," said Dick Finn. "And you can see that he went into the bush here. That's where they got him."

There were ample signs of Parsons' desperate struggle out of the clinging bush with the yelling savages behind him in torn and trailing branches and creepers. In many places the small footprints of the dandy of Lukwe could be picked up among the tracks of the bare splay feet of the blacks. That terrible scene was almost as clear to the eyes of the Lukwe crew as if they had beheld it, and it had a sobering effect on them. Even Black Furley lost a little of his unthinking recklessness, and stared round with moody eyes into the shadows of the dense undergrowth.

With his revolver in his hand and his finger on the trigger, Furley pushed into the bush, almost in the footsteps of Peter Parsons. More than once the Lukwe crew had suspected that Dandy Peter had some knowledge of the cache, derived from the delirious babblings of Keefe when the pearler had been his prisoner. They were sure of it now. After his escape from the schooner the previous night, it was clear that Dandy Peter had headed for this very spot. And it was likely enough that he would have lifted the pearls had not the savages intervened.

A faint rustle in the bush made Dick Finn start and swing round with uplifted revolver.

"Only a cockatoo, you fool!" growled Furley.

"They got Dandy Peter here!" muttered Finn. "I reckon I'm not keen on leaving my head in this bush, Jim Furley."

"I'd get after them pearls if they was in the devil-doctor's house at their village!" snarled Furley. "But, by hokey, the sooner we're through the better I'll like it. If we don't raise them pearls before sundown, I'll bring Keeffe ashore and make him point out the place."

Following the traces of Dandy Peter, the three Lukwe men reached the great baobab tree. Behind them, the thick, high bush shut off the beach and the lagoon. Shadow and silence and solitude surrounded them, and the nerves of two of them, at least, were on the jump.

Furley stood staring at the baobab, the trunk almost hidden by a tangled network of creepers and wild vines. He moved round the great tree, trampling down creepers and ferns. It was clear in his mind that Dandy Peter had known, or guessed, something of the cache, and that this was the spot where the man had been searching for the hidden pearls when the blacks came down on him.

Two or three yards away from his followers he was out of their sight. They were moving round the other side of the gigantic baobab. There was no sign that Dandy Peter had gone farther; he had been under the branches of the baobab when the blacks came on him. Black Furley's heart beat faster. He felt that he was close on the prize, that it was at hand, and probably within reach.

Crack! Crack! Furley gave a leap as two shots rang out on the other side of the baobab. A yell from savage throats answered. Trampling feet, panting breath, screaming voices—it was like pandemonium suddenly breaking out in the deathly silence of the bush.

"By hokey!" panted Black Furley, rushing fiercely round the tree, tear-

ing through tangled vines, pistol in hand, rage and fury in his bearded face.

He knew that Finn and Preece were in the grasp of savage hands, struggling for their lives. It did not cross Black Furley's mind to run for the beach and the boat, as he might have done, for he was as yet unassailed. Lawless ruffian and freebooter as he was, he was a loyal comrade. With his lips drawn back in a savage snarl, he raced round the immense trunk of the baobab, and plunged into the conflict.

The bush, so silent and still a few seconds ago, was humming with life and movement. Black faces glared from the tangled thickets. Preece and Finn were down, still resisting, but helpless in the grasp of many hands. With a roar of rage and revolver spitting, Black Furley burst on the cannibals. With fierce yells and howls they closed and swarmed round him.

Four yelling demons went down under his shooting in as many seconds. Then he was struggling hand to hand, with clubbed revolver, crashing heavy blows on fuzzy heads.

He could not help his comrades. Already Preece and Finn, overpowered by numbers, had been dragged away into the bush. But Black Furley, mad with rage, undaunted, fought a wild and desperate fight against overwhelming odds.

Foes were all around. He was dragged down to his knees, and with all his efforts he could not get to his feet again. But he still fought like a tiger. The revolver was wrenched from his hand, but his clenched fists crashed into black faces, spinning yelling savages right and left.

More than once a knife or spear flashed over him, but did not strike. Only too well he knew what that meant—and death under a spear was better than torture and the cooking-oven!

He fought on until there came a sudden crash of a spear-butt on the

back of his head, and he reeled over and sprawled. Before the half-stunned freebooter could make another effort, he was pinioned by a dozen jabbering blacks, and tapa cords bound his muscular arms to his sides.

"You make plenty big feller fight, my word!" said Tame'eto, his white teeth flashing as he grinned with triumph. "You white feller plenty too much strong feller! You stop along this big feller chief Tame'eto. Bimeby, all white feller along Aya-ua stop along this big feller chief. Along feast day he comey, you make kai-kai along this feller! All white feller along Aya-ua makee kai-kai!"

Bound and helpless, the freebooter of Lukwe was dragged away into the bush. On the lagoon, the Santa Cruz boys, who had tumbled into the boat at the first sound of alarm, were pulling back with frantic haste to the schooner. Harris stared towards the beach with consternation in his face. The bush of Aya-ua had swallowed his comrades, and to the din of conflict succeeded a silence as of death.

Then his eyes turned on the beach and the dark bush that had swallowed Furley and his comrades. His face was haggard with anxiety and doubt. There was a chance, at least, that the Lukwe men had fled in the bush, and that one or two of them had escaped the savages.

But the long hours passed. The sun disappeared, and the soft southern stars came out over the lagoon, reflected on the shining surface in a thousand points of light. Beach and bush became a dim blur.

With a weary sigh, Harris turned from the rail and paced the deck. Instantly the Chinaman was motionless again, lying still in shadow.

For an hour the pacing went on, and during that time Wu Fang did not stir. But at last the Lukwe man went to the side, leaned on the rail, and watched the starlit water. It was near midnight, the man was tired, and his

faint hope of seeing his comrades again was almost gone. Yet there was still a faint chance, and he waited and watched doggedly, while slumber reigned round him.

Wu Fang was stirring again. Silently, slowly, he was drawing nearer to the man who leaned on the rail. The little Chink, whose impassive submission had completely deceived the ruffians of Lukwe, had bided his time with Oriental patience and cunning. Now his chance had come at last!

Harris, staring wearily towards the beach with heavy eyes, heard no sound as the creeping Chink rose behind him. Had the little yellow demon had a weapon in his hand the Lukwe man's life would have gone out like the flame of a candle. And had the Lukwe man known his danger, one grasp of his powerful hands would have crumpled up the yellow man.

But Harris did not know his danger till it was too late. He knew nothing then till the creeping figure behind him rose, and a sudden grasp on his ankles tilted him over the rail, headlong into the lagoon.

The Lukwe man came to the surface, staring up at the schooner and gasping for breath. He caught a glimpse of a grinning yellow face. It vanished for a moment, then reappeared, and a rifle-barrel glimmered over the rail.

Wu Fang had picked up the rifle the Lukwe man had dropped as he went overboard. His finger was on the trigger, and his slant-eyes gleamed along the barrel. The roar of the rifle woke a thousand echoes on the silent lagoon, and Harris dived barely in time to escape the shot.

The Chink pumped out bullets till the rifle was empty, splashing lead into the lagoon. Then the slant-eyes stared from the rail, searching for the swimmer. But no swimmer was to be seen, and the Chink chuckled softly.

The Santa Cruz crew, startled out of slumber by the shots, leaped up from their sleeping-mats, staring round them.

Keefe opened his eyes, to see Wu Fang standing before him, the rifle under his arm.

"White man no stop!" said the Chink softly. "Ship belong Wu Fang, belong Wu Fang one more time, savvy? White feller stop along shark along lagoon—you feller Keefe stop along this Chinaman. You sing out what place feller pearl he stop, you savvy? Plenty too soon, feller pearl stop along this Chinaman! What you tinkee?"

And the triumphant Chink grinned and chuckled like an exultant yellow gnome!

CHAPTER 20.
The Rescue.

UNDER the bright stars that glimmered on the lagoon of Aya-ua, under the glow of the Southern Cross, Ken King paced the deck of his ketch.

Kit Hudson lay asleep in a long Madeira chair. Koko sat against the hatchway coamings, his ukelele on his bare brown knees, sleeping. On their mats on the forward deck, the Hiva-Oa crew slumbered, and from the little galley came the snore of Danny the cooky-boy.

Ken King was keeping watch and ward while his crew slumbered. But each man slept with a loaded Winchester by his side, and King of the Islands had his rifle under his arm as he paced.

On Aya-ua the night had been still and peaceful. From the black bush at the back of the circling beach came no sound, and the boy trader might have fancied that the island was uninhabited. No figure moved on the beach that glistened in the starlight.

A cable's length from the ketch, the schooner Flamingo rode at anchor. Many times Ken's glance turned towards Wu Fang's ship, wondering what was happening aboard it.

Wu Fang was no fighting-man, but he was as treacherous as a snake and as ruthless as a tiger-shark. Harris gave

him no more heed than he gave to one of the cockroaches crawling in the cabin, and for that very reason Ken could not help thinking that the cunning Chink might find an opportunity to turn the tables.

A sudden outburst of rifle-fire that broke the silence of the starry night with an effect of thunder seemed to confirm his uneasy doubt. A sound of startled, cackling voices—the voices of the Santa Cruz crew—floated across the water. Crack on crack rang from the repeating rifle; flash on flash gleamed in the shadows. Someone on the schooner was pumping out bullets, and Ken could only suppose that Wu Fang and his crew had turned on the Lukwe man, and that he was defending himself desperately.

Kit Hudson came out of slumber and the Madeira chair with a bound as the rifle shots rang out across the lagoon.

"What's that?" ejaculated Hudson.

"Trouble on the schooner," said Ken.

Koko and the Hiva-Oa crew, all awake at once, stared across the dim lagoon at Wu Fang's schooner.

The firing died away as suddenly as it had started. The excited cackle of the black boys could still be heard, but the trouble, whatever it was, was over.

"Looks as if they've got Harris!" said Hudson.

Splash! It was the sound of a swimmer in the water.

"White feller stop along lagoon, sar!" said Koko, his keen eyes piercing the shadows.

Ken King ran to the rail. From the starlit lagoon a white face stared up—the haggard, bearded face of the Lukwe man. He was swimming desperately.

"Ahoy, the ketch!" His panting voice came up. "Ahoy! Throw a line, for the love of Mike! Sharks——"

The panting cry broke off as the Lukwe man dived. A hideous shape glided in the water, the stars glistened

on a black, gliding fin, and then on a white throat as the shark turned over to bite.

Ken's rifle leaped to his shoulder.

Crack! The bullet smashed into the throat of the shark, and the white was dimmed with red. In a flurry of fury, the shark thrashed wildly, tossing up spouts of foam. But the brute had missed his victim, and the face of Harris, white and drawn with fear, came up again close under the hull of the ketch. Hudson tossed a rope, the Lukwe man grasped it, and three or four pairs of hands dragged him up the side.

His feet had barely left the water when another and another black fin glided underneath, and there was a snap of fearful jaws. The lagoon in the shadow of the ketch was alive with sharks, drawn by the disturbance created by the wounded brute. But the snapping teeth missed the Lukwe man as he was dragged swiftly up. He sank down on the deck in a pool of water, almost fainting with exhaustion and terror.

"They nearly got me," he muttered thickly. "If I hadn't made this craft——" He broke off, shuddering.

"You're safe now," said King of the Islands quietly. "What's happened on the schooner, Harris?"

"The Chink——" breathed Harris. "He got me from behind, pitched me over the side, and blazed after me with my own rifle! He reckons that the sharks have got me! You'll stand by me, King of the Islands?"

"Aye, aye! But if you sail on this craft, Harris, you'll sail under orders," said Ken. "You came here with Jim Furley to steal Keefe's pearls, and I'm standing by Keefe."

"The game's up," muttered the Lukwe man. "The niggers have got Furley and Preece and Dick Finn. I'll be glad to take your orders if you'll keep me aboard this packet."

"That goes, then!" said Ken.

"I reckon them pearls will never be lifted," said Harris. "I'd like to see you lift anchor, King of the Islands, and run out to sea. I tell you you'll never lift the pearls—nor Keefe, neither. The Chink will take care of him. I'd give all the pearls in the Pacific to be walking the beach at Lukwe this minute. We was fools to come to this island of devils!"

"The anchor doesn't come up yet, Harris," replied Ken. "Koko, get the whaleboat down."

King of the Islands stepped into the boat, with Koko, Lompo, and Kolud. Hudson watched him rather anxiously.

"Look out for the Chink, Ken," he said over the side. "He's a rat—but a rat in a corner——"

"Leave it to me," said Ken. "We've got to get Keefe. I reckon Wu Fang isn't the man to put up a fight. If he does, there will be a dead Chink to go to the sharks of Aya-ua. You feller boy, you washy-washy along schooner."

The Kanakas pulled for the schooner, and Ken, rifle in hand, watched Wu Fang's vessel keenly as he approached it. He did not believe that the Chinaman would fight, but if desperation nerved Wu Fang to a conflict, the boy trader was ready. Once he had taken Keefe from the schooner, the Chink was welcome to keep his ship, which he had recaptured from the Lukwe crew. But he wondered whether, with the pearler in his yellow hands once more, the pearls almost in his grasp, the Chink would be desperate enough to put up a fight. Standing in the whaleboat, finger on trigger, he watched the schooner as the Kanakas pulled.

Black faces stared at him as he came, but among the black faces there was no yellow face to be seen. Perhaps Wu Fang was watching from the shadows, ready for a swift, sudden shot! Ken's eyes gleamed over his rifle.

But no shot rang from the schooner. Only the Santa Cruz boys stared and jabbered as the whaleboat swept on and bumped on the hull of the Flamingo.

CHAPTER 21.

Out of the Cavity!

CROUCHED over the tiller of a gliding boat, Wu Fang looked back with his slanting eyes as two black boys pulled silently with muffled oars. In the bottom of the boat lay Keefe, the pearler, bound hand and foot, gagged with a strip of tapa. Hardly a sound was made by the two black rowers as they pulled for the dim beach of the lagoon. But from the distance astern came the sound of Ken King's whaleboat pulling from the ketch to the Flamingo.

Wu Fang grinned. Whether the Lukwe man had lived or died, he did not know, and cared little. But he had fully expected a visit from the Dawn's boat after the outbreak of firing, and he had lost no time. And as Ken's whaleboat bumped on the schooner, Wu Fang's boat thudded on the soft sand, and the Chinaman chuckled.

The black boys dragged the boat up the shelving sand, and Wu Fang leaped ashore. He muttered a word or two, and the blacks lifted out Keefe. The ropes on his legs were cut, and he stood on his feet.

The pearler was no coward. In his rough calling he had often faced danger and death. But his face was white, his eyes uneasy, under the look of the Chink. It was not the first time that he had been Wu Fang's prisoner. Now that he was in Wu Fang's hands again, Keefe knew that he was lost.

The little Chink approached him, grinning as he saw the pearler shrink from him. He removed the gag from the pearler's mouth.

"You plenty flaid along this Chinaman," he said in a low, soft tone. "Me savvy you plenty flaid along this Chinaman."

Keefe did not speak. With his hands free, he could have crumpled the grinning little villain in his strong arms. The Chink was not likely to give him a chance. His legs were freed to allow him to walk, but his arms ached in

cruelly tight cords. The fear and horror in his coppery face drew a chuckle from Wu Fang.

"Plenty feller look findee feller pearl!" grinned Wu Fang. "Me tinkee this Chinees findee! What you tinkee? Black Furley plenty big fool—he stop along cooking-oven belong Tame'eto. Dandy Peter plenty big fool—he stop along cooking-oven all samee Furley! King of the Islands plenty big fool—he tinkee findee you along schooner—he no findee! Plenty feller look along pearl—this Chinees findee.

"Along night, black feller stop along house belong him," he said. His slanting eyes swept the shadowy beach. "Me savvy! Along night, black feller no stop along bush! No see black feller, eye belong us, along we go findee pearl! What you tinkee?"

"We go findee pearl, you savvy!" added Wu Fang as Keefe made no answer.

Keefe cast a despairing look towards the masts of the ketch, dim in the starlight, far out on the lagoon. A shout might have reached King of the Islands, but it would have been futile. The boy trader could never have found him if he had followed and landed. A few steps would take him into the dark and trackless bush.

The two black boys stood looking on stolidly. Under Black Furley's bullying voice and heavy fists they had disregarded their Chinese skipper, and jumped to the orders of the Lukwe freebooter. But Furley was gone now, and they were Wu Fang's men again. Keefe had nothing to hope from them.

"You feller boy stop along boat," said Wu Fang. "You stop, along me comey back along this place." He took hold of the end of a cord looped round the pearler. "You walkee along this Chinaman," he said softly, and Keefe tramped after him as he moved up the beach.

Searching for the hidden cache of pearls in the darkness was a hopeless task. But the Chinaman did not in-

tend to search; he intended Keefe to guide him to the cache.

With the bound pearler at his heels, the Chink traversed the beach, where the ruins of the old camp of the Pautomus crew glimmered in the starlight. Like the other seekers of the pearls, he had no doubt that the cache was in the vicinity of the old camp.

On the edge of the bush he stopped to listen. But there was no sound from the darkness, save the faint murmur of branches and ferns in the wind from the Pacific.

"Me tinkee all light," murmured Wu Fang. "Black feller no stop along bush! Now you speakee, my fiend, tongue belong you! What place feller pearl he stop?"

Keefe breathed hard and deep. The look in the slanting eyes of the Chinaman struck ice to his very heart. But he could not bring himself to reveal the secret he had so long kept.

Wu Fang's eyes glittered, and he drew the knife from his girdle.

"Me tinkee you speakee!" he murmured, coming closer to the pearler. "Me tinkee you no likee this Chinaman cuttee off ear belong you, along this feller knife! What you tinkee?"

Keefe muttered huskily:

"You yellow demon! Follow me!"

He tramped into the bush, the grinning Chink following him, holding the end of the cord.

Five fathoms in the bush he tramped, by the way Black Furley and his men had gone the day before, and Dandy Peter earlier. He stopped under a great baobab tree. There were many signs, in torn and trampled branches and ferns, of the desperate fight of the Lukwe men in the hands of the cannibals. Even in the darkness, broken only by the glimmer of the bright stars through the branches above, they could be seen. Keefe looked round, but not at the traces left of Black Furley's last struggle. He looked at the glimmering yellow face and slant-eyes of the Chink. Wu Fang smiled.

"Feller pearl he stop along this place?" he asked softly. "Stop along trunk belong tree?" asked the Chink, understanding at once, as Keefe nodded.

"Aye, aye!" muttered the pearler hoarsely.

With the keen edge of his knife, the Chink slashed away creepers and vines that cumbered the great trunk of the baobab. Keefe watched him with a desperate gleam in his eyes. His hands were fast bound, but if he had a chance to get loose from the hold of the Chink, he was ready to take it. But Wu Fang was wary. He had wound the end of the rope round his left arm as he hacked and slashed at the creepers, and the trunk of the baobab was revealed.

The Chink sheathed his knife, and peered at the trunk, as if he could see like a cat in the dark. His yellow hand glided over the rough surface, and he gave a soft chuckle of triumph as his fingers felt a soft spot. The cavity that had been cut in the baobab to hide the pearls had been plugged to make the hiding-place safer. Wu Fang had found it.

A suppressed cry came from Wu Fang. His hand came out of the cavity with a tapa bag in it. His yellow fingers tore open the bag. Even in the gloom of the dark bush there was a glistening of the large round pearls with which it was packed. With blazing eyes, the Chink dived a hand into the bag and pulled out a heap of pearls.

For the moment, his attention left his prisoner. The sight of the treasure, the feel of the smooth pearls running through his slim, yellow fingers, seemed to have intoxicated him. He grinned and chuckled, and fingered the pearls, forgetful of everything but the glimmering treasure. It was the chance for which Keefe had been watching.

With a sudden tug he tore the cord loose from the Chinaman's arm. Wu Fang started, almost dropping the precious tapa bag. He grasped the bag, closing it in his left hand. The knife

flashed in his right, and he spun round at Keefe like a cat. And as he turned, the pearler kicked, his heavy boot catching the Chink on the thigh and spinning him over.

Wu Fang crashed down with a yell. Almost before he touched the ground, the pearler was plunging away in the dark bush, the loose rope trailing behind him.

Wu Fang scrambled to his feet, spitting with fury. His slant-eyes glared round for the pearler. But the desperate man was already deep in the bush. A crashing and rustling told the way he had gone. But the sound suddenly ceased. Aware that the sound would guide the Chink, Keefe stopped and flung himself down in the deepest shadow in the tangled bush. Wu Fang made two or three steps in pursuit and stopped.

For several minutes he listened. A cracking twig would have guided him, but in the darkness it would have been hopeless to seek the pearler by sight. He listened intently, but heard nothing. The pearler, with the fear of death on him, lay silent in blackness. The treasure was Wu Fang's now, and Keefe knew what to expect from the little yellow demon who had no further use for him.

Wu Fang at last turned away and limped back to the beach. The rustling of the twigs as he went came like music to the ears of the shuddering man hidden in the bush. Through the silence came the clatter of the Santa Cruz boys pushing off and dropping the oars into the rowlocks. The Chink was gone, and with him were gone the pearls. But the pearler gasped with relief.

CHAPTER 22.
Where's Keefe?

KING OF THE ISLANDS looked up at the black faces along the schooner's rail as Koko hooked on with a boathook. The Santa Cruz

crew of the Flamingo stared at him, but gave no sign of hostility. Pipiteto, the black mate, ducked his fuzzy head with respect to the white man, and ordered the black boys to let down the accommodation ladder for the boy skipper of the Dawn.

Ken King, very much on his guard, and extremely puzzled, stepped on board the Flamingo. A swift glance round the starlit deck did not reveal the pearler or the Chinaman.

"Feller Wu Fang stop along this ship?" asked Ken.

"Cap'n belong me no stop, sar," answered Pipiteto. He waved a black paw towards the dim shore of the lagoon.

"Gone ashore?" exclaimed Ken. "What place feller pearler he stop?" It flashed into Ken's mind what had happened.

"He stop along Wu Fang, sar," answered Pipiteto, with another wave towards the beach.

King of the Islands understood now.

Wu Fang had gone ashore and taken the pearler with him. Evidently he had slipped away without losing a moment, probably even before the Lukwe man had been picked up on the ketch. He had taken Keefe with him, and that meant that he had gone for the pearls. Ken stared across the starry lagoon towards the beach. It was useless to follow and search along miles of dim beach for the Chinaman.

Ken wondered what was happening—what had already happened—in the darkness of the bush. If the little yellow scoundrel had harmed the pearler, vengeance at least was in his hands; and he resolved that vengeance should be unsparing. He was in a mood to hang Wu Fang at the boom of the ketch.

Wu Fang must intend to return to his ship—he dared not remain ashore after sunrise, when the cannibals would be astir. He would return, and Ken could only wait till he came.

He called to his boat's crew, and

Koko, Lompo, and Kokulo came on board the Flamingo. They were more than enough to keep the black crew in check if the Santa Cruz boys gave trouble when Ken came to deal with the Chink.

The boy trader did not have to wait long. There was a ripple of oars in the water, and a boat loomed up in the starlight, with two black boys pulling and the Chinaman sitting calm and impassive as an ivory statue in the stern-sheets.

At the sight of King of the Islands looking over the side, Wu Fang rose to his feet in the boat and made a deep bow. The boat hooked on, and the Chink came up the side. There was a smile on his yellow face, and he kow-towed to Ken with the deepest respect.

"O born-before-me," said Wu Fang. "This Chinaman velly please see hand-some skipper along ship belong him!" He almost wriggled with ingratiating friendliness.

"Where's Keefe?" demanded Ken abruptly.

"That feller pearler he stop along beach, sar," answered Wu Fang. "We no want that feller along this ship. He wantee go along the beach, along findee pearl belong him; me takee that feller along beach, along boat. Along night, him tinkee black man no stop. He allee light, sar!"

Ken's eyes searched the smiling face of the Chinaman. What had happened ashore in the bush? From Wu Fang he was not likely to get the truth. The Chink had had no choice but to return to the schooner, and he had returned relying upon his wily Oriental cunning to see him through.

"If you've harmed him, Wu Fang, I am going to hang you!" said King of the Islands quietly. "Search this Chink, Koko! Me tinkee feller pearl stop along him."

"Me no savvy feller pearl, sar," said Wu Fang, and he made no resistance as Koko searched him for the pearls.

No pearls were found, and at a word

from Ken the two blacks who had been with him in the boat were searched. But the result was the same. Then Koko stepped into the boat and searched it, but no pearls were hidden in the boat.

Ken felt himself baffled. He had taken it for granted that Wu Fang had led the pearler ashore to force him to reveal the cache. He had had no doubt that the Chink had done so, and laid his thievish hands on the bag of pearls. But if that was the case, Wu Fang had not brought the prize back to the schooner.

"Me no savvy pearls, sar," said Wu Fang blandly. "Me wantee go along sea, along schooner belong me. Me plenty flaid stop along this feller island. Me plenty flaid along Lukwe man."

"You're not sailing till I know what's happened to Keefe," snapped King of the Islands. "If he's a free man ashore I shall see him at sunrise. If you've harmed him I'm going to hang you, Wu Fang. I'm going to lay your schooner alongside the Dawn, and keep you till I get it clear."

For a second a blaze leapt into the eyes of the Chinaman. But it was gone at once. Resistance was not in his power. Only cunning could save him, if indeed it could save him. He bowed his head submissively.

"S'pose you wantee this Chinaman stop along you, sar, this Chinaman plenty likee stop!" he said affably. "Me no flaid along black man, no flaid along feller Furley, s'pose you protect this poor Chinee."

Ken turned away from him, and rapped out orders which the Santa Cruz boys hastened to obey. Koko kept a suspicious eye on the Chink. But Wu Fang stood smiling and submissive—the smiling submission that had so effectively deceived Black Furley and his crew.

The anchor was lifted, and the schooner towed across to the Dawn. Ropes were flung to the ketch, and Lufu and Tomco and Danny made

them fast. Kit Hudson and Harris looked on, the latter fixing a glance on Wu Fang that disturbed, for a moment, the smiling calm of the Chink. It was not till he saw Harris on the ketch that Wu Fang knew that he had escaped the sharks.

"O born before me," murmured Wu Fang, touching the boy trader's arm. "You protect this poor Chinese ffrom bad Lukwe man."

"You've nothing to fear!" growled King of the Islands. "Don't touch me, you yellow scum." And the boy trader returned to his own ship.

"You'll leave the Chink alone," he rapped out to Harris, whose expression, as he glared at the Chink, was more than enough to alarm Wu Fang. "You're under orders here. You and your gang seized his ship like a crew of pirates, and he was in his rights in pitching you over the side and taking it back again. If Keefe's alive and safe, the Chink's free to sail away in his own ship as soon as I know. If you put a foot on the schooner, I'll have you thrown back where you were picked from. I'm giving orders here, and there's going to be no more Lukwe freebooting."

The stars were paling towards dawn, and when the sun at last came up over the lagoon King of the Islands swept the circling beach with his binoculars in the hope of picking up the pearler. But only the sandy, coral-powdered beach, the crawling land-crabs, and the black bush behind met his searching eyes. There was no sign of Keefe. Alive or dead, the bush hid his fate!

CHAPTER 23.

Lost in the Bush!

KEEFE staggered to his feet in the blackness of the bush. Long he had lain there after the sound of the Chinaman's departure died away. His arms ached in the cords that secured them behind him, and he was

tormented by the thorns through which he had recklessly plunged to escape the Chinaman's knife. But he lived, and Wu Fang was gone.

He stared round him in the dense darkness of the bush. Over his head branches and vines were interlaced, shutting off every gleam of the stars. Round him was thick bush, tangled and trackless. In what direction he had fled he hardly knew. It was likely that he was not more than a dozen yards from the baobab-tree where the pearls had been hidden, but in the blackness of the tangled wilderness it might as well have been a dozen miles.

From the baobab he could have picked his way to the lagoon—it was only five fathoms deep in the bush, and the way was familiar to him. But to find the baobab in the blackness was another matter.

His only hope was to get in touch with King of the Islands before the new day came. With the first gleam of day the natives would be astir, watching for a chance to snap up any white man who set his foot ashore, as they had snapped up Dandy Peter, and, after him, Black Furley and his men. If he was still in the bush when daylight came he was lost.

Slowly peering with haggard eyes in the dense darkness, the pearler moved from the tangled thicket where he had lain hidden. Chance might direct his steps aright, but he knew that in the darkness it could only be chance.

His feet sank in rotten vegetation, thorns tore his clothing and his skin, drooping branches and hanging vines caught him at every step. Every moment he hoped to see the gleam of starshine on the lagoon through some opening in the bush. But only blackness was round him—no faintest gleam came to his haggard eyes.

He stopped at last, weary and streaming with perspiration, and threw himself down to rest. It was useless to continue. Had he been

steering a right course he would have emerged upon the beach before this. Every step might be taking him deeper and deeper into the trackless bush, farther and farther from his only hope of safety. With the dawn the savages would be astir, but he had to wait for light.

The dawn was long in coming. Weary as he was, he dared not close his eyes in sleep. He waited and watched, till the blackness round him turned to a faint grey, and then to the dim twilight of the bush. The sun was up over Aya-ua, though no shaft of its light penetrated through the tangled roof over his head. But now he could see, and he got to his feet and wearily strove to pick a way through the woven thickets and tall tree-ferns higher than his head.

The sun rose higher, the heat intensified, and myriads of buzzing insects swarmed up in the heavy, close air. A glimpse of the lagoon would have guided him, but it was never possible to see more than two or three feet from where he trod. But suddenly the lost man gave a gasp of relief as he caught sight of a rag of cotton on a sharp thorn. He remembered that a spearlike thorn had torn his arm as he ran from the Chinaman, and this was the place. After his weary wanderings in the maze of the bush he was somewhere near the great baobab again.

He scanned the thickets eagerly for sign. A trampled fern, a trailing twig, a broken vine guided him, and, almost sinking with exhaustion, he tottered at last under the baobab. For a minute he leaned wearily against the tree, and then stumbled the way trampled by many feet down to the beach.

A startled cockatoo flew past him and disappeared, and for a moment he wondered what had startled the bird, but he was too dulled by weariness and the stifling heat to think. He stumbled on, the bush thinned and opened, and the shelving beach lay

before him, a cable's length to the edge of the shining lagoon.

He gave a cry of relief and joy at the sight of the shining water and the ketch anchored far out, with the schooner alongside. On the ketch he made out moving figures and saw one sturdy form in white ducks lifting a pair of binoculars. Again and again, since sunrise, had King of the Islands swept the beach with his powerful glasses, hoping against hope for a sight of the pearler. Now he was searching the shore once more, and Keefe knew that he was seen. And over the schooner rail he had a glimpse of a yellow face that watched.

He saw King of the Islands lower the glasses and the Kanakas rush to lower the whaleboat. He was to be saved—the Dawn's boat was coming as fast as sinewy arms could pull. And even as he panted with joy and relief at the sight a grasp was laid on his arm, holding him back from the beach. In almost stupefied horror and dismay he stared round at a black, grinning face. Then, with one wrench of his powerful arm, Tame'eto swung him into the bush.

A groan of despair broke from the pearler. He could not attempt to resist with his hands bound. He knew now what had startled the cockatoo. Tame'eto had been at his very heels as he stumbled from the baobab down to the beach.

"You stop along this big feller chief!" chuckled Tame'eto. "Me savvy white feller plenty too much! One time you run away sea, me savvy. This time you stop along Tame'eto."

From the direction of the lagoon came the sound of dashing oars. The whaleboat was pulling hard and fast for the beach. But Keefe knew that there was no hope. King of the Islands and his men might reach the shore, but they could not follow him into the bush swarming with cannibals.

Tame'eto was not alone. On all sides there were grinning black faces;

The blacks seemed puzzled to find the white man's arms bound. They touched the tapa cords, and jabbered to one another in their own savage dialect.

A sharp order from the chief, and two of the blacks grasped Keefe's arms and hurried him away into the bush. He gave a backward glance as he went, and saw Tame'eto and his bucks facing towards the lagoon, spears and bows and arrows in hand, ready for the boat's crew if they landed. He saw no more as he was led into a runway of the bush and hurried on.

He heard again the dash of oars, but the sound was receding. King of the Islands was not attempting a landing. It was madness to venture with so small a force into the swarming bush, where the black man was at home and where the stabbing spear and the whizzing knife were more deadly than the white man's rifle. Ken and his men would have been overwhelmed and massacred without hope or mercy.

If he could be saved King of the Islands would save him yet. But throwing away his life, and the lives of his men, was not the way. King of the Islands had seen him, and knew that he was in the hands of the cannibals, and hope was not dead in Keefe's breast as he was hurried away through the bush.

Even when Keefe was flung into the house of death, the den of O'o'oo, the devil-doctor, hope did not desert him, though in the faces of his fellow-prisoners, Dandy Peter and the Lukwe men, he read black despair.

It was hard for King of the Islands to turn back, but he knew how to bow to stern necessity. His face was grim as he stepped again on the Dawn.

"They've got him, Kit—but we'll save him yet! We can't sail and leave a white man to that. We've got to take our lives in our hands, shipmate, and face worse risks that we've ever

faced before. We've got to put it through!"

And if courage and determination could do it, the shipmates of the Dawn were the men to put it through!

CHAPTER 24.
Into the Pit!

THE long, hot day that had seemed endless to King of the Islands and his shipmate was ending at last. Beyond the high bush of Aya-ua the sun sank into the Pacific, and deep shadows stole over the lonely island. It was night at last—the soft, velvety night of the South, with stars that gleamed like points of fire coming out of the dark blue sky. The aching day was over.

Beyond the beach and the bush lay the unseen, unknown village of the cannibal islanders, where five white men lay bound prisoners in the hut of O'o'oo, awaiting the tribal feast-day and a fearful fate.

It was not more than a mile from the lagoon, but it was a mile of trackless, tangled bush, wild, thorny, and almost impenetrable. There were runways in the bush, but they were known only to the natives. No white man knew anything of the interior of Aya-ua save Keefe, the pearl-er, who was one of the prisoners of Tame'eto. To the shipmates of the Dawn all was unknown, bristling with mystery and peril. Yet they had to venture into it.

"We've got to save Keefe!" A dozen times Ken King had uttered those words. "We came here to stand by him, Kit, and we can't desert him."

The mate of the Dawn fully agreed.

The fall of night was a relief to the shipmates, though it brought nearer the hour of their desperate and perilous adventure into the dark and mysterious interior of Aya-ua.

In the daylight nothing could be done. But at night the natives of

Aya-ua retired to their huts. Like most South Sea tribes, they did not carry on warfare between sunset and sunrise. Only then was it possible to venture ashore. And at night the difficulties were almost insuperable. The task that King of the Islands had set himself was a terrible one.

Since the battle on the lagoon the natives had abandoned their huts on the beach and retired into the interior to a village back of the bush. To find that village was a task likely to tax the shipmates to their utmost—even had there been no swarm of cannibals to encounter when it was found.

It was impossible to leave the ketch unguarded, and the crew would have been useless in an attack on the native village—the odds would have been overwhelming against Ken's small force.

In a tapa bag in the cabin lay a bundle of sticks of dynamite in readiness. It was with that terrible weapon in his hand that King of the Islands intended to enter the den of the cannibals once he had found his way there. But as he stood looking at the black mass of the high bush ashore his face was dark and doubtful.

"There's only one way," said Kit Hudson quietly. "Leave it to me, Ken! You're a sailorman, old bean. I was born in the bush in the Big Island. If the way can be picked up, I can pick it up. I am as much at home in the bush as any nigger on Aya-ua."

Ken nodded. He knew that his shipmate was right, but he hated the idea of Hudson landing alone to scout in the bush.

"If I get lost in the bush, you'll still be here to carry on, old fellow," said Hudson. "We've got to save Keefe if we can; you've got to think of your ship and your crew. But I reckon I shall pull through, and come back with the bearings of Tame'eto's den."

"I hate the idea, Kit!" said Ken. And there was a long silence.

King of the Islands gave orders at last, and the whaleboat was dropped into the water. Lompo and Lufu and

Kolulo manned it, and Kit Hudson gave his shipmate a last grasp of the hand before he followed them.

"Take care, old chap!" said Ken. His voice was husky. "If you hit trouble signal with your rifle."

"You bet!"

Hudson stepped into the boat, and the Hiva-Oa boys pulled for the beach. Ken, with a grim face and a heavy heart, watched the boat glide away in the starshine and disappear in the dusk of the lagoon.

The whaleboat pulled on steadily, and there was a thud as it grounded on the sand. The mate of the Dawn stepped ashore.

"You feller boy, you stop along lagoon along me comey back along this place!" he said.

"Yessir!" answered Lumpo. And the boat pushed off again, to wait for the Australian at a safe distance from the shore.

Hudson stood alone on the shadowed beach of Aya-ua. Well he knew that he was taking his life in his hands, but his sunburnt face was calm and resolute as he turned his back on the glimmering lagoon. Dark and silent lay the high bush. Once within the bush, the lagoon and the starshine disappeared from his sight. Over his head the interlaced branches shut out the stars, save for a faint, pale gleam that filtered through here and there.

In a few minutes he stood by the great baobab-tree where Black Furley and his men had fought their last fight against the cannibals. From that point he had to pick up the way the natives had gone with their prisoners.

The previous night Keefe, the pearler, had been hopelessly lost in the bush, hardly more than a cable's length from the open beach. But the pearler from the Paumotus did not possess the almost uncanny sense of direction, the instinct of the bush, that Kit Hudson had learned in the back country of Australia, where many years of his boyhood had been spent.

It seemed that he could see like a cat in the dark. Knowing all the signs of the bush, he could pick up direction even from the slant of a tree-trunk. Slowly, steadily, he threaded his way through the tangled thickets, trailing vines, and tree-ferns that stood as high as his head. Sometimes he scratched a match, and the glimmer showed him a trampled fern, a broken branch, or some faint depression in the earth which he knew had been made by a bare foot, or a rag of tapa caught on a thorn.

Sometimes he came to a dead halt, at a loss, but always to try again, and at last to pick up some sign. It was midnight when he emerged into a cut runway—a path driven through the bush for the use of the natives.

He had no doubt that the runway led to the village of the cannibals. It was scarcely three feet wide, and over it the bush met in a tangled roof. But here the roof of vegetation was thinner, and gleams of the stars came through. The earth was trampled hard by the tread of many feet, showing that the runway was much used by the blacks in the day-time. Probably it led to the lagoon beach, at some spot distant from the point where he had landed, in one direction, and to the native village in the other.

Hudson stopped and leaned on a trunk to rest. Hours had passed since he had landed, though the distance he had covered, almost at a snail's pace, was little. He was fatigued, wet with perspiration, torn with thorns. But he felt that he had found the way to Tame'eto's village at last. He had only to follow the runway till he sighted the native village. But he had to make sure.

He stirred again at last, and trod along the shadowed runway. His rifle was ready if an enemy appeared, his finger on the trigger. But there was no sound, no movement, in the bush. He might have fancied himself the only living being in an illimitable wilderness.

Like a dark tunnel the runway stretched before him. His eyes caught a glimmer of light far ahead—the light of the stars in a clearing. He knew that he was approaching the opening of the runway, and if he had made no mistake, he would soon be looking on the huts of the cannibals. Cautiously he trod on.

Suddenly, without warning, the earth gave under his feet, and he gave a gasping cry. He had been feeling every step as he advanced, yet he had been caught by the cunning trick of the savages.

He made a fierce, desperate effort to spring clear. But it was in vain. Across the path a pit had been dug, carefully covered with branches, and screened by earth and roots. It was one of the bush-pits with which the savages of the South Seas guard the approaches to their villages. The covering of the pit had felt firm to the tread till his full weight was upon it. Then it gave, and he shot through into the pit below, dropping like a stone.

His rifle flew from his hands. Wildly he clutched for a hold, only to grasp twigs and roots that gave him no support as he shot down into the darkness.

Crash! He rolled breathless, dizzy, at the bottom of the pit.

His senses left him, and when he came round he was bound, lying in the prison hut with Keefe, Parsons, and the others.

CHAPTER 25.

The Droning Drum!

IN the bright tropic sunlight that streamed down on the lagoon, Ken King's face was pale and worn, and looked strangely old. The night, that had seemed as endless as the day before it, was gone. And of his ship-mate there had been no sign.

Was Kit Hudson lost in the bush? If it was only that—Likely enough, the keen Australian, although accustomed to the bush, was lost and astray in that trackless wilderness. But

deep in Ken's heart was the fear that it was worse than that.

Soon after dawn he had heard, or fancied he had heard, a faint, distant sound that might have been the crack of a revolver. Later, there came whizzing arrows from the bush, telling that the savages were watching the ketch, though not daring to show themselves. With anxiety that made him sick at heart, Ken had watched and waited. Till the new day came, he had hoped that Hudson would return. Now that hope had died.

Koko's brown face was grim as he glanced in silence at his white master. It was not difficult to read the faithful Kanaka's thoughts in his face.

"What you tinkee, head belong you, Koko, along feller Hudson?" asked the boy trader.

Koko hesitated to answer. Harris, the Lukwe man whom Ken had rescued from Wu Fang, broke in.

"They've got him, Captain King," he said. "It was madness to land on this island of devils. They got Dandy Peter, and Black Furley, and Preece and Finn, and Keefe—now they've got your mate! It's madness to put a foot ashore. Get the anchor up and sail, before it's too late."

"What you tinkee, Koko?" repeated Ken, taking no notice of the man.

"Me tinkee feller Hudson stop along black feller, sar!" answered Koko reluctantly.

"You no tinkee he lost along bush?"

"No, sar! Tinkee feller Hudson no comey back along lagoon, he stop along black feller!"

Ken knew it in his heart. His shipmate had gone to death at the hands of the cannibals! The boat had waited for Hudson till dawn. But at daylight, when arrows began to whiz from the bush, Lompo and Lufu and Kolulo had pulled back to the ketch. With his binoculars, Ken swept the beach and the bush. No sign of life stirred in the hot sunshine, save the land-crabs crawling on the sand and at intervals an arrow

winging from the bow of some lurking savage.

"Pull out while the going's good!" muttered Harris.

"Belay it!" snapped Ken. He was not likely to pull out of the lagoon and leave his shipmate to his doom.

From the schooner, Wu Fang watched him curiously. Since Ken had taken him aboard the Dawn, there had been no word from the Chink. With the passive patience of the Oriental, Wu Fang was watching and waiting for his chance. And it seemed to the little Chink that matters were shaping better for him now.

Ken did not heed him—he had almost forgotten his existence. He stared at the bush of Aya-ua, the temptation strong upon him to pull to the beach, land, and take all chances in an attempt to rescue his shipmate—to throw away his life if he could do nothing more. Koko had an uneasy eye on him.

"No good go along beach, sar!" said the boatswain at last. "Plenty black feller stop along bush, sar. Kill-dead white master, along arrow, along spear."

Ken knew that the Kanaka was right. He could not help Hudson by throwing away his life. In the daylight it was death to land on Aya-ua. A single flight of arrows from the bush would have wiped out the boy trader and his whole crew before they could have come to close quarters, if Tame'eto chose. More likely, the savages would have allowed them to enter the bush, and overpowered them, for it was prisoners they wanted—prisoners for the cooking-ovens on the day of the feast. In either case, the attempt was hopeless, and King of the Islands knew it.

Only under cover of night could he land. But what hope then? If Hudson, an old hand in the Australian bush, had fallen into the clutches of the cannibals, what chance had a sailorman like Ken King? He could take with him Koko, who was as much at home in the bush as Hudson. But where the Australian had failed, was a Kanaka likely to succeed?"

It was a thousand to one that if he landed after dark with Koko, they would never succeed even in locating the village back of the bush—that a new dawn would find them lost in the tangled wilderness, to fall into the hands of Tame'eto. But if King of the Islands could not save his shipmate he could die in striving, and that was all that remained to him. Not for all the treasures of the world would he have sailed from the lagoon of Aya-ua.

It seemed to Ken that sunset would never come. He longed to see the sun dip beyond the bush, though he knew how little likely he was to live to see it rise again. It dipped at last.

"Koko!" Ken's voice was low. "As soon as it's dark, I'm going. I've no right to order you to certain death, you'll come if you choose."

"You tinkee this feller Koko stop along ketch, along white master he goey along bush!" snapped the bo'sun angrily. "This feller Koko no common Kanaka, sar! You no savvy this feller Koko!"

"It's death, Koko!" warned Ken.

"Me savvy, sar! S'pose white master he go finish, this feller Koko go finish close-up," said Koko simply. "Me savvy plenty us feller go along cooking-oven. Me savvy head belong us go along house belong Tame'eto. This feller Koko no flaid! This feller go finish all samee white master."

"That's settled!" said Ken. He had known what the faithful Koko's answer would be. And with the Kanaka there was a chance of threading the maze of tangled wilderness ashore. Alone, there was no ghost of a chance.

As the darkness deepened, Ken brought on deck the tapa bag from the cabin. With great care he slung it to a strap over his shoulder. There was enough dynamite in the bag to blow the ketch to fragments. If enemy hands closed on King of the Islands that night, it was death for him and for all near him. And he thought of that terrible possibility with a steady heart.

Through the dusk, the eyes of the

Hiva-Oa crew gleamed, watching their white master. They knew his intention, and never doubted that they were looking on him for the last time. Ken could read that belief in their looks, and knew how likely it was that they were right.

"It's madness!" muttered Harris huskily.

"Madness or not, I'm going," said King of the Islands. "Keep your weather eye on the schooner, Harris. Shoot the Chink if he offers to give trouble."

"Leave that to me. But——"

The Lukwe man broke off. From the brooding silence came a low, distant sound, swelling more loudly. Harris caught his breath. He knew the meaning of the dull, heavy sound that droned over Aya-ua.

Koko started, and bent his head to listen. His eyes gleamed as he looked at his white master.

"Big feller drum stop along black feller!" he whispered. "Kai-kai, big feller kai-kai, stop along black feller! Feast he come!"

Ken felt a contraction at his heart. He, too, knew the meaning of the drone of the devil-doctor's drum. And he knew that the prisoners of Tame'eto were to live till the day of the feast; the day of the feast had come! Already the death-fire would be burning in the savage village back of the bush. Soon the black demons would be dancing the dance that was to be followed by the cannibal feast. The lives of all the white men in the house of O'o'oo were to be counted in hours—perhaps in minutes.

"Lower the whaleboat!" ordered Ken. And in the glimmer of the stars, the whaleboat pulled to the beach. Where Hudson had landed the night before, King of the Islands and the faithful Koko trod the sandy beach. The boat's crew pushed off to wait, and the black bush swallowed Ken and Koko.

King of the Islands gritted his teeth. The blackness of the bush baffled and maddened him. Booming dully through

the thick vegetation came the drone of the drum of death in the distant cannibal village. It seemed to Ken's ears that the heavy sound came from all sides at once. At intervals it died down, only to swell again to a roar.

The blackness and the tangled wilderness baffled and defeated him. But a snowy brown hand reached in the darkness, grasped his arm, and led him on. And Ken realised that Koko was threading the bush as surely as if he trod a runway. He heard a low chuckle from the Kanaka.

"This feller savvy, sar! This feller savvy plenty too much. Eye belong me no see anything, ear belong me hear plenty too much altogether."

"Ear belong you savvy what place feller drum he stop?" Ken asked.

"Savvy plenty too much, sar!"

But there was no guidance to Ken's ears in the dull, echoing drone that boomed in the bush. A thousand echoes repeated the sound from all sides. But evidently the unfailing ear of Koko picked up the direction. Ken's heart beat faster with hope.

Whether Koko could have traced a way through the black, impenetrable bush as Hudson had done might have been doubtful, but with the beating drum to guide him Koko did not fail.

Slowly, for it was necessary to force a way through the thick bush, to elude drooping branches, to disentangle trailing vines and creepers, to clamber over rotting logs, the Kanaka pushed on—slowly, but never halting, and behind him tramped King of the Islands.

The blackness was dazing. He could scarcely discern the glimmer of Koko's white cotton shirt, though he was almost touching him as he followed. Alone, King of the Islands would have been hopelessly lost in the bush, and if silence had fallen perhaps Koko would have been as lost as his white master. But silence did not fall. Sinking and swelling, but never ceasing, the devil-doctor's drum droned on.

"Feller runway he stop, sar!"

breathed Koko. They were out of the clinging bush at last. Ken King felt open space about him, though by reaching out his hands he could touch the bush on either side.

It was a runway used by the savages—the same that Kit Hudson had struck, though Ken and Koko struck it at a different spot. The blackness was almost as intense as ever, though here and there a glimmer of a star came through some interstice in the leafy roof.

"You follow this feller Koko, sar!" breathed the brown boatswain. "Close-up, we comey along house belong Tame'eto."

"Hurry!" breathed Ken.

"No can, sar! Plenty bush-pit stop along path belong black feller!" And Koko trod on slowly and warily, feeling the way before him with a lawyer-cane, only too well aware of the traps and pitfalls to be looked for in the bush of a cannibal island.

Ken could have groaned aloud with impatience, but he knew that the Kanaka was right. More haste meant less speed. It was necessary, for their very lives' sake, to feel every step of the way. To the savages who used the path, the death-pits were known. But there was no sign to reveal them to stranger's eyes, especially in the blackness of night.

Ken wondered if it was into some such trap that Hudson had fallen, for the mate of the Dawn had been taken without a chance to use his rifle. The same thought was in Koko's mind, and it rendered him trebly cautious.

Far in the distance a red flare danced in the blackness. It came from a fire burning in the clearing, beyond the end of the tunnel-like runway. The brawny black figure that trod before King of the Islands came to a stop.

"Feller he stop along this place, sar," Koko muttered. The lawyer-cane in the Kanaka's hand drove through the covering of branches and roots and earth over the hidden pit. There was

a faint sound of fragments falling into the depths below.

"No catchee this Kanaka, sar!" said Koko cheerfully. "Eye belong this Kanaka plenty too much open."

"Get on!" muttered Ken.

They threaded through the bush, avoiding the pit. Again they followed the runway, and the flare of dancing flames was nearer and clearer now. Other sounds mingled with the drone of the devil-doctor's drum, shouting and howling of excited savages, discordant and ear-splitting.

It showed that the madness of excitement had seized upon the blacks of Aya-ua. It showed, too, that the fearful feast of "long-pig" had not yet commenced. Some ceremony of barbarous superstition was proceeding, presided over by the devil-doctor, before the cannibal feast.

From the blackness of the runway, Ken and Koko reached the end of the path, and stood on the edge of the great clearing in the bush. The whole scene was unrolled before their eyes.

The savage village was still at a little distance across the fields of yam and taro. The blaze of a huge fire lighted it almost as brightly as by day. The only large building—the palm-pole house of the devil-doctor—stood apart from the rest, with a wide clear space before it.

In that space the savages were dancing in the light of the fire. Only men were to be seen. It was a ceremony in which women had no part. Some of the blacks had the crimson bloom of the hibiscus twined in their fuzzy hair. All were decorated with necklaces of beads, coral combs, strings of cartridge-clips, strings of teeth, and other barbaric ornaments—every savage "buck" dressed in his best for the strange ceremony, though of clothing none had more than a scanty loin-cloth.

Some of them blew on shells, producing strange booming notes, while others howled and shouted. There

were more than a hundred of the dancing blacks, and prominent among them was Tame'eto, with his head-dress of cockatoo feathers, innumerable necklaces, and jingling bells fastened to his large black ears.

Outside the devil-doctor's house stood a wizened, wrinkled, withered old savage, whose parchment face looked like a demon's in the glare of the fire-light. It was O'o'oo—and in his claw-like hand was a shark's-tooth knife, the blade keen as a razor; in his other hand, the stick with which he beat the great palm-wood drum. It was a strange, wild scene at which King of the Islands gazed from the edge of the circling bush.

Nothing was to be seen of the prisoners—they had not yet been brought from the house of death. Their time had not yet come. Ken breathed hard and deep, and his hand, for a moment, groped in the tapa bag among the bundles of dynamite sticks. He was in time—to save his comrade or die with him. With staring eyes, he stood watching the orgy of savage frenzy.

"Along dance go finish, black feller devil-doctor kill-dead white feller along knife!" murmured Koko. "Takee head belong white feller, smoke along house belong him, black feller makee kai-kai along white feller!"

Ken shuddered. He was in time—in time! His comrade would be alive when he was brought from the house of the devil-doctor. For life or death he was on the spot, led there by the din of the barbarous orgy. Not a glance from the maddened blacks was cast towards the two dim figures on the edge of the bush. They were not seen—their presence not suspected.

King of the Islands was in time, but only just in time. For even as he stood and gazed at the wild scene, the drum of the devil-doctor suddenly ceased to drone. And on the instant the blowing of shells, the yelling, and the shouting

died away—to the din succeeded a sudden silence.

Each capering savage stopped where he was and stood as if turned to stone. From the house of death emerged two brawny blacks, dragging between them a white man whose arms were bound behind his back.

"Feller Hudson!" breathed Koko.

It was Kit Hudson, mate of the Dawn. In the flare of firelight Ken saw his face clearly—white, set hard as iron. It was the day of doom to all the white men who lay bound in the house of death, but it had fallen to the mate of the Dawn to feel first the shark's tooth knife in the claw of O'o'oo.

Between the two brawny blacks he stood, facing the little wizened old demon, while Tame'eto and his bucks, still as stone images, stood and gazed on, with greedy ferocity in their savage faces. The devil-doctor, grinning and showing his toothless gums, advanced upon Hudson, knife in hand, and the Australian's head was forced forward by the blacks who held him, bent to receive the stroke.

Sight of that wizened figure creeping towards him roused a very demon of fury in the mate of the Dawn. Kicking, plunging, struggling, he sought to tear himself from the hands that held him.

Well he knew that there was no escape from the death which threatened him, but in him was born the desire to implant just one hearty kick on the devilish old witch-doctor before his life was blotted out.

And as he kicked and struggled, mad with rage, it seemed for one moment that he would succeed in tearing himself free from his captors. The hands bending his head forward lost their hold as Kit struggled, and before the natives could get a fresh grip the young Australian's head came up, catching one of the men a hefty blow on the jaw.

For an instant the man went limp,

temporarily stunned. But before Kit could take advantage of the blow the other man had secured a fresh grip. And his fellow-captor, recovering, took hold again of the struggling Australian. Despite his struggles, the two natives forced the mate of the Dawn's head down and down.

And slowly O'o'oo crept nearer and nearer, knife raised to strike the final blow at that unprotected neck.

Ken's eyes were burning. His rifle leaped to his shoulder.

Slowly, like a creeping beast, designing to torture his helpless victim with terror and suspense and apprehension, O'o'oo advanced on the mate of the Dawn, the shark's-tooth knife glimmering in his wrinkled claw. And King of the Islands, watching him from the edge of the bush, dwelt on his aim with a strange coolness in that fearful moment.

The claw-like hand was lifted. And then, even as he lifted his hand, there burst from O'o'oo a gasping shriek, and he spun round and crashed to the earth. For a fraction of a second the savages stared at the fallen, writhing wretch, thunderstruck. Then, as the report of the rifle rolled from the bush, they knew what had struck him down.

Through the dead silence came the crack of the rifle. Kit Hudson gave a convulsive start and stared wildly round. At his feet, his heart stilled for ever, lay O'o'oo, the devil-doctor of Aya-ua, with a bullet in his brain!

Brief was the silence that followed the ringing shot which had stretched O'o'oo at the feet of his intended victim. It was followed by a fearful outbreak of yells from the cannibals.

Far across the island rang that fearful howling, echoing to the farthest recess of the lone island. It reached the ears of Ken King's crew on the ketch anchored in the lagoon a mile away, and of the crew of Wu Fang's schooner anchored alongside the ketch. And the native seamen started and jabbered, and stared with alarmed eyes

at the black bush that circled the lagoon. Of what was passing in the dim interior of Aya-ua they could see nothing, but to their ears it sounded the death-knell of King of the Islands. And Wu Fang, on his schooner, grinned.

Tame'eto brandished his spear and pointed to the slim figure in white ducks on the edge of the bush. And the whole swarm of savages followed him as he led the rush towards Ken.

Kit Hudson and the other prisoners stared after them. They were left almost alone in the straggles of huts that formed Tame'eto's village. But their arms were bound fast with cruel cords. They had no chance to escape, and could only watch while the swarm of cannibals overwhelmed the boy trader and his Kanaka comrade.

King of the Islands did not retreat a step. He flung aside his rifle, and his hand slid into the tapa bag slung over his shoulder. With perfect coolness, he stepped forward to meet the rush of the savages. He flung a word to Koko over his shoulder.

"You feller Koko! You stop along ground, along face belong you."

Koko knew what was coming. He dropped on his face. Kit Hudson, too, knew what was coming, and breathed hard and deep as he stood in the glare of the fire, watching.

From the tapa bag King of the Islands jerked a bundle of dynamite sticks, tied together with a short fuse. With his left hand he scratched a match, and there was a spluttering spark as he touched the fuse.

Howling, yelling, screaming, brandishing spears, the swarm of cannibals rushed down on him. He waited a second, then his arm rose and swung, and the bundle was tossed into the air, falling in the midst of the howling mob. Instantly the boy trader flung himself on his face.

He had hardly touched the ground when the roar of the explosion followed. It boomed like thunder over

Aya-ua, and far over the waters of the Pacific that circled the lone island. It deafened Ken King as he lay, and the shock of it almost stunned him. But lying on his face, pressed to the earth, he escaped its force.

But of the howling savages in whose midst the dynamite exploded, hardly one escaped the shock. The wild yelling was silenced when that fearful roar died echoing away.

King of the Islands lifted his head. Dazed, but knowing that the danger was past, he stared across the yam field. A great gap had been torn in the earth. Here and there a terrified black crawled away, gabbling with fear. A flutter of cockatoo feathers showed where Tame'eto had been. But the chief of Aya-ua was not to be seen, and most of the yelling cannibals had shared his fate. Sudden and terrible destruction had fallen on the ferocious mob, as if a giant's hand had descended on them and blotted them out.

King of the Islands looked once— and did not look again! His face was pale. It had been the only way to save his shipmate—to save the others who were doomed to the cannibal feast. But it was terrible.

"My word, sar!" Koko came forward and gave his white master a hand to rise. "Feller dynamite he talk plenty too much, sar! Black feller no stop!" he grinned.

"Black feller no stop!" repeated Koko, with cool satisfaction. "Black feller no makee kai-kai along feller Hudson, sar. Two-three black feller stop, run along bush, plenty too quick altogether."

Ken glanced round, his eyes avoiding the terrible scene of the explosion. The few survivors of the cannibal swarm had fled into the bush, and other blacks were scuttling from the village in frantic flight. Panic terror had fallen on the cannibals who were left. There was not a hand to be raised against the white man who had come

to the rescue of the prisoners of Tame'eto.

"Come!" muttered Ken. He made a circuit to avoid the scene on which he did not care to let his eyes fall, and reached the village. He drew his knife as he ran towards Hudson, and sliced the tapa cords that bound his comrade.

"Thanks, Ken!" breathed Hudson, as he grasped his shipmate's hand. "It was a close thing! That old demon's knife was at my neck when you shot him down."

Keefe the pearler came from the devil-doctor's house as Koko cut through his bonds with his knife.

"King of the Islands, you've saved me—saved all of us!" said the pearler. "I reckoned you'd try, but I never dreamed you'd pull through. If we get the pearls, Ken King, they belong to you!"

CHAPTER 20.

The Burled Sack!

STANDING at the rail of the Flamingo, Wu Fang stared towards the beach, listening. Silence had followed the roar of the distant explosion which had rung and echoed over Aya-ua from beyond the bush, and the Santa Cruz blacks, the crew of the schooner, had settled down on their sleeping-mats again. But Wu Fang stood and listened, his slanting eyes gleaming in the starlight.

What had happened in the darkness beyond the bush? The little Chink grinned as he asked himself that question. He had little doubt that King of the Islands had gone to his death in seeking to rescue his shipmate. He would not be the first white man who, in the grip of savage cannibals, had exploded dynamite and blown himself and his assailants into fragments. That seemed to Wu Fang certain what had happened.

Dead or alive, the boy trader was far away in the bush. And to the cunning Chink, who had waited so long

and so patiently for his chance to get hold of the pearls, which he had secreted ashore, and escape from Aya-ua, it seemed that his opportunity had come.

His slanting eyes gleamed at the ketch, anchored alongside the schooner with two or three strong cables securing the vessels together. On the deck of the Dawn, Harris, the last of Black Furley's crew, stood with a rifle under his arm. He was staring towards the dark beach, but he no more than Wu Fang expected to see King of the Islands alive again. The three members of the Hiva-Oa crew left aboard the ketch had stretched themselves on their mats again, and were dozing or sleeping. The other two, Tomoo and Kofulo, were in the whaleboat, waiting off the beach for the white master whom they did not expect to return.

Wu Fang's hand slid into his tunic and grasped a hidden knife. Harris was the only man he had to fear now. And the thought was in his ruthless mind of "getting" him with a thrown knife. But at the distance, and in the dim glimmer of the stars, he could not be sure; and the Lukwe man had his rifle ready. The Chink dared not risk it. Still less dared he risk cutting the cables that held his schooner to the ketch. The first blow of an axe would have brought a shot from the white man on the Dawn. Wu Fang released the hidden knife.

He moved away among the sleeping crew, and silently roused Pipitoto, the black mate, and four of the native seamen. Hardly a sound was made on the schooner as the natives stirred at the whispered order of the Chinese trader, and his orders were promptly obeyed. Not for all the pearls in the Pacific would the native crew have followed him in an attack on an armed white man, even had Wu Fang ventured to lead them.

But that was not the Chink's intention. Cunning was the way of the wily Oriental. In silence, stores were

broken out and packed in the longboat. It was not till the falls were released that Harris, on the ketch, became aware that something was going on aboard the Flamingo.

He came quickly to the ketch's rail, staring across the strip of water that separated the two vessels, his rifle lifted. King of the Islands had left him orders to shoot down the Chink at the first sign of treachery—orders that the Lukwe man was only too willing to carry out. He heard the thud of the boat dropping to the water, but the schooner was between, and the boat and its crew were hidden by the bulk of the vessel. The splash of oars followed.

"Ahoy!" shouted Harris. "Bring back that boat!"

Wu Fang grinned. Keeping the schooner between him and the ketch, he steered across the lagoon, the boat's crew pulling hard at the oars.

Bang! Harris fired at the first glimpse of the boat beyond the schooner. The bullet knocked up a spray of water over the rowing blacks.

There was a jabber of native voices on the ketch and the schooner. Harris fired again, but in the distance and the dimness, his shot went wider than before. The boat pulled on rapidly, and vanished into the dimness of the lagoon.

The Lukwe man stared after it. The Chink was gone, but it did not occur to him that Wu Fang was gone for good. That Wu Fang knew where to lay his hands on the pearls of Aya-ua there was no doubt, and the Chink was gone to seek them. But if he returned to his schooner with the pearls, he was not likely to be able to keep them from the Lukwe man's grasp.

Wu Fang knew that as well as Harris, and though the Lukwe man did not guess it, it was not his intention to return to the schooner at all. Once the pearls were in his hands the Chink intended to run out to sea. Harris did

not know that he had provisioned the boat for a long cruise, and he was far from reading the mind of the wily Chink.

Once safe from the white man's rifle, Wu Fang changed his course, and the boat pulled for the beach. The Chink was abandoning his schooner. But he cared little for that, if he could sail away from Aya-ua with the tapa sack of pearls in his possession. Ben Keefe's pearls were worth a hundred schooners like the Flamingo.

The little Chink grinned and chuckled as the Santa Cruz boys pulled. The pearls of Aya-ua had been in his yellow hands once, when he had taken the tapa sack from its hiding-place in the baobab-tree. But he had not dared to bring it to the schooner while King of the Islands was in the offing. He had hidden it in the sand, and now he was free to lift it once more, and sail away from Aya-ua.

The schooner and the ketch became dim blurs in the distance as the boat pulled on, the Chink steering steadily, setting his course by the baobab-tree that rose over the bush, black against the stars. At last the boat grounded on the shelving sand.

Somewhere in the dimness was the Dawn's boat waiting for King of the Islands. But it was out of sight of the Chink, and he gave it no thought. His black rowers trampled ashore in the wet sand, and the Chink stepped on the beach. Pipiteto and the seamen waited with the boat, their eyes following the Chink curiously as he disappeared up the shadowy beach.

At a little distance from the lagoon Wu Fang stopped, and watched and listened. He did not fear the natives—the blacks of Aya-ua did not engage in warfare by night. And he knew, too, that that night the feast was toward in the native village beyond the bush. But he stopped and listened, his slanting eyes searching the shadows, his ears strained for a sound. Aya-ua was an island of danger and terror, and the

Chink was not at ease in the darkness and solitude of the beach, with the brooding blackness of the high bush so close at hand. It seemed to him that his straining ears picked up a sound on the silent beach.

But his slanting eyes, staring through the shadows, saw nothing. He moved on again, making his way to the spot where he had hidden the stolen sack of pearls. Slowly, carefully, the Chinaman traced his way, and stopped where a pointed coral rock rose from the sand.

He dropped on his knees and scraped the soft sand away at the foot of the rock. Scarce a foot deep, but with no sign left to reveal where it lay, he had buried the sack of pearls he had taken from the hollow trunk of the baobab, and in a few minutes he scraped away the covering sand.

He gave a low chuckle of glee as he lifted the tapa sack from the sand and rose to his feet. He opened the neck of the sack and ran his fingers among the pearls, pouring a score of them into his yellow palm, to watch them glisten in the glimmer of the stars. There were more than a hundred in the tapa sack. It was a king's ransom that the Chinaman held in his greedy fingers.

"Tinkee feller pearl belong this Chinee," murmured Wu Fang.

And he tied the neck of the sack again and slipped it out of sight under his loose tunic.

Softly, swiftly, he crept down the beach towards the spot where the Santa Cruz boys had been left with the boat. Suddenly he started violently, and a blaze of fury came into his slanting eyes.

Between him and the boat a shadowy figure moved. It was not a native. He could not see who it was, but he could see that it was a white man.

A white man in torn and tattered rags of clothes, moving in the same direction as Wu Fang, but ahead of him, heading towards the boat that lay a dim shadow on the water's edge.

Wu Fang drew a hissing breath. A white man between him and the boat! But the white man, whoever he was, had not seen him—did not know that he was there. The Chink's hand went under his tunic, and came out with something that gleamed in the star-shine. Softly as a cat, swiftly as a tiger, he raced down the shelving sand and leaped. And he struck as he leaped.

CHAPTER 27.

Aboard Again.

"**K**ING OF THE ISLANDS!"
Voices called to the boy trader from the doorway of the devil-doctor's house. Black Furley, Preece, Dick Finn, and Dandy Peter Parsons stared out at him in the flare of the firelight, and their haggard eyes had never been so glad to see a friend as they now were to see a foe! Hope had been dead in their hearts as they lay bound in the den of O'o'co, but they knew now that they were saved. Friend or foe, King of the Islands was not the man to leave them there.

Ken King walked across to the hut, leaving Keefe with Hudson. Koko followed him, his long bush-knife in his hand. The four prisoners emerged from the hut. Their legs were free, though their arms were tightly bound behind them. Preece and Finn looked glad and relieved, but Black Furley scowled, and Dandy Peter Parsons eyed the boy trader with little enough goodwill in his look.

At a sign from Ken, Koko cut the bonds of Preece and Finn, and they chafed their stiffened and aching arms. Ken fixed his eyes on the other two. He was there to save them from the cannibals, as he had saved his shipmate and the pearler, but he was doubtful how to deal with the burly, bullying freebooter and the treacherous dandy of Lukwe.

"By hokey!" growled Furley. "You're setting us loose, Ken King, I

reckon. You ain't leaving a white man here."

"No." Ken shook his head. "But we'd better have this clear, Furley. You're here after Ben Keefe's pearls—you and your crew. I'm standing by Keefe, as I've told you. Not a single pearl in the sack is going to Lukwe, if we lift them—and I think we shall. You've got that? Your man Harris is on board my ketch now. I've left him in charge, but he is a prisoner, all the same. You're prisoners, too—till I get shut of you."

"Do you reckon I'm the man to turn on you after you've got me out of this nest of demons?" replied Furley. "The game's up for us, and I know it! You've got Keefe—and you'll get the pearls! Give me a chance to get off this island of demons, and that's all I want. And you can depend on that."

"Cut him loose, Koko!"

The burly Lukwe skipper was released. Ruffian and freebooter as Jim Furley was, Ken felt that he could be trusted not to turn on the man who had saved him from the cannibals. But he was not taking too many chances on Black Furley's good faith, and he intended to take good care that the Lukwe crew remained unarmed until he could see the last of them.

Peter Parsons looked at the boy trader, a sneer on his handsome, rascally face. Whatever faith Ken might have had in a man like Furley, he had none in Parsons. He knew Dandy Peter too well for that.

"I've got to get you out of this, Peter Parsons," said Ken slowly. "But I can't trust you—I'd as soon trust a tiger-shark. I warn you—a single sign of treachery and I'll shoot you dead!"

"You're afraid of an unarmed man?" jeered Parsons.

"White master," said Koko, with a grim glare at the dandy, "this Kanaka tinkee plenty too much better leave feller Parsons stop along house belong black feller."

"Ay, ay," said Ken, with a smile.

"Much better—only we can't do it, Koko. I've warned you. Parsons. Take care how you steer your course when you're loose. Cut him loose, Koko."

The boatswain hesitated, then proceeded to slice through the tapa cords with his bush-knife, and the dandy of Lukwe was free.

Like the other prisoners, he proceeded to rub his arms, numbed and aching from the cords. He did not trouble to utter a word of thanks, neither would Ken have cared to hear it.

The boy trader was well aware that Peter Parsons was insensible to gratitude. He knew that Parsons, if he found an opportunity, would make another attempt on the pearls of Aya-ua, and that no risk, and no crime would stop him. He was as treacherous as Wu Fang, but he had an undaunted courage that the Chink did not possess, and was ten times as dangerous a man.

To leave this man prisoner in the den of the cannibals was impossible, but to trust him an inch was impossible also. Ken King meant every word of the warning he had uttered.

Not a black man was to be seen in the village or near it. The explosion that had wiped out Tame'eto and his bucks had terrified the remnant of the cannibal crew into panic. What were left of them had scuttled frantically into the bush in various directions. But Ken knew that sooner or later they would rally, probably with reinforcements from other quarters, and he was anxious to be gone.

Leaving the deserted den of the cannibals behind them, the great fire still flaring against the night, they started across the yam fields to the bush. Koko had passed his rifle to Hudson, and Ken had handed his revolver to Keefe.

The three of them were armed, and Koko had his long bush-knife. The rescued freebooters were unarmed, and Ken intended to keep them so. With Koko in the lead, they entered the

bush, Ken and Kit and the pearler close behind Koko, Black Furley and his men following, and Dandy Peter Parsons in the rear.

It had been by a weary and difficult way in the bush that King of the Islands and Koko had reached the cannibal village. But the way back to the lagoon was easier, for several cut runways led in various directions from the clearing round the village, and Koko had no trouble in picking out one that led down to the lagoon.

It was likely to land them on the beach at a distance from the spot where they had entered the bush—but then it would be only necessary to follow the water's edge to arrive at the spot where the Dawn's boat was waiting off-shore.

Koko, leading the way, felt every step with a long lawyer-cane, and more than once called out a warning as he discovered one of the hidden death-pits with which the savages guarded the approaches to their village.

But the runway was traversed at last, and the gleam of the starlight was seen at the end of the long tunnel-like path, and the glimmer of the lagoon in the stars.

From the direction of the lagoon there came the sudden crack of a rifle, followed immediately by another shot.

"That's Harris, on the ketch!" exclaimed Ken.

"Wu Fang must be giving trouble," said Hudson.

"I left orders to shoot him dead if he gave trouble," replied Ken. "If he's asked for it, it's his own lookout."

They hurried on, and in a few minutes they were out of the bush and treading the sand and powdered coral of the beach.

Far in the distance across the waters of the lagoon a dim blur showed where the ketch and the schooner rode at anchor. King of the Islands clambered lightly to the top of a tall rock to take his bearings. So far as he could calculate, the runway

had led them out on the circling beach over a mile from the spot where the Dawn's boat was waiting. But it was easy going on the beach.

Ken jumped down from the rock. "I reckon we've got to foot it for a mile along the beach," he said. "The boat's waiting half a cable's length off-shore, opposite a big baobab-tree—"

"Where the pearls were hidden!" muttered Keefe.

"Feller Parsons no stop!" said Koko.

"What?" King of the Islands stared round in the dim starlight. There had been eight in the party, but now he counted only seven shadowy figures. Black Furley, Preece, and Finn were there. It was Dandy Peter Parsons who had slipped away in the darkness, unseen, silent. How long he had been gone Ken did not know. It was only at this moment that Koko detected that one man was missing.

"The scoundrel!" muttered Ken. "What trickery is he up to? If he's not on board when we lift anchor, the Dawn will sail without him, and he can stay marooned on Aya-ua."

"What can he do—alone, unarmed?" asked Hudson. "Let him rip, and be hanged to him!"

"He's after the pearls," said Keefe. "But he's too late—the Chink's got 'em. He got them out of the hollow in the baobab-tree when I was in his hands. It's from Wu Fang we've got to get the pearls, Ken King!"

"I guessed that much," said Ken, "and I've kept Wu Fang and his schooner in the lagoon. I reckoned he'd cached them somewhere on the beach, and was waiting for a chance to get hold of them again in safety. Dandy Peter is welcome to look for them."

There was little doubt Parsons had fled to make one more attempt on the lost pearls of Aya-ua. But where he had gone, and what his plans were King of the Islands cared little. Dandy Peter had chosen to take his chance

alone ashore, and the boy trader left him to it.

If Dandy Peter came aboard the Dawn before she sailed he would give him a passage. If not—well, the man must look out for himself.

The party tramped along the sandy beach circling the lagoon till King of the Islands sighted a dark blur lying out on the starry waters. He gave a whistle, and there was a sound of pulling oars. A couple of minutes later Tomoo and Kolulo were staring in amazement at the white master they had never expected to see again, and the mate of the Dawn, whom still less had they expected to see.

"My word!" stammered Tomoo. "White master he stop!"

Ken laughed.

"White master he stop plenty too much altogether!" chuckled Koko.

"Tumble in!" said Ken.

The seven tumbled into the whale-boat, and pulled for the Dawn. Somewhere on the dark shore was Dandy Peter, of Lukwe, but how he was occupied King of the Islands little dreamed.

CHAPTER 23.

Beaten!

"**B**EATEN!" Peter Parsons ground the words between his teeth. "Beaten!" He was standing in the blackness of the bush by the trunk of the great baobab. Once before he had stood there, the pearls of Aya-ua almost in his grasp, when the savages had seized him. Now he was safe from the blacks of Aya-ua. But the pearls were gone.

With cool, desperate hardihood, Parsons had resolved on this last attempt to seize the treasure of Aya-ua. With the pearls in his possession, he would be left on the island—he would not dare to show himself again till King of the Islands had sailed. And terrible as was the disaster that had fallen on the natives, Aya-ua was still

an island of terror and peril, haunted by fierce cannibals.

But for that Parsons cared little. He would hide and lurk in the bush, steal a fishing canoe sooner or later, and escape, once the pearls were in his hands. But the pearls were no longer in their hiding-place. The last desperate chance had failed him—he was beaten.

He stood trembling with rage and disappointment. Who had lifted the pearls. Not Keefe. The pearler had fallen into the hands of the savages, and had been a prisoner with him in the house of O'o'oo. Like a flash it came to Dandy Peter—Wu Fang!

It was the Chink who had lifted the pearls, and the Chink was at the mercy of King of the Islands. The pearls would go where they belonged. The game was up, and he had marooned himself on the cannibal island for nothing.

He snarled with rage as he turned back to the beach. He was beaten, and all that remained to him was to rejoin the party from which he had fled in the darkness—to humble himself and beg King of the Islands to take him off Aya-ua. And perhaps he was already too late for that. Ken King was not likely to linger on the beach, and probably he had already hailed his boat and got back to the ketch.

Parsons' haggard face was white with fury as he tramped down the beach. He did not know where the Dawn's boat had waited, though he could guess that it was not far away. He scanned the open beach in the glimmer of the stars. At first he could see nothing, and he could hardly doubt that Ken King and his companions had already reached their boat and put off for the Dawn.

But as he stared he discerned a dark object on the water's edge at a distance. It was too far away to be picked up clearly, but he was sure that it was a boat. He was not too late, after all.

As he hurried down the beach he saw

that it was a boat, grounded on the sand. The starshine showed him five figures lounging in or near it, all blacks. There was no sign of white men, and he realised that this could not be the Dawn's boat. Even in the distance he could see that the blacks were not Ken King's men. The Hiva-Oa crew of the Dawn were golden-skinned Polynesians, and these men were blacks. Then he realised that they were some of the Santa Cruz crew of the schooner—Wu Fang's men. It was a boat from the Flamingo.

What it meant, why it was there, he could not begin to guess. Wu Fang was not there—the five men he could see were all Santa Cruz blacks. One of them he recognised as Pipiteto, the mate.

He was alone, unarmed, but he did not hesitate a second. It was a boat, and a boat's crew, and that was what he wanted. Had there been a dozen of the blacks, the desperate dandy of Lukwe would not have hesitated.

Danger from behind was not even in his thoughts as he went towards the boat, and he was taken utterly by surprise when something unseen leaped at his back. He had heard no sound behind him—Wu Fang had been too wary for that.

Wu Fang did not know that it was Dandy Peter, or care. All he knew was that it was a white man cutting him off from his boat. Like a tiger he leaped on Parsons from behind, and slashed with the knife at the same moment. It seemed that a miracle could hardly have saved the dandy of Lukwe from that swift and treacherous stroke from behind.

But Dandy Peter's luck did not fail him. He was taken by surprise, and the stroke was swift and sure. Yet even as the keen point touched him, he twisted with the instant presence of mind taught him by a life of desperate peril, and the knife gashed along his back instead of driving home to the heart as the murderous Chink intended.

In a fraction of a second Dandy Peter leaped clear, another slash of the knife gashing his shoulder as he went. He faced round, to see the yellow-skinned little demon springing in at him with lifted knife. A swift backward spring saved him from the stroke.

"Wu Fang!" he panted.

The Chink followed him up, his slanting eyes glittering like a snake's. At a glance he saw that Parsons was unarmed, and drove in at him with slashing knife. The dandy of Lukwe dodged and twisted, barely escaping the keen point, and bounded towards the boat.

Pipiteto and the other blacks were staring, grinning, at the scene. Dandy Peter raced madly for the boat, and behind him raced the Chink, knife in hand, panting. Barely a foot ahead of the lunging knife, Peter Parsons leaped into the boat. Some vague thought was at the back of his mind of getting hold of a stretcher, or a thole-pin, and facing the murderous knife with some kind of weapon in his hand.

But the impetus of his desperate leap as he landed in the boat drove it off the beach, and it floated. That was all that saved the life of Peter Parsons, for the Chink was springing after him close behind. The movement of the boat caused Wu Fang to fall short in his leap. Instead of dropping into the boat at Parsons' back, he dropped three feet behind him and stumbled forward.

Before Wu Fang could recover from that stumble, Dandy Peter had turned on him, and as the Chink straightened up the dandy's grasp was on him. The murderous right hand was stayed by a grip on the wrist, and the knife forced back.

Peter Parsons tightened his grasp on the little Chinaman, and Wu Fang, struggling in vain to use the knife, crumpled up in that grip of steel.

The boat rocked wildly as they struggled, and from under the Chink's loose tunic a tapa sack slipped, to burst open as it thudded in the bottom of

the boat. From the burst sack a stream of pearls rolled out, glistening in the starshine.

"The pearls!" Dandy Peter yelled.

The pearls of Aya-ua rolled and tumbled about the rocking boat in glistening cascades.

"You feller boy!" screamed Wu Fang.

Pipiteto and the blacks were already scrambling after the boat. Their black hands grasped it and they tumbled in. A moment more and they would have seized Parsons, and the Chink would have been free to strike. But in that moment Parsons wrenched the little Chinaman from his feet, swung him bodily into the air, and hurled him from the boat. There was a splash in the lagoon, and Wu Fang disappeared under the surface.

Dandy Peter turned on the Santa Cruz boys like a tiger, and his crashing fist sent Pipiteto sprawling full length in the boat. The fury in his face was more than enough for the others. They crowded back from the enraged white man.

Dandy Peter picked up an oar, and the blacks crowded away from him in terror. With a shove of the oar against a coral rock he sent the boat spinning farther out in the lagoon.

A big Chinese hat floated away, and a yellow, furious face showed over the glimmering water. The knife was still in Wu Fang's hand, and murder in his slanting eyes. He swam at the boat, and Dandy Peter swung up the oar.

A black fin showed in the glistening lagoon. There was a gleam of a white throat, and one long, terrible cry from Wu Fang. The next instant the Chink had vanished.

Dandy Peter, the oar in his hands, stared almost stupidly at the widening circles on the water where the shark had disappeared with its prey. Wu Fang was gone.

A hideous snout showed beside the boat; another and another. The sharks were gathering. Parsons

shuddered. But almost in a moment the hardy ruffian recovered his nerve.

"You feller boy!" he snarled at the scared blacks. "You take feller oar—you washy-washy plenty quick!"

"Yessar!" stammered the Santa Cruz boys.

Pipiteto, rubbing his aching jaw, sat at the tiller, and the four black boys took the oars and pulled. Their eyes lingered on the glistening pearls scattered in the boat.

Dandy Peter picked up the tapa sack and gathered up the pearls one by one. Ben Keefe's treasure—the pearls of Aya-ua—in his hands at last! Wu Fang had gone to the sharks, and he had beaten King of the Islands!

He snarled an order to Pipiteto at the tiller, and the boat was steered for the reef passage. The ruffian sat with a boathook in his hand—the only weapon he could find. But a weapon was hardly needed. The blacks were scared into submission by the mere look on his desperate face.

The sack of pearls bound to his belt, Parsons grinned with glee as the boat pulled for the reef passage. The night was growing old; sunrise was not far off, and he had no time to waste. Had there not been a single bit of food or drop of water in the boat, Dandy Peter would still have put to sea to escape with his prize before King of the Islands could discover what had chanced. But it had not taken him long to learn that the boat was packed with stores for a long cruise, and he could guess what the Chink's plan had been. That plan he now intended to carry out himself.

From the reef passage the boat glided into the open Pacific. Then the mast was stepped and the sail shaken out. The wind caught the sail and the boat danced away on the sea. And Dandy Peter, standing by the mast and staring back at the black mass of Aya-ua, shook his clenched fist and laughed.

"I've beaten you, King of the Islands!" he yelled, taunting the boy trader, who was far out of hearing. "I've beaten you, Ken King!" And he laughed again, loud and long, as the boat ran before the wind into the wide Pacific.

CHAPTER 19.

Gratitude!

THERE was deep thankfulness in Ken King's heart as he stepped once more on the deck of the Dawn. From the terrible perils of the bush, from the clutches of the cannibals, he had returned safe to his ship, his comrade safe with him. It was more than he had dared to expect or hope. Kit Hudson gave a joyous chuckle as he trod the deck by his shipmate's side.

"It feels good to be on the Dawn again, Ken, old man!" he said.

"Ay, ay!" said Ken, smiling. "We've had luck, Kit!"

"Plenty good stop along this feller hooker, sar!" grinned Koko. "Me likee plenty too much stop along this ship, my word! Me tinkee head belong me go smoke along house belong black feller! Head belong me no smoke along house belong black feller!" added Koko, with cheerful satisfaction. "Head belong me stop along shoulder belong me, and me likee plenty too much!"

Harris stared at the boy trader and his companions almost like a man in a dream.

"You back?" he said. "I never reckoned I'd see you alive again! You, too, Furley—and Preece and Finn! Cap'n King's pulled you out of it!"

"We're out of it," Black Furley grunted, "but the game's up, Harris! We've got away from the cooking-ovens, but we ain't lifting the pearls. I reckon King of the Islands is looking after that!"

"You can bet on it, Furley!" said Ken, with a laugh. "Drop that rifle,

Harris. I'm not distrusting you, but I've no use for armed men in this packet."

Harris handed over the rifle. If the Lukwe crew had thought of giving trouble, they had no chance. But Black Furley and his gang, to do them justice, had no such intention. King of the Islands had saved them from a fearful fate, and the horrors of the house of death in the den of the cannibals were still fresh in their minds. Furley was sullen and discontented, but he would not have lifted his hand against the man who had saved him from the cooking-ovens.

"We heard you firing," said Ken. "You've had trouble with the Chink. What's happened to Wu Fang?"

"Gone," answered Harris.

Ken glanced quickly at the schooner. It was still at anchor and roped to the Dawn, and some of the Santa Cruz boys were staring across.

"He got away in his boat with two or three black boys," said Harris. "I reckon he's gone after the pearls. I fired after him twice, but never hit him. You'll get him easy when he pulls back to the schooner."

"He figures that we finished in the bush, Ken," Kit Hudson laughed. "He's after the pearls—has his hands on them by now, most likely. He won't keep them long when he comes back."

"When he comes back!" repeated Ken. "Will he come back, Kit? Even if we had finished in the bush Harris was here. And Harris would have handled him easily enough with the pearls in the offing, and Wu Fang knew it. If he's got hold of the pearls he's not coming back to his ship."

"By hokey!" Black Furley burst into a gruff laugh. "The Chink's got the pearls and run to sea with them. You're beaten after all, King of the Islands! The Chink's beaten you!"

Ken did not heed the freebooter. Had the wily Chink won the long and

desperate game? It was a bitter thought to the boy trader. He had given little enough thought to the pearls of Aya-ua while his shipmate was a prisoner in the hands of the cannibals. But he thought of them now.

He stepped back into the whaleboat, and the Kanakas pulled across to the schooner. From the Santa Cruz boys left on the Flamingo he learned that the schooner's boat had been provisioned for a long cruise before Wu Fang went. That was proof enough that Wu Fang intended to abandon his ship—and further proof that the pearls of Aya-ua were in his grasp. He returned to the ketch.

"The Chink's gone, and doesn't mean to come back, Kit," he said. "He's got the pearls, and run out to sea in his boat. There can't be any doubt about that. But——"

"But we haven't finished in the bush, as he supposed," said the mate of the Dawn. "We're after him, Ken."

"Ay, ay—and without losing a minute," said King of the Islands. "It's up-anchor now, and away with all sail set! We'll put Furley and his men on the schooner, as the Chink's chosen to desert his ship. I'll be glad to get shut of them from the Dawn."

"There's a chance yet!" muttered Keefe. "If the boat's got out to sea we shall raise her at sunrise——"

"There's more than a chance, Keefe," answered the boy trader. "We'll comb the Pacific for Wu Fang if he's got away. Keep your pecker up—you'll lay hands on your pearls yet!"

"You and your mate share if we lift them at last," said the Pearler. "Share and share alike!"

No time was lost. Already the stars were paling towards the early dawn. Black Furley and Finn, Preece and Harris were quickly transferred to the schooner, to sail back to Lukwe if they chose.

The ketch's anchor swung up to

the bows, and the whaleboat was manned to tow her out of the lagoon. Standing by Koko at the helm, King of the Islands cast a glance towards the dark circling bush of Aya-ua and the coral beach shelving to the water. He was thinking of Dandy Peter. But Parsons had taken his fate into his own hands.

The Kanakas pulled hard at the oars, and the ketch glided into the reef passage as the first glimmer of the sun came up over Aya-ua. Ken King swept the lagoon and the beach with his binoculars. That the schooner's boat had run out to sea was certain, for there was no sign of it on the lagoon. Neither was there a sign of Dandy Peter on the beach.

Little did Ken guess that the dandy of Lukwe had run out to sea in the boat he was pursuing.

Outside the reef the whaleboat was swung up to the davits, and sail shaken out. And as the sun rose higher every eye on the Dawn watched the Pacific for a sign of a boat.

The binoculars hardly left Ken's eyes for a moment. Far and wide he swept the ocean for the sight of a boat's sail. He knew that it could not be far ahead of him, and there was little doubt that it had run before the wind. But the swift ketch, under full sail, could cover a dozen fathoms to the boat's one, and the boy trader had little doubt of running it down. And suddenly he gave a shout.

"The boat!"

Far in the distance, glancing against the sun on the sea, was a dancing sail. In those lonely waters it could only be the sail that Ken was watching for.

"Good luck!" grinned Hudson. "We've got him!"

"And the pearls!" muttered Keefe.

Swiftly the ketch overhauled the boat. Ere long the naked eye could pick it up, and the figures of its crew could be discerned. There was no sign of Wu Fang. But Ken rubbed his

eyes and stared, and stared again at the sight of a tattered figure among the black Santa Cruz boys.

"My sainted Sam!" he exclaimed at last. "Dandy Peter, or his ghost!"

"It's Peter Parsons all right!" said Hudson. "I'd know the cut of his jib at twice the distance!"

"And it's the schooner's boat!" muttered Kcefe. "Parsons has beaten the Chink somehow—he's got the pearls!"

"And we've got him!" said Ken grimly.

Standing in the boat, Dandy Peter stared back at the pursuing ketch with rage in his eyes. The sight of the Dawn's tall sails spelled defeat for him. Not for a moment had he expected prompt pursuit—it had not even crossed his mind that King of the Islands knew that Wu Fang had the pearls, and intended to run out to sea with them. In the belief that he was pursuing the Chink, the boy trader had run the dandy of Lukwe down, and the sight of his sails was a nasty surprise to Peter Parsons.

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No. 14.—THE CASE AGAINST MRS. AMES,
by Arthur Somers Roche.

Parsons jammed the tapa sack of pearls out of sight under his tattered ducks, and stood watching the ketch as it ran the boat down. He told himself desperately that Ken King could not know that the pearls were on board the boat. How could he know? There was a chance yet, or Dandy Peter hoped that there was.

"Ahoy, the boat!" Ken's voice came ringing to him. "Stand by, Peter Parsons!"

The ketch swept by, and with a light leap King of the Islands sprang from the teak rail and landed in the boat. Parsons' grasp closed convulsively on the boathook, and a revolver glimmered in the hand of the boy trader.

"Drop it!" he rapped.

Koko joined his white master a moment later. The ketch hove-to, to wait, every face on board staring over the side. Dandy Peter dropped the boathook, and the Santa Cruz boys, at a word from Ken, took in the boat's sail.

"What do you want here, Ken King?" demanded Parsons hoarsely. "You're done with me, and I'm done with you. Leave me to steer my own course."

"Where's the Chink?"

"Concerned about the Chink, are you?" sneered Parsons. "Ask the sharks in the lagoon at Aya-ua where he is!"

"You've got his boat," said Ken quietly. "If Wu Fang's gone to the sharks, where are the pearls?"

"Pearls? What pearls?" asked Dandy Peter.

"Search that man, Koko!"

Instantly the grasp of the brawny boatswain was on Dandy Peter. With a yell of rage the dandy of Lukwe struck at him, only to crumple up helplessly in the mighty grasp of Koko. Struggling, foaming with rage, Peter Parsons crashed down in the boat, and a brawny brown knee pinned him there.

A moment more, and the grinning Kanaka held up a tapa sack.

"Feller pearl he stop!" chuckled Koko.

Ken took the sack and opened it. It was crammed with pearls. It was the treasure of Aya-ua at last, for which the shipmates of the Dawn had faced so many fearful perils.

Without a word to the dandy of Lukwe—without a glance at him—Ken King swung on board the Dawn, and Koko followed him. Dandy Peter got on his feet, white with fury. With eyes of despair he watched the canvas shaken out again on the Dawn, and saw the swift ketch glide away on the sea, carrying the pearls of Aya-ua forever from his sight.

On the deck of the Dawn Ben Keefe held the tapa sack and poured out the stream of glistening pearls into his palm. The pearler had come into his own at last. He raised his eyes from the glistening cascade of pearls.

"Share alike, King of the Islands!" he said.

"The pearls are yours, shipmate," answered Ken. "We came into this game to see you through, and we've pulled it off, Keefe!"

"You've lost time and trade——"

"A dozen of the pearls will see us clear for that if you choose. But you've found your fortune—and it's yours!"

"They say on the beaches that you're the whitest man in the Islands, Ken King, and I reckon it's so!" said Keefe. "But if you and your shipmate will take only a dozen pearls I reckon I'm going to pick them out for you!"

"Leave it at that!" Ken laughed. And Kit Hudson smiled and nodded. And when the pearls that Ben Keefe picked out for the shipmates were sold to John Chin at Lalinge, they realised a sum that made the cruise to Aya-ua a profitable trip, after all, for the shipmates of the Dawn.

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(Continued on page 95.)